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**Phraseology and communication –
Formulaic language in communication**

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Thematic Section: Phraseology and communication – Formulaic language in communication

As a research discipline, phraseology refers to the study of formulaic language and linguistic patterns. The beginning of the modern phraseology research is mostly dated in the early 1970s (Burger 1973, 2005). The first approaches were based on a definition of phraseology as broad field of multi-word units. Yet, for a long time, research focused on idiomatic multi-word units as the core of phraseology. Today though, the scope of phraseology has expanded considerably. Sinclair's "idiom principle" (Sinclair 1991: 110) and especially results from studies in corpus linguistics and construction grammar have made the distinction between a phraseological core and a periphery obsolete (Steyer 2020: 276). Hence, current research encompasses various types of lexicalized multi-word units such as collocations, idioms, proverbs, and other more or less fixed patterns in language.

Steyer (2023: 203) highlights the importance of phraseology in communication. Formulaic language is an essential feature of language use, thus lexical patterns are far more fundamental than previously assumed. "Patterns are the key to why speakers understand each other in everyday communication in spite of ever-changing lexical material, syntactic variance and strong idiosyncrasies." (Steyer 2020: 275). Thus, we communicate according to predefined structures, combining words and lexical units into sentences and sentences into texts according to fixed patterns; in other words, a large part of our communication is characterized by formulaic language. Phraseological lexis, much like single-word lexis, constitutes our communicative competence, and accordingly, a solid knowledge of phraseology is essential for competent language use.

On the lexical level, linguistic patterns are "structures and interrelations of lexical items" (Steyer 2020: 277) with relevance for communication, defined as *usuelle Wortverbindungen* (UWV):

UWVs are conventionalised patterns of language use that manifest themselves in recurrent syntagmatic structures. This includes not only idioms and idiosyncratic structures, but all multiword units that have acquired a distinct function in communication. Our focus is on real-life usage, pragmatics and context. The central characteristic is the autonomous status as a communicative and entrenched cognitive unit [...]. (Steyer 2020: 276)

Newer approaches even go beyond the lexical level focusing on fixed expressions as well as other linguistic structures, e.g. chunks and phraseme constructions. Accordingly, research into phraseology is relevant to a wide range of disciplines and fields of research on communication. The contributions in the 2026 volume of Yearbook of Phraseology provide a representative overview over the diversity and interdisciplinarity of current phraseological research (Stumpf & Konecny 2026/in press).

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This thematic section contains articles based on five plenary talks at the international conference *Phraseology and communication – Formulaic Language in Communication* that was held at Aarhus University 19-22 May 2025.¹ The conference was organized by *The European Society of Phraseology*² (EUROPHRAS) and the Department of German and Romance languages at the Aarhus University, Denmark and supported by the Carlsberg Foundation, grant CF24-2257, and The European Society of Phraseology.

The conference aimed at exploring formulaic language from an interdisciplinary perspective with focus on the many facets of phraseology in communication. Hence, the thematic section represents current interdisciplinary discussions at the intersection of phraseology as a research discipline and the broad field of communication research. The authors present qualitative and quantitative approaches to formulaic language from different disciplines such as sustainability communication, specialized communication, specific use of formulaic language in genres and media, phraseology in language education and development of theoretical frameworks within semantics and cognitive linguistics.

To be able to communicate, thus, to put knowledge, ideas and opinions into words, it is essential to have command of adequate expressions. Even though sustainability has been an important issue for some time now, the language of sustainability is constantly evolving. In her contribution, *Environmental Sustainability Communication and Evolutions in Formulaic Language*, **Antoinette Fage-Butler** discusses the role and future goals of research on formulaic language in relation to the indisputable relevance of phraseology in the language of environmental sustainability. With examples ranging from shifting climate terminology (global warming, climate crisis, climate catastrophe) to metaphors used in environmental science (planetary boundaries, tipping points, overdrawing on our planet's accounts) and linguistic choices in discourse (living *from*, *in*, *with*, and *as* Nature) she demonstrates how formulaic language is used to negotiate worldviews, identities, and responsibilities and thereby emphasizes the importance of phraseology in communication. She thereby places language at the forefront of societal change and emphasizes the need for stronger linguistic awareness with focus on e.g. inventing new words and phrases to be able to address the challenges of sustainability adequately. Ultimately, the article positions phraseology as a methodological bridge between linguistic analysis and societal transformation. Drawing on approaches from research on phraseology, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, framing analysis, pragmatics and semantics, she shows how phraseologists can contribute to the "green transition" not only by investigating language use but also by helping to compose new linguistic resources for more sustainable ways of living.

The realization of formulaic language, its forms and functions, in selected text types or media, including spoken, written, and digital communication of a linguistic community or individuals is an important field of research on phraseology. In his article, *A Rendezvous with Destiny" Franklin D. Roosevelt's Proverbial Rhetoric for Freedom and Peace*, **Wolfgang Mieder** offers a detailed exploration of how one of the most influential American presidents strategically used proverbial rhetoric to make complex political realities understandable for citizens and thus to shape public sentiment during some of the most turbulent moments of the 20th century. Mieder begins by outlining two dominating concepts: *Freedom* as a central motif in Roosevelt's communication, and the closely related concept of *Neighborliness* as the necessity of good neighborly relationships. He highlights that the ways Roosevelt's puts these concepts into words, thus his use of linguistic patterns, are not

¹ Selected papers from the conference have been published in the conference proceedings, cf. Chrissou et al. (2026), Engberg et al. (2026) and Heier et al. (2026).

² *The European Society of Phraseology* (EUROPHRAS: www.europhras.org) is an international and interdisciplinary academic society of researchers working on formulaic language and multi-word units. The society has members from a wide range of different research disciplines from about 50 countries around the world. EUROPHRAS was founded in Germany in 1999, and the EUROPHRAS 2025 conference in Aarhus was the 13th regular conference (with general assembly) of the society.

merely to be considered as memorable political statements but as fixed expressions that have entered the proverbial repertoire of American culture. Following with a definition of categories such as quotations, Biblical proverbs, folk proverbs, proverbial expressions, animal metaphors, and maritime phrases he then analyses Roosevelt's use of proverbs in the context of the communication i.e. discusses the proverbial rhetoric in relation to influential events and significant situations of his time as president. Based on the analysis, the article emphasizes the great importance of proverbs for the communicative style of Roosevelt, showing how phraseology can become an instrument of national rhetoric, shaping collective memory and political identity.

Phraseology is a key area of teaching and learning languages. Most current research focuses on the implementation of formulaic language in existing educational frameworks, curricula and textbooks as well as the development of new didactic concepts and teaching materials. In her contribution, *A tough nut to crack (or not)? L2 learners' phraseological development viewed from different perspectives*, **Griet Boone** presents a multi-perspective research approach to investigate how learners acquire phraseology in German as a foreign language. From a researcher-driven perspective she presents a three-year longitudinal study of Dutch-speaking learners of German. The study reveals substantial individual variation and shows that factors such as L1–L2 congruency and prior vocabulary knowledge significantly influence collocation learning. Boone complements this perspective with a students' perspective, drawing on interviews and written reflections that illuminate learners' own strategies, motivations, frustrations, and moments of insight that influence the learning process. A third perspective, rarely addressed in phraseological research, comes from L1 German business professionals, who evaluated non-target-like formulaic expressions produced by advanced L2 users. Boone's findings show that in workplace communication, clarity of message often outweighs linguistic accuracy, and that L1 professionals tend to be tolerant and even appreciative of unconventional L2 efforts if the message of the communication is clear. Bringing together longitudinal quantitative data, qualitative learner reflections, and a perception study with L1 business professionals, Boone provides a comprehensive and practice-oriented account of phraseology in foreign language learning. She emphasizes the importance of paying sustained attention to formulaic language in the classroom. At the same time, she also reminds teachers and learners that effective communication, particularly in intercultural professional contexts, depends on more than just the perfect use of phraseology.

Phraseology is an essential part of professional vocabulary in specialized communication, for example in tourism, business, economics, law, medicine and health sectors but also in academic, science and technical communication. In her contribution, *Collocations in specialized communication: interlingual, corpus-driven and corpus-based perspectives and applications*, **Caroline Flinz** combines research on language for special purposes (LSP) with language education. She offers a comprehensive and methodologically innovative account of collocations as central building blocks of lexical competence. From the perspective of language learning, she positions collocations in specialized communication at the interface between linguistic structure, language usage and didactic mediation and argues in favor of an interdisciplinary approach. By integrating theoretical models with corpus-driven and corpus-based methods Flinz shows how collocations can be systematically extracted from authentic LSP corpora to reveal their preferred syntagmatic environments, domain-specific formulaicity, and genre conventions. This integrative perspective allows Flinz to highlight the limitations of general-language lexicographic resources, and to argue for domain- and context-sensitive collocational descriptions that support both linguistic accuracy and communicative adequacy. By examples from two of her projects, on tourism language and everyday language in scientific communication, she illustrates how corpus data can be transformed into user-oriented vocabulary selection, clear lexicographic entries, and data-driven learning scenarios that help learners acquire not only specialized terminology but also its conventional lexical contexts. Thereby, she shows how phraseology, when combined with corpus linguistics, can be fruitfully explored in both linguistic analysis and the implementation of LSP in foreign language education.

Theories of phraseology are subject to ongoing development. A broad definition of the research objects of phraseology as formulaic language or linguistic patterns has consequences for the theory, terminology, and applied aspects of phraseology research. In the same way, the development of linguistic theories influences research approaches within phraseology. In her article, *Kognitive Metaphern- und Metonymietheorie und die Semantik der idiomatischen Mehrwortverbindungen*, **Anna Sulikowska** presents an innovative multifactorial model to describe the meaning and motivation processes of figurative idioms from a cognitive perspective. Responding to long-standing criticism of the cognitive metaphor theory within German-language phraseology, Sulikowska argues that the assumed shortcomings stem from a narrow application of the theory, not the theory as such. Phraseological research, she shows, has largely relied on the early version of cognitive metaphor theory while overlooking later developments, the expanded role of metonymy, and the diversity of metaphor types now recognized in cognitive linguistics. Sulikowska concludes that newer cognitive approaches offer a comprehensive framework for exploring the meaning of figurative idioms. She proposes a multifactorial model of idiom meaning that integrates conceptual metaphors, metonymies, image schemas, primary metaphors, epistemic mappings, and mental imagery. Her detailed analysis of the idiom *money slips through someone's fingers* demonstrates how idiomatic meaning emerges not from a single metaphorical shift but from the interaction of multiple conceptual structures as well as metonymic chains tied to the literal scene of hands, gripping, and losing control. With her analysis, she shows how the processes of meaning constitution of figurative idioms can be described at system level. Her multifactorial cognitive modelling reframes idiomatic meaning as a dynamic conceptual routine rather than a fixed mapping, offering new insights into how cognitive metaphor theory can contribute to the theory of phraseological semantics.

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