

Idiomacity vs. “Repeated Discourse”: Comparative Approaches In English and Romanian

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Abstract: *Starting from the idea that some of the terminology related to **fixed lexical patterns** in English has been borrowed by Romanian linguists, sometimes with their validated English meaning, some other times with confusing and rather contradictory meanings (see, for example, **phraseological unit** and **idiom**), the present paper aims at providing a comparative presentation of some of the most representative approaches to the various types of **fixed lexical patterns** existing in English and Romanian and of the terminology adopted by the specialists representative of these two linguistic and cultural spaces.*

Keywords: *fixed lexical patterns, idioms, phraseological unit, phraseology*

Introduction

Language is traditionally agreed on to be constructed from ‘basic’ structures and a lexicon. Nevertheless, recent studies in **lexicology**, **lexicography**, **lexical semantics** and **phraseology** suggest that language is represented by **sequences of words** which do not always observe ‘traditional’ restrictions. In other words, language is made up of a great variety of lexical patterns which are **more or less fixed in form** and more or less variable in **meaning**.

Useful as such a view might be, it surely cannot make up for the fact that the ‘names’ assigned to denote the various types of fixed lexical patterns existing in any language are quite often as numerous as confusing. Moreover, a comparative approach to such fixed lexical patterns in different languages makes things even more complicated, because the terminology used in the languages envisaged may bring to the fore a series of unexpected problems. In our case, the English and Romanian terminologies used to denote fixed lexical patterns in these languages is a source of confusion and debate, because sometimes different terms are used to describe identical or very similar fixed lexical patterns (e.g. **idioms** vs. **collocations** in English), and some other times one and the same term is used to denote significantly different word combinations (e.g. **idioms**, **phraseological units** used in English and Romanian).

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned aspects, the present paper attempts to clarify some of the problematic terminology used to denote fixed lexical patterns in English and Romanian by comparing the relevant views of some specialists in the field.

1. Idiomacity: the English perspective on fixed lexical patterns

The various types of fixed lexical patterns in English identified by specialists in phraseology, lexicology or lexical semantics are referred to by a wide range of terms. The traditional terminology includes terms such as: ‘composites’ (Vinogradov 1947) ‘phraseologic expressions’ (Chernuisheva 1964), ‘word combinations’ (Akhmanova 1974, Cowie 1994), ‘phraseological units’ (Ginzburg et al 1979), whereas modern studies on to fixed lexical patterns make use of such terms as: ‘prefabricated routines and patterns’ (Krashen 1981), ‘sentence stems’ (Pawley and Syder 1983), ‘formulae’ (Peters 1983), or ‘fixed expressions’ (Carter 1987), ‘phrasal lexemes’ (Lipka 1991, Moon 1998), ‘lexical phrases’ (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1989, 1992), ‘composites’ (Cowie, following Mitchell in Cowie 1988), ‘gambits’ (Keller in Cowie 1988), ‘routine formulae’ (Coulmas in Cowie 1988), ‘phrasemes’ (Mel’čuk 1988, 1995), ‘formulaic language’ (Weinert 1995; Wray 1999), ‘idioms’ (Fernado 1996), ‘fixed expressions and idioms’ (FEIs) (Moon 1998), ‘collocations’, ‘colligations’ (Firth 1957, Sinclair 1998, 2001, 2004) to denote the various patterns of idiomacity in English.

Unfortunately, many of these terms have limited applicability, this fact being sometimes attested by the authors themselves, who tend to choose their terminology according to the scope of their research (see for example, Fernando 1996, Moon 1998, Houston and Francis 2000).

Although general, **fixed expression**, a term adopted from Alexander (1978, 1979, also Carter 1987), and others, is considered very convenient by some specialists and used to denote different types of phrasal lexemes, phraseological units, or multi-word lexical items: **frozen**

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collocations, grammatically ill-formed collocations, proverbs, routine formulae, sayings, similes.

Nevertheless, **fixed expression** cannot be accepted as a satisfactory term, since many fixed expressions of these types are not actually fixed. Moreover, as Moon (1998: 2) suggests, the term **fixed expression** does not apply to **compound nouns, adjectives, and verbs** such as *civil servant*, *self-raising*, and *rubber-stamp*, to **phrasal verbs** such as *make up* and *stick out*, **foreign phrases** such as *fait accompli*, *che sarà, sarà*, and *caveat emptor* and **multi-word inflectional forms** of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs such as *had been lying* and *more careful(ly)* (Moon's examples). This is due to the fact that compound words are associated with morphology, and multi-word inflectional forms are simply part of the grammar of English.

The inappropriateness and misleading nature of the term **fixed expression** is also pointed out by Stubbs. He states that "[...] units are rarely invariant, and often not even continuous. They are idiomatic, but only rarely idioms; they have typical components, but are highly variable, with probabilistic relations between the components; they are typically realized by a sequence of several word-forms, but their boundaries do not correspond systematically to syntactic units; and indeed they do not fit into traditional concepts of either lexis or syntax" (Stubbs 2002: 59).

As far as the traditional term **constructions** suggested by Fillmore et al. and Sinclair's terms **extended units of meaning** (1998) and **lexical items** (Sinclair 1996) are concerned, they also have limited applicability either due to their rather general reference or to their debatable nature. As Stubbs (2002: 62) states, "it is an odd failing of linguistics that it has no convincing descriptive theory of units of meaning".

Idiom is also an ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways. On the one hand, the term **idiom** is used to denote a particular manner of expressing something in language, music, art, and so on, which characterizes a person or group and, on the other, it denotes a particular **lexical collocation** or **phrasal lexeme**, peculiar to a language. These uses are related to **idiom** as both a superordinate and a hyponymic term for a lexical combination, thus further confusing the matter.

Narrower uses restrict **idiom** to a particular kind of fixed lexical units such as *kick the bucket*, *spill the beans* that are fixed and semantically opaque or metaphorical, or, traditionally, 'not the sum of its parts'. Such units are sometimes called **pure idioms** (Cowie 1988: 133) being clearly separated from grammatically ill-formed patterns such as *by and*, transparent metaphors such as *skate on thin ice* and strings of words such as *move heaven and earth* which have no possible literal meaning.

Quite often, **idiom** is a general term used for many kinds of multiword item, whether semantically opaque or not. Makkai (1972) uses the term **idiom** to cover non-compositional **polymorphemic words** such as *blackbird* as well as **collocations** and constructions that are not freely formed, whereas Hockett (1958: 171 ff.) considers that single morphemes should as well be included in this category, since their meanings cannot be deducible.

Specialists focussing on the speech act theory, suggest that **idiom** can also be used to refer to conventionalized formulae with an illocutionary function (Sadock 1974, Morgan 1978, Fernando 1996). However, Sadock (1972) draws attention to the ambiguity of utterances which have more than one pragmatic function, this aspect leading such formulas to status as **idioms**.

Similarly, Gibbs (1986) draws attention to ways in which some indirect speech acts are conventionalized, hence to the possibility of identifying conventionalized forms as **idioms**. Pointing out practical problems with this classification, Levinson (1983) and Coulthard (1985) underline the fact that **formulae** such as *Can you pass the salt?* are rarely recognized as **idioms** in lexicology.

Fillmore et al. (1988) use the term **formal idiom** to refer to semigrammatical structures such as 'NOUN 1 *to* NOUN 2', which are in fact syntagmatic equivalents of **phraseological collocations**.

In contrast with the terms mentioned so far, the label **phraseological unit** is used in some Slavonic and German studies as a superordinate term for multi-word lexical items (Gläser 1984: 348) in the same way as **phraseme** is sometimes used as a superordinate term outside Anglo-American traditions. There are, however, other uses of both terms. For example, Vinogradov (1947) restricts **phraseological unit** to more metaphorical items, and Amosova (1963) uses **phraseme** for multi-word items which are not pure idioms.

Different from Amosova, Mel'čuk's attaches the term **phraseme** to idioms, as well. Starting from the idea that **phrasemes** cannot be constructed from words or simple phrases

according to general rules of language, but they have to be stored and used as a whole, Mel'čuk (1998 : 24) points out the fact that **phrasemes** are predominant in any language, most often outnumbering words. In his opinion, **phrasemes** may be of two types, i.e. **pragmatic** and **semantic**. As regards the lexical patterns making up these two classes of **phrasemes**, the former category includes **pragmatemes**, whereas the latter is represented by **idioms**, **collocations** and **quasi-idioms**.

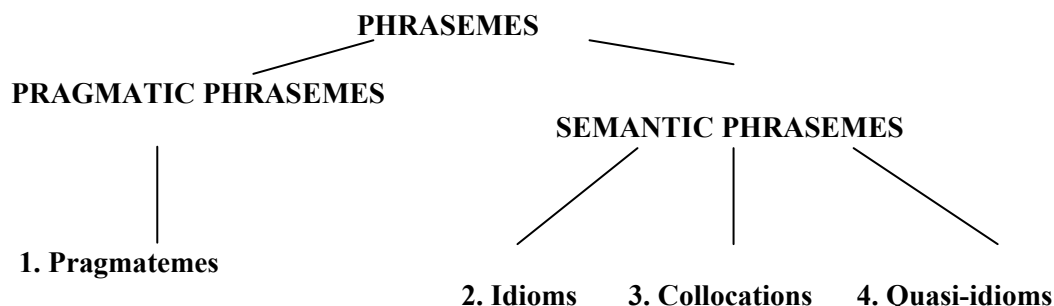


Figure 1 - Classification of phrasemes (Mel'čuk 1998: 30)

Phraseological unit and **phraseme** can be identified with Lyons's **phrasal lexeme** (1977: 23), a term also used by Moon (1998b: 80). She considers that **phrasal lexemes** include **phrases** and **idioms**, i.e. lexical patterns which, due to their semantic, lexico-grammatical, or pragmatic features are regarded as holistic units, rather than compositional strings. In other words, Moon uses the term **phrasal lexemes** to denote **pure idioms**, **proverbs**, **similes**, **institutionalized metaphors**, **formulae**, **sayings** and various other kinds of institutionalized collocation.

The terminology mentioned above has been integrated in useful typologies which compare and contrast either the terms used by different specialist to denote one and the same type of lexical pattern, or the various types of lexical patterns and their formal and semantic behaviour.

A good illustration of the former situation is the table suggested by Cowie (1998) in which some of the traditional Russian terminology is contrasted with the modern one, giving thus an insight into the terminological similarities and dissimilarities traceable at the levels of general, sentence-like and word-like lexical categories:

Author	General category	Sentence-like or pragmatic unit	Word-like or semantic unit
Chernuisheva (1964)	Phraseological unit	Phraseological combination	-
Zgusta (1971)	Set combination	Set group	-
Mel'čuk (1988)	Phraseme or set phrase	Pragmatic phraseme, or Pragmateme	Semantic phraseme
Gläser (1988)	Phraseological unit	Proposition	Nomination
Cowie (1988)	Word- combination	Functional expression	Composite
Howarth (1996)	Word- combination	Functional expression	Composite unit

Table 1- Terms used for 'sentence-like' and 'word-like combinations' (Cowie 1998: 5)

As regards the latter situation, considering the degree of fixity of lexical patterns, Moon (1998), distinguishes between three types of so-called 'fixed expressions', namely:

- '**Anomalous collocations**' include examples such as *by and large* or *through thick and thin*, which cannot be analysed according to the normal rules governing English, in that a preposition (*by*) and an adjective (*large*) are not normally able to be coordinated, and adjectives such as *thick* and *thin* cannot normally occur as the compleitive of a preposition. Examples such as *kith and kin*, in which one of the components 'is fossilised within that particular collocation' (*kith*, for example, is found only in this pattern), are also included in this category.

- ‘**Formulae**’ include lexical patterns such as **proverbs**, **slogans**, **quotations**, **gambits**, and **closed-set turns**, (e.g. *You have never had it so good* and *Shut your mouth*) which are in no way anomalous with respect to the language as a whole.
- ‘**Fossilised or frozen metaphors**’ include ‘pure idioms’ such as *skate on thin ice* or *spill the beans*, which are anomalous only in the sense that they cannot be manipulated grammatically. Thus, each part of the idiom (*skate*, *thin*, *ice*, and *spill*, *beans*, respectively) is not treated as a separate lexical item by speakers, but as part of a phrase.

Similar typologies have been presented in the previous sections and will be supplemented by further typologies, which, while focussing on **collocations**, will compare and contrast them with other lexical patterns formally or semantically marked.

Mention should be made that in her study devoted to **fixed expressions and idioms**, Moon (1998) also suggests a classification of such lexical patterns in terms of their text functions, i.e. according to the way in which they contribute to the content and structure of a **text**. She explains that although the contribution of fixed lexical patterns is instantial and bound up with **context** it is nevertheless possible to generalize and to chart typical functions.

Moon’s categorization of such lexical patterns is made according to five functions which are related, but not identical to Halliday’s model of the semantic components of language (Halliday 1978: 116 ff.). Thus, she identifies **informational**, **evaluative**, **situational**, **modalizing** and **organizational** expressions and idioms, each of these categories having specific functions (see table 2 below).

Category	Function	Examples
informational	stating proposition, conveying information	<i>rub shoulders with</i> <i>in the running</i> <i>catch sight of soemthing for sale</i>
evaluative	conveying speaker’s evaluation and attitude	<i>kid's stuff</i> <i>a different/fine kettle of fish</i> <i>near the knuckle</i> <i>it's an ill wind (that blows nobody any good)</i>
situational	relating to extralinguistic context, responding to situation	<i>Excuse me!</i> <i>long time no see</i> <i>knock it off</i> <i>talk of the devil</i>
modalizing	conveying truth values, advice, requests, etc.	<i>I kid you not</i> <i>you know what I mean</i> <i>to all intents and purposes</i> <i>if in doubt, do not</i>
organizational	organizing text, signalling discourse structure	<i>by the way</i> <i>for instance</i> <i>talking of-</i> <i>be that as it may</i>

Table 2 -Text functions of FEIs (Moon 1998: 217)

Moreover, Moon provides a classification of fixed expressions and idioms according to their **discoursal functions**. The model she suggests views **texts** in terms of their semantic stratification and distinguishes between **ideational**, **interpersonal**, and **textual** or textural components. Such a model is useful in the interpretation of ongoing discourse, any selection having repercussions at all levels, which are simultaneous.

ideational	experiential logical	communication of ideas connections between ideas
interpersonal	interactional	interrelationship between speaker and hearer mood illocution

	personal	modality attitude
textual	theme information cohesion	thematization and thematic patterning given/new distinction cohesive structure

Table 3 - Discoursal functions of FEIs Source Halliday 1978, Morley 1985 (Moon 1998: 218)

Different from the text functions of lexical patterns, which are lower-level functions reflecting the immediate effects of such patterns within their co-texts, **ideational**, **interpersonal**, and **textual components** operate at the level of discourse. Moreover, the **textual component** is best considered in terms of the ways in which lexical patterns are placed topically and thematically, or contribute cohesion to their texts.

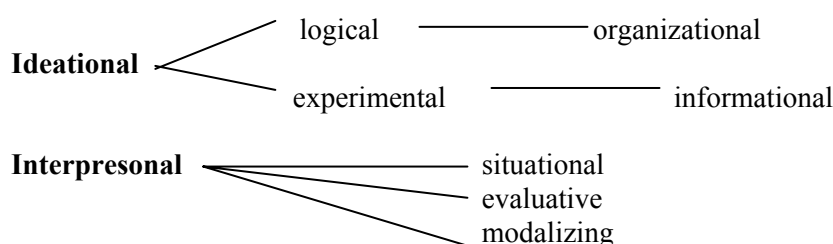


Fig. 2- Ideational and interpersonal, related to FEIs functions (source Moon 1998: 218)

The text functions of fixed lexical patterns referred to by Moon are common to the lexicon in general, but they apply to fixed lexical patterns, as well. As regards the roles that fixed lexical patterns have in real-time discourse, I agree with Moon that they are equally important as their lexical, syntactic, and semantic characteristics. “Neglecting or ignoring these roles may lead to discoursal ill-formedness in encoding and to misinterpretation in decoding”. (Moon 1998: 219)

Although often confusing, such a consistent terminology proves the specialists’ constant interest in the study of lexical patterns, as well as their increasing awareness as regards the frequent use of ready-made memorized combinations in written and spoken language. It also proves the crucial part such combinations play in language acquisition, on the one hand, and in language production, on the other.

2. Repeated discourse: The Romanian perspective on fixed lexical patterns

The wide circulation of certain terms related to **idiomaticity** in English, has favoured the inclusion of some of these terms in the specific studies devoted to lexical patterns in other languages.

A case in point is Romanian, a language in which the English terminology related to **idiomaticity** has influenced many of the specialists interested in suggesting possible typologies of fixed lexical patterns in Romanian. The various patterns identified by these specialists have been integrated recently in the so-called “repeated discourse” (Dumistrăcel 2006, Munteanu 2007), which includes most **idiomatic** patterns in English, but also a series of word combinations which are not mentioned in the English studies.

For the purpose of the present paper, special attention will be devoted only to the terminology common to the two language systems and problematic due to their referential ambiguity.

Consequently, if reference is made to the studies influenced by the English tradition on phraseology, the Romanian specialists have sometimes used the English terminology related to fixed (idiomatic) lexical patterns with their validated English meanings, whereas some other times they used some of the English terms in confusing and rather contradictory ways. Two illustrative examples in this respect are **phraseological units** and **idioms**, whose Romanian equivalents do not always denote the same reality.

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”, whereas an **idiom** is “a lexicalized, reproducible word group in common use, which has syntactic and semantic stability and may carry connotations, but whose meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of its constituents” (Gläser 1998: 125). To put it differently, **idioms** presuppose “a specific choice and combination of semantic components carried by its constituents” (Gläser 1998: 125-126). Moreover, distinction is made between **word-like phraseological units** and **sentence-like phraseological units**. The former are “**nominations** and designate a phenomenon, an object, an action, a process or state, a property or a relationship in the outside world”, whereas the latter are “**propositions** and designate a whole state of affairs in the outside world” (Gläser 1998: 126-127) as illustrated by **proverbs, commonplaces, routine formulae, slogans, commandments and maxims**, as well as by **quotations and winged words**. Both types of phraseological units include **idioms** and **non-idioms**.

A similar inclusive classification is that provided by Hristea (in Bidu Vranceanu et al. 2005: 224), who distinguishes four types of **phraseological units**, without explicitly stating whether they have **idiomatic** or **non-idiomatic** interpretation:

- **phraseological syntagms** (‘locuțiuni frazeologice’) – more or less compact groups of words which have a unitary meaning and function as a single part of speech, namely as a **noun** (e.g. *bătaie de joc* – “ironic”), as an **adjective** (e.g. *întors pe dos* – “supărat”) or as a **verb** (e.g. *a se da pe brazdă* – “a ceda”);
- **phraseological expressions** (‘expresii frazeologice’) – stable groups of words which may have the form and function of a sentence (e.g. *a taia frunză la câini, a-și lua inima – n dinți, a face pe cineva cu ou și cu oțet*);
- **international formulae and clichés** (clișee) – groups of words which have an approximately similar form and are used with the same meaning in different languages (e.g. *art for art’s sake* – *artă pentru artă* – “artă pură”, *apple of discord* – *mărul discordiei* – “motiv pentru ceartă”, *the Gordian knot* – *nodul Gordian* – “problemă insolubilă”, *sword of Damocles* – *sabia lui Damocles* – “amenințare iminentă”, *Achilles heel* – *călcâiul lui Ahile* – “punctul slab al cuiva”);
- **expressive periphrases** (‘perifrază expresivă’) – less restricted combinations, used in affective statements specific to a certain cultural model (e.g. *luceafărul poeziei românești, bardul de la Mircești*).

General and useful as it may be in certain classifications, the term **phraseological units** is not always used to denote the same types of lexical patterns in English and Romanian.

The same holds valid for the term **phrase** which is used to refer to certain lexical patterns in English (e.g. **idioms** or **collocations**) different from Romanian, where the same term denotes “a word-combination standing for a part of speech whose grammatical functions it discharges” (Levițchi 1970: 15).

Trying to justify the necessity that **idioms** should be listed in the lexicon, Francis Katamba (1993) refers to the existence of two classes of **phrases**. One seems to be the class of **collocations** (they are not specifically referred to as such), as it includes those phrases whose meaning can be deduced if the speakers *know the meaning of the words they contain and the ways in which they are syntactically related to each other* (e.g. *to pass the salt*). The latter class is that of **idioms** (called ‘listed syntactic objects’ by Di Sciullo and Williams 1987, in Katamba 1993: 295), which is made up of phrases such as *to pass the buck, to eat a humble pie, to be in the red*, whose meaning cannot be worked out on the basis of the meanings of the words which they contain (Katamba 1993: 296). To put it differently, the main aspect differentiating the two types of **phrases** is their being or not being **semantically compositional**.

Different from Katamba’s approach, Romanian lexical studies, use the term **lexical phrase** to denote different lexical patterns, even whole sentences, which function as a phraseological unit enjoying structural stability (**proverbs, conversational formulas**, etc.). Referring to formal characteristics of **phrases**, Levițchi (1970: 19) suggests that they may be classified as **stable** and **unstable**. If the phrases in the former category allow no change in the component element, unstable phrases are regarded as structures liable to change of form or to (partial) replacement. This latter category is exemplified by the lexical pattern *to play a trick to somebody* in which the verb may, on the one hand, take different tenses, and word order can change → *to play somebody a*

trick, and may be replaced by its connotational synonyms *to put* and *to serve* → *to put a trick on somebody*, *to serve a trick on somebody*, on the other.

Furthermore, when referring to the **semantic classification** of **phrases**, Levițchi (1970: 19) distinguishes between two classes of such lexical patterns: **1)** phrases which are used in a direct meaning, and **2)** phrases which, partly or wholly, express figurative meanings. As regards the meaning of **phrases**, Levițchi mentions that it is the sum of the meanings of the component elements as illustrated by *to set at liberty* → a pune în libertate, *in other words* → cu alte cuvinte, *to be of good cheer* → a fi bine dispus, a fi vesel, a fi plin de viață, *safe and sound* → teafăr, sănătos, *to come into view* → a apărea, a se zări, *silence gives consent* → tăcerea înseamnă consimțire.

Contrasting **phrases** used in their direct meaning with **phrases** which are, partly or wholly, based on figures of speech (chiefly on **metaphors**), Levițchi explains that the role of the latter is very active in the semantic development of a language. The phrases he selects to prove his view are *to give somebody a lesson* → a-i da cuiva o lecție, a învăța pe cineva minte, *to carry coals to Newcastle* → a vinde castraveți grădinarului, a căra apa la puț, *the/a cat in gloves catches no mice* → cine se boierește treabă nu face, *to put a spoke in somebody's wheel* → a-i pune cuiva bețe în roate, *make hay while the sun shines* and *strike the iron while 'tis hot* → bate fierul cât e cald, *to give somebody the needle* (slang) → a pune pe cineva pe jar, a face pe cineva să fiarbă; a scoate pe cineva din sărite, in which all the words are used in their direct meaning, but the whole meaning of the phrase is metaphorical.

Analyzing a phrase like *to break the silence* → a sparge/a întrerupe tăcerea, Levițchi points out that the verb *to break* assumes a figurative-metaphorical meaning as a result of its association with *silence*, but owing to the frequent use of the phrase, the metaphor is of the fading or degraded type.

Last but not least, in the category of **phrases**, Levițchi includes lexical patterns which are built on **similes** (*as*) *red as a rose* → roșu ca trandafirul/un trandafir, roșu ca bujorul/ un bujor, *to run like a deer* → a fugi /a alerga ca o caprioară, or on **hyperboles** *a thousand thanks* → mii de mulțumiri, *to be a shadow of one's former self* → a nu mai fi decât o umbră.

The important point made by Levițchi with respect to such phrases is that “sometimes it is difficult enough to establish whether this or that word in a phrase has a direct or a figurative meaning. Language is permanently ‘on the run’ and what was new and striking and graphical yesterday may be trite and ‘matter-of-fact’ today. The problem is all the more complicated as even big-sized dictionaries do not clearly discriminate between direct and figurative meanings of words, to say nothing of words in phrases” (Levițchi 1970: 20). In his approach to the English lexicology, Levițchi also enlarges on Vinogradov's semantic classification of **phrases**, adapted by Kunin (1955) to the realities of his time. Thus, distinction is made between **phraseological fusions**, **phraseological unities**, and **traditional combinations**. The first category includes indivisible and indecomposable phrases in whose general meaning one cannot detect any connection with the words the phrase is made up of. The second is represented by stable phrases, which, like idioms, have a meaning of their own, distinct from the meaning of the component elements, although these are connected logically. The category of traditional combinations is made up of words that may combine only with certain other words.

As regards **phraseological unities**, Levițchi explains that they are often considered to include figurative phrases such as *as fresh as a daisy* → înfloritor, plin de tinerețe și sănătate, verde ca bradul, *neither here nor there* → nici în clin nici în mână, fără nici o legătură, and **proverbs** *diamond cut diamond* → cui pe cui se scoate. Moreover, **traditional combinations**, include patterns in which one or more words are used in their direct, non-figurative senses such as *to pay a visit to someone* → a face o vizită cuiva, *to give/lend assistance to someone* → a da ajutor cuiva, *to strike/deal/inflict a blow to someone* → a lovi pe cineva, a da cuiva o lovitură, thus corresponding to the category of **collocations** attested by later studies in the field.

Besides classifying **phrases** from the formal and semantic points of view, Levițchi also makes an attempt in providing a stylistic classification of such lexical patterns. He starts from the assumption that similarly to words, **phrases** may be classified in accordance with the domains to which the phraseological material can be referred. Thus, he identifies **phrases connected with trades** (e.g. *to bring grist to the mill* → a aduce câștig; a aduce apă la moară; *to have too many irons in the fire* → a se apuca de prea multe, a ține prea mulți iepuri într-o mină; *between hammer and anvil* → între ciocan și nicovală; *in full blast* → în toi, în plin avânt; *a chip of the old block* →

leit firea lui taică-său; *to screw up one's courage* → a-și lua inima în dinți; *one nail drives another* → cui pe cui se scoate), **phrases connected with medicine** (e.g. *to swallow the pill* → a înghiți hapul; *to take the temperature of* → a aprecia situația, a simți pulsul; *a dose of one's own medicine* → păcăliciul păcălit; nu săpa groapa altuia, ca să nu cazi singur în ea), and **phrases connected with rivers**, etc. (e.g. *to shiver on the brink* → a dârdii, a-i fi frică, a nu mai putea de frică; *to go at the deep end* → a se arunca în apă; a se apuca cu curaj de o treabă; *to make a splash* → a face senzație; *on thin ice* → pe teren șubred; în primejdie; la strâmtoare).

Finally, Levițchi refers to the **phrases** which may be **monosemantic** (*in full blast*) or **polysemantic** (*to be in abeyance*) → 1. a aștepta, a fi în așteptare; 2. a nu se manifesta, a nu apărea; 3. a nu avea stăpân sau pretendent; 4. a fi abrogat provizoriu).

Observing Levițchi's approach to **phrases**, and the more recent approaches to the study of the various types of lexical patterns in English, Constanța Avădanei (2000) embarks upon the exploration of **idiomatic expressions** in English and Romanian. The innovative character of her comparative-contrastive approach resides in the use of updated, English-oriented terminology, in the structuring and adapting of formal and semantic classifications, as well as in the significant and illustrative examples selected from various sources.

Although made in the larger frame of English lexicology and phraseology, Leon Levițchi's approach to **phrases**, and Avădanei's approach to **idiomatic expressions** in English and Romanian represent an important contribution to the study of the various types of lexical patterns traceable in the two languages, but, more importantly, in Romanian, where phraseological studies have only recently started arousing the specialists' interests.

The freshness of phraseology within the Romanian borders and its unclear status is attested by different specialists. For example, Hristea, the linguist who set the theoretical foundations of Romanian phraseology, states that phraseology does not have a clear positioning within the larger frame of Romanian language studies (Hristea 1984: 134). On the other hand, more recent studies suggest that phraseology is an independent branch of linguistics whose domain of activity is related either both to **vocabulary** and **syntax** (Colțun 2000: 13), or strictly to **lexicology** (Zugun 2000). Moreover, reference is made to the importance of **phraseology** for stylistics and semasiology, and of the studies devoted to phraseologic units for disciplines such as etymology and lexicography.

As regards the areas of interest of the Romanian **phraseology**, the idea is shared that this borderline branch of linguistics focusses on the study of **fixed lexical combinations** which are most often called **unități frazeologice** or **frazeologisme**, and are contrasted with free word combinations which are studied by syntax.

Starting from Hristea's (1984: 139) statement that all phraseologic units in a language are fix combinations of two or more words which have a unitary meaning, Ioana Scherf (2006) defines the **phraseologic unit** (or **frazeologism**) as the fix word combination, whether idiomatic or not, which is made up of at least two words, but functions as a single semantic unit in language. She adds that **phraseologic units** are recorded in dictionaries as ready-made patterns and, as such, are accepted to share 'phraseologic features' such as **polylexicalism**, **multiplication**, **stability**, **idiomaticity**, **complexity** and **expressivity**: "**unitatea frazeologică** este o îmbinare stabilă de cuvinte, cu sau fără idiomacitate. Ea are o întindere de cel puțin două cuvinte și este lexicalizată, adică funcționează în limbă ca o unitate de sine-stătătoare, relevând unitate semantică și este consemnată în dicționare, ca dovadă că ea nu se formează după regulile îmbinărilor libere de cuvinte, ci se "cheamă" din memorie "de-a gata" pentru a se integra apoi, datorită valenței proprii, în lanțul vorbirii" (Scherf 2006: 82, in Munteanu 2007: 102).

Last, but not least, **idioms** and **idiomatic expressions** are analyzed and classified by Dumitrăcel (1980) in his study devoted to Romanian words, expressions and metaphors. Different from other studies on Romanian phraseologic units, Dumitrăcel's approach to **idioms** and **idiomatic expressions** is oriented towards the stylistic value and the etymology of such lexical patterns.

Instead of **conclusion**, mention should be made that the terminology used in the Romanian studies devoted to lexical patterns is as diverse as controversial. The first inventory of the possible terms used to denote various types of **phraseologic units** in Romanian is made by Dumitrescu who, enlarging on terms such as *expresie* and *locuțiune*, mentions that they function in parallel with other terms such as *izolare*, *idiom* or *idiotism*, *locuțiune proverbială*.

Far from having reached the development and the wide circulation of the studies devoted to the various types of lexical patterns in English, the approaches made by the Romanian specialists in the field and selectively presented in this paper are a valuable resource which should be further explored in studies on Romanian phraseology.

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