

## IDIOMS WITH COMPONENT-PHYTONYM SEMANTICS SPECIFICATION IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### *EXPRESSÕES IDIOMÁTICAS COM ESPECIFICAÇÃO SEMÂNTICA DE COMPONENTE FITÔNIMO EM LÍNGUA CHINESA E INGLESA*

### *IDIOMAS CON ESPECIFICACIÓN SEMÁNTICA COMPONENTE-FITONIMA EN LENGUA CHINA E INGLÉS*

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**ABSTRACT:** The article is devoted to the study of the semantic and structural features of phraseological units with a phytonym component in the Chinese and English languages, considering the cultural aspect. At the non-linguistic level, plant images are associated with the emotional background, at the linguistic level - with the translation of these emotions in the form of connotations in the semantics of linguistic units, including idioms. Idioms convey several cultural knowledges recorded in the national consciousness, broadcast fragments of the linguistic image of the world and express attitudes towards certain objects, phenomena or events. In the context of the globalization of modern society, there is a need for a detailed study of the culture of the people, information which is embedded in the semantics of linguistic units, especially phraseological units used in acts of communication.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural linguistics. Linguacultural aspect. Linguistic unit. Culture-specific item with phytonyms.

**RESUMO:** O artigo se dedica ao estudo dos traços semânticos e estruturais das unidades fraseológicas com componente fitonímico nas línguas chinesa e inglesa, levando em consideração o aspecto cultural. No nível não linguístico, as imagens das plantas estão associadas à experiência emocional, no nível linguístico - com a tradução dessas emoções na forma de conotações na semântica das unidades linguísticas, incluindo expressões idiomáticas. Estas expressões transmitem uma série de conhecimentos culturais registrados na consciência nacional, transmitem fragmentos da imagem linguística do mundo e expressam atitudes em relação a determinados objetos, fenômenos ou eventos. No contexto da globalização da sociedade moderna, há necessidade de um estudo detalhado da cultura do povo, cuja informação está embutida na semântica das unidades linguísticas, especialmente nas unidades fraseológicas utilizadas em atos de comunicação.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Linguística cultural. Aspecto linguístico cultural. Unidade linguística. Item específico da cultura com fitônimos.

**RESUMEN:** El artículo está dedicado al estudio de las características semánticas y estructurales de unidades fraseológicas con componente de fitonimia en los idiomas chino e inglés, teniendo en cuenta el aspecto cultural. En el nivel no lingüístico, las imágenes de plantas

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*están asociadas con el trasfondo emocional, en el nivel lingüístico, con la traducción de estas emociones en forma de connotaciones en la semántica de unidades lingüísticas, incluidos los modismos. Los modismos transmiten una serie de conocimientos culturales registrados en la conciencia nacional, transmiten fragmentos de la imagen lingüística del mundo y expresan actitudes hacia ciertos objetos, fenómenos o eventos. En el contexto de la globalización de la sociedad moderna, existe la necesidad de un estudio detallado de la cultura de las personas, cuya información está incrustada en la semántica de las unidades lingüísticas, especialmente las unidades fraseológicas utilizadas en los actos de comunicación.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Lingüística cultural. Aspecto lingüístico-cultural. Unidad lingüística. Ítem específico de cultivo con fitonimias.*

## Introduction

Structurality is one feature of scientific information. Under the presence of this feature, information can be added to a specific system. There is such a type of system as self-regulating. This term speaks of the ability of the system for continuous self-development. This can occur under the influence of factors of both internal and external environment. The impact of these factors entails the emergence of new conditions in which the elements of the system can change, become obsolete, and gradually disappear. Some of the essential factors are external, that is, those that affect both the elements of the system and the entire system from the outside: resettlement, historical battles, influential leaders and personalities, etc. Any changes entail an alteration in scientific concepts. In this case, old paradigms are gradually losing their priority and significance, and new ones come to the fore. These changes are called “paradigms ‘shift’”: “a fundamental change in the basic concepts and experimental practices of a scientific discipline” (BIBRI, 2019, p. 141). These changes are natural for any scientific system. To concretize and define a new scientific paradigm, it is necessary to substantiate it from a theoretical point of view. This is facilitated by the process of accumulating new empirical data.

Cultural linguistics is in the process of forming a theoretical base and conceptual apparatus, therefore it is one of the newest modern academic trends. This direction is interdisciplinary, as it was formed at the junction of several courses in the humanitarian category. F. Sharifian points out that “the newly developed field of Cultural Linguistics is a multidisciplinary area of research that explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations” (SHARIFIAN, 2017, p. 29). This happened during the accumulation and comprehension of the experience of related disciplines, since it became necessary to apply a new approach to the study of these scientific data. This served as the impetus for the creation of a new direction. The scientific factors of related disciplines served as the basis for

concretizing research in cultural linguistics. This experience is the basis for the versatile study of linguistic units with concomitant meanings. However, cultural linguistics can also provide information about its own research to use it in the development of both a theoretical base and a terminological apparatus for other scientific areas, because it is connected with many other types of science. This view was mentioned in the ninth chapter of Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Linguists, Bucharest:

[...] the necessity to combine the internal consolidation of linguistics with a substantial widening of its horizon was enunciated lucidly by Edward Sapir shortly after the Hague congress and most probably as an immediate response to the latter's platform. He argued that linguists, whether they like it or not, must become increasingly concerned with the many anthropological, sociological, and psychological problems which invade the field of language (JAKOBSON, 1969, p. 75).

One of the key trends in research in cultural linguistics is the establishment of the relationship between concepts such as "culture" and "language". As a rule, the relationship of these two terms is based on a strong relationship since the language accompanies the people at all stages of its historical development. Language is the bearer of cultural traditions and mentality, as it captures, preserves, and conveys them. The mentality, traditions, and other peculiarities of the people can be felt through the language. Guangyan Chen argues that "Language, as culture and culture as language indicates that culture is recorded, manifested, interpreted and mediated through language" (CHEN, 2020, p. 59).

It should be understood that a person is an important link between terms such as "language" and "culture". It is the person who is the center of this connection, as he directly participates in the formation of both cultural and linguistic norms. "Language practice is part of human social practice and cognitive activities. Human beings, in their own social practice and cognitive activities, keep using the sign system, created by themselves. So, humans are important. They should be included in the scientific researches of a language" (WANG, 2020, p. 57). Since cultural linguistics studies the specifics of a person and language, it can be distinguished as a separate linguistic discipline. But, since cultural linguistics also studies traditions and mentality through culturological connotations in the language, it can be distinguished into the discipline of a culturological course.

It is important to understand the dual orientation of cultural linguistics since researchers at different times attributed this discipline either to culturological subjects or to the sciences that study a person. At the moment, cultural linguistics has established itself in the status of a new direction, which has arisen as a result of the mixing of several disciplines. The person is

part of the system. It exists in close relationship with the environment. Interacting with society, he can express his assessment of the surrounding reality with the help of language. Moreover, objects and phenomena that a person nominates can carry both subjective and objective assessments.

The difference between objective elements of the environment and subjective ones is that they are not subject to changes depending on the will of a person. By examining them, a person evaluates them and defines a name. This happens regardless of which group the environmental element belongs to. This is necessary for subsequent communication to introduce a new component into the language system and use it further. This is how a language base is created, based on the culture and characteristics of the people and being a part of it. The formation of the name of an element of the environment is influenced by a person's personal ideas about them. In addition, the nomination process considers the peculiarities and mentality of the people to whom it belongs and the state where it lives. Since each of the peoples has their own cultural traditions, the nomination process for each of the nationalities is not similar to each other. This makes it possible to study the process of nominating environmental elements in different countries using comparative analysis.

## Methods

This article is based on systematic approach to the interdisciplinary analysis. Due to the cross-disciplinary approach, we take into consideration the anthropocentric factor, linguistic and non-linguistic information, intercultural analysis, especially dealing with the problem of culture and language correlation.

## Results and discussion

Studying and mastering, the man of the world always began with nature as its environment, which accepts living and a kind of participation in the structure of life and human concepts (KLYUCHEVSKIJ, 2003, p. 51). Permanent stay in in wildlife leads to a person's attempt to understand it, explain natural phenomena and objects, endow them with the features of man and divine beings. From here comes totemism as the ideology of the early clan society, which is the embryo of all European customs, which can be clearly traced now in the language as the keeper and translator of the previously stored knowledge and representations. Thus, the

identity of the ethnic group directly related to the surrounding nature, a part of which are forest and trees.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the linguacultural potential dendronym oak based on comparison with the denotatum image in European Celtic and English culture. Consequently, it is necessary to determine how the tree fits into the traditional culture, what is the relationship between a tree as a botanical object and its image in a cultural symbolic way, between a tree and a person, the position of a particular tree in the arboretum, and what reflection in modern English find these developing during centuries of relationships and statuses. The tree is a unique phenomenon, whose great metaphorical potential is explained by its intermediate position between living nature and inanimate, between the upper and lower worlds. Wood characterized by both strength and weakness, nature and structure, seasonality and cyclicity, is able to stand, being dead. The tree as the main representative of the forest ecosystem is not only benefits other living organisms but also represents danger (HOOKE, 2010; JAKOBSON, 1969). The degree of usefulness, active use of wood in the economy was determined by its qualities: size, density/softness wood, flexibility of the trunk, the ability to withstand weather conditions, the presence of juicy and tasty edible fruits, real or perceived medicinal or toxic properties. Trees are a universal object of deification and worship that rationally explained, since wood is unique material for heating, construction of buildings and structures, as well as carts, musical instruments, baskets, and religious items. Images of tree branches on decorative items already in the VI century BC. testify to the recognition of the important role of the tree in the material and spiritual life of a person. Dendronyms, names of tree-like plants, trees and shrubs, represent an ancient layer of vocabulary that reflects changes in time of the surrounding world, climate, and ecology (KHISMATOVA, 2005; Meaning and Origin of The Phrase ‘Heart of Oak’, 2017). Through dendronyms, on the one hand, reflects man's understanding of nature, his attitude to flora and fauna of their predecessors, on the other hand, subsequent generations receive multifaceted information about natural objects, in particular about trees, before they collide with them and their qualities in reality.

The Chinese traditionally love four plants, they are plum (*meihua*), orchid (*lanhua*), bamboo (*zhuzi*), and chrysanthemum (*juhua*). The ancient Chinese called them *junzy*- a person with good and high spirituality. In ancient China, people aspired to become like that. It is believed that these plants symbolize the qualities that a noble man should possess: straightforwardness of character, modesty, sincerity of thoughts and feelings, and much more. Probably, our ancestors made high demands on themselves. They strove for spiritual perfection.

Plum is a symbol of winter: The Chinese *meihua* plum blooms in Northern China in winter, often covered with snow. Therefore, plum embodies the purity of thoughts and resilience to adversity. On picturesque scrolls, plum stems are drawn curved, gnarled. Likewise, a noble husband should maintain inner peace in the face of external adversity. The birthplace of the *meihua* plum is the Yangtze River region, from where it spread widely throughout East Asia. *Meihua* blooms earlier than other flowers and can withstand temperatures down to -50 °. The delicate flowers are often covered with snow, creating an amazing contrast. Plum flowers are different: there are white, pink, red. In China, the *meihua* plum was a harbinger of spring, often its flowering coincided with the celebration of the Chinese New Year - Spring Festival (Chun-tse), which is celebrated in late January-early February according to the lunar calendar. In China, the plum symbolizes stamina, endurance, hard work, will, and hope. Plums are very durable - they live up to 1000 years. Therefore, they also symbolized constancy and undying love. The wonderful scent of the plum was believed to come from the cold and bitterness (RUWEI, 2004, p. 189).

In Chinese culture, plum is considered a symbol of many qualities that are embedded in the stable expressions of *chenyu*. As a rule, *chenyu* is ancient sayings, quotes from famous classical novels of Chinese literature. *Chenyuyi* make up the golden fund of the Chinese language, they are taught by heart from elementary school age. In our article, we will analyze several *chenyuy*, which include the component phytonym - plum. The analysis will be carried out according to five parameters that we consider to be the most important: vocabulary definition, figurative interpretation of meaning, cultural connotation, vertex and the function of expressing *chenyu* in the communicative situation of the context. The structural-semantic analysis of the *Chenyuy* is accompanied by a culturological commentary, data on the cultural values of the Chinese people, which are contained in the *Chenyu* semantics.

**標梅之年**“The year the plum blossoms, ripe plums fall to the ground, it’s time to harvest the plums”: (figuratively) the woman has reached marriageable age, it’s time to arrange a wedding. 梅子成熟后落下来。比喻女子已到了出嫁的年齡。[The plums fall down when they are ripe. The analogy is that the woman has reached the age of marriage] (Explanatory Dictionary of the Chinese language, n.d.).

In East Asia, the plum is a favorite symbol of early maiden adolescence, as the plum blossom blooms even before the leaves appear. In Chinese, plum is *mei hua*, and the Chinese clan surname Mei (literally "wild plum") speaks of the popularity of this symbol. The erotic connotation of the name *mei-hua* can be seen in the name of the marriage bed “a plum-coloured



blanket". A girl who has reached marriageable age is called a ripe plum, ready for the fact that she will fall, but she will be picked up by the hands of the groom.

The expression is a quotation from one of the oldest works of Chinese literature, the Book of Songs (10th century). The type of stable expression is *chenyu*, because this is an ancient saying, a quote from the classics. Structurally, the expression consists of four hieroglyphs, which is one of the main characteristics of the *chenyu* expressions. The expression consists of three concepts that make up three peaks: 標梅 (falling (withering) overripe plum (figuratively about an old maid; also in the meaning: it's time to get married) + 之 (service word) + 年 (year, annual, annual). In a communicative situation, the expression performs a nominative function.

The context in which the studied expression is contained was found in the novel by the contemporary Chinese writer Bi Du. The main character of the novel is a young girl Bi Weiwei, in whose life great changes have taken place, forcing her to leave the country and go abroad, to Europe, to her childhood friend.

医院里有很多**標梅之年**的女护士,我得替她们把把关。”“妳呢?怎么没把自己算进去?”我答自己已婚,老公是耳鼻咽喉科的郑医生。“郑之龙?那个医界翘楚?”他睁大眼睛问。 [Many nurses in the hospital were like ripe plums, ready to get married, and I need to talk about them. "What about you? Why didn't you consider yourself?" I replied that I was married and my husband was Dr. Zheng from the ENT department. Zhilong? This medical director? "He asked with wide eyes] (DU, 2020).

The context presents a conversation between the two main characters of the novel. They say that many girls who work as medical nurses in the hospital have long reached marriageable age and dream of getting married. Describing these girls, the author of the novel uses the famous *chenyu*, which contains a phytonym component – plum.

**投桃报李** “toss a peach, get back a plum”: (figuratively) to return a favour.意思是他送给我桃儿,我以李子回赠他。比喻友好往来或互相赠送东西。 [It means that he gave me peaches, and I gave him plums in return. It is a metaphor for friendly exchanges or giving things to each other] (Explanatory Dictionary of the Chinese language, n.d.).

The flora of China is bright and unique in its own way. Herbs, flowers, trees, the fruits of these trees in Chinese national consciousness are the keepers of age-old traditions, and also used directly in the creation of a portrait of the "ideal" person. Peach and plum have been and remain constant symbols of valuable things. Plants are actively involved in a variety of rituals,

accompanying a person from cradle to death. Symbolic actions with plants indicate the most important milestones in human life, hint at further development of events in his fate.

The semantics of the idiom is based on the ancient cultural tradition of the Chinese people. Give someone a peach and you'll get a plum. In the course of the development of the language, the phrase gradually becomes stable. Its semantics are transformed, acquiring a metaphorical meaning: share something of value with your friend and something of value will return to you.

The idiom under study is a quote from Book of Songs Daya Yi. The idiom type is *chenyu*. It classically consists of four hieroglyphs that represent four concepts: 投 (throw, throw) + 桃 (peach (symbol of longevity and female love) + 报 (repay, reward, thank, pay tribute) + 李 (plum [fruit]). Four the idiom concepts are expressed by the significant parts of speech (verb and noun), they form the four peaks of the idiom in a communicative situation, the idiom performs a nominative-communicative function, since its main component is the verb.

The book by the writer D. Craig describes the various techniques that special services use to combat terrorists. These techniques are designed to reveal hidden information from an interlocutor who wants to completely conceal this information.

这位丈夫投桃报李, 也说自己有了外遇。(The husband retaliated, and said he had an affair) (CRAIG, 2016, p. 128).

The context is interesting in that it uses the idiom under study. The author specifically uses a stylistically colored language unit in order to clarify: the husband shares information that he has been hiding for a long time, and he hopes that thanks to this, he will be provided with other valuable information that he needs.

In the culture of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (hereinafter: Great Britain), one of the central sacred trees is the oak. Oak has always been considered the national tree of England. His great height, age, and strength made him the king of the English forest and a symbol of endurance. The tree was also sacred to the Druids and Anglo Saxons, and the protector of King Charles II of England when he was on the run from his enemies. During the English Civil War, King Charles II fought against Oliver Cromwell. One battle took place at Worcester in 1651. Charles and his men were defeated and forced to flee. Karl hid for some time in the hollow of an oak tree and watched as armed soldiers searched the woods.



The Great Oak is a huge tree in the heart of Sherwood Forest (near Edwinstone) in Nottinghamshire, England. According to local legend, the oak was a secret meeting place and refuge for Robin Hood and his people. A tree about 800-1000 years old weighs about 23 tons and has a circumference of 10 meters. In 2002, The Tree Council declared the Great Oak one of the UK's 50 National Heritage Trees (DEARY, n.d.).

That is why, in the English language there are many idioms that include the "oak" component.

***All oak and iron bound and sound as a barrel:*** (figuratively) in good health; feeling good (CALD – Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2020).

The cultural connotation of the idiom is positive. Its semantics contains connotative information that is a reference to the values of British culture. To understand the expression, knowledge of cultural facts is necessary: in the culture of the country, the oak is a symbol of strength, strength of body and spirit. The origin of the idiom is difficult because lexicographic sources do not contain information about this. In a communicative situation, the idiom performs a nominative, adverbial function.

The context in which the idiom is found is the title of an article on a news site. The article is devoted to the struggle for the restoration of an ancient fence, which is several hundred years old.

***All oak and iron bound: Restoration of historic fence complete*** (BRADFORD, 2018).

N. Bradford uses the studied idiom in the title of his article to grab the attention of readers. Idiomatic expressions are always emotionally colored, they are always paid attention to. This stylistic technique helps the author to focus the readers' attention on the most important idea of the text: the volunteers managed to stop the process of demolishing the ancient structure and prove that it is a cultural heritage and should be protected by the state. The idiom at the beginning of the title emphasizes the author's idea: now the ancient structure is not in danger.

***Heart of oak:*** The phrase heart of oak denotes a person with a strong, courageous nature, especially a brave and loyal soldier or sailor, and a courageous or valorous spirit. Its literal meaning is the heartwood of the oak. The heartwood is the dense, inner part of the wood of a tree trunk, yielding the hardest timber. The figurative usage is first recorded in the first part of the true and honorable history of the life of Sir John Old-castle, the good Lord Cobham (1600), by the English playwright and translator Anthony Munday (died 1633) (Meaning and Origin of The Phrase 'Heart of Oak', 2017).

The cultural connotation of the idiom is positive. It is based on the value system of the British people, in whose perception of the world, the oak is considered a sacred tree, a symbol

of fortitude. Trees that live for centuries often acquire a kind of cult status, as is typical for objects with a long history. Trees became a place of worship and were considered to have some magical powers, and now tourists make pilgrimages to them, so they have become "cult" within the framework of modern culture. In a communicative situation, the idiom performs a nominative, substantive function since its main component is the noun.

## Conclusion

The language of the people reflects not only the picture of the world. Language is a repository of knowledge about the culture of a people. Language and culture are closely related. Language is part of culture, while culture is part of language. In the system of each language, linguistic units are distinguished, which differ from other linguistic units by a set of special qualitative characteristics. These are idioms. They are stable in a structural way. The arrangement of the constituent components is meaningful to their semantics and cannot be changed. In the semantics of idioms, there are processes of expansion, when a free phrase becomes a stable expression, an idiom. The process of expanding semantics occurs due to the emergence of connotative meaning, which is made up of semes containing allusions to the cultural values of the people. While studying the idioms semantics a researcher have access to people culture and vice versa: to understand an idiom properly we have to know its cultural background.

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