Proverb as a Multi-Word Lexical Unit (MWLU): A Study of Chang Language

Laishram Bijenkumar Singh and Waikhom Pinky Devi
Centre for Naga Tribal Language Studies and Department of Linguistics, Nagaland University

Abstract
This paper explores the defining features of proverbs, demonstrating that they function as multi-word lexical units. It examines the linguistic characteristics inherent in proverbs and identifies these elements as integral components of such units. Like many other languages, Chang makes rich use of proverbs, employing their distinctive syntactic and semantic features to affirm their status as multi-word lexical units. The paper studies the intricate relationship between lexical and phraseological units within proverbs. This study investigates the dynamic interplay between individual words and fixed expressions within proverbs, revealing how this synergy shapes their meaning and structure. In doing so, it offers a deeper understanding of not only linguistic mechanisms but also the cultural norms they encapsulate, highlighting proverbs as complex artifacts that bridge the gap between lexis and phraseology.

Keywords: Chang, Proverb, Multi-Word Lexical Unit

1.0 About Chang

Chang is a language spoken in the North East state of Nagaland, India. It is a major tribe that has its own distinct culture and language. Chang is dominantly inhibited in the Tuensang district, which is 274 km from the capital city, Kohima. The term Chang indicates both the language and the community that speaks it. Chang is also known by alternate names Mojung, Changyanguh, Mochumi and Mochunger. According to the 2001 census, the total population of Chang is 60,9000 inhabited in 36 villages. Chang doesn't have their own script, it uses Roman script for writing purposes. Benedict (1972), has classified Chang with the Konyak group.

2.0 Introduction

This study presents a linguistic analysis of proverbs in the Chang language. The paper is structured into two main sections: the first provides a foundational overview, defining proverbs and exploring the concept of multi-word lexical units in general terms. The second section delves into a discussion that demonstrates how Chang proverbs exhibit the characteristics of multi-word lexical units, drawing on a selection of well-known examples from the language.

3.0 Defining proverbs and multi-word lexical unit

According to Mieder (1985), a proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.

The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs (2004) mentioned that proverbs are simple and concrete sayings popularly known and repeated, which express a truth, based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. They are traditional sayings that offer advice or present a moral in a short and pithy manner.

Wolfgang Mieder, in his book "Proverb: A handbook" mentioned that The American paremiologist Bartlett Jere Whiting (1904–1995) reviewed many definitions in an important article on "The Nature of the Proverb" (1932), summarizing his findings in a lengthy conglomerate version of his own: A proverb is an expression which, owing its birth to the people, testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth that is, a truism, in homely language, often adorned, however, with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short but need not be; it is usually true, but need not be. Some proverbs have both a literal and figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have but one of the two. A proverb must be venerable; it must bear the sign of antiquity, and, since such signs may be counterfeited by a clever literary man, it should be attested in different places at different times. This last requirement we must often waive in dealing with very early literature, where the material at our disposal is incomplete. (Whiting 1932: 302; also in Whiting 1994: 80)

3.1 Multi-word lexical unit

A phrase consisting of two or more words functioning as a single lexeme. The constituents are relatively stable (fixed expression) and, if used idiomatically, their combined meaning is more or other than the sum of the parts, e.g. fly-by-night, face the music (Hartmann and James, 2002).

As per Kirsten Malmkzær (2002), a multi-word lexical unit is a unit including more than one complete word, i.e., compounds and idioms like blackbird, bank on, give up, night owl, hammer and tongs, at all, kick the bucket. For such multi-word combinations to be considered true multi-word lexical units, the convention is that their meanings should be more than the sum of the meanings of

their components. Thus, night owl is a lexical unit, but nocturnal owl is not, and kick the bucket is a lexical unit when it means 'die' but not when it means 'strike the pail with one's foot'.

Igor Burkhanov stated that this term is used to denote lexical items which are not lexemes,i.e one word lexical items, but consist of two or more words. It is important to note that multiple-word lexical items are the units of lexecon and functionally are similar to lexemes. Multiple-word lexical items are different from free word combinations, since the latter are not units of the language system.

It is noteworthy to mention that a multi-word lexical unit differs significantly from a free combination. It is essential to distinguish between free combinations and set combinations, as the latter constitute multi-word lexical units. In this regard, Zgusta stated that words are combined in a meaningful way in sentences according to the communicative intentions of the speaker, these combinations may vary from one sentence to another, just as the communicative intentions vary, too. Further, he argues that free combinations are either attributive or completive. Examples of both types of combinations are so extremely frequent that it is not necessary to quote them extensively; it will suffice to adduce only a few of them as illustrations. In one sentence, we can see the word combinations *wet sand*. In other sentences, we can see the word combinations wet wood, wet feet, wet forest and so on, and there will be other combinations, such as dry sand, yellow sand, etc. One can speak agreeably, or quietly, or in a loud voice, etc and one can smile agreeably, live agreeably, and so on. A huge number of completive combinations could be easily quoted, too: one can carry wood, or carry a burden, generally or stones, or the bride over the threshold, etc and one can burn wood or pick up wood or sell wood and so on. In short, one can call word combinations of this type (irrespective of whether attributive, completive or any other) free combinations. They are created by the speaker ad hoc, on the spur of the moment for the purpose of the statement just intended to utter. Their meaning is derivable from the meaning of the single combined words. They cannot be considered to be wholes (or units), or to be members of the system of language as wholes (i.e. as complex units), because they are elicited only by the concrete necessity of what the speaker intends actually to say. To distinguish free combinations from set combinations, zgusta also mentions that it is not possible to exchange their constituent elements or substitute another for one of them, or sometimes even to add something. For example, the word good is free in the sense that an endless number of things can be described as good, in the same sense the word day is also free, because it can have an endless number of different attributes. In a sentence, like "it was a good day", the combination is absolutely free because it would be equally possible to say " it was a very good day" or "it was a bad day" or a long day of work" or many other things, according to the actual communicative intention. But as mentioned above in the greeting "Good day!", it is not possible to say something else, e.g. "Excellent day!", nor to add something, e.g., "very good day!" without basically changing the meaning of the expression, without affecting its acceptability as a greeting. The combination of the words good day has then, a lexical meaning as a whole, though it is, in this case, "derivable from the single parts. It is a set combination of words; in this case, it is a multi-word lexical unit. Multi-word lexical units are very frequent. They carry lexical meanings as wholes(units); in this respect, they function in the sentence in the same way as those lexical units that consist of one word only. They designate segments of the extra-linguistic world in a way which is precisely analogous to that of designative words. He further provided eight criteria based on which one can detect a multi-word lexical unit.

1. Substitution: In a multi-word lexical unit, substitution is impossible.
2. Addition: Sometimes, it is impossible to add something to the set combination.
3. Very frequently, different semantic phenomena are critical or at least indicative; so, above all, the eventual fact that the meaning of the whole combination is not fully derivable from that of the single parts.
4. A constituent part of a set combination of words may be severely or exclusively restricted to it.
5. The multiword lexical unit may have a synonym or a close near synonym that consists of one word only.
6. A small group of semantically related expressions may show analogous or identical status among the multi-word lexical units and single words.
7. A one-word equivalent in a foreign language can suggest that we might have a multi-word lexical unit before us.
8. Multi-word lexical units do sometimes have special formal and grammatical properties.

4.0 Discussion

This paper aims to demonstrate that Chang proverbs function as multi-word lexical units and should not be analysed as isolated lexical items. It focuses on linguistic expressions that consist of fixed word combinations, notwithstanding certain lexical or structural variations.

Chang proverbs present a linguistic paradox: they are constructed from ordinary words using standard syntax, yet they function not as simple sentences, but as complex units with non-compositional meanings. This fundamental characteristic aligns them with the category of multiword expressions (MWEs).

According to (Amanda P. et al.), proverbs are distinguished from fixed expressions/frozen sentences (or idioms, proper). In idioms, the verb and one of its argument positions are frozen together, that is, they are distributionally invariant, or the argument nouns can only vary within a small and closed paradigm. Usually, the subject of frozen sentences is distributionally free, and its selection depends not just on the verb, but on the overall meaning of the combination of the verb and its frozen arguments. On the other hand, typically, proverbs are completely frozen sentences, where, despite some (reduced) lexical variation and some (even more constraint) syntactical paraphrasing, all the elements are fixed. In other words, proverbs have the subject position necessarily filled by a fixed element while the subject in fixed expressions usually varies and may be defined intentionally, by distributional constraints.

This study examines 10 Chang proverbs, listed below, and evaluates them against Zgusta's criteria to demonstrate that they function as multiword lexical expressions.

i.   *həntʃou ŋebə kʰo tʰusət* 'little knowledge is dangerous'.
ii. *juklaŋa phədət-tibə* 'We are often betrayed by those we trust, never by those we distrust'.
iii. *ounək-kəusi tʃəmzou həldikta* 'If a cock crows untimely, the house will be burned'.
iv. *keidou ŋəmsi uktəu təkta* ' you beat the dog and the dog bite the pig'.
v.   *ŋoŋbə keijei maŋdəm ədəkta* ' a barking dog never bites'
vi. *ŋouto kei-ei ŋoŋbəzam* 'A dog barking at a Mithun'.
vii. *hinei joumo lambətəgə* 'A crab trying to glean leftover paddy after harvest'.
viii. *noje oksi ʃilepakei*   'Your intestine is being stitched'.
ix. *meiʃi ʃiʃet ŋaopʰok pʰokmai* 'Loss in hunting, gain in fishing'.
x.   *kʰunjuwa wankak sokən təzinku* 'Don't pour hot charcoal on the head'.

i.   *həntʃou ŋebə kʰo tʰusət* 'little knowledge is dangerous'
This is a well-known and deeply revered proverb among the Chang. This proverb is considered as a cornerstone of practical wisdom and encapsulates a key principle for navigating life in Chang culture. The proverb indicates that having a limited, superficial understanding of a complex subject can lead to overconfidence and poor decision-making. A person with only a small amount of information may believe they are an expert, leading them to take actions or give advice that is incorrect, inappropriate, or even harmful.
This proverb functions as a single, cohesive lexical item where the meaning of this proverb is not derivable from its individual components, marking it as a multi-word lexical unit." Here, *həntʃou* 'little' and *ŋeba* 'knowledge' are fixed and rigid. The given proverb, fulfilling the criteria of a multi-word lexical unit, does not permit the addition or substitution of any other elements.

ii. *juklaŋa phədət-tibə* 'We are often betrayed by those we trust, never by those we distrust"
This proverb is very common in Chang society, which semantically implies that betrayal is a concept that only exists within a relationship of trust. You cannot be "betrayed" by an enemy because you expected nothing from them. The very possibility of betrayal is created by the act of trusting.
From a structural perspective, the position of *juk* 'frog' and *laŋa* 'stone' is fixed. The proverb exhibits non-compositionality, as the meaning of the entire expression cannot be fully derived from the meanings of its individual constituents. Furthermore, the expression does not permit either substitution of its lexical items or the addition of new elements, indicating a high degree of fixedness. These features collectively fulfil the criteria of a multi-word lexical unit.

iii. *keidou ŋəmsi uktəu təkta* 'you beat the dog and the dog bite the pig'.
Embedded with ancestral wisdom, this traditional Chang proverb holds great significance in Chang society. The semantic interpretation of the proverb highlights two dimensions: first, a hierarchical transmission of anger, wherein it descends through successive levels of authority; and second, the principle that a seemingly minor action can initiate a chain reaction, ultimately resulting in significant and unforeseen consequences.
As a defining feature of multi-word lexical units, the lexical items *kei* 'dog' and *uktəu* 'pig' in the proverb are fixed and non-substitutable, and no additional elements can be incorporated into the expression. Moreover, the meaning of the proverb is non-compositional, as it cannot be fully derived from the meanings of its individual components, thereby reinforcing its status as a conventionalized lexical unit.

iv. *ounək-kəusi tʃəmzou həldikta* 'If a cock crows untimely, the house will be burned.'
This is a well-known Chang proverb which suggests that an unusual or ominous occurrence, such as a rooster crowing at an unusual hour, is regarded as a bad omen indicating impending misfortune. In a broader metaphorical sense, it conveys the belief that strange or unnatural events may foreshadow trouble. Its function is to articulate the notion that irregular signs are often interpreted as precursors to calamity.
The elements of the proverb are fixed and immutable. The lexical items *ounək* 'hen' and *tʃəm* 'house' cannot be replaced by any alternatives, nor can additional elements be introduced into the expression. Furthermore, the overall meaning of the proverb is not entirely compositional, as it cannot be fully derived from the meanings of its individual components. This characteristic satisfies the criteria of a multi-word lexical unit.

v.   *ŋoŋbə keijei maŋdəm ədəkta* 'a barking dog never bites'.
This proverb indicates that a 'barking' person is actually insecure or feels powerless. By making a lot of noise, they are trying to project an image of strength and authority that they don't genuinely possess. The barking is a defence mechanism to hide their fear or inability to act.
In the given proverb, the lexical item *kei* "dog" occupies a fixed and non-substitutable position, reflecting the structural rigidity characteristic of such expressions. All constituent elements are similarly fixed, and the introduction of additional components is not permissible within the expression. Furthermore, consistent with a key property of multi-word lexical units, the overall meaning of the proverb is non-compositional, as it cannot be fully inferred from the meanings of its individual constituents.

vi. *ŋouto kei-ei ŋoŋbəzam* 'A dog barking at a Mithun'.
This proverb is prominent in Chang society. The semantic interpretation of the proverb denotes an incorrigible individual, that is, a person who persistently disregards advice or correction from others. Structurally, the expression does not permit the addition of lexical elements, and its meaning is non-compositional, as it cannot be derived from its individual constituents. These properties substantiate the classification of Chang proverbs as multi-word lexical units.

In this proverb, the verb *ŋoŋbə* bark and its argument *ŋou* Mithun form a fixed collocational unit, while the subject *kei* dog is not distributionally flexible. All constituent elements are structurally fixed, with both the subject and object positions remaining invariable. Specifically, neither *kei* dog nor *ŋou* Mithun can be substituted, and the verb *ŋoŋbə* bark cannot be replaced by any alternative lexical item. This structural rigidity satisfies the primary criterion of a multi-word lexical unit.

vii. *hinei joumo lambətəgə* 'A crab trying to glean leftover paddy after harvest'.
This proverb denotes an inept individual, with its semantic implication extending to a person whose actions are both poorly executed and inappropriately timed. Structurally, the expression exhibits a high degree of fixedness: the lexical item *hin* crab is non-substitutable, no additional elements can be incorporated, and the overall meaning is non-compositional, as it cannot be derived from the meanings of its individual constituents. These features indicate that all elements within the phrase are fixed.

viii. *noje oksi ʃilepakei* 'Your intestine is being stitched'.
This proverb is used to refer to an underachiever hampered by a lack of rigor and an overly relaxed approach. Such proverbs are used in a situation where an individual's potential is limited by a fundamental lack of self-discipline and a preference for leisure over exertion.
 Here in this proverb, the position of *oksi* 'intestine' is fixed and cannot be substituted with any other elements, also no other elements can be added to this phrasal expression, which indicates that all the elements in the given phrasal expression are fixed. The subject position cannot be substituted with any other words.

ix. *meiʃi ʃiʃet ŋaopʰok pʰokmai* 'Loss in hunting, gain in fishing'.
This proverb carries lots of wisdom in chang society and the semantic interpretation of this proverb refers to the idea that a setback or failure in one area of life can unexpectedly lead to a success or advantage in another. It's a way of saying that a loss is not always a permanent or absolute defeat. The proverb indicates compensation, adaptability, and finding opportunity in disappointment.
Syntactically, this proverb constitutes the property of multi word lexical unit, here, the words *meiʃi* 'deer' and *ŋao* 'fish' cannot be substituted by any other nouns. We also cannot add any other word in the whole phrase, as the addition of new words changes the meaning of the whole sentence. As mentioned above, the meaning of the whole combination cannot be derived from the single parts. All the elements in the whole phrase are fixed. The set of words is severely or exclusively restricted to it.

x. *kʰunjuwa wankak sokən təʒinku* 'Don't pour hot charcoal on the head'.
This is a chang proverb which carries the traditional wisdom of chang society. The semantic interpretation of the proverb is not to cause trouble for yourself or not to create a problem that will ultimately harm you.
This proverb exhibits the properties of a multi-word lexical unit. In this proverb, kʰunjuwa 'head' and wankak 'charcoal' are fixed i.e. invariable and cannot be substituted, no additional words can be inserted, the expression is unchangeable and its meaning is non-compositional

conclusion
This study examines the cultural and linguistic significance of proverbs within Chang society. As integral components of oral tradition, Chang proverbs function not only as repositories of collective wisdom but also as stylistic devices that enrich communicative practices. By encapsulating philosophical insights and social norms, these proverbs contribute to the preservation and transmission of Chang cultural heritage. The analysis highlights their dual role as linguistic artifacts and vehicles of cultural expression, underscoring their relevance in both everyday discourse and academic inquiry into folklore and language. Chang proverbs play a crucial role in communication and language acquisition by reflecting cultural norms, traditions, and shared knowledge, thereby offering valuable insights into their society of origin. As multi-word lexical units, Chang proverbs are defined by a fixed form and a context-dependent meaning. They operate as single semantic entities, where the combination of words is understood holistically, rather than as a sum of individual components. Consequently, the constituent words of a proverb are never interpreted in isolation.

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