

Članci – Articles - Artikel

**Marija Omazić**

Faculty of Philosophy  
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University  
Osijek

**Introduction:  
WHY, WHAT and How in phraseology**

In the past 20 years there has been a growing interest in what was traditionally known as ‘idioms’ in the American and British traditions, but what is also called ‘multi-word combinations or units’, ‘fixed expressions’, ‘formulaic language’, ‘coselection of words’, ‘phrasal lexemes’ and ‘phrasemes’ or ‘phraseological units’. Those units are studied in a variety of disciplines of theoretical and applied linguistics: lexicology, lexicography, discourse analysis, corpus analysis, first and second language acquisition, foreign language teaching, cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, semantics, rhetoric and stylistics. This expansion reflects a keener awareness that phraseology is pervasive in speech and writing, and that it plays an important role in first and second language acquisition and speech production.

Despite being undoubtedly fascinating, phraseology has been relatively neglected even in lexical studies and semantics. It is only in the past decade that the spectrum of perspectives broadened to include different aspects of the phenomenon, thus shaping the new and more widely acknowledged discipline: phraseology. One of the reasons for the increased interest in phraseological units is the tendency in modern linguistics to study language as a mental phenomenon, and the tendency towards interdisciplinary studies. In the logical approach to language, PUs were treated as exceptions to the rule, as special lists of lexically fossilized phrases with specific meanings that language users consulted only if they could not interpret the expression literally. Another recent tendency is to study language in use, and not in its ideal state, which means that spoken

discourse, as well as formerly neglected registers and variants, became one of the central objects of linguistic research.

Phraseology can be defined as the study of structure, meaning and use of phraseological units. Phraseology has only recently been recognized as a field of study in the American tradition, but it has strong roots in the European, particularly Russian and East European, linguistic traditions. The growing interest in the field in Europe, marked by several symposia on phraseology, resulted in the foundation of the *European Society of Phraseology* (EUROPHRAS)<sup>1</sup> with its seat in Zürich (founded in Bielefeld in 1999). The society builds on the tradition of EURALEX, only with a narrower, more specialized focus on phraseology. Its goal is to organize conferences dedicated to phraseology and publish annual bulletins providing information on European research in the field, promote the international cooperation among scholars working in the field of phraseology, thus bridging the gap between researchers from different traditions.

The main difference between the orientation of the European and American researchers is twofold: unlike American phraseology, European phraseology focuses on a variety of languages, thus enabling a more universal and contrastive approach. The American tradition is generally more in line with the cognitive and psycholinguistic approach. This is not to say that there is no cross-fertilization of approaches, but there are still general tendencies that characterize the two strands of research.

Current phraseological research incorporates four major approaches: classical theory relying on the Russian tradition, seeking to establish a systematic framework of descriptive categories; a more culture-oriented approach including the anthropological and cultural dimension; cognitive approach; and the more applied strand: corpus research, lexicography, foreign language learning and teaching. Corpus and lexicographic work is based on the neo-Firthian lexical theory, with the focus on frequency and collocations, whereas the general and theoretical approach recognizes the need to look beyond statistics to account for the textual and pragmatic behaviour of phraseological units, and aims to describe them taking into account the scalar value of their features.

Phraseology as a subdiscipline of linguistics, although still disputed and criticized by many, has recently seen unprecedented development. Only in 2005 there were two major international conferences dedicated to phraseological research, gathering hundreds of scholars to discuss not only their work, but also

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information visit <http://www.euophras.unizh.ch>, or contact the chairperson: Prof. Dr. Annelies Häcki-Buhofer, Deutsches Seminar, Universität Basel, Nadelberg 4, CH-4051 Basel; E-Mail: [Annelies.Hacki-Buhofer@unibas.ch](mailto:Annelies.Hacki-Buhofer@unibas.ch)

the place of phraseology within linguistics and across other disciplines. EUROPHRAS 2005, organized jointly by Ljubljana University and Karl-Franzens Universität Graz, took place in Strunjan, Slovenia from 12 to 14 September. *Phraseology 2005* was organized from 13 to 15 October 2005 by the Université catholique de Louvain in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. But it is more than just a coincidence, in 2006 three more phraseological conferences will be organized: EUROPHRAS 2006 in Veszprém, Hungary; Collocations and Idioms 1: the First Nordic Conference on Syntactic Freezes in Finland; and International Conference On Phraseology And Paremiology in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. At the end of this issue you can find calls for papers for these three conferences.

The present issue of *Jezikoslovlje* wishes to capture and present the essence and the sense of this vibrant and intense activity, assess the past and project the future of phraseological research. The volume is intended as a cross-section of current developments in phraseology, with five representative papers which, although all start from different theoretical bias, namely cognitive, culture-based, computational and corpus-based, lexicographic and methodological, or cross-linguistic perspectives, have phraseology at their core.

The contribution by Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij and Elizabeth Piirainen aims to establish to what extent the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor (CTM) can be applied to idiom analysis, arguing that the theory fails to account for idiom irregularities, and that idioms have a different cognitive and communicative value compared to novel metaphors. The authors conclude that CTM in its present version does not cover all relevant aspects of the semantic and pragmatic behaviour of idioms, as well as that the knowledge of underlying conceptual metaphors is not the only type of knowledge which is linguistically relevant. In order to describe how idioms function, one has to take into account other concepts as well, above all culturally based concepts, which in many cases govern the inference from literal to figurative.

The paper by Omazić explores the role of cognitive linguistic theories, Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Integration Theory or Blending Theory, in accounting for the creation and processing of conventional and modified phraseological units, examining some of the existing cognitive models and their interpretation and application, and furnishing them with phraseological material to examine their efficiency and universality. The two theories are viewed as complementary, Metaphor Theory being productive in accounting for a wide range of conventional phraseological units, and Conceptual Integration Theory particularly well-suited to account for modified phraseological units.

Papers by František Čermák and Mojca Pecman represent the corpus-based approach to phraseological research, one of the fastest growing in phraseology, the one that finally managed to give phraseology the accuracy many had denied it before, and should therefore be considered as one of the main pillars of its legitimacy. Čermák investigates the metacommunicative setting of proverbs and other phraseological units in English and Czech, making an inventory of meta-communicative introducers found in two large corpora: British National Corpus and Czech National Corpus, and noting different tendencies found across these two languages.

Mojca Pecman's paper is a true exercise in applied phraseology, as she examines the methodology of the notation and annotation of collocations, as well as the question of markers allowing the extraction of units from their phrasal contexts, and of labels destined to specify the extraction of units from their phrasal contexts. She takes a critical stand towards the use of markers and labels in lexicography and argues for the importance of the design of systematic and rational modeling procedures for the processing of collocational resources.

Finally, the paper by Željka Fink illustrates cross-linguistic approaches to phraseological material. The starting point for her analysis are two Croatian and two Russian idioms of comparison, whose contextual behaviour, lexical and grammatical variations are being examined. Examples of related idioms of comparison from seven more Slavic languages are provided, and the existence of more idiom variants not recorded in phraseological dictionaries tested.

This volume of *Jezikoslovlje* also brings a review of the much-awaited Dmitrij Dobrovolskij and Elizabeth Piirainen's 2005 book *Figurative Language: Cross-cultural and Cross-linguistic Perspective*, in which the authors examine figurativeness across languages and cultures, exploring the regularity of relationships between the literal, image-based reading fixed in the lexical structure of a given figurative unit and its lexicalized figurative meaning. As a result of this exploration the authors offer a common basis for exploration of figurative language, a CONVENTIONAL FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE THEORY that draws not only on linguistics, but also on cognitive heuristics and cultural studies.

What then, how and why phraseology? Alison Wray's thought-provoking plenary lecture at the *Phraseology 2005* conference in Louvain-la-Neuve, identified many open *why*-questions in the field of phraseology. She wondered, for example, why our intuition about collocations fails us, why phraseology plays an important role in first and second language acquisition, why is formulaic language difficult to characterize in terms of form and meaning, why is phraseology prevalent in many disorders, and why there appears to be variation in the

balance of formulaic to novel expression across languages. There are of course many more basic questions to be solved in phraseology, the most challenging being:

#### WHAT?

- 1) Terminological consistency: the cover term and definition for the units studied and their subclasses: idiom, phraseme or phraseological unit;
- 2) Inventory of characteristics of phraseological units (idiomaticity, metaphoricality, analysability, compositionality, variability, *etc.*);
- 3) Delimitation of the field of phraseology in relation to other disciplines.

#### HOW?

- 4) Methodology and argumentation standards: data and not intuition-based;
- 5) Clear classification criteria for phraseological units;
- 6) Clear criteria for identifying PUs in discourse;
- 7) Clear criteria for inclusion, treatment and presentation of phraseological units in dictionaries.

#### WHY?

- 8) Underlying mechanisms governing the emergence, establishment, use, and processing of conventional and modified phraseological units;
- 9) Role of phraseology in language acquisition and speech production.

This special issue of *Jezikoslovlje* is an attempt to ask and provide some answers to HOW, WHAT and WHY in phraseology, and we hope that it may serve as an impetus for future developments and exchanges in this rapidly expanding field.