

# A Comparison Study of Word Formation Between English and Chinese Animal Words

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**Abstract:** Animals are closely related to human beings, and they have become part of people's lives by becoming their friends or serving them. With the continuous progress of society, animal words with obvious differences not only plays an important role in the communication between Chinese and Western cultures but also becomes an important aspect of language learning that cannot be ignored. Studying these differences and connections can promote communication and cooperation between different cultures and countries. From the aspect of the word-formation of the animal word, this paper mainly conducts a comparative study of Chinese-English animal words, aiming to help learners better understand the meanings and word formation of animal words, better understand and use Chinese-English animal words.

**Keywords:** Animal words; Word formation; Comparison

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## 1. Introduction

In this era when Hollywood movies occupy almost the entire film and television industry, many movies will use animals to represent their respective many wonderful spiritual virtues, making them synonymous with their own country. For example, the representative animal of China is the dragon, the representative animal of the United States is the white-headed sea eagle, the British is the lion and so on. These are all movies about animals from different countries, which shows that animals have a very special meaning for many countries, and different animals also symbolize different spiritual virtues. In the process of language research, in order to facilitate the refinement and systematization of the research work, we will systematically classify the words in the language, so that the disordered words present their category properties to achieve the purpose of refinement of the research. In the process of classification, people always follow certain criteria, such as what common properties these words have, what things they are related to, etc. This gives rise to a series of category concepts such as animal words, plant words, etc., and the words related to animals, we are accustomed to call it animal words. Animal words is very important in the process of second language acquisition, and the comparative study of Chinese-English animal words can provide some experience for Chinese people to learn English and European and American people to learn Chinese, so that people can achieve better results in mastering the corresponding animal words.

## 2. Literature review

Animals are closely related to people's lives and are an important part of human life, so there are rich animal words in both Chinese and English languages. The research on animal words at home and abroad is mainly from the following aspects, namely, associative meaning and cultural connotation.

Animal words reflects richer associative meanings in both Chinese and English languages. Cao Rong (2006) compares the associative meanings of Chinese-English animal culture words and further investigates the reasons for their differences. Tao Li (2011) reveals that there are great differences in the associative meanings of Chinese-English animal words. Du Zhixia (2015) conducts a comparative study of idiomatic animal associative meanings. The differences in the associative meanings of animal words in Chinese and English reflect the distinctive cultural differences between the two languages.

Many scholars also analyze animal words from the perspective of cultural connotations. Since Chinese and English are two culturally different languages, the comparison and analysis of some specific linguistic phenomena can help people understand and grasp the cultural connotation of the language they are learning. Many scholars have used different animals to compare and analyze.

Lv Hongbo (2006) compares Chinese and English animal words through the Chinese zodiac and analyzes their differences mainly in cultural connotations. In Zhao Qinjuan (2010), the cultural connotation of the Chinese-English animal word “dragon” is compared and analyzed, and the translation skills should be paid attention to when translating between English and Chinese to avoid communication difficulties.

The above studies have analyzed the significant importance of animal words to cultural exchange between the two countries from the perspective of culture. This paper conducts a comparative study of Chinese-English animal words from the aspects: the way animal words is constructed aiming to help learners better understand the meanings and word formation of animal words, better understand and use Chinese-English animal words.

### **3. Comparison of word formation mode of Chinese and English animal words**

Chinese and English belong to Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European language families, respectively, one is an isolated language and the other is a flexuous language, so the two languages differ in the structure of word construction.

#### **3.1 The Word Formation of Chinese Animal Words**

##### **3.1.1 Single-morpheme Words**

A single-morpheme word is a word that consists of only one morpheme. In Chinese, a morpheme is usually a syllable. Among animal words, there are also many single-morpheme words.

###### **(1) Monosyllabic Single-morpheme Words**

Monosyllabic words are used quite frequently in ancient Chinese, and so are animal words. The animal words in ancient languages are generally single syllables, i.e., one Chinese character corresponds to one animal word. From the perspective of word formation, the ancient people saw the shape of animals around them, observed their behavior, described their posture, and used pictograms to create many Chinese characters that represent animals, such as cattle, sheep, deer, turtles, birds, etc. Later, many Chinese characters evolved into radicals, and the ancient people used morpho-syntactic word formation to create more words that represent animals. They are generally called monosyllabic animal words. For example, niu (means “cattle”), gou (means “dog”), zhu ( means “pig”) and niao (means “bird”).

###### **(2) Monosyllabic Single-morpheme Words**

The phonological structure of simple words is not monosyllabic; there are monosyllabic, bisyllabic, and polysyllabic words. Multisyllabic words have no meaning or are irrelevant to the original meaning, regardless of the number of individual syllables. Only the combination of several syllables can give meaning. For multisyllabic simple words, the sound forms within the word may be related in different ways. The Chinese lenition is a phenomenon unique to the Chinese language, inherited from ancient Chinese. It is a two-syllable word with no meaning in a single syllable. For example, qilin (means “kylin”), hudie (means “butterfly”), xiyi (means “spider”) and yuanyang (means “mandarin duck”).

##### **3.1.2 Compounding**

A compounding word is a word formed by combining a root word and a root word. In the word formation method of Chinese animal words, formal compound words are the most common, usually with a certain morpheme as the central morpheme, indicating a class, which is tentatively called “central language”, and descriptive or restrictive morphemes are added in front of the “central language” to construct many words belonging to the addition of descriptive or restrictive morphemes in front of the “central term” creates many words belonging to the “central term” category. For example, Chinese character “long”(meas “dragon”) can serve as a “center word” to create the following: jiaolong, xiaolong, qinglong...

#### **3.2 The Word Formation of English Animal Words**

In English, a word contains one or more morphemes that can stand on its own. Morphology is the branch of grammar which studies the internal structure of words and the rules by which words are formed. A morpheme can be understood as the smallest meaningful unit of language, a unit that cannot be divided into further smaller units without destroying or drastically altering the meaning, whether it is lexical or grammatical, that is, morpheme is both a grammatical and a semantic concept. (Hu, 2017)

##### **3.2.1 Conversion**

Conversion (called sometimes “full conversion”) is a word-formation process by which a word is altered from one part of speech into another without the addition or deletion of any morpheme. There are many examples of words that have been transformed from nouns to verbs without changing their form. In English, it is common to see nouns used as verbs, so that the action can be vividly depicted. This approach also applies to animal nouns. Many animal nouns can be converted into verbs for use in appropriate contexts, based on the shape characteristics or personality traits of the animal, and used to describe the speech and thinking of humans who have

similar characteristics to the animal, making the sentences vivid and imaginative. For example:

Example 1: He hared off down the street.

Hare is a herbivore we know well because its forelimbs are shorter than its hind limbs, so it is good at jumping and running fast. In English, the word here is used as a verb to mean “to run fast”, so that hare is transformed from its original denotative meaning into a concrete descriptive meaning.

Example 2: The salad appeared in a bowl with some dressing and I wolfed it down.

Wolf, which refers to a large canine mammal, is sexually cruel and alert, and uses a fierce pursuit to obtain prey. But after turning into a verb, it is extended to “gobbling up”, which derives from the characteristics of wolves, which are very strong, but when it catches prey, it feasts on it to store energy.

### 3.2.2 Compounding

Compounding refers to the formation of those words that consist of more than one lexical morpheme, or the way to join two separate words to produce a single form. Among English animal words, some of them are produced by compounding, and the main forms of construction are “Adjective + Noun”, “Pronouns + Noun”, “Noun + Noun”, etc.

For example:

Adjective + Noun:	black + bird—blackbird	blue + fish—bluefish
	green + fly—greenfly	gold + fish—goldfish
Pronouns +Noun:	she +wolf—she-wolf	he + goat—he-goat
Noun + Noun:	Billy + goat— Billy-goat	field + mouse—field-mouse
	dragon+ fly —dragonfly	wolf + hound—wolfhound
	fox + hound —foxhound	fire + fly— firefly
	copper + head —copperhead	

### 3.2.3 Derivation

It is the morphological process whereby grammatical or lexical information is added to the base (root or stem). It has been the oldest and the most productive word-formation method in the English language and some other European languages. Some of the animal words are also produced by derivation. Some of the animal words are also produced by derivation. For example,

“-ess” means “female”: lioness, tigress;

“-let” means “small”: piglet, owlet, pullet;

“-er”: anteater, bloodsucker, flycatcher, fox-hunter, kingfisher, oyster-catcher, roadrunner, retriever, sandpiper, pointer, woodpecker;

“-ian”: Alsatian, Dalmatian, Friesian;

“-ling”: yearling, gosling, nestling, fledgling.

## 4. Conclusion

In this thesis, on the basis of reviewing the previous research results, conducting a comparative and detailed comparative study of Chinese-English animal words in terms of word formation. There are great differences in the way Chinese and English animal words are constructed. Radicals and radicals are the components of Chinese characters. Chinese radicals and radicals have both phonetic and ideographic functions, and their combinations make up Chinese characters. Chinese characters can be words in their own right, and combinations of words can form compound words. Many of the radicals in Chinese do not form words on their own, but exist for ideographic purposes. In English, earlier words were made from roots and affixes, mainly from the Latin language. Although there are many Latin roots and English affixes, the English language is faced with a constant flow of new concepts. There were times when there were not enough roots and affixes to go around, so the original words were simply combined, and synthetic words emerged. This difference allows the two languages to express different animals in a richer and more flexible way, and it also provides more possibilities for cross-cultural communication.

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