



## **DEFINING THE CONCEPT AND TERMINOLOGY OF PHRASEOLOGY**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the theoretical foundations, historical development, and contemporary challenges of phraseology as an independent subfield of linguistics. The study highlights the lexical enrichment of languages, with particular attention to the emergence of new phraseological units resulting from scientific, technological, and cultural evolution. Special emphasis is placed on the diversity and inconsistency of phraseological terminology, which has long complicated the delineation of core concepts. Drawing on influential works in Russian, German, and broader European linguistic traditions, the article analyzes key definitions, classifications, and criteria proposed for identifying phraseologisms. By comparing free and fixed word combinations and exploring the semantic specificity of idioms, the research sheds light on the linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic roles of phraseological units. The study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions by systematizing major theoretical positions and highlighting the necessity of a unified terminological framework in modern phraseological research.

**Keywords:** Phraseology; phraseologism; idiom; phraseme; fixed expressions; lexical enrichment; semantic specificity; linguistic terminology; idiomaticity; German phraseology; Russian phraseology.

### **Introduction**

Every natural language possesses a unique lexical richness that continues to evolve throughout its historical development. In the contemporary era of globalization, this process has accelerated significantly due to rapid scientific and technological innovation as well as intensified intercultural communication. New concepts, expressions, and linguistic constructions arise continuously, expanding both the semantic and structural capacities of languages. Such innovations inevitably



stimulate linguistic research, particularly in fields concerned with lexical formation and idiomatic usage.

Phraseology, which investigates fixed expressions such as phraseologisms and idioms, represents one of the most dynamic and rapidly developing branches of modern linguistics. Despite its growing importance, the field remains characterized by considerable terminological inconsistency, as scholars employ a wide variety of overlapping or incompatible terms to refer to similar phenomena. This issue has persisted since the early works of Charles Bally and continues to generate scholarly debate today.

By analyzing representative examples such as *viele Hände machen der Arbeit schnell ein Ende*, *eine Hand wäscht die andere*, or *die Hand in anderer Leute Taschen haben*, this study demonstrates how phraseological expressions reflect cultural knowledge, conceptual metaphors, and linguistic creativity. The article seeks to explore the fundamental concepts of phraseology, trace its historical development, and clarify the criteria used for distinguishing phraseological units from free word combinations.

### **Literature Review**

The study of phraseology has deep roots in European and Russian linguistic traditions. Early foundational work can be traced to **Charles Bally**, whose *Traité de stylistique française* laid the groundwork for distinguishing fixed expressions based on semantic peculiarity. Bally's distinction between *séries phraséologiques* and *unités phraséologiques* generated discussions that remain relevant today.

In Russian linguistics, the field was significantly shaped by **V. Vinogradov**, whose tripartite classification of phraseologisms in the mid-20th century established phraseology as an autonomous scholarly discipline. This classification influenced numerous subsequent studies and was later adapted into German linguistic research by **R. Klappenbach**.

German phraseology experienced notable development during the 1970s–1980s, with major contributions by **A. Rotkegel**, **H. Burger**, **W. Fleischer**, and **K. D. Pils**. Comprehensive works such as *Handbuch der Phraseologie* (Buhofer, Burger & Sialm), *Phraseologie der deutschen Gegenwartssprache* (Fleischer), and *Phraseologie – eine Einführung* (Palm) continue to define contemporary research frameworks.



Scholars including **H. Schemann**, **B. Schmitz**, and **E. Donalies** have highlighted the overwhelming variety of terms—over a thousand by some estimates—that historically complicated the field. Terms such as phraseologism, idiom, phraseme, set expression, fixed combination, and lexeme-like word group have been used inconsistently across different traditions. This “almost chaotic terminological diversity” is viewed as both a challenge and a reflection of phraseology’s relatively young status as a linguistic discipline.

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized interdisciplinary approaches, including psycholinguistic perspectives, contrastive phraseology, translation studies, and corpus-based analysis, reflecting a broader and more complex understanding of phraseological phenomena.

### **Methodology and Methods**

This article employs a combination of **descriptive**, **comparative**, and **historical-analytical** research methods: **1. Descriptive Method.** Used to identify and define core phraseological terms, classify phraseologisms, and describe their structural and semantic features. Examples from German and other languages illustrate the applicability of definitions proposed by leading scholars. **2. Comparative Method.** Applied to contrast different linguistic traditions—primarily German and Russian—in their treatment of phraseology, terminological preferences, and classification models. The comparison of free vs. fixed expressions also relies on this method. **3. Historical-Analytical Method.** Traces the evolution of phraseology from early European and Russian scholarship to contemporary theoretical frameworks. This approach helps contextualize the terminological diversity and the gradual emergence of phraseology as an independent discipline. **4. Semantic and Contextual Analysis.** Used to examine idiomatic meanings of sample expressions, demonstrating how phraseologisms differ from free syntactic combinations and why their meanings cannot be derived compositionally. **5. Conceptual and Theoretical Synthesis.** Integrates different scholarly perspectives to propose a systematized understanding of phraseological terminology and criteria.



## The main part

Every language possesses its own lexical richness, and the continuous evolution of this richness has always remained at the center of attention of linguists worldwide. Numerous comparative and contrastive studies have been conducted in this regard. In the context of contemporary globalization, this issue has become even more urgent. The reason is that the lexical fund of certain highly developed world languages is expanding day by day with new lexical units. Due to the rapid advancement of science and technology, as well as the unprecedented flow of human intellectual development, various new concepts and expressions—as well as linguistic constructions used to denote them—emerge every moment. As is well known, any innovation serves as the primary source for the emergence of new words or expressions, which, in turn, leads to their investigation within linguistic research.

Below:

- viele Hände machen der Arbeit schnell ein Ende (zu mehreren kann man eine Arbeit scheller erledigen) – ‚ko’pdan quyon qochib qutilmas’;
- eine Hand wäscht die andere (ein Dienst zieht natürlich einen Gegendienst nach sich) – ‚sizdan ugina, bizdan bugina’;
- alle / beide Hände voll zu tun haben (sehr viel zu tun haben; sehr beschäftigt sein) – ‚qulog’igacha band bo’lmoq; ikkala qo’li ham band; juda band bo’lmoq’;
- die Hand in anderer/fremder Leute Taschen haben (stehlen; auf Kosten anderer leben; parasitär verhalten) – ‘ko’z olaytirmoq (birovni cho’ntagiga); -phrases such as 'to live at the expense of others, to be free' are typical representatives of a linguistic phenomenon, which is referred to in today's relevant literature as phraseology.

A variety of terms are used to denote fixed word combinations. Many authors complain about an “almost chaotic terminological diversity” [12]. Such a situation also indicates that phraseology is a relatively young branch of linguistic science. Phraseologism, phraseme, and idiom are terms that have become widely used at the international level today. These terms trace back to the Greek–Latin phrasis meaning “expression”, or the Greek idiōma, which denotes “peculiarity” or “a specific characteristic” [8, 2].



Phraseology is a subfield of lexicology concerned with the study of phraseologisms. “In contrast to German linguistics, Russian linguistics regards phraseology as an independent linguistic system on a par with lexicology” [8, 9]. The subject matter of phraseology consists of phraseologisms/expressions/ idioms. At times we also encounter terms such as phrasal lexemes, idiomatic expressions, or speech formulas. The lexical wealth of a language expands not only through the formation of new words or the borrowing of lexemes from foreign languages, but also, for example, through the semantic specialization and “stabilization” of free syntactic word combinations and word classes. It is precisely in this way that phraseologisms emerge, serving as an important means of enriching the vocabulary.

Today, the term phraseology is understood to refer both to the phraseological units of a language and to the subfield of linguistics that studies them. Phraseological units possess two essential characteristics: each unit must consist of more than one word (polylexicality), and it must contain at least two autosemantic components. These components constitute the lexical elements of the phraseological unit.

The research domain of phraseology includes the following areas: issues related to the lexicology of phraseological materials; criteria of delimitation; problems of contrastiveness and related issues of translation; psycholinguistic aspects (for example, the evaluation of phraseologisms by speakers); variants and polysemy of idioms; and models of semantic description of phraseological units.

The development of phraseology owes much to the early contributions of Russian linguists, whose studies in the 1930s–1940s played a crucial role in establishing a research direction focused on identifying phraseological units within word combinations.

In Europe, the study of phraseology begins with the publication of Charles Bally’s *Traité de stylistique française* [1], which laid the foundations for modern research [3, 18–44]. Bally viewed the essence of the phraseologism in its semantic peculiarity; however, this position led him to a number of contradictions when distinguishing between *séries phraséologiques* (fixed word groups lacking idiomaticity) and *unités phraséologiques* (non-idiomatic fixed expressions). He also raised several issues that remain topics of discussion even today [19, 221].

Nearly a century has passed since then, yet terminological inconsistency persists, and numerous terms continue to be used. Therefore, it is necessary to begin by



addressing the fundamental concepts of phraseology. This task is far from simple, as K. Pils noted in the early 1980s that more than a thousand distinct terms were in circulation within the field [12].

However, the designation of these linguistic units has not been uniform over time: lexeme-like word groups [17], phrasemes [8], fixed word combinations [15, 2], fixed word combinations / phraseological word groups [2, 12], phrasemes, idioms, and so forth. To classify linguistic units as phraseologisms, one must begin with and adhere to the criteria outlined above. A phraseologism is a combination of words or a group of words. According to formal criteria, phraseological units consist of more than one word. K. D. Pils considers this characteristic first and foremost in providing what he calls “the most general definition” of phraseological units [12, 31], although he acknowledges that this definition is rather simplistic: “Thus, a phraseological unit is a lexeme-like word group, that is, at the same time a word-group, i.e., a (morpho)syntactic unit. The absence of meaningless but grammatically correct syntagms as exceptions indicates that it is a semantic unit belonging both to lexical and syntactic domains” [12, 31].

Describing the terminological inconsistency in the field, H. Schemann lists a wide range of the most commonly used terms: “set expressions, idiomatic expressions, phraseological expressions, stable expressions, complex units, phraseological units, prefabricated components, frozen formulas, linguistic formulas, frozen combinations, fixed combinations, phraseological combinations, usage metaphors, linguistic use patterns, fixed uses, idioms, idioticisms, idioms, phrasemes, phraseologisms, expressions, phrasemes, figurative expressions, set expressions, proverbs, compound sentences, idioms, fixed expressions, coined units, language formulas, prefabricated language expressions, autonomous syntagms, fixed syntagms, formulaic combinations, phraseological collocations, patterned expressions, shaped word blocks, fixed lexical groups, fixed word groupings, phraseological word combinations, stable collocations, stable phraseological combinations, and others” [14, 23].

This disorder has now been eliminated, and since then a unified terminology has prevailed in the field of linguistics. At present, the terms phraseologism, phraseme, and idiom dominate, and all of them refer to fixed word combinations. As their synonym, the term phraseological unit is used.



The following works are considered fundamental and highly influential in German phraseological research: Annelies Buhofer, Harald Burger, and Ambros Sialm's **Handbuch der Phraseologie** ("Handbook of Phraseology") [4]; Wolfgang Fleischer's textbooks **Phraseologie der deutschen Gegenwartssprache** ("Phraseology of Contemporary German") [8]; Kristin Palm's **Phraseologie – eine Einführung** ("Phraseology: An Introduction") [11]; and Harald Burger's **Phraseologie. Eine Einführung am Beispiel des Deutschen** ("Phraseology: An Introduction Using German as an Example") [2].

However, one important point must be emphasized: many well-known scholars continue to adhere to and use their own preferred terms. As E. Donalies notes, a linguist who begins to explore this field of phraseology encounters "an almost unmanageable variety of different terms" [6].

There are numerous debates concerning free and fixed word combinations; however, we shall cite the following definitions by Wolfgang Fleischer. In his work *Phraseologie der deutschen Gegenwartssprache* ("Phraseology of Contemporary German"), he provides the following definition of phraseology:

"A phraseologism is an expression that contains at least one autosemantic word. These are combinations of parts of speech whose overall meaning within usage differs from the meaning of their individual components outside of that usage" [8]. In the *Handbuch der Phraseologie* written by Harald Burger, Annelies Buhofer, and Ambros Sialm, phraseologisms are defined as follows:

"A combination of two or more words is considered a phraseological unit if:

- (1) the unity formed by these words cannot be fully explained by syntactic and semantic rules of combination, or
- (2) the expression is widely used within the speech community in the same way as a lexeme" [4].

Some scholars metaphorically compare phraseologisms to "the spice of language," stating that:

"Phraseological expressions enrich the language and can remove excessive rigidity and objectivity from a text. They allow the speaker to impart emotional expressiveness, vividness, and impact" [18, 48].

The phraseology of a language concerns fixed combinations of words that function as secondary linguistic signs. These stable word combinations include structures such as syntagmas or word groups, sentences, and even short texts. Thus, we ask



the question: What is the difference between a free expression and a fixed expression? Let us compare the following expressions:

1. Die Mutter wäscht ihrem Sohn den Kopf

2. Die Mutter sieht sich das Zeugnisbuch des Sohnes an, ist unzufrieden mit ihren Leistungen und wäscht ihm den Kopf.

The difference between a fixed word combination and a free combination consisting of several elements lies in the nature of the linkage between its components. Regarding this, H. Schemann states:

“The inherent meaning of an element is realized in the linguistic context created by another element or elements” [14, 23].

At the beginning of B. Schmitz’s work “Systematisches Wörterbuch und Übungsbuch der deutsch-französischen Phraseologie. Ein Übungsbuch für alle, die sich im Französischen frei ausdrücken wollen”, phraseology is defined as follows:

“The totality of idioms characteristic of a language or an author is referred to as its phraseology... Under this label, generally only collections of idioms are understood. Nevertheless, it can undoubtedly also be taken as a theory of the meaning and usage of expressions” [12].

In contrast, the semantic development of a lexical idiom is described by a meaning variant that is “specific” or “particular” to it. The term idiom appeared in German at the end of the 17th century with the meaning “distinct dialect” [16, 914], and in the 18th century, Gottsched defined idiomatism as “those linguistic phenomena whose unusual development is responsible for the fact that our language cannot be translated word-for-word into another language” [9, 538]. Likewise, the terms idiotikon (“dialect dictionary, regional dictionary”) were used.

In early foreign dictionaries, idiomatology was defined as “the study of the specific features of a language; the study of dialects or linguistic varieties” and also as “idiomatic expressions characteristic of a dialect or language” [10, 428]. Today, the term idiomatics is commonly used instead of idiomatology.

The term idiomacity, used to denote a particular property of some fixed expressions, appeared in German in the 1950s under the influence of the Russian term *идиоматичность* and the English term idiomacity [12, 772].

Local expressions such as idiom (from the French *façon de parler*, attested since 1605) and idioma (lexicographically recorded since 1691 and borrowed from foreign usage) also emerged under the influence of foreign phraseological patterns



[12, 730]. In K. Pils's work, the term phraseologism—as well as fixed expression and set phrase—is used as a general label for all types of linguistic phenomena examined here. Today, phraseology is widely used in two distinct senses:

**A subfield of linguistics** concerned with the study of phraseological units;

**The inventory of phraseological units** belonging to a particular language.

To ensure clarity, the compound term phraseological research is sometimes used for the first meaning, whereas phrasal lexicon (phrasilexica) has been proposed for the second [12, 784].

J. Gottsched typically used the concept of a speech form to unite words or groups of words: words, he argued, “are used individually or in connection with others as figures of speech” [9]. The term idiomatics reflects both scientific and historical development, since the phenomena discussed here were initially considered primarily from the viewpoint of proverbs and proverb-related expressions.

K. With the works of V. Vinogradov (1946), Russian phraseology experienced a significant rise in the 1950s–1960s, establishing itself as an independent scholarly discipline. His tripartite classification of phraseological units dominated the field for many years. Later, this classification was adapted to German by R. Klappenbach [13, 217–218].

L. One of the earliest comprehensive collections of German proverbs appears in M. F. Peters's seventeenth-century three-volume work *Der Teutschen Weißheit*. Unlike Peters, J. G. Shotel included not only proverbs but also proverbial expressions in his collection *Ausführliche Arbeit von der Deutschen Hauptsprache*. W. Mieder, in his work *Das Sprichwort in der deutschen Prosaliteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1976), discusses the role of proverbs in literary texts. Proverbs have been analyzed in numerous works, including those of E. Törner and G. Poikes. The most important modern monolingual collections of idioms were edited by A. Schirmer, W. Borchart, W. Friedrich, L. Röhrich, and H. Gorner, while G. Buchmann introduced the concept of “winged words” (famous quotations and set expressions).

In the 1970s–1980s, German phraseology also became a major object of scholarly investigation. A. Rotkegel provided a structural description and classification of phraseologisms. Unlike A. Rotkegel, the representative of H. Burger's school focuses not on the systematic classification of phraseological units, but rather on describing the linguistically significant properties of idioms [8, 21].



V. Koller devoted his research to the role of phraseological units in the text, distinguishing their stylistic and pragmatic aspects.

D. Heller, K. Daniels, and above all K. D. Pils wrote extensive commentaries on the history of the development of phraseology as a discipline.

In recent years, interest in phraseology has grown considerably, as evidenced by the increasing number of new publications on its various subfields. Among contemporary works, for instance, “Kristina Palm’s *Phraseologie – eine Einführung* offers an accessible and conceptually clear introduction to modern phraseological issues supported with illustrative examples” [2].

Kristina Palm distinguishes between the narrow and broad meanings of phraseology. In the narrow sense, she defines phraseology as “the science that studies fixed combinations of words in a language, or the field that examines the functions and meanings of individual words within a system or sentence” [7, 68].

In the broad sense, phraseologisms are characterized by three main criteria: fixedness, sentence-like value, and idiomaticity. Furthermore, various phraseological phenomena are included in this category, such as proverbs, anti-proverbs, sayings, borrowed proverbs, and winged expressions [11, 3–5].

## **Conclusion**

Phraseology has undergone substantial development over the past century, emerging as a distinct and increasingly influential branch of linguistic science. Despite its progress, the field remains characterized by significant terminological ambiguity, owing to the historical coexistence of multiple linguistic traditions and theoretical approaches. The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that fixed expressions—regardless of whether they are termed idioms, phraseologisms, or phrasemes—play a crucial role in linguistic enrichment, cultural transmission, and communicative expressiveness.

By synthesizing the contributions of major European and Russian scholars, this study underscores the need for a unified and coherent terminological framework. Establishing such a framework would facilitate clearer communication among researchers and support more systematic study of the structural, semantic, and pragmatic properties of phraseological units. Ultimately, phraseology continues to provide valuable insight into how languages conceptualize reality, encode cultural knowledge, and evolve in response to social and intellectual change.



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