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# LINGUISTIC CULTURE, PHRASEOLOGISMS AND PHRASEO-DIDACTICS IN SLOVAK LANGUAGE

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## **Abstract**

Phraseology belongs to language components that are strongly related to linguistic culture. It is not by accident that phraseology is mentioned almost in all relevant considerations of linguistic culture and it is no coincidence that there are already special remarks about the relation between phraseology and linguistic culture. The influence of religion has also been proved as idioms with biblical origin which are very frequent in Slovak. Idioms of biblical origin are integral part of the cultural fund of the majority of European nations and they carry the history of religious and moral values. These assertions are also confirmed by the historical development of the language on a pan-European scale. The methodology of teaching phraseology at basic and secondary schools that emphasizes the importance of mastering phraseology of standard language in the linguistic culture of pupils and at the same time accentuates the application of that culture in adulthood is called phraseo-didactics.

*Keywords:* education, phrasal idiom, paremiology, idioms, proverbs

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## **1. Introduction - linguistic culture and the use of phraseologisms**

In recent years, not only the linguists, but increasingly, the general public have also noticed that vocabulary and speech of the contemporary man lose step by step general sophistication and diversity. Why is that so? This is partly the consequence of modern times: the impact of the world, which is influenced by technical advancement and the associated progress and unrestricted enhancement of the convenience of today's man. That often leads to indifference and in the case of language skills, to their significant decline. But above all, it is the result of a weak influence on the level of speech culture, at the level of the linguistic expression of a man in general. It is certain that mass media should also have a bearing on the growth of the nation's speech culture as they daily address and influence a broad spectrum of listeners and viewers. According to the opinion of the majority of the professional public, we also believe that schools (at all levels of education) should, in particular, be responsible for the widespread dissemination of the standard language, the cultivation of language

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and the improvement of linguistic culture in each stylistic level and communication situation. The emphasis should be put on developing the ability to instantly express one's opinions, insights, impressions, ideas, not only factually but also emotionally and suggestively. One of the possible solutions to the issue of improving linguistic culture does not necessarily have to be found in the near or far future, but on the contrary - we could benefit from the past, from history. We can find examples in the speech of current older generation the speech of which is full of rigorous, figurative, concise and juicy expressions or sentence constructions. They are specific due to their diversity and wisdom reflecting the long-time experiences of previous generations, their wit and intelligence. We call them phraseologisms.

## 2. Phraseological tradition in Slovak since 15<sup>th</sup> century to present days

Phraseology belongs to language components that are strongly related to linguistic culture. It is not by accident that phraseology is mentioned almost in all relevant considerations of linguistic culture and it is no coincidence that there are already special remarks about the relation between phraseology and language culture. These assertions are also confirmed by the historical development of the language on a pan-European scale.

The diachronic research of Slovak phraseology has not been given enough attention until recently. In fact, complex systematic research of Slovak phraseology can be seen particularly within the last 50 years. "Phraseological research concentrated on the synchronic aspect of Slovak phraseology." [1] Therefore, at least briefly, we should mention some of the essential features of phraseology, publications and people related more or less to this issue in previous cultural movements and periods. In the past, Humanism played an important role in the European phraseology tradition. It emphasized not only the linguistic, stylistic and literary function of proverbs, but also their educational and didactic function. One of the most prominent collections of this period is the collection of the Dutch priest Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) *Adagiorum collectanea*, which was later published in many editions. The construction of this collection was adopted directly or indirectly by all later collections in Europe. Even J.A. Comenius based his *Moudrost starých Čechu* on it. Comenius also translated and rewrote poems in *Dionysia catonis Disticha moralia*, which date back to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century. They were published in 1662. However, they have not been preserved. "European civilization was formed (among other factors) under the influence of Christian history and culture, Greek and Roman history and their literature, culture and mythology. These factors have also been reflected in the language – in the form of phrasal idioms." [1, p. 10] From the words of Krošláková we can define what the phraseology fund of the people was. Moreover, we can observe what can be found in today's national phrasal idioms 'treasuries' and which phrasal idioms can be found in several European languages, for example in the form of loan translations or international collocations.

Ján Sinapius, the descendant of D.S. Horčíčka, followed the ideas of Erasmus of Rotterdam. He published *Výtah z Tisícok prísloví Erazma Rotterdamského* and few years later in 1678 the work of D.S. Horčíčka *Nový trh latinsko-slovenský* was published as a collection of 534 domestic proverbs and material taken over from the Polish collection of Knapský (published in 1632). He took over the bulk of the Slovak proverbs from Horčíčka's collection. It was translated into Czech by Pavel Doležal and included as attachment 'Adagia' in the book *Grammatica Slavico-Bohemica* (1746). Anton Bernolák, followed up Doležal's collection with his work *Grammatica slavica (Slovak Grammar, Trnava, 1790)* in the chapter *Agadia Slavica* where he presents 521 collocations of different genres and origin. These are collections that are besides being used for grammar purposes intended to serve as a proof of the authenticity of the language and the ethnic identity of the Slovaks in Hungary.

The phraseological fund played an important role in the development of secular education, school system and culture as such. It was enriched by many mundane statements of folk origin, which the Church often understood as blasphemy and free-thinking. The response to this situation was the decision of Pope Gregory VIII and the ecclesial council to subject the phraseology fund to strict control and condemn many statements as morally unacceptable and harmful. The monk Paul Muncius was commissioned to prepare a selection of proverbs, sentences, and gnomes that were from the Church's point of view flawless and intended for the lay public. The file came out in 1575.

The dissemination of the phraseology fund was intensified in particular by the introduction of printing which enabled the expansion of books and, thus information in wide areas. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the number of schools grew and literacy spread as well. The interest of the public was in particular in the religious literature due to the Reformation and growing re-Catholicism. The phraseological tradition influenced the process of values forming and their hierarchy as well as preserving and securing moral norms by naming them and requesting to follow them in communication. In this sense it has been topical up to present days.

Press that most intensively and significantly influenced the phraseological tradition in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was the calendars of V.M. Kramérius, J. Palkovič, G. Fejerpataky-Belopotocký, K. Rozsa, D. Lichard, K. Salva and all the other religious calendars. "It was mainly Juraj Palkovič (1796–1850) who creatively participated in forming and shaping the Slovak culture in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When talking about the history of The Holy Bible translation, his complex translation was also important." [1, p. 104]

It is undisputed that phrases of biblical origin are frequent in Slovak phraseology. Biblical phrasal idioms are a living component of vocabulary and their frequency in common communication situations is relatively high even today. In the preserved Bible translation by Palkovič we can follow a line of phrasal idioms that are used in the same or a modified form to this day. The didactic-reflexive sentences, aphorisms, proverbs that were long an integral part of the preaching literature, and at the same time existed as separate poetry

genres, were of great interest especially among the Catholics. This is evidenced by the 17<sup>th</sup> century collection of writings titled *Preces et orationes Lingua Latina et Slavica* from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the collection of sermons *Postila* from 1641-1650, *Sententiae* from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century or the *Proverbia* from the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in which there are also many statements of folk origin.

Literature was a separate movement that kept the existence of a phraseological tradition. The moral didactic-reflexive literature includes *Valaská škola mravův stodola* (1755) by H. Gavlovič or *Veselé účinky a rčení* (1795) by J.I. Bajza. As Krošláková says in the Bajza's novel *René mláďenca príhoda a skúsenosti* we find almost all variations of phrasal idioms [1, p. 71-73]. The collection of papers by L. Bruck from Žaškov in Orava region has also the features of a manuscript collection in *Carmina Proverbialia partim vitae humanae statum delineantia, partim etiam utilem de moribus doctrinam salse proponentia in usum Juventutis Scholasticae collegit, maiori ex parte in patriam linguam transtulit et proposuit Leopoldus Bruck ab anno 1820*. It contains not only paraphrases of Latin, humanist sentences and proverbs but also folk proverbs.

In the Enlightenment it was especially the work of J. Fándly, who collected and published mainly practical agricultural sayings, but also many proverbs and sayings about virtuousness. The significance of his work is also shown in the diversion from Czech. He attempted to enrich the Slovak language in the sense of the Bernolák's efforts to have autonomous Slovak language. It is also important to mention Bernolák's *Slovár*, which is an important lexicographical work. It is the first dictionary of standard Slovak including phraseology as well. Of all types of phrasal idioms (in the widest sense of the word) it mostly lists proverbs expressing the long-time experience and the wisdom of the people.

The translations of phrasal idioms are only in four languages; Bernolák did not mention Czech idioms. Phraseology in four languages presented in *Slovár* shows explicitly that some of the Slovak idioms are semantically, constructively and motivationally identical with the corresponding Latin, German and Hungarian idiom [2].

In the Hispanic literature, the styles of the Marquis de Santillan or the speeches in Sancho Panza style are particularly striking. Folk production during Romanticism was perceived as the only natural and pure. It raised the value of human speech – dialects and folk art production – folklore. Ján Kollár left us an extensive handwritten collection of national songs, lyrics, games and customs. We also know the collections of J. Ribay and F. Trnka (*Pořekadla/přísloví Slovákův moravsko-uherských*) from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the period of Romanticism Štúr's Slovak and ideology proclaiming the language as the primary integrating feature became a symbol joining the Slovaks together regardless their social status or world view. Rich collections from this period were published mainly in magazines, e.g. by C. Zoch, J. Kalinčiak, F. Šujanský and other collectors and in numerous Štúr collection of papers and codices.

The idea of national unity and standard language was even more emphasized in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and resulted in the foundation of Matica Slovenská in 1863. Matica published the collection of P. Dobšinský in *Zborník slovenských národných piesní, povestí, prísloví, porekadiel, hádok, hier, obyčajov a povier*. The work of P. Dobšinský motivated A.P. Záturecký to collect proverbs and sayings. During more than 30 years of collecting he put together 13 000 basic and variant units (*Slovenské príslovia, porekadlá a úslovia* – 1<sup>st</sup> edn. in 1897). With the growing amount of material the collectors were forced to deal with the question of variability and origins of sayings. Therefore, the researchers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century tried to define and complete the system of the contemporary fund of phraseology. Their theoretical and methodological aspects of work contributed to the development of scientific thinking in the area of modern linguistics. There are many examples in fiction that can be seen as a precious source of phraseological fund from that period, e.g. Kalinčiak's *Reštavrácia* (published in 1860, in Lipa Almanach). Besides Miko's notes about this literary work we find E. Tvrdoň's remarks about the topic also interesting: "The rich phraseological material fulfils a variety of stylistic functions in *Reštavrácia*: it revives the author's language in general (effective and expressive substitution of simple expressions by phraseologisms) as well as the characterization of characters and situations, it participates to a great extent in the wit of author's speech but it is mostly applied in the speech of characters in which he often supports its humorous tone. Many phraseologisms in the literary context of *Reštavrácia*, where they are used as factors of style and composition, are not always in their original form. With their semantic focus and language features (the rhythm of the sentence, its euphony and in comparison with the common speech, the significant deformation of the grammatical structure in discourse), the proverbs and sayings differ from the standards of language in everyday communication. Kalinčiak tried to emphasize these formal signs of phraseology in the selection of idioms and their insertion into the text." [3]

The cultural and historical sources mark a common starting point for the phraseology of European languages because it is based on universal human experience (belief, the search for life values, self-awareness, knowing one's surroundings and others). Individual languages, however, capture this experience on the basis of specific figurative motivation or specific historical, cultural, ethnic and other specificities of members of a language community. Moral norms and values of the Christian worldview were formulated in sentences and gnomes that people adopted and reformulated in the form of proverbs and sayings.

Here it is possible to look for the roots of a part of the phraseology fund in which Christian teachings blended with the values of the pagan worldview. So it is no wonder that the origin of many idioms that are still used in Slovak reaches back to the Great Moravian period. The European phraseology fund was heavily influenced by Latin, Greek and Byzantine proverbs and proverbs of oriental cultures. Quotes from the works of Seneca, Ovid, Cicero, Aristotle and others

found their analogy in the folk form of proverbs and sayings. The roots of paremiography reach back to Socrates, Aristotle and Plato.

### **3. Phraseo-didactics in school practice**

Phraseo-didactics can be defined as the methodology of teaching phraseology at primary and secondary schools, which emphasizes mastering of the standard language phraseology in linguistic culture of pupils and requires the perspective application of this culture in adulthood. Moreover, emphasizing the prospective application of this culture in adulthood is called phraseo-didactics. Methodologically appropriately organized teaching involves the creation of the so called phraseological reserve for linguistic culture in the next development of a pupil's personality. Two aspects come into consideration: objective, which means cultivated description and cognition and the subjective aspect of the speaker, i.e. emotional, engaged and operational evaluation [4]. The question is if phraseology should be taught at elementary schools? Should we teach phraseology or why should it not be forgotten?

In interviews with teachers we often face the opinion that the range of material that should be taught in every school year is immense and the situation should not be made even more complicated by teaching phraseology. However, when we asked teachers in the questionnaire whether they knew what Miko's or phraseological three minutes were, nobody (out of 64 teachers) knew the answer.

The problem, therefore, is not 'whether to teach phraseology' but rather 'how to teach it'. Anyone would agree with Miko, when he states that by enhancing phraseology in teaching standard language the overall linguistic culture of pupils is improved [5] and the perspective of complex communicative competencies will be demonstrated in adulthood, practice or profession. To sum it up, the importance of teaching phraseology is in the fact that phraseological units:

- develop knowledge, creative thinking and language perception since knowing, comparing and analysing them lead pupils to a sensitive and cultivated selection of linguistic means in stylistics;
- help to shape cultivated readers;
- are source of educational effects because by using them we form the relation to a language, folk wisdom and the ethics of behaviour (they capture folk and man's knowledge and experience of all generations in a witty, poetic or expressive form but always with ethical standpoint).

Many of our linguists' statements regarding phraseology and phraseo-didactics correspond with those we find in foreign publications, e.g. A. Hughes titled *Testing for Language Teacher*. It also introduces a scale that evaluates the level of mastery and language control in six qualitative stages. The highest (sixth) degree of foreign language control is the group of users who "use vocabulary and idioms at a level that is rarely (if at all) distinguishable from educated, native users" [6]. The author clearly emphasized that knowing idioms represents the highest degree of knowledge and control of a language. Therefore,

this scheme may be applied to native language and its knowledge by its own peoples. To add one important notice, as we have already mentioned, the sixth level of Hughes' scale includes speakers who know and can adequately use idioms and Hughes compares them to educated native speakers. Thus, we are witnesses of the fact that the English pedagogues and linguists (those who belong to the founding Western branch of the whole phraseological theory from the beginnings of Ch. Bally) agree with the opinion expressed by Mlacek in the 70's of the last century that: "...phraseology is generally considered to be one of the most generalized areas in every natural language, and according to the degree of its control, the overall level of knowledge of both native and foreign languages is often evaluated" [7]. We believe that, amongst other claims, this fact is also a reliable basis for justifying the teaching of phraseology at elementary schools and the acquisition of this relatively separate component of lexicology for our common and professional needs. Phraseological units are naming or reporting units in which the author can incorporate his relationship to reality (describe a more complex view of reality), his sense of humour, wit, momentary mood, temperament and other moments and emotions he wants to express as if in the subtext, so that the communication process is more vivid, more engaging, and at the same time original; without idioms speech is often dull.

Phraseological units are therefore the intensifying factor of communication and a powerful means of figurative, effective, brief and comprehensible discourse. Based on the main objective of the subject Slovak language and literature, which is to lay the foundations for pupils' communication skills, it is necessary and desirable to include appropriate phraseological units into the language material as they are an organic component of living speech. Teaching Slovak language at the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of elementary school is aimed at developing the pupils' communication competence in ordinary life situations. Therefore we agree with Svobodová [8], according to which it is good to teach pupils that one meaning can be expressed in several words (or idioms) from the first grade of the elementary school and gradually develop and improve it at the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.

The pioneer in the Slovak phraseo-didactics is Miko, the author of the publication *Phraseology in School - the first phraseo-didactic guide*. At present, Ďurčo deals with the issue most intensively and he has expanded the field of research also into the teaching of foreign language phraseology. Miko was the first one to point out the shortcomings in the teaching of phraseology at Slovak schools, the low occurrence of idioms in textbooks and their absence in curriculum. However, he did not just draw attention to the deficiencies in teaching, but also proposed specific steps for teachers to incorporate this specific topic into the lessons of the Slovak language. Probably the best known, time-saving and very pragmatic is his proposal called Phraseological three minutes. Miko's phraseological three minutes consist of three parts:

1. presentation of the idiom (with possible variations),
2. its interpretation,

3. presentation of synonymous and antonymous idioms. We comment on the idioms when necessary [5, p. 46].

Đurčo provided phraseo-didactics with valuable methodological stimuli, especially with his model approach in determining the meaning of idioms and the specification of semasiological and onomasiological models. The author classifies both types further on and illustrates on examples highlighting the function-semantic model of idioms by Miko [9]. Several experts (e.g. Ďurčo, Pekarovičová and others) intend to propose a method of selection and a presentation of phraseological units with regard to the development of receptive and productive skills in order to make the process of acquiring the inventory of communication relevant idioms more effective. In this context it is essential to mention the request of several experts in phraseology and phraseo-didactics to define the phraseo-communicative minimum. The content of teaching at basic schools is the Slovak language integrated in linguistic, literary and composition component. It is possible for the teacher to use an idiom in every single one of them. This can be done in an unobtrusive form also with lexical units of vocabulary, stylistic elements in text or possibly as an element of folk verbal art or culture as such.

In practice, individual linguistic levels (or individual themes) are often taken as isolated phenomena. Unfortunately since many of them can be combined with other language issues or topics. A certain amount of attention should be given to phraseology in teaching continuously, in grammar classes as well as in literature and composition. By doing so we will promote improvements in pupils' speech what will later be reflected in an excellent basis of the acquired language competencies.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The possibilities of using phraseology in teaching are wide. This idea corresponds with the proposal of several experts who recommend the use of phraseology in the development of vocabulary, specifically in teaching synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, in practicing verbal forms where idioms can serve as a suitable illustrating material or the means of logical thinking of pupils themselves in the semantic analysis of iconic expressions, since several equivalent idioms are based on different figurative motivations. They also present rich material concerning comparisons expressed by the non-prepositional instrumental case.

Idioms may also be used in literature classes to present the precious heritage of our ancestors, folk wisdom and thus the educational potential of idioms can be used. Biblical idioms referring to the events from the Bible represent a very sensitive line in the culture of our ancestors. They may even function as moral schemes of behaviour. Biblical idioms are vital part of vocabulary and their frequency in everyday communication situations is relatively high even today.



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