



Igor Mel'čuk: *General Phraseology: Theory and Practice (Studies in Linguistics and Language Resources 36)*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2023. 281 pp. ISBN 9789027212962

General Phraseology: Theory and Practice (2023) is the most recently published monograph on Phraseology by Igor Mel'čuk. The book proposes an apparatus of definitions (a total of 51) and essential concepts for describing phrasemes—multilexemic expressions—from a synchronic perspective and seeks to describe how phrasemes are structured within the field of phraseology.

The description of phrasemes examines “all the properties of a phraseme”—semantic, syntactic, lexemic-combinatorial, morphological, and phonological properties—“necessary and sufficient for its successful use in the utterance by an idealized Speaker or a logical device” (p. 3). The monograph presents the author's culminating findings and conclusions following decades of research in phraseology, as noted in the introduction. Addressing the challenge from the fact that, in phraseology, “corresponding entities have been known under different names” (p. 5), the book aims to provide readers with a cohesive, comprehensive, and deeply analytical reference for the terminological system of phraseological concepts developed within the Meaning-Text model of language, without introducing novel phraseological categories or a new system. While the book features numerous cross-references and indexes for guidance, readers must have previous knowledge of the adopted theoretical model and the general issues concerning phraseology. The proposal of an apparatus of definitions and essential concepts for describing phrasemes is explained clearly using a restrained and concise style in a relatively short work (281 pages). Although the book's scope makes it complex, it remains accessible.

This review examines the structure of the work and provides an overview of the notational system introduced to describe phrasemes and their associated concepts.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, each organized in a parallel structure. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, providing a definition of phraseology, a reading guide and outlining the book's focus. Chapter 2 defines phraseme and offers a primary classification into lexemic, morphological, and syntactic phrasemes. This definition is framed through the two main notions of “selection” (pp. 23–26) and “compositionality” (pp. 27–35), treated as distinct categories rather than gradual values. Phrasemes are analyzed and classified from the production perspective, moving from meaning to text.

Lexemic phrasemes constitute the first and most extensive class in languages, so they receive the most detailed treatment in the monograph, spanning Chapters 3–8. Chapter 3 presents an analysis that yields in clearly defined

subcategories of *lexemic phrasemes*, and a precisely formulated notational system for describing them. Following the language production approach, the author identifies a primary division between semantic-lexemic and conceptual-lexemic phrasemes based on whether the transition from concept to semantic dimension is free or constrained. These two initial categories are further divided into compositional and non-compositional subcategories, leading to the identification of four types of phrasemes. The group of *semantic-lexemic phrasemes* contains collocations and idioms while the group of *conceptual-lexemic phrasemes* includes compositional (nominemes) and non-compositional (clichés) elements. After establishing a framework for the classification of lexemic phrasemes, the author conducts a more in-depth analysis of idiomatic expressions and noncompositional semantic lexemic phrasemes, along with their respective properties and classifications, based on the compositionality of the signified elements of these idioms (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 uses this theoretical framework to select three Russian idioms. While the primary language used for illustrative examples throughout this text is Russian, the proposed framework is designed to be applied to other languages, hence the title “General Phraseology”.

The concepts of noncompositionality, irregular syntactic transformations, and the extent of formal fixedness, as identified by Fraser (1970), have been topics of considerable debate within structuralist and generative language models. This debate is revisited in the present work, with the author offering a novel explanatory perspective grounded in his theoretical model. According to this model, and considering the noncompositional nature of lexemic phrasemes, the presence of semantically-driven syntactic transformations, such as passivization and focalization, cannot be logically inferred. Against this background, it is argued that any possible transformation of an idiom indicates a categorical shift, moving the idiom into the class of collocations, which are compositional semantic-lexemic phrasemes. For instance, semantic-driven syntactic transformations in the idiom *spill the beans* may be justified if speakers break down the idiom’s components into separate meaningful lexemes of a base and a collocate. The author asserts that the creativity of idioms lies outside the scope of phraseology, thereby excluding it from this analytical discourse. Specifically, cases of semantic-driven transformations, as well as syntactic-driven transformations in idioms, are admitted if and only if they are motivated to fulfill “some artistic intentions” (p. 71). Creative uses are thus outside the scope of the book.

The author acknowledges the challenges inherent in distinguishing between a “new version of an expression” (p. 71) and its creative application. He addresses the possibility of making such a distinction, ultimately leaving the issue open to further consideration. This perspective contrasts with alternative grammatical frameworks, such as Construction Grammar, which assert that creativity is cognitively

grounded and plays a significant role in the production process of phrasemes (see Mellado Blanco et al. 2024). However, the book intentionally refrains from engaging with alternative theoretical frameworks (p. 5), focusing instead on providing a comprehensive reference for the treatment of phraseology within the Meaning–Text framework.

Finally, the notion of ‘variants’ in idioms is rejected. These are not treated as stylistic choices but as entirely different expressions or synonyms. Consequently, instead of separate dictionary entries, the proposal suggests they can share the same lexical entry due to synonymy.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to collocations. The semantic components of collocations are the base and the collocate, a lexical item selected as “a function of the base” (p. 113). The nature of the collocate accounts for the subsequent division of the class of collocations. Depending on its function, the collocate may be selected to convey the intended meaning of the collocation or to ensure its syntactic well-formedness. (p. 117).

Chapters 7 and 8 are dedicated to conceptual-lexemic phrasemes, non-compositional nominemes, and compositional clichés. The former group is informally “a multilexemic proper noun” (p. 137). The latter group is subdivided into four primary categories defined by the intersections of two key features: concreteness and specificity of referents. Termemes and proper nicknames represent generic concrete referents and specific concrete referents, respectively. Conversely, sentencemes and formulemes correspond to generic abstract referents and specific abstract referents, respectively.

Chapter 9 shifts the discourse to introduce the definition of pragmantemes, offering a redefinition and expansion relative to the author’s earlier work (pp. 162–163). Pragmantemes are characterized as a transversal category that intersects with various types of phrasemes. A phraseme qualifies as a pragmanteme if it is “signalative” (p. 162), indicating a psychological state rather than conveying a proposition, and “clausative” (p. 163), functioning as a complete utterance.

Chapter 10 introduces the first group of phrasemes: morphemic phrasemes, defined as “two or more morphemes forming part of the same wordform” (p. 167). These are divided into two types: morphemic collocations (compositional) and morphemic idioms (non-compositional), such as *whopper* (*whopp* + *-er*). Morphemic phrasemes are linked to lexemic phrasemes in a diachronic perspective, as some lexemic phrasemes have historically evolved from earlier morphemic phrasemes (pp. 181–182).

The final chapter is dedicated to syntactic phrasemes, described as non-segmental signs (p. 191), since their signifiers include not only lexemes or morphemes but also prosody, superficial syntactic relations (SSynt-relations), or a syntactic operation. In this chapter, the author mainly addresses syntactic idioms, namely, noncompositional

syntactic phrasemes. Many examples and a thorough explanation of the interactions among the involved levels of representation in syntactic phrasemes illustrate their definition (pp. 187–203). The aim of this section is to clarify the definition of the category of syntactic idioms, which the author feels is too vague and blurred (p. 186). He argues against the treatment of syntactic idioms proposed within the Construction Grammar framework, in which syntactic phrasemes constitute syntactic patterns presenting open slots within their structure (for example, see the different accounts for reduplicative syntactic idioms in Mel'čuk, footnotes 8 and 9, p. 207; Mel'čuk 2022, and the constructivist view of Janda et al. 2020 and Janda et al. 2024).

Finally, the author includes an appendix of lexical functions, a “Definition index” that lists the 51 definitions proposed in the book (pp. 239–244), and a “Notion and term index” that presents a collection of utilized linguistic notions (pp. 245–274).

The monograph is both a culmination and a definitive statement of the author's lifelong work in phraseology. It may be regarded as a manifesto of his theoretical perspective, a synthesis that encapsulates his core ideas. Beyond its retrospective value, the book offers a foundational reference for future research, serving as a key resource for examining phraseology within the Meaning–Text language model framework.

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