

Original Research Article

Cross cultural visual expression of English idioms in modern graphic design

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Abstract: This paper delves into the cross - cultural visual expression of English idioms in the realm of modern graphic design. English idioms, as a rich cultural heritage, carry unique cultural connotations and semantic features. In the context of globalization, integrating English idioms into modern graphic design not only enriches the visual language but also promotes cross - cultural communication. By analyzing the cultural differences between English and Chinese idioms, exploring the visual elements suitable for expressing idioms, and studying successful design cases, this paper aims to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for graphic designers to effectively use English idioms in cross - cultural visual expression.

Keywords: English idioms; cross - cultural; modern graphic design; visual expression

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, cultural exchange has become increasingly frequent. Modern graphic design, as an important medium for cultural communication, is constantly seeking new visual elements and expression methods. English idioms, with their concise language forms and profound cultural meanings, have great potential in graphic design. However, due to cultural differences, the visual expression of English idioms in a cross - cultural context faces many challenges. This paper first introduces the background and significance of the research, then analyzes the cultural characteristics of English idioms and their differences from Chinese idioms, and finally explores the strategies and methods of cross - cultural visual expression.

2. Cultural characteristics of English idioms

2.1. Historical and cultural origins

English idioms are often rooted in historical events, religious beliefs, and social customs. For example, the idiom "hang in the balance" originates from ancient legal practices where the outcome of a trial was determined by the swing of a balance scale. Understanding these historical and cultural backgrounds is crucial for accurate visual expression.

2.2. Semantic ambiguity and multiple interpretations

Many English idioms have multiple meanings depending on the context. The idiom "break the ice" can mean both to start a conversation in a social situation and to overcome initial difficulties. This semantic complexity requires designers to carefully consider the context and choose appropriate visual elements to convey the intended meaning.

2.3. Figurative language and imagery

English idioms frequently use figurative language such as metaphors, similes, and personification. For instance, "a heart of gold" uses a metaphor to describe a kind and generous person. The vivid imagery in idioms provides rich material for visual design, but it also requires designers to transform these abstract images into concrete visual forms.

3. Cultural differences between English and Chinese idioms

3.1. Different cultural concepts

There are significant differences in values and worldviews between English and Chinese cultures. For

example, English culture emphasizes individualism, while Chinese culture places greater importance on collectivism. This difference is particularly evident in idiomatic expressions: the English idiom 'everyone for themselves' embodies the concept of self-reliance and self-improvement, while the Chinese idiom 'many hands make light work' highlights the importance of collective strength.

3.2. Diverse symbolic meanings

The same object or concept may carry vastly different symbolic meanings across cultures. Take color symbolism as an example: In Chinese culture, "red" symbolizes good fortune and happiness, as seen in the idiom "red-light district" (symbolizing prosperity). Conversely, in English-speaking cultures, "red" may carry connotations of danger or anger, as in the phrase "see red" (meaning "red alert"). Designers must fully understand these cultural nuances to avoid misunderstandings in cross-cultural visual communication.

3.3. Varied linguistic structures

English and Chinese idioms have different linguistic structures. English idioms are often composed of prepositional phrases, verbs, and nouns, while Chinese idioms are mainly four - character phrases. This difference in structure affects the way idioms are visually represented. For example, the English idiom "out of the blue" may require a more dynamic visual arrangement compared to the relatively static Chinese four - character idiom.

4. Visual elements for expressing English idioms

4.1. Color

Color is a powerful visual element that can convey emotions and cultural meanings. As mentioned earlier, different cultures have different associations with colors. When expressing English idioms, designers should choose colors that are consistent with the cultural connotations of the idioms. For example, to express the idiom "green with envy", green can be used as the dominant color to convey the feeling of jealousy.

4.2. Shape

Shapes can also be used to represent idioms. Geometric shapes such as circles, squares, and triangles have different symbolic meanings. The circle can represent unity and completeness, which can be used to express idioms related to harmony, like "in harmony with". Irregular shapes can be used to convey a sense of chaos or unpredictability, suitable for idioms such as "all over the place".

4.3. Image and symbol

Images and symbols are the most direct way to visually represent idioms. Designers can use iconic images related to the meaning of the idioms. For example, to express the idiom "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush", an image of a bird in the hand and two birds in the bush can be used. Symbols can also be created to represent abstract concepts in idioms. For instance, a broken chain can symbolize "break free from".

5. Strategies for cross-cultural visual expression

5.1. Cultural adaptation

Designers should adapt the visual expression of English idioms to the target culture. This involves understanding the cultural values, beliefs, and aesthetic preferences of the audience. For example, when designing for a Chinese audience, designers can incorporate Chinese cultural elements into the visual representation of English idioms to make them more relatable.

5.2. Contextualization

The visual expression of idioms should be placed in a specific context. The context can help clarify the meaning of the idioms and avoid ambiguity. For example, if the idiom "hit the nail on the head" is used in a design about problem - solving, the visual elements should be related to the act of hitting a nail accurately, and the overall design should be set in a context that emphasizes problem - solving.

5.3. Simplification and Clarification

Since idioms can be complex, designers should simplify the visual representation while ensuring that the

core meaning is conveyed. Avoid using overly complicated visual elements that may confuse the audience. For example, instead of using a detailed and realistic image to represent an idiom, a simplified and abstract image may be more effective in cross - cultural communication.

6. Case studies

6.1. Case 1: "Piece of cake"

In a graphic design for a bakery, the idiom "piece of cake" was visually represented. The designer used a simple image of a slice of cake with a smiley face on it. The color scheme was warm and inviting, with shades of pink and yellow. This design effectively conveyed the meaning of the idiom, which is that something is very easy, and also attracted the attention of customers.

6.2. Case 2: "Think outside the box"

For a design promoting innovation, the idiom "think outside the box" was translated into a visual concept. The designer created an image of a person standing outside a three - dimensional box, with thought bubbles emerging from their head. The use of perspective and the contrast between the box and the open space outside it emphasized the idea of breaking free from traditional thinking.

7. Conclusion

The cross - cultural visual expression of English idioms in modern graphic design is a challenging but rewarding task. By understanding the cultural characteristics of English idioms, recognizing the cultural differences between English and Chinese idioms, and using appropriate visual elements and strategies, designers can create effective and engaging designs that promote cross - cultural communication. Future research can further explore the application of English idioms in different design fields and the impact of cultural factors on the visual perception of idioms.

In conclusion, integrating English idioms into modern graphic design provides a unique opportunity for cross - cultural exchange and visual innovation. Designers should continue to explore and refine their approaches to achieve more successful cross - cultural visual expressions.

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