Editorial

Data and theory in phraseology

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This second volume of the *Yearbook of Phraseology* again contains an international and intercontinental community of authors showing that phraseology is of interest the world over. The range of approaches and leading questions in this year's *Yearbook* also shows how various are the data and theories which the domain of phraseological phenomena can give rise to.

This raises the issue of the place of linguistic theory in an account of phraseological phenomena. The issue receives some clarification if we consider phraseological units as lexical units, units stored and retrieved from the mental lexica of native speakers. As such they share properties with other lexical units, namely words, both simple and compound. Here the place of theory specifically in morphology is just as vexed because the human mental lexicon is not uniform in its nature, thus unlike the physical universe. It is, as Edwin Williams and Anna-Maria Di Sciullo pointed out in a memorable but not entirely satisfactory metaphor, like a prison in having as its inhabitants those who have broken a law. Lexical items are, to put it less memorably, idiosyncratic but not totally. Not all their properties are unpredictable. Chaos and anarchy do not reign in the prison house of the mental lexicon.

Wouldn't it be sensible if the lexicon contained words which were formed in a consistent manner? Let's say that those who produced works of art were all < action to create a work of art – er > s on the model of *painter*. But that is not the case. We have poets, novelists, playwrights and short story writers in the literary domain. What a number of this year's studies show is how much careful work there has to be to understand the idiosyncrasies of even one small family of phrasal lexical items. Do the local generalizations that apply to this little family of phrasal lexical items generalize to others? Usually not. But that is also the case in morphology. Many of the generalizations in morphology hold over quite limited domains and there are often exceptions. It is the case that most English compound nouns have primary stress on the first word rather than the second. But not all.

So should we give up trying to theorize about the phrasal lexicon? Not at all. We can only begin to understand the richness of human lexical knowledge if we both collect and analyse coherent data sets, and then try to understand how these are represented in the mental lexicon by proposing theories that explain this knowledge. Such theories then need to be tested.

I am grateful to the following for special help. First my fellow editors and the reviewers without whom this volume would not have come into existence. Everyone was efficient, punctual and helpful. The reviews are an important function for the *Yearbook* even when submissions are rejected since authors receive the views of their peers and can learn from them. A special thanks goes to Olivier Simonin who acted as an intermediary in having papers from the phraseology conference he organised in Perpignan submitted to the *Yearbook*.