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Book review

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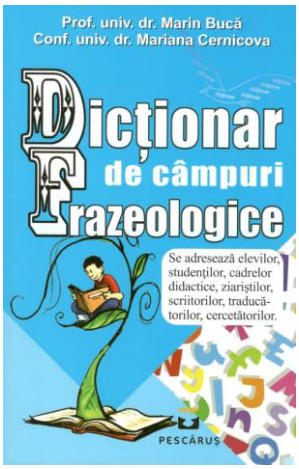

We begin our review of Marin Bucă & Mariana Cernicova's "Dicționar de câmpuri frazeologice" [Dictionary of Phraseological Fields] (2015) with a truism: phraseology is one of the essential components of the system of any language. It is well known that phraseological units are the most "sensitive" syntagms of a linguistic system, both in how they are formed and in how they are understood and used. This is why, in today's discourse, online and offline alike, one can sense a certain hesitation in the way speakers use them, a certain individual preference in phraseological choice, and, at times, genuinely inventive ways of creating, paraphrasing and innovating phraseology.

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Despite this state of affairs, or perhaps precisely because of it, it is evident that various kinds of phraseological dictionaries are needed, able to gather and preserve this specific body of linguistic material.

In recent years, phraseology has increasingly benefited from cognitively oriented analysis. Scholars working in this vein argue that phraseological expressions, charged with affectivity and standing at the confluence of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and euphemism are, in fact, "living metaphors", "conceptual metaphors" (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980) that capture the way people think and act in the most diverse everyday situations. Whether or not speakers consciously register the metaphorical process at work in the coining of such expressions seems, to us, of secondary importance: thanks to a well sedimented phraseological competence in the speaker's mind, the selection of phraseological units in discourse is guided precisely by their high degree of expressivity. Expressions are thus used not because no single word can convey a certain overall meaning within an utterance, but because speakers feel the need to give expressivity to their discourse, or to lend communication a recognisable, conventional shape.

We have chosen to open the review with these preliminary remarks in order to underline the importance of phraseological expressions in speech, the need for an adequate grasp of their meanings and uses and, consequently, the ongoing need for phraseological dictionaries of this kind.

The dictionary under review, entitled Dicționar de câmpuri frazeologice, was published more than a decade ago, but its value and usefulness remain beyond dispute. Its authors, Marin Bucă and Mariana Cernicova, bring to it a substantial expertise in lexicographic work across a variety of fields, accumulated over several decades. In Marin Bucă's case, the leading author of this oeuvre, this expertise is partly grounded in his graduate training at Moscow State University (Lomonosov), where he gained extensive knowledge of general linguistics, and partly in his own research and lexicographic endeavor in Romanian language. Marin Bucă's lexicographic output alone runs to some fifty volumes, among which the "Marele dicționar de expresii românești" [Great Dictionary of Romanian Expressions] (Bucă 2011) and the monumental, over 1,000-page "Enciclopedia gândirii aforistice românești" [Encyclopaedia of Romanian Aphoristic Thought] (Bucă 2006) stand out. The dictionary reviewed here fits quite naturally in such a vast body of work. Its 406 pages contain not only phraseological units proper, but also locutions and set expressions, and occasionally sayings, organised into phraseological fields and marked for register: colloquial, popular, bookish, archaic, regional, poetic, and so on. As Theodor Hristea observed, the boundary between what grammarians label a *locuțiune* and what they call an *expresie* is, in the end, a matter of degree rather than of kind: the more expressive and affectively charged a stable word-group remains, the more it deserves to be called an expression, whereas a group that has lost virtually all its expressivity and become fully 'set' is better called a locution, though in the many intermediate cases the label matters far less than the recognition that both are, equally, phraseological units (Hristea 1984). Grouping them together within a single semantic field, as this dictionary does,

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therefore follows the internal logic of the material itself rather than an arbitrary editorial choice. Taken together, all these stable forms share the stability, memorability and expressive force that make phraseological units what they are, and are just as firmly sedimented in the consciousness of Romanian speakers, while also helping bring out the cultural-national dimension of Romanian phraseological vocabulary, for instance la *Paștele cailor* (literally 'at the horses' Easter', i.e. 'never') or de *florile cucului* (literally 'for the cuckoo's flowers', i.e. 'for nothing, pointlessly').

The lexicographic apparatus is transparent and consistent throughout: headwords are set in bold capitals, the expressions and locutions themselves appear in italics, and the gloss follows in plain type, either as a synonym, a paraphrase, or, where an analytic definition is not possible, an indication of the circumstances of use, introduced by formulas such as *se spune* ('it is said') or *se zice* ('one says'). Variant forms are consistently signalled by *sau* and *ori* (both meaning 'or'), and register labels, regional, popular, archaic, colloquial, slang, ironic, vulgar, bookish, etc., are given in abbreviated form and explained in the list of abbreviations at the front of the volume. This consistency of presentation is precisely what makes it so easy to move between entries, as the examples illustrate.

We believe that this organisation into phraseological fields, favoured by the authors, can offer cognitive linguists an ideal corpus for cognitive analysis, since the headwords represent events in human life, life stages, intellectual and moral qualities, behaviours, feelings and emotions, and so on, all the more so as cognitivism itself is built around a system of values, with particular emphasis on the anthropological and axiological dimension. If, for instance, we look up the phraseological field *nerăbdător* ('impatient'), we find the following sequence (roughly what English would render as 'to be on pins and needles' or 'on tenterhooks'): *a sta ca pe ace/ spini/ ghimpi/ jar/ foc/ cărbuni/ cuțite/ cuie/ jăratic/ coji de ouă/ sponci/ mărăcini* etc. The sheer multitude of phrasemic constituents through which this phraseological 'weld' is achieved is striking for its inventive capacity. It reveals the way in which the Romanian linguistic community assimilates and processes reality: concisely, expressively, through simple elements drawn from everyday life. Such conceptual frames (as phraseological units are termed in cognitivism) are clearly a means of knowing the world, part of the Romanian community's world view, and, ultimately, revealing markers of its way of life. In Vinogradov's classic terms (Vinogradov 1947), entries of this kind are best described as unities rather than fusions: each variant keeps a transparent internal form (Zhukov 1978; Zhukov 1986), the sting of a pin, a thorn, an ember, a live coal, so that impatience is not merely named but re-enacted through a different bodily image each time. It is precisely this abundance of near-synonymous internal forms, rather than any single 'ideal' phrase, that the dictionary's field-based organisation captures so well, something an alphabetical arrangement would have scattered and obscured.

The field *niciodată* ('never') sits closer to the opposite end of that same scale: most of its variants have long since lost any picture a speaker could point to, their force resting on convention and sheer accumulation rather than on a live image. What this field reveals is not so much the internal form of any single unit as the experiential basis

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accumulated by Romanian speakers as a whole, the inventiveness, creativity and uniqueness that make up, in Eminescu's phrase, the 'physiognomy' of the Romanian language. This entry abounds in sayings, some well-known, others less so:

Când lupii beau tutun şi urşii făceau tutun/ Când mi-o creşte iarba în barbă/ Când mi-o creşte păr în palmă/ Când mi-oi vedea ceafa/ Când o face plopul pere şi tânjala viorele/ Când o face plopul pere şi răchita micşunele/ Când o prinde mâţa peşte/ Când o face spânul barbă/ Când o zbura porcul/ Când s-ar ţese pânza-n drum fără iţe, fără drug/ Când s-o lipi cerul de pământ/ Când se va împrieteni şoarecel cu pisica/ Când voi secera scumpia/ Când va da din piatră lapte/ Cât cântă cucul/ Cât e latu şi împăratu/ Cât e hăul şi dudăul/ Cât e lumea (şi pământul)/ Până-i cucul!/ De când mama m-a făcut/ De când se scria musca pe perete etc., as well as in locutions: La calendele greceşti/ La luna câinilor (cailor)/ La moşii ăi verzi/ La anul, când o făta bostanul/ Nici la amin/ Nici în mormânt/ La sfântul aşteaptă/ La vara cailor/ La Paştele cailor etc. Here, as throughout the dictionary under review, one can observe the authors' scholarly rigour, as they record an impressive volume of expressions, sparing no effort in identifying every phrasemic variant, regardless of register.

At the same time, the dictionary is an important (re)source for those translating into and out of Romanian. This is precisely because phraseological units belong to what Eugen Coşeriu called discurso repetido, 'repeated discourse': the layer of a language made up of ready-made blocks that speakers reproduce rather than assemble anew from their constituent words, as opposed to the free combinatorial 'technique of discourse' that generates the rest of an utterance (Coşeriu 1977). A block of repeated discourse cannot be translated piece by piece; it can only be matched against the target language's own repeated block, if one exists, which is exactly why translators need a resource that gathers as many of these blocks as possible and lets near-equivalents be compared at a glance. The sheer abundance of recorded phrasemes in this dictionary helps the translator identify the 'ideal' phraseme in the course of the translation process, all the more so as phraseological units are often affectively marked, carrying irony, sarcasm, double meaning or comic effect. Here too the dictionary's field-based organisation is an asset: since each field already groups together near-synonymous phrasemes, it offers ready-made material for weighing the fine semantic and stylistic distinctions between them, and for choosing which variant best fits a given context.

Ultimately, this dictionary is addressed to the general reader as well, to anyone who wishes to get to know and enrich their own lexical stock, and to remain connected to the linguistic and socio-cultural reality of the community they belong to, offering them the means to select the phraseme best suited to a given communicative situation. This is particularly true in educational settings: as Ciobanu-Mocanu (2007) argues, command of phraseology is itself a marker of linguistic development, one of the 'new dimensions' along which children's language evolves as they move from literal towards figurative competence. A dictionary that lays out entire phraseological fields at a glance, rather than scattering related expressions alphabetically, gives teachers and pupils alike a natural way to build precisely this competence, field by field. Discursive-

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pragmatic preference in communication is, after all, one of the ways in which a speaker's language, and through it the speaker themselves, can be characterised.

If phraseology is, as the linguist V. N. Teliya has argued (1996), a mirror in which a community finds its own national consciousness, then we consider the dictionary under review to be a worthy part of that mirror of Romanian consciousness.

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