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**THEORETICAL FEATURES OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS, COLLOCATIONS  
AND IDIOMS**

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**Abstract:** *This article discusses theoretical features of phraseological units, collocations and idioms. Differences between full idioms, semi idioms and weak idioms have been identified.*

**Key words:** *phraseology, phrasemes, EUROPHRAS, EURALEX, set phrase, fixed expression, idiomatic phrase, multiword expression.*

In linguistics, **phraseology** is the study of set or fixed expressions, such as idioms, phrasal verbs, and other types of multi-word lexical units (often collectively referred to as phrasemes), in which the component parts of the expression take on a meaning more specific than, or otherwise not predictable from, the sum of their meanings when used independently. For example, ‘Dutch auction’ is composed of the words *Dutch* ‘of or pertaining to the Netherlands’ and *auction* ‘a public sale in which goods are sold to the highest bidder’, but its meaning is not ‘a sale in the Netherlands where goods are sold to the highest bidder’; instead, the phrase has a conventionalized meaning referring to any auction where, instead of rising, the prices fall.

Phraseology (from Greek φράσις *phrasis*, "way of speaking" and -λογία *-logia*, "study of") is a scholarly approach to language which developed in the twentieth century. It took its start when Charles Bally's notion of *locutions phraseologiques* entered Russian lexicology and lexicography in the 1930s and 1940s and was subsequently developed in the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries. From the late 1960s on it established itself in (East) German linguistics but was also sporadically approached in English linguistics. The earliest English adaptations of phraseology are by Weinreich (1969) within the approach of transformational grammar, Arnold (1973), and Lipka. In Great Britain as well as other Western European countries, phraseology has steadily been developed over the last twenty years. The activities of the European Society of Phraseology (EUROPHRAS) and the European Association for Lexicography (EURALEX) with their regular conventions and publications attest to the prolific European interest in phraseology. European scholarship in phraseology is more active than in North America. Bibliographies of recent studies on English and general phraseology are included in Welte (1990)<sup>[6]</sup> and specially collected in Cowie & Howarth (1996) whose bibliography is reproduced and continued on the internet and provides a rich source of the most recent publications in the field.



The basic units of analysis in phraseology are often referred to as phrasemes or *phraseological units*. Phraseological units are (according to Prof. Kunin A.V.) stable word-groups with partially or fully transferred meanings (“to kick the bucket”, “Greek gift”, “drink till all's blue”, “drunk as a fiddler (drunk as a lord, as a boiled owl)”, “as mad as a hatter (as a march hare)”). According to Rosemarie Gläser, a phraseological unit is a lexicalized, reproducible billexemic or polylexemic word group in common use, which has relative syntactic and semantic stability, may be idiomatized, may carry connotations, and may have an emphatic or intensifying function in a text.

A **phraseme**, also called a **set phrase**, **fixed expression**, idiomatic phrase, multiword expression (in computational linguistics), or idiom, is a multi-word or multi-morphemic utterance whose components include at least one that is selectionally constrained or restricted by linguistic convention such that it is not freely chosen.<sup>[4]</sup> In the most extreme cases, there are expressions such as *X kicks the bucket* ≈ ‘person X dies of natural causes, the speaker being flippant about X’s demise’ where the unit is selected as a whole to express a meaning that bears little or no relation to the meanings of its parts. All of the words in this expression are chosen restrictedly, as part of a chunk. At the other extreme, there are collocations such as *stark naked*, *hearty laugh*, or *infinite patience* where one of the words is chosen freely (*naked*, *laugh*, and *patience*, respectively) based on the meaning the speaker wishes to express while the choice of the other (intensifying) word (*stark*, *hearty*, *infinite*) is constrained by the conventions of the English language (hence, *\*hearty naked*, *\*infinite laugh*, *\*stark patience*). Both kinds of expression are phrasemes, and can be contrasted with “free phrases”, expressions where all of the members (barring grammatical elements whose choice is forced by the morphosyntax of the language) are chosen freely, based exclusively on their meaning and the message that the speaker wishes to communicate.

Phrasemes can be broken down into groups based on their compositionality (whether or not the meaning they express is the sum of the meaning of their parts) and the type of selectional restrictions that are placed on their non-freely chosen members. Non-compositional phrasemes are what are commonly known as idioms, while compositional phrasemes can be further divided into collocations, clichés, and pragmatemes. A phraseme is an idiom if its meaning is not the speaking, idioms will not be intelligible to people hearing them for the first time without having learned them. Consider the following examples (an idiom is indicated by elevated half-brackets: ‘ ... ’):

-rock and roll’ ‘a Western music genre characterised by a strong beat with sounds generated by guitar, piano, and vocalists’

-cheek by jowl’ ‘in close association’

-the game is up’ ‘your deceit is exposed’

-[X] comes to [N<sub>X</sub>’s] senses’ ‘X becomes conscious or rational again’

-put [N<sub>Y</sub>] on the map’ ‘make the place Y well-known’

-bull session’ ‘long informal talk on a subject by a group of people’.



In none of these cases are the meanings of any of the component parts of the idiom included in the meaning of the expression as a whole. An idiom can be further characterized by its transparency, the degree to which its meaning includes the meanings of its components. Three types of idioms can be distinguished in this way—*full idioms*, *semi-idioms*, and *quasi-idioms*.

*Full idioms*: An idiom *AB* (that is, composed of the elements *A* ‘*A*’ and *B* ‘*B*’) is a *full idiom* if its meaning does not include the meaning of any of its lexical components: ‘*AB*’  $\not\supset$  ‘*A*’ and ‘*AB*’  $\not\supset$  ‘*B*’.

-put [*N<sub>Y</sub>*] through its paces’ ‘to test *Y* thoroughly’

-go ballistic’ ‘suddenly become very angry’

-by heart’ ‘remembering verbatim’

-bone of contention’ ‘reason for quarrels or fights’

*Semi idioms*: An idiom *AB* is a semi-idiom if its meaning

1) includes the meaning of one of its lexical components, but not as its *semantic pivot* (see below),

2) does not include the meaning of the other component and

3) includes an additional meaning ‘*C*’ as its semantic pivot:

‘*AB*’  $\supset$  ‘*A*’, and ‘*AB*’  $\not\supset$  ‘*B*’, and ‘*AB*’  $\supset$  ‘*C*’.

“private eye”

‘private *detective*’

“sea anemone”

‘*predatory polyp* dwelling in the sea’

**Rus. “Мозолить глаза”**

‘be in *Y*’s sight *too often or for too long*’ (lit. ‘make corns on *Y*’s eyes’)

The *semantic pivot* of an idiom is, roughly speaking, the part of the meaning that defines what sort of referent the idiom has (person, place, thing, event, etc.) and is shown in the examples in *italic*. More precisely, the semantic pivot is defined, for an expression *AB* meaning ‘*S*’, as that part ‘*S*<sub>1</sub>’ of *AB*’s meaning ‘*S*’, such that ‘*S*’ [= ‘*S*<sub>1</sub>’  $\oplus$  ‘*S*<sub>2</sub>’] can be represented as a predicate ‘*S*<sub>2</sub>’ bearing on ‘*S*<sub>1</sub>’—i.e., ‘*S*’ = ‘*S*<sub>2</sub>’(‘*S*<sub>1</sub>’).

**Quasi-idiom or weak idiom**: An idiom *AB* is a quasi-idiom, or weak idiom if its meaning

1) includes the meaning of its lexical components, neither as the semantic pivot, and

2) includes an additional meaning ‘*C*’ as its semantic pivot:

‘*AB*’  $\supset$  ‘*A*’, and ‘*AB*’  $\supset$  ‘*B*’, and ‘*AB*’  $\supset$  ‘*C*’.

Fr. ‘*donner le sein à Y*’ ‘*feed the baby Y* by putting one teat into the mouth of *Y*’ “start a family” ‘conceive a first child with one’s spouse, starting a family’ “barbed wire” [‘*artifact designed to make obstacles with and constituted by*] wire with barbs [fixed on it in small regular intervals]’ **Compositional phrasemes** A phraseme *AB* is said to be compositional if the



meaning ‘AB’ = ‘A’ ⊕ ‘B’ and the form/AB/ = /A/ ⊕ /B/ (“⊕” here means ‘combined in accordance with the rules of the language’). Compositional phrasemes can be broken down into two groups—*collocations* and *clichés*.

Phraseological combinations are phraseologies whose meaning is understood from the phraseological meaning of whole phraseological units. The transfer of meaning based on metaphor is clear and unambiguous. The lexical components of phraseological combinations are the most stable. Phraseologisms such as “to look a gift horse in the mouth” (to examine a present too critically, to find fault with something one gained without effort), “to ride a high horse” (to behave a superior, haughtily, overbearing way), “a big bug” (a person to importance), “a fish out of water” (a person situated uncomfortably outside his usual and proper environment) are examples of phraseological combinations. There is a lot of phraseology. Some of them are easy to translate and some are even international. For example, to know the way the wind blows – to know where the wind blows. Phraseological units are words that have a specific valence. One component of such phraseological units is used in its literal sense, and the rest is used in a metaphorical sense. Phraseological units are to some extent semantically indivisible. Phraseological units are partially altered combinations of words. The meaning of these phraseological units is easily understood from the meaning of the words that make them up. To be at one’s wits end, to be a good-hand at something, to come off a poor second, to come to a sticky end, to stick at nothing, gospel truth, bosom friend are examples of phraseological units. In conclusion, the semantic aspects of occupational phraseological units show that in both languages they are related to human physical labor, which express concepts directly related to human labor activity.

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