



PHRASEOLOGY IS A BRANCH OF GENERAL LINGUISTICS

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Abstract

Two main families of phrasemes (= non-free phrases) are distinguished: lexical phrasemes and semantic-lexical phrasemes; the phrasemes of the first family are constrained only in their form (their meaning being free), those of the second family are constrained both in their meaning and in their form. Two basic concepts are introduced: compositionality of complex linguistic signs and the pivot of a meaning. Three major classes of phrasemes are presented: noncompositional idioms and compositional collocations and clichés. A new type of general dictionary is proposed, and the lexicographic presentation of the three classes of phrasemes is illustrated. To show how the proposed approach to phraseology can be used in Automatic Language Processing, three fully-fledged examples are examined in detail.

Keywords: phraseology; compositionality; pivot (of a meaning); idioms; collocations; clichés; lexicography; automatic language processing.

There is no need to insist on the importance of phraseology for linguistic studies; on this point the linguistic community is in agreement. But, curiously and unfortunately, there is no agreement on either the exact content of the notion ‘phraseology’, nor on the way phraseological expressions should be described, nor on how they should be treated in linguistic applications, in particular, in lexicography and Natural Language Processing. In this article, I will try to deal with these three points: proposes a rigorous definition of phraseme, a characterization of the major classes of phrasemes and an exhaustive phraseme typology, thus establishing the boundaries of phraseology; Section 3 sketches the fundamentals of the lexicographic description of phrasemes in an Explanatory Combinatorial Dictionary; in Section 4, three examples of difficult cases of machine translation are considered where the solutions come from the dictionary and are based on the proposed description of one of phraseme classes. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the most important points of the article and formulates some paths of future research. The theoretical framework of the discussion is Meaning-Text Theory (MTT). Certain of its notions and formalisms will be used without explanation. Technical terms appear, on their first mention, in Sans-Serif Bold. 2 Phraseology in the language The literature on phraseology is too huge to be reviewed here even cursorily; see, for instance, the collections Everaert et al. 1995, Wanner 1996, Álvarez de la Granja 2008 and Anscombe and Mejri 2011. I will limit myself to mentioning Mel’čuk 1995 (a sketch of a theory of phraseology within the Meaning-Text framework) and the classics Bally 1909 and Weinreich 1969, which have most profoundly influenced my approach to phrasemes. Two main families of phrasemes: lexical



and semantic-lexical phrasemes A phraseological expression, also called a set expression, set phrase, idiomatic phrase, multi-word expression, sometimes simply idiom, etc., is, first of all, a (multiword) phrase – that is, a linguistic expression formed by several (at least two) lexemes syntactically linked in a regular way.

1 The notorious example of an idiom X kicks the bucket ‘person X dies of natural causes, I being flippant about X’ is syntactically and morphologically structured exactly the same way as all similar phrases of the form “Transitive Verb→DirO”: kick the ball, hit John, squeeze her hand, etc. (Even the expression kick the bucket itself can mean ‘kick the bucket [full of dirty water]’.) This expression is special, i.e. phraseological, only because of its “unpredictable” meaning ‘die of natural causes [said flippantly]’. A phraseological expression, or phraseme, is thus a phrase featuring some unpredictable properties, i.e., a linguistically constrained phrase, or else a phrase that is not free. Therefore, I have to begin with a definition of free phrase. 1 To simplify my task, in this paper I leave aside the phrasemes of the morphological level – that is, the phraseologized combinations of morphs inside a wordform. For this family of phrasemes, or morphophrasemes, see, for instance. Phraseology in language Definition 1: Free phrase A phrase is free if and only if [= iff] each of its lexical components L_i is selected by the speaker in a linguistically non-constrained way – that is, each L_i is selected strictly for its meaning and in conformity with its linguistic properties but independently of the lexical identity of other components. In other words, while selecting L_i , the Speaker need not take into account any particular lexeme being part of the phrase in question. Corollary: Each lexical component of a free phrase can be replaced by any of its (quasi-)synonyms without affecting its meaning and grammaticality. In the phrase select the word freely, you can replace any component with its synonym and the meaning is preserved: choose the lexeme without constraint. Definition 2: Non-free phrase = phraseme A phrase is non-free (= phraseologized) iff at least one of its lexical components L_i is selected by the speaker in a linguistically constrained way – that is, as a function of the lexical identity of other component(s). In a non-free phrase, at least one L_i is selected depending on other particular lexemes building up this phrase. Corollary: It is not true that every lexical component of a non-free phrase can be replaced by any of its (quasi-)synonyms without affecting its meaning and grammaticality. In kick the bucket \approx ‘die’ you cannot replace any of the components: boot the bucket or kick the pail do not mean ‘die’. Let it be emphasized that the terms (non-)constrained, when applied to linguistic expressions, must be understood strictly in the technical sense indicated above: as selection of a lexeme regardless of the individual identity of any other lexeme of the same expression. (In the literal sense, any free phrase is of course “constrained” by the linguistic means at the disposal of the Speaker and by linguistic rules of their combination). A phraseme violates the freedom of selection of its lexical components. This violation happens on the paradigmatic axis of speech production, as the speaker is looking (in his mental lexicon) for appropriate lexical units. The lexical selection activity proceeds in two stages: – First, the speaker has to construct his starting meaning; for this, he selects the necessary simpler meanings and unites them into the meaning of his eventual phrase – that is, into its starting semantic representation [= SemR]. – Second, the speaker has to select the lexical units to express his starting SemR and unite them into the deep-syntactic representation of the phrase. Accordingly, two cases of violation of selection



freedom must be distinguished. The language does not specifically constrain his semantic choices. But the lexical components of the phrase cannot be chosen freely: some or all of them are selected as a function of the other. The violation of the selection freedom takes place in the transition and manifests itself in lexical constraints. Therefore, resulting phrasemes are called lexical: kick the bucket, pull in order to have fun' or Rus. na golubom glazu lit. 'on blue eye', 'pretending to act honestly and sincerely', The rain is falling in torrents. It rains cats and dogs or Rus. Not only the lexical composition of the phraseme is constrained, but also its meaning. To describe the situation P, the Speaker is forced by the language to select the starting meaning 'σ', and he can take no equivalent meaning. Thus, the phrase is constrained semantically and lexically. This type of phraseme is thus "doubly" constrained: in the transition (semantic constraints) and then in the transition (lexical constraints). This is a semantic-lexical phraseme. And in English it would be inappropriate to write on a sign Caution, painted , al though this is a perfectly grammatical and semantically correct phrase (the symbol " " indicates pragmatic unacceptability). Here the language prescribes the meaning to express and its specific lexical expression.

The List of Used Literatures

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