

# SESSIONE

## RECENSIONI DI MONOGRAFIE

**PIIRAINEN, Elisabeth (2016), *Phraseologie und figuratives Lexikon. Kleine Schriften, Tübingen, Stauffenburg (Linguistik, volume 89)*.**

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The book under review is a collection of 27 articles of Elisabeth Piirainen published from 1994 to 2013 in various journals and edited volumes. The collection unites four major research topics of the author: phraseology of dialects, areal phraseology, contrastive phraseology and research into widespread idioms. All these research topics are characterized by application of strongly empirical methods of questionnaires surveys among native speakers (with and without professional background in linguistics) as well as the theoretical apparatus of cognitive semantics and cultural semiotics. Instead of discussing each article individually, I would rather group them around the research areas mentioned above and focus on the main findings that underline the importance of both these topics as such and of the article collection under review.

### PHRASEOLOGY OF DIALECTS

It would not be an exaggeration to say that before the pioneer work of Elisabeth Piirainen on the basis Low German dialect of Westmünsterland (articles 1, 4, 6, 7, 22, 23 and 27), large-scale and theoretically profound “linguistic” re-

search into dialectal phraseology did not exist. For research on phraseology, dialectal data was (and still is) a completely new data source; for classical research on dialects, phraseology is a new (and still hardly investigated) research dimension. The results in this area clearly prove its necessity. In the field of phraseology, they led to reconsideration and/or new evaluation of major postulates which were exclusively based on data from written forms of a few standardized and normalized European languages. According to Piirainen, differences between dialectal phraseology and phraseology of standard languages can be found at absolutely all levels. At the level of constituents, the central observation of the anthropomorphic nature of phraseology of standard languages can be disproved. In dialects, constituents representing animal body parts play a more important role (cfr. article 1). Major differences can be attested to source domains and image components grounded in the local rural culture of dialect speakers (articles 6, 7, 27). They often lead to gender specific restrictions that are not purely biological but rather cultural (a phenomenon that plays hardly any role in phraseology of standard languages, according to Piirainen). On the contrary, image components that can be traced back to intertextuality and are central for

phraseology of standard languages seem to be less prominent in dialects (article 13, 20). Furthermore, some target domains appear to be restricted to dialects. The role of wordplay has to be reconsidered as well. Though it is a productive mean of creative idiom usage both in standard languages and in dialects, the functions and mechanisms can differ substantially: If in standard German modifications of already existing idioms are more productive and aim to achieve a humoristic effect, in dialects (as well as in Dutch) wordplay is an intrinsic feature of idiom creation that has educative and/or euphemistic goals (articles 4, 6, 15). This is why it cannot be regarded just as an occasional modification of idiom structure and allows for the establishment of the term “conventional wordplay” (German: *usualisiertes Wortspiel*).

## AREAL PHRASEOLOGY

Reflecting the emergence of regional languages in Germany since 1930, similar methods were applied to extend the data from basis dialects to new colloquial spoken language forms crossing the borders of single rural dialects and overarching bigger regions. Several articles in the collection are therefore devoted to phraseology of these new regional languages (cfr. articles 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 21). Due to this data, further standard views of traditional research on phraseology were challenged. Concerns were raised even with regard to the core definition of a phraseological unit putting polylexicity (a minimum of two words) in its center. As it turns out, reducing the compilation of spoken data to this criterion turns out to be a rather limiting approach. Therefore, Piirainen calls the items under investigation “figurative units” that can be single words, derivatives, compounds (articles 23, 24) or idioms and proverbs (article 27). They cannot be

described in terms of a center and a periphery and stand on an equal footing in the so called figurative lexicon. Much of these thoughts is incorporated in the *Cognitive Theory of Conventional Figurative Language* (Dobrovolskij & Piirainen 2005; 2009). Furthermore, stability of form that has been stressed as a second criterion for phrasemes within the traditional framework does not apply to colloquial regional languages in the same way. A high degree of variation and flexibility seems to be a characteristic feature. Results achieved within this line of work allow for a profound re-evaluation of diatopic markers in the majority of dictionaries that include idioms and question phraseme-didactic undertakings that have been guided by the misleading notion of «a uniform German phraseology» so far (cfr. article 16 for idioms used only in the former GDR).

## CONTRASTIVE PHRASEOLOGY

Piirainen applies the method of comparison not only to different varieties of one language. A number of articles in the volume presents the results of interlingual contrastive research integrating data from Dutch (articles 2, 5, 9, 15) and Japanese (article 3; 26, partially 27). In contrast to the traditional contrastive research, Piirainen’s approach is not restricted to the form and/or meaning of idioms, i.e. to their surface. It rather includes deeper cognitive and conceptual structures that underline their image components. According to the theoretical assumption behind this approach, the image component influences the usage of idioms and explains their semantic and syntactic specifics in context. This is why Piirainen’s approach allows not only to note the differences between idioms but also to explain them.

## RESEARCH INTO WIDESPREAD IDIOMS

The forth and the last group of articles (cfr. articles 13, 20, 25, 26, 27) is dedicated to the classification of cultural phenomena in idioms of modern language varieties and presents the results of the project «Widespread Idioms in Europe and Beyond (WI)» initiated and managed by Elisabeth Piirainen (Piirainen 2012; 2016). It had access to 78 modern standard and lesser-used languages from all language families as well as dialects and identified 470 idioms as similar and widely known. Two results of the *WI-project* are of a particular importance. Firstly, earlier ideas that the same genetic affiliation of two or more languages could explain a similarity on the level of idioms have been disproven. These ideas disregard the fact that the origin of the majority of idioms does not go back to a common “proto-language” of an early past. As becomes obvious, distribution crosses genetic boundaries. Secondly, the concept of «common (European) cultural heritage», which was also often used for explanation of similarities in earlier works, requires a more detailed investigation. Until now, cultural traditions from Classical Antiquity, Christianity (the Bible), the Renaissance, Humanism, and the Enlightenment are included in this term. Though the role of these domains remains central, other cultural domains such as folk narratives, jests and legends appear to be significant as well. They have produced numerous widespread idioms and have not yet been listed under the concept of «common (European) cultural heritage». As Piirainen finds out, today’s convergence of idioms is the product of an intense exchange of thoughts among educated language users that could only have been based on writing and reading books in historical times. This shared knowledge of widely disseminated texts led to and supported the establishment of cultural memory and conventional language. The *WI-project* describes this phenomenon using the term

“intertextuality” and calls for its precise validation in individual languages. Cognitive linguistics acknowledges cultural models of human experience, social interaction and embodied experience as important factors of the cognitive categorisation of the world. Nevertheless, research has tended to repeatedly emphasise the embodied experience. Within the framework of the *Cognitive Theory of Conventional Figurative Language*, an elaborate classification of cultural domains as they are manifest in modern languages was developed.

The diverse findings of the four mentioned research dimensions could have been only briefly summarized in the current review. The collection of articles where all these findings are put together is a valuable contribution to the modern research on phraseology and figurative lexicon that has to be read as a guideline for similar projects to come.

## REFERENCES:

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