

Joseph García Rodríguez: *La fraseología del español y el catalán. Semántica cognitiva, simbolismo y contrastividad*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2020. 310 pp. ISBN 978-3-631-82742-0.

Phraseology has enjoyed a considerable boom within Hispanic or Ibero-Romance linguistics over the last few decades, and the contribution of researchers from Spanish universities is particularly relevant. This has led to the publication of some useful contrastive studies on phraseology, such as the important contributions provided by Mellado Blanco (2014) and Mellado Blanco et al. (2014), or the numerous contrastive studies published by researchers at Leipzig University as one of the most important centres of phraseological studies, among them Barbara Wotjak and Gerd Wotjak, the editor of the collection in which the volume under review here was published.

However, in spite of the progress that has already been made, as the author, Joseph García Rodríguez, researcher at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in Catalonia, rightfully indicates on the back cover, studies aimed at unravelling the intricacies of phraseologisms between two or more languages are still scarce. García Rodríguez attributes this to the need to have a profound knowledge of the different linguistic systems; although this statement is obviously and undoubtedly correct, it may seem a truism. From an academic perspective, it seems indispensable that researchers have intimate knowledge of their object of study, although it is difficult to deny that—at least in some branches of linguistics, in generative approaches, typology, etc.—this profound knowledge does not actually seem to be among those skills that are considered to be fundamental.

This lack of contrastive approaches is the reason given by the author for dealing with Catalan and Spanish phraseology in his study, as only a few, occasional contributions dealing with some very specific aspects or selected phraseologisms have been made in the field of contrastive analysis with regard to this very language pair. His aim is to fill this important gap by means of a cognitive-symbolic and contrastive analysis, and to provide a detailed study of the similarities and differences between phraseological units (PUs) in the two languages.

At first glance, the book consists of only three numbered chapters, but in fact there is an unnumbered introduction with three subsections, and an unnumbered chapter with the conclusions. The three numbered chapters are extremely subdivided, perhaps too much so: section 5.4.2.1.2. of chapter II, for example, has just ten lines.

In section 1 of the introduction (“Presentación”, p. 15), García Rodríguez indicates the object of study: phraseologisms with elements of nature, specifically, the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) in Spanish and Catalan from a contrastive perspective. In section 2 (“Fuentes consultadas y extracción de datos”,

pp. 16–17), he details the quantitative criteria that were applied for the selection of the elements of nature and lists the main sources used to compile the study material. It is remarkable that the lexicographical resources that were used (monolingual, bilingual and phraseological dictionaries of both languages) are indicated here, while the other sources the study draws on are indicated in another part of the book. Section 3 (“Criterios de selección”, p. 18) sets out the sampling patterns for the selection of PU. At this point, it should be noted that García Rodríguez advocates a broad concept of phraseology, as he points out that he selected collocations, idioms, routine formulas and paroemias, while syntagmatic compounds were left out. He also clarifies the number of PUs covered in the analysis (643 in total), chosen after the screening of the dictionaries resulted in over 3000 phraseological units. It would have been desirable to state, at least briefly, the reasons for reducing the number of cases to be analysed. There will obviously have been motivations such as the amount of work that could be covered in a doctoral thesis or the space available in the volume that arose from this project, but it would not have been superfluous to make these explicit.

In chapter I, entitled “La fraseología teórica: aportaciones y avances” (pp. 19–68), García Rodríguez gives a magnificent summary or state of the art of phraseology in Hispanic linguistics, that is to say, he reviews the authors and publications of reference in this field, discusses the problems of phraseological terminology (which are still in the process of consolidation, cf. Sinner, Tabares Plasencia and Montoro del Arco 2020) and deals with the discussions surrounding the defining characteristics of PUs (pluriverbality¹, idiomaticity, fixation). However, it must be said that while this summary may be of great value for the uninitiated, for the experts in phraseology, a more recent bibliographical update would refine this section: the most recent publications cited are from 2015, which may have to do with the time that elapsed between the completion and *viva voce* of the thesis and its publication as a book. García Rodríguez’ use of scientific literature also lacks a more international focus. What is quoted is very relevant, but a considerable amount has been written about phraseology in German, English and French. Thus, authors from the Hispanic world or Hispanists are frequently cited, while other international researchers are rarely mentioned (with the exception of Mel’čuk 1995; Burger 2000; Wotjak 2000). What’s more, the publications cited are several years old and do not always represent the latest contributions on the subject. This overview of phraseology would have been more complete if

¹ It is curious that pluriverbality is considered to be synonymous with polylexality (p. 25), when they are clearly not the same thing, since there are clearly pluriverbal but not polylexical PU.

studies by authors from other linguistic areas (such as Fleischer, Häcki-Buhofer, Kuhn, Mejri, Anscombre, Ďurčo, Palm, etc.) had been taken into account. In the section on variability (pp. 24–37), it is striking that, after citing some older publications, the author focuses on only one proposal and does not take into consideration fundamental studies such as that of Koike (2003) or more recent ones such as Sinner and Tabares Plasencia (2016). In subchapter I.5, (“El universo fraseológico”, pp. 34–68), the section devoted to collocations is somewhat larger than it needs to be as, although the space dedicated to collocations and idioms is comparable, the concept of collocation is focused on in both subchapters. Similarly, in another subsection (pp. 57–60), the author embarks on the distinction between nominal collocations / idioms and syntagmatic compounds, and, once again, there are quite a few references missing, from the *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* (RAE ASALE 2009) to a large group of scholars who have devoted themselves to finding a solution to this remarkably controversial question since the mid-1990s (cf. Pérez Vigaray 1996; Pérez Vigaray and Batista Rodríguez 2005; Montoro del Arco 2008a, 2017, García Padrón and Batista 2010a, 2010b). Furthermore, in this chapter, it would have been desirable for the author himself to discuss and take a position on the volume’s controversial object of study. This is something which would have greatly enriched this somewhat general section on phraseology.

García Rodríguez’ position regarding the construction *hacer un paseo* ‘have a walk’ instead of *dar un paseo* is at least remarkable. Without any doubt, the structure with *hacer* ‘make’ instead of *dar* ‘give’ is not unusual in the Spanish of the Catalan speaking areas, and in Valencian Spanish this construction is seen as one of the characteristic features even by authors as critical as Eugeni S. Reig (cf. <<http://www.elpuntavui.cat/article/5-cultura/19-cultura/433099-trau-la-llengua-pero-no-te-la-mossegues.html>>). We believe that Catalan Spanish is a diatopic variety as “good” as any other; in concluding that such a structure *cannot be used, at least in the Spanish language* (“*un paseo no se puede *tomar o *hacer, como mínimo, en la lengua española*”, p. 43), García Rodríguez takes a normative position that is astonishing, to say the least, for a linguistic study.

Chapter II (pp. 69–191), is dedicated to the cognitive-symbolic analysis of phraseologisms in a bilingual corpus. After dealing with the theoretical aspects of cognitive semantics and the relation of phraseology to cognitivism, the author looks at the elements of nature in phraseology regarding cognitive-symbolic aspects, methodological aspects of cognitive analysis and the formation of phraseologisms with elements of nature in Spanish and Catalan from the point of view of cognitive semantics.

The author speaks of a bilingual corpus as the basis of his cognitive-symbolic study, but, in fact, with *corpus* he refers to a list of 643 phraseologisms compiled

on the grounds of a review of dictionaries. It is remarkable that, throughout the book, he refers to the phraseological units on this list as his research corpus (“UFS que componen el corpus de la investigación”, p. 74), and consistently identifies these dictionaries as “fuentes de extracción del corpus” (p. 199) ‘sources for the extraction of the corpus’. The decision to work on the basis of dictionary data is understandable in view of the amount of work that is “feasible” in a PhD project, but it should be noted that this does not allow, as the author seems to assume, the systemic level to be accessed, but rather a view of what the dictionary authors regard as part of the system. Furthermore, this does not necessarily have to coincide with what is actually used in the respective languages. For example, there can be no doubt that the fact that dictionary authors also or especially use literary texts as a source is reflected in the selection of phraseologisms (and the interpretation of their meaning, which certainly represents the idiolectal and clearly not systemic level).

The usage of the expression *casilla vacía* ‘empty cell / field / box’, marked as Ø (cf. the explanation on p. 111), to refer to cases where no entries in the list of phraseologisms in one language correspond to a certain phraseologism in the other language concerned, is absolutely inappropriate. In phraseology, *casilla vacía* is a term already used with the established meaning ‘open slot’ (such as *open-slot idioms* or *open-slot PU*), coined by Zuluaga Ospina (1980; cf. Montoro del Arco (2008b))—a publication actually quoted by García Rodríguez elsewhere in his book—in order to refer to a completely different phenomenon, i.e. to allude to elements that can vary, subject to morphological inflections, such as German *dieser Teil der Menschheit / der Anwesenden / ... geht jetzt* ‘this part of humanity / of the people present / ... is going to leave now’ [= I am going to leave now] (cf. Montoro del Arco and Sinner 2014: 177–178). Incidentally, this symbol is the only quantitative indication that is provided throughout the study. The renunciation of qualitative data, although implicitly justified by the author with the explanations regarding the orientation towards qualitative analysis, is painfully noticeable, especially in subchapter II.5 on the formation of phraseologisms with nature elements in Catalan and Spanish, which to some extent reads like a mere enumeration of phenomena that sometimes appears arbitrary as there is no hint at their relative weight in the respective language. Overall, the author deals with the chosen phraseologisms extensively and with remarkable detail and care, but also in a quite descriptive manner. As García Rodríguez only analyses a sample, and as the criteria for the selection are not indicated, it is difficult to assess the completeness and relevance of the elements under scrutiny. While the author has clearly taken great care to systematically analyse and categorise the selected phraseological units by establishing conceptual hyperonyms, an effort that is reflected in the considerable scope of this section (pp. 112–191), it is also true that not all the

units that form part of each group are discussed, and the explanations offered are sometimes slightly impressionistic. When presenting his analysis, García Rodríguez does not always follow the same pattern; for example, sometimes dealing with extra-linguistic aspects (historical fact, anecdote, etc.) related to the formation of a particular phraseologism, while in other cases failing to include such information and instead commenting on the metaphors underlying the PUs.

Chapter III (pp. 193–258) deals with contrastive phraseology. It begins with an overview of the history of the analysis of phraseological units in Spanish and Catalan in the first subchapter. The overview is not exhaustive; however, it does not become clear why the studies cited in this section were selected; in several cases, the authors simply states that they seem interesting without giving further arguments in order to merit this special interest. García Rodríguez refers to some of the existing studies on Spanish-Catalan contrastive phraseology; here he explicitly cites the publications by Freixas Alás (2016) and Prat Sabater (2016) on collocations with the verb *hacer* ‘to make’ as particularly worth mentioning. If these are to be regarded as phraseological units, other chronologically preceding and in part very extensive studies on such constructions in the Spanish varieties of the Catalan-speaking regions which follow the model of Catalan constructions with *fer* should also be mentioned here, such as Szigetvári (1994: 27–309), Szigetvári (2002), Szigetvári and Morvay (2002), Sinner (2004: 522–532) or Beas Teruel (2009). As we have already noted, the discussion of collocations in chapter I is very detailed, almost excessive. This makes it all the more noticeable in this section that some of the relevant literature on this issue in Catalan and Spanish, and in both languages in contrast, has not been dealt with. But in fact, most of the studies that deal with collocations in the context of language contact in Catalan-speaking areas do not identify them as phraseologisms, and it seems to us that, in listing the studies on Catalan and Spanish and on language contrast (and contact), he only mentions those that actually operate in accordance with this concept, and does not take into account the many contributions that already exist on constructions that would actually fall into the category as he conceives it.²

The assessment could also have been a little more critical. For example, García Rodríguez does not comment on the bold design of the study carried out by Vicente Llavata (2003), which was carried out on the bases of an original and its translation. It has been known for quite some time that translated texts cannot be dealt with as if they were original texts, and that such an approach in contrastive

² However, it should be noted that also some papers that are identifiable as relevant contributions to Catalan, Spanish and contrastive phraseology were left unconsidered, such as Brumme (2008a, 2008b) and Sinner (2016).

studies will necessarily lead to questionable results but, as a matter of fact, such procedures are still commonplace in comparative language research (cf. the overview in Sinner 2017). Nor is this problem addressed in the second subchapter on determinations and parameters, where the author deals with various trends in contrastive phraseology in order to substantiate the decision to orient the study towards the first of the three levels of analysis (systemic, textual or lexicographical) identified by Mellado Blanco (2015) and differentiates the different types of equivalence and criteria for comparison. In his study, García Rodríguez focuses on qualitative equivalence.

For the contrastive analysis, five parameters developed previously in the chapter were applied to determine the selection of equivalents: phraseological meaning, literal meaning, iconicity, morphosyntactic structure, and connotations. If the dictionaries initially consulted did not offer any phraseological units, the closest equivalent was sought. Thus, in addition to the 33 dictionaries used for data extraction, 17 additional dictionaries, 5 text corpora and two Spanish language portals were consulted. In total, 707 phraseologisms were analysed for the contrastive study regarding differences and similarities. In order to illustrate the collected data, a table was drawn up for each element of nature featuring the units in Spanish and in Catalan, according to the type of qualitative equivalence in question: complete, partial or zero phraseological equivalence. Independently of this, when bidirectional differences were found between the two languages, the type of divergence was detailed according to the postulates elaborated in the previous parts of the book. As García Rodríguez points out (p. 205), the complete equivalences and some of the partial equivalences can be considered as “universal” (or just common?) between these two languages because they share all or most of the parameters discussed by the author.

Summing up, it should be pointed out that contributions such as the book reviewed here—which has some defects but also boasts many virtues—are very welcome as they open the way to new research in the field of contrastive phraseology of Catalan and Spanish and in general. It is a valuable contribution providing a wealth of important information and data for the study of Hispanic, Catalan and contrastive phraseology.

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