

*MODIFIED WINGED WORDS FROM A  
TYPOLOGICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVE IN ENGLISH, GERMAN AND  
ITALIAN PHRASEOLOGICAL STUDIES:*

*ED È SUBITO CAOS.*

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**Riassunto:** Il presente contributo si propone di individuare le lacune tipologiche e terminologiche nella letteratura fraseologica da una prospettiva interlinguistica, per quanto riguarda i frasemi intertestuali riconducibili a una fonte o a un autore e che tendono a funzionare come modelli. Dopo aver delineato il fondamento teorico comune, questo articolo dimostrerà, attraverso un confronto delle classificazioni di base presenti nella letteratura fraseologica inglese, tedesca e italiana, che esiste una varietà di termini diversi utilizzati in ciascuna lingua. Tuttavia, questi insiemi tipologici e terminologici non coprono interamente la gamma degli oggetti di interesse. In conclusione, ci si interroga sulla possibilità di fornire un insieme di termini sufficiente a facilitare gli approcci interlinguistici.

**Parole chiave:** frasemi, intertestualità, modelli di citazione, modificazione.

**Abstract:** The present contribution aims at identifying typological and terminological lacunae in phraseological literature from an interlingual perspective with regards to intertextual phrasemes that are retraceable to a source or an author and that tend to function as patterns. After outlining the common ground of the theoretical foundation, this paper will show, through a comparison of basic classifications found in the English, German and Italian phraseological literature, that there is a variety of different terms used in each language. However, these typological and terminological sets do not entirely cover the full range of the objects of interest. In conclusion the concern is being raised whether it is possible and feasible providing a sufficient set of terms that can facilitate interlingual approaches.

**Keywords:** phrasemes, intertextuality, quotation patterns, modification.

## Introduction

In the 70's and 80's, phraseological research essentially aims for establishing classifications and definitions. Influenced by Construction Grammar, phraseology has continued steadily to extend its scope leading into analyses of phrasemes that were traditionally located in phraseological periphery, such as patterns<sup>1</sup>. Another category of phrasemes considered peripheral are those that refer to an external source. Winged words, quotations and slogans etc. are intertextual references, that is, they relate to another text, the original text in which they first appeared, and they also tend to function as patterns. Nonetheless, neither have they been acknowledged accordingly nor have there been attempts to set up a sufficient classification. At least in the field of German Studies, paremiological research has already advanced in this direction, e. g., Mellado Blanco (2018) who analyses proverbial patterns and their degrees of productivity. Furthermore, Stumpf (2015: 216-17) identifies patterns that originate from slogans in advertisements. In the 5th edition of his introduction to phraseology of German, Burger (2015), for the first time, groups phraseotemplates, paraphrasal verbs and proverbial patterns together in the category *Muster* (patterns).

While classifications are constantly being updated, at the same time terminological problems are becoming more apparent, particularly the lack of functional equivalents for interlingual comparisons or even the lack of terms, including operational definitions, in intralingual approaches. This paper contributes to the identification of typological and terminological gaps in the phraseological literature by first outlining the common theoretical foundations of English, German and Italian phraseology in general, and then by contrasting classifications of phrasemes at the border between winged words and patterns. Surprisingly enough winged words and similar types of phrasemes which can generate templates have not yet been conceptualised completely in their productivity by Romance Philology, which is especially curious in the case of the famous Italian literary quotation *Ed è subito sera* by Salvatore Quasimodo, that has been subject to linguistic studies repeatedly over half a century until now. Based on Quasimodo's verse it will be shown that current phraseological classifications are not sufficiently elaborated.

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1 In this paper, patterns are understood as linguistic templates that contain lexically open slots and whose syntactic structures have a meaning on their own referring to the notion of lexically open idioms by Fillmore/ Kay/ O'Connor's (1988) and Fleischer's (1997) phraseme type *Phraseoschablonen*.

## 2. Theoretical framework

It is precisely the interest in unpredictable and idiosyncratic elements of language, that puts phraseology in the same tradition of thought like Cognitive Grammar and Construction Grammar. Due to its general intention to analyse »the structure, meaning, and use of word-combinations« (Cowie, 1994: 3168) phraseology requires a holistic approach which is why the discipline benefits greatly from Cognitive Grammar, Construction Grammar and studies of formulaicity/formulaic language. The interdisciplinarity of phraseology is rendered obvious in exactly these domains. From a Construction Grammar perspective, phrasemes can be conceptualised as constructions (Schafroth, 2015: 319), as form-meaning pairs which consist of a set of syntactical conditions on one side and meaning and use on the other (Lakoff, 1987: 467). Phrasemes can be conceptualised by Cognitive Grammar too: a symbolic unit of two poles, a semantic unit opposed by a phonological unit (Langacker, 1990: 16). The necessary empirical testing of theoretical concepts, especially with regards to the relation of open-choice principle and idiom principle in language production, has become feasible and efficient with minimal effort using tools like corpus management softwares. In her study Steyer (2013) focuses on habitual combinations of words, that are recurrent and entrenched. Stumpf's study (2015) examines the (ir-)regularity of phraseological multi-word expressions.

Although terminological confusion can be detected in phraseological studies, it appears to be accepted that the term "phraseme" signifies multi-word expression which is entrenched and/or idiomatic. In this case, multi-word expression is understood as combination of at least one lexical morpheme or grammatical morpheme plus at least another lexical morpheme or grammatical morpheme (cfr. definitions by Gries 2008, Schafroth 2015, Giacoma 2012, Fiedler 2007). Sinclair's dichotomy of the open choice principle and the idiom principle conveys the same idea as phraseology: in language production we do not just freely combine single words and arrange them with regards to grammatical and semantic rules (open choice), but we also rely on the use of «semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices» (1991: 110). «Prefabs», as Erman and Warren (2000: 31) call entrenched or conventionalised word combinations, are stored in the mental lexicon in the same way single words are.

### 3. Terminology and typology from a contrastive perspective: English, German and Italian Phraseology

#### 3.1. Winged words in phraseological classifications

In contrast to proverbs, winged words are characterised as of no central importance in phraseological literature, especially in introductory works they are mostly categorised as belonging to the peripheral area of phraseology.

With regards to some famous classifications<sup>2</sup>, such as those by Fleischer (1997), Fiedler (2007), Giacomini (2012) and Burger (2015), it should be noted that name one fundamental characteristic of winged words: the author or the source of the phraseme is known and retraceable. Although winged words and quotations can be distinguished from proverbs and proverbial expressions by the source reference, the border between phraseology and paremiology is quite blurred. Analogously to the notion of phraseology in a narrow or a broader sense (centre/periphery), paremiology focuses on proverbs, but «[...] generally encompasses genres such as aphorisms, Wellerisms, adages, maxims, apothegms, famous quotations» (Villers, 2021: 146).

The relationship between phraseology and paremiology is best understood as complementary given the close relationship between proverbs and winged words/quotations and considering that proverbs can originate from winged words and viceversa: the winged word *God moves in a mysterious way* by William Cowper – the first verse of his hymn “Light Shining out of Darkness” – is the English expression for the *topos* of the inscrutability of God’s intentions or ways of working, retraceable to Romans 11, 33, and also depicted in the German proverb *Die Wege des Herrn sind unergründlich* and in the Italian one *Le vie della provvidenza sono infinite*. Burger (2015) outlines the importance of the pragmatic function of winged words and quotations categorising them as (context-bound or non-context-bound) communicative phrasemes together with routine formulae, pragmatic phrasemes, constructional idioms, clichés, catchphrases, idiomatic phrases and structural phrasemes.

A key characteristic of phrasemes like winged words and proverbs is their intertextuality, referring to Dobrovolskij and Piirainen’s (2009: 17–19) notion of intertextual motivation in their typology of synchronic semantic motivation of idioms. Idioms can be metaphorically, symbolically or intertextually motivated, whereas intertextually motivated idioms are often also motivated metaphorically or symbolically. The idiom *to cast pearls before swine* (ger. *Perlen vor die Säue werfen*, it. *gettare perle ai porci*) contains the semantically autonomous component “pearls”, which is a symbol that occurs outside the phraseme with the same meaning, although the symbolic motivation extends only

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed comparison of multi-criteria and ramification-based typologies of phraseological categories including a series of subtypes see Villers (2021: 150-151)

to the single component and not to the whole phraseme (Dobrovolskij & Piirainen 1996: 101). Moreover, the phraseme qualifies not only as an idiom but also as a winged word, coming from the Bible, Matthew 7, 6. Proverbs and winged words share their intertextual character insofar as both types of phrasemes reproduce microtexts that were coined before. Whether the author or the source may be known or unknown, both proverbs and winged words are alike in their quotational nature. Yet, the etymological knowledge of phrasemes, the specific original contexts they first appeared in, do not necessarily lead into the impossibility of understanding the phraseme. Dobrovolskij and Piirainen (2009: 32) clarify that idioms remain metaphorically or symbolically motivated in case the intertextual motivation is not understood.

### 3.2 Terminological observations in the field of winged words

A brief (non-representative) survey amongst Italian PhD students brought to light that almost nobody of them knew the Italian term “*parole alate*”, let alone its meaning. *Geflügelte Worte*, the German counterpart, refers to Büchmann’s collection of quotations that was named after the Homeric phrase (gr.) ἔπεα πτερόεντα (*epea pteroenta*) and published in 1864 (cfr. Fleischer, 1997: 14). Calhoun (1935: 226) systematically analysed the Homeric epithet concluding that “*pteroenta*” «evidently does not mean “winged” or “swift” in the general sense that all words fly with the speed of sound», but rather «that the particular words which follow were spoken quickly or with animation or some symptom of emotion». Vivante (1975: 2) comments his interpretation as follows: «[...] words have wings in that they fly from the speaker’s mouth to the listener’s ear»; but then clarifies that, in his opinion, Homer did not perceive it metaphorically but concretely real: «breath gathering into voice, sound formed into meaning and travelling through the air» (1975: 2). In his cognitive linguistic approach, Horn (2015: 21) argues for the phrase to be understood as instantiation of the conduit metaphor with the meaning «‘words that are spoken out loud and reach the addressee’», so he focuses on the process of transfer of verbal communication.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the question, whether the metaphorical understanding of Homer’s epithet is legitimate or not, the actual term “winged words” conveys the idea that it is not an ordinary quotation but more popular and used outside of its original domain.<sup>4</sup>

Giacoma (2012) takes a contrastive approach between Italian and German, basing her classification on that of Burger and Fleischer, what might have been caused by the lack of an adequate terminology, because the Italian phraseological terminology

3 Horn (2015: 20) finds the impossibility to assign the epithet to a specific source domain with great certainty but sees the tendency that πτερόεις refers to archery because it never cooccurs with birds favouring the idea of flying words.

4 Burger (2015: 129) argues that a winged word is born in a phraseological sense, if an expression is transferred into a new context.

«still needs to be systematized» (Autelli, 2021: 7), a desiderate that Schafroth, Imperiale and Autelli will tackle with their *Manuale di fraseologia italiana* that is estimated to be published in 2024.<sup>5</sup> In her classification, Giacomini (2012: 30) uses the German term *Geflügelte Worte* and describes it as «sentenze, massime e citazioni riconducibili ad un autore». De Giovanni (2015: 164) conducts a meta study of linguistic dictionaries concluding that *citazioni* is the most common term in Italian. The Italian terminology corresponds to Fleischer's (1997) and Burger's (2015) classifications of *Geflügelte Worte*, *Sentenzen* (en. *sententiae*), *Maximen* (en. *maxims*) and *Aphorismen* (en. *aphorisms*), although both authors further list commercial and political slogans while Giacomini does not add them into her classification. Fiedler (2007) uses the terms winged words, quotations, catchphrases, slogans and sententious remarks, yet for the latter three subtypes she does not name any examples. In an additional chapter of Fiedler's coursebook called "supplements", Gläser adds another subtype called *dicta* which she categorises as phraseological unit in "language for special purposes" defining them as non-sentence-equivalent fragments that are being known outside of their domain of origin, e. g. the survival of the fittest (Fiedler, 2007: 140). Gläser (1998: 126-127) herself groups winged words and quotations, commandments and maxims, and slogans with proverbs, commonplaces and routine formulae in a category named "sentence-like phraseological units (or sentence idioms)" and furthermore, locates allusions and fragments of quotations in a transit zone from nominative to propositional phrasemes.

### 3.3 Overview of the terminology of schematic phrasemes

Lately, a specific type of phraseme has become subject to intensive phraseological research: schematic phrasemes or patterns that cover a wide range of multiple subtypes which are referred to as e. g., phraseotemplates (Schafroth, 2015) / *Phraseoschablonen* (Fleischer, 1997), formal idioms/ lexically open idioms (Fillmore/ Kay/ O'Connor 1988), *espressioni patterned* (Casadei, 1995), *Phrasemkonstruktionen* (Dobrovolskij, 2011), *fraseologismi a schema fisso* (Schafroth 2020).

Inspired by the theoretical framework provided especially by works on constructions like *let alone X* (Fillmore/ Kay/ O'Connor, 1988), *What's X doing Y?* (Kay & Fillmore, 1999) and *Incredulity-Response-constructions* (Fillmore/ Kay/O'Connor, 1988), phraseotemplates subsequently gained more attention in phraseological studies. Due to digitalisation and technological progress theoretic models can now be validated efficiently by thorough empirical examination of large amounts of data

<sup>5</sup> The first manual of Italian phraseology will contain 19 contributes of renowned international and Italian linguists and investigate on main types in Italian phraseology and their fundamental characteristics (cfr. the information on the website of Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf)

and the results gained from corpus analysis; a good example is once again Mella-do-Blanco (2018) and her analysis of proverbial patterns.

Schematic phrasemes such as comparative phrasemes and phraseotemplates are not covered by Giacomà's (2012) classification, thus leading into a terminological lacuna. Schafroth suggests that the Italian *Che me lo chiedi a fare?* is neither found in monolingual nor phraseological dictionaries because such constructions were probably first recorded as such by Construction Grammar (Schafroth, 2015: 327). Casadei (1995: 338) bases her terminology on Fillmore/Kay/O'Connor and their dichotomy of lexically filled and lexically open idioms, from which she derives the terms (*espressioni idiomatiche*) *lessicalmente saturate/ parzialmente saturate/ lessicalmente aperte*. She summarises schematic phrasemes under the term *espressioni patterned* and makes gradations highlighting differences in the degree of lexical saturation (Casadei 1995: 339).

#### 4. Modified winged word or pattern? The case of *Ed è subito sera*

Schafroth (1998: 80-81) points out that modifications to literary quotations, such as Salvatore Quasimodo's famous *Ed è subito sera* do have quite a history in Italian media and advertising language identifying a process of acquisition of autonomy that the literary set-pieces underwent. 30 years before that, Sabatini had already found proof of use of the phraseme in advertisements (1968: 1055) calling the modification «Api-comfort... ed è subito caldo!...», a «calco sfacciato, a spese di Quasimodo», an audacious loan at the expense of Quasimodo. Rondinelli (2017: 192) comments in his investigation on slogans: «Proverbi e locuzioni possono diventare plastismi ovvero parole o espressioni divenute - o ritenute - alla moda che spesso vengono usate, gettate e riutilizzate come oggetti di plastica.» He refers to what Castellani Pollidori (1995) called «lingua di plastica» and characterises *Ed è subito sera* as *plastismo* referring once again to Castellani Pollidori, who identifies the phraseme's use in journalistic language (1995: 137). It is thus well documented that this specific linguistic phenomenon has been studied structurally and pragmatically for about 50 years now. A rather new example proving the verse is still utilised in a productive manner was delivered online by Neapolitan newspaper *Il Mattino* titling «Corso Vittorio Emanuele, via ai lavori ed è subito caos con la riapertura delle scuole» (Esca, 2020).

Regarding the use of the template *Ed è subito X*, Schafroth (1998: 83-84) identifies (1) a text linguistic function because the rheme, the lexically open slot that is being filled, is focused, whereas the phraseme is anaphoric as well since the conjunctive "ed" connects two propositional structures that form a microtext, (2) a pragmatic linguistic function because the initial "ed" and "subito" suggest a high value of information, (3) an aesthetic function by referring to a famous poem and (4) an economic function, because it is a *passé-partout*-structure that can be used situationally and is semantically

distinct and highly pragmatic-aesthetic.<sup>6</sup> The initial “*e(d)*” is not only important from a structural-pragmatic point of view, but also in terms of intertextuality. Proietti (1992: 147) retraces its use back to the bible (*E Gesù disse ai suoi discepoli...*) and to various other domains, like 19th/20th century lyric poetry, book titles or film titles. *Ed è subito X* is thus a case of dual intertextuality, nonetheless the doubt remains that every recipient is able to relate its instantiations to Quasimodo or even relate the “*ed*” to its biblical tradition. But is it simply an occasional modification of a famous literary quotation or a pattern? Certainly, journalists and marketers intentionally create catchy headlines and slogans, hence premade structures minimise the productional effort and potentially maximise the effect. Looking only at the text production, it may appear as an occasional modification in the sense, that a phraseme is modified intentionally for a specific text. However, the creative use of Quasimodo’s verse as well as its high productivity are well documented over a long period of time which indicates that *Ed è subito X* is entrenched to certain degree, therefore it is fair to say that it is also a pattern, or at least in the process of evolving into one. A contributing factor might be that the pattern contains the initial “*e(d)*”, an element, whose intertextual nature most probably seized to be recognisable, i. e. has become part of the general collective linguistic memory. After all, any reference is dependent on shared knowledge between language producer and recipient.

## 5. Conclusions

A comparison of English, German and Italian phraseological terminology automatically results in identifying several terminological lacunae, which is only logical to the extent, that each of the three linguistic communities have different linguistic traditions. The biggest difference might be, that the terms “winged words” and “*Ge-flügelte Worte*” are more than a reference to the Homeric epithet, but name a specific type of phrasemes, that comprises a set of similar subtypes, whereas that does not seem to be the case for the Italian language, which prefers *citazioni*. Even if there is evidence that the term “winged words” is a misconception or an inaccurate translation of the Homeric original, the metaphor accurately conveys the difference between a winged word and a quotation, that is the notion of gaining popularity through reproduction.

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<sup>6</sup> Lüger (1999: 205-206) gives a detailed explanation of expressivity of (sentence-equal) phrasemes including the relationship of the author to the reproduced structure on the one hand, and on the other, the recipient’s reaction; he names self-expression (or self-profiling) as main reason for usage, for instance to create an effect of repartee or to present oneself as creative. This function is also obvious in cases with meta-communicative references to show a high social status or an elaborate register. Burger (2015: 142) illustrates the socio-cultural dimension by specifying that, already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, winged words had the function to express social affiliation to the educated classes.

An issue in all three linguistic communities is the lack of a term for patterns originating from intertextual phrasemes from a known source, which is why the terms en. quotation pattern, ger. *Zitatmuster* and it. *modello di citazione* are proposed here to fill this gap, prioritising in this case the quotational nature as criterion and thus even having a coherent and graspable functional equivalent in Italian as opposed to using a term that contains “winged word(s)”. It is very unlikely that a hypothetical endeavour such as creating new terms for already existing subtypes of phrasemes like winged words and quotations could be successful, however, interlingual comparisons of terminology and typology as well as looking for a deeper understanding of intralingual particularities can help elaborating existing phraseological classifications and finding functional equivalents. A first desiderate connected to that thematic nexus is to further analyse the language-particular terminology and typology, for instance terms not mentioned or explained in detail in this paper, such as catchphrases or snowclones for English and *parola d'autore/ frase d'autore* or *plastismo* for Italian.

Another promising desiderate presents itself in corpus studies of winged words and quotations to fathom if they generate patterns and to analyse them quantitatively and qualitatively; *To be or not to be* or *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita* are certainly two highly attractive potential objects for detailed studies. As for the diffusion of modifications of *Ed è subito sera* in Italian media and advertisement language, respectively the instantiations created based on the model *Ed è subito X*, it is highly probable that the literary quote is evolving or has already evolved into a pattern.

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