

Chapter 5

General Language Locutions

'With that tape,' he said, 'we can request the computer to supply us with any information we like about your ideolect.' 'Come again?' I said. 'Your own special, distinctive, unique way of using the English language.

DAVID LODGE, SMALL WORLD: AN ACADEMIC ROMANCE

1. Introduction

The question is now posed as to whether phraseological differences between the two sub-corpora are limited to such multiword sequences, or whether distinctions can be made within the administrative register with regard to phraseological features borrowed from the 'general' language, namely 'locutions' (cf. Chapter 2). Does the picture established in Chapter 4 change when another approach is taken to the corpus, or are the findings consistent?

The approach taken in this chapter compares the general language and the register of administration, owing both to the source of the phraseological patterning investigated and also to comparisons made between the comparator corpus and the administrative corpus (FRADCO). This comparative data is used in particular to investigate the presence, role and function of common locutions in the two corpora, and the distribution of these locutions between the two halves of the administrative corpus (FREUCO and FRNACO), as well as between genres within this corpus. In this way, it can be ascertained whether certain locutions are more genre- or register-bound. It is interesting to see also whether the locutions which are employed have anything in common, in terms of semantics, syntax, pragmatics or discursual usage.

This chapter therefore takes a 'micro' approach to collocations in the corpus: the starting point is generally-accepted idiomatic phrases of French. As Rey and Chantreau say, "aucun discours ou presque ne peut faire l'économie des locutions, lieux communs éculés ou produits plaisants de l'imagination populaire" (1993, p. xiii). While few varieties of language can do without such phrases, each genre or register draws on the phraseological resources of the French language to a different extent, and possibly for different purposes.

Examples are given, followed, in square brackets, by the sub-corpus from which they are taken and the textual genre (for example, [frnaco\cppmfr] to refer to the 'Communiqué de Presse, Premier Ministre' genre of the national French sub-corpus - see Appendix 1 for details of the abbreviations used). Where it is useful

to indicate the number of occurrences of a particular locution in the corpus, this appears before the square brackets (e.g.: 7 [frnaco\cppmfr]). Where it is not otherwise indicated, examples come from the complete administrative corpus.

1.1 *The Dictionnaire des expressions et locutions*

Rey and Chantreau's *Dictionnaire des expressions et locutions* (1993) has been introduced in Chapter 2. Here we should consider briefly the sources of its entries. The dictionary is based partly on existing dictionaries and collections of 'locutions' and partly on a corpus, in a loose sense of the term, of authentic texts. It should come as little surprise, given the history of corpus linguistics in France, that the majority of texts in the corpus are literary in nature: the literary part of the text collection constitutes some 450 texts. However, Rey and Chantreau note that "c'est même une tendance remarquable de la locution française, de nos jours, que d'intégrer des éléments de discours répété, provenant de la politique, de la publicité, souvent véhiculés par les médias de masse" (*ibid.*, p. xv). They give as examples from the field of politics such common phrases as 'le pré carré' and 'l'état de grâce'. In light of this, this second edition of the dictionary extended the range of texts in its reference corpus, with the result of "réintroduisant ainsi dans la phraséologie ce pouvoir social qui dépasse la référence à un créateur individuel et repérable" (*ibid.*, p. xv). Little detail is given concerning this constituent of the source material, but the editors do note that they have made use of articles from a number of newspapers and magazines, including *Charivari*, *Libération*, and *Le Monde* (*ibid.*, p. 816). Given the extent of the time period covered in the reference corpus, it is understandable that the dictionary covers current usage and also older locutions, some of which have now even fallen out of use completely. These are marked *vx* or *vieilli* in the entry. It turns out that few of these appear in the administrative corpus.

Although the dictionary gives no indication of the frequency of the locutions in the reference corpus,⁶³ in searching for the locution in the administrative corpus this analysis is effectively comparing the register of administrative French with the general language to the extent that it is represented by this reference corpus. In addition, in order to gain some idea of frequency, and more importantly, the function of such locutions in different types of language, these have been compared with the comparator corpus. Although this corpus is relatively small and, like Rey and Chantreau's source base, biased towards literary and

63 Rey and Chantreau do note, however, that their locutions derive a part of their importance from their frequency in the language (1993, p. x). While frequency is not a major consideration for inclusion in the dictionary, it is still recognised that locutions have a quantitatively important role in language.