

# Issues and Trends in Phraseodidactics<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article discusses current problems and trends in the field of phraseodidactics (the art of teaching phraseology). Phraseodidactics is an evolving field of research in the Russian Federation. Most of studies have been undertaken by European linguists, phraseologists and educators. However, a substantial part of research lacks unanimity of opinions and systematization; there is some dispute on the necessity of introducing phraseological units to foreign language students as well as on the volume of phraseological optimum, a set of phraseological units to be studied by students. Therefore, there is a need to carry out a review of the literature on phraseodidactics. Fifteen papers addressing phraseodidactics and phraseological competence have been selected and analyzed. The purpose and contribution of this paper is to offer a clearer picture of the modern state of affairs in the field of phraseodidactics, to identify current trends and problems, and to offer possible solutions.

**Keywords:** Phraseological Unit; Phraseodidactics; Phraseological Optimum; Phraseological Competence.

## 1. Introduction

Phraseological research is one of the topical trends in linguistics. The analysis of the works of Russian and foreign specialists in the German language showed that currently there is quite a big difference in the definition of phraseology, its volume, as well as various methods and approaches to the study of the subject. Various opinions are expressed by educators about the need for the introduction of phraseological units in the process of foreign language teaching. For example, some linguists hold the point of view that phraseological units are a special stylistic device of emotional-expressive level, which serve to decorate written or oral speech, give emotional coloring or provide reference to a certain stylistic register; thus, they are an optional part in the general methodology of language teaching. Many works of the

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1990s describe phraseological units as difficult to assimilate because they are often non-equivalent stable combinations; therefore, it is highly recommended to study phraseological units in a very limited amount (Wotjak & Richter, 1997).

However, it should be noted that the *majority* of phraseologists today have come to the conclusion that insufficient attention to phraseology is one of the significant gaps in the methodology of teaching both native and foreign languages, since phraseological units along with lexemes are an integral part of the lexicon and can be introduced into students' vocabulary even at the early stages of language learning. According to Ehrhardt (2014), in the process of interpreting phraseological meaning, the understanding of the relationship among the components of the phraseological unit is more important than knowledge of grammar or vocabulary (Ehrhardt, 2014; Saidi & Siew, 2019).

In this regard, methodologists and educators face the task of defining the term of phraseological competence which is directly related to the problem of determining the volume of phraseological optimum for various stages/levels of language learning (Faraji & Poshtdar, 2018).

Studies undertaken in the field of phraseodidactics in Russia are scarce. It is necessary to mention the work of Fedulenkova (2010), where the author formulates 10 key points (concerning teaching phraseology) that need to be implemented as part of the educational process. Kazan school of phraseology places heavy emphasis on comparative studies of phraseology of different languages (Diaz et al., 2018; Tarasova & Tarasov, 2018; Gataullina et al., 2018; Salieva et al., 2016).

As for the relevance and degree of knowledge of the phraseodidactic postulates in the works of Western scholars, today we can state the fact that phraseodidactics has taken a worthy place among other disciplines on the methods of teaching a foreign language in the European methodological literature. Researchers in several European countries began to create collaborative databases by using computer technologies. It has become possible to explore the use of phraseological units and their structural and functional peculiarities in multiple contexts, to keep statistics on the frequency of various phraseological units and to create a phraseological minimum. One of the urgent tasks for phraseologists and methodologists today is to develop a specialized set of exercises that would contribute to the effective phraseology acquisition at various levels as qualitative and quantitative lack of exercises is evident in the majority of course books that teach foreign languages.

## 2. Methods

Conducting our research review involved:

- using web-based search engines such as Google and Яндекс;

- using various electronic research databases to identify materials that describe the research topic, such as ResearcherGate (2019) and Academia.edu (2019);
- snowballing, i.e. reference chasing and tracking citations.
- The search keywords were ‘phraseodidactics’, ‘teaching phraseology’, and ‘phraseological competence’.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Literature review showed that one could identify five major topics of research interest in the field of phraseodidactics:

- methodological complexity of teaching phraseology;
- didactic principles of organizing phraseological material;
- scope of phraseological competence (phraseological optimum);
- assessment of phraseological competence;
- description of the stages and principles of creating multimedia platforms aimed at teaching/learning phraseology.

Phraseological units are complex signs of indirect nomination, and their study according to the standard scheme of work with lexical material is undesirable and inefficient. In order to avoid errors in the use and interpretation of the meaning of phraseological units, it is necessary to take into account their distinctive features. They are as follows:

- phraseological units are multi-component formations; it complicates their memorization;
- phraseological units are often characterized by morphological peculiarities, which can also cause difficulties in their acquisition;
- some phraseological units contain the so-called unique components that occur in the language only as part of these phraseological units, which also complicates their memorization;
- syntactic stability and restrictions in the use of phraseological units also represent additional difficulties for foreign language learners, since the usage of some phraseological units requires is allowed only in an appropriate contextual environment;
- phraseological units are characterized by semantic complexity: the meaning of these units is a multilevel formation and contains not only a nominative-significative component, but also is characterized by a certain emotional and expressive coloring, imagery, evaluation and style;

- unmotivated phraseological units, where the relationship between the form and content is not traced, are particularly difficult to remember;
- another methodological difficulty lies in the use of phraseological units that have similar counterparts in L1, but at the emotional-expressive or stylistic level these units can have significant differences.

In accordance with these features of phraseological units Lüger formulated 5 main goals of phraseological instruction:

- understanding of the form of a phraseological unit, including the component composition, intonation and phonetic design and the availability of variable components;
- the ability to recognize this unit in the context, even in a modified version;
- the ability to predict acceptable transformations of a phraseological unit and to use them in context;
- Understanding of the importance of a phraseological unit and the ability to replace the idiomatic expression with a semantically appropriate counterpart;
- the formation of communicative competence in the use of a phraseological unit in different situations and contexts, taking into account its connotation, expressivity, register and so on (Lüger, 1997).

The concept of competence is one of the key terms in didactics and methods of teaching a foreign language. Phraseological competence as a term which received its scientific justification in the works of C. Ehrhardt, who treats this concept as an understanding of the meaning of phraseology and the ability to use it correctly in speech. The linguist focuses on the fact that in addition to the knowledge of semantic and grammatical peculiarities of phraseological units, phraseological competence implies understanding of their pragmatic potential (Ehrhardt, 2014).

However, it should be borne in mind that the phraseological meaning is an extremely complex and multilayered phenomenon. Further specification of the term 'phraseological competence' is necessary, because today linguists have not given a precise definition of what it means to understand the meaning of a phraseological unit. Deciphering the meaning of phraseology is a complex mental process, which is influenced by language competence, language intuition, general outlook and understanding of the context in which a particular unit is used.

In the work of Hallsteinsdottir (2012) attempts to describe the factors influencing the understanding of the idiom are made. First of all, these factors include the level of foreign language proficiency and the level of native language proficiency. The higher the level of proficiency in the phraseological meaning of a unit, one should

show his/her ability to understand the native language is, the higher the probability that the meaning of phraseological units having equivalent matches in the native language will be deciphered in the studied language correctly, regardless of the degree of frequency of these units. However, it should be taken into account that the level of understanding of a native speaker and a foreigner have significant differences, since a foreign language is always perceived through the prism of its native language (Hallsteinsdottir, 2011).

Apart from the correct interpretati context where this or that unit appears.

The same situation is observed in the functioning of phraseological units in speech: Scientists have determined what factors affect the adequate use of phraseological units and the ability of their creative use in speech. Most often, students make mistakes in the use of the so-called “false friends of a translator”, as similar in the component composition phraseological units in L1 and L2 do not always have the same connotative characteristics in different languages. Furthermore, quite often foreign language students transfer phraseological units of their native language to the target language, which leads to the use of non-existent combinations that may be incomprehensible to the native speaker.

Phraseological competence is directly related to the question of the amount of phraseological units for future assimilation into students’ active and passive vocabulary. This issue has long been considered one of the most urgent and controversial. The most successful strategy for the development of phraseological optimum was proposed by the participants of the *Ephras* project, who investigated frequency of phraseological units in corpora and conducted a survey among native speakers on the popularity and use of the identified units. As a result of the comparison of two parallel statistical studies, the following pattern was revealed: frequent phraseological units selected from corpora are widely known and used in speech; however, not all phraseological units recognized as frequent ones by native speakers are frequent in corpora. This difference may be explained by the fact that corpus dictionaries contain data on the use of phraseological units in written speech. Finally, the developers of the database of *Ephras* created their phraseological optimum that consisted of 1112 phraseological units. These units were frequent both in corpora and in the responses of native speakers (Hallsteinsdottir et al., 2006).

In addition, the selection of the phraseological optimum should be based on the phraseology of the native language, since the linguistic competence in the native language, as we have said above, affects the development of phraseological competence in a foreign language (Hessky & Ettinger, 1997).

Another important issue is distinguishing the amount of phraseological units that should be learned at the receptive and productive level. Some believe that only clichés should be introduced into students’ active vocabulary (e.g., phone-talk clichés). Others distinguish not only clichés, but a set of phraseological units to be

studied. Some hold the view that proverbs have no less communicative significance and are also subject to active assimilation (Ehrhardt, 2014).

The three-stage principle of studying of phraseological units, proposed and developed by Kühn (1992), is among the most popular. It includes the recognition of a phraseological unit in the text, interpreting its meaning and the use of a stable expression in speech. The main requirement put forward by the scientist is that the presentation of phraseological material should not be isolated, but in the appropriate context. Only in this case it is possible to focus attention not on the form and not on the component composition of phraseology, but on its meaning, functional significance in the text and peculiarities of situational use (Kühn, 1992; 1996).

However, Lüger (1997) notes two drawbacks of Kühn's theory: 1) lack of drilling exercises and 2) little attention to the degree of communicative significance of phraseological units. Ettinger (2007) sees exercises aimed at using phraseological units in speech excessive.

In order to improve the methods of teaching phraseology a number of scientists propose to introduce additional stages of training. For example, Bergerová (2008) proposes to introduce a mandatory phase of contextual consolidation.

Rentel (2011) develops his own extended concept of teaching phraseology on the material of advertising texts, where an important step in the introduction of phraseological material is the method of visualization.

#### 4. Summary

Our literature review showed that one of the urgent tasks in the field of phraseodidactics is to concretize the term 'phraseological competence' and to determine the volume and contents of phraseological material that must be mastered by L2 students.

As regards phraseological optimum, we adhere to the concept developed by the team of authors of the Ephras project, who, on the one hand, proposed to take into account frequency of phraseological units both in corpora and among native German speakers. Their optimum has accurate selection criteria and it is based on theoretically proved arguments and experimental research. We intend to use it as a role model for creating phraseological optimum for the Russian-speaking students who learn German. However, we would like to take into account phraseology of the native language (Russian) as linguistic competence in the native language affects the development of linguistic competence in a foreign language.

We agree that Kühn's didactic concept is a leading one among educators.

In addition, the development of methodology for determining the level of phraseological competence for students of various stages/levels of learning the German language should be carried out.

In the future, it is possible to use comparative studies of phraseology of different languages in the methodology of teaching a foreign language, as well as the development of sets of exercises for teaching phraseology using modern media, in particular, it is planned to create a media platform for the study of the German language for Russian-speaking students.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion of our article we would like to emphasize that phraseodidactics has its own specific goals, objectives, and methods of forming language skills. An important principle of the study of phraseological units is a comprehensive systematic study of the phraseological meaning of the units. This goal is difficult to achieve, but a thorough analysis of the communicative use and emotional and evaluative potential of phraseological units can lead to positive results. Great help in the study of phraseological meaning is provided by various corpora, thanks to which it is possible to reveal a wide palette of contextual meanings of phraseological units.

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