PHRASEOLOGY AND EXPRESSIONS OF A LANGUAGE

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Abstract: *THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS IN ENRICHING BOTH LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS. BUILT UPON SPECIFIC SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXTS, THESE COMPLEX LEXICAL UNITS SERVE AS EQUIVALENTS OF WORDS BUT CARRY A MORE PRONOUNCED SEMANTIC LOAD. THE STUDY HIGHLIGHTS THE ESSENTIALITY OF PHRASEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS IN UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURAL, COGNITIVE, AND SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF A LANGUAGE. IT ARGUES THAT LEARNING THESE EXPRESSIONS NOT ONLY AIDS IN MASTERING A LANGUAGE'S COMMUNICATION MODEL BUT ALSO PROVIDES INSIGHTS INTO THE WORLDVIEW AND THOUGHT PATTERNS OF ITS SPEAKERS. BY EXAMINING THEIR STABILITY, SEMANTIC RICHNESS, AND STYLISTIC IMPACT, THE ARTICLE UNDERSCORES HOW PHRASEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS ADD VIBRANCY, AUTHENTICITY, AND DEPTH TO A LANGUAGE.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary and grammar might seem at first glance to be sufficient elements that a speaker must master in order to express themselves in either a native or non-native language. Referring to the so-called world of discourse is generally done with the help of word combinations and, exceptionally, through isolated words. In speech or writing, a series of expressions are used that lend a colorful and expressive quality to the communication. These word combinations, which conceal a part of the history of the language and society, are the subject of phraseology research.

Each speaker, when using a language, does not appear to independently and spontaneously create absolutely all combinations of words based on their knowledge of vocabulary or grammar; instead, they tend to refer to possible combinations offered by usage, following these models more or less faithfully.

Analyzing several languages, alongside the reality called "word" imposed on the mind as a central element in the mechanism of language, one can observe the existence of groups of words that, removed from context, carry different meanings and functions. The question arises: Do groups of words such as *a număra pe degete* in Romanian, *compter sur les doigts* in French, or *contare sulle dita di una mano* in Italian constitute functional units that surpass the word in each of these languages, or are they simply associations of lexical elements forming the chain of speech? On the one hand, the elements that can be segmented—*a număra* and *deget*—also appear as minimal units in other combinations that do not acquire specific values. On the other hand, these constructions are interpretable as distinct units called locutions or expressions.

The phraseological treasury of the Romanian language is highly diverse. Regrettably, this treasure, inherited from ancestors, has been studied only partially. In Romanian linguistics, several questions arise: Is phraseology a subdivision of lexicology or an independent branch of linguistics? What is the object of study of phraseology? The study of the history of the emergence and evolution of phraseological expressions remains largely unexplored territory in Romanian linguistics.

2. MEANING AND PRACTICE

The term "phraseology" refers to both the discipline and its object—the ensemble or totality of phraseological units in a given language. This branch of linguistics deals with the study of partially or entirely fixed word combinations, known as phraseological units, phrasemes, or idioms. Phraseology is a relatively young branch of linguistics; its foundations were laid long before phraseology was recognized as a separate linguistic compartment. It exists at the intersection of three sciences: lexicology, semasiology, and syntax. Its status within linguistics is controversial; some authors consider it a sub-branch of lexicology, while others argue that "it pertains to lexicology and syntax, but phraseology has a broader, interdisciplinary character, as phraseological units are studied from multiple perspectives: lexical, stylistic, syntactic, semantic, and etymological" (Colțun, 2007, p. 13). Moreover, "the necessity of addressing phraseological units in dictionaries makes lexicography responsible for studying them" (Munteanu, 2007, p. 100).

Regarding the history of phraseology, the first phraseological elements appeared in the late 19th century in works on general linguistics, under various names referring to what we now call phraseological units. Herman Paul highlighted the presence of fixed expressions formed from elements constituting a block; Henry Sweet referred to word combinations he called *idioms*, regular from a normal perspective but irregular semantically. Michael Breal mentioned groups of words he termed *formules*, *locutions*, or *groupes articulés*, characterized by fixity and semantic opacity. Swiss linguist Charles Bally was the first to use the term *phraseologie* in a linguistic sense, referring to the set of characteristics of a group of words in which each element partially or completely loses its individual meaning, and the group as a whole acquires a distinct meaning. Bally called such groups *locution composées*. Subsequently, the term *phraseologie* became established as the name of the discipline.

Later, "the establishment of phraseology as a discipline occurred between the 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union, with its theoretical foundations laid by linguists V.V. Vinogradov and E.D. Polivanov. Significant contributions to phraseology were later made by German and French linguists. Among Romanian linguists, Eugen Coșeriu, who lived in exile, began studying phraseology as early as 1964, defining the notion of repeated discourse, which included quotes, proverbs, fixed locutions, comparison formulas, and various other expressions integrated by the speaker into what Coșeriu called the free technique of discourse" (Coșeriu, 1966, apud Munteanu, 2007, p. 101–104).

One of the main tasks of phraseology linguists is to determine the object of study for phraseological research. However, just as the status of phraseology has been controversial, the object of study has also become a topic of debate, as there is no unanimous agreement on the groups of words that can be considered phraseological units. The unclear boundaries of this object stem from two main different traditions. While linguists in the former Soviet Union focused on completely or almost completely fixed word combinations, such as idiomatic expressions and proverbs, the French tradition emphasized flexibility, and Anglo-Saxon phraseologists have given significant importance from the beginning to less fixed combinations, such as collocations. There has been, and continues to be, a broader and a narrower perspective addressing this issue. "Coșeriu had a broad perspective, including quotes and proverbs in repeated discourse; others exclude them from the object of phraseology, along with sayings, maxims, aphorisms, storytelling formulas, and others" (Hristea, 1984, p. 145).

The field of study of phraseology, according to some, pertains to both vocabulary and syntax. To date, no universally accepted term has been found to define the object of phraseology because phraseological units represent an intersectional field of semantics, stylistics, and grammar. Depending on the origin of phraseological units, two areas of investigation have been delineated: linguistic phraseology, understood as a means of expression for a community, and literary phraseology, which includes "aphorisms, witticisms, word combinations belonging to writers or notable figures, and which are accidental in nature" (Boroianu, 1974, p. 27). However, for phraseology to establish itself as a research domain, it must answer numerous questions: what are the syntactic and semantic characteristics of a word combination, and how widespread must it be to be considered a functional unit with phraseological status? These questions have received various answers throughout the development of phraseological research, and the status of this discipline seems uncertain even today, while the concept of a phraseological unit remains as ambiguous as that of a word.

The uncertain, rather peculiar status of phraseology and the difficulties in interpreting and classifying its specific material are determined by two fundamental aspects: the limitations of traditional conceptions of phraseology and the possibility of approaching its domain from diverse perspectives. The impression of uncertain status is heightened by the somewhat inconsistent use of numerous synonymous or quasi-synonymous terms, such as clichés, international clichés, expressive constructions, petrified constructions, stable lexical combinations, quasi-phrases, proverbial expressions, fixed formulas, idiomatic phrases, periphrases, ready-made locutions, pragmatemes, fixed or stable syntagms, and syntagmatic units.

Phraseology, both as a domain and as a discipline, is difficult to separate from other levels of language, especially syntax and vocabulary, because the basic concept in phraseology—that of

a phraseological unit—refers to a combination of two or more lexical units, governed in almost all cases by a syntactic relationship and characterized by a perceived unified meaning, capable of being used more or less frequently as such in a given language. Admitting the existence of complex functional units in a given language necessitates distinguishing them from so-called free combinations of words, as well as establishing various types of such units and integrating them into a specific level of language (syntax or vocabulary) or into a separate domain. Hence, phraseology as a domain groups such functional units, while as a discipline, it studies the phraseological component of a language.

As a linguistic discipline, phraseology can be theoretical or general. It may be called general phraseology if it studies the issue of word combinations across a language or group of languages as a whole or specialized phraseology if it addresses only a specific area of phraseology in a language, such as collocations, terminological units, or idiomatic expressions. It can also be termed diachronic phraseology if it examines the historical evolution, in terms of form and meaning, of word combinations within a given language or synchronic phraseology when providing a description, even partial, of the field of phraseology at a given moment. Recent research in comparing the phraseology of different idioms has led to the emergence of contrastive phraseology, while the application of structural theories has given rise to generative-transformational phraseology.

At the beginnings of its formation, as primarily a lexicographical concern, phraseology was approached mainly from a didactic perspective. Later, this field was viewed from an artistic-literary perspective. The criterion for recording certain groups of words in dictionaries of epithets and famous sayings seemed to be the artistic, poetic, or literary value of the respective constructions, or the fame they gained due to the literary work from which they were extracted, and not least the renown of the author. Some authors, including Pierre Larousse, attempted to bring phraseology closer to aphoristic and paremiological literature and aimed to more clearly delineate various groups of words with functional and literary value from usual associations, to organize the material recorded by previous works.

The lexical status of word combinations in monolingual dictionaries began to take clearer shape in the 18th century, while theoretical observations regarding phraseology only appeared at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Without using the term "phraseology," some linguists of that period, such as Hermann Paul, Arsène Darmesteter, and Ferdinand de Saussure, started to be concerned with how certain groups of words with denotative value are formed. For instance, H. Paul explained the emergence of different word groups through the phenomenon of isolation, caused by "semantic slippage"; Darmesteter based his observations on the concepts of *rayonnement* and *enchainement*, while Saussure attempted to distinguish between syntagms that belong to speech, characterized by individual freedom of expression, and those that belong to language, marked by the "collective ear."

As an autonomous linguistic discipline, phraseology focuses on the study of phraseological units in a given language or a group of languages. The term "phraseological unit" was first used by Charles Bally in his work *Précis de stylistique*, from which it was adopted by V.V. Vinogradov and other Soviet linguists. The Swiss linguist is indisputably regarded as the founder of the modern study of phraseology. He emphasized two fundamental concepts—unification and affinity—to explain how so-called compound locutions are formed. He defined phraseology as a part of the

vocabulary that studies and classifies such word groups. Bally's ideas did not immediately spread throughout Western European linguistics but found a broad reception in the works of Soviet and Eastern European linguists. Later, they also appeared in Western European and global linguistic studies due to growing interest and new approaches to this field, diverging from traditional perspectives.

In Romanian linguistics, after discussions initially revolved around the concepts of locution and expression, phraseology was brought into focus by T. Hristea. However, the term "phraseology" had been previously used by Iorgu Iordan. The increasingly frequent use of phraseological terminology in Romanian studies and research was only observed after 1960.

The fact that phraseology is conceived in both a broad and narrow sense can be explained by the lack of a unified theoretical basis in linguistics, developed through in-depth research into the principles of delimiting and defining phraseological units compared to other linguistic units. When determining phraseological units, both internal and external factors must be considered. The renowned linguist Charles Bally identified three external factors:

1. From a structural perspective, phraseological units are composed of several words written separately.
2. The combinations have fixed syntax and do not allow the introduction of other words into their structure.
3. No word in these combinations can be replaced with other words.

In other words, a phraseological unit is not made up of just any words written separately; at least two significant words are required (e.g., *a spăla putina*).

Charles Bally also acknowledged that internal factors have greater value, but they cannot be immediately observed and do not allow for clear delimitation of phraseological units from other linguistic units, as only a small number may have equivalents among words. In various works dealing with the phraseological units of different languages, determination is approached differently:

a) Some linguists rely on a single criterion—the reproduction or fixation of component elements.
b) Others base their approach on two criteria—the structure of component elements and phraseological semantic value.
c) A third group considers three criteria—the lexical meaning, component elements, and grammatical categories.

Phraseological expressions are a source of enrichment for both the linguistic and cultural spectrum, as the formation of each phraseological expression is based on specific socio-cultural situations. From a semantic or functional perspective, phraseological units are equivalent to words and can be considered complex lexical units of the language. However, unlike lexemes, they carry a more pronounced semantic load. Studying a language involves thorough and comprehensive knowledge of both its fundamental constructive components and its auxiliary ones. Any language is a well-structured system built from indispensable linguistic elements: lexemes, semantic fields, lexical expressions, and phraseological expressions.

When learning a language, meticulous attention must be given to phraseological expressions because they involve acquiring a new communication model. Language presents itself not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a socio-philosophical one. As Charles Bally also pointed out, phraseological expressions represent "the semantic-lexical core of a language" (Groza, 2017, p. 5). Although they are word combinations, phraseological units, like simple lexical units,

are used in speech as lexical material, as clichés, or stereotyped expressions. Hence, phraseological units possess a relatively stable and invariable character.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Beyond their specific cognitive-linguistic and stylistic semantics, phraseological expressions represent an authentic complex socio-philosophical system unique to a language. The phraseological expressions of a language provide a gateway to understanding the structure of a language and the thought processes of a people. They are representative both linguistically and philosophically-culturally. Without a doubt, they make a language more vivid, colorful, and authentic from both lexical and stylistic perspectives.

Phraseology is an essential field of linguistics with profound implications for understanding both the structure of a language and the thought patterns of a people. Phraseological expressions, through their semantic and stylistic complexity, serve as a bridge between everyday language and the cultural and philosophical dimensions of a community. Studying these units provides valuable insights into the dynamics of language, highlighting the intrinsic link between socio-cultural context and linguistic structure.

In language learning, phraseological expressions play a crucial role by contributing to the understanding of new communication models and deepening the cultural dimensions associated with that language. They transform language into a vibrant, authentic, and expressive system, offering indispensable support for developing linguistic and cultural competence. In this sense, phraseology not only enriches the lexicon but also becomes a means of uncovering the linguistic and cultural identity of a people.

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