FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

SYMBOLIC MEANINGS IN JAPANESE PROVERBS FEATURING AQUATIC SPECIES (A CONTRASTIVE STUDY WITH VIETNAMESE PROVERBS)

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ABSTRACT: In this study, we analyze symbolic meanings (SM) in Japanese proverbs that feature aquatic species and compare them with Vietnamese proverbs. The findings show that (i) the two languages share a number of symbolic motifs involving aquatic species; however, the biggest difference is that marine species are more dominant in Japanese proverbs, whereas freshwater species are more prominent in Vietnamese proverbs. This pattern suggests that differences in geographical environment shape human cognition and are reflected in language. (ii) Some SMs and associative mechanisms in Japanese proverbs are the same as those found in Vietnamese proverbs. However, the two languages also diverge in several ways as follows: the same symbolic motif may evoke different SMs; or similar SMs may be conveyed through different motifs; and some SMs only occur in Japanese but not in Vietnamese, and vice versa. It is hoped that this study will contribute to Japanese-language research, teaching, and translation in Vietnam as well as to the findings of contrastive studies on Japanese-Vietnamese proverbs.

KEY WORDS: Proverbs; SMs; aquatic species; Japanese-Vietnamese contrastive linguistics.
RECIEVED: February,10th, 2026 . EDITED: June, 26th, 2026

1. Introduction

Similar to Vietnamese proverbs, Japanese proverbs (Kotowaza) are concise summaries of life experiences and philosophies of the people. Due to the unique characteristics of an island nation, aquatic species hold a significant place in Japanese culture. Comparing the SMs of this element in proverbs of the two countries not only helps learners and translators gain a deeper understanding of national culture but also enhances linguistic effectiveness. However, this topic has not yet been studied in depth. Therefore, this paper focuses on analyzing the similarities and differences in the SMs of aquatic species in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs.

2. Research Methodology and Research Questions

In Japanese, the data were collected from Shogakutosho's Dictionary of Proverbs (尚学図書, 1982). In Vietnamese, the data were collected and tabulated from the dictionary of proverbs compiled by Nguyen Duc Duong (2010). However, during the data collection process, the study also referred to Nguyen Lan's dictionary (2014) for interpretations of meaning. The data were collected based on the terms denoting aquatic species (e.g. fish, shrimp, crab, squid, and etc.), while items containing only indirectly-related elements (e.g. seashells, tuna floss, and etc.) were excluded.

As a result, 235 Japanese proverbs featuring aquatic species were collected, of which 86 proverbs do not carry symbolic meanings. Meanwhile, in Vietnamese, we obtained 189 proverbs related to aquatic species, of which 51 proverbs do not exhibit symbolic meanings.

The data is systematized through statistical methods and classified according to habitat (aquatic, marine, unspecified habitat) and species identification. Simultaneously, the study analyzes the associative mechanisms based on three categories of SMs: human, objects, and events, in order to clarify the cultural characteristics of each country.

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Finally, the study compares the motifs, SMs, and associative mechanisms to clarify the similarities and differences between Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs featuring aquatic species.

3. Literature Review

Based on the viewpoints on proverbs (Kotowaza) of Japanese researchers and linguists such as Takeda (（武田）, 1992), Okutsu (（奥津）, 2000), etc., and Vietnamese proverb researchers such as Cu Dinh Tu (1973), Phan Thi Dao (2001), Trieu Nguyen (2004), Nguyen Duc Duong (2010), etc., this study states that whether in Japanese or Vietnamese, proverbs are short and concise sentences created by the people to convey truths of life, human knowledge, as well as production and life experiences.

Akimoto（秋元）(2002) defines SMs as the linguistic phenomenon of using one entity (object, event) to represent another entity. Based on the viewpoint of Takeda（武田）(1992, p.141) and Sensyu（銭秀双） (2019, p.65), the system creating SMs in Japanese proverbs includes four main methods: simile (直喩), metaphor (隠喩), metonymy (換喩), and synecdoche (提喩).

Both simile and metaphor are based on similar mechanisms but differ in their execution: simile (direct comparison) uses explicit markers such as *youda* -ようだ and *mitai* - みたい, while metaphor conceals the comparison, often employing the structure 「A は B です」(A is B).

On the contrary, metonymy is formed on a closely associated relationship, while synecdoche is based on the inclusive relationship between part and whole (species and genus).

For example, in the Japanese proverb 「朝雨と女の腕まくりには恐れるな」, the image of *a woman rolling up her sleeves* is directly compared with *morning rain*. The comparison is explicit because the two phenomena are placed on the same level and connected by the particle to-と(and). By contrast, in the proverb 「朝雨は女の腕まくり」, the relation is metaphorical: listeners or readers must have a certain understanding of the common characteristic of *morning rain*—namely, that it soon stops—and infer the meaning from the similarity between the two images. In the proverb 「笑う門に福来る」, *the gate* is a part of the house that is the family's living space; using *the gate* to stand for *the family* is therefore a case of metonymy. The proverb 「朝雨は傘をぬげ」 employs a synecdoche: the image of *taking off one's hat* stands for no body protection in general. Takeda (1992, p. 150) refers to this as "using the specific to express the general" (特殊で普遍を表す), or 「種で類を表す提喩」 (*species-for-genus synecdoche*), that is, using an individual item to represent a larger class or collectivity. He also points to the reverse pattern, namely "using the general to express the specific" (普遍で特殊を表す) (*genus-for-species synecdoche*).

Building on this view, Seto (1999, pp. 91–120) draws a clearer distinction between metonymy and synecdoche. He argues that metonymy is grounded in relations of physical contiguity (E-relations), that is, spatial or temporal proximity between entities in the real world. In other words, entity A is used to refer to entity B because they are directly connected in reality, such as the relationship between container–contained, place–product/event, tool–action, and attribute–object. By contrast, synecdoche is based on relations of semantic inclusion (C-relations), involving semantic inclusion among categories in human cognition. This is a process in which a name is transferred from a specific category to a more general category of which it belongs. In historical linguistics, this phenomenon is termed *generalization*. Such transfer relies on our knowledge of how things are classified in the mind (*taxonomy*), rather than on real-world part–whole or adjacency relations (*partonomy*). Seto (1999) also distinguishes two directions of transfer within synecdoche. The first is transfer from the specific to the general (*species for genus*). For example, *pencil* may be used to refer to *writing instruments* in general in *pencil case*. The second is transfer from the general to the specific (*genus for species*). For example, the use of *ticket* to refer specifically to a *traffic ticket* in the sentence *I got a ticket again* illustrates this type. Based on spatial, temporal, and abstract examples, Seto argues that synecdoche

should be treated as an independent category rather than merely as a subtype of metonymy as traditionally conceived.

In Vietnamese, Nguyen Duc Ton (2010) defines SMs as the use of a specific object or phenomenon to express an abstract concept in a symbolic and conventional way. Regarding the methods of creating SMs, researchers such as Nguyen Van No (2007) agree on three main mechanisms: simile, metaphor, and metonymy. However, it is noteworthy that the concept of "general meaning" proposed by Phan Thi Dao (2001) and Trieu Nguyen (2006) is a type of meaning with specific characteristics, different from the types of meaning formed from the three traditional methods mentioned above.

In our opinion, the general meaning stated by Phan Thi Dao (2001) and Trieu Nguyen (2006) is the SM formed by the synecdoche mentioned above by Japanese linguists. An example of the general meaning given by Phan Thi Dao (2001) is *"thợ may ăn giẻ, thợ vẽ ăn hồ, thợ bồ ăn nan, thợ hàn ăn thiếc"*/*"tailors making use of fabrics, painters making use of paints, bamboo weavers making use of bamboo strips, welders making use of tin"*, which means "whatever profession you do, you earn your living from it". In this proverb, the symbolic motifs are "specific professions" and the SM is "profession in general", meaning that "specific materials for each profession" represent "benefits from profession in general". Thus, there is an inclusive relationship between the symbolic motifs and the SM, similar to the definition of synecdoche pointed out by Takeda (1992) and Seito (1999) in Japanese language. Therefore, in this study, we propose four methods of creating SMs in Vietnamese language, including simile, metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. Based on these theories, we proceed to analyze the SMs of elements referring to aquatic species in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs.

With regard to SMs in Japanese proverbs, representative studies include Takeda（武田） (1992) and Sensyu（銭秀双）(2019). Takeda's work (1992) established important theoretical foundations for the study of Japanese proverbs. Building on this framework, together with Seto's analyses discussed above, Sensyu (2019) clarified the SMs of plant-related elements in Japanese proverbs. However, no Japanese-language study to date has addressed the SMs of aquatic species in proverbs.

In Vietnam, Nguyễn Văn Nở (2007) is a representative scholar in this area, but his study is limited to a small number of fish species and does not extend to other aquatic species as well as related elements such as body parts and habitats. Therefore, in order to conduct a comparative analysis of the SMs of aquatic species, it is necessary to examine the SMs of other species so as to supplement the findings of Nguyễn Văn Nở (2007).

In the present study, in order to fill the aforementioned research gaps, we analyze the SMs of aquatic species in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs, and then conduct an interlingual comparison on the basis of the theoretical frameworks outlined above.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Characteristics of symbolic motifs

Regarding symbolic motifs, both languages use freshwater species, marine species, and species with unspecified habitat. Symbolic motifs found in both Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs include octopus, loach, crab, eel, shrimp, clam, sardine, and carp. Some symbolic motifs appear in Japanese proverbs but not in Vietnamese proverbs, such as lizardfish, swordfish, needlefish, medaka, sea cucumber, and abalone, etc. On the contrary, some symbolic motifs appear in Vietnamese proverbs but not in Japanese proverbs, such as perch, snakehead, striped snakehead, fiddler crab, mussel, and baby basket clam, etc. The table below lists the aquatic species that appear in the proverb data of both languages.

Table 1. *Aquatic species appearing in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs*

Aquatic species appearing in both languages	Octopus, loach, crab, eel, shrimp, clam, sardine, and carp	
Aquatic species appearing only in one language	**Japanese**	**Vietnamese**
	Lizardfish, swordfish, needlefish, pufferfish, medaka, mackerel, sea bream, whale, sea bass, crucian carp, Orcinus orca[1], catfish Sea eel, sea cucumber, abalone, squid, clam, spotted babylon, jellyfish	Ray, giant catfish, herring, mullet, lethrinidae, silver carp, perch, striped snakehead, goby, snakehead, tiny shrimp, cobia, white-spotted spinefoot Clam, fiddler crab, baby basket clam, tower snail, mussel, sandworm

By identification, the data is divided into three groups: fish in general, detailed species identification, and non-fish aquatic organisms. The following are detailed statistical results by symbolic motifs in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs (Charts 1, 2), and by identification (Charts 3, 4).

Chart 1[2]

Percentage of AQUATIC SPECIES in Japanese proverbs according to habitat

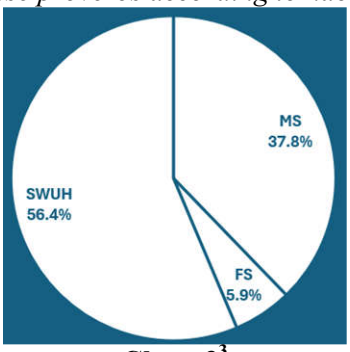


Chart 2

Percentage of AQUATIC SPECIES in Vietnamese proverbs according to habitat

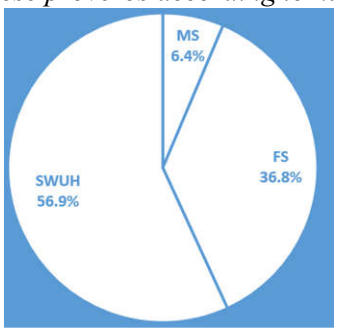


Chart 3[3]

Percentage of AQUATIC SPECIES in Japanese proverbs by identification

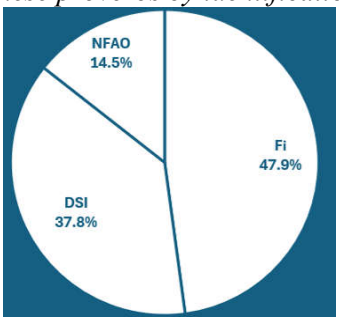
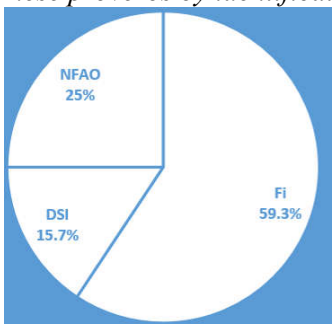


Chart 4

Percentage of AQUATIC SPECIES in Vietnamese proverbs by identification



Data indicates that species with unspecified habitat predominate in both languages. Among species with defined habitats, marine species (seafood) are prevalent in Japanese proverbs but

[1] *Also known as killer whales*

[2] *MS: Marine species, FS: Freshwater species, SWUH: Species with unspecified habitat*

[3] *Fi: Fish, DSI: Detailed species identification, NFAO: Non-fish aquatic organisms*

represent a very small proportion in Vietnamese proverbs. Conversely, the freshwater species occur more frequently in Vietnamese than in Japanese.

In both languages, fish in general appear frequently and in similar proportions. However, Japanese proverbs exhibit a higher prevalence of detailed species identification compared to Vietnamese. On the contrary, non-fish aquatic organisms are less common in Japanese than in Vietnamese proverbs.

Proverbs in both languages contain names of the same species, such as octopus, loach, crab, eel, shrimp, shellfish, sardine, and carp. For example, the Japanese proverb 「蟹は甲羅に似せて穴を掘る」 uses the image of *crab* to symbolize *human beings* in general. Vietnamese likewise employs this image, as in the proverb "Đời cua cua máy; đời cáy cáy đào," where crab-related imagery symbolizes *parents*.

However, Japanese proverbs contain a larger number of culture-specific marine species names, such as lizardfish, swordfish, sea cucumber, and abalone. For instance, in the proverb 「鯛なくば狗母魚」 (If there is no sea bream, one must make do with lizardfish), *lizardfish* symbolizes a second-best substitute used when something better is unavailable. Such elements were not found in the Vietnamese proverb corpus surveyed in this study. By contrast, Vietnamese proverbs frequently contain names of freshwater species which are absent from Japanese proverbs, such as *cá rô, cá chuối, cá sộp, cáy, trai,* and *hến (*perch, snakehead fish, catfish, crab, clam, mussel, etc.)

In addition to species identification, the symbolic motifs in proverbs of the two languages also include related entities such as body parts, habitats, harvesting tools, processing methods, as well as specific activities and states of aquatic species. Japanese proverbs also contain elements not found in the Vietnamese proverb corpus, such as fish stalls, crab shells, and squid shells. For example, the proverb 「不善人といるは鮑魚の肆に入るがごとし」 ("To associate with bad people is like entering a shop selling dried or salted fish") uses the image of *fish shop* to convey the corrupting influence of a bad environment. On the contrary, Vietnamese proverbs commonly employ images closely tied to local life and cuisine, such as *rau má* (pennywort/ gotu kola), salt, stakes, fishhooks, fins, and dilapidated houses. For instance, the proverb "Không có cá lấy rau má làm trọng" ("If there is no fish, value pennywort instead") uses the image of *rau má (pennywort)* to symbolize the material resources available to a person.

The differences in symbolic motifs in the proverbs of the two countries clearly reflect their geographical and economic characteristics. Marine species are dominant in Japanese proverbs while freshwater species are the main focus in Vietnamese proverbs. With its island nation status and long-standing fishing tradition, the lives of the Japanese people are closely intertwined with sea. Inuzuka (2011) called Japan the land of the sea （海国日本）. Matsuura et al. (2004, p9) wrote that "Japan comprises four large islands and is surrounded by a long coastline stretching from north to south. The seas surrounding Japan act as a convergence zone for fish species from cold currents in the north and warm currents in the south, creating some of the world's most productive fishing grounds with diverse migratory fish species arriving each season". Typical fish species of Japanese fishery mentioned by Matsuura et al. (2004, p10) include tuna, salmon, sardines, anchovies, mackerel, scad, and squid. In real life, marine species plays an important role for the Japanese people, which has influence on their linguistic thinking and creates a rich symbolic system of marine species in Japanese proverbs. On the contrary, in Vietnam, the dense network of rivers and the rice-based agriculture have established the dominant role of freshwater species in the lives of Vietnamese people. In spite of possessing a long coastline, freshwater organisms (in ponds, lakes, rice paddies) are more familiar to Vietnamese people than marine species. This is due to a history of concentrated settlement in the plains and limitations in transportation in the past. This difference in geographical features and lifestyles is the direct cause of differentiation in symbolic motifs in proverbs between the two countries.

4.2. Characteristics of SMs in proverbs featuring aquatic species.

In the proverb system of both languages, aquatic species play a role in symbolizing categories of human, events, and objects.

Considering all three categories, the statistical data show a significant similarity between the two languages: SMs referring to human are overwhelmingly dominant in both Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs, with roughly equal proportions. This is followed by SMs referring to events with the second highest proportion, and finally, SMs referring to objects with the lowest proportion. However, upon closer comparative analysis, there is a shift in the distribution structure between the two languages. In Japanese, aquatic entities tend to be abstracted to represent events more frequently than in Vietnamese. By contrast, Vietnamese shows a lower proportion of these species used as symbols for objects compared to the comparative language (detailed illustrations in Charts 5 and 6).

Chart 5[4]

Proportion of SMs in Japanese proverbs

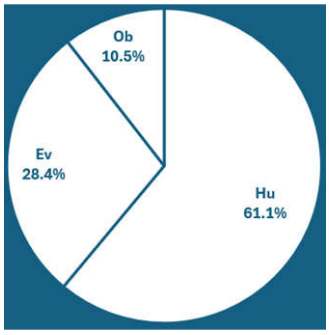
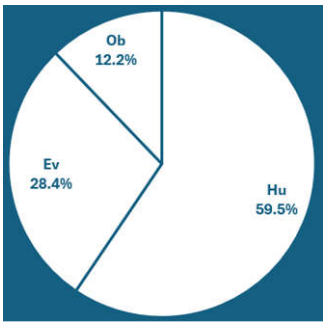


Chart 6

Proportion of SMs in Vietnamese proverbs



From the aforementioned statistics, it can be seen that although there are significant differences in symbolic motifs, both Japanese and Vietnamese people share similarities in using images of aquatic species as an effective means to depict aspects of human, events and objects. The following section will delve into a detailed analysis of the characteristic association mechanisms of the two nations in the process of constructing SMs in proverbs referring to aquatic species.

4.2.1. The Category of Human in Japanese Proverbs

Mechanical attributes such as shape, size, condition, and biological characteristics of aquatic species are mapped onto SMs referring to human beings through metaphor and simile. Among these, metaphor serves as the primary meaning-making mechanism, enabling the natural features of the referent to be projected onto corresponding social and human attributes or states.

Based on the qualitative characteristics of body parts of aquatic species (such as belly, heart, shell, head, and tail) or sensory characteristics (fishy smell), Japanese proverbs establish associative mechanisms with humanistic values. Accordingly, these physical characteristics are referenced to abstract categories in order to represent the soul, attitude, nature, or age stratification of human beings.

J1) サヨリのように腹黒い (As black as halfbeak's belly; Reminding everyone to be wary of people with dark and narrow-minded hearts)

In example J1, the image of halfbeak acts as a metaphor to represent narrow-minded individuals. Through metaphorical mechanism, the "belly" is referred to the category of "thoughts and

[4] *Hu: Human , Ev: Events, Ob: Objects*

intentions", while the "black" color symbolizes negativity and dishonesty. The combination of the elements "halfbeak + belly + black" creates a complete SM: a person associated with dark thoughts and schemes.

Based on the attributes of size and weight, the Japanese language establishes an associative mechanism to express a person's abilities, power, and social status. Accordingly, the image of "big fish" is associated with talented, powerful individuals, or dangerous individuals who have committed serious crimes. On the contrary, "small fish" symbolizes individuals with limited abilities, belonging to the disadvantaged or vulnerable groups in society.

J2) 大魚は小池に棲まず (Big fish do not live in small ponds.)

In example J2, based on the biological characteristics of big fish such as size, strength, and ability to dominate smaller species, Japanese language has established a metaphor for talented individuals who are capable of leading or gaining dominance in social conflicts. Correspondingly, the image of "small ponds" serves as a symbol of a confined environment, lacking resources for development. This frame of reference creates a structural analogy in which the "big fish" being confined to a narrow space represents the reality that talented individuals lack the favorable conditions to fully develop their abilities.

Through the unique behaviors of aquatic species, such as movement (swimming, leaping over waterfall, climbing trees), hunting methods, and interactions with the aquatic environment, Japanese people make metaphorical associations with human capabilities and qualities. Specifically, these characteristics are used to represent multifaceted aspects of human life, from success and fierce fighting spirit to negative character traits such as greed, avarice, or laziness. Especially, some physiological activities of these species are used to symbolize specific social behaviors, such as drinking habits.

J3) 猿の水練魚の木登り (Monkeys learn to swim, fish climb trees)

J4) 鮟鱇の待ち喰い (Anglerfish waiting for prey)

In example J3, Japanese linguistic thinking operates on the metaphorical mechanism of incompatibility between entity and environment. The fish's act of "climbing trees" establishes a paradoxical state of biological function, which then refers to the social category to imply that a person works in an environment completely contrary to their core strengths and abilities. The similarity as a basis of this association lies not in form but in the behavior's impossibility. Similarly, example J4 uses "anglerfish" as a metaphorical symbol for a passive lifestyle through the corresponding model: "fish waiting for prey" and "people waiting for achievements that are not their own doing". This fish's characteristic of suppressing active movement is referenced the dependent and unmotivated state of human. Thereby, the metaphor not only describes a survival phenomenon but also carries a critical nuance towards individuals who rely on luck and go against the principle of value creation through labor.

The physical states and survival situations of aquatic species, such as being caught, escaping, or temperature change, are symbolized for aspects of human life. These attributes become a linguistic code expressing individual circumstances of restraint or freedom, as well as specific psychological and behavioral states such as intoxication, impulsiveness, or loss of control, etc.

J5) 慌てる蟹は穴に入れぬ (A panicked crab cannot enter its burrow)

Example J5 establishes a correspondence between the "crab – panicked – entering burrow" model and the "person – hasty – carrying out work" model. This image symbolizes a state of panic that causes individuals to fail in even the most instinctive or familiar tasks. Panic transforms burrowing (a simple survival skill of crabs) into a paradox of performance, similar to human confusion under pressure.

Drawing inspiration from the aquatic species' habitats such as rivers, freshwater, and seas, Japanese people have formed metaphorical associations with people who have diverse destinies, social contexts, and working environments.

J6) 蝦踊れども川を出でず (No matter how hard a shrimp jumps, it cannot leave the river)

In example J6, the image of a jumping shrimp is used as a metaphor for human powerlessness in the face of fate. Despite possessing a strong instinct for movement, shrimp cannot leave the river ecosystem that determines its survival. The similarity between "river" and "fate" establishes a worldview of inevitability: no matter how hard individuals struggle, they are still limited by objective rules and barriers of destiny.

From fishing tools such as nets, to seafood processing tools like cutting boards and pots, the image of aquatic species is metaphorically associated with human in a state of being trapped, imprisoned, or in a dangerous situation.

J7) 網呑舟の魚を漏らす (The net lets a fish bigger than the boat escape)

J8) 魚の釜中に遊ぶが若し (Fish playing in a pot)

In example J7, the big fish acts as a symbolic carrier, representing serious crime. Conversely, the net, a symbolic material in fishing, is associated with the law as a tool for enforcing national justice. The act of fishing with a net but letting a big fish escape is interpreted symbolically as capturing criminals but allowing a serious criminal to escape.

In example J8, the pot is a symbolic material characterized by its closed nature, preventing the fish inside from resisting or escaping, and simultaneously exposing the fish to the risk of destruction. Therefore, the combination of "fish – pot – playing" constitutes a symbolic field, in which the SM is referred to as a person in a dangerous situation.

Furthermore, the relationships between aquatic species as symbolic motifs, are interpreted and referenced by Japanese people to the relationships between people on a level of SM, which reflects the forms of social interaction in human life.

J9) 鮒の仲間には鮒が王 (Among the crucian carp genus, crucian carp is king.)

J10) 水清ければ魚棲まず (Water that is too clear has no fish.)

In example J9, the fish, which is the head of the genus and serves as the symbolic carrier, is symbolically referred to as the leader of an organization or a nation. In addition, the close relationship between aquatic species and their habitat (especially the fish-water relationship) is used as symbolic motif for human relationships.

In example J10, the inseparable relationship between fish and water as a symbolic motif is interpreted at the level of SM as the friendship between people. The structure of "fish - too clear water – no relationship" corresponds to "people – overly harsh attitude – no friendship", thereby forming the meaning of the proverb: an overly harsh person will have no friends.

From the aforementioned analysis, it can be seen that the Japanese language structuring process is mainly based on exploiting biological characteristics of aquatic species as *symbolic motif* through metaphorical associations. Through the mechanism of meaning transfer, these natural attributes are restructured to express the categories of human life such as personality, behavior, circumstances of existence, and social relationships. Thereby, the typical symbolic thinking of Japanese culture in generalizing the laws of life is clearly demonstrated.

4.2.2. Categories of objects and events in Japanese proverbs

Based on exploiting the typical biological attributes of aquatic species as symbolic motif, the Japanese proverb system has established symbolic referential relationships to a diverse range of categories of objects and events in life. In this domain, metaphor remains the principal mechanism for creating SMs, while metonymy and synecdoche are also employed.

In the category of events, aquatic species are associated with and mapped onto abstract domains such as secrecy, benefit, achievement and good fortune, work, shortcomings, content of speech, and etc. The examples below illustrate SMs in the event category within the Japanese proverb system.

J11) 淵中の魚を知る者は不祥なり (It is ill-omened for those who know the fish in the deep water)

J12) 魚を争う者は濡る (Those who compete for fish will inevitably get wet)

J13) 釜中魚を生ず (There is no fish in the pot.)

In example J11, fish in deep water, which are difficult to detect due to being covered by many layers of water, are used as symbolic motif and are symbolically referred to as secrets. Thereby, the proverb's meaning is formed as follows: "the person who holds the secrets risks falling into a dangerous situation".

In example J12, fish, which require a lot of effort to catch, become a symbolic motif of the benefits that people compete for. The act of competing in a watery environment, resulting in getting wet, is interpreted symbolically as losses. Therefore, the proverb expresses the meaning: the competition for benefits, whether successful or not, always leads to certain losses.

It can be seen that both proverbs use metaphor to create SMs of aquatic species. In example J13, the pot is a cooking utensil, and fish is food that sustains people in reality. The phenomenon of "no fish in the pot" is a sign of scarcity of necessities, a manifestation of poverty. This specific phenomenon is used to symbolize a more abstract state (poverty) through metonymy.

In case the SM belongs to the category of objects, aquatic species in Japanese proverbs symbolize property, worthless objects, possessed items, and money.

J14) うちの鯛より隣の鰯 (*The neighbor's sardines seem better than one's own sea breams.*)

In this example, the images of "sardines" and "sea breams", which are human food, are used to symbolize things that are owned or not owned by humans. "The neighbor's sardines" are owned by someone else (the neighbor), while "one's own sea breams" is owned by oneself. Japanese people often use uchi-うち to indicate what they own. In this case, the human element, specifically "neighbor", who is someone living near one's house, is used to refer to "outsiders" in general. Furthermore, the specific object "sea breams" (one's own) is used to refer to things that belong to oneself in general, while "sardines" (someone else's) is used to refer to things that belong to someone else in general. Therefore, it can be seen that the SM in this case is formed through the mechanism of synecdoche.

Through analysis, one can observe that aquatic species and related elements, as symbolic motifs, are referenced to categories of objects and events in human life. Through the mechanism of transfer from symbolic motifs to SMs, natural characteristics are restructured to reflect social phenomena and life experiences. This contributes to clarifying the characteristics of symbolic thinking in Japanese proverbs.

4.2.3. Comparison with Vietnamese proverbs referring to aquatic species

The Vietnamese linguistic system is similar to Japanese in its use of aquatic species as a symbolic representation of human, objects, and events. The same symbolic categories between the two languages are established based on three main axes. Firstly, the category of human includes positive archetypes such as successful individuals, talented people, and free subjects, as well as group of persons with negative characteristics such as greedy individuals, disobedient ones, those in precarious situations, or imitators. Secondly, the category of events is typified by the concepts of benefit, achievement, luck, and work. Thirdly, the category of objects focuses on property values, worthless items, or objects beyond the ability to own.

The symbolic meanings of aquatic species related to human in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs are summarized in the following table.

Table 2. *Groups of symbolic meanings of aquatic species*

Symbolic meaning groups		Japanese	Vietnamese
Symbolic meanings related to human	Symbolic meanings related to human communities and relationships	水清ければ魚棲まず (Water that is too clear has no fish)	Nước trong quá thì không có cá (A river too pure yields no fish)
	Symbolic meanings related to human virtues	香餌の下必ず死魚あり (There are always dead fish under delicious bait)	Cá chết vì mồi (The bait hides the hook)
	Symbolic meanings related to competencies	大魚は小池に棲まず (Big fish do not live in small ponds)	Cá lớn nuốt cá bé (Might makes right)
	Symbolic meanings related to social status and social classes	網呑舟の魚を漏らす (The net lets a fish bigger than the boat escape)	Cá chuối đắm đuối vì con (A mother's love knows no bounds)
	Symbolic meanings related to circumstances and states	蝦踊れども川を出でず (No matter how hard a shrimp jumps, it cannot leave the river)	Cá nằm trốc thớt (Like a fish on a chopping board)
Symbolic meanings related to objects	Assets, possessions, money	うちの鯛より隣の鰯 (The neighbor's sardines seem better than one's own sea breams)	Cá ai lạc vào ao ta, ta được (Finders keepers, losers weepers)
Symbolic meanings related to events	Benefits, achievements, luck, secrets, etc.	淵中の魚を知る者は不祥なり (It is ill-omened for those who know the fish in the deep water)	Một con cá lội, mấy người buông câu (There is only one fish but several people cast their lines/ Many dogs are after one bone)

Based on biological characteristics and external factors such as body structure, size, behaviors, ecological environment, and the system of tools used for exploitation and processing, Vietnamese language establishes multifaceted metaphorical associations about human beings. These physical attributes are mapped to human to represent personality, abilities, social status, and complex relationships. For example, in the proverb *"Cá chết vì mồi"/"Fish die because of bait",* the "fish - die - bait" model is correspondingly mapped to the structure of "human - danger – benefit", based on the similarity between the instinct for survival and greed in the face of material temptations. Similarly, the proverb *"Cá lớn nuốt cá bé"/"Big fish eat small fish"* uses the opposition of physical size as a symbolic code for power inequality. Here, the act of "eating" between species of different sizes is a metaphor for the law of social antagonism, where powerful individuals or groups impose their dominance and eliminate weaker individuals. The aforementioned examples serve as typical evidence of similarities in linguistic thinking between Japanese and Vietnamese, in which aquatic species are used as symbolic motif to represent human characteristics through metaphorical

mechanisms. This process is not merely a comparison of form, but rather the transfer of biological characteristics from symbolic motifs to SM, aiming to generalize psychological states, personalities, and destinies of human beings in the proverbs of both nations.

Regarding SM within the category of objects and events, it is noted that many Vietnamese proverbs are similar to the Japanese proverb system. In the proverbs such as *"Có cá mòi đòi cá chiên"/"There are sardines, yet people demand goonch catfish"/"The more you have, the more you want"*, the symbolic motif of fish is referred to as the SM of benefit, based on the characteristics of fish as an object that is caught and contested by humans. Similarly, in the proverb *"Cá ai lạc vào ao ta, ta được"/"If someone's fish wanders into my pond, I get it"*, the combination of symbolic motifs of "fish - wander - my pond" is interpreted symbolically as "someone's property - random appearance - space under the ownership of another". Elements such as containers for aquatic species (such as fish baskets) or the habitats (ponds) serve as symbolic motifs for the space where the property is stored, thereby establishing the inner-outer boundary and affirming the ownership.

In addition to the similarities in SMs and associative mechanisms mentioned above, the two languages also have the following differences. There are cases where the same symbolic motif can convey different SM in the two languages. For example, in Japanese, some SM do not appear in the Vietnamese proverb corpus of this study, such as "drunkard", "person who cannot escape their fate", etc., as analyzed in the previous section. On the contrary, some SM in Vietnamese proverbs such as parents, children, diligent person, misfortune, etc., do not appear in the Japanese proverb corpus surveyed. For example, in Vietnamese, "fish" represents the object of anger, and the "cutting board" represents the object of wrongful accusation. In the proverb *"Giận cá chém thớt"/"Angered by fish, chop the cutting board"/"Taking out your anger on the wrong person"*, the symbolic elements, consisting of three parts: "fish + chop + cutting board", are associated with "the object of anger + the act of venting anger + the object directly affected". In addition, in some proverbs, the same SM is expressed through different symbolic elements in the two languages. For example, the SM of "talented person" in Vietnamese is associated with valuable aquatic species such as "golden loach" in the proverb *"Đất sỏi có chạch vàng"/"There is golden loach in barren land"* (Despite their poverty, their family have talented and virtuous children). Similarly, the SM of "benefit" in Japanese is associated with marine species like whales and sea bream, etc., while in Vietnamese it is associated with freshwater species like crucian carp, perch, snakehead, etc.

The similarities and differences in symbolic meanings in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs can be summarized in the following table.

***Table 3**. Similarities and differences in symbolic meanings of aquatic species in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs*

Same symbolic motifs and same symbolic meanings	逃がした魚は大きい (The fish that got away is always the biggest)	Con cá sẩy là con cá to (The one that got away)
Same symbolic motifs but different symbolic meanings	いつも柳の下にどじょうはおらぬ (There are not always loaches under the willow tree)	Nhà rách có chạch vàng (Don't judge a book by its cover)
Same symbolic meanings but different symbolic motifs	蝦で鯛を釣る (Catch a sea bream with a shrimp)	Thả con săn sắt bắt con cá rô (Throw a sprat to catch a mackerel)
Different symbolic motifs and different symbolic meanings	蝦踊れども川を出でず (No matter how hard a shrimp jumps, it cannot leave the river)	Giận cá chém thớt (Taking out anger on the wrong person)

The aforementioned analyses have clarified the similarities and differences in the symbolic meanings of aquatic species in Japanese and Vietnamese proverbs. This result reflects the worldview and linguistic thinking of the people of each country when symbolizing aquatic species in proverbs. These differences are caused by the realities of life and the livelihoods of the people of the two countries. Japan, characterized by its maritime economy, contrasts sharply with Vietnam which is primarily based on rice farming.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we examine SMs in proverbs referring to aquatic species in Japanese and Vietnamese. The findings show that the two languages share many similarities in symbolic motifs, SMs, and associative mechanisms. In terms of symbolic motifs, both languages use general fish, specifically-named fish species, non-fish aquatic species, freshwater species – marine species, as well as aquatic species with unspecified habitat. Furthermore, elements such as body parts, movements, states, and living environments also appear frequently in proverbs. Regarding SMs, both languages form categories of human, objects, and events. Of these, the category of human is dominant. In terms of meaning-making mechanisms, metaphor is the primary method, followed by simile, synecdoche, and metonymy.

In addition to similarities, there are also differences in symbolic motifs and SMs between two languages. In some proverbs, the same symbolic motif is associated with different SMs. Conversely, there are instances where different symbolic motifs are associated with the same SM in Japanese and Vietnamese. A remarkable difference is that symbolic motif in Japanese is dominated by marine species, while freshwater species predominates in Vietnamese proverbs. This reflects the differences in cultural experiences and life experiences reflected in the proverbs of the two languages.

In this study, we have only analyzed a small number of proverbs referring to aquatic species, without mentioning other animals. In further studies, we will expand the data to include proverbs featuring other elements such as other animals, plants, etc., to complete the overall picture of the SMs in Vietnamese and Japanese proverbs.

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Nghĩa biểu trưng trong tục ngữ tiếng Nhật chứa yếu tố chỉ các loài thủy sinh (đối chiếu với tục ngữ tiếng Việt)

Tóm tắt: Trong nghiên cứu này, chúng tôi tiến hành phân tích nghĩa biểu trưng trong tục ngữ chứa các yếu tố chỉ các loài thủy hải sản của tiếng Nhật và so sánh với tục ngữ tiếng Việt. Kết quả cho thấy i) Chất liệu biểu trưng trong hai ngôn ngữ có những điểm tương đồng về các loài thủy hải sản, nhưng điểm khác biệt lớn nhất là trong tục ngữ tiếng Nhật, các loài hải sản chiếm ưu thế, trong tục ngữ tiếng Việt, các loài thủy sản chiếm ưu thế. Đây là minh chứng cho thấy những khác biệt về môi trường địa lý ảnh hưởng sâu sắc tới tư duy của con người và được thể hiện trong ngôn ngữ. ii) Trong tục ngữ tiếng Nhật có những nghĩa biểu trưng, cơ chế liên tưởng giống với tục ngữ tiếng Việt nhưng cũng có những nghĩa biểu trưng khác biệt được liên tưởng từ cùng một chất liệu biểu trưng, có những nghĩa biểu trưng giống nhau được liên tưởng từ những chất liệu biểu trưng khác nhau, có những nghĩa biểu trưng chỉ xuất hiện trong tiếng Nhật nhưng không xuất hiện trong tiếng Việt và ngược lại. Nghiên cứu hy vọng đóng góp một phần vào việc nghiên cứu, đào tạo và dịch thuật ngôn ngữ Nhật tại Việt Nam, đóng góp một phần vào thành quả nghiên cứu đối chiếu tục ngữ Nhật-Việt.

Từ khóa: Tục ngữ; nghĩa biểu trưng; thủy; hải sản; đối chiếu.