

PHRASEOLOGY IN THE CHINESE LINGUISTIC TRADITION

Though prefabricated multiword language units represent a universal phenomenon, in different linguistic traditions they may be referred to by different names.

In the Chinese linguistic tradition the first term for a Chinese fixed multiword phrases was 俗語 'saying' and it was registered in the Han Dynasty (202 B.C. — 220 A.D.). In those days the term *saying* referred to 'folk rumors'. This term first appeared in the book *Records of the Historian* (91 B.C.) by Sima Qian, the father of Chinese historiography, and here is an example of its use: 民人俗語曰：‘即不為河伯娶婦，水來漂沒，溺其人民’云¹ ‘there were sayings among people “if people did not sacrifice their daughters to marry He Bo¹, the flood would inundate the whole district and drown the people”’.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in the 1910s-1920s, the period of changing the *wenyanwen*, the classical Chinese language, into the contemporary Chinese language and quite detailed linguistic descriptions of it, there appeared many new names for different fixed multiword Chinese language units, such as *two-part allegorical saying*, *locution*, and *idioms*, and thus the meaning of the original term *saying* became narrower.

However, nowadays the traditional term *saying* has two uses: the wide and the narrow ones. The wide use of the term *saying* refers to a general concept which includes several types of Chinese multiword expressions:

1) *proverb* – mostly reflecting experience from work and life and passed down verbally, like 朝霞不出門，晚霞行千里 ‘Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning. Red sky at night, sailor's delight’ – a proverb of weather forecast appeared by watching the sky (cf.: Russ. ‘поговорка’);

2) *xie hou yu*, or *xiehouyu* – a two-part and allegorical folk saying, the first part of which is always stated, but is metaphorically descriptive, while the second part, usually unstated, carries the message, like 小葱拌豆腐 - 一清二白, ‘bean curd mixed with chopped green onion – completely clear-cut and innocent’. *Xie hou yu* is enigmatic, humorous and witty, often based on some language phenomena, like homonymy. Thus, *green* in the part of this enigma ‘onion is green’ is a homonym to *clear*, i.e., pronounced in Chinese is the same as *clear*, and bean curd is white, so the first part, like the second one, states ‘it is clear and white’, thus both of them which mean ‘pure and innocent’. After pronouncing the first part, people make a pause to give listeners a chance to guess the riddle of the saying;

3) *locution* – using a word or phrase, usually with a stylistic device, in an unusual or specialized way through repeated usage by groups which, like 磨洋工 ‘loaf on the job’, however its original meaning refers to a long-time and high-quality needed process in construction.

¹ The people who were believed to control the rivers.

Two types of multiword phrases – *idioms* (*Chengyu*) and *quotations* – are not part of saying in its wider sense, for the two terms are formal and mostly are used in written form, and thus have little common with saying.

Idiom, or *Chengyu*, in Chinese is a 4-character phrase, usually comes from a certain historic story and has its provenance. Thus, 唇亡齿寒 ‘If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold’, it means ‘face the same fate’ and comes from a story in Spring and Autumn period (770 B.C.-476 B.C). Another example is 天下无双 ‘unparalleled in the world’ – from *Records of the Historian*, it is used to compliment sb, 鼎鼎大名 ‘a great reputation’ – from a story in Qing dynasty, it is used to describe a well-known people or a thing, 背水一战 – from a story about the battle of Jingxing in 205 B.C.¹, which literally means ‘fighting a battle with one’s back to the river.’ It is used to describe a situation in which one has to fight to win or die, or a moment when one has to make do-or-die efforts. Idioms are likely to be unintelligible to many common people but to individuals learned in formal written Chinese.

It should also be mentioned that the term *idiom* in the meaning ‘phrase or expression peculiar to a language’ appeared in English in the 1580s from Middle French *idiome* and directly from Late Latin *idioma* ‘a peculiarity in language’ which goes back to *idioma* ‘peculiarity, peculiar phraseology’ but its correlative Chinese term *chengyu* is native and can literally be translated into English as ‘the existed language’, and ‘ready-made words’. So, both etymological and modern meanings of the English word *idiom* and its correlative Chinese word *chengyu* which is usually translated as *idiom* are not quite identical.

Quotation generally refers to those original words of others, like 自信人生二百年, 会当击水三千里 ‘if a man confidently believes that he can live up to two hundred years old and so he can swim an accumulated length of three thousand miles’ – the quotation by Chairman Mao (Mao Zedong, 1893-1976).

The term *saying* in its narrow sense refers mainly to popular Chinese fixed multiword phrases in the adjectival function. Here are some examples of such sayings in the narrow sense of the term: 八竿子打不着 ‘have nothing to do with what is talked about’, 陈谷子烂芝麻 ‘something out of date’, 站着说话不腰疼 ‘nothing is easier than fault-finding’, 吹胡子瞪眼睛 ‘very angry or in a rage with somebody’, and the like.

Describing this type of saying, Sun Yue in his book *The status and features of sayings in phraseology* (2006) wrote: ‘Sayings in narrow sense have their own features. They are different from those 4-character phrases which are dignified in style and stable in construction, not the same as those xiehouyu with two parts, and they are also different from Chinese proverbs in meaning, in expression, in construction, in grammatical function. Sayings consist of more than 5 characters each, and are relatively flexible in construction, more mixable in meaning, more various in grammatical function, and somewhat sharp and live. They can

¹ 孙月; 俗语在熟语中的定位及其特征 [D]; 河北大学; 2006年:

be frequently read in Chinese literature. So, Chinese saying in its narrow sense is just a kind of phrase independent but parallel to Chinese 4-character phrase, proverbs, two-part allegorical saying and locution'. (The translation is done by the author.)¹

The generalized term *saying* for a long time was also used in China in the same sense as *phraseology*. The Chinese scholar Yao Xiyuan mentions in *The Definition and Classification of Phraseology* (1998) that the term *phraseology* did not appear in domestic (referring to China) until the 1990s. Various titles were used to describe those fixed multiwords before 1990s, such as *idioms*, *proverbs*, *locution*, *two-part allegorical saying*, *saying*, *maxim*, *rumors*, *vulgar saying*, *slang*, *straight words*, *legends*, etc.².

Since the early 90-ies phraseology stepped into the unprecedented period of prosperity. The term *phraseology* which never existed in the traditional Chinese linguistic research, by and by entered the professional lexicon of the Chinese scholars. It came there as a translation from Russian. The first one in China who proposed the concept of phraseology was Zhang Jiahua, a professor of Russian linguistics, in his book *Contemporary Semantics in Russia* (2003), the second section of the fifth chapter *A Comparative Study of the Category of Russian and Chinese phraseology*. He proposed to use the terms *phraseology* and advised to use the term *phraseologism* instead of the previously used term *idiom* for this purpose, like the Russian words *фразаология* and *фразаологизм*. Nowadays there are more and more scholars who accepted the term *phraseology*, and the use of phraseology gradually replaced the generalized term *saying*.

So, the Chinese scholars' interest in phraseology broadened, and they began also to pay attention to different types of multiword naming units. And yet, the study of phraseology in Chinese linguistics at this time has been mainly centered on two basic theoretical problems: the problem of denotational and connotational meanings of idioms and their thematic domains. Bbut many more important issues relating to structure and system of the Chinese phraseology, contrastive studies of phraseology and phraseological units in Chinese and other languages, the issues concerning the essence of idiomatization and storage of phraseological units in the mental lexicon, etc., still need a careful scrutinizing.

¹ '俗语在熟语中的定位及其特征

狭义俗语是有其自身区别特征的一类语言现象。它们既不同于风格典雅、形式固定的四字成语，也不同于以词组形式出现的三字惯用语和由前后两部分组成的歇后语，而且在表达内容、表达方式、语义构成、语法功能等诸多方面也 and 谚语表现出不同的特质。狭义俗语一般在五言以上，形式相对灵活，语义的融合性也比较强，同时语法功能多种多样，形象色彩鲜明生动，又常常被川在文学作品中，以增强表现力。因而是熟语中可以 and 成语、惯用语、歇后语、谚语并列的一个独立类别。'

² '俗语在熟语中的定位及其特征

狭义俗语是有其自身区别特征的一类语言现象。它们既不同于风格典雅、形式固定的四字成语，也不同于以词组形式出现的三字惯用语和由前后两部分组成的歇后语，而且在表达内容、表达方式、语义构成、语法功能等诸多方面也 and 谚语表现出不同的特质。狭义俗语一般在五言以上，形式相对灵活，语义的融合性也比较强，同时语法功能多种多样，形象色彩鲜明生动，又常常被川在文学作品中，以增强表现力。因而是熟语中可以 and 成语、惯用语、歇后语、谚语并列的一个独立类别。'