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# **DOCTORAL THESIS**

## **AN ETHNO-LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO ROMANIAN AND SPANISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS THAT CONTAIN RELIGIOUS TERMS**

**-SUMMARY-**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION / 7

### Chapter I: STATE OF RESEARCH / 13

#### 1. Theoretical approaches to phraseology / 13

- 1.1. Structural approaches / 13
- 1.2. Generativist approaches / 18
- 1.3. Cognitive approaches / 20
- 1.4. Psycholinguistic approaches / 23
- 1.5. Integral approaches / 26
- 1.6. Pragmatic approaches / 28
- 1.7. Sociolinguistic approaches / 30
- 1.8. Lexicographic approaches / 31
- 1.9. Didactic approaches / 33
- 1.10. Translation approaches / 34
- 1.11. Ethno-linguistic approaches / 35
- 1.12. Concluding remarks / 42

#### 2. Romanian and Spanish approaches to phraseology / 41

##### 2.1. Romanian approaches to phraseology / 41

- 2.1.1. Structural approaches / 41
- 2.1.2. Integral approaches / 48
- 2.1.3. Ethno-linguistic approaches / 48
- 2.1.4. Other approaches / 51

##### 2.2. Spanish approaches to phraseology / 51

- 2.2.1. Structural approaches / 51
- 2.2.2. Integral approaches / 54
- 2.2.3. Other approaches / 56

##### 2.3. Concluding remarks / 56

### Chapter II: AN ETHNO-LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO ROMANIAN AND SPANISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS THAT CONTAIN RELIGIOUS TERMS / 60

#### 0. Introduction / 60

#### 1. The religious background of the two countries / 60

- 1.1. Romanian religious background / 61
- 1.2. Spanish religious background / 62

#### 2. Sacred entities / 64

##### 2.1. God / 64

- 2.1.1. The Romanian perspective / 64
- 2.1.2. The Spanish perspective / 66
- 2.1.3. The conceptualization of God in phraseology / 69
  - A. God's attributes / 69
  - B. Man's attitude toward God / 91

- C. Jesus Christ / 96
- D. Concluding remarks / 101

## **2.2. The devil / 103**

- 2.2.1. The Romanian perspective / 103
- 2.2.2. The Spanish perspective / 105
- 2.2.3. The conceptualization of the devil / 108**
  - 2.2.3.1. The devil's identity / 108
  - 2.2.3.2. The typology of the devil / 112
  - 2.2.3.3. The devil's physical attributes / 113
  - 2.2.3.4. The devil's spiritual attributes / 117
  - 2.2.3.5. The devil's impact on men / 127
  - 2.2.3.6. Men's impact on the devil / 132
  - 2.2.3.7. Spatial-temporal coordinates / 137
  - 2.2.3.8. Concluding remarks / 139

## **2.3. Mary the Blessed Virgin / 140**

- A. The attributes of the Virgin / 142
- B. Man's attitude toward the Virgin / 146
- C. Concluding remarks / 148

## **2.4. Angels / 149**

- 2.4.1. Archangels / 152
- 2.4.2. Concluding remarks / 153

## **2.5. Saints / 154**

- A. Saints' attributes / 155
- B. Men's attitude toward saints / 159
- C. Saints' attitude toward men / 162
- D. Peculiarities / 166**
  - 1. St Agop Verzaru / 167
  - 2. St Alexis / 168
  - 3. St Anne / 168
  - 4. St Anastasia / 168
  - 5. St Andrew / 169
  - 6. St Anthony / 170
  - 7. St Barbara / 171
  - 8. St Benedict / 171
  - 9. St Bruno / 172
  - 10. The Seven Sleepers / 172
  - 11. St Catherine / 172
  - 12. St Fernando/St Francis / 172
  - 13. St Philip / 173
  - 14. St George / 173
  - 15. St Jacob / 174
  - 16. St Ignatius / 174
  - 17. St Elijah / 175
  - 18. St John / 176
  - 19. St Jinojo / 177
  - 20. St Martha / 177
  - 21. St Martin / 178

- 22. St Nicholas / 178
- 23. St Paraschiva / 179
- 24. St Patrick / 179
- 25. St Paul / 180
- 26. St Peter / 180
- 27. St Rita / 182
- 28. St Thomas / 182
- 29. St Basil / 182
- 30. St Friday / 183
- 31. St Vitus / 183
- 32. St Blaise / 184

**E. Concluding remarks / 184**

**2.6. Biblical characters / 186**

- 1. Adam / 186
- 2. Annas / 187
- 3. Abraham / 188
- 4. Barabbas / 188
- 5. Cain / 188
- 6. Caesar / 189
- 7. Eve / 189
- 8. Pharisees / 190
- 9. Job / 190
- 10. Herod / 191
- 11. Isaiah / 191
- 12. Judas / 192
- 13. Lazarus / 193
- 14. Lot / 193
- 15. Magdalene / 194
- 16. Methuselah / 194
- 17. The women of the Gospels / 194
- 18. Moses / 195
- 19. Noah / 195
- 20. Pilates / 196
- 21. Prophets / 197
- 22. Samson / 197
- 23. Solomon / 199

**24. Concluding remarks / 198**

**3. Sacred space / 199**

**3.1. The unseen world / 199**

- 3.1.1. Heaven / 200
- 3.1.2. Hell / 203
- 3.1.3. Limbo / 206

**3.2. The seen world / 206**

- 3.2.1. The altar / 206
- 3.2.2. The church / 208
- 3.2.3. Other spatial coordinates / 212
  - 3.2.3.1. 'Belén' / 212
  - 3.2.3.2. Ceca/Mecca / 213
  - 3.2.3.3. The Jordan River / 213

**3.3. Concluding remarks / 214**

**4. Sacred time / 214**

4.1. Fasting / 215

4.2. Feasts / 220

4.2.1. Sunday / 220

4.2.2. Christmas / 221

4.2.3. Epiphany / 222

4.2.4. The Lord's Entry into Jerusalem / 223

4.2.5. Easter / 224

4.2.6. The Ascension of Christ / 228

4.2.7. Pentecost / 228

**4.3. Manifestations of religiosity / 229**

4.3.1. Prayer / 229

4.3.2. The Liturgy / 230

4.3.3. The sermon / 233

4.3.4. Sacraments / 234

4.3.4.1. Baptism / 234

4.3.4.2. The Eucharist / 236

4.3.4.3. Holy Unction / 237

**4.3.5. The peculiarities of prayer / 238**

4.3.5.1. Halleluiah / 238

4.3.5.2. Amen / 239

4.3.5.3. Hail Mary / 239

4.3.5.4. Blessing/the curse/blasphemy / 240

4.3.5.5. 'Bogdaproste' / 240

4.3.5.6. The Creed / 241

4.3.5.7. 'Denia' / 241

4.3.5.8. Osanah / 241

4.3.5.9. The Lord's prayer / 242

4.3.6. The pilgrimage / 242

4.3.7. The funeral repast / 243

4.3.8. The procession / 247

**4.4. Concluding remarks / 248**

**5. Sacred instruments / 248**

5.1. Holy water / 249

5.2. The Antidoron / 249

5.3. The Bible (The Holy Scriptures) / 250

5.4. The papal bull / 251

5.5. The icon lamp / 251

5.6. The bell / 252

5.7. The knot-shaped bread / 255

5.8. The funeral wheat porridge / 256

5.9. The cross / 256

5.10. The Gospel / 262

5.11. The Orthodox icon / 263

5.12. The candle / 264

5.13. The chrism / 267

5.14. 'Pascalia' / 267

5.15. Matrimonial crowns / 267

5.16. The kamelaukion / 268

- 5.17. The prosphora / 268
- 5.18. The Psalter / 269
- 5.19. The rosary / 269
- 5.20. The sanbenito / 270
- 5.21. The incense / 270
- 5.22. The talanton / 271
- 5.23. Concluding remarks / 273**

## **6. Actants / 274**

- 6.1. The Pope / 274
- 6.2. The cardinal/the bishop/the metropolitan bishop / 275
- 6.3. The protopope / 276
- 6.4. The priest / 276
- 6.5. The monk / 282
- 6.6. The sexton / 285
- 6.7. Concluding remarks / 285**

## **III. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS / 286**

**ANNEX 1. THE CORPUS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS USED IN THE ANALYSIS / 292**

**ANNEX 2. THE NUMERIC DISTRIBUTION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS ACCORDING TO KEYWORDS / 406**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY / 410**

**Keywords:** *phraseological units, Ethno-linguistics, Romanian, Spanish, religious terms, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, popular religiosity, diffuse attitudes, stylised attitudes, the meme, collective mentality, semantics, literal signification, global signification, mental image.*

The present thesis, entitled *An Ethno-linguistic Approach to Romanian and Spanish Phraseological Units that Contain Religious Terms*, describes an investigation into phraseology, a language compartment that is of particular interest to researchers, due to its complicated nature and to the difficulty in defining its object of investigation. The latter consists of prefabricated linguistic structures – as opposed to free word combinations –, whose structure is fixed by virtue of usage. Apart from polylexicity and fixation, other distinguishing characteristics of phraseologisms can be identified (idiomaticity, institutionalization, pragmatic value). Phraseology has been approached from numerous perspectives: structural, typological, morphosyntactic, lexical, pragmatic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic interactions.

Our examination will address phraseology from an ethno-linguistic perspective, since the connection between language and reality is of paramount importance to language decoding. Therefore, worthy of being remembered are the understanding of the mechanism of polylexical constructions' implicit ontology and their correlation with cultural facts. In this matter, we consider the relation between the verbal domain (phraseology) and the cultural domain (popular religious beliefs); therefore, language is understood as *enérgeia*, and the three competences are simultaneously activated (elocutional, idiomatic and expressive).

The thesis is confined to Romanian/Spanish contrastive phraseology, focusing chiefly on identifying the similarities and differences between stable word groups in the two languages. The aim of our research is to investigate phraseological units that contain elements from the semantic field of Religion, a field that is highly productive in the phraseology of both languages, but which is of little interest among researchers. In addition, this particular topic is significant due to various points of convergence: the common European framework; Romanian and Spanish are Romance languages; the majority of the two countries' citizens are Christian. Consequently, our research hypothesis concerns the prevalence of common features among phraseological units in the two languages. Divergent aspects derive from cult differences (Orthodoxy/

Catholicism), from the individual evolution of the national religious framework and from particular language evolution.

The aim of our research was to complete the following: to investigate the existing contributions in the phraseological field, to identify the phraseological units that contain religious terms, to classify the phraseological units identified, to present the mechanisms with which mental images operate, to analyze phraseologisms from a semantic point of view, to identify the types of equivalents that can be settled between the phraseological units from the two languages, to describe the phraseological collective imaginary, namely the way in which the man lives the sacred – even if this may not be shared by all community members. The relevance of our research lies in both the systematic review of the main approaches to phraseology and in the analysis that brings forth a poorly investigated perspective. In addition, special attention is paid to the comparative/contrastive dimension of two languages that have scarcely been subject to a similar research. Moreover, we consider that the interdisciplinary approach (linguistics, theology, ethnology) confers an innovative approach to the research and conveys unity of interpretation to repeated language facts. In addition, we reckon that our study arouses interest through the interpretative model proposed, which is configured through the ethno-linguistic concepts that we adapted in order to suit the present analysis.

Due to spatial restrictions, we haven't tackled the lexical and morphosyntactic implications of the phraseologisms identified. We aimed at approaching the phraseological issue exclusively from the historical level of language. Therefore, the individual level, namely the individual competence and the use of phraseologisms, was not a matter of our concern. The above-mentioned perspectives would have had a peripheral role in the overall approach and would have circumscribed the research to a sociolinguistic perspective.

The thesis has two chapters and two annexes, the content of which will be presented in the lines that follow. The research deals with both a theoretical and a practical approach, a wider space being allotted to the practical part.

Chapter I, entitled *State of research*, has two main parts. The first section, *Theoretical approaches to phraseology*, is dedicated to a brief presentation of the contributions of the main schools of linguistics and of the main linguistic approaches. However, it was not our intention to exhaust the inventory. The study deals with the literature review on three different levels: a brief description of linguistic directions, the highlight of the way in which phraseological units are analysed and some critical

considerations. Thus, Structuralism emphasises structural relations between phraseological components, Generativism identifies transformational deficiencies and Cognitivism establishes an account that deals with the conceptual metaphor. The psycholinguistic perspective is concerned with idiom processing models, while the pragmatic approach takes into consideration the participants in communicative exchanges and the communicative situation. Sociolinguistics focuses on regional variants and speakers' variables (age, sex, ethnic group, social class). Integralism propounds a new phraseological classification, describing the phraseological phenomenon heterogeneously, without neglecting other linguistic directions. Lexicographic, didactic and translation perspectives gave rise to approaches that attempt to describe the way phraseologisms are inserted in dictionaries and the way they are taught and translated.

The last part of this section, which is considerably wider than the previous ones, lists the works dedicated to the ethno-linguistic perspective, pointing out some of the coordinates of the conceptual framework developed by certain linguists such as W. von Humboldt, F. Boas, E. Sapir, B. L. Whorf, C. Levi-Strauss, C. Geertz or A. Duranti, whose contributions are crucially important in explaining the relation between language and culture. Further additional information was brought to clarify the concepts which are significant to our present research: *the meme, the emic and etic perspectives, symbolic values, ethos, cosmovision*. In our linguistic approach, we adopted three different perspectives: structural relations between symbols, interpretative significance and contextual significance.

The last section of the first chapter is dedicated to a brief presentation of the main Romanian and Spanish contributions in the field of phraseology. We presented the conceptual framework outlined by researchers such as I. Zanne, L. Şăineanu, I. Iordan, F. Dimitrescu, D. Nica, Th. Hristea, S. Dumistrăcel, Gh. Colţun, P. Zugun (Romanian linguists), respectively J. Casares, H. Thun, A. Zuluaga, A. Tristán Pérez, L. Ruiz Gurillo, G. Corpas Pastor (Spanish linguists). We systematized the concepts through the design of two contrastive schemes regarding the general phraseological terms used in the two languages, respectively phraseological subcategories according to fixation and idomatization. In our opinion, terminological inconsistency and looseness have accounted for the need to use the notions *phraseological units* and *phraseologism* in the present study. They are widely applied and are common to both languages. Moreover, we consider that dealing with the topic in a broader sense is adequate due to the fact that our

approach is situated within the framework of language/culture interference, outside the need of outlining a typology.

Chapter II, entitled *An Ethno-linguistic approach to Romanian and Spanish phraseological units that contain religious terms*, is divided into six sections and it represents the most extensive part of the thesis. The first subchapter outlines the national religious background, considering the phenomenon of popular religiosity, which becomes essential in configuring the coordinates that define collective religious experience. Apart from the official religion, which is common to the two nations, which are different in respect of the cult, several religious manifestations are brought forth. They configure a system (customs, beliefs, myths) and can be regarded as symbolic universes. In our analysis, we correlated language facts with prescribed attitudes and with popular Christian mentality, identifying traces of the imaginary derived from folktales and other cultural areas.

The following subchapters tackle the main categories of the sacred sphere, which are ordered following the general-to-specific pattern: sacred entities (God vs. the devil, the Blessed Virgin Mary, angels, saints, biblical characters), sacred space (the unseen world – heaven, hell, limbo –, the seen world – the altar, the church etc.), sacred time (fasting, feasts, manifestations of religiosity), sacred instruments (holy water, the Antidoron, the funeral wheat porridge, the knot-shaped bread, the incense), actants (the Pope, the cardinal, the bishop, the priest, the monk). We made an inventory of the thematic elements that we identified in phraseology, regarding the above-mentioned categories. Thus, delineation is made in order to establish subgroups inside of these categories, according to various attributes or to the bidirectional relationship between the entities and the man etc.

This chapter focuses on the comparative and contrastive analysis of phraseologisms, insisting on the way in which the two semantic levels of a phraseological unit (the literal meaning and the true meaning) are configured, on the predominant semes (common or differentiating), on the conceptual or cultural metaphor that forms the bedrock of phraseologisms, on their transparency and idiomaticity level. We identified several types of interlinguistic correspondence between phraseological units: total equivalence (both the true meaning and the mental image coincide), partial equivalence (structural and pragmatic differences and differences concerning symbolic values were detected) or zero equivalence (facts of language that were generated only in one of the two languages). False friends and asymmetrical polysemy were also taken into

consideration. Every subchapter is preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion.

The great number of phraseologisms that we have identified mirrors the intense religious feeling experienced by the two nations. Moreover, the observations made by Calero Fernández (1998: 168) are confirmed: doctrinal or hierarchical changes undergone by the Church over the centuries are not echoed in phraseology, because theological discussions that brought about scissions in Christianity affected a closed group, not the majority of the speakers. Consequently, the main difference between Orthodoxy and Catholicism (*filioque*) cannot be traced in phraseological units. Generally speaking, the fanatical fervour associated to Spanish Catholicism (Drăghicescu 2004: 273) or the active role played by the Church in the history of Spain stand out, respectively the natural combination of religiosity with the profane, confessional problems or the unification with the Church of Rome outline the Romanian background. These facts are scarcely or hardly echoed in the Corpus selected for the research.

Although the identified fixed word combinations “talk” about basically Christian nations, the type of Christianity echoed in phraseology is popular. Thus, there are different ways to access and to live the sacred, which is a consequence of the fears, desires and inner questions experienced by individuals, whose representations are conferred by the rural community perspective. Through these facts of the language, the man expresses his attitude towards the elements from the real world. The social function of religion – that ensures the cohesion of individuals – is scarcely reflected in phraseology; for example, the phraseological units regarding the rites of transition: the importance of the godfather at Baptism, the massive participation to the funeral meal. Moreover, temporal coordinates (feasts) establish a recurrent phenomenon that is connected to agricultural labour, harmonizing economic, social and religious dimensions. In certain situations, real facts are transformed through lexicalization in collective memory – Lotman’s triad (1974: 22-23) *life/text/memory*, consequently performing the sign function.

Therefore, we consider that global significance indicates especially complex inner experiences with shades of difference, which are not lexicalized in a different way in language. Another constant presence in both languages are negative remarks and ego-focused emotions – the same conclusions have been drawn by Scherf (2006) and Suárez Cuadros (2006) when comparing German and Romanian, respectively Ukrainian and Spanish. Many phraseological units have pragmatic value, being oriented towards the

recipient and taking an ethical dimension (towards the own person and towards alterity), facts that are in accordance with the way in which popular religiosity is experienced on other levels (Rodríguez Becerra 2000; Duch 2004).

Self-consciousness is brought about in phraseology, a preoccupation with oneself related to the man's role in the world and to the sacred/profane dichotomy intensely experienced and recreated on the metaphorical level. The dichotomy materializes in two basic directions – vertically (divinity/man) and horizontally (man/man) –, which are reciprocally connected and which have consequences on the whole existence. However, the phraseological perspective is not unitary. The relationship with the divinity is simplified, open, favourable (what appeals to the man is not the reward in the afterlife, but problem alleviation through supernatural assistance), insubordinate, nature-oriented. The man is designed both as a servant and as a son of Almighty God. The desire for infinity is often suppressed by the mundane existence. The space and the time influenced by the sacred (the pre-eminently positive space/time) are destructured, desacralized. In addition, we observed the critical attitude towards the clergy. We have not identified marked differences in the structuring of the spiritual universe, namely the ways of meme perception are analogous in the two languages, even if the actual research aims for two different cults and cultures. The constituents of phraseological units that have been identified embody a *cultural focus*; national identity is preserved through operational micro fields, through the generated mental image or through the numeric dimension of recurrent word-combinations. On the one hand, there were generated more Romanian phraseological units related to the devil, some of which have an expressive dimension. On the other hand, the Spanish phraseological spectrum is marked by the formal scheme of the perception of the divinity. Even if many phraseological units are configured on a biblical basis, metaphorical ingenuity can be distinguished; some metaphors overlap trans-linguistically on the source-domain level or on the level of metaphorical untying.

We sought to analyse the phraseological behaviour of the seme /sacred/ through the established concepts. We took notice of its frequent neutralization and exceeding of the religious sphere, since it often makes use of an ironic, hilarious and contempt value. Thus, various domains are included, even though they have no apparent connection to the initial domain. In such situations, several (often secondary) semantic features which can be spotted acquire distinct values. Not all phraseological constituents cast their initial significance over the global significance. In addition, depending on the context, some phraseologisms acquire heterogeneous semantic features which are often antonymic. Not

all phraseological units register lexical correspondences, which illustrates the function of substitution performed by the repeated discourse – the semantic substance was not structured in lexematic units. Another common fact is the ambivalence of certain lexemes inside the phraseological universe of discourse (this is scarcely the case of a sole phraseological unit whose feature is polysemous asymmetry); the phenomenon is confined to „the variety in unity” manifestation, being a distinguished characteristic of all popular creations (Şeuleanu 1994: 83). Therefore, the sacred is personalized, oriented towards personal seeking (Borobio 2004: 45).

The research process ends with a conclusion chapter which synthesizes the results that we obtained and which propounds several ways of taking further the research. The complexity of phraseology, in general, and of the ethnological approach, in particular, is highlighted.

Our research started with establishing a working hypothesis and the objectives, it continued with the consulting of the bibliography and with the design of the corpus that we appended (Annex 1). In order to identify the phraseological units that contain religious terms, we consulted monolingual, bilingual and phraseological dictionaries and various manuals of phraseology. The corpus we have selected consists of 208 keywords (for example, *candle, incense, St Andrew, chrism*), which are approached heterogeneously (the corpus contains units that are generally regarded as distinct phraseological categories, according to wide phraseological approaches: *locuțiuni, expresii, proverbe*). We have identified 757 Romanian fixed combinations and 938 Spanish phraseological units, making a total of 1695 phraseologisms that have been taken into account in our analysis. We did not include in our numerical evaluation phraseological variants (the use of distinct lexemes – second-order elements – that are synonyms) or minor structural differences (singular/plural, the use of the definite/ indefinite article, word order variation).

The numeric distribution of the lexemes taken into consideration in this paper can be consulted in Annex 2. Phraseologisms have been alphabetically ordered according to the keyword. For every phraseological unit we explained its significance and we offered its Spanish equivalent, even if the phraseological units which we identified go beyond our research. We translated Spanish fixed combinations literally in order to facilitate the access to information (when we have not identified any equivalent phraseological unit, we only indicated the literal significance). When dealing with multiple meaning phraseologisms, we suggested several fixed constructions in order to cover all the meanings. We also mentioned bibliographical sources in the corpus.

Then, we grouped the phraseological units corresponding to a keyword according to certain recurrent features and we compared the phraseologisms from the two languages. Namely, we identified equivalences, taking into consideration the mental image, the motivation of the metaphorical process, the structure, the global significance, the presence of culture-bound elements. In order not to burden the research, we have not included in our analysis the information concerning the two levels of significance, which was brought forth in the corpus. It was mentioned only when specifications were needed in order to reach a better understanding. The work method is regressive (from the present to the past), oriented towards description, explanation, interpretation; the method we adopted was selective induction, focusing on the aspects that we considered significant for our process; therefore, we started with specific linguistic material and we continued with interpreting the results. Apart from identifying semantic mechanisms, our paper pursued the aim of reconstructing culture through the connection of prefabricated linguistic structures with gestures, rituals, cultural phenomena, symbolic images; our approach was oriented towards *the cumulative function of the language* (Scherf 2006: 168); when it was the case, we also mentioned the genetic basis of phraseological units. Methodological correlation concerned different levels of analysis, since the linguistic material provided valuable information about the relationship between the speaker and reality through the manifestation of alterity.

As for the bibliography, we mention that it is confined to the main studies on phraseology (international studies, in general, and Romanian and Spanish studies, in particular). Since the consulting literature on ethno-linguistics deals scarcely with our topic, we operated with general concepts that we adapted for our approach. Other works that provided useful information to our research were catechetical studies, collections of customs and traditions, papers on the phenomenon of popular religiosity, collections of phraseologisms, studies on the history of the language and other types of linguistic research.