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硕 士 学 位 论 文

**A Research on Idiomaticity in Spoken Discourse**

——**Based on an Analysis of Woody Allen's Film Scripts**

口 语 语 篇 中 的 习 语 性 研 究

——**基于对伍迪·爱伦的电影剧本分析**

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论 文 提 交 日 期: 2 0 0 8 年 5 月

论 文 答 辩 时 间: 2 0 0 8 年 月

学 位 授 予 日 期: 2 0 0 8 年 月

答 辩 委 员 会 主 席: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Synopsis

Idiomaticity is a property of language that makes the speech natural and acceptable enough for native speakers. It is a native-like selection of expression and one of the parameters for ensuring the naturalness of a text. The phenomenon of idiomaticity in language is associated with the use of a variety of multiword expressions preferred by native speakers. With the development of corpus linguistics, statistics from large-scale corpora indicate that the production of real natural language is realized by idiomatic expressions. Idiomaticity in language has become the topic of common concern in the field of linguistics. The importance of idiomaticity in discourse has recently been recognized, but studies of it have been very few. Therefore, based on an analysis of Woody Allen's film scripts (see Appendix), attempts are made to study spoken discourse in terms of idiomaticity.

The study begins with an introduction of the recognition of idiomaticity in language. Then a few definitions and terminological issues related to the phenomenon of idiomaticity are explained. Decisions are made to focus on the idiomatic expressions as the main form of realization for characterizing idiomaticity in spoken discourse. A general description of the nature and perspectives of study concerning idiomatic expressions are given. According to Fernando (2004: 69-74), there are formal categorization and functional categorization of idiomatic expressions. The formal categorization of idiomatic expressions aids the identification and recognition of a large number of various types of idiomatic expressions. The categorization based on the three meta-functions of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, identified as ideational, interpersonal, and relational, are adopted as the functional categorization of idiomatic expressions. Useful insights obtained from the theoretical foundations lead to the investigation of idiomatic expressions in spoken discourse. Thus the present paper locates the research on an analysis of Woody Allen's film scripts (totaling about 116,620 words) as the corpus. The 10 film scripts selected are composed of improvised or semi-improvised dialogues that are approximate to spontaneous spoken English produced by native speakers. As to the methodology, quantitative analysis is conducted to reveal the large number of idiomatic expressions in the film scripts and to enable us

to have a clear map of the distribution of different kinds of multiword expressions exemplifying idiomaticity. The study presents a small amount of data that is indicative of what might be revealed by a larger-scale research. Besides, qualitative analysis is undertaken to identify the lexicogrammatical forms of various kinds of idiomatic expressions as well as to analyze their functions and communicative strategies in specific contexts. The results reveal that idiomaticity or the use of idiomatic expressions contributes to the naturalness of spoken discourse and the fluency of speakers, which is one of native speakers' language competences. Moreover, it has suggested the relevance of the findings of this study to language teaching. The application of lexical approach to language teaching and the possibility of applying formulaic language to improving students' spoken English proficiency are both explored. At the end of the study, it also considers the validity of the corpus used as well as the ambiguity in measuring idiomaticity in spoken discourse in order to point out some limitations existing in the study.

**Key words:** idiomaticity; idiomatic expressions; spoken discourse



## 摘要

习语性是使话语表达自然流畅并为本族语者所接受的一种语言特性。它是地道语言选择的表达方式，是作为确保语篇自然流畅的参数之一。语言中的习语性现象是与本族语者所偏好的一系列多词组合式的使用相关。随着语料库语言学的发展，大规模的真实语料统计表明，自然话语的生成是由习语性语言来实现的。习语性也逐渐受到语言学研究领域的关注。近年来，语篇中习语性的重要性已得到认可，但是相关的研究却很少。因此，在分析伍迪·爱伦的电影剧本基础上，本文尝试进行了口语语篇中的习语性研究。

本研究开头介绍了对语言中习语性的认可，然后解释了与习语性现象相关的定义和术语问题。研究着重于习语表达式，以此作为描述口语语篇的习语性的主要实现形式。文章对习语表达式的性质和研究视角进行了总体描述。依据 Fernando(2004: 69-74)对习语表达式的分类存在形式分类和功能分类。形式分类有助于辨认大量各类习语表达式，而功能分类采用了韩礼德系统功能语法中三大元功能，即概念元功能，人际元功能和语篇元功能区分了习语表达式。理论部分为之后口语语篇中对习语表达式的实际调查奠定基础。本文章将研究的语料定位于伍迪·爱伦的电影剧本（共计约 116,620 词）分析。所选择的十部电影剧本是由即兴或半即兴对话组成，这些对话接近于本族语者的自然英语口语。本研究所采用的研究方法主要是定量研究和定性研究。其中用定量分析来表明电影剧本中习语表达式的数量，使读者清楚明白各种具有习语性的多词表达式在语篇中的分布情况。研究呈现了小规模的数据，这些数据可以表明大规模研究可能显示的结果。定性分析被用来界定各种习语表达式的词汇语法形式，分析它们在特定语境中的作用和交际策略。研究结果表明习语性或习语表达式的使用有利于保证口语语篇的自然和说话者语言表达的流畅，这是本族语者的语言能力之一。另外，研究还提出建议，将研究结果和语言教学联系起来。其中探索了词汇教学法在语言教学中的应用以及运用公式化语言提高学生英语口语的可能性。在研究即将结束之际，本文考虑了语料的有效性问题和口语语篇中衡量习语性存在的分歧，以此指出了本研究中存在的不足。

**关键词：**习语性；习语表达式；口语语篇

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background and aim of the present study

In the last few decades, linguists have regarded language as a highly systematic and rule-governed behavior. This view of language has almost dominated linguistic theory. In 1964, Noam Chomsky stated “it is evident that rote recall is a factor of minute importance in ordinary use of language, that a minimum of the sentences which we utter is learnt by heart as such that most of them, on the contrary, are composed on the spur of the moment” (Mackenzie, 2000). This reflects the theoretical nature of Transformational-Generative-Grammar, which claims that new sentences, never spoken or heard before, can easily be formulated given the set of rules for combining a large set of vocabulary items. Thus, according to Chomsky, human language is distinguished by its creative potential. And this system focuses on the creative power of syntactic rules and allows for the generation of an infinite set of context-free sentences from a finite grammar, which provides a plausible account of the grammatical basis of linguistic creativity.

However, Chomsky’s priority of syntactic rules and emphasis on grammatical rules have recognized only one side of language, i.e. grammaticality of language use, while ignoring idiomaticity and acceptability of language that is related to lexicon. In contrast, recent studies indicate that the role played by the lexicon in the production of language is gaining more importance than was previously assumed. Widdowson (1989:128) has recognized the implication of phraseological approach for language learning. In fact, in a variety of language-related fields there is a general movement away from the compositional, generative view of language processing towards a recognition that a great deal of what native speakers say and write is stored already in the lexicon in the form of hundreds of thousands of word combinations and is manipulated in chunks (Howarth, 1993).

In recent years, the study of phraseology has evolved from its peripheral Chomskyan status to a fundamental role in language discussion, description and acquisition. Studies of language acquisition and, in particular, of the spontaneous (or ‘on-line’) processing of speech (Bolinger, 1976; Peters, 1983; Pawley and Syder, 1983)

have increasingly given recognition to the role of memorization and repetition of complex units as opposed to rule-governed computation and assembly. Pawley and Syder (1983:208) have studied the lexicalization of word combinations and conclude that memorized sentences and phrases are the normal building blocks of fluent spoken discourse. In addition, experimental psychologists who study the comprehension of idiomatic expressions and originally consider them to be potentially ambiguous anomalies in the linguistic system have now regarded them as highly conventional lexicalized units. Gibbs (1980:155) maintains that what is important in language processing is not whether a particular utterance is stated literally or metaphorically. Rather, it is the conventionality of a sentence that makes it easier or more difficult to comprehend and remember. Evidence of the phraseological approach can also be found in corpus linguistics (Kjellmer, 1990), lexicography (Cowie, 1981) and discourse analysis (Tannen, 1989), but most particularly in the work of descriptive linguists, such as Fillmore, Bolinger and Cowie.

With the development of corpus linguistics, the importance of phraseology has also been highlighted. Indeed, one of the major insights of the corpus analysis of English has been the profoundly phraseological nature of much of what we say and write: “the foundation of fluency, naturalness, idiomaticity, appropriateness” (Sinclair, 1991:496). With the application of large corpora in linguistic research, researchers have new discoveries and recognition in language use. Sinclair (1991:110) states that “slot and filler model” cannot explain many concrete phenomena in language use, and he puts forward the “idiom principle” to complement it. Studies based on large-scale corpora indicate that the production of real natural language is realized by prefabricated, institutionalized, and fully contextualized phrases and expressions and sentence heads, with a grammatical form and a lexical content that is either wholly or largely fixed. In an empirical study of the “idiom principle”, Erman and Warren (2000) find that as much as 50% of language may be explicable in idiomatic terms.

More recent work in linguistics suggests that much of native speakers' speech and writing is enabled by the internalization of a vast number of institutionalized utterances, or lexical phrases, or fixed and semi-fixed expressions. As Nattinger (in Carter and McCarthy, 1988b:76) puts it, language use seems to be “basically a ‘compositional’ process, one of ‘stitching together’ pre-assembled phrases into discourse”. The



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