

Isabel González Rey: *La Nouvelle Phraséologie du Français*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2021. 280 pp. ISBN 978-2-8107-0737-9.

Isabel González Rey is a professor of French and the head of the *Phraseonet* research unit at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. In 2021, her *Nouvelle Phraséologie du Français* was published in a third and enlarged edition. This tremendous work is a formal, semantic, and pragmatic study of phraseological units that focuses on the French language. It contains a new chapter on pragmatemes, new typologies and terminology, as well as updates on important studies, augmenting the previous 2015 edition by nearly 60 pages. After a brief introduction chapter on the importance of phraseology, the author devotes an enlightening chapter to the rise of this discipline. She first provides a short but comprehensive overview of its origins: from the pioneers who identified its components in the late 19th century (such as Hermann Paul or Henry Sweet) to the influence of its founding father Charles Bally on Russian linguists, González Rey aptly describes how phraseology rose as a field of study and gained momentum in various countries. She then offers an overview of the main schools and trends in the 20th and early 21st centuries, from corpus phraseology to semantic approaches. As expected from the title of the book, she devotes a few pages to the main contributions by foreign or French scholars to French phraseology.

The third chapter, on the “status” of phraseology, starts with the different meanings associated with the term *phraseology*, which can refer to the field of study, the phenomena it investigates (phraseological units), but can also be used as a synonym for “jargon”. It then offers a discussion on whether phraseology should be considered an independent discipline or a mere branch of lexicography, stylistics, or even grammar. González Rey chooses to view it as a bona fide and interdisciplinary field and argues convincingly that the phraseological system should not be seen as marginal but, concurring with Gaston Gross (1997), as a phenomenon that is “central to languages” (p. 41). She also explores how the broad and more restricted definitions of phraseology affect this debate. Although she cites a few scholars with diverging views on the limits of the field, one can only regret that the author does not indicate which trend is more prevalent. For instance, she seems to grant equal weight to the broad and restricted views even if the latter – where proverbs and other sentence-level units are rejected from the field of phraseology – is rather uncommon, especially in recent years, and even among linguists who do not have a computational approach.

Chapter 4 focuses on the linguistic criteria to analyse phraseological units (PUs). After mentioning the numerous near-synonyms to refer to PUs and discussing approaches such as lexicology, syntax, or Maurice Gross’s *Lexicon grammar*, González Rey lists and examines twenty characteristics or notions

that are commonly attributed to phraseological constructions. While the chapter is rather comprehensive, the weight of each criterion is not always clear. Some are described as obligatory (polylexicity, frozenness, and reproduction) while others are not assigned a status – the author simply concludes that some traits, including the three mentioned above, are compulsory while others “are only present in some expressions” (p64). Moreover, several characteristics are redundant with one another or refer to the same phenomenon from a different point of view (e.g., lexicalization frequency, repetition, and institutionalization). A more explicit description of how these characteristics are interconnected could have allowed the author to explain why some criteria seem less relevant in the definition of phraseological units.

The fifth chapter contains the author’s typology of phraseological units, which will serve as the structure for the remaining chapters. González Rey lays the foundation of her classification by developing on the notion of idiomaticity, which she defines as non-compositionality. The author then uses a syntactic frame to divide PUs into syntagmatic constructions and complete utterances and applies the semantic criterion of compositionality to form the following categories (pp. 72–73):

- Collocations (syntagma + compositional, entirely or only the main term)
- Locutions (syntagma + non-compositional)
- Pragmatemes (complete utterance + compositional or non-compositional)
- Paremias (complete utterance + compositional and non-compositional at the same time, i.e., figurative)

The author uses a third criterion and assigns “pragmatic” functions to these four categories: compositional PUs are referential while non-compositional ones are inferential. This typology calls for a few remarks. First of all, it seems problematic and arbitrary to describe all paremias (proverbs, maxims, etc.) as being figurative or having a “double literal and metaphorical meaning” (p. 74). This begs the question: are the following not paremias? *First come, first served*; *The best things in life are free*; *You’re never too old to learn*. It is even more problematic and arbitrary when the author claims that paremias have a “moralizing” use (p. 74), all the more since there is a plethora of works on the numerous pragmatic functions of paremias and proverbs. It could also be said that the pragmatic criterion (referential / inferential) has no real impact on the typology, as it closely follows compositionality. The same goes for the concept of dependency the author uses to describe constructions: compositional ones are “endocentric” (meaning the head and the whole play the same function) while non-compositional ones are “exocentric” (p. 79). Conversely, an important criterion, generalizing or “generic” meaning, does not appear in the list of criteria. Yet,

it is what seems to separate pragmatemes and paremias given that the author rightly notes that pragmatemes are “bound to a specific situation” (p. 71). In addition, one may notice that this typology is very similar to the one proposed by Corpas Pastor (1996). Only the category of pragmatemes, added in this new edition, seems to distinguish them.

Chapter 6 deals with paremias. It is the shortest one and can be considered the weak point in the book as it seems that González Rey is not particularly focused on this category. This is not surprising since phraseologists often set aside sentence-level constructions, which are studied more closely by paremiologists. The author briefly introduces the field of paremiology and what connects it to phraseology. She also provides a quick description of paremias and the traits they are commonly attributed: binary and mnemonic structure, semantic unity, and a moralizing or “sententious” value (p. 83). To complement her description, she quotes Sevilla Muñoz (1992), who mentions traits like brevity, antiquity, and a sententious or moralizing value. This is unfortunate for three reasons. Firstly, the list of traits is far from exhaustive. For instance, no mention is made of the generalizing or generic meaning, which is the most cited trait in linguistic approaches. Secondly, these definition attempts are based on several criteria that are controversial or arbitrary (morals, binarism, mnemonics, antiquity, brevity) and therefore hardly applicable to a definition. Finally, it is unclear whether these traits are obligatory features or simply common ones.

In the second half of the chapter, the author quotes Sevilla Muñoz (1992) again to introduce a typology of paremias (proverbs, weather sayings, maxims, apothegms, etc.). However, she does not provide any definition for any of the famous categories listed, only examples. This comes as a surprise since there are numerous books or articles in French that could have been relevant regarding the typology and definition of paremias (Anscombe 2017; Schapira 1999; Villers 2014, etc.). However, she provides her own typology of paremias, which she divides according to grammatical and structural criteria: “non-sentence” vs “sentence paremias” (pp. 90–91). This ambiguous terminology actually refers to verbless sentences and verbal sentences. They are further subdivided into types of parallelism (repetition vs opposition) and structures or tenses (juxtaposition, coordination, relatives, etc.).

The seventh chapter, which is the main addition in this new edition, is dedicated to pragmatemes. After providing an enlightening overview of the pioneers and different labels given to this category, González Rey explores a few leads to define pragmatemes before settling for syntactic independence and situational dependence. She then discusses the various degrees of compositionality and opacity at work in pragmatemes, including the impact irony has on them. The author uses most of the chapter to present her own typology of pragmatemes

(pp. 110–115). She divides them into conversational and behavioural pragmatemes, depending on the type of reaction they aim to trigger. The main frame, based on pragmatic functions, is as follows:

- Conversational pragmatemes
 - Formal pragmatemes
 - Informal pragmatemes
- behavioral pragmatemes
 - Directive pragmatemes
 - Exhortative pragmatemes

Each entry of the main pragmatic frame is then subdivided several more times according to grammatical criteria: (pragmatemes with or without a verb), their domain of use (general vs “terminological” – meaning specialized), and structural elements (single word or syntagma, tenses and sentence types).

While it is very elaborate, this typology may appear confusing. This is due to the terminology and conflicting criteria it uses. For instance, the “formal” category has a “structuring” function in a formal context (*Best regards*) and even includes what Roman Jakobson would call the phatic or interpersonal function (*You’re welcome; Nice to meet you*). The “informal” one consists in the expression of “emotions or opinions” (*Ouch! Good riddance*) but in a more private or casual context (p. 112). This immediately raises concerns as these categories appear to be a mix of pragmatic functions and register of language or communicative situation. This is confirmed with *Hello!* being listed under “formal” and *Hi!* Under informal (p. 111). One can only wonder why the former is more structural and interactional than the latter. The second main type (behavioural pragmatemes) is limited to recipients that are anonymous groups. This explains why the “directive” category (*No smoking*) is not as transparent as its name suggests. For instance, military orders such as *Take aim! Fire!* or *Cease fire!* are, surprisingly, included in conversational pragmatemes although this category is defined as aiming to trigger verbal responses (p. 110). Finally, the last category, exhortative pragmatemes such as *Exit* or *Open*, function as information providers (p. 114). Once again, some entries are quite confusing as they include instructions such as *Do not disturb* or *Shut the door*.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to collocations. Once again, González Rey starts the chapter with an impressive overview of existing studies. From Sinclair’s frequency-based approach, from which she distances herself, to Cowie’s semantic classification, the author examines numerous renowned typologies, even reserving a few pages to studies in the French language.

This allows her to identify the main properties in collocations. She first explores the formal dimension through issues such as the number of constituents

in collocations (two parts: a base and a collocate but not always two words) or the method to identify the base with deletion and substitution tests on the collocates. Naturally, the author does not forget to mention the two definitions of the term “collocation”, which implies co-occurrence: a restricted conception and a broad one that includes grammatical constructions also known as “colligations” (p. 138). The author then explores the semantic dimension through the notion of compositionality, assigning the base a compositional meaning and noting varying degrees of compositionality in the collocate. Stylistics is the next approach. It allows the author to stress the expressive and aesthetic impact of collocations. Surprisingly, she explores the pragmatic angle much later in the chapter despite the connection of the two approaches. For instance, she claims that collocations have a double pragmatic function (pp. 148–149): referential (informative) and argumentative or explicative but does not seem to consider that the expressive or aesthetic values noted earlier are proper functions. It is also surprising to note that the author does not use examples in context to prop up her claims. In between these two connected but separated approaches, she tackles issues such as institutionalization and the various degrees of “frozenness” (*figement* in French), as well as the importance and limitations of frequency in the identification of collocations. This leads her to posit that there is a correlation between the degree of specialization of collocations and their degree of variation: due to their semantic motivation and specificity, “terminological collocations” (i.e., specific to a field) tend to have fewer variants (p. 152). While this innovative thesis seems very sustainable, one can only regret that the author does not use any corpus data to support her claims.

The last part of this chapter contains the author’s typology of collocations (pp. 153–157). She divides them into lexical collocations (*nerves of steel*) and grammatical ones or “colligations” (*on condition that*). Each main category is subdivided grammatically (noun, verb, adjective, adverb vs conjunctive and prepositional) and each grammatical subtype is further divided semantically into compositional or semi-compositional collocations, which are similar to the notions of open and restricted collocations. Not only does the author offer a coherent and functional typology, but she also rightly notes that collocations can, like the other PUs, change categories in specific speech contexts (p. 156). For instance, a collocation like *to score a goal* can become a pragmateme if a sports commentator shouts *Goal!* However, the author does not clearly state if binomials (*black and white*) and compound names (*The Queen of England*) are included in collocations and which elements are the base.

The ninth chapter, on “locutions”, follows a pattern that is slightly different from the previous ones. González Rey does not open with an overview of existing studies, probably because they are too numerous. She now quotes relevant

authors only when discussing specific notions. However, she does open with a justification of the term *locution*, whose etymology “better accounts for the form and meaning of this type of phraseological unit” (p. 159). This short justification comes as a surprise: not only is the term *idiom* commonly used in French and in English, but the author defines *idiomaticity* as non-compositionality (chapter 4), which is her main semantic criterion to identify locutions (chapters 5, 8 and p. 164). She prefers to use the term *idiom* / *idiomatic expressions* to refer to all PUs, making it a non-specialized synonym for *phraseological unit*, thus replacing the generic term *frozen expressions* present in the previous editions of the book. Throughout the book, she alternates between a generic use for the term *idiom* (meaning all PUs) and a restricted use to refer only to figurative PUs (p. 39 for instance). This requires the reader to stay alert. After opening remarks on terminology, the author proceeds to comment on elements to identify locutions, such as the absence of hierarchy between their constituents, and non-compositionality (as opposed to collocations). She stresses the role played by figurativeness and the vividness of images (iconicity) in the formation and survival of locutions (p. 166) and separates metaphors created in speech from those that are lexicalized. In the next pages, she rightly emphasizes the power and advantages of analogy and sensory-based metaphors, as well as other advantages conferred by idioms: informing through shared knowledge, wisdom, authority, speech economy, attention grabbing (in headlines), social inclusion, or vividness.

After a brief description of idiom twisting (or parodies) and its advantages, the author provides her own typology of locutions (pp. 183–188). She briefly notes that they can be arranged thematically or according to their structure, but her main typology draws on Cowie (1981) and his separation of figurative and pure idioms, based on compositionality. Thus, she divides locutions into “congruous” and “incongruous” images before further dividing both into general or “terminological” (i.e., specialized) locutions. A final grammatical layer is applied as each entry is divided into noun, verb, adjective, and adverb phrases. Once again, the author offers a coherent typology that takes into account a variety of criteria (semantics, domain of use, grammar) and does not forget to note that a locution can shift to the category of collocation if it is used literally.

The final chapter, the biggest one, is devoted to “frozen verbal constructions” (FVC). Although this category is not officially present in the author’s typology, it actually encompasses verbal collocations and verbal locutions. González Rey chooses to dedicate a chapter to these constructions because they are, she claims, the most common grammatical type among phraseological units (p. 191). The chapter opens with the usual overview of existing studies and comments on key notions such as degrees of frozenness, structure types, or how meaning is created. This leads to an extensive discussion on metaphor and the different

tropes at work in verbal constructions, followed by an emphasis on their stylistic values. While this part is certainly enlightening, the abundance of typologies of metaphors, tropes, non-tropes, and the long lists of constructions (pp. 226–233) do not necessarily serve the author's purpose. The next pages broach topics such as slang, described as a form of speech encryption, and registers of language. The author then tackles the notion of affect and posits that it is behind the usage of every figurative FVC as it allows speakers to “materialize their affect” and “release an excess of emotions” (p. 253) on top of their informative and persuasive functions. Since figurative FVCs are, in fact, locutions, this part may seem a bit redundant and the reader might wonder if this triple function is a complement or redraft of the advantages of locutions described in the previous chapter.

Overall, *The New Phraseology of French* is a solid work despite a few punctual inconsistencies and a weak chapter on paremias. González Rey offers relevant discussions on key notions and numerous typologies all the while adopting an interdisciplinary approach that accounts for semantics, syntax and form, pragmatics, stylistics, etc. As per the title of her book, she does pay particular attention to French phraseologists and theories but, very fortunately, also occasionally quotes relevant works in other languages, mostly Spanish and, to a lesser extent, English or German. Another possible remark about the title is that the adjective “new” is less accurate than it was in previous editions. Indeed, the 15-page bibliography of this 2021 edition only incorporates 9 works published in 2015 or after, including 7 by the author. This leaves little room to truly new studies, especially in fields such as corpus phraseology or phraseodidactics.

Damien Villers

Correspondence address: damien.villers@univ-tlse2.fr

References

- Anscombre, Jean-Claude. 2017. Le fonctionnement du temps et de l'aspect dans la gnomacité / généricité des proverbes. *Scolia* 31. 11–37.
- Corpas Pastor, Gloria. 1996. *Manual de fraseología española*. Madrid: Gredos.
- Cowie, Anthony. 1981. The treatment of collocations and idioms in Learner's Dictionaries. *Applied Linguistics* 2(3). 223–235.
- Gross, Gaston. 1997. Du bon usage de la notion de locution. In Michel Martins-Baltar (ed.), *La Locution entre Langue et Usages*, 201–223. Lyon: Ens Éditions.
- Schapira, Charlotte. 1999. *Les stéréotypes en français*. Paris: Ophrys.
- Sevilla Muñoz, Julia. 1992. La terminologie parémiologique française et sa correspondance espagnole. *Terminologie et Traduction* 2(3). 331–343.
- Villers, Damien. 2014. *Le Proverbe et les Genres Connexes*. Sarrebruck: Presses Académiques Francophones.