



## New taxonomic proposal for Chinese phraseology

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**Abstract.** Over the years, the taxonomy of Chinese phraseology has been controversial. One of the main challenges for research in the field of phraseology is to discover how to classify all of the phraseological units in a logical and objective way. Based on the concept of grammatical metaphor (Pamies 2014, 2017), this paper tries to prove that a new taxonomy, more similar to the “Western” tradition, with the criteria of fixedness, idiomaticity and multilexematicity could be applied to the Chinese phraseology. Firstly, we examine the terminological problems in the Chinese phraseology and explain the function of metaphor in phraseology. Secondly, we demonstrate how this new taxonomy is applied to all the categories of Chinese phraseology, offering new terminology and definitions for each category. Thirdly, we focus on the slight taxonomic differences regarding phraseology between Chinese and Romanic/Germanic languages. Hopefully the application of this new taxonomy to Chinese phraseology can facilitate an objective comparison with other languages.

**Keywords:** Phraseology, grammatical metaphor, taxonomy, Chinese

### [ch] 汉语熟语新分类法之探讨

**摘要:** 多年来, 关于汉语的熟语分类一直存在争议。熟语研究的主要困难之一是如何把所有的熟语以合理、客观的方式归类。本研究基于语法隐喻理论 (Pamies 2014, 2017), 以定性、民族性和多语素为标准, 尝试推出一种新型的、更加接近“西方传统”的汉语熟语分类法。本文首先讨论了汉语熟语的术语命名中所存在的问题以及隐喻在熟语的功能, 接着阐述了如何把这种分类法应用到汉语熟语中, 并为每个熟语类别都重新命名和下定义, 最后总结出这种新型汉语熟语分类法与日耳曼语族或罗曼语族的熟语分类法之间的细微区别。希望本研究的汉语熟语分类法有助于汉语与其它语言的对比研究。

**关键词:** 熟语, 语法隐喻, 分类, 汉语

### [sp] Nueva propuesta taxonómica para la fraseología china

**Resumen.** A lo largo de los años, la taxonomía de la fraseología china ha sido controvertida. Uno de los principales desafíos para el estudio de la fraseología es descubrir cómo clasificar todas las unidades de fraseología de una manera lógica y objetiva. Basándose en la teoría de la metáfora gramatical (Pamies 2014, 2017), este trabajo intenta demostrar que una nueva taxonomía similar a la “occidental” con los criterios de fijación, idiomaticidad y multilexematicidad, podría aplicarse a la fraseología china. Para eso, primero, examinamos los problemas terminológicos en la fraseología china y explicamos la función de la metáfora en la fraseología. Luego, demostramos cómo esta nueva

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taxonomía se aplica a todas las categorías de la fraseología china, ofreciendo nuevos términos y definiciones para cada categoría. Por último, mostramos las ligeras diferencias taxonómicas con respecto a la fraseología entre el chino y los idiomas románicos y germánicos. Con esto, esperamos que la aplicación de esta nueva taxonomía a la fraseología china pueda facilitar una comparación objetiva con otros idiomas.

**Palabras clave:** Fraseología, metáfora gramatical, taxonomía, chino

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## 1. Introduction

One of the main challenges for research in the field of phraseology is to discover how to classify all of the phraseological units in a logical and acceptable way. Over the years, the taxonomy of Chinese phraseology has been controversial. From the 50s of the twentieth century, under the influence of Soviet linguistics, there have been attempts to reform the Chinese phraseological taxonomy. For instance, the term *shu yu* (熟语) is applied as a hyperonym that covers all the types of phraseological units, and *shu yu xue* (熟语学) is used to designate the science that studies all of these phraseological units (Henry 2016: 100). This trend is characterized by the attempt to describe and define the Chinese phraseology according to the functional criteria such as idiomaticity and fixedness.

Yet, Henry (2016) believes that a more critical revision of Chinese taxonomy is needed, in particular, to clarify the status of the *chengyu*. This author makes a critical analysis of the Chinese metalinguistic theories about *chengyu*. According to the scholar, this traditional concept is confusing as it mixes the rhetorical, prosodic and aesthetic criteria with the functional criteria. Some linguists such as Wen Shuobin and Wen Duanzheng (2009), Fang Shenghui (1943), Zhou Zumo (1955), Shi Shi (1979) and Ma Guofan (1978) have recognized the importance and relevance of fixedness [*dìng xíng xìng* 定型性] (“impossibility of replacing, moving or inserting components”), idiomaticity [*mín zú xìng* 民族性] (“non-deductibility in the global meaning of its components” and “national specificity”) and relative flexibility [*líng huó xìng* 灵活性]. Relying on these principles proposed above, Henry (2016) observes a contradiction between these criteria and the excessive emphasis on the literary criteria concerning *chengyu* which by

definition is characterized by four syllables, two-part structure, rhetorical parallelism, etc.

From the functional perspective, some *chengyu* serve as idioms, while others are proverbs, collocations, or even formulae. Due to this confusion, it is impossible to compare Chinese phraseology with that of other languages appropriately, since a common metalanguage is indispensable in this case. Therefore, Henry (2016) considers that a more modern approach is needed:

Considering the multiplicity of viewpoints and the abundance of confusing terminology that have prevailed in Chinese phraseological studies, it appears crucial to make an assessment (2016: 95).

In this regard, I agree with Henry, considering that both confusing terminology and ambiguous boundary between subcategories will cause inconveniences in the classification of Chinese phraseology itself and difficulties in the comparison of Chinese phraseological stock with those of other languages. In this sense, the Chinese phraseology is in need of reform to be more clear-cut, accurate and “user-friendly”.

## 2. Terminological problems of Chinese phraseology

With respect to the terminology related to the subcategories of Chinese phraseology, there is still no binding agreement in this respect. Up to now, the most authoritative and popular proposal is that made by Sun Weizhang (1989), followed by Wu Fan (2014), applying the terms defined below:

The hypernym is *shu yu* (熟语): fixed and stereotyped phrases or statements which generally do not allow for arbitrary modifications.

Traditionally, *shu yu* is subcategorized into the following five types: ① *chengyu* (成语: fixed, conventional and concise combination of words, in most cases, of four characters), ② *guan yong yu* (惯用语: fixed and short combination of colloquial words), ③ *yan yu* (谚语: brief, popular saying), ④ *ge yan* (格言: concise sentence, with a warning and didactic function), and ⑤ *xie hou yu* (歇后语: allegorical saying composed of two parts. The first part is a metaphorical description and the second is a literal explanation or clarification of the first part) (ref. Wu Fan 2014).

According to these traditional criteria of Chinese phraseology, there are no clear boundaries between these five categories. (1) Some *chengyu* [成语] (by their form) are also proverbs (by their function); (2) Some *xie hou yu* [歇后语] (by their form) are also proverbs (by their function); (3) Some *guan yong yu* [惯用语] can also be *chengyu*, for their metric-phonological structure.

All of these ambiguities justify the need to reform the classification of Chinese phraseology with other criteria, especially when its phraseological stock is compared with that of other languages. A contrastive analysis of phraseology of different languages must set aside the phonetic, graphic and artistic criteria, which by definition can never be universal from the typological point of view, in order to

analyze a linguistic phenomenon whose essence is basically grammatical and semantic. Thus, from the perspective of general and typological linguistics, Chinese phraseology requires metalinguistic categories that are, if not universal, at least comparable.

It is a known fact that, in order to compare languages, it is necessary to have a “common denominator” or *Tertium comparationis* (Comrie 1989). The traditional criteria and categories applied by Chinese phraseologists are neither compatible nor commensurable with those used by “western” phraseologists in general. Therefore, to offer an objective contrastive analysis, one is required to use common criteria applicable to two languages. As an illustrative example, we will discuss the comparison between Chinese and Spanish phraseology. The first possibility would be to use the Chinese taxonomy for the description of both languages, but it is impracticable since the number of characters, an important criterion for *chengyu*, is irrelevant in any language that does not consist of ideograms. The second option is to apply the Spanish taxonomy to Chinese, which seems possible, if we take as a model the taxonomy that Pamies applied to Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French and English (Pamies 2007, 2014, 2016, 2017), based on the theory of *grammatical metaphor*.

### 3. Grammatical metaphor

Languages have their most natural way of encoding the meanings which they express, which is called congruent way; and the non-congruent ways of encoding language are considered as grammatical metaphor which is a substitution of one grammatical class, or one grammatical structure, by another (Halliday & Martin 1993:79, apud. Wang 2010:29-30). Grammatical metaphor is used by Halliday to refer to the meaning transference from congruent to metaphorical in grammar. It includes all kinds of “cross-coded phenomena represented by categories other than those that evolved to represent them” (Halliday 1985: xviii, apud. Pamies 2017:65). Pamies (2007, 2014, 2016, 2017) has observed that grammatical metaphor can also be applied to a syntagm playing the role of a lexeme, judging from the fact that in the initial proposal of Halliday, many examples of grammatical metaphor were light verb constructions, which is one type of phrasemes. Not all the grammatical metaphors are phrasemes, but all the phrasemes contain a grammatical metaphor, and this feature becomes distinctive in the case of three particular types of grammatical metaphor, which influence exclusively the phraseological level: pseudo-syntagms, semi-syntagms and pseudodiscursive sequences (Pamies 2007, 2014, 2016, 2017).

### 4. Application of the new taxonomy to Chinese phraseology

There is no evidence that Chinese phraseology is fundamentally different from English or other languages (Packard 2000; Duanmu 2002), and it is even possible that a generalized theory from other languages is applicable to Chinese. In this paper, we try to apply the taxonomic theory that Pamies (2007, 2014, 2016, 2017) created for some Romanic/Germanic languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Italian,

English, etc.) to the Chinese phraseology. The proposal developed by Pamies is based on these three criteria of phraseology: fixedness, idiomaticity and multilexematicity.

Using these criteria, we can distinguish 4 subclasses of pseudo-syntagmas:

Table 1. Pseudo-syntagm

pseudo-syntagm 伪词组	1) compound 复合词
	2) idiom 固定词组
	3) onymic word-group 实体专有名称词组
	4) phraseo-term 专业术语词组

#### 4.1.Pseudo-syntagm (伪词组)

A pseudo-syntagm is a structure whose literal form corresponds to a syntagm, but whose real function is that of a single word (Pamies 2007), which constitutes a type of grammatical metaphor (Pamies 2014, 2016). This concept is also applicable to Chinese. We can call it *wěi cí zǔ* (伪词组“pseudo syntagm”). In Chinese it can be defined as: 在结构上相当于一个词组，但使用时则相当于一个词。

##### 4.1.1. Compound (复合词)

A compound is a lexeme (less precisely, a word) that consists of more than one stem. These stems can neither change order nor be separated with other stems (*fixedness*) and their overall meaning may not be derived from the components (*idiomaticity*). This phenomenon is also verifiable in Chinese if it is defined in the same way. In Chinese it can be defined as:

由两个能体现概念意义的语素[即“实语素”]组成，约定俗成的意义单位。其结构具有稳定性，各成分不能任意拆开、更改、替换或增减；其语义具有统一性，其整体意义往往不能从习语的每个词汇意义中推测出来，更不能把习语成分的意义简单相加。

Traditionally, in Chinese, this term is used to designate bisyllabic words, but nevertheless, they are not the real “compound words” because within them, at least one of their components is not a free moneme, but a dependent moneme (Duanmu 1997; Starosta 1997; Packard 2000: 78). Like in many other languages, there are a number of compounds in Chinese, for example:

- (1) 打字 机  
dǎ zì jī  
'type' 'machine'  
'typewriter'

##### 4.1.2. Idiom (固定词组)

*Idiom* is the second type of *pseudo-syntagm* in the classification of Pamies (2007, 2014, 2016, 2017): it is a combination of two (or more) free monemes with

grammatical restrictions (*fixedness*) and its global grammatical function is that of a single *part of speech* (noun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition or conjunction). This linguistic phenomenon also exists in Chinese, although it is not grouped as an independent category according to its traditional phraseological taxonomy which instead is based on distinct defining criteria. From the functional perspective, some of the Chinese “idioms” correspond to the subclass *chengyu* (成语), some – to the *guan yong yu* (惯用语) while others – to the subclasses like proverbial clauses, proverbs, formulae, etc.

Judging from this definition of *idiom*, in Chinese, we propose to call this type of phrase 固定词组 (*gù dìng cí zǔ*), which means “fixed polylexical sequence”. In Chinese it can be defined as:

由两个（或多个）实语素组成的，具有语法限定性（固定性），其整体语法功能在具体的语境下只是相当于一个词，具有单一的词性。其结构具有稳定性，各成分不能任意拆开、更改、替换或增减（个别变体除外）；其语义具有统一性，其整体意义往往不能从习语的每个词汇意义中推测出来，更不能把习语成分的意义简单相加（也有一些字面意思与实际意义相符）。

In turn, it is subclassified into *nominal idiom*, *adjectival idiom*, *verbal idiom*, *adverbial idiom*, *prepositive idiom*, and *conjunctive idiom*, depending on the grammatical function that they fulfill in a unitary and indivisible way in the sentence.

• Nominal idiom (名词性固定词组)

- (2) 铁 公鸡  
tiě gōngjī  
'iron' 'rooster'  
'stingy person'

• Verbal idiom (动词性固定词组)

- (3) 挤 牙膏  
jǐ yáogāo  
'squeeze' 'toothpaste'  
(squeeze the toothpaste [little by little from a tube])  
'be forced to tell the truth little by little; confess reluctantly'

• Adjectival idiom (形容词性固定词组)

- (4) 倾 城 倾 国  
qīng chéng qīng guó  
'collapse' 'state' 'collapse' 'state'  
(so beautiful as to ruin states)  
'(of woman) exceedingly beautiful'

• Adverbial idiom (副词性固定词组)

- (5) 毫 不 犹豫  
háo bù yóuyù

‘absolutely’ ‘not’ ‘hesitate’  
 (without the slightest hesitation)  
*cf. eng. make no bones about sth.*

• Prepositional idiom (介词性固定词组)

- (6) 自 打  
 zì dǎ  
 ‘from’ ‘beat’  
 ‘from’

As we can observe, judging by the form, some Chinese idioms appear like compounds, since both of them consist of two or more characters. In fact, like in Spanish and many other languages, it is very difficult to make a clear-cut boundary between these two subclasses. For this reason, it is very necessary to incorporate compounds into phraseology. In comparison, idioms tend to be more idiomatic than compounds. Here are two concrete examples: a compound *dǎ zì jī* 打字机\*type machine “typewriter” is still a machine, which can be deduced from its components, while the real meaning of an idiom *tiě gōng jī* 铁公鸡\*iron rooster “stingy person” has nothing to do with the rooster, and its definition can hardly be deduced.

4.1.3. Onymic word-group (实体专有名称词组)

Onymic word-groups are fixed polylexical sequences that serve globally and indivisibly as proper names which are taken to uniquely identify their referents in the world, for example, names of given institutions, places, organizations, periods, historical or mythological events, etc. (e.g. *United States of America; Middle Ages, the Holy Father, the Desert Fox, Scotland Yard, the Supreme Court*) (Pamies 2007, 2017). Mel’čuk (2015: 68) considers that, from a theoretical point of view, even personal proper names belong to this category (apud. Pamies 2017:67). It should be noted that they do not allow changes of order (\*Nations United) or insertion of adjectives (\*very European Union); or expansion (\*North Mountainous Korea), or synonymic substitution (\*Allied Nations). Like many other languages, there are numerous Onymic word-groups in Chinese. In Chinese it can be defined as:

由两个以上普通名词组成的特定事物的固定专有名称，包括地名、组织机构名称、国家名、历史时期名称、历史（或神话）重大事件名称等。

- (7) 鸟 巢  
 Niǎo cháo  
 ‘bird’ ‘nest’  
 ‘National Stadium, also known as the Bird's Nest’.

Colson (2016) remarks that, in Chinese, since a proper name possesses generally a literal meaning, and its spelling has no equivalent of capital letters, the recognition of a proper name in a corpus presents exactly the same problems as an idiom, or even more so (apud. Pamies 2017:67).

#### 4.1.4. Phraseo-term (专业术语词组)

A phraseo-term is a polylexical sequence that designates a specific reference in a specific field of expertise (e.g. *hard disk*, *artificial intelligence*, *plosive consonant*), with a certain degree of fixedness, since they do not allow changes of order or insertion of adjectives or synonymic substitution (Pamies 2007). There are also phraseo-terms in Chinese which correspond very well with this definition. In Chinese it can be defined as:

在特定专业领域中定义明确，结构比较固定，各成分不能任意拆开、更改、替换或增减，由两个以上普通名词组成的专用术语。

- (8) 物理            疗法  
       wùlǐ          liáofǎ  
       ‘physical’   ‘therapy’  
       ‘physiotherapy’

#### 4.2. Semi-syntagm (半词组)

A semi-syntagm is a syntagm-like sequence serving neither as a word nor as a real syntagm, consisting of two components, one is metaphorical and the other literal; moreover, the former behaves as if it were a morpheme of the latter (Pamies 2007), playing only a *lexical function* (Mel’čuk 1982, apud, Pamies 2007). In other words, it owns a *base* that behaves like a true lexeme, and a *collocator* that serves as a mere functional morpheme of the *base*. For example, in *heavy smoker*, the adjective *heavy* does not actually function as an adjective, but instead, it is a morpheme of intensification (equivalent to \**smokerissimus*) (Pamies 2007:68).

Semi-syntagms include collocations (e.g. *broad daylight*), light verb constructions (e.g. *take a walk*), as well as stereotyped comparisons (e.g. *drunk as a fish*) (Pamies 2017:67). This type of phraseological unit also exists in Chinese, as the following table indicates.

Table 2. Semi-syntagm

semi-syntagm 半词组	1) collocation 固定搭配
	2) light verb construction 轻动词词组
	3) stereotyped comparison 模式化比较

##### 4.2.1. Collocation (固定搭配)

Collocation is defined as: a combination of two words in which one is metaphorical, serving as a functional morpheme of the other, while the other is literal and keeps all its grammatical properties (Pamies 2007, 2014, 2016, 2017). In Chinese it can be defined as:

形式上是由两个词组成的词组，其中一个词具隐喻性，另外一个只具本义，前者仿佛是一个语素一样约定俗成地修饰后者，并自带某词义功能，而后者无论是意义还是语法特征都保持不变。



Basically, there are four types of collocations.

• Coloc. Adj. + N. (形容词与名词的固定搭配)

- (8) 顶头 上司  
 dǐngtóu shàngsī  
 ‘above’ ‘boss’  
 (boss just above the head)  
 ‘one’s immediate [direct] superior’

• Coloc. Adj. + Adv. (形容词与副词的固定搭配)

- (9) 闻名 天下  
 wénmíng tiānxià  
 ‘famous’ ‘worldwide’  
 (known throughout the world)  
 ‘very famous’

• Coloc. Adv. + V. (副词与动词的固定搭配)

- (10) 热烈 欢迎  
 rèliè huānyíng  
 ‘warmly’ ‘welcome’  
 ‘warmly welcome’

• Coloc. V. + N. (动词与名词的固定搭配)

- (11) 透支 健康  
 tòuzhī jiànkāng  
 ‘overdraw’ ‘health’  
 ‘one’s health is harmed due to excessive physical or mental consumption’

#### 4.2.2. Light verb construction (轻动词词组)

A light verb construction is a special type of collocation formed by a noun (*base*) and a verb that loses its usual meaning and meantime converts the noun into “nominal predicate” (as in a verb-noun collocation). It is different from a verb-noun collocation in that its verb is able to collocate with many nouns, meanwhile its original meaning is weakened and “desemantized” (Pamies 2007, 2014). In Chinese it can be defined as:

由一个名词（基础部分）和一个动词组成的特殊搭配，该动词可以与大量的名词搭配，组合后其本义弱化，此过程也称为“语义虚化”（如，发牢骚、发酒疯、发脾气、发神经、发大财、发高烧、发洪水等）。

We have observed numerous light verb constructions in Chinese, in which the most frequent light verbs are the following ones: *dǎ* (打\*hit), *nòng* (弄\*do), *gǎo* (

搞\*perform), *fā* (发\*send), *shuǎ* (耍\*play), *zuò* (做\*make), *chī* (吃\*eat), etc. To illustrate this phenomenon, one can analyze a series of light verb constructions with *fā* (发\*send):

- (12) a. 发 脾气  
       *fā*    *píqì*  
       ‘send’ ‘temper’  
       ‘get angry’  
       *cf. eng. burst with anger*
- b. 发 牢骚  
       *fā*    *shénjīng*  
       ‘send’ ‘complaint’  
       ‘get angry’
- c. 发 高烧  
       *fā*    *gāoshāo*  
       ‘send’ ‘high fever’  
       ‘get a high fever’  
       *cf. eng. run a high fever*
- d. 发 洪水  
       *fā*    *hóngshuǐ*  
       ‘send’ ‘flood’  
       ‘flood’

#### 4.2.3. Stereotyped comparison (模式化比较)

A stereotyped comparison is a “false” comparison, due to the fact that it merely serves as metaphorical magnifier of an adjective, an adverb, a noun or a verb (e.g. *this computer is faster than greased lightning*). Moreover, a “real” comparison allows the logical order to be inverted (e.g. *Jim is taller than Peter* > *Peter is shorter than Jim*), which, in the case of stereotyped comparison, owing to its fixedness, it is not allowed (*\*the greased lightning is slower than this computer*), and its meaning is often idiomatic and hyperbolic (e.g. *slower than molasses*) (García-Page 2008, *apud.* Pamies 2014: 61-62). In Chinese it can be defined as: 模式化比较是一种虚假比较, 利用比较的形式来强调突出某特点, 从而增强所要表达的效果 (如, “比猪还笨”、“稳如泰山”)。一个真正的比较可以按照逻辑反过来说 (如, “乌龟跑得比兔子慢”可推出“兔子跑得比乌龟快”), 在模式化比较中, 其本身俱有的固定性不允许这种变动, 而且其整体意义往往带隐喻性或夸张性。

In Chinese, we find a large number of stereotyped comparisons, for example:

- (13) 温顺 如 绵羊  
       *wēnshùn*    *rú*    *miányáng*  
       ‘docile’ ‘as’ ‘sheep’

(as docile or meek as a sheep)  
 ‘very docile or meek’

The comparisons may be very long, for example, sp. *más feo que el sargento de Utrera, que reventó de feo* [“more ugly than the sergeant of Utrera, who bursts out of ugly”] = “very ugly” (Luque, Pamies & Manjón 1997:129). Likewise, in Chinese phraseology, there is also this type of stereotyped comparison, for example, if someone makes you wait too long, you may express your impatience in the following way:

- (14) 等 到 花 儿 都 谢 了  
 děng dào huāer dōu xiè le  
 ‘wait’ ‘until’ ‘flower’ ‘even’ ‘wither’ ‘particle’  
 (wait for such a long time that the flowers have withered)  
 ‘wait a long time’

### 4.3. Pseudo-discursive sequence (拟话语用语)

A pseudo-discursive sequence consists of several lexemes, but is always globally memorized instead of constructed, acting like an autonomous act of speech. Although it looks like a sentence (unit of discourse created by the speaker), judging from its function actually it is a *unit* of the language (Pamies 2017:68). In Chinese it can be defined as:

从语言形式上看它是话语，但其实际功能是一个约定俗成的固定用语，是语言的一个单位，不受个人意志支配，使用者不能对其随意编造，而是把它看成一个不可分割的整体，将其牢记并使用。

These pseudo-discursive sequences can be divided into six subcategories presented below:

Table 3. Pseudo-discursive sequence

pseudo-discursive sequence 拟话语用语	1) formula 模式化固定用语
	2) proverbial clause 句子结构型固定语
	3) non-didactic quotation 非哲理性著名语录
	4) paroemia (proverb, maxim) 格言
	5) motto 座右铭
	6) slogan 标语口号

#### 4.3.1. Formula (模式化固定用语)

Corpas (1996:171) defines a formula as a habitual, stereotyped expression for social interaction that fulfills specific functions in predictable, routine and to a certain extent ritualized situations. The vast majority of formulae are sentences or sayings which are “prefabricated” and memorized. These expressions are considered obligatory or customary to say in certain situation, in order not to

violate social rules of interaction, including greetings, farewells, thanks, petitions, congratulations, condolences, etc. In Chinese it can be defined as:

在某种情景语境中充当具体的社会交流功能，符合一定程式和套路以及礼仪习惯的约定俗成的语言，如问候语、道别语、请求语、客套话、寒暄语、致谢语、祝福语、吉祥话、悼念语等。

Example of units from this category include:

- (15) a. 慢 走。  
Màn zǒu  
'slowly' 'walk'  
'goodbye'
- b. 哪里， 哪里。  
Nǎlǐ, nǎlǐ  
'where' 'where'  
'not at all (polite expression for responding to compliments)'.

#### 4.3.2. Proverbial clause (句子结构型固定语)

A proverbial clause is a brief and well-known sentence, grammatically complete (with subject and predicate), and pragmatically autonomous, similar to a proverb, but not sententious. From the functional perspective, it does not express a traditionally held truth or a piece of advice based on common sense or experience. From the formal point of view, it is a complete sentence, usually learned by heart, which serves to describe or comment on a contextualized event.

For example, to express ironically his surprise when he sees someone doing something unusual, the language user may say:

- (16) 太阳 从 西边 出来 了。  
Tàiyáng cóng xībiān chū lái le  
'sun' 'from' 'west' 'come out' 'particle'  
'The sun has risen from the west.' (Jia Yongsheng 2013: 148)

#### 4.3.3 Non-didactic quotation (非哲理性著名语录)

A non-didactic quotation refers to a brief and famous quotation, pragmatically autonomous, whose author is well identified, similar to a maxim, but without offering a general truth. It may come from literature, history and religion, or even from a saying which has recently become famous (by a politician, an athlete, a singer, etc.) (Pamies 2007, 2014). In Chinese it can be defined as:

某已知特定人物所留下的著名言论摘录或记录，言简意赅，语义上可独立成句，但不具哲理性或教育性，使用时可直接插入到话语中作为说话者本身言语的一部分，对于语录的作者，可提及也可省略不提。语录可来源于文学、历史、宗教等，甚至可来自在大众传媒的宣传下瞬间变得人皆所知的流行语句，如某政客、体育明星、歌星、影星等所说的某句话。

The following example can be given to illustrate this group:

- (17) 中国 人民 从此 站 起来 了! ——毛泽东  
 Zhōngguó rénmin cóngcǐ zhàn qǐlái le  
 ‘China’ ‘people’ ‘from now on’ ‘stand’ ‘up’ ‘participle’  
 (from now on the Chinese people have risen to their feet)  
 ‘From now on the People's Republic of China has been founded; the  
 Chinese people have already achieved freedom.’ (Mao Zedong)  
 Origin: On 21st September 1949, at the founding ceremony of the People's  
 Republic of China, the former President Mao Zedong declared that Chinese  
 people had stood up.

#### 4.3.4 Paroemia (格言)

A paroemia is a fixed, well-known and brief statement that intends to influence the receiver's behavior. It should be noted that the paroemias are subdivided into proverbs and maxims.

##### 4.3.4.1. Proverb (谚语)

A proverb is a brief, simple, and popular saying that gives advice and effectively embodies a commonplace truth based on practical experience or common sense. It is grammatically autonomous, and sententious (Pamies 2007, 2014). Generally speaking, it is also oral and anonymous, transferring the popular wisdom from generation to generation. In Chinese it can be defined as:

广泛流传于民间的，可作为人们行为规范的言简意赅的固定短句，多来源于人民大众的口头创作，其主旨是传授知识经验和人生哲理，凝聚古圣先贤的人生智慧，但其具体作者已不得而知。从句法结构角度来看，是相对完整的句子，可独立使用。

Their various thematic and stylistic constituents are derived from all the layers. For example, the unit below belongs to the group at issue:

- (18) 若 要 人 不 知, 除 非 己 莫 为。  
 Ruò yào rén bù zhī, chūfēi jǐ mò wéi  
 ‘if’ ‘want’ ‘person’ ‘not’ ‘know’, ‘except’ ‘oneself’ ‘not’ ‘do’  
 (if you don't want others to know, you'd better not do it)  
 ‘The only way to prevent people from knowing is not to do it.’  
*cf. eng. What is done by night appears by day.*

##### 4.3.4.2. Maxim (名人名言)

A maxim is a brief and famous statement of a general truth or principle, especially an aphoristic or sententious one. It is a complete sentence, that is, grammatically autonomous, and its origin can be traced to a given author, usually, a philosopher, a writer or a historical personality (Pamies 2007, 2014). In Chinese it can be defined as:

简而言之，是某位名人所说的著名言论，其特点是能反映人生哲理，富有教育意义，言简意赅，出于已知名人之手，并且在群众中广泛流传。

To illustrate the specifics of this group, the following unit can be given:

- (19) 不管 白猫 黑猫，抓到 老鼠 就是 好 猫。——邓小平  
 Bùguǎn báimāo hēimāo, zhuā dào lǎoshǔ jiùshì hǎo māo  
 ‘no matter’ ‘white cat’ ‘black cat’, ‘catch’ ‘mouse’ ‘be’ ‘good’ ‘cat’  
 (be it a black cat or a white cat, a cat that can catch mice is a good cat)  
 ‘The method must be evaluated by its results.’ (Deng Xiaoping)  
 cf. eng. *A black plum is as sweet as a white.*

#### 4.3.5. Motto (座右铭)

A motto is a short sentence or phrase chosen as encapsulating a principle, belief or ideal of an individual, family, or institution. In other words, it is representative of a person or brand’s ideals and values. For example, the motto of University of Oxford is *Dominus illuminatio mea* which means “the Lord is my light”; the motto of the corporate of Adidas is “Impossible is nothing”. A motto can also be a very short phrase so to be more concise and “powerful”. For instance, the motto of Apple Computer is “Think Different”. In Chinese it can be defined as:

用于表达原则、目标或理想的简短句子或短语，通常具激励、警戒或指导作用，使用者可以是个人、家庭、群体或机构。

The motto of Zhu Guangqian (朱光潜), a famous Chinese contemporary esthetician, is also very concise:

- (20) 恒、 恬、 诚、 勇  
 héng, tián, chéng, yǒng  
 ‘perseverant’, ‘calm’, ‘honest’, ‘brave’  
 ‘I am determined to be perseverant, calm, honest and brave.’

#### 4.3.6. Slogan (标语口号)

A slogan is a simple, catchy sentence or phrase used in a clan, political, commercial, religious, or other context as a repetitive expression of an idea or purpose, with the goal of persuading members of the public or a more defined target group, usually very concise and appealing to the audience (Pamies 2007, 2014). In Chinese it can be defined as:

在某领域范畴（如政治、社会、商业、军事、体育、宗教等）使用的言简意赅具有宣传鼓动作用的句子或短语，其目的性很明确，或宣传某些政策，或主张某种理念，包括各种标语和口号，以及商业广告等。

In Chinese, written slogans and oral slogans are distinguished and named differently. The oral slogan is called *kǒu hào* [口号\*mouth appeal (oral appeal)], while the written slogan *biāo yǔ* [标语\*sign language (phrase put on the wall expressing the idea or belief of a certain institution or group)]. In general, written slogans (*biāo yǔ* 标语) originally come from oral slogans (*kǒu hào* 口号). In other

words, when an oral slogan is made public in written form (such as posters, murals, signboards, screens, etc.), gradually becomes a written slogan. An example of a slogan is:

- (21) 为 人民 服务  
 Wèi rén mín fú wù  
 ‘for’ ‘people’ ‘servir’  
 “Serve for the People”

Origin: It is a political slogan which first appeared in Mao-era China. It originates from the title of a speech by Mao Zedong, delivered on September 8, 1944.

#### 4.4. Summary table of the complete typology of Chinese phrasemes

Tables 4, 5, 6 summarize our complete typology of phrasemes, based on their class of grammatical metaphor. The majority of the subclasses coincides with those already proposed for other languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian and English (Pamies 2007, 2014, 2016, 2017), with slight differences.

Table 4. Pseudo-syntagm (伪词组)

(source) Input function	(target) Output function	Grammatical Metaphor	Phraseme	Examples in Chinese
Syntagm	Lexeme	Pseudo-syntagm	固定词组 (idiom)	铁公鸡; 乌鸦嘴
			复合词 (compound)	打字机; 牛仔裤
			实体专有名称词组 (onymic construction)	贵阳; 人民解放军
			专业术语词组 (phraseo-term)	宏观调控; 物理疗法

Table 5. Semi-syntagm (半词组)

(source) Input function	(target) Output function	Grammatical Metaphor	Phraseme	Examples in Chinese
Syntagm	Lexeme +Morpheme	Semi- syntagm	固定搭配 (collocation)	顶头上司; 热烈欢迎
			轻动词词组 (light verb construction)	发脾气; 发洪水
			模式化比较 (stereotyped comparison)	胆小如鼠; 稳如泰山

Table 6. Pseudo-discursive sequence (拟话语用语)

(source) Input function	(target) Output function	Grammatical Metaphor	Phraseme	Examples in Chinese	
Discourse	System	Pseudo-discursive sequence	模式化固定用语 (formula)	慢走; 哪里, 哪里!	
			句子结构型固定语 (proverbial clause)	太阳从西边出来了。	
			非哲理性著名语录 (non-didactic quotation)	中国人民从此站起来来了! ——毛泽东	
			格言 (paroemia)	谚语 (proverb)	若要人不知, 除非己莫为。
				名人名言 (maxim)	不管白猫黑猫, 抓到老鼠就是好猫。——邓小平
			座右铭 (motto)	恒、恬、诚、勇	
标语口号 (slogan)	为人民服务				

It must be pointed out that some subcategories neglected in Pamies' classification (2017) could be added, for example, pragmatic connectors, which link different parts of the discourse together, such as *in other words*, / *in short*, / *by the way*, / *in conclusion*, etc. These units are neither words nor idioms, since they do not belong to any "part of speech". Some phraseologists consider them as a subcategory of pragmateme (frozen statements conditioned by the situation of communication). In Chinese, there are also pragmatic connectors, for example:

- (21) a. 总 而 言 之  
zǒng ér yán zhī  
'all' 'then' 'say' 'it'  
'in a word; in summary'
- b. 一 言 以 蔽 之  
yī yán yǐ bì zhī  
'one' 'word' 'to' 'cover' 'it'  
'to sum up in a word'.

#### 4.5. Peculiarities of phraseological subclasses

The typology looks into not only the universality among different languages, but also the limits of this universality. Regardless of the fact that this phraseological taxonomy proposed by Pamies (2007, 2014, 2016, 2017) can be applied to Chinese with the same criteria used for many other languages, we must admit that there are still some slight differences. To be specific, the subcategory of phrasal verb in Romanic/Germanic languages does not have a correspondence in Chinese (Chen 2013:421); in contrast, the subcategory of *xie hou yu* (歇后语 "two-part allegorical saying") is peculiar to the Chinese language.



#### 4.5.1. Phraseological subclasses absent in Chinese

The phrasal verb (PV) is a peculiarity of the family of Romanic languages as well as Germanic languages. A PV is usually defined as a structure formed with a verb proper and a morphologically invariable particle that functions as a single unit both lexically and syntactically (Darwin & Gary 1999, apud. Liao & Fukuya 2002:73). In other words, it consists of a verb with a preposition or adverb or both (Cambridge Dictionary 2018), for example: *take on*, *give in*, *make do with*, *look up to*, *look down on*. Typically, its meaning is not obvious from the meanings of the individual words themselves. To illustrate, the phrasal verb *look down on* does not mean that a person is looking down from a higher place at someone who is below him/her; it means that somebody thinks that he/she is better than someone else (*English Oxford Living Dictionary* 2018). However, this kind of lexical phenomenon does not exist in Chinese. Hence, in the new taxonomy proposed, it is not included in the classification of Chinese phraseology.

#### 4.5.2. Phraseological subclasses absent in Romanic/Germanic languages

A case in point is the category of *xie hou yu* (歇后语“two-part allegorical saying”). Sometimes they are also translated as “wait-for-it phrase” or “Chinese riddle-phrase”. As Wu Fan (2014: 2) asserts, *xie hou yu* is a peculiar form of Chinese phraseology. It is a two-part enigmatic folk simile which starts off with a basic statement (metaphorical) and finishes with a literal annotation or explanation. That’s to say, the first part acts as a metaphor or primer for the latter part that carries the message. A pause separates the two parts, giving the listener time to guess the “answer”, like a game of riddles. In many cases the second part is omitted altogether, just as what the term *xie hou yu* itself indicates literally. Generally speaking, they are used humorously to express an idea in an ironic or pun-like way, and can be from a variety of sources such as Chinese mythologies, superstitions, religious and common beliefs, or even everyday life. We give a few examples below:

- (22) 狗 咬 耗子——多 管 闲事  
 gǒu yǎo hàozi, duō guǎn xiánshì  
 ‘dog’ ‘bite’ ‘mouse’, ‘much’ ‘care’ ‘other people’s business’  
 (a dog catches mice ---- poking its nose into what is not its business)  
 ‘to poke one’s nose into others’ business’  
 Motivation: Catching mice is the cat’s job; obviously if a dog attempts to do so, it is getting all up in the cat’s business.

In English there are some similar playful phrases:

- (23) *be like school in the summertime ---- no class*  
 (24) *be like Robinson Crusoe ---- all washed up*  
 (25) *be like a doorknob ---- everybody gets a turn*

These examples are close to the Chinese *xie hou yu*. It can be observed that in both Chinese and English examples, the punch line that the speaker tries to indicate is located in the second segment, and this real idea can be deduced accordingly from the first segment. However, there are still some differences:

- a) It is not common for English to omit the second part, since without it one can hardly deduce the real information to be expressed, while it is very often in the case of Chinese *xie hou yu*;
- b) In English, the first part is not a complete sentence, as it lacks the subject or its subject differs in different contexts; in contrast, the Chinese *xie hou yu* always has its first part grammatically autonomous, and formally fixed (none of its elements can be changed). From this point of view, these English playful phrases are not so “fixed and independent” as the *xie hou yu*.

## 5. Conclusions

The traditional approach to classify Chinese phraseology has emphasized too much on the phonetic, graphic and artistic-literary criteria, while most of the western languages categorize their phraseological stock using the functional, grammatical and semantic criteria. It is a fact that two different languages are comparable only when the same criteria are applied. For this reason, basing on theory of grammatical metaphor, we propose a new phraseological classification “exported” to Chinese from the “western” languages. It is based on categories such as the pseudo-syntagm, the semi-syntagm and the pseudo-discursive sequence. By offering appropriate and representative examples for each category, we have verified that Chinese phraseological stock possesses most of the subcategories included in the taxonomy which Pamies (2007, 2014, 2016, 2017) applied to Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French and English. We conclude that this phraseological taxonomy is also applicable in Chinese, yet, with slight differences. Not all the categories of this taxonomy have a correspondence in Chinese, and vice versa, since there are still some types of phraseology which are peculiar to Chinese (e.g. *xie hou yu*) or to Romanic/Germanic languages (e.g. *phrasal verb*). Hopefully, this new taxonomy could be used as a comparative-descriptive instrument avoiding “double standards”, and in this way facilitates the comparative analysis between Chinese and other languages.

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