

Common features in the phraseology of European languages: cultural and areal perspectives

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Common points in the phraseology of European languages are often attributed to some “European cultural heritage”, a term which is then usually not defined any further. One of the tasks of the project “Widespread Idioms in Europe and Beyond” is to use systematic empirical research to describe these cultural roots more precisely. First of all, it was essential to determine which idioms actually share a relatively identical lexical and semantic structure across a large number of languages, and thus could be called “widespread”. So-called “pre-tests” were an important step in this process. They were carried out using some 1,500 potential widespread idioms in 12 genetically and geographically diverse European languages. The result was a core set of about 250 actual widespread idioms, which were then checked for occurrence in many further languages.

The project considers not only national languages but also small or regional languages within Europe’s various language families, plus a few non-European languages for comparison. It so far involves 74 languages. By analogy with the methods of areal linguistics, the linguistic data is projected onto a map of Europe in order to interpret the occurrence of the idioms from an areal perspective.

Most widespread idioms can be classified according to particular domains of cultural knowledge, with idioms that go back to well-known sources like the Bible or classical texts making up the largest class. Here the widespread use is often not due to borrowings from one language into another but owed to the fact that individual languages have integrated, independently of one another, texts from the same source into their phraseological systems. For many of the small languages, however, there was no need to adopt educated linguistic elements into their individual phraseology.

All in all, the idea of an underlying “cultural heritage” can now be stated more precisely in some respects. There is a great variety of cultural domains that play a role in the constitution of common phraseological features, ranging from pre-scientific domains (e.g. alchemy, popular belief, folk medicine), historical events and semiotised gestures through to elements of exotic, non-European cultures. Most common phraseological features in different European languages must be attributed not to the present but rather to an earlier form of ‘globalisation’, which took place at a time when the educated classes of many European countries were in contact with each other, exchanging ideas through written discourse.

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“Many Roads Lead to Globalization”

The Translation and Distribution of Anglo-American Proverbs in Europe

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There exists a long tradition of borrowing proverbs and proverbial expressions from one language and culture to another. Paremiologists like Friedrich Seiler, Archer Taylor, Matti Kuusi, Gyula Paczolay, and many others have shown that this process of loan translations has taken place in three major waves in Europe with similar processes occurring in other areas of the world: 1. numerous proverbs from Greek and Roman antiquity appeared in identical translations throughout Europe, 2. Biblical proverbs were translated into all vernacular languages, and 3. medieval Latin proverbs also were taken over into the emerging national languages. Later centuries saw additional loan translations, but they did not have the widespread geographical, cultural, and linguistic distribution as those of these three major waves. There is, however, a fourth wave of international proverb translations in progress that started to a certain degree in the nineteenth century and that has now reached considerable proportions due to the fact that the English language has become the *lingua franca* of the modern world. Anglo-American proverbs in particular have spread globally to those countries where English is the major language. But they have also been accepted to some degree into European languages without being translated because so many Europeans as globally conscious citizens are fluent in English. In addition, numerous English-language proverbs have become current as loan translations with speakers often being unaware that the proverbs are by origin not part of their national repertoires.

The German language and culture have proven themselves for a number of reasons to be especially willing to accept both English language proverbs and/or their loan translations. This can be seen by contextualized examples of such proverbs as “The early bird catches the worm”, “One picture is worth a thousand words”, “It takes two to tango”, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away”, “Don’t put all of your eggs into one basket”, “Don’t swap horses in the middle of the stream”, “Good fences make good neighbors”, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence”, and others. The same is true for proverbial expressions like “to be in the same boat”, “to give (get) the green light”, “to steal the show”, etc. As these proverbs enter the German and various other European languages, they slowly but surely become part of the modern paremiological minimum and as such they should be registered in proverb collections and mono- and bilingual dictionaries. With oral, written, and visual mass media and tourism, economics, and politics helping to spread these proverbs and proverbial phrases, paremiologists need to pay much more attention to the multifaceted roads of this phenomenon that augments global communication.

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Remarks on Russian phrasemes in European languages

Due to the fact that Russian is an Indo-European language and because of a long history of common traditions and exchanges, it has a great number of phrasemes in common with other European languages. The widespread hypothesis of a former Balto-Slavic community is partly supported by findings of Balto-Slavic phrasemes and it is assumed that there is a “pool” of common Slavic phrasemes and even common East Slavic phrasemes. The dominant position of Russia in the Slavic world during different historical and ideological periods (Panslavism, Communism) caused numerous borrowings of phrasemes. In “Western” languages there is much less evidence of such borrowings, although already early reports by travellers (cf. Herberstein) present Russian phrasemes. Nowadays we find Russian realia in the phrasemes (very often blazons) of European languages, but direct borrowings are rare and mainly caused by political reasons. There are even cases of famous “borrowings” which are wrongly attributed to a Russian origin.

National linguo-cultural specificity vs. linguistic globalization: the case of figurative meaning

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It is widely accepted that idioms and proverbs reflect and transmit many important aspects of the cultural heritage embedded in the language of each nation. Languages propagate implicit "thought schemes" that are not directly accessible, and form an implicit set of expectancies about rights and duties, about what is possible or valuable and what is not. In this sense, the study of such ethno-specific particularities connects linguistics and cultural anthropology (or "culturology" according to the Russian tradition).

However, at the same time, languages are not completely free from the general tendencies to a "European" convergence affecting many fields of human activity (not only now but also in certain periods of the past).

Comparative cross-linguistic description and the analysis of these opposed tendencies show that European languages metaphoric systems also reflect a kind of "linguistic globalization of thought", connected to the particular world vision of the inhabitants of wider communities, if not all Europe, creating and reflecting some cognitive and cultural schemes embedded into metaphors, proverbs and other figurative "plots".

FÖLDES, Csaba (Veszprém/Ungarn):

Auswirkungen der deutschen Sprache auf die Phraseologie ihrer östlichen Nachbarsprachen, mit besonderem Blick auf slawische Sprachen und das Ungarische

Die Kontakte des Deutschen mit seinen Nachbarsprachen im Ostmittel- und Osteuropa waren seit eh und je noch intensiver und tief greifender als im Hinblick auf die Nachbarsprachen im Westen. So kann man insbesondere im Mitteleuropäischen Kultur-, Integrations- und Kontaktraum eine überraschende Vielzahl gemeinsamer phraseologischer Bilder und Ausdrücke registrieren. Dies ist vor allem im Falle solcher Sprachenkonstellationen wie Deutsch und Ungarisch besonders interessant, zumal diese Sprachen weder genetisch miteinander verwandt sind noch eine typologische Ähnlichkeit aufweisen. Es lässt sich mithin ein genuiner mitteleuropäischer phraseologischer Konvergenzraum postulieren.

In diesem Zusammenhang thematisiert das Referat die Verbreitung der deutschen Phraseologie in slawischen Sprachen sowie im Ungarischen und versucht die Spannbreite von Phänomenklassen und -typen (direkter und indirekter) phraseologischer Sprachkontakte zu erfassen, zu typisieren und zu interpretieren.

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of Globalization: Phraseology – a burden or a benefit*”

Arme Ritter zwischen Baum und Borke?
Phraseologismen deutscher Herkunft im hohen Norden.

Für viele phraseologische Phänomene und Prozesse sind historische Sprach- und Kulturkontakte innerhalb Europas nach wie vor ein ergiebiges Forschungsfeld. Nach kurzen Bemerkungen zu dem gegenwärtigen Stand in der germanistischen, fennistischen und skandinavistischen Lehnphraseologieforschung werden in dem Beitrag einige wenige aufgrund der Burger'schen weiten Phraseokonzeption (besonders beachtet werden unterschiedlich strukturierte Idiome, Geflügelte Worte und Sprichwörter) und der lexikographisch bestimmaren Äquivalenztypologie von Korhonen herangezogene Phraseologismen in Hinsicht auf ihre Struktur, Semantik und Textpragmatik en detail besprochen: Sprachlich-kulturelle Eigenarten der Entlehnung deutscher Phraseologismen ins Schwedische und ins Finnische (auch mit Blick auf das Dänische und auf das Estnische) werden in ihrer sowohl gegenwartbezogenen als auch historischen Dynamik exemplarisch umrissen, indem maßgebliche Wörterbücher und Textkorpora miteinander kritisch vergleichend für sprachphilologische Einzelbeobachtungen zu Rate gezogen werden mit dem Ziel, angesichts der reichen europäischen Phraseotraditionen auch zu allgemeineren, sprachempirisch eruierbaren Erkenntnissen über die Rolle der deutschen Sprache und Kultur in unserer globalen Welt gelangen zu können.

Französische und italienische Einflüsse auf die deutsche Phraseologie – Wann es sie gab und ob es sie heute noch gibt

Harald Burger/Peter Zürcher (Zürich/Schweiz)

Die heutige Phraseologie des Deutschen weist noch eine Reihe von Entlehnungen aus dem Italienischen und Französischen (Lehnphraseologismen oder Lehnübersetzungen italienischer und französischer Phraseologismen) auf, die aus der Sprachgeschichte seit dem 16. Jahrhundert erhalten geblieben sind. Neue Entlehnungen im Lauf des 20. Jahrhunderts sind vor allem noch als „Geflügelte Worte“ zu registrieren. Die romanischen Sprachen sind seit dem 19. Jahrhundert als Phraseologie-Spender für das Deutsche vom Englischen weitgehend abgelöst worden. So enthalten jüngste lexikographische Sammlungen „neuen“ Wortschatzes zwar zahlreiche englische, aber keine italienischen oder französischen Entlehnungen mehr. Im Laufe der Geschichte des Neuhochdeutschen spielte sich ein vergleichbarer Vorgang vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert ab, insofern das zunächst dominante Italienische gänzlich vom Französischen verdrängt wurde. Aus dieser lexikographisch relativ gut belegten (allerdings phraseographisch kaum erforschten) Epoche sowie aus den späteren Phasen bis heute sollen charakteristische Beispiele genauer diskutiert werden.