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Phraseology: A critical reassessment

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Overview

- The problem
- The standard solution
- Problems with the standard solution
- Another way of conceptualizing phraseology
- Phraseology and idiomaticity



The problem

- 'Phraseology' is a very slippery term!



The problem

- Ebeling and Hasselgård (2015)



The problem

□ Ebeling and Hasselgård (2015: 207):

- “That language to a large extent relies on ‘combinations of words that customarily occur’ (Kjellmer 1991: 112) is now a generally accepted view in linguistics. Such combinations are said to constitute the **phraseology**, or phrasicon, of a language. **Phraseology** also refers to ‘the study of the structure, meaning and use of word combinations’ (Cowie 1994: 3168). A central assumption is that linguistic knowledge encompasses ‘memorised sentences’, ‘lexicalized sentence stems’ and ‘**phraseological** expressions each of which is something less than a completely specified clause’ (Pawley and Syder 1983: 205). Like Pawley and Syder, many linguists have subsequently observed that ‘**phraseology** is one of the aspects that unmistakably distinguishes native speakers of a language from L2 learners’ (Granger and Bestgen 2014 ...).

Despite having been on the linguistic scene for quite a long time, **phraseology** has only in recent years become acknowledged as an academic discipline in its own right (see Cowie 2006; Granger and Paquot 2008). Granger and Paquot (2008: 27) link this late scientific recognition to **the field’s** unruly terminology and its vast and apparently unlimited scope.”



The problem

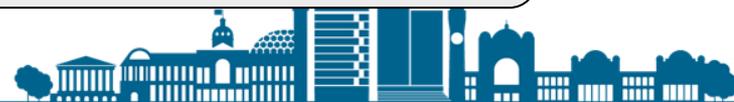
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= ‘structural property of language’



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= ‘sub-field of linguistics’



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= ‘multi-word units’



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= ‘multi-word unit usage’



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The problem

□ Hunston (2011)



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 - “**Phraseology**’ is a very general term used to describe the tendency of words, and groups of words, to occur more frequently in some environments than in others.



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- “**Phraseology**” is a very general term used to describe the tendency of words, and groups of words, to occur more frequently in some environments than others.

= ‘characteristic feature or property of language’



The problem

□ Hunston (2011: 93):

- “The phrase *on the assumption that* is particularly frequent: of the 63 instances of *the assumption that* in the corpus in question, 26 (41 per cent) are preceded by *on*. Most frequently (in all but six cases), the *on* is itself part of a verb + preposition combination such as *is based on*, *rest on* and *relies on*. We may conclude that ‘assumptions’ are most often construed as the foundation of other ideas. This is corroborated by other relatively frequent **phraseologies**, such as *START/SET off with the assumption that* (three instances), and *arises/starts from the assumption that* (two instances). Although no other **phraseology** is anywhere near as frequent, other noticeable **phraseologies** include *MAKE the assumption that* (five instances) and a set of instances that indicate a negative evaluation of the assumption.”



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= ‘multi-word unit(s)’

The problem

□ Hunston (2011: 167):

- “**Phraseology** has been interpreted in this book to mean:
 - the identification of sequences of words i.e. MWUs that play a role in the evaluative act
 - differentials in wordform frequency that can be used to establish likelihood of a kind of evaluation occurring
 - consistency in how particular kinds of textual item are evaluated within a specialised corpus.”



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The standard solution

- Distinguish two broad ‘approaches’ to phraseology:
 - “the phraseological approach” vs “the frequency-based approach” (Granger and Paquot 2008)
 - = “the taxonomic approach” vs “the probabilistic approach”



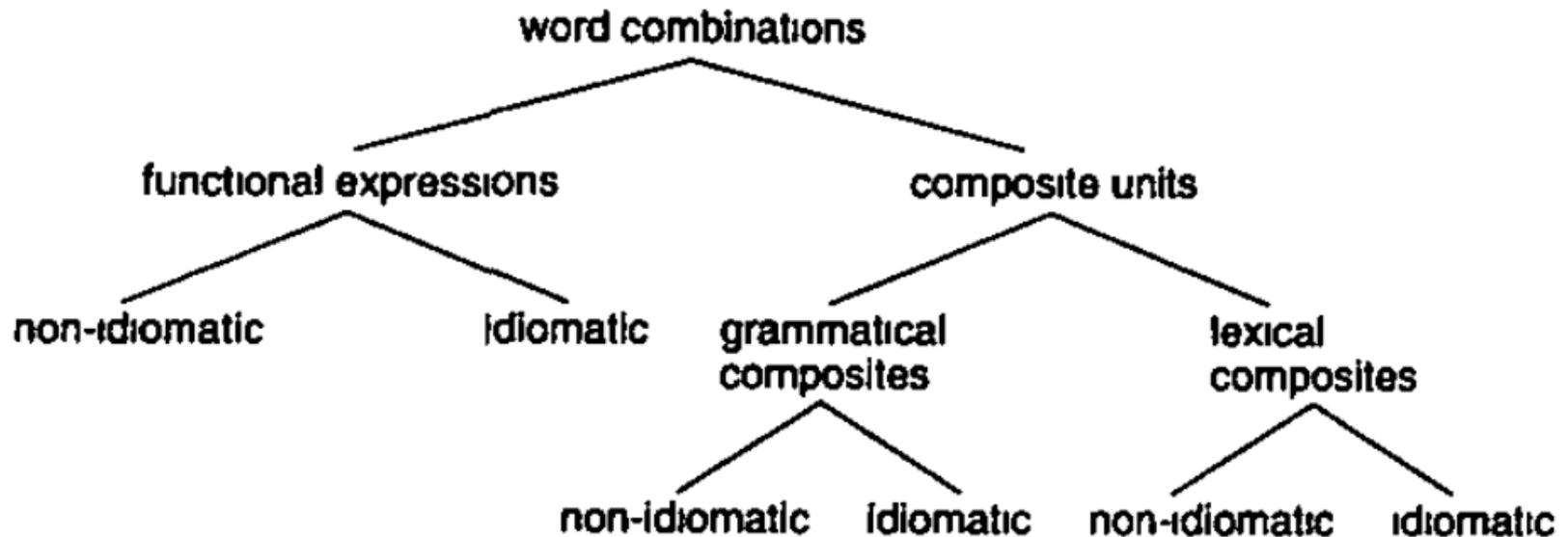
The taxonomic approach

- 'Phraseology' = subfield of linguistics (cf. biology, geology, theology, archaeology ...)
- 'Taxonomic' because main interest is in developing and working with formal taxonomies of phraseological units.



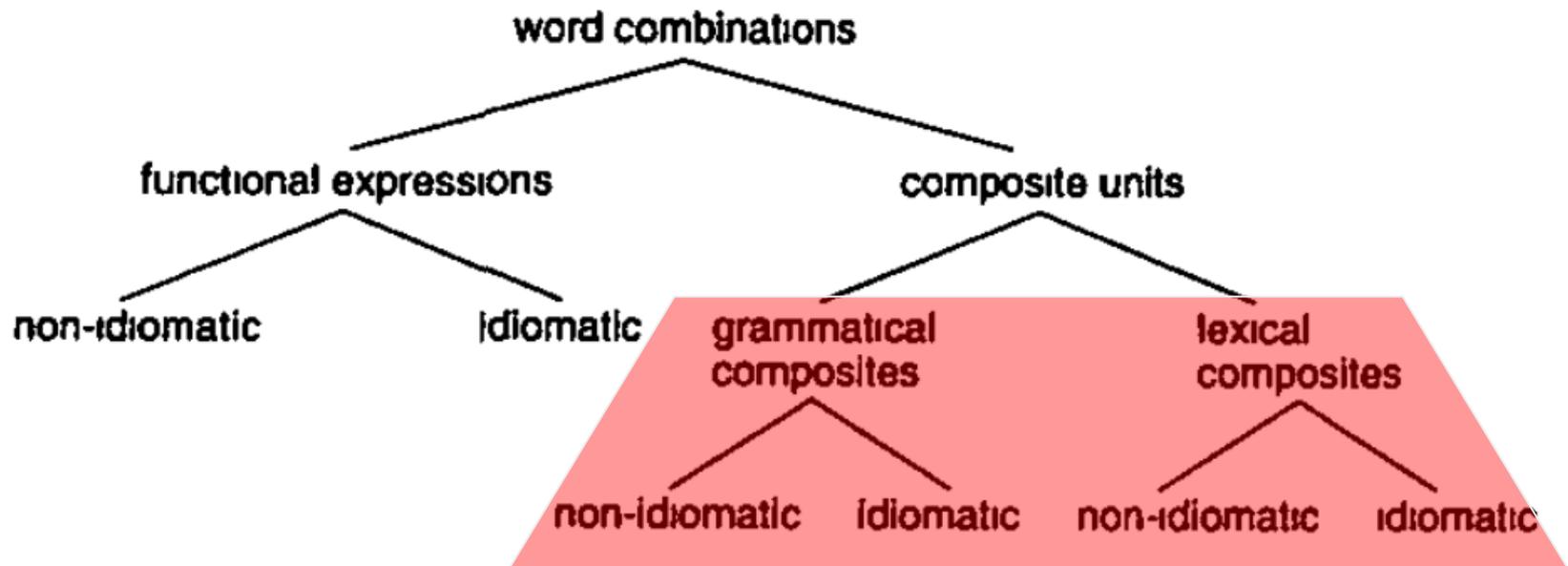
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	free combinations	restricted collocations	figurative idioms	pure idioms
lexical composites verb + noun	<i>blow a trumpet</i>	<i>blow a fuse</i>	<i>blow your own trumpet</i>	<i>blow the gaff</i>
grammatical composites preposition + noun	<i>under the table</i>	<i>under attack</i>	<i>under the microscope</i>	<i>under the weather</i>



Problems with the taxonomic approach

1. Categorization

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lexical composites verb + noun	<i>blow a trumpet</i>	<i>blow a fuse</i>	<i>blow your own trumpet</i>	<i>blow the gaff</i>
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Problems with the taxonomic approach

probably late on Friday. This blew a fuse which put a backup charger out of at it for half an hour when I blew a fuse at which point I set down my heat

2000 </dt> HAROLD Wilson blew a fuse in 1969 when he discovered his such that the player famously blew a fuse and was sent off in St Etienne. <p> missus Anna's bedroom - and blew a fuse when he realised the electrical now coach at Reading, almost blew a fuse as he celebrated <p> with the Royals bogey at the Road Hole, then blew a fuse. <p> Monty was on for a sizzling 60 at the Road Hole - and then blew a fuse. <p> At one stage Monty was on for a 40 seconds when his Toyota blew a fuse. mcrae said: `It was a shame there heard yesterday. Singer Liam blew a fuse when Jim Hunter's lorry got stuck in Strathclyde Uni's student bar blew a fuse when they saw the cans being given off but John Gardiner just blew a fuse. The fact is that sleeping I can't understand why Chic blew a fuse again. I thought he'd sorted himself him in a race and I nearly blew a fuse. I told him there was no way anybody as millionaire Keane, 27, blew a fuse and kicked her kung fu-style in the as someone's personal stereo blew a fuse and started blasting out a bit of 1999 </dt> FED-UP Colin mcrae blew a fuse after he was forced out of the New with the sound levels and he blew a fuse. He was obviously continuing from at half-time. Boss Colin Lee blew a fuse after Iffy Onuora's 28th-minute at the table, my computer blew a fuse. <p> I've been thinking about it all stitched up and Tony Blair blew a fuse when he realised it was not," added crossed, short-circuited and blew a fuse." <p> We sort out our hurt feelings, <hd> DAY MR COOL BLEW A FUSE </hd> Confronted by filmmaker John how hot she is. Caloundra fans blew a fuse. The next night she sashayed into computer and printer today we blew a fuse. It was a couple of hours before the during the morning, but it blew a fuse. Then I was stuck in traffic for an by it all and that is why I blew a fuse." Cipollini's team tried to lighten occurred. Labour circuitry blew a fuse and the system failed. For all who excepted, of course) nearly blew a fuse trying to decide between the



Problems with the taxonomic approach

whether the machine would blow a fuse or go into a sulk, the way it is do? I'm not saying I will not blow a fuse one day. But, frankly, I prefer We dare not lose or Incey will blow a fuse; Interview; Gary Neville; never lose is his ability to blow a fuse at the referee. He had a series of digital telly will make them blow a fuse. People who watch Sky or Ondigital trick in the book to make me blow a fuse. Roy Keane and Nicky Butt are also any moment Sir Charles would blow a fuse and scotch any possibility of frustration. It is as if we `blow a fuse" after exerting ourselves, and where we might otherwise `blow a fuse". It is occasionally seen in other was so overloaded, he'd surely blow a fuse if he didn't lighten up soon. What Warren. The Colonel's going to blow a fuse when he finds out, especially if in to Jacques. He's going to blow a fuse when he finds out about Miller." Can like most geniuses, he'll blow a fuse and do something stupid.the pressure off and letting your toddler blow a fuse without giving in or getting angry, trying to adopt Siouxsie. I blow a fuse when I'm informed that the time has fam.) old peter les plombs to blow a fuse, explode with anger une raclee a the embarrassment. Daring to blow a fuse may be a prerequisite for making Even simple things made us `blow a fuse". <p> Frequent surges of stress into that suppressor or else I blow a fuse and out goes the power in my office. If she doesn't, she would blow a fuse. Escondido Principal Julie Ryan is outright she's a 40. She'll blow a fuse. I shall take in this 38d; of The Christmas lights will not blow a fuse. Sister will love sister, brother most languid of individuals blow a fuse. A Sunday newspaper critic wrote to cause trades unions to blow a fuse over public sector reform and ESB awards next year -- and blow a fuse. Let me now turn briefly to the two t say a word she's going to blow a fuse. So he says to <ZGY> me Ooh is it



Problems with the taxonomic approach

must have been in danger of blowing a fuse. Spurs boss George Graham was 'away could have been excused for blowing a fuse after his team squandered the chance its big launch -- after blowing a fuse. Bemused listeners could only hear for attitude problems, and blowing a fuse. He sounds as tense and hung-up as steadily, with Mrs Thatcher blowing a fuse, bring on a high-profile chap who an apology for "almost blowing a fuse" on an enthusiastic He shoots! He the human equivalent of blowing a fuse. <p> Taking the first steps to The old Monty would have blown a fuse. But the new calmer, more controlled doesn't matter -- should have blown a fuse somewhere. It didn't. Somewhere or then he said, 'I've nearly blown a fuse in my computer trying to think of a wondered if the computer had blown a fuse. 'Do you speak or write any foreign to make - bank manager's blown a fuse. So we wish fair winds to all our he said. 'But I seem to have blown a fuse." <p> His laboratories have a number interpretations. He's blown a fuse several times when his insistence runs out and someone really blows a fuse." Sickened supporters chanted 'Sack him snip at £4m. <h1> Lawrie blows a fuse; Football; Match report </h1> <dt> and SNP meet after Blair 'blows a fuse" 432) </subh> <bl> By PETER smack by a parent who simply blows a fuse will not harm a child, but he says. ' the dodgy electricity supply blows a fuse. Say is astonished when LV, who has and Kev's quiet, but if he blows a fuse, watch out" - the prospects for



Problems with the taxonomic approach

- *BLOW a fuse*: most instances are ‘idioms’, not ‘restricted collocations’
- But which kind of ‘idiom’- ‘figurative’ or ‘pure’?
- Nesselhauf (2005): collapses into a single category of ‘idioms’:

idioms

	free combinations	restricted collocations	figurative idioms	pure idioms
lexical composites verb + noun	<i>blow a trumpet</i>	<i>blow a fuse</i>	<i>blow your own trumpet</i>	<i>blow the gaff</i>
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Problems with the taxonomic approach

1. Categorization

- How ‘fixed’ are idiomatic expressions?
- *KICK the bucket*
- Iordanskaja & Mel’čuk (2009: 161):
 - “... in the notorious idiom *kick the bucket* the DirO *bucket* **cannot** be promoted to Subject – which is one of the defining properties of DirOs (**The bucket was kicked*, although the verb KICK has the passive).”



Bungral

OC3D Elite
●●●●●●

Join Date: May 2007
Posts: 4,386

Quote:

Originally Posted by **name='Toxcity'**
Bungy is a poo and got rid of it for a GTX280 which then kicked the bucket. 😬

I'm a poo yeah?? 😬 Git. I didn't kick the bucket... The bucket was well and truly kicked by the time it got to me!!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **name='gotmaxpower'**
:eyes:

Agreed! Need to hurry up and buy an X2 so I can have some Clear Sky goodness.

CPU: Intel Core i5 2500K @ 4700mhz - 47 x 100MHz **Mobo:** MSI P67A GD65 **GPU:** EVGA GTX 570 **RAM:** 2 x 4GB Mushkin LV 1.35v 1600MHz DDR3 **HDD:** 3 x 1TB Samsung Spinpoint F3's **Case:** CoolerMaster ATCS 840 - Custom House of Kolor paint job. **PSU:** Corsair HX750 **Cooling:** Custom WC - XSPC Delta V3, PA120.3, DDC Ultra with XSPC Res Top, 3/8" XSPC UV Green Tubing over 1/2" Barbs **OS:** Windows 7 Enterprise Edition 64-Bit

Quote

Post Reply



Problems with the taxonomic approach

1. Categorization

- Is there really any such thing as a ‘free combination’?
- E.g. *WANT + NP*



Problems with the taxonomic approach

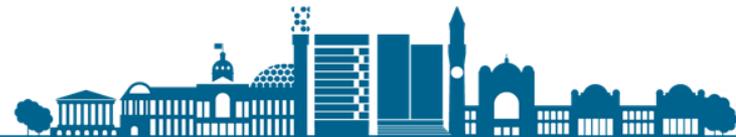
□ Nesselhauf (2003: 225):

- “... *want* can be combined with a great number of nouns (*want toys, a child, a drink, a car, truth* etc.) and there are no arbitrary constraints on its combinability ...”



Problems with the taxonomic approach

- Frath and Gledhill (2005):
 - “It is true that the verb *want* takes many thousands of different types of complements. But Nesselhauf suggests there are no ‘arbitrary constraints’ on its complementation. Do we imply from this that *want* does not collocate with anything, or collocates with everything?”



Problems with the taxonomic approach

□ Frath and Gledhill (2005):

- “... In fact, three main types of nominal complement for *want* are listed in the Cobuild dictionary ... Starting with the most frequent usage, these include Noun Group complements expressing bald demands to a second person (*I want you, I want an explanation from you Jeremy, What do you want?*), resultatives expressing a goal (*I want my boy alive, I want my car this colour, They began to want their father to be the same as other daddies*) and very specifically a wish to have children (*I want this baby very much*). These are clearly very different but consistent collocational clusters. It would be unwise therefore to categorise the complements of such a frequently used verb as ‘free combinations’, and we are led to the conclusion that most other verbs, even high frequency ones, can display a similarly restricted set.”



Problems with the taxonomic approach

1. Categorization

- How valid/helpful is the notion of ‘free combination’ for contrastive analysis?
- E.g. *HAVE + NP*



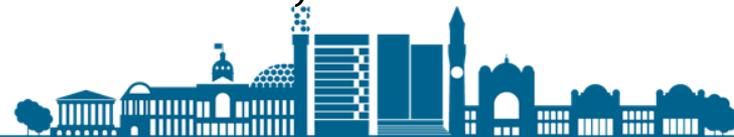
Problems with the taxonomic approach

□ Coffee

- English: *have a coffee*
- French: *prendre un café*; Italian: *prendere un caffè*; Spanish: *tomar un café*
- German: *Kaffee trinken*

□ Dreams

- English: *have a dream*
- Japanese: 夢を見る [*yume o mimasu*; *see a dream*]



Problems with the taxonomic approach

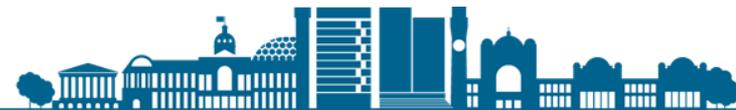
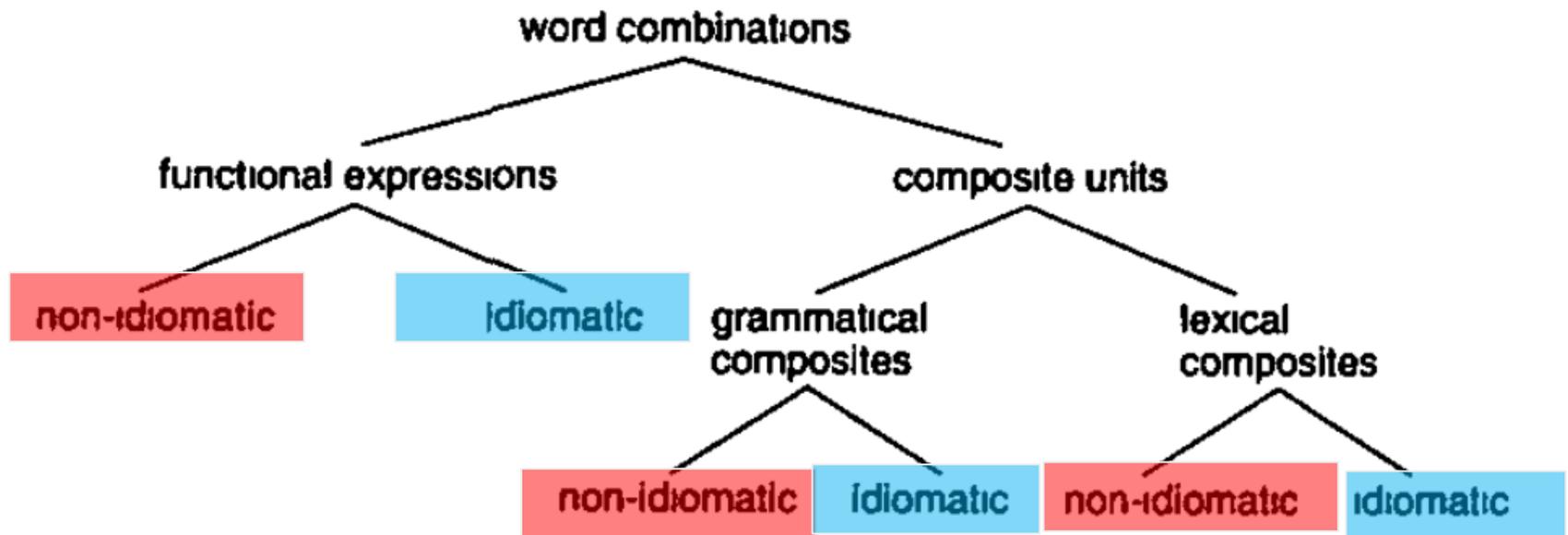
1. Categorization is inherently problematic
2. Acceptability judgements ('you can/cannot say x')

 - are unreliable.
 - reflect a static view of language; cannot account for change (e.g. *"I'm so not going to do that"*)

3. Assumption that it is possible to distinguish between phraseological and non-phraseological word combinations.



- phraseological combinations
- non-phraseological combinations



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Problems with the taxonomic approach

- Assumption that it is possible to distinguish between phraseological and non-phraseological word combinations.
 - Not a problem if you are a generativist (grammatical rules generate language).
 - If you are a usage-based linguist (i.e. grammatical ‘rules’ are generalizations about what language users do), then maybe need to look elsewhere.



The probabilistic approach

- Defines phraseology as “the tendency of words to occur, not randomly, or even in accordance with grammatical rules only, but in preferred sequences” (Hunston 2002: 137)



The probabilistic approach

- “In grammar we look at the patterns of language as if they could be described by a large number of separate choices, each choice being from a small list of possibilities. In each case, the possibilities can be itemized in full, and we can talk of choosing one item rather than another. The choice between Active and Passive Voice in the verbal group in English offers a typical example of a grammatical **system**. Every verbal group is either one or the other, and there are only two possible choices” (Sinclair 1966: 410-11).



The probabilistic approach

- “... But running parallel to grammar is lexis, which describes the tendencies of items to collocate with each other. A study of these tendencies ought to tell us facts about languages that cannot be got by grammatical analysis, since such tendencies cannot be expressed in terms of small sets of choices. One lexical item is not chosen *rather than* another, lexical items do not contrast with each other in the same sense as grammatical classes contrast. There are virtually no impossible collocations, but some are much more likely than others” (Sinclair 1966: 410-11).



The probabilistic approach

- “Unlike proponents of the classical [i.e. typological] approach to phraseology, Sinclair and his followers are much less preoccupied with distinguishing between different linguistic categories and subcategories of word combinations or more generally setting clear boundaries to phraseology. In Sinclair’s model of language, phraseology is central: phraseological items, whatever their nature, take precedence over single words” (Granger and Paquot 2008).



The probabilistic approach

- Much wider range of features included (Hunston 2002):
 - Collocations:
 - *strong tea, powerful car, strong/powerful argument*
 - Semi-fixed phrases/‘units of meaning’:
 - *where there’s smoke there’s fire*
 - *no smoke without fire*
 - *sometimes there is smoke without fire*
 - Grammatical preferences:
 - *Manchester is hemmed in by industrial areas*
 - Complementation patterns:
 - *allow vs. prevent*
- **Semantic non-compositionality not a criterion.**



	Typological approach	Probabilistic approach
Categorization	Core aim = develop exhaustive taxonomies	Not concerned with; types of PU studied tend to be defined by methodology
Evaluation	Acceptability judgements; 'you can(not) say x'	Typicality judgements; 'x is frequent/significant/attested/rare ...
Distinguish between phraseological and non-phraseological?	Yes	???



The probabilistic approach

- Sinclair (1991: 109):
 - “[The open-choice principle] is a way of seeing language text as the result of a very large number of complex choices. At each point where a unit is completed (a word, phrase, or clause), a large range of choice opens up and the only restraint is grammaticalness”.



The probabilistic approach

- Sinclair (1991: 110):
 - “The principle of idiom is that a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analysable into segments.”



The probabilistic approach

□ Sinclair (1991: 108):

- “The model of a highly generalized formal syntax, with slots into which fall neat lists of words, is suitable only in rare uses and specialized texts. By far the majority of text is made of the occurrence of common words in common patterns, or in slight variants of those common patterns. Most everyday words do not have an independent meaning, or meanings, but are components of a rich repertoire of multi-word patterns that make up text.”



The probabilistic approach

- Hunston (2002: 147-49):
 - “The idiom principle and the open choice principle together provide a theoretical account for two observations; that phraseology is extremely pervasive in English, and that **phraseology alone cannot account for how sentences or utterances are made up.**”



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Distinguish between phraseological and non-phraseological?	Yes	Yes



A problem for the probabilistic approach

- Criticizes ‘traditional’ slot-and-filler model of grammar but does not entirely reject it.
- Sinclair (1991: 109):
 - “[I]n order to explain the way in which meaning arises from language text, we have to advance two different principles of interpretation. One is not enough. **No single principle has been advanced which accounts for the evidence in a satisfactory way.**”



Another way of conceptualizing phraseology

□ Hilpert (2014: 22):

- “Construction Grammar is a theory that takes a radically different perspective: knowledge of language is to be modelled as knowledge of constructions, and nothing else in addition.”



Another way of conceptualizing phraseology

□ Hilpert (2014: 22):

- “the line between the mental lexicon, containing knowledge of words, and the mental grammar, containing knowledge of rules, becomes increasingly blurry; so much so that Construction Grammarians propose to abandon it altogether. Instead, knowledge of language is seen as a large inventory of constructions, a construct-i-con.”



Another way of conceptualizing phraseology

- Construction Grammar is fully compatible with (indeed, is a version of) usage-based theories of language.
- Abolishes the distinction between the phraseological and the non-phraseological.
- So would seem an ideal choice for phraseological research
- BUT: if *everything* is phraseological, then doesn't 'phraseology' as a meaningful concept cease to exist?



Another way of conceptualizing phraseology

- As a lexicogrammatical concept, yes:
Construction Grammarians do not use the term ‘phraseology’ – they have no need for it.
- So, is this the end for phraseology?
- No! It just needs to move to another level of description.



Another way of conceptualizing phraseology

- Phraseology is “... the preferred way of saying things in a particular discourse” (Gledhill 2000: 1).
- Essentially the same as the ‘everyday’, non-technical meaning of the term.
 - **phraseology** |,freɪzɪ'plədʒi| noun (plural **phraseologies**) a particular mode of expression, especially one characteristic of a particular speaker or subject area: *legal phraseology*



Another way of conceptualizing phraseology

- Both taxonomic and probabilistic views of phraseology are fundamentally linguistic;
- Gledhill/everyday definition is fundamentally sociological or sociolinguistic, (i.e. what discourse communities do), although the empirical focus is still on linguistic features.
- So can be combined with CxG approach (or any other probabilistic/usage-based method)



Example: analysis of academic disciplinary discourses

- Disciplinary discourses are both preferred ways of knowing and preferred ways of saying; form and meaning are (as always) inseparable.
- Gee (1989): “Being ‘trained’ as a linguist meant that I learned to speak, think, and act like a linguist, and to recognise others when they do so.”
- In other words, we learn the **phraseology** of linguistics/biology/history/law



Example: analysis of academic disciplinary discourses

□ *the way(s) in which + cl*

- There was criticism of the way in which the crisis was handled by the state government. (BNC)
- One of the main ways in which PtdOH is generated in the cell is by the activation of PLD, which hydrolyzes PC to produce PtdOH and choline. (Cell Biology)
- Eagleton traces the ways in which Heathcliff figures both a form of protest against the bourgeois capitalist forces of Thrushcross Grange and also the purest embodiment of those forces. (English Literature)



the way(s) in which + cl:
distribution across disciplines

Corpus	Frequency pmw
Sociology	175
English Literature	94
History	74
BNC written	56
Economics	23
Nuclear Physics	5
Cell Biology	3
Electrical Engineering	2



Terminology, Phraseology, Idiomaticity

- Terminology: technical lexis associated with a particular discourse community (e.g. *stanza*, *polypeptides*, *opportunity cost*);
- Phraseology: preferred ways of meaning and making meaning in a particular discourse community (e.g. *the way(s) in which*);
- Idiomaticity: ‘naturalness’ (nativelike usage) in a general language variety



Conclusion

- 'My' conceptualization of phraseology works for me, but it might not work for you.
- All approaches to 'phraseology' have their merits and demerits.
- The important thing is to be clear about how you are using the term, and to work with a definition that is consistent with what you fundamentally believe about language.



Thank you!



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