

# Contrastive analysis on the pragmatics of French and Chinese idiomatic expressions: the defrosting

## Abstract:

Fixedness is a polyfactorial phenomenon (LAMIROY and KLEIN, 2005: 135) and “a linguistic process which, from a syntagm whose elements are free, makes a syntagm whose elements cannot be dissociated” (G. GROSS, 1996: 3-4). MEJRI (2005: 184) specifies that “[...] fixdness can be only partial, which implies degrees in the process [...]. This supposes [...] a continuum between free sequences and constrained sequences”. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is the comparative analysis of French idiomatic expressions (i.e. un coup de main [to give sb a hand], casser sa pipe [kick the bucket], etc.) with their Chinese counterparts or *chéngyǔ* (满面春风 *mǎnmiànchūnfēng*: shine with happiness/be smiling from ear to ear/look like a million dollars/one's face radiates happiness), both of which are characterized by a high degree of fixedness.

However, a frozen sequence can in turn be dis-frozen, i.e., lose some of its formal fixity (tout feu tout femme [all fire all woman], defrosting of être tout feu tout flamme [all fire all flames]; 随心所欲 *suíxīnsuǒyù* and its original *chéngyǔ* is 随心所欲 *suíxīnsuǒyù* for a bathroom advertisement) and its globality semantic (Elle fait deux poids deux mesures [She's double standards], in an advertisement for a weighing scale). This detour of fixdness, considered as “défigement” (defrosting)<sup>1</sup> or 成语活用 *chéngyǔhuóyòng* (CHEN, 2021: 219) in Chinese, is quite often used in puns, humor and journalistic discourse. Defrosting thus defined represents an excellent tool for discourse creation. We are therefore interested in the particular phenomenon of defrosting in a contrastive perspective between French (Indo-European family, inflectional and derivational language) and Chinese (Sino-Tibetan family, isolating or analytical language), which can allow us to better deepen interlinguistic and intercultural study in the two countries insofar as fixedness is a “mechanism crystallizing the idiomaticity of a language” (MEJRI, 2008: 245).

Our corpus drawn from various sources (advertising, newspapers, blogs, social networks, forums, spontaneous exchanges, textbooks, etc.) allows us to show the vividness of the defrosting (especially the idiomatic expressions) whether “for metaphorical or playful reasons” (G. GROSS, 1996: 71) in both languages. The methodology is based on a purely linguistic comparative analysis on idiomatic expressions. We have already obtained results relating to formal defrosting (paradigmatic change: replacement of lexies/syntagmatic change by addition, syntagmatic change by subtraction or reduction, syntagmatic change by modification of order, defrosting by fusion or separation), semantics (literal duality or figurative/Remotivation by metalinguistic mention) and also on the differences between variation and defrosting in the two languages.

**Keywords:** contrastive linguistics, defrosting, fixdness, idiomatic expressions, French-Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> (KLETT 2013, MEJRI 2013, ZHU 2014)

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