

# **Dealing with phraseology in business dictionaries: focus on dictionary functions – not phrases**

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## **Abstract**

The language of written business communication is characterised by the extensive use of phraseology, not only in terms of collocations and idiomatic expressions, but also of standard phrases in prototypical business genres. In any case, the phraseological information should be included in business dictionaries (in the following referred to as BDs) in accordance with the planned dictionary functions. Hence, the selection and presentation of the phraseological information should be decided by the lexicographer on the basis of the user needs alone and not on the recommendations of the phraseological literature about lexicographical practice. In this paper, I will firstly explain why lexicography and phraseology, although closely associated in a large number of studies, are quite different disciplines, and how their shared interest for dictionary practice in general is based on radically different views. I will then discuss the dictionary functions of BDs and focus on a number of concepts featuring extensive phraseological solutions to show and argue that dealing with phraseology in BDs should always keep focus on dictionary functions.

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## **1 For better or for worse – the scientific marriage of lexicography and phraseology**

Phraseology – regardless of its focus on pragmatics and culture or on linguistics proper – and lexicography have so to speak been "married" to each other for many years. For better or for worse their marriage has been a matter of insatiable scientific interest for phraseologists and lexicographers. A bibliography of lexicography-related phraseology on the EURALEX home page<sup>1</sup> contains over 1700 references in which the dictionary tends to be regarded as a natural outcome of this scientific marriage. Still, those references are probably only but the tip of the iceberg. Also, phraseological sessions are compulsory parts of most lexicographical conferences. There are two plausible explanations to this mutual interest. The first explanation is to be found in a maximizing definition of phraseology. As Farø (2005: 14) puts it, phraseology deals with all multiword combinations that are relevant to the vocabulary:

Als Ausgangspunkt ist festzustellen, dass die Phraselogie sich mit allen wortschatzrelevanten Mehrwortverbindungen beschäftigt, d. h. auch mit Kollokationen und Sprichwörtern.

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<sup>1</sup> The list can be found on <http://www.euralex.org/euralex/bibweb/.windows-1250>

So does lexicography obviously, as it must necessarily deal not only with words (monolexical units) but also with their significant combinations (polylexical units). Needless to say, that explanation is naïve. The second explanation is that linguists working on the idiomaticity of the language system (= the phenomena of semantic transfers, tropic or not, through polysemy at the level of monolexical units and of fixedness at the level of polylexical units (cf. Gross 1996 and Mejri 2004)) tend to assign two dimensions to phraseology: the dictionary practice on the one hand and the syntagmatic character of word sequences on the other. Following this line of thought, the first explanation raises so-called "practical" problems as to the user-friendly description and arrangement of the syntagmatic sequences, while the second raises theoretical problems as to the description of the phenomenon of polylexicity. Consequently, there are two ways of looking at the relationship between lexicography and phraseology, depending on who is in charge, the lexicographer as a dictionary maker or the phraseologist as a linguist:

1. The treatment of phraseology by lexicographers in accordance with the findings of the phraseological literature.
2. The studies of phraseology by linguists insofar as they make recommendations as to the treatment of phraseology in dictionaries.

In both cases, the dictionary conceived as some shared product of the two disciplines seems to be the combining factor that maintains this marriage. It should obviously be dissolved because lexicography and phraseology should never have been scientifically married in the first place. Lexicography is a scientific discipline of its own (cf. Tarp 1998: 121–137) and has dictionaries as its object of study, whereas phraseology is a sub-discipline of linguistics and has multiword combinations as its scientific object. Lexicography being an eclectic science, it certainly welcomes contributions from linguistics, including phraseology and its paremiological branch, as well as from all kinds of scientific disciplines for that matter. But lexicography in the narrow sense only welcomes contributions that are relevant to the development of functional dictionaries and dictionary concepts. Hence, phraseology must be seen merely as a lexicographical data type which is not particularly interesting alone, but only insofar as the dictionary functions are concerned. The third way of looking coherently on phraseology and lexicography is as follows:

3. The treatment of phraseology by lexicographers in accordance with the planned dictionary functions.

This is particularly true of BDs, in which phraseology can be selected and integrated in a number of ways, all depending on the planned dictionary functions and the intended user

groups. This is also true of tailor-made BDs that are specifically designed to help users in corporations, in either communication- or knowledge-oriented user situations.

## **2 Dictionary functions of BDs – the multiple phraseological perspectives**

BDs and their correlate: corporate dictionaries are specialized tools that must be specifically designed to assist dictionary users by bringing lexicographical solutions to the problems they might encounter in particular user situations related either to business communication or to business knowledge needs in their mother tongue (L1) or in the foreign language (L2). More specifically, users look up in BDs to get help to write business texts, including certain business genres, to read and understand business texts, and to translate business texts from or into their mother tongue. They can also look up in BDs to acquire knowledge, independently of any text activity. They do so by learning, sporadically or systematically, the language of business in general or the language of their particular business area, or the knowledge of the business itself (cf. Bergenholtz/Tarp 2005: 11–25, for a detailed discussion of the different categories of dictionary functions). For the author of a BD, the lexicographic assignment is to identify precisely who the intended user groups are, to acknowledge their business competences and their business needs (degree of language proficiency in L1 and in L2, degree of knowledge of the business field and of the specialized language particular to this business field, etc.), and to identify what types of problems might occur in the foreseen user situations. In short: what kind of tool, what kind of users, what kind of functions are to be performed, and in what user situations? These are the basic questions to ask before even thinking of designing a dictionary concept for business users. These are also the same questions that apply to the treatment of phraseological data types in BDs. This means that business phraseology is only interesting as long as it is treated out of consideration for the needs of the intended business users. From a functional lexicographical point of view, it also means that the attempts to define and uniformly categorise and classify the terminology of phraseology according to all sorts of linguistic criteria are of no particular relevance for the treatment of phraseology in BDs. Business phraseology is not a data type *per se*, but a data type among many others that can be selected and presented in multiple ways by the lexicographer, all depending on the planned dictionary functions. Phraseology cannot become a paramount solution in BDs in relation to translation problems. This might explain why Humbley (2002: 96), commenting on the studies of terminology and terminographical dictionaries designed to assist business translators, could not confirm the fresh phraseological enthusiasm that characterized the new scientific alliance of terminographers and phraseologists at the beginning of the nineties (cf. Pavel et al. 1993).

## **3 Advanced learner's BD – the linguistic phraseology perspective**

The DAFA (Bertels et al. 2000–) is an innovative, "monolingual" online learner's dictionary of business French for advanced foreign learners, in which the phraseological perspective was systematically foregrounded. The lexicographical methodology is based on the systematic use

of an explanatory and combinatory description of the business vocabulary in French, the basic didactic assumption being that this method of designing data presentation and structuring should greatly facilitate the sporadic or systematic learning process of the business language. The dictionary is also designed to assist the users in connection with text production directly in French (the authors call it "encoding") and to a certain extent assist them in connection with the production phase of translation, when words and ideas are still formulated in the mother tongue. The dictionary is definitely not suited for L1>L2 or L2>L1 translation of texts. Albeit very impressive because of its rich and systematic treatment of the lexical data types at the syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels, including information on synonymy, antonymy, grammar, usage notes, textual examples, encyclopaedic notes and contextual information in the form of concordances etc., the DAFA seems to compromise the concept of user-friendliness because of the predominance of its linguistic approach, and thereby to compromise its planned dictionary functions.

Although basically monolingual, the DAFA features a multilingual access of the  $L_{1(a,b,c,d,e)} > L2 > L_{1(a,b,c,d,e)}$  type whereby the user can initiate his search in the mother tongue from a springboard index (English, German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch) and obtain basic help with translations of the entries of the L2 wordlist. The advanced interface of the MySQL database with PHP scripts provides dynamic, hypertextual access to all collocations and idiomatic expressions as well as to detailed valency patterns of verbs and their prototypical arguments, including word derivations. Thus, the user can navigate throughout the multiple layers of the dictionary and explore the rich paradigmatic and syntagmatic information that is linked to the entries and their related keywords. After entering the entry or keyword in the search window, the user is taken to a word combination index where all related lexical items are hyperlinked. Unfortunately, combination indexes are not alphabetized as the lexical items seem to be arranged according to onomasiological criteria which are not obvious to the user. For the entry *contrat* for example, the index list includes a list of stereotyped verbs that can be combined with *contrat* (*négocier, signer, conclure, passer, décrocher, obtenir, remporter, placer, etc.*) as well as a list of word combinations containing the word *contrat* (*contrat d'achat, contrat d'assurance, gros contrat, contrat énorme, en vertu du contrat, etc.*). No distinction, however, is made between syntagms that are genuine terminological units with classifying properties (*contrat d'achat*), free and transparent syntagms (*gros contrat*) and idiomatic expressions, as the entry *affaire* for example (*homme d'affaires vs l'affaire est dans le sac*). Clicking on any item of the index will take the user to the "dictionary article" page from which the definitory and collocational information can be retrieved. Unfortunately, collocations are not accessible directly but must be chosen from a polysemic menu (semantic discrimination of entries) in which they are classified and structured in accordance with the syntactic patterns of the base and its collocates (+noun, +adjective, +verb, etc.) and in accordance with their lexical functions (type, characterization, measure, level, others, etc.). Although greatly simplified, the lexical description is in line with the linguistic description developed by Mel'čuk (1984–1999) within the framework of the meaning-sense theory

applied to the ambitious and time-consuming DECFC dictionaries<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the same kind of description and access is applied to the treatment of idiomatic expressions, which in many cases remain opaque to the user.

In short, the DAFA is both an impressive and at the same time disappointing dictionary: impressive because of the extensiveness of the phraseological information, disappointing because of the very limited interlingual assistance and the linguistic access structures. Thus, the main problem does not lie in the analytic quality of the phraseological information itself, but in the adaptation of the phraseological data types to the planned dictionary functions. Learner's dictionaries essentially combine knowledge- and communication-oriented functions (cf. Tarp 2004: 300–304); in the DAFA, the priority is obviously given to knowledge acquisition by way of fine-grained representation of the phraseological knowledge that is based on the idea of a mental lexicon. On the other hand, communication needs and communication solutions to communication problems are largely underestimated, especially in text production in the foreign language. For the non-native user, the general problem remains the easy access to the information needed because the concept presupposes a very high degree of proficiency in the foreign language. The abstract quality of the onomasiological arrangement, the interlinked semantic networks and the syntactic and semantic valency patterns also imply that the advanced users are familiar with this linguistic line of thought and with its terminology, which is not very likely. Finally, the fragmentation of access to the phraseological data types and the quasi-total suppression of semasiological principles reduce the functional felicity conditions of the dictionary: the fast and simple access to the lexicographical data types in order to retrieve the information needed when producing texts in the foreign language<sup>3</sup>.

#### **4 Monolingual technical BD – the terminographical phraseology perspective**

The DOPT developed by Pedersen (1995) illustrates the built-in limitations of the terminographical phraseology perspective. The dictionary consists of a monolingual English dictionary to which L1 springboard wordlists can be addressed. Other languages can also be easily implemented when needed. The dictionary is designed for the users working at a large Danish manufacturer of pump solutions, who use English as their corporate language. The dictionary concept is based on the functional recommendations formulated by Bergenholtz/Tarp (1994: 16–25) in *Manual of Specialised Lexicography* in which the authors, among other things, criticize the disastrous lack of phraseological information in most specialized dictionaries. Collocations are considered a crucial lexicographical data type in

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noticing that the DECFC at present only describes a total amount of 500 lexical items.

<sup>3</sup> A directive user survey conducted by the authors of the DAFLES for LGP (cf. Binon et al. 2002-, and Selva/Verlinde 2002), which is designed by the same team and on the basis of the same principles as the DAFA, reveals that Dutch speaking users have difficulty in finding and retrieving the information needed, and that the interlingual assistance has been largely underestimated. In any case, the survey does not really reflect user problems in genuine user situations, as it is designed as a series of directive search tasks matching the specific access and presentation structures of the dictionary.

specialized dictionaries, and Bergenholtz/Tarp (1994: 117–126) strongly recommend that a large number of collocations are included in dictionaries in order to help virtually all types of users in communication-oriented user situations, in particular text production in L2. Thus, phraseology is richly represented in the dictionary of pump technology.

There is no doubt that the dictionary concept of the DOPT is a valuable contribution to the metalexigraphic theory of specialised dictionaries, including among other things a systematic introduction to the subject field as well as specific, differential grammatical information dealing with the characteristics of technical English. However, there are nevertheless two problems. First, the dictionary concept is based on a terminological view of the industrial activity, not as an industrial business field, as it should be, but as a technological subject field. This means that phraseological data types belonging to the commercial language of the industrial activity are disregarded. Limiting the scope of the dictionary concept to technological English reduces the number of users to the single category of technical text producers and technical writers. This makes the DOPT unable to provide assistance to problems encountered in connection with commercial L2 text production in genres such as catalogues in which terminological phraseology is mixed with commercial phraseology (cf. Cortès 2004: 135–161), brochures, etc. These business genres can raise problems to the users who, although familiar with the technological phraseology, are not familiar with the specific phraseology of pump promotion in particular or with the language use of publicity material in general. Due to the terminographical perspective, the real number of potential dictionary users can also prove to be rather limited because the L2 terminology of pumps will normally be mastered by most expert users of the group, and thus be of little interest for them. Second, the terminographical perspective leads to new dictionary proposals for the inclusion of user-unfriendly phraseological comments. For the Danish verb *afbryde* (= 'break, cut off, disconnect, interrupt, shut down, shut off, switch off, trip'), the lexicographical description recommended by Pedersen (1998: 53–65) includes the use of the following unexplained ad hoc categories that are addressed to the English "equivalents" and their collocations: *+/-agent, +/-connection, +/-instrument, +/-process, +/-permanence*.

**break** <v+o>

+/-agent, +connection, +instrument, +process, -permanence

▲ ~ the power to the motor

**cut off** <phr v+o; pt and pp cut off>

+agent, +connection, +instrument, +process, +/-permanence

▲ ~ air supply to the pump; ~ any flow to the auger; ~ the power; ~ the pump; ~ the supply of current

Because of the abstract format of the data types and of the plurality of options (the configuration of the plus and minus sign do not permit the user to establish unambiguous semantic discrimination in all cases), this presentation does not really help the user to select the correct equivalent and is largely superfluous. The semantic information also makes the

article structure unnecessarily complicated. It would be preferable to explicit the main usage constraints of the verbs, including explicit comments on the nature and degree of synonymy, and to bring exhaustive lists of corpus-based collocates as well as textual examples. To sum up, the side effects of the phraseological terminographical perspective include a reduction of the potential user groups because of a limited phraseological data type selection and a potential, increasing complexity of the phraseological data type description.

## 5 Bilingual BDs – the functional phraseology perspective

The functional concept of the bilingual *DFE* (Danino et al. 1999) and *FDE* (Kruse et al. forthcoming) – Danish-French and French-Danish paper BDs – has primarily been developed to help Danish users to solve problems in connection with text production in French, particularly within the prototypical genre of business correspondence, as business letters today are normally written directly in the foreign language and are no longer translated. The Danish users that do not have the sufficient French proficiency to do so can still look up in the Danish-French wordlist and get the information needed there, but it should be noticed that the L1-L2 part includes a large number of implicit and explicit references (5,300) to the L2-L1 list. The users are then prompted to consult the L2-L1 list. Thus, the two volumes constitute an asymmetric dictionary that can optimize help in connection with text production in the foreign language without compromising the needs related to the text translation functions (L1>L2, L2>L1 and also L2 reception).

The principle of functional asymmetry applies to the treatment of the extensive business phraseology data types: whereas collocations and idiomatic expressions belonging to the world of business are all translated in the L1-L2 part, only non-compositional polylexical sequences are translated in the L2-L1 volume, simply to ensure the user that the right form has been found. Generally speaking, the whole treatment of the extensive phraseological data types features the basis of the functional perspective to the detriment of the linguistic perspective:

- Simplified article structure in which collocation and standard phrases are listed alphabetically in a common phraseological article field, regardless of the polysemy treatment of the lemmas and their related equivalents: this treatment ensures fast outer access to the required forms as the user is not particularly interested in semantic discrimination on its own (meaning descriptions), but only wants to retrieve the correct information required.
- Cross references from business phraseology data types to functional sections outside the wordlist. For instance, the Danish business letter endings make use of the conventional phrase *med venlig hilsen* (= *best regards*), whereas French letter endings strategies include a large number of lexical phrases, syntactic constructions and cohesive devices that are determined by pragmatic factors due to the situational context (combining degree of

politeness and specific speech acts, etc.). A simple cross reference from the entry *hilsen* leads the user to the French letter ending section.

- A corpus of parallel L1 and L2 business letters highlighting selected phraseological items in authentic business correspondence situations (epistolary discourse).

## 6 Corporate BDs – the extended business phraseology perspective

### 6.1 Including metaphorical phraseology

The creation of metaphors demonstrates the same semantic mutation phenomena as idiomatic expressions. But are they relevant to the vocabulary? Admittedly, it is true that the linguistic forms of metaphors do not possess language specific idiomatic features, insofar as the symbolic mechanisms used to infer meaning are actually working in the same way whatever language is concerned; furthermore, metaphors are unstable. Yet, productive and highly predictable metaphorical patterns and networks can prove to be very useful lexicographical data types to assist text production functions in specific user situations, in particular in relation to text production needs in L2 in which they can be reproduced according to genre conventions.

It is argued in Leroyer/Møller (2004) that the vocabulary of football must not only be viewed as a specialized vocabulary featuring a large number of syntactic and semantic constraints (= the collocations of the subject field) as argued by Gross/Guenther (2002), but also as a highly mediated language and a business, mostly in use in written journalistic genres. For the concept of a football dictionary for journalistic text production directly in L2 and for learning, it means a much larger number of phraseological data types to be selected. Falster Jakobsen (2005: 147–149) defends the idea that the discursive function of idiomatic phrasemes<sup>4</sup>, including metaphors and their networks, is to entertain, "delectare", rather than to inform, "docere". Leroyer/Møller (2004) believe that the discursive use of football metaphors and fixed expressions that are embedded in football metaphors have a symbolic function in texts: to show and tell through stories that the written universe of football games reports is much more than technically referring to, say, the course and outcome of a particular football match. Football texts reflect a culture based on shared beliefs, a mythology of which meaning can be easily inferred. A football victory, a *victoire* in French can collocate with support verbs such as *arracher*, *assurer*, *concéder*, *digérer*, *goûter*, *offrir*, *signer*, *remporter*, *voler*, which infer different meaning all depending on the metaphorical networks at play (*war*, *food*, *art*, etc.), while a defeat, *défaite*, only collocates with *encaisser* for the losing part, and *infliger* when seen from the winning part's point of view (*victims*, *punishments*). The phraseological data types should naturally be accessed directly from the L2 wordlist and could also be onomasiologically structured in accordance with the metaphorical networks at play in

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noticed that there is no terminological agreement on the term "phraseme"; Falster Jakobsen (2005: 144-145) uses it in the same way as Cortès (1998-1999), to refer to figurative and fixed polylexical units. What is interesting for the purpose of this article is that "phrasemes" are built on productive, discursive patterns.

prototypical text examples. Similarly, the keywords associated to the identification and description of networks should also be lemmatised:

**catastrophes naturelles** → but; équipe; tir

*avalanche de buts; déluge de buts; inonder le terrain de ses tirs; une tornade de buts*

*être en pleine tempête; être/se trouver dans l'oeil du cyclone*

- *Football: l'Angleterre est en pleine tempête.*
- *Beckham inonde la surface de réparation de ses tirs.*
- *Ligue 1, Ajaccio se trouve dans l'oeil du cyclone.*

It should be stressed that this method of arranging phraseological data types and access structure should not be seen as the product of a text linguistic line of thought because indexes of idiomatic and metaphorical scenarios can be of great usefulness to the users in connection with knowledge-oriented functions. They can facilitate the systematic learning process of the structured vocabulary of the scenarios that are conventionally used in the business of football text production. The scenarios can in turn be reproduced to meaningfully coin the L2 phrases that are the journalistic back bone of this type of text production. Foregrounding the onomasiological selection and presentation of the phraseological information can thus contribute to the enhancement of the functional integration of stylistic data types in the dictionary as has also been shown by Jónsson (2003) for a LGP monolingual dictionary.

## 6.2 Including promotional phraseology

Leroyer (forthcoming) argues that dictionaries specifically developed for the needs of the users working in corporations should also be designed in accordance with the prescriptions of the language policy of the corporation as well as of its communication policy. For the purpose of text production directly in the foreign language, this means that the situational phraseology of corporate communication in use in privileged genres should also be included in the dictionary. Corporate communication is part of any business today and business should never be limited to the technical description of the knowledge of the core business itself. I have already argued above, in the context of the terminographical perspective, why this should be the case. Suffice to say now is that the enhancement of the scope of the phraseological information could be easily realized by compiling a genre-based corporate corpus (cf. Leroyer/Møller forthcoming) and extracting the relevant items of the corporate phraseology used in those genres.

For instance, the extensive promotional phraseology of pumps in brochures and online catalogues could be presented in form of frequently used sequences such as standard phrases, generic messages and slogans by addressing the phraseological items and sequences to the

entries of the wordlist, be it lemmatised forms of product names or of terminological and business communication items proper. Using hypertext technology could also establish links to the representative documents from which phraseology has been extracted and thus help the user to check on the proper usage of the required phraseological information in the situational context of L2 text production tasks:

#### **alpha pro**

- *This places the Pro at the top of the A-range where it stands head and shoulder above all others.*
- *The new Alpha pro is labelled A.*

#### **energy-labelling**

- *Energy-labelling for circulator pumps is an important step forward for sustainable development.*

#### **energy-labelling scheme**

- *The energy labelling scheme is expected to boost product development within the pump business.*
- *With the energy-labelling scheme, focus will be on energy-efficient pumps.*

#### **energy savings**

- *Consumer labelling-scheme to generate real energy savings.*

#### **plug-and-pump**

- *With plug-and-pump it's no longer necessary to open the terminal box to make electrical connections.*

#### **pump solution**

- *Your pump solution. The full scale. The full picture.*

### **7 Concluding remarks – Rephrasing the phraseological problem**

In contrast to what has been commonly argued so far by the vast linguistic community working in the common field of phraseology and lexicography, the selection and arrangement of phraseological data types in dictionaries do not constitute a practical problem concerning user-friendliness. The problem should be rephrased: the selection and arrangement of phraseology is a highly theoretical problem, not of linguistic, but of functional essence. Taking BDs as a case example, it has been argued that the multiple phraseology perspectives of business dictionaries can vary greatly depending on the intended user groups and planned user situations, and that the specific phraseological solutions therefore must always be functionally based. Moving slightly away from business dictionary functions and focussing on linguistic methods or on the linguistic material as a linguistic substance, which is always very tempting to the lexicographer because of the specificity of the phraseological material (cf. Mejri 2004), leads to the highly probable risk of developing BD concepts that turn out not to work for the better in real dictionary use situations. That also goes for predominant terminological approaches. The scientific phraseological discussion on the premises of linguistics does not contribute to the development of functional phraseological solutions in BDs. Finally, this contribution has shown that dealing with phraseology in BDs can very well

include innovative dictionary concepts and solutions in which the scientific border lines of the phraseological material can be partly abandoned by the lexicographer to the benefit from new selection and presentation methods determined by the needs of the dictionary users in the user situations planned.

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