

Abstract

This study presents plant fixed expressions in Mandarin Chinese and in German. We delve into semantic frames through the compositionality of meanings. The participant roles (Ruppenhofer et al 2005) and the mechanism of type coercion (Pustejovsky 1995) are the theoretical background of this research. The data were collected from *Academia Sinica Ancient Chinese Corpus*, *Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Mandarin Chinese*, and the *German Corpus Search, Management and Analysis System (COSMAS)*.

The result shows that although the core meanings that compose the semantic frame of specific plant vehicle vary from language to language, the frames can be built based on the same underlying conceit, such as both teas in Chinese and in German are derived from tea being a popular drink (e.g., *guo-cha* 過茶 ‘pass-tea = give gifts for betrothal’; *im Tee sein* ‘in-the-tea-be = to be in the tea; to be in an exuberant mood’). When the vehicles are different, like Chinese *gua* ‘melon’ and German *Apfel* ‘apple’, the same underlying conceit can decide the generating points of the expressions (e.g., *nao-dai-gua* 腦袋瓜 ‘brain-melon = head’; *rote Äpfel sind auch faul* ‘red-apple-are-also-rotten = even red apples are wormy; appearances are deceptive’). The findings resume Pustejovsky’s (1995) mechanism of type coercion from a syntactic coercion to a broader package-semantic operation. There is a cognition scenario in our minds that varies from language to language and from culture to culture, but the mechanism that is operated in them targets to the same direction. Corpora provide rich data for linguistic observation.

References

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