

# Corpus-Assisted Study of Gender Related Tiger Metaphors in the Chinese Context

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**Abstract**—Animal metaphors have many different connotations, ranging from loving emotions to derogatory epithets, but gender expressions using animal metaphors are often imbalanced. Generally, animal metaphors related to females tend to be negative. Little known about the reasons for the negative expressions of animal female metaphors in Chinese contexts still have not been quantified. The study was based on the conceptual metaphor theory, and it used the Modern Chinese Corpus at the Center for Chinese Linguistics at Peking University (CCL Corpus) as a database, which identified the influencing variables of gender differences in the description of animal metaphors mapping humans in the Chinese context by observing the percentage of "tiger" metaphor. This study has proved that the tiger metaphors associated with humans in the Chinese context tend to be negative. Importantly, this study has also shown that the proportion of tiger metaphorical idioms that are related to women is very high. This finding can be used as crucial information for future studies on other gender-related animal metaphorical idioms and can offer additional insights for understanding trends in other animal metaphors.

**Keywords**—Chinese, CCL Corpus, gender differences, metaphorical idioms, tigers.

## I. INTRODUCTION

METAPHOR is a special language in which one notion or thing is used to explain another, people often use metaphors consciously or unconsciously in daily life [1]. Association and inference, pragmatics and semantics, abstraction and concretization, and other cognitive processes are all involved in interpreting metaphor [2], [3]. In many languages, metaphors are frequently used to describe gender. It has been noted that more insulting phrases are used to describe females than males in metaphors [4]. For example, in Chinese context, a word "bear" is always used to describe looking so strong for men. But it is an insulting word that represents looking so fat for woman [5]. Animal metaphor has a very rich metaphorical source area to link to humans in a variety of contexts because of the variety, cultural significance, and almost human traits of animals [6]. Many animal metaphors were also proved the trend of offensive and disrespectful to women whether the metaphor is of pets, cows, or wild animals, depicting women as inferior and subordinate to males [7].

Reference [8] indicated that not all animal expressions in all languages have negative implications for women, adding to the evidence for cultural uniqueness in animal expressions. For example, the snake expression is more derogatory towards men in Chinese and more derogatory towards women in English. Certain animals such as "goat" could be used to describe both

men and women at the same time [9]. Some researchers have investigated the influence of animal metaphor sexism on people's ideology when they are employed in various circumstances in one or more languages [10], [11]. These studies also observed some evident tendencies in positive or negative views regarding gender description. However, little research has considered the influence factors (e.g., animal metaphorical idiom) of gender difference and compared the proportion or specific details of the negative and positive parts of male or female descriptions.

Let's look at the animal metaphorical idiom. (1) He is a white-eyed wolf. (2) He is a pig. Both sentences are metaphorical "X is Y". (1) "white eye wolf" is an animal metaphorical idiom which uses to describe ungrateful people, which we commonly understood as negative meaning; but in (2) we can understand the meaning of many, such as: "he is dirty like a pig", "he stupid like a pig" and "he ugly like a pig", etc. As we can see in Fig. 1, metaphor is a feature inheritance of two concepts, but this knowledge representation cannot reflect the feature items that establish the correlation between X and Y, and not all the features of Y may be possessed by X, because X's inheritance of Y features is optional, so there will be various understandings like sentence (2).

This study uses data from the Center for Chinese Linguistics at Peking University's Modern Chinese Corpus (CCL Corpus) [12], [13]. Based on the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory [14], [15], this paper aims to determine the influencing factors of gender differences in the description of animal mapping humans in Chinese by observing the "tiger" metaphor. The results show an obvious negative trend in tiger metaphors associated with humans, which provides some supporting evidence for previous research [1]. Importantly, this study also found that the high proportion of female-related negative tiger metaphors is due to the high proportion of tiger metaphorical idioms, which can be used as important data for future research on other gender-related animal metaphorical idioms and provide further ideas for understanding trends in other animal metaphors.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Animal Metaphors in Gender

The majority of articles on animal metaphors are offensive and disrespectful to women. Because of benign sexism, animal analogies may be seen as more insulting when used in reference to women than to males [16]. Women were represented as being

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weak, innocent, and in need of protection [17]. Additionally, women seem to be less tolerant of harmful language than males and being conscious of this distinction may help explain why metaphors that may be abusive to women are seen as being more offensive. Reference [4] and [18] showed that the aggression reflected by the human-animal metaphor becomes more intense with the change of context. In the corpus-based research [19], it is found that the person who has the same Chinese and English is the metaphor for the snake. However, when considering human gender, the specific conceptual

metaphors for men and women in the two languages are different, with the snake metaphorical expression having more derogatory meanings for men in Chinese and more derogatory meanings for women in English. Reference [20] chose 96 phrases from over 1,000 nicknames or generic names invented and used by persons of roughly 50 different races in the United States that are especially for women of 20 different races. Animal metaphors like bitch, frog limb, and elk were employed as modifiers to communicate abusive meanings to minority women, according to her research.

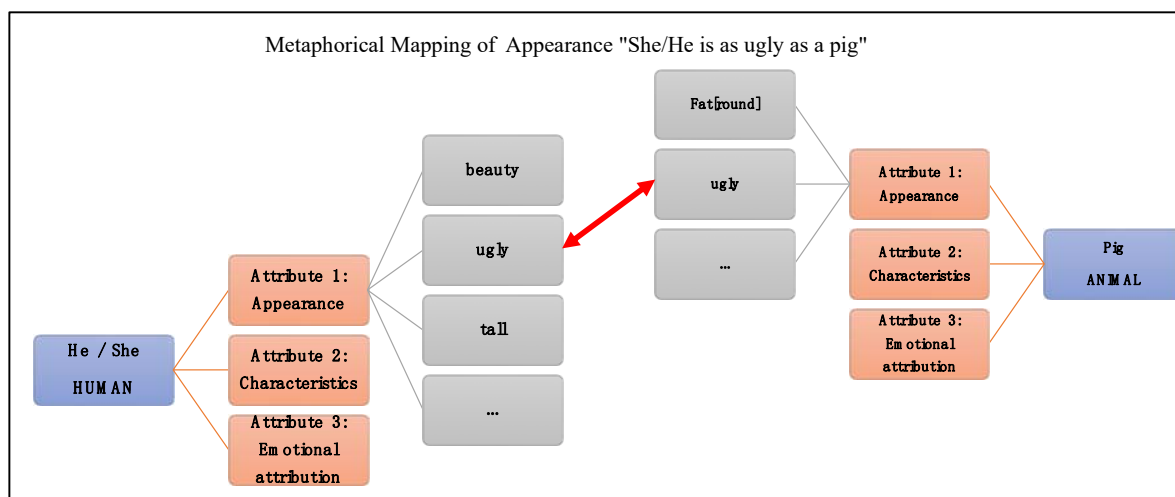


Fig. 1 Metaphorical mapping of "She/He is as ugly as a pig"

### B. Theoretical Framework

Animal metaphors are a rich area, particularly when animals are used to depict people. Animal metaphor is a common sort of metaphor used to build social actors. This research is based on the conceptual metaphor theoretical framework to complete the process of data collection and analysis.

Conceptual metaphor theory [14], [15] largely refers to the cross-domain translation from a somewhat concrete source domain to an abstract target domain. A source domain is a notion that is used to assist individuals in comprehending ideas in the target domain that is difficult to grasp. If the metaphor is represented by a formula, then X is Y, with X representing the target domain and Y representing the source domain. Conceptual metaphor can be subdivided into two types: (1) idiom, the idiom "toad" mostly refers to a delusional person, "he is a toad", indicating that he is not good enough, but wants to get good things. This kind of animal metaphor usually has a fixed meaning (2) Metaphor of animal attributes (appearance, characteristics, etc.), this kind of metaphor can be understood more meaning in general, such as "He is as dirty as a pig", "he is as stupid as a pig", "he is as fat as a pig", "he is as ugly as a pig", etc. Reference [21] divided animal metaphors into three categories by Personification, (1) based on the animal's behaviors and appearance (e.g., "这个女人是条蛇, 纤细又迷人 This woman is a snake, slender and charming."); (2) attributing human emotions to animals (e.g., "她就是一只快乐的猴子, 上蹦下跳的 She's just a happy monkey, jumping up

and down."); (3) attributing human traits to specific types of animals based on our inferences called anthropomorphism (e.g., "你拥有猫头鹰的生物钟, 每天白天睡觉晚上工作 You have an owl's biological clock, sleeping during the day and working at night.").

Anthropomorphism [22], in which the rationale for choosing an animal metaphor is solely dependent on assumptions about the animal rather than specifying particular qualities of the thing in question. The big chain metaphor [15] states that all forms of life in the world are arranged in a hierarchy, with a link between each form's features and its purpose or activity. Non-human features would explain human characteristics, and vice versa, based on this statement. In other words, humans are mental analogs for animals, that we can anthropomorphize the animal, and then transfer the human character attributes assigned to the animal back to the human. This is also comparable to the study, which claims that human characteristics are often mistakenly assigned to animals and then employs "human-based animal qualities" to better understand human behavior.

### C. Research Questions

1. What are the attitudinal tendencies of animal metaphors in the use of gender?
2. What is the influence of metaphorical idioms?

## III. METHOD

### A. Corpus

The focus of this research is to examine the positive/negative/

neutral gender use norms of the specific animal "tiger" in the Chinese context. The Modern Chinese Corpus (CCL Corpus), created by Peking University's Chinese Linguistics Center, was chosen as the corpus for this study because it is sufficiently large, with around 700 million Chinese characters including current and ancient literary works, newspapers, novels, children's books, and other materials. There were 3992 pieces related to "tigers". For this research, only text data that were identified as contemporary in the list of patterns in the CCL Corpus were used.

### B. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

In terms of data collection and analysis, information on "tigers" is first retrieved from the corpus. The Chinese span is 100 words on either side of the word "tiger" given adequate context.

As the context of general nouns is different, they may be put in different sentences with different metaphorical objects. Reference [21] extracted the metaphorical features of specific nouns by some regular metaphorical constructs, using the method of single-word attribute mining, group attribute mining, and search engine attribute mining to obtain relevant attribute values according to the specific situation. The experiment showed that the method obtained metaphorical feature recognition in a sentence, but the total accuracy only reached about 70.6%, and it is still difficult to find all attributes in noun metaphor knowledge. Thus, metaphorical phrases involving "tiger" as the source domain and a human as the target domain are manually detected in this research. As long as the words "tiger" exists in the expression, and the word is not merely the name of the animal, but also contains some metaphorical meaning openly or implicitly, these phrases or sentences are picked as the study's object.

All discovered expressions' source and target domains were then classified. The source domain of metaphor expression is

the appearance and characteristics of "tiger", as well as the relationship between "tiger" and humans. Reference [23] served as the foundation for this classification. Wierzbicka [23] said that when people talk about tigers, they talk about their habitat, size, look, behavior, and link to humans. The size of snakes was included in the snake appearance category, and another class of snake characteristics was added to the source domain, due to the resemblance or overlap between the size and appearance of animals, as well as the distinct features of different animals. This study lists three categories related to foxes and tigers, (1) appearance; (2) characteristics (e.g., speed, behavior, etc.); (3) Emotion (e.g., attributing human emotions to animals and anthropomorphism).

Ordinary/Human, Female/Woman and Male/Man are the metaphorical expression domains. Ordinary/Human means that the term relates to both males and females. When people including men and women appear in the expression of animal metaphor, it is classified as Ordinary/Human; When the expression is more inclined to describe women, it is divided into Female/Woman; when the expression is more tending to describe man, it is divided into Male/Man. Following this, the context is used to decide the assessment of each phrase. Finally, the findings of the animal are contrasted in order to grasp the gender difference in "tiger" metaphors.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The insulting animal metaphor "tigress," which is most often used to disparage women and has a high frequency among metaphorical idioms connected to "tiger," has a total of 87 related sentences. This is because the scene of the tiger mating is very violent. If the male tiger does not flee quickly after mating, he is sure to be injured or even killed by the female tiger. So, a furious and unreasonable lady is referred to as a "tigress" due to her characteristics.

TABLE I  
THE RATE OF THE METAPHOR OF "TIGER"

Animal Related Sentence							
Tigers	3992						
Tigress	87						
Paper Tiger	86 (related to human 39)						
Tiger Ass	50						
Percentage							
	Female/Woman	Male/Man	Ordinary/Human	Total	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Appearance	14	11	26	51 [23.8%]	59	2	6
Emotion	56	3	28	87 [40.6%]	21	0	9
Characteristic	32	3	41	76 [35.5%]	78	8	31
Total	15[7%]+87[40.6%]	17[7.9%]	95[44.3%]	214 [5.3%]	71[33.1%]+87[40.6%]	10[4.6%]	46[21.4%]
Negative	7[46.7%]+87[85.2%]						
Evaluation	Neutral	1[6.6%]	1[5.8%]	4[4.2%]			
	Positive	8[53.3%]	9[52.9%]	25[26.3%]			

With 86 total sentences, 39 of which are connected to humans, the derogatory metaphorical idiom "paper tiger" is also often employed. The tiger is an extremely ferocious animal with pointed claws and fangs, as well as quick reflexes. Later, the metaphorical idiom of the "paper tiger" (the tiger made of

paper) was expanded to refer to a force or person that seems to be powerful but is truly feeble.

The next offensive metaphorical idiom is "tiger ass" which has 50 comparable expressions and is used as often. The tiger can respond so quickly that if you strike it from behind, you

may not even have a chance to touch it before it is ensnared by its claws. "Tiger ass" is used to describe people who should avoid engaging in combat with strong, evil forces or individuals simply because they could be a bit back shortly. The saying "The tiger's ass cannot be touched" is sometimes used as a metaphor for those who are arrogant, self-righteous, and can't listen to criticism.

As can be seen from the "tiger" metaphors about gender in Table I, the proportion of women's negative metaphors is higher than that of men without removing the insulting metaphorical idioms obviously related to women. But if remove metaphorical idioms that are clearly insulting to women, the proportion of "tiger" metaphors is almost the same for men and women, 46.7% and 41.1%, respectively. It may be inferred that the fact that the idioms for female insults are not subdivided is the primary cause of the high tendency of female insults in the "tiger" metaphor.

Finally, there was no significant difference in appearance, emotion, and feature of human-related "tiger" metaphorical sentences, which were 51%, 40.6%, and 35.5%, respectively. Even after excluding the blatantly disparaging phrase for women ("tigress" 40.6%), these three categories as a whole exhibited negative results of 33.1%. Furthermore, tiger metaphors — which may be used by both men and women — tend to be negative in general from a gender standpoint. All of them provided evidence for the derogatory and offensive use of animal metaphors. However, it has been discovered via study that this is connected to the relatively high frequency of "paper tiger" and "tiger ass" in the Chinese context.

#### V.CONCLUSION

Research on animal metaphors and their gender descriptions is fairly wide. In this research, tiger metaphors in the Chinese context were collected and analyzed using the CCL corpus. The findings revealed that tiger metaphors relating to humans are more negative, which lends some evidence to previous studies. This study also discovered that the high percentage of negative tiger metaphors describing females was mostly due to the high proportion of negative tiger metaphorical idioms, which might serve as some important data for future studies on other gender-related metaphorical idioms.

According to the study findings presented in this work, the emotional attitude trend associated with tiger metaphors is often negative, which is supported by the majority of negative descriptions of tigers. It can be inferred that the attitude trend of the idioms of specific animal metaphors has a significant impact on the overall emotional attitude trend. In other words, if the metaphorical idioms of an animal are mostly negative, the overall attitude of the animal is more likely to be negative in the Chinese context, and vice versa. This provides further insights into the trends of other animal metaphors in the future.

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