

## Contrastive phraseology in French and Chinese: the notion of fixedness and its linguistic properties

### Abstract

Every nature language possesses a number of polylexical units that belong to it specifically. The elements of these units are inseparable and have to be organized in a certain order to convey a meaning. Linguists define them as “frozen expressions” or “fixed expressions” (G. Gross, 1996), “fixed sequences” (Mejri, 1997), “fixed elements” (Palma, 2007), or “phraseological units” (González Rey, 2002). In Chinese, the most common term for these elements is “熟语 shúyǔ” (Sun, 1989, Wang, 2006, etc.). Phraseology is the area of linguistics concerned with the study of these fixed expressions.

Today, researchers in both the East and West are increasingly studying these fixed expressions in their respective languages. However, relatively little research has been conducted from a comparative perspective concerning these expressions in French (an inflectional and derivational language of the Indo-European family) and Chinese (an isolating or analytic language of the Sino-Tibetan family). French and Chinese are two languages very rich in idiomatic expressions that reflect the respective societies, cultures, literatures, histories, beliefs, customs and superstitions of each language’s speakers, as well as their specific national mentalities and worldviews. The main object of this article is to provide a comparative analysis of phraseological units in the two languages.

The crosslinguistic analysis of fixed sequences or "phraseological units" and shúyǔ in Chinese terminology shows that these polylexical units share common properties: paradigmatic non-substitutability; blocking of their morphosyntactic properties; semantic non-compositionality. However, phraseologists from two countries note that there are different degrees of rigidity depending on the phraseologicals units (collocation, proverb, idiomatic expressions) or shúyǔ (*guànyòngyǔ*, *yànyǔ*, *xīzhòuyǔ*, *chéngyǔ*), forming a continuum between free sequences and those which are fully constrained. As Gluksberg points out: among fixed expressions, there would be those which are “more” compositional and those which are “less” (quoted by Ralic, 2015, p. 58). In both languages, linguists also evoke certain variations concerning phraseological units: possibilities of lexical and syntactic variation, degree of semantic opacity with a continuum from literal meaning to global meaning.

**Keywords** : contrastive lexicology, contrastive phraseology, fixed expressions, phraseological units, chinese-French

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