

Economy of Wealth: National Stereotypes in Idiomatic Representation

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Abstract: The problem of wealth is a fundamental issue of modern economic theory. In this article I suggest that comparative analysis of idioms and culture stereotypes of money given in language idioms is conducive to our understanding of underlying market mechanisms in modern China, North America, Japan and Russia. In my analysis I study idioms (phraseological units), belonging to 5 idiomatic systems (phraseological systems): (Chinese, Japanese, British, American and Russian). With the help of on-line electronic linguistic corpuses (Chinese corpus), KOTONOHA (Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese), BNC (British National Corpus), COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and Russian corpus (Russian National Corpus) I single out national stereotypes connected with wealth and money distribution. I view idioms as a core component of national identity. Idioms with a ‘money’ component may serve as important guidelines for national sovereignty and provide essential information about day-to-day spending choices. I identify tendencies common to all these systems, which comply with the main goals of modern global market-building a new global society of mutual respect and shared knowledge which is able to overcome false stereotypes.

Key words: Culture • Stereotype • Comparative economics • Idiom • Phraseology • Corpus linguistics
• China • North America • Japan • Russia

INTRODUCTION

I start my analysis from the vision of wealth in the country, which for centuries was associated with the opportunities for getting rich-North America. ‘...contradictory and paradoxical American cultural values and historical associations: ... resistance to governmental regulation and taxation (the tax collector is viewed as a representative of oppression) and to all forms of concentrated power and monopoly... Retention (Parsimony/ Frugality) is culturally manifested in (a) the acquisition of such subconscious copro-symbols as gold, money and land ... the gospel of wealth and the identification of poverty with laziness ...the procreative nature of wealth (‘money can beget money and its offspring can beget more and so on’) ... private charity versus public welfare ... the sub-text of conspiracy and paranoia in American culture (which may represent a defense mechanism erected against repressed fears of passive, homosexual submission, as witnessed in Richard Nixon’s ‘it’s time to get big government off your back and out of your pocket’) [1-6]. Alternatively, I would offer the readers to reflect on the following description of Chinese

wealth philosophy. ‘In China, some scholars have argued that luxury spending is socially beneficial to equalise wealth, under the assumption that the total endowment of resources is a fixed amount. This argument is not only consistent with Confucianism but also might point to another lesser known side of Confucianism that the luxury spending of the rich can be regarded as a wealth-transferring mechanism. Furthermore, luxury spending was encouraged for purposes of enjoyment; it did not involve the consideration of power and protection. This is in sharp contrast to the extravagance of the European nobility; their intention was to maintain a hierarchical structure ...‘the rich’s luxury spending is regarded as a wealth-transferring mechanism, which is ‘just like gambling in a room, the money does not flow out but circulates among the players’ [7]. These two approaches represent Western and Eastern visions on wealth accumulation and our purpose is to identify similar stereotypes in linguistics idioms, which provides us with a better vision of cultural mechanisms of modern economy. Our second task is to compare idiom systems with ‘money/gold’ component, presented not only in China and North America, but in Russia and Japan.

In conditions of modern global economy the problems of wealth throughout the world and careers abroad are very significant. 'With the advent of globalization, the world has become relatively small and career opportunities abroad are not a rarity anymore as many corporations search for qualified, competent and internationally oriented professionals all over the world to meet their strategic manpower needs. More and more people are now developing an orientation towards internationalism in both subjective understanding and objective reality of their careers' [8].

American Money and Gold Idioms: Though usually primary analysis of English idioms is based on British National Corpus, we switched on to the data, provided by an index from COCA (Corpora of Contemporary American). 'The Corpus of Contemporary American English (450 million words) is more than four times as large as the British National Corpus (100 million words). As a result, it often provides data for lower-frequency constructions that are not available from the BNC. ... COCA and the BNC complement each other nicely and they are only large, well-balanced corpora of English that are publicly-available. The BNC has better coverage of informal, everyday conversation, while COCA is much larger and more recent, which has important implications for the quantity and quality of the data overall' (Corpus of Contemporary American).

Black money-income illegally obtained or not declared for tax purposes [26 contexts. Dates: 2011-1991]. *Blood money*-money paid in compensation to the family of someone who has been killed; money paid to a hired killer; money paid by the police or the media for information about a killer or killing [88 contexts. Dates: 2012-1990]. *Conscience money*-money paid because of feelings of guilt, esp. about a payment that one has evaded [3 contexts. Dates: 2004-1990]. *Earnest money*-money paid to confirm a contract [45 contexts. Dates: 2011-1990]. *Easy money*-money obtained by dubious means or for little work; money available at relatively low interest [242 contexts. Dates: 2012-1990]. *Hush money*-informal money paid to someone to prevent them from disclosing embarrassing or discreditable information [89 contexts. Dates: 2012-1990]. *Seed money*-money allocated to initiate a project [290 contexts. Dates: 2012-1990]. *Tight money*-finance money or financing that is available only at high rates of interest [290 contexts. Dates: 2011-1990]. *Old money*-established, inherited wealth; those people, whose families have been wealthy for many generations

[34 contexts. Dates: 2011-1990]. *Mad money*-small money saved for emergency spending [46 contexts. Dates: 2012-1990]. *Money laundering*-is the crime of processing stolen money through a legitimate business or sending it abroad to a foreign bank, to hide the fact that the money was illegally obtained [604 contexts. Dates: 2012-1990]. *Good (as) gold*-something exceptionally good [52 contexts. Dates: 2011-1990]. *Black gold*-oil [92 contexts. Dates: 2011-1990]. *Fool's gold*-a substance that is found in rock and that looks very like gold; a foolish enterprise which is sure to fail or cause problems [134 contexts. Dates: 2012-1990].

This brief overview of American English idioms represents the picture, that *money* and *gold* are associated with the following aspects: a) dirt and black color; b) blood; c) feeling of guilt; d) honesty; e) easy work; f) silence; g) plant life; h) the feeling of tightness; i) old age; j) madness; k) washing process. Negativism is predominant in this representation.

Chinese Money and Gold Idioms: For conducting this research stage I used Chinese corpus at Leeds University. The Leeds corpus of the Chinese language, designed by Sergei Sharov, enables to see frequency indexes in the Internet and business Chinese usage. I submit each idiom with the frequency index, indicating its usage frequency in the Internet and business Chinese.

My analysis of the Chinese idiomatic system is focused on 4-character idioms. "In Chinese lexical system Chinese idioms are a typical unit. As an individual type in the domain of idioms, most Chinese idioms have some unique qualities. One of the design features of most Chinese idioms on the dimension of form characteristics is the four-character form the Chinese lexicon provides an exact number of the characters in such a unit. According to the statistics given in Zhou [9], up to 95.57% entries in Dictionary of Chinese Idioms are four characters. The uniformity in form regulates to a large extent some other linguistic characteristics of Chinese idioms, specifically phonological and semantic distribution. Compatible with the rhythmical arrangement and prosodic features represented by the two-plus-two syllables, a great number of Chinese idioms consist of double substructures, mostly parallel with each other [10]. Branded with a distinct national style, Chinese idioms mirror the esthetic pursuit of symmetry deeply embedded in oriental thinking" [11].

Normally in Chinese you find more idioms with Jin1-'gold'. *Jin1 cheng2 tang1 chi2*-stronghold [2 entries in Chinese Internet]. *Yan3 mao4 jin1 xing1*-to see stars

(after a blow) [130 entries in Chinese Internet]. *Huang2 jin1 shi2 dai4*-golden age, the best period of life [446 entries in Chinese Internet]. *Jin1 an1*-your wellbeing (a polite address) [6 entries in Chinese Internet]. *Jin1*-‘gold’ is often viewed as the source of pleasant bell sound. In old traditional Chinese philosophy *Jin1* is a symbol of the West and autumn. In numerology it denotes a measure of precious metals.

From this outlook we perceive a more positive vision of gold in Chinese culture. We can also observe a synesthetic effect based on the golden color and the sound, produced by the metal itself.

Japanese Money and Gold Idioms: I obtain Japanese idioms frequency indexes with the help of KOTONOHA on-line Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese. It submits the contexts of a time period between 1880 to 2008. This on-line corpus was designed by Japanese ministry of education, sport and tourism with the assistance of national scholars of Japanese. Each Japanese idiom under analysis is provided with an index of frequency and the years of occurrence in writing. *Dorobo: ni oisen*-‘money given to a thief’-a waste of money [1 entry. Date: 1930. Speaker’s sex: male]. *Kane ga neru*-‘the money is sleeping’-the money, which does not bring any profit [11 entries. Date: 1920-2008. 3 entries made during 2002-2008. Speaker’s sex: male-8, female-2]. *Kane ni itome o tsukenai*-‘not to add any thread to money’-to use money without any reserve, to spend money extravagantly [17 entries. Date: 1890-2008. 4 entries made during 1992-2008. Speaker’s sex: male-12, female-5]. *Kane ni me ga kuramu*-‘eyes get dark with money’-to forget everything for the sake of money [10 entries. Date: 1820-2005. 4 entries made in 2005. Speaker’s sex: male-8, female-1]. *Kane ni naru*-‘to become money’-to bring income [466 entries. Date: 1890-2008. 248 entries made during 2000-2008. Speaker’s sex: male-200, female-58]. *Kane o ikau*-‘to revive the money’-to use the money successfully [31 entries. Date: 1930-2008. 8 entries made during 2000-2008. Speaker’s sex: male-12, female-4]. *Shinda kane*-‘dead money’-wasted money [5 entries. Date: 1900-1960.. Speaker’s sex: male-6, female-3]. *Kane o nigiraseru*-‘to give the money in hand’-to engage somebody in a deal, to share in a deal [25 entries. Date: 1860-2008. Speaker’s sex: male-23, female-4]. *Kanegura o tateru*-‘to build a big money storage house’-to make a fortune [1 entry. Date: 1940. Speaker’s sex: male-1].

The analysis presented proves that in Japanese society *kane* (gold or money) is associated with a) dirt; b)

sleep; c) dark color; d) death and birth, life; e) a big storage house. From this survey we can draw some lines of similarity with American idiom system. We see that Japanese money attitude is ambivalent: neither positive, nor negative.

I have also identified frugal character of Japanese money accumulation strategy, which is effective in modern global crisis situation, where growth is and must be limited. ‘Growth means larger jaws and a bigger digestive tract for more rapidly converting more resources into more waste, in the service of frequently destructive individual wants. Development means better digestion of a non-growing throughput and more worthy and satisfying goals to which our life energies could be devoted’ [12].

The Japanese government retains the country’s wealth priority to local residents. Yet, this is a very challenging situation. ‘Scholars recognize that the Japanese government’s insistence on retaining its ‘no immigrant’ stance’ is at odds with what Japanese people see happening on the ground in their neighborhoods” [13].

Money can become live and dead, it can move and sleep. I have also identified *gender asymmetry* with male predominance. Japanese males speak more about money, which follows a common trend in Japanese communication, where male utterances and speech styles prevail.

Russian Money and Gold Idioms: Frequencies of Russian idioms were obtained with the help of the Russian National on-line Corpus. The indexes contain 3 indicators: 1) the number of entries; 2) date of usage; 3) speaker’s sex.

‘A coin price’-to cost too little [43 entries. Date: 2001-2011. Speaker’s sex: male-35, female-5]. ‘Even a small piece of gold costs a lot’-[10 entries. Date: 2000-2010. Speaker’s sex: male-4, female-1]. ‘(To save) money for a black day’-[85 entries. Date: 2000-2010. Speaker’s sex: male-41, female-30]. ‘Money does not smell’-incomes of all kinds are good [27 entries. Date: 2000-2008. Speaker’s sex: male-15, female-5]. ‘A debt looks nice, when it is paid’-it is necessary to pay back one’s debts [13 entries. Date: 2000-2007. Speaker’s sex: male-8, female-2]. ‘Golden mean’ [99 entries. Date: 2000-2011. Speaker’s sex: male-36, female-24]. ‘Gold bottom’-a money spinner [22 entries. Date: 2000-2009. Speaker’s sex: male-14, female-5]. ‘Gold youth’-young people from rich families [41 entries. Date: 2000-2011. Speaker’s sex: male-25, female-9]. ‘To sweeten a pill’-

to make an unpleasant thing less harmful [21 entries. Date: 2000-2008. Speaker's sex: male-12, female-6]. 'Gold century'-the best time in life [21 entries. Date: 2000-2008. Speaker's sex: male-17, female-36]. 'To bathe in gold'-to be very rich [2 entries. Date: 2000-2004. Speaker's sex: male-1, female-6].

The conducted analysis demonstrates the following trends in Russian idiom system. *Gold* and *money* are associated with mean, bottom and a duty to pay back one's debts. We can observe synesthetic features, describing money through smell. This approach is similar to Chinese synesthetic approach, based on sound. This analysis also proves that the general tone of money perception in Russian culture is positive, which is also more in line with Chinese tradition.

'To the extent that cultural identification anchors the self-system and implicates a wide range of psychological processes, a perception of cultural identification may facilitate social understanding. As such, cultural identification may be actively discerned in social interactions. Among a group of friends, a perception of cultural identification would be relatively straightforward through intimate knowledge of one another. One intriguing question is whether people with no knowledge of one another are able to discern others' cultural identification' [14]. Perception of money is an aspect of cultural identity and it is important for managers of global economies to understand this factor.

CONCLUSION

'With saturation within domestic marketplaces and increased growth opportunities overseas, many financial service providers are investing in foreign markets. However, cultural attitudes towards money can present market entry challenges to financial service providers' [15].

The research has 2 important conclusions: 1) the idea of 'money/wealth/gold' is very important to all cultures under analysis from comparative economics and culture study point of view; 2) idioms with 'gold/money' components draw lines of similarity between American and Japanese idiom systems on the one end of the spectrum and Russian and Chinese cultures on the other end of the spectrum. Money and gold traditionally formulate the main driving force of any economy. Our research has demonstrated it vividly that the meaning of money concept may be 2-folded: dark and light, which is encoded in cultural values of any nation.

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