

# Experience of Phraseological Studies in Academic Group for Multilingual Purposes

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**Abstract.** *Modern society is a society of information. Hence, a great role of knowledge of foreign languages in use of modern information technologies is universally recognized. A general global trend to integration in economic, cultural and political spheres maintains the relevance of multilingual training. The aim of the paper is to share experience in teaching phraseology from multilingual perspective with the view of raising cross-cultural awareness. The paper is focused on three basic university levels of teaching phraseology: the level of general phraseology, the level of somatic phraseology and the level of biblical phraseology. The algorithm and the materials of the paper are sure to be of use for the development of the multilingual model of poly-cultural education.*

**Keywords** – *multilingual audience, phraseological units, English, German, Swedish.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of multilingualism is one of the most important socio-linguistic problems of the present day. That is because one can hardly find out any unilingual or one-ethnic nation. It is reported that there exist up to 7990 original ethnic groups living in more than 157 nation states. And, as far as scholars estimate [18] that very quantity of nations make use of about five thousand different languages.

In domestic linguistics and social psychology the discussion of the problem is focused on the social nature of multilingualism, considering it as ‘a product of language functioning in certain social conditions’ [19].

The globalization that is intensively extending to all vitally significant processes of existence of the international community, is evidently becoming catalyst of awareness by millions of people of their cultural identity and diversity. A huge flow of information is characteristic of the modern world. Knowledge of several languages becomes an urgent need under these conditions. At the beginning of the new Millennium Russia enters political, economic, trade relations with various countries of both Europe and Asia. In this regard there rises a problem of education of a multicultural personality who – besides the native language – has also a good command of some other languages including international ones.

The *objective* of the investigation is to share experience of teaching comparative phraseology of English, German and Swedish in an academic group of students. The accompanying aim is to offer the algorithm in organization

of a three-level teaching phraseology of the three Germanic languages: English, German and Swedish.

The *significance* of the work consists in the fact that there is an urgent need to fill a lacuna in methodological and methodical support of teaching the phraseology of modern Germanic languages in a polylingual institutional audience. The paper in hand shares the experience of simultaneous teaching phraseology in three Germanic languages.

The following abbreviations are used in the paper: PU stands for phraseological unit and PUs, correspondingly, for phraseological units, the USSR stands for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There is a huge amount of literature on the topic, but most of it deals primarily with the problems of sociology, psychology, success and tolerance, and teaching techniques at schools and areas of national minorities of the former USSR [31]. Besides, most of the papers published discuss the issues of bilingualism [5; 10; 30; 45].

Though sometimes ‘the term *bilingualism* is used as a cover term to include both bilingualism and multilingualism’ [4] the issues of multilingualism and bilingualism are studied and discussed in a number of works from different points of view:

a) from philosophical point of view – in the works by U. Weinreich [43], J. Edwards [12], T. P. Smirnova [39], etc;

b) from ethno-sociological point of view – in the works by M. Saville-Troike [37], L. Wright [44], Yu. D. Desheriyev [9], etc;

c) from socio-lingual point of view – in the works by B. Spolsky [41], N. Coupland and A. Jaworski [7], P. Baker [3], C. Paulston and R. Tucker [32], etc;

d) from psycho-lingual point of view – in the works by A. A. Zalevskaya [46], Th. Scovel [38], O. O. D'yakova, E. V. Kurbatova [11], J. Field [16], etc;

e) from philological point of view – in the works by V. D. Arakin [2], W. Mieder [28], L. G. Popova [35], V. M. Mokienko et al. [29], etc.

A few papers deal with the perspectives of a polylingual education [42].

Among the works that are most relevant to my research I think it is necessary to mention the papers written by E. Piirainen [33], N. A. Kindrya [20], A.D. Petrenko &

D.A. Petrenko [34], W. Mieder [26; 27]. The authors are mainly busy with classifying bilingualism according to a number of criteria, i.e.:

- a) according to the mechanism of speech generation: the immediate bilingualism or the mediated bilingualism—which is the result of mental switching of language codes;
- b) according to the acknowledged status: the official and the non-official bilingualism;
- c) according to the speaker's age and readiness to master another language: the early and the late bilingualism;
- d) according to the quantity of participants in poly-language contacts: the mass bilingualism, the group bilingualism, the individual bilingualism;
- e) according to the areal or geographical factor: the regional bilingualism or the national bilingualism;
- f) according to the way of emergence: the contact bilingualism and the contactless bilingualism;
- g) according to the language environment: the natural bilingualism and the artificial bilingualism;
- h) according to the level of mastering the language: the active bilingualism and the passive bilingualism;
- i) according to the co-relation of activity and passivity: the balanced bilingualism and the non-balanced bilingualism;
- j) according to the co-relation of language quantity: symmetrical bilingualism and the non-symmetrical bilingualism;
- k) according to the sphere of usage: the horizontal bilingualism and the vertical bilingualism;
- l) according to the number of communicative actions: the receptive, the reproductive and the productive bilingualism.

To estimate the grouping one might state that the rubrication of the phenomenon under the study is rather detailed and more than sufficient if not to tell 'splitting hairs'. Though it would be superfluous to claim for findings here, one of them is still worth mentioning. All those features mentioned may evidently be ascribed to multilingualism as well.

### III. METHOD

Two basic types of methods are utilized in the research: 1) linguistic methods, and 2) teaching methods.

To achieve the title target and the accompanying aims the following sets of linguistic methods are employed:

- a) paradigmatic methods: the method of phraseological identification [24], the method of comparative-typological analysis [1];
- b) non-paradigmatic methods: the method of contextological analysis, the descriptive method [21].

Among linguistic methods, the most commonly applicable is the method of dictionary definitions. A number

of original monolingual dictionaries of idioms have been used [6; 8; 17].

The following teaching methods are utilized: lectures, seminars, reading, compiling sentence extractions from the texts of fiction, plays, drama, etc. and their analysis as well as the method of methodical project [25; 36]. Besides interactive methods are utilized such as: interview, role games, etc.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

My teaching experience proves that the best way to study another language is that through its phraseology, because phraseological units present a lingual-cultural code of the language [22]. And phraseology serves as a reliable guide into the cultural space of the nation.

1. At the initial stage of L2 teaching we first of all appeal to phraseology that is connected with national customs, traditions, legends and believes, realities, historical persons and events, etc. That is done because this layer of phraseology is most wide-spread in the language (which is fixed in the dictionaries) and is intensively used in different kinds of present-day discourse, i.e.: a) common life discourse, b) business discourse, c) interview discourse, d) juridical discourse, e) medical discourse, f) scientific discourse. Compare the contextual use of the idioms, made up by the native people, in the kinds of discourse mentioned:

a) common life discourse:

"I wish Vitor didn't *have* this *bee in the bonnet* about me being a working girl." [6].

b) business discourse:

"Today the business *holds* its *head high* and is a world leader in its specialized fields." [6].

c) interview discourse:

"I mean i-i—if you could get *in for a penny* a week that was alright because when things got better you could build on a penny a week, you see?" [6].

d) juridical discourse:

"The Court of Appeal *laid down the law* in these terms in *Gibbons and Others v South West Water Services Ltd <...>*" [6].

e) medical discourse:

"<...> accusation that anyone mentioning alcoholism or drug addiction or having a different understanding of addictive disease from his or her own *has a "bee in the bonnet"*. [6].

f) scientific discourse:

"The Catholic Church had made a bad mistake with Galileo when it tried to *lay down the law* on a question of science, declaring that the sun went round the earth." [6].

In case the students find it difficult to identify a phraseological unit and to see the meaning of the phraseological unit in the context, they refer to the explanatory dictionaries of idioms or set expressions for the definitions, e.g.: a) *have a bee in the bonnet* is defined as 'be obsessed with sth (usu with the implication that it is

unimportant, irrelevant or foolish)' [8, p. 255]; b) *hold one's head high* is defined as 'have, show, confidence (or pride) in one's worth, good character, ability, etc. [8, p. 286]; c) *in for a penny, in for a pound* is defined as 'having spent some more money, gone to time and trouble, decided on some action, one may as well go much further (than one originally intended)' [8, p. 306]; d) *lay down the law* is defined as 'to scold someone; to make something very clear to someone in a very stern manner' [40, p. 300]; etc.

1.1. Quite a set of ancient **customs and traditions** served as the cultural background having generated the following phraseological units, e.g.: *good wine needs no bush* – meaning 'if your products are good, they will speak for themselves without needing to be advertised' [17, p. 166], (formerly, a bundle of ivy hung outside a building was a sign that liquor could be bought within) [8, p. 244]; *to rob Peter to pay Paul* – having the meaning of 'to give to one person what rightfully belongs to another' [17, p. 192], the expression goes back to the old custom of clergy to transfer different church utensils to poor churches from rich churches; *to dance attendance on someone* – meaning 'to be over-anxious to please and assist someone' [17, p. 240], the expression goes back to the ancient English custom according to which on wedding evening the bride had to dance with any person she was invited by; etc. The dictionary definitions give additional information on the socio-linguistic background of the PU origin, thus enabling the students (alongside with the context) to clearly see the PU meaning, as in J. Paxman's comment on the persons running Britain:

"The last occasion on which the monarch was required to make a real choice occurred when the Queen was obliged to **dance attendance on** a sick Harold Macmillan in October 1963." [6].

1.2. At this very stage of L2 teaching students also make a point of studying **beliefs and legends**, especially those that gave rise to native idioms: *a black sheep* – meaning 'a member of the family who has disgraced himself, one whose name is generally not mentioned in the family circle' [17, p. 20]; *halcyon days* – meaning 'times of undisturbed happiness and peace [17, p. 70]; *a peeping Tom* – meaning 'who furtively and secretly looks into house windows etc. in order to see people undress, make love etc. [8, p. 452].

When the students come across the PU *off to Gretna Green for the first time* they cannot guess its meaning until their attention is drawn to PU dictionary definition, which reads as follows: "couples who were under age in English law would run away together to get married at Gretna Green, a small town on the English-Scottish border. The conditions for marrying under Scottish law being less strict than under English, this was a favourite device for couples who had not obtained the consent of their parents" [17, p. 185]. As it is, the definition explains the PU meaning, describes its social and cultural background, thus letting the students avoid ambiguity in reading and comprehension as with:

"They are a genuine couple who wished to be married in Scotland and, as they hailed from Gretna in Louisiana, they **went to Gretna Green** for a 'traditional' anvil wedding." [6].

Teaching experience proves that the students' preliminary acquaintance with the dictionary definition of the PU *have kissed the Blarney Stone* enables them to see the PU meaning vividly because the dictionary entry not only offers a kind of semantic explanation but also gives the social and cultural details of the PU origin "referring to a Blarney Castle, near Cork, Ireland, which is supposed to give this ability [namely, of powers of persuasion or flattery] to anyone who kisses it" [23, p. 725]. Cf:

"<...> 'And didn't we all know you for a darling girl?' he whispered in her ear <...>. 'And didn't we all know you **kissed the Blarney Stone?**' she whispered back." [6].

1.3. Besides, the enrichment of English phraseology was substantially influenced by **historical facts and events**, as in:

(a) *to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds* (connected with the law of 1701, according to which Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds, struggling against highwaymen in Buckinghamshire, could not be a Parliament member) – meaning 'to petition for release from duties of the member of parliament' [23, p. 405]; cf.:

"He wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer **to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds** on Saturday <...>." [6].

(b) *the black hole of Calcutta* – meaning 'a gloomy, unbearably stuffy, hot place or a room lacking every possible comfort' (from an incident in India in 1756 when many English prisoners were crowded into a small room for a night where many of them died) [8, p. 86] cf.:

"<...> You get them all standin' in a mob, all talkin' that chapati language an' all that, an' you never know whether they're talkin' about you... It was like **the black hole of Calcutta** down my factory." [6].

(c) *khaki election* (originally from parliamentary elections in England after World War I in December, 1918) – meaning 'elections during which militaristic moods are used' [23, p. 240]; cf.:

"The war-time '**khaki election**' of 1900 returned the Conservatives almost entirely on their war record with almost no discussion of social questions." [6].

1.4. One of the most intriguing and curious layers of English phraseology for L2 learners are those embracing idioms with only **proper names** in their componential structure:

(a) *Jack Sprat* – meaning 'a small, undersized boy or man' [17, p. 192], as in:

"As a couple, they had the **Jack Sprat** symmetry of the man who eats no fat and the wife who eats no lean." [6].

(b) *Paul Pry* – meaning 'a meddlesome, inquisitive, but not necessarily malicious, person (from the central character of the comedy PAUL PRY by John Poole, 1786-1872) [8, p. 450] as in:

"In 1834, the pseudonymous **Paul Pry** <...> was a little below middle height." [6].

(c) *Tommy Atkins* – meaning 'a generic name given to the English infantry soldiers in World War I (Gulland, 1994:

192), (from a 19<sup>th</sup> century specimen form made out to 'Thomas Atkins' issued to recruits) [8, p. 563], as in:

"<...> 'the mortality of the English regulars less than that of the French, Belgian, or even Russian or German armies: because the former are all *Tommy Atkins*, poor fellows <...>.'" [6].

(d) Tom, Dick and Harry – meaning 'all sorts of people, anybody at all (the implication usually being people of a very ordinary or of a quite unsuitable kind) [8, p. 562], as in:

"He wanted to confide in O'Hara, to get him on their side, but he didn't want every *Tom, Dick and Harry* knowing their business. It wasn't a story that put anyone in a good light." [6].

(e) *a Florence Nightingale* – meaning 'a woman who is kind to someone who is ill', 'a devoted nurse' [8, p. 192]. The current meaning is seen in the contextual example:

"And how long am I likely to have to play *Florence Nightingale*?" [6].

2.1. The second level of teaching phraseology is connected with the most common phraseology and first of all embraces **somatic phraseology** of the three closely related Germanic languages: English, German and Swedish.

The teaching of phraseology goes here within the frame of a systematic course on general and Germanic phraseology and—alongside students' mastering the use of concrete phraseological units—tackles the general problems of structure and semantics of phraseology in the languages under the study.

The main problem of semantics in phraseology is the mechanisms of semantic transfer of components of the PU prototype [13]. Consequently, such basic mechanisms of meaning change of the phraseological prototype as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole are primarily studied here:

a) Metaphor: Eng. *live from hand to mouth*, Germ. *von der Hand in der Mund leben*, Swed. *leva ur hand i mun*; Eng. *get smth under one's nose*, Germ. *klar auf der Hand liegen*, Swed. *ha ngt på sina fem fingrar*; Eng. *play with smb's nose*, Germ. *jemanden an der Nase herumziehen*, Swed. *dra ngn vid näsan*;

b) Metonymy: Eng. *close/ shut one's eyes to smth*, Germ. *ein Auge zudrücken*, Swed. *sluta ögonen för ngt*; Eng. *open one's ears, incline one's ear(s)*, Germ. *die Ohren auf tun/ aufmachen/ aufsperrn*, Swed. *öppna sina öron på ngt*; Eng. *throw dust in one's eyes*, Germ. *j-m Sand in die Augen streuen*, Swed. *slå blå dunster i ngn's ögon*;

c) Synecdoche: Eng. *to an educated eye*, Germ. *für deutsche Ohren*, Swed. *för elak tunga*; Eng. *fall into bad hands*, Germ. *in schlechte Hände geraten*, Swed. *komma i dåliga händer*;

d) Hyperbole: Eng. *din into smb's ears*, Germ. *j-m die Ohren vollblasen*, Swed. *tuta något i öronen på någon*; Eng. *be able to count something on the fingers*, Germ. *an jeden Finger zehn bekommen/ haben*, Swed. *ha tre på vart finger*; Eng. *cry one's eyes out*, Germ. *sich die Augen ausweinen*, Swed. *gråta ögonen ur sig*; etc.

Analyzing parallels of somatic phraseology in English, German and Swedish, the students come to the conclusion that phraseological units—irrespective of their typological specificity in every language under study—have very much in common in the three Germanic languages. This fact immediately serves as a motto for further L2 and L3 studies.

3.1. At the third level of university education phraseology of **biblical origin** is studied in the three languages: Eng. *the tree of the knowledge (of good and evil)*, Germ. *der Baum der Erkenntnis des Guten und Bösen*, Swed. *kunskapens träd (på gott och ont)*; Eng. *add a cubit to one's stature*, Germ. *j-s Lebens Länge eine Spanne zusetzen*, Swed. *läggga en enda aln till sin livslängd*, etc. The main problems for seminar discussion in the field are as follows [14]:

- 1) The Bible as the source of phraseological units;
- 2) Phraseological unit as means of nomination;
- 3) Peculiarities of the functional space of phraseological units of biblical origin;
- 4) Types of classification of biblical phraseology in linguistic literature;
- 5) Structural and semantic peculiarities of phraseological units of biblical origin;
- 6) Semantic transfer of prototypes of biblical phraseology as a feature of systematicity;
- 7) Symbolic meanings in phraseological units of biblical origin;
- 8) Types of variability in phraseological units of biblical origin;
- 9) Thematic grouping of phraseological units of biblical origin;
- 10) Stylistic functioning of biblical phraseology [15].

Especial attention is paid to the parallels in development of phraseological units illustrating systematic character of biblical phraseology in every Germanic language under study. While reading fiction, or plays, or dramas and tragedies—depending upon the task for current independent work—the students pay attention to the way the biblical phraseological units are used in texts. In the meantime they find out that many proverbial phrases of biblical origin are not as a rule used in written discourse in the full biblical form, i.e. only their remnants are found in the authorized texts, e.g.:

Eng. *(not) to live by bread alone* instead *Man shall not live by bread alone*,

Germ. *(nicht) vom Brot allein leben* instead *Der Mensch lebt nicht vom Brot allein*,

Swed. *(inte) bara leva av bröd* instead *Människan skall inte bara leva av bröd*, etc.

Analysis of the contextual examples leads me to the conclusion that such reduced instantial use of proverbial phrases of biblical origin appears to be quite regular. More than that, the resultative, or clipped, verbal phraseological units may be classified according to the type of clipping of their components, e.g.:

- 1) Initial (or terminally clipped) biblical phraseological units:

Eng. *evil communications* < *Evil communications corrupt good manners*, Germ. *böse Geschwätze* < *Böse*

*Geschwätze verderben gute Sitten*, Swed. *dåligt sällskap* < *Dåligt sällskap förstör den bäste*;

- 2) Terminal (or initially clipped) biblical phraseological units:

Eng. *bury their dead* < *Let the dead bury their dead*, Germ. *ihre Toten begraben lassen* < *Die Toten ihre Toten begraben lassen*, Swed. *begrava sina döda* < *Låt de döda begrava sina döda*;

- 3) Bilaterally clipped biblical phraseological units:

Eng. *a) spare the rod, b) spoil the child* < *Spare the rod and spoil the child*, Germ. *a) die Rute schonen, b) das Kind verwöhnen* < *Die Rute schonen und das Kind verwöhnen*, Swed. *a) spa på riset, b) hata sin son* < *Den som spar på riset hatar sin son*, etc.

Making suggestions for further research I would highly advise teachers to concentrate their attention on tasks for students' reading and analysis of newspaper articles to compile a special glossary on instantially clipped phraseological units of biblical origin in the three Germanic languages under study.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The result of the research testifies to the effectiveness of the three basic university levels of teaching phraseology as the main lingual-cultural code of any language, i.e.: the level of general phraseology, the level of somatic phraseology and the level of biblical phraseology. The suggested algorithm in teaching phraseology for multilingual purposes consists in molding and utilizing the following steps:

- a) appeal to PU dictionary definitions with the view of perceiving the historical background of its origin;
- b) analysis of the contextual illustrations of PU use in different kinds of discourse;
- c) study the mechanisms of semantic transfer of the PU prototype;
- d) comparative studies of somatic phraseology and biblical phraseology in the three Germanic languages;
- e) search of isomorphic and allomorphic features in the phraseology under study;
- f) making up extractions of reduced proverbial phraseology from English, German and Swedish fiction, newspapers, scientific and business papers;
- g) compiling a three-language glossary of biblical phraseology.

Sharing the experience in multilingual teaching phraseology to students with the view to achieving cross-cultural awareness and mutual tolerance, the paper shows how to teach English, German and Swedish in an academic group for multilingual purposes at the three levels of institutional studies. It also shows how to combine phraseology—as the most important aspect of language, lingual-cultural studies—comparative studies of languages, on the one hand, and development of lingual and lingual-cultural competences, cross-cultural awareness inclusive, of would-be specialists in linguistics and translation, on the other hand.

The three-level teaching algorithm and the materials of the paper are sure to be of use for the development of the multilingual model of poly-cultural education. Further development of the project is seen in compiling an English-German-Swedish phraseological dictionary.

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