

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

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1. Phraseology and Phraseological units

Phraseological units

VS

Shúyǔ 熟语

(i) a certain degree of **syntactic fixedness** (blocking of transformational properties and unalterable constituent order); and/or (ii) a certain degree of **semantic fixedness** (at least partial non-compositionality); and/or (iii) a certain degree of **lexical fixedness** (paradigmatic restriction); and/or (iv) a constraint on use in a communication situation (Bolly 2011: 28)

Phraseology is the dimension of linguistics that concerns the study and analysis of these fixed expressions.

Idiomatic expressions

Chéngyǔ 成语 (ready-made expression)

High degree of fixedness, or (定型性 *dìngxíngxìng*)

2. French idiomatic expressions and Chinese *chéngyǔ*

Idiomatic expressions

Ex : avoir le coeur sur la main (to have the heart on the hand / to give the shirt off one's back / to have a heart of gold)

VS

Chéngyǔ 成语

Ex : 龙腾虎跃 (the dragon, jump, the tiger, jump)

Pinyin : lóng téng hǔ yuè

Literal translation: dragons rising and tigers leaping

Implied signification: a scene of bustling activity / a place where dragons soar and tigers leap / a scene of hustle and bustle as in a worksite

Expression

Implies a rhetoric and a stylistic; most often involves the use of a “metaphor, metonymy, etc.

Idiomativity

- 1) Non-autonomous lexical units: polylexicity
- 2) Functional integrity : like a monolexical units in the sentence
- 3) High degree of fixedness: non-compositionality; paradigmatic non-substitutability; syntax blocking.

Expressive and stylistic properties + idiom

- polylexical sequences,
- semantically non-compositional
- high degree of syntactic fixedness
- loaded with cultural implicits

3. Défigement (Defrosting)

Idiomatic expressions

VS

chéngyǔ 成语

- Non-compositionality: high degree of semantic fixedness
- Paradigmatic non-substitutability: high degree of lexical fixedness
- Syntax blocking: high degree of syntactic fixedness

Figement



Défigement

VS

固定结构 Gùdìng jiégòu



活用 huóyòng

Fixedness



defrosting

For example :

1) « En avril ne te découvre pas d'un **fil** » (Cast not a clout till may is out / Till April's dead, change not a thread) → « En avril ne te découvre pas d'un **DIM** » (Clothing brand).

2) « Qui trop embrasse, **mal étreint** » (Grasp all, lose all) → « Qui trop embrasse, **manque le train** » (Who kisses too much, misses the train). (by a poet Robert Desnos)

3) « Elle respire la vertu » (She is very virtuous) → « Elle respire la vertu, mais elle est vite essoufflée » (She looks very virtuous, but the reality is contrary) (Georges ELGOZY).



Defrosting follows three lexical and syntactic rules.

- 1) The modification must be clear and convey the speaker's intent.
- 2) The gap between the base formula and the modified expression must be sufficiently large for the change to be perceived.
- 3) The original phraseological unit must remain recognizable thanks to the retained elements and the context (cited in Klett, 2013: 62).

Défigements des expressions
idiomatiques (Defrosting of
idiomatic expressions)

VS

« 成语活用 *chéngyǔ huóyòng* »
(Defrosting of *chéngyǔ*).

- 1) Loss of **formal** fixdeness
- 2) Loss of **semantic** fixdeness

Corpus

advertising, newspapers, blogs, social networks, forums, textbooks, etc.

Methodology

based on a purely linguistic comparative analysis on idiomatic expressions and *chengyu* 成语.

3.1 Loss of formal fixdeness

1) Paradigmatic change: replacement of lexies

1) tout feu tout **flamme** (to be aflame with passion / to be fired with enthusiasm) -> tout feu tout **femme**; (title of a movie)

2) se mettre **martel** en tête (be worried sick) -> mettez-vous **Martell** en tête (Martell : cognac) ;



1) 随心所欲 (follow, heart, placed before a verb as an agent of action, desire)

Pinyin: suí xīn suǒ yù

Signification: follow one's bent inclinations/ arbitrarily/at one's sweet will

↓ water heater advertisement



随心所浴 (follow, heart, [placed before a verb as agent of action, take a bath])

Pinyin : suí xīn suǒ yù

Signification : take a shower according to one's sweet will

2) 默默无闻 (silently, without, famously)

Pinyin: mò mò wú wén

Signification: unknown to the public/be completely unknown or unrecognized

↓ advertisement for mosquito coil brand



默默无蚊 (silently, without, mosquito)

Pinyin : mò mò wú wén

Signification : tranquility without mosquitoes

2) Syntagmatic changes through addition

- 1) Il cassera **tôt ou tard** sa pipe. (addition) - **He will break sooner or later his pipe.**
- 2) Luc a cassé sa pipe et tu casseras **la tienne** un jour aussi. (pronominalisation)- **Luc broke his pipe and you will break yours one day too.**
- 3) Une fois sa pipe **cassée**, nous serons libres d'agir. (passivation) - **Once his pipe is broken, we will be free to act. (passivation)**

CASSER SA PIPE = mourir



Kick the bucket = to die

百川殊途**而**同归于海

Pinyin : bǎichuān shū tú **ér** tóng guī yú hǎi

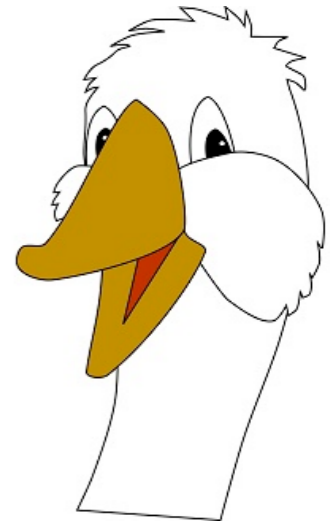
Translation: hundreds of rivers **then** return to the sea by different routes

@ranny_illus

The original expression is « 殊途同归 *shū tú tóng guī* »: reach the same goal by different means [routes] / all roads lead to Rome

3) Syntagmatic change by subtraction or reduction

“c’est une oie blanche” (it’s a “white goose”) -> “C’est une oie” (It’s a “goose”)



1) Deletion of the beginning of *chéngyǔ*:

« 三十而立 sānshíér lì » (thirty, and, standing).

Signification: a man should be independent [steadfast] at the age of thirty.; at thirty, a man should be able to think for himself



而立之年 èr lì zhī nián (standing, of, year)

2) Removal of the end of the *chéngyǔ*

« 雌雄宝剑 cí xióng bǎo jiàn » (female, male, treasure, sword) which designates / denoting a double-edged sword/a treasured sword

« 杨柳细腰 yáng liǔ xì yāo » (poplar, willow, thin/fine, waist): wasp waisted like poplar and willow.



拿那雌雄宝插她的杨柳细边。

Pinyin : Ná nà cíxióngbǎo chā ta de yángliǔxì biān.

Translation: Insert this treasure (implied: sword) into his thin as poplar and willow (implied: waist), i.e. kill.

4) Syntagmatic change by modification of order

只要是损己利人的，他就选挑上，自己背起来。

Pinyin : Zhǐyào shì sǔnjǐlìrén de, tā jiù xuǎn tiāo shàng, zìjǐ bēi qǐlái.

Translation: As long as it hurts **himself** and benefits **others**, he chooses and accepts it.

The original expression is: « 损人利己 sǔn rén lì jǐ »: to seek **one's own interest** at the expense of **others** / to secure benefits at the expense of others.

5) Loss of fixedness by fusion or separation

On March 20, 1989, the Libération newspaper headlined :
Coup d'état de grâce -> “coup d'état” (stroke of state) and “état de grâce” (state of grace).



捧腹喷饭 *pěngfù-pēnfàn* », from the following two *chéngyǔ*:

捧腹大笑 (hold with both hands, belly, big, laugh)

Pinyin: **pěng fù** dà xiào

Translation: uproarious/double up with laughter/be convulsed with laughter

令人喷饭 (let, people, **spring, rice**)

Pinyin: lìng rén **pēn fàn**

Translation: make sb. spurt out his food by laughing/choke with laughter/rouse laughter

« 开源节流 *kāi yuán jiē liú* » : broaden sources of income and reduce expenditure / earn more income and cut down expense

我们两个人的 « 开源 » 的途径既不广，同时只得极力 « 节流 » 。

Pinyin: Wǒmen liǎng gè rén de **kāiyuán** de tújìng jì bù guǎng, tóngshí zhǐ děi jíliè **jiéliú**.

Translation: Since our **resources** weren't vast, we had to do our best to **economize**.

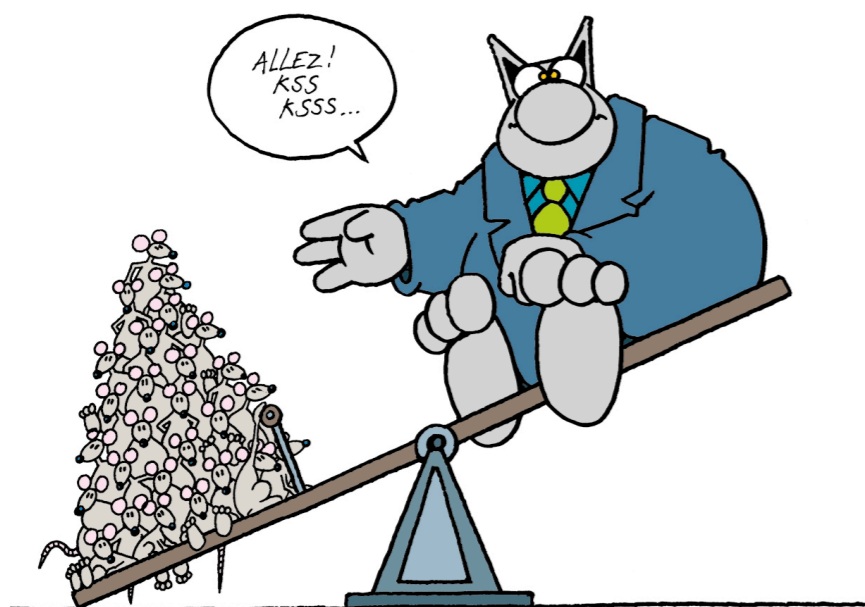
3.1 Loss of semantic fixdeness

1) Literal/figurative duality

Elle **fait deux poids deux mesures***, mais on ne peut pas le lui reprocher. (She's **double standards**, but we can't blame her.) - **Advertising for a weighing scale**

La bicyclette est l'instrument idéal pour lever le pied **sans perdre les pédales** (**without losing control-always have pedal**) (Jean RIVOIRE). - **bicycle advertising**

* judging two similar things with bias, according to different rules.



2) Re-motivation by association or metalinguistic mention

Comment pourrait-on **avoir dans le nez** (**have in the nose->To dislike someone**) des gens qu'on ne peut pas **sentir** (**smell**)? (a pun around nose and smell - how can you have sth in your nose if you can't smell)

« 异想天开 *yìxiǎngtiānkāi* », indulge in the wildest fantasy/ask [cry] for the moon/... be a fanciful illusion. (**negative connotation**)



敢想敢说又敢做，创造发明日日多，这样的**异想天开**好得很。

Pinyin : Gǎn xiǎng gǎn shuō yòu gǎn zuò, chuàngzào fā míng rì rì duō, zhèyàng de **yìxiǎngtiānkāi** hǎo dé hěn.

Translation: Dare to think, say and do, creation and invention are multiplying day by day, **giving free rein to one's imagination (implied: creativity)** is all very well. (**positive undertone of « creativity. »**)

4. Défigement (Defrosting) VS Variation

Synchronic process

VS

Diachronic process

Variation

VS

Défigement (Defrosting)

Defrosting

Exemples :

courir **deux/plusieurs** lièvres à la fois (**do two things at once.**)
rater/louper/manquer le coche (**miss the opportunity**)
c'est de l'**hébreu/du chinois** (**it's Hebrew/Chinese**)

Exemples :
tout feu tout **femme**
Il cassera **tôt ou tard** sa pipe.

1) Occasional appearance

2) Coexists with ancient *chéngyǔ*:

« 活**龙**活现 *huólóng huóxiàn* »,

« 活**灵**活现 *huólíng huóxiàn* »

Or « 活**眼**活现 *huóyǎn huóxiàn* » (appear vividly/come alive/vivid).

3) Replace permanently:

墨**汁**未干 (ink, **liquid**, do...not, dry)

Pinyin : *mòzhī wèigān*

Translation: before the ink is dry/immediately after (the writing or signing of) a document [agreement]

The character « **汁 zhī** » (liquid) replaced the old character « **渃 shěn** »(liquid) with the same meaning, but rarely used and difficult to remember.

Features :

- 1) Language variants (limited and known to speakers)
- 2) Coexistence of at least two forms of one of the constituents
- 3) Preservation of the fixed character of the expressions

Features:

- 1) Discourse, context
- 2) Affect the fixedness of expressions

Variation

Conclusion

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