



Conceptual Metaphor in Chinese Idioms: Lexicographic Data

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Abstract. The article discusses the metaphorical concepts that underlie the formation of phraseological units of the Chinese language, and determines their activity proceeding from information provided by lexicographic sources. The point of departure is the consideration of the scope of phraseology in the Chinese language which comprises various groups of stable word combinations. So, one of the objectives of the study is to clarify the classification of the phraseological units in Chinese, as well as look at the principles of the selection of stable phrases in the Chinese linguistic tradition. The research proves that Chinese linguists strive to combine the structural and semantic criteria of phraseological classification. An attempt is made to analyze the models of metaphorization and the most frequent metaphorical concepts forming phraseological images in the Chinese language.

Keywords: metaphor, metaphoric concepts, conceptual metaphor, lexicography, Chinese language, phraseology

For citation: Krasikova, E.A. (2025). Conceptual metaphor in Chinese idioms: lexicographic data. Vestnik of Moscow State Linguistic University. Humanities, 4(898), 42–48. (In Eng.)

Научная статья
 УДК 81'373.612.2(510)

Концептуальная метафора в китайских идиомах: лексикографические данные

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются метафорические концепты, лежащие в основе образования фразеологических единиц китайского языка. Определяется их активность, исходя из информации, предоставленной лексикографическими источниками. Отправной точкой исследования стало рассмотрение сферы применения фразеологии в китайском языке, которая включает в себя различные группы устойчивых словосочетаний. Целью исследования является уточнение классификации сверхсловных единиц в китайском языке, а также рассмотрение принципов отбора устойчивых словосочетаний в китайской лингвистической традиции. Исследование показывает, что китайские лингвисты стремятся сочетать структурные и семантические критерии классификации фразеологизмов. Предпринята попытка проанализировать модели метафоризации и наиболее частотные метафорические концепты, формирующие фразеологические образы в китайском языке.

Ключевые слова: метафора, метафорический концепт, концептуальная метафора, лексикография, китайский язык, фразеология

Для цитирования: Красикова Е. А. Концептуальная метафора в китайских идиомах: лексикографические данные // Вестник Московского государственного лингвистического университета. Гуманитарные науки. 2025. Вып. 4 (898). С. 42–48.

INTRODUCTION

This article is devoted to the consideration of metaphoric concepts that underlie the formation of phraseological units of the Chinese language, with special reference to their classification and the degree of their activity in the language system. First, it seems necessary to conduct a theoretical review of the scientific literature on the issue under study and clarify the conceptual and terminological apparatus, which includes such concepts as “metaphoric concept”, as well as various approaches to identifying different types of phraseological units. Following E.G. Belyaevskaya, who develops the classical approach to understanding metaphor proposed by V.N. Telia, by the metaphoric concept we mean “models of semantic transfer that function in the language system, providing the necessary conceptual basis for forming the language units and generally underlying the process of speech production” [Беляевская, 2020, p. 173]. Thus, it is metaphoric concepts that are often the cognitive basis for the formation of paroemias and other phraseological units, including idioms. As V.N. Telia pointed out, “the phraseological set up of a language is a mirror in which a linguistic and cultural community can see its national identity” [Телия, 1996, p. 9]. Therefore, one of the important aspects of phraseological research is the study of the conceptual foundations of phraseological signs or, in the terminology of I.V. Zyкова, “macrometaphoric conceptual models” [Зыкова, 2014, p. 6], on the basis of which this or that phraseological image is formed.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Consideration of the material of the Chinese language phraseology requires, as a first step, the clarification of what is meant by phraseology in Russian linguistics and in the Chinese linguistic tradition. The approaches in these cases are different as the languages in question are structurally different, and they require special attention to provide common ground.

As V. N. Telia, one of the leading scholars in Russian phraseology, notes, the emergence of phraseology as a science is associated with the publication of the famous book by S. Bally “French Stylistics” (1909), where the features of stable combinations of words were formulated for the first time. In Russian linguistics, one of the most significant works devoted to the identification and classification of phraseological units belongs to Academician V.V. Vinogradov [Виноградов, 1977]. Based on the ideas of the existence of “indivisibility of a word-combination” by A.A. Shakhmatov, academician V.V. Vinogradov singled out three main types of stable phrases. First, there are

unmotivated and semantically indivisible, non-derivative phraseological units, the main feature of which is absolutely opaque semantics where it is impossible to deduce the meaning of the whole proceeding from the meaning of the component word. Such units were termed - phraseological fusions (*кузькина мать*). Second, these are phraseological units characterized by the potential divisibility of their semantics which is partially motivated by the meanings of the component words. Such phrases are termed phraseological unities (*из огня да в полымя, нет худа без добра, переливать из пустого в порожнее, валить с больной головы на здоровую*). Finally, there are phraseological collocations in which the meanings of component words retain their original meanings, but, however, they are not free in forming new word-combinations and are “bound” to certain particular contexts. For example: *щекотливый вопрос, щекотливое положение, щекотливое обстоятельство*, etc. (but is impossible to say *щекотливая мысль, щекотливое намерение*, etc.) [Виноградов, 1977].

Describing the scope of phraseology and types of phraseological units in analytical and synthetic languages, V. N. Telia identifies six classes of phraseological units: 1) idioms 2) phraseological combinations 3) paroemias (proverbs and sayings), 4) stamps 5) clichés 6) catch phrases [Телия, 1996, p. 58].

In Chinese linguistics, other approaches to the description of phraseology and the typology of stable word-combinations are being implemented.

The process of formalizing phraseology as a science began in China after the 50s of the XX century. In modern Chinese, phraseology is denoted by the term 熟语学 *shuyuxue*. As 孙维张 Sun Weizhang notes in the work “Phraseology of the Chinese Language” 汉语熟语学 [孙维张, 1989], the term 熟语 “phraseology, idiomatic expression” came to Chinese from Russian or English [周荐, 2007, p. 255]. The beginning of the development of phraseology as an independent branch of science in the Chinese linguistic tradition dates back to 1956, when the 语言学概论讲义 “Course of Lectures on Introduction to Linguistics” was published, where 俞敏 Yu Ming and 黄智显 Huang Zhixian were among the first to introduce the term *shuyu*, which is understood as “stable phrases unique to certain languages”.

At the beginning of the 21st century it can be stated that Chinese stable word-combinations have so far escaped close attention of linguists in China and elsewhere, especially when the application of new methodology came to the fore. The main approaches here are description and classification (which we are going to consider further on). So at present, in our opinion, the topical issue to be considered is working out grounds for a theoretical and practical approach

to research in Chinese phraseology, and, moreover, grounds that would make the results obtained comparable to what is already known through the study of phraseology in European languages.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main questions of the study include:

1. Description of the basic principles of identifying stable word-combinations and their classification in the Chinese linguistic tradition.
2. Analysis and comparison of the conceptual components underlying the semantics of idioms of the Chinese language, which, in particular, determine their use in film discourse.
3. Comparison of the metaphorical concepts underlying the semantics of Chinese idioms, implemented in discourse and recorded in lexicographic sources to (possibly) indicate significant coincidences in the foundations of systemic and discursive metaphors.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objectives of our research included the study of the main directions of metaphorization characteristic of Chinese phraseological units. To this end, we have fixed the metaphorical concepts that ensure the formation of phraseological images in the material under study. Taking into account the need to distinguish between the systemic and discursive activity of metaphorical concepts underlying the semantics of Chinese phraseological units, at the first stage of the study we analyzed Chinese *guanyongyu*, based on the material of the lexicographic source “101 惯用语”, which included the most frequent, according to Chinese lexicographers, three-syllabic phrases. The material of our study included 100 *guanyongyu*, one idiom was excluded from consideration because it is based on homonymy.

RESEARCH METHODS AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The point of departure in the study carried out was explaining the choice of Chinese *guanyongyu* as research material. For this purpose we considered the existing point of view on the typology of Chinese phraseological units.

Starting with 1956, during the second half of the 20th century, Chinese linguists conducted a number of studies aimed at finding principles for distinguishing different types of stable linguistic units in the Chinese language. Here one can cite such works as 马国凡 Ma Guofan “Yanyu and xiehouyu” 谚语与歇后

语, 1961, Liu Guanghe 刘广和 “Shuyu qianshuo” 熟语浅说, 1989, Sun Weizhang 孙维张 “Chinese phraseology” 汉语熟语学, 1989, 周荐 Zhou Jian “Issues in the study of the classification of shuyu” 熟语分类问题研究, 1997. After the term *shuyu* was borrowed into Chinese, there were great differences in its understanding and application. For example, 邢福义 Xing Fuyi insists that in modern Chinese phraseology the following main types of phraseological units may be distinguished: 谚语 *yanyu*, 歇后语 *xiehouyu*, 成语 *chengyu*, 惯用语 *guanyongyu* [邢福义, 2016, p. 228]. Let us take a closer look at the peculiarities of this typology.

Within the framework of this classification, the first group includes 谚语 *yanyu* – superlative formations that have a sentence structure and are similar (or, at least, very close) in their characteristics to proverbs and sayings in the Russian language. For example: 爱徒如子, 尊师如父 – *to love the student as a son, to respect the teacher as a father* [谚语俗语惯用语 1800 条, 2022, p. 2].

The second group includes 歇后语 *xiehouyu* or omissions, which have a special structure specific to Chinese culture alone: this is a saying or allegory based on comparison and interpretation, consisting of two parts, namely, an allegory and its disclosure, while disclosure is usually omitted. In other words, *xiehouyu* has a double structure: full and truncated. An example of *xiehouyu* is 鸡蛋碰石头 – (不量力). *To break a stone with an egg – (to overestimate your strength)*.

The next type of stable phrases is 成语 *chengyu* (literally “ready-made expressions”) which are semantically indivisible phraseological units, most often having a four-syllable structure, formed according to the norms of the ancient Chinese language and functionally being a member of the sentence. Let's give an example: 程门立雪 – *to stand in the snow at the door of (scientist) Chen* (fig. *respectfully expect instructions; pay due respect to the teacher, respect the teachers*) [成语大词典, 2022 p. 190].

The final type of stable phrases 惯用语 *guanyongyu* are well-established, habitually used units of a three-part structure that are closest to figurative expressions that relate to the phraseology (or idiomatics) of other languages. For example: 挨板子 – *to receive censure, to be criticized, to get nuts* (literally *to get whips*), [谚语俗语惯用语 18 1800 条, 2022, p.1].

The classification of stable phrases and set phrases discussed above is far from the only one in the Chinese linguistics. There are still numerous diverse points of view on the scope and boundaries of the phraseological fund of the Chinese language. It is noteworthy that Chinese scholars have proposed

various principles for classifying stable multi word linguistic units, thus demonstrating different understanding of Chinese phraseology.

One of the most comprehensive and authoritative classifications belongs to 孙维张 Sun Weizhang, who distinguished four ways of determining the boundaries and the scope of the phraseological set up of the Chinese language. Let's look at this classification in more detail. Based on the data of the above given scheme, it can be concluded that the author suggests several possible classifications of the phraseological stock of the Chinese language.

The first option (or in the first classification) called 熟语 *shuyu* the author proposes to combine units like 成语 *chengyu* (ready expressions), 习惯语 *xiguanyu* (the usual expressions), 谚语 *yanyu* (people's expressions, proverbs and sayings), 格言 *geyan* (aphorisms), and 歇后语 *xiehouyu* (shortened figurative phrases).

Developing the second typological option, the author considers the *chengyu* (ready-made expressions) separately from the *shuyu*. In the second classification 熟语 *shuyu* include 惯用语 *guanyongyu* (habitual common idioms), 谚语 *yanyu* (proverbs), 格言 *geyan* (aphorisms), 歇后语 *xiehouyu* (shortened figurative phrases).

In the third option of classifying stable word-combinations the general name for the units in question is 惯用语 *guanyongyu*, and these set phrases are divided into the following types: 成语 *chengyu*, 熟语 *shuyu*, 谚语 *yanyu*, 格言 *geyan*, 歇后语 *xiehouyu*. In the fourth option 成语 *chengyu*, 惯用语 *guanyongyu*, 熟语 *shuyu*, 谚语 *yanyu*, 格言 *geyan* and 歇后语 *xiehouyu*. We are going to consider them separately further on.

But before we do that, we would like to point out that in the classification model considered the author identifies a total of six (6) types of stable word-combinations and, grouping them in different ways, distributes them into four possible classification options. As a result, these groups overlap with each other and the hierarchy of different types in each classification option is different. So, for the author, it is important not so much to identify different types of stable verbal complexes in the Chinese language, as to clarify how they relate to each other.

As follows from the above description, the boundaries of terms nominating set phrases in the Chinese language are very blurred, and in some cases their differentiation presents a number of difficulties for researchers. For example, the boundaries between the terms 成语 *chengyu* and 惯用语 *guanyongyu* remain obscure.

The difficulties of classifying set phrases in the Chinese language, in our opinion, are largely due to

the fact that Chinese authors are trying to simultaneously take into account three bases or parameters of their classification: the semantics of the multi word unit, the scope of its use, as well as the structural features of these formations, which reflect the lexical and grammatical specifics of the Chinese language, and which are difficult to find parallels to in European languages. As a result, the above-mentioned multiple bases for the classification of stable verbal complexes begin to overlap, and therefore, for our study, we found it possible to single out only one group of units as material, namely 惯用语 *guanyongyu*, which are most closely related to the phraseological units of the English and Russian languages, more precisely, phraseological fusions and phraseological unities in the classification of V.V. Vinogradov. Let's focus in more detail on the distinctive features of this class of phraseological units differentiating them from other groups of set phrases that were singled out by Chinese researchers.

For the first time in 1956 the term 惯用语 *guanyongyu* was introduced by 俞敏 Yu Min and 黄智显 Huang Zhixian proposing to deal with 熟语 *shuyu* (idioms), 成语 *chengyu* (ready-made expressions), 歇后语 *xiehouyu* (shortened figurative expressions) and other units as separate subclasses of 惯用语 *guanyongyu* (habitual common idioms).

In "Yanyu, xiehouyu, guanyongyu" (谚语·歇后语·惯用语, 1961) 马国凡 Ma Guofan defines 惯用语 *guanyongyu* as "stereotyped phrases with integrated value", which include idioms like: 露马脚 (lit. *to stick out the horse's hooves*; fig. *to swim out*; *to give himself away with his head*; *the secret became clear*), 吃不消 (lit. *not to digest, not to assimilate*; fig. *not to endure, unbearable*). The above examples confirm that the semantics of these stable language units is based on metaphorical transfer. However, not all authors agree here. For example, the famous Chinese linguist 王德春 Wang Dechun, in the book "Studies in Lexicology" (词汇学研究, 1983), notes that "惯用语 is a kind of familiar stable phrases in the language." These shall include such commonly used phrases of everyday communication, as 招呼用语 *speech greeting formula* and 口头用语 *colloquial expressions*: 你好 *Hello*, 再见 *goodbye*, 对不起 *I'm sorry*, 碰钉子 (lit. *to run into the nail*; fig. *mainly to failure, to whistle, to fail, to run into trouble*), etc. (et al).

A significant contribution to the clarification of the term *guanyongyu* was made by 张宗华 Zhang Zonghua [张宗华, 1985], who rejects the arguments of 马国凡 Ma Guofan [马国凡, 1961] and other authors about the structural and semantic features of *guanyongyu*. In his opinion, the structure of *guanyongyu* should consist of at least two words, and at least one of them should be 双音词 *a two-syllable* (binomial).

Thus, more than three hieroglyphic characters are needed to form the *guanyongyu* structure.

The above presented ideas are developed by 周荐 Zhou Jian, who notes that there are different opinions on how, i.e. on the basis of which criteria one should distinguish between *chengyu* and *guanyongyu*. First, outlining the boundaries of idiomatic and non-idiomatic word-combinations the author relies on the relationship between expressions consisting of four hieroglyphic signs and expressions consisting of three hieroglyphic signs. Second, the researcher focuses on the fact that phraseological units can be classified depending on the presence or absence of a covert or figurative meaning. The author refers 惹火烧身 (lit. *to get burned by lighting a fire*; fig. *to bring trouble on one's own head*) and 背黑锅 (lit. *to carry a black cauldron on one's back*; fig. *to take the blame for someone else's guilt, to be responsible for someone else's misdeeds*) to the units with figurative meaning (ready-made expressions). At the same time 周荐 Zhou Jian refers 望闻问切 *medical examination, including listening, questioning and palpation of the pulse, the four main methods of examination of the patient* to units that have only direct meaning [周荐1997, pp. 26–31].

Thus, summarizing all of the above said, the following distinctive characteristics of such a class of stable language units as *guanyongyu* can be noted making them units which most closely correspond to what is referred to as phraseology (idiomatics) in the Russian linguistic tradition where the following translation options have been established for their Chinese counterparts: “folk sayings”, “familiar expressions”, “everyday idioms”. First, *guanyongyu* in the vast majority of cases have a clear three-morphemic structure (however, there may be exceptions), the main components of which are a two-syllable (binomial) and a monosyllable. Second, the semantic organization of *guanyongyu* is characterized by imagery and at the same time is not characterized by such a high degree of stability as that of *chengyu*.

It should also be noted that determining the semantic scope and the semantic peculiarities of these multi word units seems openended today, and therefore, the discussion of the nature and scope of the phraseological set up of the Chinese language is a topical area of modern linguistic research.

Having chosen Chinese *guanyongyu* as research material we set out to discuss the metaphoric models underlying their semantics. In our work we proceed from the method of linguistic and cultural reconstruction of conceptual models of phraseological units formation, developed by I. V. Zykova, see for more details [Зыкова, 2015].

FINDINGS

Having analysed the material of the lexicographic source “101 惯用语”, which included the most frequent, according to Chinese lexicographers, three-syllabic phrases, we could state that in the course of the study, it was found that the most frequent *guanyongyu* included in this dictionary are used both to characterize a person (30 units) and to describe a situation (46 units). The third group of idioms was also identified which included units referring both to a person and a situation (23 units). It should be noted that the vast majority of the analyzed *guanyongyu* are culturally specific and historically conditioned. For example, 东道主 (lit. *the owner of roads in the eastern direction*; fig. *the owner who receives; the host country, the organizing state, the organizer*) takes its origins from the famous peice of historical prose of Ancient China, which is a detailed commentary on the short chronicle 春秋 *chunqiu* about the events of the Spring and Autumn period – 春秋左傳 *chunqiu zuohuan*, which was described by the historian of this period Zuo Qiuming [101惯用语, 2017, p. 59]. The material studied also contains units (however, they are few) based on modern images; for example, the phrase 挤牙膏 (lit. *to squeeze out toothpaste*; fig. *to squeeze out information, to do something reluctantly, through force, a teaspoon per hour*) may be mentioned in this connection.

At the next stage of the analysis, 15 metaphorical concepts characteristic of Chinese phraseology were identified and analyzed, which form the cognitive basis of the imagery of most frequent Chinese stable phrases. According to the data obtained we have determines 15 active conceptual metaphors (“Zoometaphor”, “Somaticisms”, “Nature”, “Gastronomy”, “Spatial Relations”, “Money”, “Doors”, “Theatrical Art”, “War”, “Clothing and Accessories”, “Medicine”, “Religion”, “Sport”, “Traffic”, “Cold”), the most 5 productive conceptual metaphors in Chinese phraseology turned out to be:

1. “Zoometaphor” (19 units): 旱鸭子 (lit. *a dry duck*; fig. *a landlubber*), 驴脾气 (lit. *the temper of a donkey*; fig. *stubbornness*).
2. “Somaticisms” (18 units): 胆小鬼 (lit. *a ghost with a small gallbladder*, fig. *coward*), 一根筋 (lit. *having one tendon only*; fig., *not flexible*), 有眉目 (lit. *have eyebrows and eyes*; fig. *be in a hopeful situation*).
3. “Nature” (15 units): 飘飘然 (lit. *feel like floating*; fig. *puffed up*), 桃花运 (lit. *peach-blossom luck*; fig. *good luck in romance*).
4. “Gastronomy” (14 units): 醋坛子 (lit. *a jug with vinegar*; fig. *jealous*), 黄粱梦 (lit. *the golden millet dream*; fig. *day-dream of success*).

5. "Spatial Relations" (10 units): 占上风 (lit. *occupy the upper wind*; fig. *take an advantageous position*), 钻空子 (lit. *squeeze in the gap*; fig. *take advantage of the loopholes*).

It should be noted that the most active cognitive bases of figurative multi word units in the Chinese language represent the spheres closest to everyday empirical experience of representatives of Chinese culture. Based on the above examples, it can be concluded that "Zoomethora", concepts related to "Somaticisms", as well as natural metaphoric concepts play the greatest role in the formation of the most frequent phraseology in the Chinese language system. The metaphoric concepts of average activity are more concrete; however, they are in many ways close to the generalized metaphoric models of the set phrases of the first group. Thus, the metaphorical concept of "Door" is close to spatial concepts and, above all, to the metaphorical concept of "Container", since it brings to the fore the idea of a boundary and the desire to enter or leave some enclosed space. The metaphoric concept of "Cold" can be considered to belong to the 'natural' metaphoric concepts. In addition, it should be noted that this metaphoric concept correlates with such metaphoric concepts as "Fire" – "Water" and "Light" – "Darkness", often acting as one of their conceptual components underlying phraseological meaning. The 'game' metaphorical concepts of "War", "Sport", and "Theatre" are used to represent a person's daily work and social activities. Of particular interest is the metaphorical concept of "Money", since it is closely related to the metaphor of "Quantity", which is not presented separately in our lexicographic material, but is often combined with other metaphoric concepts that form phraseological images, very

often to denote an object of small size (or to denote small amount).

It is well known that the 'system' makes use of imagery most suitable to ensure effective communication, but different types of discourse may be characterized by the selective approach to metaphors chosen to be realised in concrete cases.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the analysis conducted on the material of lexicographic sources allowed us to identify the specifics of those metaphorical concepts characteristic of the Chinese language that underlie the formation of phraseological images in the language system. Thus, the metaphoric concepts "Zoometaphor", "Somaticisms", "Nature", "Gastronomy", "Spatial Relations" show the most active productivity, the metaphoric concepts "Money", "Doors", "Theatrical Art", "War", "Clothing and Accessories", "Medicine", "Religion" show the average productivity, the metaphoric concepts "Sport", "Traffic", "Cold" show low productivity in Chinese linguoculture.

The data obtained allowed us to formulate a hypothesis that the activity of metaphorical concepts, on the basis of which imagery is formed in Chinese lexicographic data, may be related to the specific cultural and historical conditions.

In order to further expand the understanding of the culturally conditioned features of realizing the potential of metaphorical conceptual models of the Chinese language, it is necessary to continue a comprehensive study based on other varieties of Chinese discourse including polymodal discourse.

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Статья поступила в редакцию
одобрена после рецензирования
принята к публикации

18.03.2025
14.04.2025
25.04.2025

The article was submitted
approved after reviewing
accepted for publication