Italian Phrasemes as Constructions: How to Understand and Use Them

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Abstract: The present article describes the objectives and methods for a learner-centered description of Italian idioms based on the theoretical principles of Construction Grammar (CxG). The aim of the underlying research project is to develop a new way of looking at idioms, taking into account all linguistic aspects that could help to fully understand and use them in a formally and functionally adequate manner, including situational and discursive features. By phrasemes we understand different kinds of word combinations characterized by idiomaticity and/or entrenchment. I will focus here on (a) “predicative phrasemes” (typically figurative and containing an inflected verb as a predicate, also called expressions idiomatiques verbales), (b) “phraseotemplates” (lexically open or formal idioms, in German phraseology Phraseoschablonen) and (c) “pragmatemes” (according to the French term pragmatème, i.e. pragmatically highly conventionalized phrases, also called expressions-énoncés). Idiomaticity is characterized by non-compositionality of its components and unpredictability of the whole structure. Italian examples for each of the three types are: (a) Tenere il piede in due staffe (‘to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds’), (b) Cosa me lo chiedi a fare? (‘Why are you asking me at all?’) and (c) In bocca al lupo! (‘Break a leg’). In chapter 2 I will first discuss basic concepts of Construction Grammar and Cognitive Grammar. In the following part (chapter 3) I will present my ideas about CxG and its ability to create a greater awareness of how many word combinations (in this context called constructions) in a language are idiosyncratic and unpredictable and about how to use fundamental theoretical issues of usage-based CxG (mainly Goldberg, Croft) and unification-based approaches in order to describe idioms in a new holistic way. Chapter 4 will deal with some important classifications of phrasemes and their practical aptitude for phraseodidactics. Chapter 5 will finally present my idea of applying methods of Construction Grammar and Fillmore’s semantics of understanding to build a new digital lexicographical format for phrasemes which is going to be called phraseoframe. This will be illustrated for the three types of phrasemes mentioned above. Each phraseme will be described by means of a simple meta-language which is easy to understand and has links to prosodic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic and discourse functional properties. As my approach is corpus based empirical evidence will be given for each of the three types of idioms by using several corpora of Italian spoken and written language (e.g., BADIP, PAISÀ and WEBBIT).

Keywords: Construction Grammar, Corpus, Idiom, Phraseology, Idiomaticity, Entrenchment, Phraseodidactics, Phraseoframe
Introduction

The main purpose of the present paper is to sketch out an approach to the learner-centred treatment of phrasemes within the framework of Construction Grammar. I will first sum up similarities and differences between the concepts ‘symbolic unit’, ‘construction’ and ‘phraseme’ and define the latter (chapter 2). In the third part, I will develop my phraseoframe model, mainly based on U-semantics and Construction Grammar, whose primary objective is to describe phrasemes in a comprehensive and learner-appropriate way by transposing the modified attribute-value method of Frame semantics and unification-based Construction Grammars to my purposes. Chapter 4 will deal with various classifications of phrasemes and will propose my own typology. I will finally (chapter 5) apply the theoretical issues discussed in the preceding part to three types of phrasemes: Predicative phrasemes (attaccare un bottone), phraseotemplates (the si (che) construction) and pragmatemes (a buon rendere, e poi colpo di scena), using the phraseoframe schema.

Symbolic Units, Constructions and Phrasemes

The similarities between central theoretical issues in Cognitive Grammar (CG), Construction Grammar (CxG) and phraseology have recently been pointed out by Gries (2008). They can be summarized by the author’s claim that phrasemes (or, in his terminology, phraseologisms) as well as constructions are symbolic units (which is the basic term in CG). A symbolic unit is, according to Langacker (1990, 16), “bipolar”, consisting of a semantic unit defining one pole and a phonological unit defining the other1. A construction follows the same theoretical principles:

Each construction will be a form-meaning pair (F, M), where F is a set of conditions on syntactic and phonological form and M is a set of conditions on meaning and use (Lakoff, 1987, 467).

The concepts ‘symbolic unit’ and ‘construction’ are indeed very similar2, if we part from Lakoff’s definition of construction, which does not include non-compositionality as one of its integral features. This is different in Goldberg’s early definition of construction (1995), quoted here from one of her later articles, according to which:

1The difference between symbolic unit (CG) and construction (CxG) is, according to Ziem (2008, 181), that the former may consist of several symbolic units ([dog]/[DOG] and [-s]/[PLURAL]), whereas a construction is not further reducible ([dogs]/[DOGS])

[any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable form its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist (Goldberg, 2003, 219).

In comparison to her previous opinion Goldberg then made a somewhat surprising alteration to her definition, bringing into play the criterion of frequency and combining it with the feature of non-idiosyncrasy, thus abandoning the original defining criterion of non-compositionality:

In addition, many constructionalist approaches argue that patterns are stored even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency (Goldberg, 2003, 219f.).

In her second book about constructions this amendment is formulated even more clearly: “[…] Patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency” (Goldberg, 2006, 5). Thus Gries (2008) is right to postulate that a construction, which, all in all, he considers a synonym for symbolic unit, “must have occurred frequently enough for it to be entrenched in a speaker/hearer’s linguistic system” (Gries, 2008, 13). This means that frequency has been added subsequently as one of the prerequisites for the existence of a construction, which is certainly due to the fact that idiosyncrasy (or non-predictability) is not only caused by non-compositionality2 (idiomaticity) but also by entrenchedness (which, in Gries’ opinion, is the result of high frequency).

Here, I would like to add two observations: First, a symbolic unit does not necessarily have to be frequent. Defining a morpheme, lexeme (simple or complex) or a combination of lexemes as a symbolic unit only means that the signifiant and the signifié of this unit (that we might also call linguistic sign) are, by convention, inextricably linked to one another, as Saussure’s sheet-of-paper metaphor so aptly described it (CGL, 246). Second, entrenchedness does not only have to do with frequency, it may also be due to a fixed or even strange word order (recalling Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor’s ‘familiar and unfamiliar pieces unfamiliarly arranged’) or to a situational restriction (e.g., formulae that refer to one specific situation).

What we ought to bear in mind, however, is that all three concepts, ‘symbolic unit’, ‘construction’ and ‘phraseme’, do not exclude one another but are, on the contrary, related by irreversible inclusion: Symbolic units include constructions which include phrasemes (cf. Gries, 2008). The main difference lies in the treatment of

2Non-compositionality is discussed in Svensson (2008).
lexically unspecified patterns such as abstract grammatical patterns (e.g., argument structures or word order like SVO), which are definitely part of the first concept (symbolic unit), not necessarily part of the second (construction), depending on the particular constructionalist approach and in no case part of the third concept (phraseme). As far as non-compositionality is concerned, it is irrelevant for CG and its symbolic units, it may be relevant for CxG and its constructions (see the difference between Lakoff (1987; Goldberg, 1995, pass.) and it may also be characteristic of a phraseme (see my definition below).

With regard to frequency, there is no unanimity about its being relevant for the definition of *phraseme*. Gries claims that frequency is crucial, not only for phrasemes, but also, as we discussed above, for constructions and symbolic units. But do constructions really have to be frequent in order to be considered constructions? Is *let alone* a frequent pattern? What about the construction “afraid/worried/considered/anxious + lest + subject + subjunctive verb form” (e.g., She worried lest he should tell someone what had happened, LDOCE5), or the idiom to take the gilt off the gingerbread? I think frequency is optional. It is rather entrenchment (in a broader sense) that counts, on the one hand: Entrenchment due to strange or fixed word order, or to pragmatic restrictions. On the other hand, it may be non-compositionality that makes a linguistic pattern something opaque. Both of them mean non-predictability and thus idiosyncrasy. In the end, Gries’ definition of *phraseme* (phraseologism) as:

co-occurrence of a form or a lemma of a lexical item and one or more additional linguistic elements of various kinds which functions as one semantic unit in a clause or sentence and whose frequency of co-occurrence is larger than expected on the basis of chance (Gries, 2008, 6)

Is very similar to mine, but more narrow on the one hand and broader on the other. I therefore suggest the following:

Any combination of at least two separate elements, i.e., at least one lexical morpheme (word-form or lexeme) and one or more grammatical morpheme plus at least one more lexical morpheme or one more grammatical morpheme, can be defined *phraseme* when the whole construction is either entrenched (in some way) or idiomatic (non-compositional) or both of them. Every phraseme is a construction and every construction is a symbolic unit, but not the other way round.

Reversely, any linguistic pattern consisting of two free morphemes that is neither entrenched nor idiomatic (non-compositional) cannot be called *phraseme*. Thus compositional (transparent) compounds like *motor vehicle* are no phrasemes, although they are symbolic units and may be, depending on the theoretical approach, constructions. *Red herring* is non-compositional (it is no ‘red’ ‘herring’), thus a phraseme (as well as a construction and a symbolic unit). *Far and wide, back and forth* are phrasemes (and constructions) because they are entrenched, as well as collocations like *to lay the table* and *to clear they table* (in Italian you say *apparecchiare, sparecchiarela tavola*). The fact that collocations consist of two separate linguistic units (*clear, table*) is entirely compatible with my definition of *phraseme*. Derivations like *driver or uncomfortable* are symbolic units and maybe constructions, too, still depending on the theoretical framework, but they are no phrasemes. A derivation like *womanizer* may be qualified as a construction, because it is non-compositional, but it is no phraseme, because it is one (complex) lexeme. The situation is more difficult, however, with lexically open phrasemes, i.e., when the entrenchment is due to a fixed syntactic structure, for instance the (more/better/bigger, etc.) the (better/more/worse, Kortmann, 2014, 88). Complex lexemes are usually derivations and compounds.

In some way excludes however mere frequency. As already noted, I do not consider co-occurrences as police and fire brigade or piano and violin constructions (or even phrasemes) only because they have a frequency of occurrence that is greater than expected (cf. Gries, 2011). For a critical comment on frequency as a defining characteristic of a construction see Traugott and Trousdale (2013, 5).

Using the term *combination* (instead of co-occurrence, deriving from corpus linguistics) I want to emphasize that is not the *parole* level that is decisive but the *langue* level. This clarification is consistent with the concept of symbolic unit and it is consistent, too, with the basic premise of usage-based Constructions Grammars and also of my approach: That linguistic knowledge is understood as an emergent product of linguistic use (cf. Ziem, 2008, 55).

Verbs like *It ricordarsi di qualcosa/qualcuno or Fr. se souvenir de quelqu’un/quelque chose* (‘to remember something/someone’) are indisputably polymorphous constructions, but as the reflexive pronoun se (or *mi in the finite form mi ricordo*) and the preposition *de/di* belong to the lexeme they are a matter of argument structure and valency, not of phraseology.
etc.), or the famous incredulity-response construction *Him be a doctor?* (which is *X be a Y?*). These phraseotemplates, as I call them, are certainly borderline cases they are more constructions than phrasemes (cf. Stathi, 2011) – but they are included in the definition of *phraseme* given above.

Having given the necessary definitions of *construction* and *phraseme*, I will now suggest a usage-based approach to an adequate linguistic description of phrasemes.

**Construction Grammar and the Necessity of a Holistic Description of Phrasemes**

As far as the form-meaning paradigm of constructions is concerned Croft specifies his interpretation of *meaning*:

\[
\text{[The term meaning is intended to represent all of the CONVENTIONALIZED aspects of a construction’s function, which may include not only properties of the situation described by the utterance but also properties of the discourse in which the utterance is found (Croft, 2001, 19).}]
\]

The complexity of the levels involved, both on the form and the meaning side here again I would like to recall Saussure’s – is illustrated in Fig. 1 and will play a vital role in my understanding of phrasemes as constructions to be described as comprehensively as possible. An idiom like *fare il terzo grado a qualcuno* (*to question, cross-examine someone*) is such a form-meaning pair characterized by particular morphological and syntactic properties: The verb *fare* has to be inflected, *qualcuno* as well as the grammatical subject are represented by a noun and we are dealing with a ditransitive argument structure (Subj V Obj Obj) with an agent and recipient (or patient) bearing the feature [+ human] and being grammatically expressed by a subject and an indirect object. But there are also properties on the meaning side of the pair, referring to semantic and pragmatic contents, if one is inclined to separate them at all, but also to discourse-functional properties specifying the situation in which something is uttered.

At this point it seems appropriate to go back some decades in time in order to remember Fillmore’s semantics of understanding (or U-semantics). According to Fillmore:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a sentence can only be fully interpreted if we know something about the situation in which it has been used; in many cases, then, understanding a sentence involves knowing the class of situations in which it could be appropriately uttered and knowing what effect it could be expected to have in that situation (Fillmore 1975, 16).}
\end{align*}
\]

Fig. 1. The symbolic structure of a construction (Croft, 2001, 18)

1. According to Gries’ definition, phraseotemplates could also be considered phrasemes, as they represent a linguistic unit in terms of a semantic unit (cf. the author’s example of the into-causative, which he himself regards a phraseologism; Gries, 2008, 5). Collocations, however, would not be covered by his definition of *phraseme*.

2. Saussure here does not mean that I adhere to the central structuralist assumption that there is something like “a strictly semantic structure that exists independently of the general cognitive organisation of the human mind” (Peeters, 2000, 4). Moreover, the linguistic sign in Sign-Based CxG “embodies ‘at least phonological structure, (morphological) form, syntactic category, semantics and contextual factors, including structure’ (Sag, 2012, 71)” (Traugott and Trousdale, 2013, 4).

3. In Construction Grammar semantics and pragmatics are not clearly separated (Ziem, 2008, 134ff.). Gazdar (1979, 2) even claims that pragmatics is nothing else than meaning minus truth conditions and this is, as Busse (2009, 72) points out, almost everything semantics is generally interested in: Namely aspects depending on the context, the use and the users of linguistics signs for communicative purposes, things that cannot be explained by logical semantics. Thus semantics could, according to this point of view, be equated with pragmatics. We can recognize the shortcomings of “pure” semantics in the functions of discourse markers like *but, well or actually*, because these elements do not deal with truth conditions at all but with pragmatic aspects as contrast, insecurity, coherence, politeness or involvement (cf. also Fried and Östman, 2005). As phrasemes have at least as much pragmatic as semantic relevance – if we think of phraseotemplates and pragmatemes they have primarily pragmatic potential –there will be no categorical distinction between semantic and pragmatic features in the phraseoframe (chapter 5).
The consequence of this view is to claim a holistic encyclopaedic approach which reflects the “necessity to study lexical concepts as integral part of human cognition in general” (Peeters, 2000, 4). This perspective has already been adopted by Langacker (1987), one of the founding fathers of Cognitive Linguistics, who insisted that the distinction between linguistic and extra linguistic (encyclopaedic) knowledge is as false and impossible as the distinction between semantics and pragmatics (cf. Stathi, 2011). Although the non-separation of semantics and pragmatics is one of the theoretical principles of usage-based CxG (cf. Ziem and Lasch, 2013, 51) the construction list practice of describing constructions does not always fulfill it. Up to now (Schafroth, 2013a; 2013b; 2014b) I have not made this distinction in my phrase frames. Although even authors postulating the holistic paradigm (e.g., Croft, 2001; Fried and Östman, 2004) do not always distinguish between semantics and pragmatics I have recently come to the decision not to separate the semantic from the pragmatic features. I thus fully agree that:

a. “semantics is based on speakers’ ‘construals’ of situations, not on objective truth conditions” (Goldberg, 2013, 16) and
b. “Semantics, information structure and pragmatics are interrelated” (ib.),
And that linguistic knowledge therefore is

c. “not merely semantic in the traditional […] sense of that term”, but that it also “represents conventional pragmatic or discourse-functional or information-structural or even stylistic or social dimensions of the use of a grammatical form or construction” (Croft, 2001, 93).

The basic assumptions of the holistic paradigm, already outlined in Fillmore, have been substantially developed by the German linguist Dietrich Busse (2012, pass.) in his theoretical framework of interpretative semantics and linguistic epistemology. Busse’s theory of an explicative semantics is linked to a communication-theory in which the expressive and the appellative function of linguistic signs are on the same level as the referential function (cf. Ziem, 2008, 151). Busse’s postulate of epistemic relevance goes hand in hand with the holistic paradigm: Linguistic understanding always takes place in a conceptual space (cf. Busse, 1988; Ziem, 2008; Croft, 2011) in which a distinction of linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge is not possible. Individuals being part of this space construe their reality by language, drawing on knowledge by inferences during the interpretation of linguistic signs: Knowledge they acquired by previous experiences. As a result, what should be considered in a holistic description of constructions is not only linguistic knowledge but also “how speakers implicitly anchor what they say to extralinguistic factors and how these factors, in turn, constrain the usability of a specific linguistic expression” (Fried and Östman 2005, 1760)11. To sum up these theoretical observations, we can say that:

[u]nderstanding [a] word requires knowing the whole scenario; understanding a sentence containing this word requires knowing the scenario and using the lexical contents and grammatical structure of the rest of the sentence to fill in some of the details; understanding a large text containing such a sentence may require situating a scene described by this text as a well-defined part of a larger story or state of affairs (Fillmore, 1976, 28).

Why I call my description of phrasemes (phraseo)
frame will be explained in the following part:

In Frame semantics, a linguistic unit, here, a word (in just one of its senses) evokes a frame. The frame is the structure of knowledge required for the understanding and appropriate use of lexical items or phrases (Fillmore, 2004, 406).

The phraseoframe is a frame of knowledge representation that tries to register the relevant aspects to be considered in order to describe a phraseme in a holistic manner. “[E]ach frame is associated with descriptions of roles of the entities that participate in them (individuals, props, setting features)” (Fillmore, 2012, 284). These frame elements reflect linguistic properties as well as the conceptual links to the frame evoked by a phraseme, summarized as “thesaurus”. The format of representation is a frame, literally (typographically) speaking, elaborated for digital lexicographical purposes, as it is currently realized in the learners’ platform project (cf. Schafroth, 2014a). In this lexicographical description, I of course concentrate on the representation of epistemically relevant linguistic knowledge about phrasemes (rules of linguistic usage in the broadest sense, including communicative parameters) – I have so far indeed restricted my constructionist

11Speakers’ interpretations refer to contexts like (a) culture, tradition, history, (b) interactional and conversational constraints and (c) feelings and opinions (Fried and Östman, 2005; Fried and Östman, 2005, 1760). Other levels and types of knowledge are discussed in Busse (1991; summarized in Ziem, 2008, 154ff.).
activities on these-not ignoring, however, extralinguistic knowledge such as cultural or psychological items (expressed by remarks on the particular use of a construction in a particular situation).

The form of representation of a construction’s features roughly follows the attribute-value structure as it is used in Construction Grammar, simplifying, however, the notational conventions: Attributes and values are neither formalized in boxes-within-boxes diagrams nor in the form of bracketed pairs organized into sets (attribute-value matrices) (cf. Fried and Östman, 2004) but as a sort of phraseeme sketch containing the relevant types of information in prose, distributed on the domains prosody, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, discourse functions. The attributes indicate the types of knowledge that are or may be relevant for the frame evoked by the phraseeme: e.g., within the domain semantics and pragmatics: ‘Speech act’, ‘situational setting’, ‘motivation’. As the unification of linguistic properties is focussed in this approach, I will follow here the methods of unification-based Constructions Grammars, making a clear difference between internal and external characteristics (internal/external syntax of a construction). On the other hand, the phraseoframe is also usage-based, following the premise that “experience with language creates and impacts the cognitive representations of languages” (Bybee, 2013, 49). As a consequence, if corpus data reveal “idiomatic variation” (Wulff, 2013, 285) the formal and semantic variants will be recorded as well.

In order to give a quick overview of the structure and the elements of the eclectic phraseoframe model we can bear in mind the following items:

- Theoretical fundamentals: Fillmore’s semantics of understanding, Busse’s epistemically relevant semantics, Frame semantics, Construction Grammar (Cognitive Construction Grammar, Radical Construction Grammar and, as far as the attribute-value structure is concerned, as well unification-based Construction Grammars) (cf. Ziem and Lasch, 2013)
- Theoretical premises: Holistic paradigm (trying to capture all facets of linguistic knowledge relevant for understanding and adequately using linguistic signs); non-separation of semantics and pragmatics; usage-based analyses
- Methodological essentials: Learner-appropriate metalanguage; breakdown by linguistic domains; attribute-value structure in prose (without CxG formalism of boxes and brackets) reflecting linguistic knowledge types (attributes) and their descriptive elements (values); inclusion of formal and semantic variants; broad documentation of corpus data
- Technical features: digital representation; hyperlinks to other phraseomes of the same semantic fields and frame; hyperlinks to audio- and video files to illustrate prosody and gesture

Classification of Phraseomes

What does this mean for phraseology? And what about the criteria usually taken into account when we speak about phraseomes? Before giving an answer to these questions I will briefly treat some phraseological classifications before presenting my own typology.

Let us start with Makkai (1972; 2011) who has made some important distinctions. Firstly, he classifies “idioms” (phraseomes) in subgrammatical idioms (phonetic, phonemic, morphological idioms), lexemic idioms (nominal combinations, phrasal verb idioms, tournure idioms, phraseological idioms of encoding and sememic idioms), proposing then even hypersememic or pragmemic idioms (referring to conversational implicatures, one of several techniques of pervasive idiomaticity). It is remarkable that among all imaginable types of phraseomes Makkai does not mention syntactic idioms, which would correspond to our phraseotemplates. Makkai’s tournure idioms are predicative phraseomes in my terminology (e.g., to spill the beans), whereas phraseomes like not written in stone, to make a long story short to cut to the chase are called phraseological idioms of encoding, because they display their idiomatic character, according to Makkai, only in speech production (encoding). Without having learned them, speakers would not able to produce them. On the other hand, “their meaning is clear the first time they are heard” (Makkai, 2011, 222).

12A similar way of treating phraseomes, here pragmatemes, in terms of morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic description is suggested by Kaufßer (2011). According to the author, there are pragmatemes expressing a particular communicative function, such as threat, doubt, resignation, incredulity or, even more specifically, the speaker’s refusal to continue his communication. My phraseoframe thus tries to put into practice a phraseological desideratum: “Mais il est nécessaire que toutes les dimensions du figement soient prises en compte: Les critères morpho-syntaxiques, ceux de nature sémantique et également la dimension pragmatique, plus intéressante, encore plus analysée, mais particulièrement pertinente pour les phraséologismes pragmatiques” (Kaufßer, 2011, 46).

13In fact, when examining phraseomes as they occur in texts we should not speak of constructions but of constructs instead, because the former represent the general abstract structure and the latter are their instantiations licensed by constructions.

14Literature on phraseology is abundant. Summaries of different states of research, theoretical approaches, terminology and concepts can be found in Moon (1998; Burger, 2007; Ellis, 2008; Granger and Meunier, 2008; Ettinger, 2009; Benigni et al., 2015). Meunier and Granger (2008) focus on phraseology in foreign language learning and teaching.
(Besides, this may be true for native speakers but not for foreign learners). By using this example I have already mentioned the second important type of phraseemes, the idioms of encoding and idioms of decoding, picked up by Fillmore et al. (1988) who call them encoding and decoding idioms and whose definitions seem to me clearer than the one given in Makkai (1972):

A decoding idiom is an expression which the language users couldn’t interpret with complete confidence if they hadn’t learned it separately. With an encoding idiom, by contrast, we have an expression which language users might or might not understand without prior experience, but concerning which they would not know that it is a conventional way of saying what it says (Fillmore et al., 1988, 504f.).

I will illustrate this with Italian examples. Idioms of decoding are darsi la zappa sui piedi (‘to shoot oneself in the foot’), alzare il gomito (‘to have one too many’), arrampicarsi sugli specchi (‘to grasp at straws’), idioms of encoding rosso acceso (bright red), fin qui tutto bene (so far so good), piu che altro (above all), per così dire (so to speak), in linea di massima (basically). All of them are idiosyncratic constructions which a L2 learner of Italian would either not understand at all or not be able to produce in exactly the same way. Even if one encoding idiom or the other might be transparent to a foreigner learner, let us say fin qui tutto bene, it is doubtful that any of them could be produced on the basis of the open-choice principle-learners would probably say fino a qui, tutto bene. So, in the end, the distinction between encoding and decoding idioms is not really helpful for learner-centred phraseology and confirmation has come once again: In a foreign language everything is different (cf. Hausmann, 1997).

Another typology was proposed by Fillmore et al. (1988), who distinguish firstly lexically open (or formal, schematic) and lexically filled (or substantive, specific) phraseemes-the term idioms used by the authors comprises all kinds of phraseemes-and secondly three types of usual or unusual combinations to be qualified as idiomatic: (a) Unfamiliar pieces unfamiliarly arranged (kith and kin, with might and main), (b) familiar pieces unfamiliarly arranged (all of a sudden, in point of fact), (c) familiar pieces familiarly arranged (to pull someone’s leg, to tickle the ivories). I have always wondered why they did not add the fourth type: Unfamiliar pieces familiarly arranged. One might think of phraseemes like uscire dai gangheri (‘to fly off the handle’), mettersi in ginghameri (‘to put on one’s finery’). The two poles, lexically open and lexically filled phraseemes, are represented in Fig. 2:

![Diagram of lexical openness and filledness](image)

Fig. 2. Lexically open and lexically filled phraseemes arranged on a continuum (based on Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor, modified according to Schafroth, 2014a)

Is it reasonable, following Nunberg et al. (1994), to claim the existence of two types of idioms, (a) idiomatically combining expressions and (b) idiomatic phrases? The first type permits an interpretation according to the argument structure, inherited by the hierarchically superior general structure of transitive verbs (Ziem and Lasch, 2013, 58), as in the bivalent monotransitive construction alzare il gomito (‘to have one too many’). The relationship between the verb and its direct object is determined in terms of semantics, however, not in terms of syntax: “Collocational dependencies are in fact the overt manifestation of semantic relations, not syntactic relations” (Croft, 2011, 176). In the predicative phraseeme (idiom) we are looking at, alzare allows only the lexeme gomito. “This collocational dependency is called an idiom chunk and it is evidence for a relation between” (ib.) alzare and gomito:

\[
\text{alzare} \quad \text{il gomito}
\]

BERE \quad TROPPO ALCOOL

[VERB] \quad [OBJECT]

According to one of the principles of Construction Grammar, what we have to look at are not the single components of a construction, but the construction on the whole and consider them non-derivational and monostatal (Fried and Östman, 2004, 25). Only the categories and roles (i.e., argument structure here) are derivative, constructions themselves, however, must be taken as basic (Croft, 2001, 175). In the idiomatically
combining expression alzare il gomito, following Croft (2001, 181), “the syntactic parts of the idiom” (alzare and gomito) “can be identified with parts of the idiom’s semantic interpretation” (‘bere’ and ‘troppo alcool’), according to which alzare corresponds to bere (‘drink’) and il gomito to troppo alcool (‘too much alcohol’).

As far as idiom typology is concerned only a few linguistic proposals turn out to be applicable from a foreign language teaching point of view. I thus do not consider it necessary to distinguish between idiomatically combining expressions and idiomatic phrases (Nunberg et al., 1994), because neither dare del filo da torcere (‘to cause a lot of trouble’), representing the first category, nor tirare le cuoia (‘to die’, similar to kick the bucket), standing for the second one, are semantically transparent for a foreign learner of Italian. Both of them have to be described more or less in the same way in a dictionary. The typology set up in Fillmore et al. (1988) seems to be suitable for linguistics, because they make us understand how phrasemes are structured, but it is nonetheless of little help for L2 learners, who have different needs.

My own classification of phrasemes is simple. Based on the definition of the term phrase given above and taking into consideration the fundamental definition of a construction (as a form-meaning pair) I will distinguish the following types, moving down, according to Fig. 2, from lexically open phrasemes at the top to lexically filled phrasemes at the bottom, passing over, however, phenomena which are between the main types as well as cases with more or less idiomacity or entrenchment:

- Phraseotemplates (più/meno X più/meno Y, Che (OBJ) (OBJ) VERB, si fare(ì)..., ti (che)...)
- Predicative phrasemes (darsi la zappa sui piedi, fare mente locale, alzare il gomito, menare il can per l’aità)
- Collocations (apparecchiare/sparecchiare la tavola, capelli radi, scapolo impenitente, digrignare

1 Notable among them is however the onomasiological approach in Bardsø et al. (2003).
2 Predicative phrasemes are characterized by an inflectional verb and a nominal part, often reflecting the structure “(direct, indirect or prepositional) object (+ adverbial)” (Alzare il gomito, uscire dai gangheri, darsi la zappa sui piedi). Furthermore they are typically figurative. Some authors call them idioms (e.g., Moon, 1998), but this term is too ambiguous because it is also used in a broad way in the sense of set phrases or phrasemes/phraseologies (Makkai, 1972; 2011; Fillmore et al., 1988). Others authors refer to terms like expressions idiomatiques verbaux (González Rey, 2001), which is very precise, by the way, while yet others split the concept into two entities they call idiomatically combining expressions and idiomatic phrases (Nunberg et al., 1994, see above). The terminological confusion is considerable (Burger et al., 2007).
3 Collocations are understood here as semi-fixed lexeme combinations consisting of a cognitively primary and semantically autonomous base, e.g., ipoteca (‘mortgage’) and a semantically dependent collocator, e.g., the verb accordare, whose meaning ‘to take out’ depends on its base mortgage, but which in other contexts (e.g., accordare una sigaretta ‘to light a cigarette’) may be completely different.
4 It is not relevant here whether or not the collocator is idiosyncratic, e.g., verde in numero verde (‘toll-free telephone number’) or un mondo in divertirsi un mondo (‘to have a lot of fun’), or di seconda mano in una macchina di seconda mano (‘a second-hand car’). Cf. Koncercy and Antelli (2012-).
5 Complex attributive adjectives (adjectival phrases) as di seconda mano (synonymous with usato) are treated here as adjectival collocators.
6 As far as word formation is concerned, we have a theoretical problem. Adhering to the above definition of phraseme, derivations may be constructions, but they are not to be regarded as phrasemes. The problem with compounds is that they may be fused in one form (e.g., cacciavite ‘screwdriver’, tergicristallo ‘windshield wiper’) and thus not be considered phrasemes. Beyond that, due to pure orthographical conventions, compounds might be written together as cassaforte (‘safe’) and thus be outside the phraseme category, or they might be inside (carro armato ‘tank’) and outside (carrarmato) at the same time. I however stick to my decision to call compounds phrasemes only if separate lexical units are taken into account, whether they are partially non-compositional (lettera aperta ‘open letter’, mercato nero ‘black market’) or entirely non-compositional (colletto bianco ‘white-collar’, pesce d’aprile ‘April fool’). Compositional compounds (e.g., motore a benzina ‘gasoline engine’, cavallo di raza ‘thoroughbred’) may be constructions (based on the criterion of entrenchment), but they are no phrasemes.
Lexicographical Treatment of Phrasemes within the Framework of Construction Grammar

As a permanent (and eternal) learner of several foreign languages, I have always regretted being rather limited in my ability to understand let alone produce phrasemes. Even university teachers advised us against trying to master the field of phraseology because of its being too difficult for L2 learners, as they argued. I have never been convinced, however, of this explanation. Later, as a linguist and university professor, I tried to figure out new ways to enhance the methodological situation for learners in the field of phraseology (cf. Ettinger, 2009; 2011). Construction Grammar helped me to understand what I would have to do. This is how the phraseoframe came into being.

In the following section, some innovative ideas on L2 phraseology will be described (cf. also Bolly, 2009). As indicated above, as it is impossible to treat all phraseological types, three kinds of phrasemes, predicative phrasemes, phraseotemplates and pragmatemes, will be illustrated by the phraseoframe. The objective is to elucidate the importance of a comprehensive description of phrasemes for learners of Italian as a foreign language. The entirely corpus-based description will be realized according to the types of features on the form and meaning side of these constructions: Prosodic, morphological and syntactic properties will be followed by semantic-pragmatic and discourse-functional properties. The mode of representation will be an attribute-value structure in prose.

Predicative Phrasemes

The first phraseme is a somewhat particular case. *Attaccare un bottone a qualcuno* (literally ‘to sew on a button to somebody’) would be in English something like *to talk somebody’s ear off*. If we want to know how it is used we do not learn much when we consult traditional Italian dictionaries like Zingarelli, Treccani and Garzanti.

(1) attaccare un bottone, (fig., fam.) molestare con discorsi e chiacchiere interminabili (Zingarelli)

(2) attaccare un b. a qualcuno, o attaccare bottone con qualcuno, tratterarlo con una conversazione lunga e noiosa (Treccani.it, Vocabolario).

(3) (a) attaccare bottone, iniziare un discorso; tentare un approccio: Ha attaccato bottone con tutta

(b) attaccare un bottone, (fig.) iniziare un discorso lungo e noioso: Mi (= a me) ha attaccato un bottone che non finiva più!

What we can conclude form these three lexicographical explanations are two things: First, there seem to exist two different constructions with *attaccare* and *bottone*, which are syntactically different and, second, Italian dictionaries obviously do not agree on the meaning of the two phrasemes. This remarkable result allows the conclusion that the two constructions are mixed together in everyday language.

Let us first describe the two syntactic patterns and try to grasp the difference in meaning:

(A)

| QUALCUNO (agent) INIZIA UN DISCORSO LUNGO E NOIOSO CON QUALCUNO (addressee) |

(B)

| QUALCUNO (agent) INIZIA UN DISCORSO CON QUALCUNO (addressee) (PER TENTARE UN APPROCCIO (goal)) |

These are indeed two different constructions, each of them having different syntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties (bearing in mind the indefinite article in A and the zero article in B). Here once again we can see that the semantic content cannot be separated from the pragmatic one. A and B imply different goals and motivations and are associated with different prototypical semantic features, which can be verified on the basis of corpus documents:

(i) Mauro ha poi trovato subito un ottimo argomento per attaccare bottone con Sarah: La Spagna, meta di viaggio di entrambi; la bella napoletana infatti ha vissuto per cinque anni a Madrid e lì ha conosciuto un modello spagnolo con il quale ha avuto una storia durata sei anni, ma ora, è di nuovo single. (PAISÀ)

(ii) Fermarsi a guardare superficialmente questo evento si vedono solo dei gran bevitori di birra e gente che va li’ solo per attaccar bottone con gente del sesso opposto (anche dello stesso come s’e’ visto prima...), [...]. (WEBBIT)

(iii) Neanche Berlusconi sa bene cosa sia meglio fare, in questa giornata che segna il trionfo di un ex comunista. Entra, esce a farsi fotografare con una comitiva di turisti, rientra, si siede accanto a Fini e gli attacca un bottone su chissà cosa (il presidente
di An a un certo punto non riesce a trattenere uno sbadiglio) (CORIS)
(iv) Mi scusì se le ho attaccato un bottone, vedo che lei sta partendo. Beh, spero che vada in un bel posto e che passi una bella vacanza. (WEBBIT)

A should indeed not be confused with B. Whereas B may express (a) coming into contact or starting a conversation with someone or (b) trying to flirt with someone, A unambiguously means a negative judgment from the speaker’s point of view who sees himself engaged in a conversation against his will. Thus A is often accompanied by the features [+disturbing] and [+boring], which can be reflected on the linguistic surface (by adjectives, adverbs and other modifiers): Attaccare un bottone infinito, for instance. Linguistic context is particularly important for understanding the semantic-pragmatic core of the respective constructions. It is not always easy to grasp the meaning without paying careful attention to the context. When the direct object is used in the plural (bottoni), to mention another difficult case, A and B could be possible.

In the following phraseoframe only one of the two similar phrasemes, namely A (attaccare un bottone a qualcuno), will be illustrated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phraseme</th>
<th>attaccare un bottone (a qualcuno)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>type of phraseme</td>
<td>predicative phraseme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROSODY</td>
<td>intonation falling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>focus stress on bottone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORPHOLOGY</td>
<td>finite verb [attaccare]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>variable elements [attaccare] [un] [bottone]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[un] [bottone] – sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the plural: attaccare bottoni (a qualcuno), s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corpus examplev (below)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYNTAX</th>
<th>syntactic function sentence types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sentence or dependent clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– declarative sentence usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– interrogative sentence possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– imperative sentence improbable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>internal syntax</th>
<th>qualcuno attacca un bottone (a qualcuno)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>obligatory actants</td>
<td>[qualcuno] [bottone]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>optional actants</td>
<td>[a qualcuno]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modifiers</td>
<td>note that the absolute use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(without a qualcuno) is not frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(see corpus example vi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collocations</td>
<td>attaccare un bottone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[infinito]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>external syntax</th>
<th>syntax function may be used as an apposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>syntax function</td>
<td>prepositional object by means of the preposition su introducing the topic of the conversation: La tintora disse che no, non c'era niente, estava per attaccare un bottone su tutta la faccenda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEM_PRAGM</th>
<th>meaning to engage someone in a conversation considered excessively long by the interlocution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>semantic field(s)</td>
<td>irritation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semantic roles</td>
<td>subject is agent, indirect object (Obj₂) is addressee (and patient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference to hearer</td>
<td>yes, but less frequent than reference to third person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference to speaker</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speech act(s)</td>
<td>very often informative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 A and B are in fact converging to an even greater extent: B may approach A in meaning when used with the indirect object a qualcuno instead of con qualcuno. These linguistic subtleties are all documented in the two detailed phraseoframes about A and B, easily accessible through the website of the Italian learners’ platform (Piattaforma per chi impara l’italiano, cf. Schafroth (dir.), 2014b)

21 For the other phraseme, attaccare bottone (con qualcuno), see http://li.phil.hhu.de/suche

22 What ought to be done, if we want to consistently follow Construction Grammar’s theory, is to distinguish between several degrees of abstraction: (1) macro-constructions (abstract meaning-form pairings, such as Subj V Obj₁ Obj₂ / X causes Y to receive Z), (2) meso-constructions (“similarly-behaving specific constructions”), (3) micro-constructions (“individual construction-types”), and (4) constructs (“the empirically attested tokens, which are the locus of change”) (cf. Traugott, 2008, 136). This will be done in future studies.

23 As far as adjuncts like mica da ridere (‘which is not funny’) is concerned, it could be argued that this syntactic enlargement is a matter of external syntactic, but we subsume this phenomenon under internal syntax, because it still modifies the noun (Obj₂) syntactically as an adjective does.
status of speech act(s) | indirect  
motivation            | expression of displeasure  
illocutive function    | complaint  
situational setting    | (dialogues) in spoken language or in computer mediated communication rather not face-to-face
variety                | spoken language; also largely documented in written language, especially in newspapers and fiction and in computer mediated communication
register               | colloquial  
frequency              | no corpus-based frequency results, but familiar in everyday language

DISCOURSE  
(introducing) new topic | no  
(causing) topic change  | no  
discourse function     | usually anaphoric when talking about someone possible
metalinguistic function | Do not confuse *attaccare un bottone* (a qualcuno) with the similar phraseme *attaccare bottone* (con qualcuno) which is not associated with the features [+disturbing] and [+boring]. See there.
USAGE NOTES

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR L2
It is recommended to use only the standard variant *attaccare un bottone* a qualcuno. Do not use the plural form and do not leave out the indirect object. see above; and (v):
(v) La saluto perché spesso nel percorso tra la fermata del bus e casa mia, a Baltimora, incontravo delle persone sconosciute che per educazione americana, mi *attacca un bottone* infiniti su chi fossi e chi fossero loro, [...]. (WEBBIT)
(vi) Se chiamate un amico al cellulare, e questi *attacca un bottone* che non finisce più, una spiegazione c’è. L’amico ha un telefonino Tim autoricaricabile: più la conversazione si prolunga, più ci ha risposto ricarica la carta, mentre chi chiama paga (La Repubblica Corpus).

CORPUS EXAMPLES

24 By *metalinguistic function* I understand the playful usage of a phraseme with the effect of interpreting it as compositional. Another possibility is univerbation based on a phraseme, both cases representing plays on words. Phrasemes are hence constructions to be placed between compositional phrases and morphology (cf. Stathi, 2011, 151). This is exactly what often happens in texts. The metalinguistic function is activated when a phraseme is “dephraseologized” or used in another syntactic structure or in a word cluster, e.g. to *burn the midnight oil* (to be understood literally) *spiller of the beans* (as a nonce formation). Aspects of idiomatic creativity, including idiom variation and variability, are treated by Langlotz (2006).

25 This is however not entirely true for other languages. In Mel’čuk (1987) there are indeed phenomena (of Russian) that might be compared to phraseotemplates.
Beyond that, how should all these constructions be described in a dictionary in order to provide a maximum of knowledge about its meaning and its use?

If we part form the construction Che me lo chiedi a fare? as a whole we can recognize on the formal side of the pairing an interrogative clause composed by a wh-pronoun (che, che cosa o cosa) and a verb phrase consisting of an inflected verb and an obligatory and invariable infinitive complement (a fare). The argument structure of the verb (here chiedere) is fully reflected in the sentence where subject, direct object and indirect object are represented, the latter two by pronouns.

The phraseotemplate I want to describe here is the si (che) construction used for expressing concession, reinforcement (or insistence) or rectification. The construction is briefly mentioned in some Italian grammar books (e.g., Serianni, 1997, 252, or Patota, 2006, 255), but L2 learners do not find sufficient descriptions in any grammar or textbook. Analysing some linguistic corpora (here PAISÀ, CORIS, BADIP, WEBBIT, La Repubblica Corpus) I could make out the following form-meaning-pairs:

(1) V si (Object)

RECTIFICATION

(1a) A: Oggi non piove, meno male – B: Prima pioveva sì
(1b) Secondo punto... è una questione di abitudine. Ti posso assicurare che non mi perdo tantissimo adesso (mi distraggo di più quando quando seguo la serie in tv), e se capita, la rivedo, altro vantaggio. Per quanto riguarda la letteratura, conoscessi le lingue leggerei sì, i libri in lingua originale.
(1c) A: Non ci ha mai invitati a casa sua – B: Ci ha invitati sì una volta!

(2) ma si che V

CONTRADICTION

(2a) A: Qualcosa da dover fare incidere qualcosa – B: ma dai davvero per domani mattina per domani sera non credo – A: ma sì che te la incidono
(3) (ma) si che V

REINFORCEMENT

(3a) Queste sì che sono rivelazioni.
(3b) Ecco, questo sì che sarebbe un miracolo.
(3c) A: Ricorda qualcosa’altro? -B: Oltre la rete la ragazza dai capelli biondi, ma sì che l’ho vista, eccome.
(3d) Stavolta, nell’incendio dei giorni scorsi, avrete visto di sicuro nei TG i Rom incattazzati che parlavano con i poliziotti. E sì che si sono incattazzati! Non facevano altro che ripetere: “Ma perché? Stiamo pagando puntuali ogni mese!”

(4) V si Predicative/Direct Object/Infinitive ma/però

CONCESSION

(4a) Quello che fumava di più era TopCat (risate) Sean invece non fumava, beveva sì, però non fumava.
(4b) Devo confessare che quando l’Ulivo vinse le elezioni, benché contrariato, mi consolai al pensiero che, tutto sommato, avremmo avuto un detestabile governo di sinistra, ma composto di gente provveduta, capace di fare il suo mestiere.
(4c) Infatti, se i pannelli solari funzionanti rimanevano esposti verso il Sole, si poteva guadagnare energia sufficiente per far funzionare la stazione ma contemporaneamente quella temperatura all’interno della stazione sarebbe aumentata notevolmente.
(4d) Così, in una Polonia dove l’opposizione è praticamente ufficializzata, dove il visitatore si muove come in un paese democratico con vari partiti - sentendo cioè due e più campane –, sta anche divertendo palese che mettersi contro il regime può sì costare la prigione, ma per brevi periodi subito seguiti da un indulto.
(4e) C’è sì Roma, ma c’è soprattutto Parigi, da tempo l’alleato strategico.

What we can deduce from these examples is that obviously the si (che) construction is above all a discursive or even rhetoric strategy to rectify, contradict, strengthen, fine-tune or modify an argument. When used without che the morpheme sì, introducing a sort of concession, is often placed directly behind an inflected verb, which frequently is the copula essere, the verb avere or a modal verb like potere, dovere, volere. If there is a clause containing a concession indicated by sì, then we generally find a coordinate clause joined by ma or, very occasionally, by però.

Isn’t this too complicated for a foreign learner of Italian? My answer is: From the European reference level C1 onwards (or even earlier) it is possible to learn a construction like this. Besides, why should such a construction, argumentatively strong and usable in many situations, be restricted only to native speakers? There are only a few linguistic elements involved, the main difficulty consisting in the right position of si (che) and in combing two clauses.
An epistemically satisfying description could contain the following items (space prevents me from displaying a complete phraseoframe):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phraseme</th>
<th>a) <em>(ma) si che</em> VERB</th>
<th>b) VERB si ... ma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>type of phraseme</td>
<td>phraseotemplate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROSODY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intonation</td>
<td>a) rising (falling)</td>
<td>b) rising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pitch</td>
<td>on <em>si</em> (in a and b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus stress</td>
<td>on <em>si</em> (in a and b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORPHOLOGY</td>
<td>finite verb</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>variable elements</td>
<td>none</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNTAX</td>
<td>syntactic function</td>
<td>a) in the form of <em>si che</em> or <em>masì che</em> (preceding the verb): modifier of the following verb phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) in the form of <em>si</em> (after the verb), with or without <em>ma</em> (or <em>però</em>): modifier of the verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intonation</td>
<td>a) rising (falling)</td>
<td>b) rising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pitch</td>
<td>on <em>si</em> (in a and b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus stress</td>
<td>on <em>si</em> (in a and b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Hoffmann (2013) points out, complex sentences are constructions, too. In the case of the *si che*-meso-constructions (Traugott, 2008, 236) it is however difficult to identify a superordinate abstract macro-construction.

![Fig. 4. Phraseoframe for the constructions *(ma) si che* VERB and *VERB si ... ma*](http://example.com/fig4.png)
Pragmatemes

The last type of phraseme to be treated here are formulae which I shall call pragmatemes, following Mel’čuk (1995), according to which a pragmateme is a phraseme fixed by the situation to which it is related (Mel’čuk, 2008, 4). Form and meaning of pragmatemes represent and evoke the conceptual content of a specific situation to which they are closely linked27. Examples of this classical type of construction are Bless you!, Never mind!, Hold the line!, but also formulae like You’ll catch your death!, What do you say?, Pardon my French, Whose turn is it to deal? or Wet paint! (cf. Fléchon et al., 2012 with French examples). Pragmatemes, also called expressions-énoncés in French phraseology (González Rey, 2001)28, are encoding idioms (according to Makkai, 1972; 2011), familiar pieces familiarly arranged (citing Fillmore et al., 1988) and thus compositional, i.e., the way their elements are combined is regular and their meaning is transparent. However, they are characterized by a high degree of entrenchment so that L2 learners would probably understand them when uttered in a concrete situation, but they would not be able to produce them.

It is a challenging if not impossible task for traditional dictionaries to describe pragmatemes in a satisfactory way. What ought to be done by lexicographers is to provide all information about their meaning and their use. I will try this with respect to the Italian constructions a buon rendre and e poi-colpo di scena.

A Buon Rendere

First of all we would have to determine whether its frequency of occurrence is greater than expected (cf. Gries, 2011). This might be questionable in the case of our pragmateme in Italian. But as we are not able to provide data about this issue we exclude this item.

Let us then turn our attention to Italian dictionaries. In Zingarelli 2013 we find, rather concise, the following paraphrase: ‘detto di favore e sim., impegnarsi a restituirloro’. Garzanti 2009 gives a similar explanation: ‘Si dice a chi ha fatto un favore, promettendo di restituirloro’ and in the Nuovissimo Dardano we can read: ‘Locuz. per dire che si accetta ql.co con il proposito di ricambiare appena possibile’. None of them enables a foreign user to under stand let alone use the construction, although Dardano provides some crucial semantic indications. What is in deed relevant as far as the meaning of a buon rendre is concerned can be expressed in two of my students’ lexicographical trials:

(a) a buon rendre, si dice a qualcuno che ci ha fatto un favore per sottolineare che siamo pronti a ricambiare il favore nel futuro: Grazie per il tuo sostegno. A buon rendre!
(b) a buon rendre, 1. se qualcuno dice a buon rendre vuol dire che vuole ringraziare qualcun altro e ricambiare appena possibile: Grazie per la cena. A buon rendere!

(a) and (b) convey the minimum semantic information one ought to have. Actually the description is not sufficient to fully understand how and when to use this formula. The crucial point is that whoever says a buon rendre, after having benefited from a favour (which may be big, but usually is a banal or every day one, like having been offered a coffee in a bar by a colleague) feels obliged to return the favour or at least considers it a formula of politeness to say these words, often combined with some sign of gratitude: Grazie! A buon rendre! Languages differ here considerably. The German (pseudo) equivalent Danke, Du hast was gut bei mir! would not be used if only a little favour is concerned. In Italian, however, the favour is usually small, but may be big, too. Let us have a look at some corpus examples (WEBBIT):

(i) «[…] e magari bermi pure io un caffè per bontà vostra …» «Tutto qua? Ma vieni con me che te lo offro direttamente al bar un caffè!» invitò Paolo, sorridente a quel tizio che aveva un “non so che” di Pacino e De Niro con l’accento napoletano. «Grazie dottò, a buon rendre. Andiamo!»

(ii) volevo kiedervi se usassisi la sendto e recvfrom? potrebbe funzionare? mmm … AbsoluteBeginner: Scusate se insisti, ma che tipo di server è? Grazie Domy per la tua risposta ma è un po’ vaga. Non vorrei rompere le scatole in mezzo a voi che siete tutti esperti, ma è una questione importante. Ho provato a capirci qualcosa leggendo nei motori di ricerca ma … nun gliela fo! Grazie. E non posso nemmeno dire a buon rendre.

As quite often is the case with lexemes, expressions and phrasemes, speakers tend to invert their meaning by antithesis. This also applies to the pragmateme a buon rendre, which may refer to a situation in which the speaker expresses anger towards his interlocutor, making
him understand that sooner or later he will hit back. But this might also be used in an ironic or humorous way. Let me cite one more the student who already proposed (b):

(c) a buon rendere 2. se qualcuno dice a buon rendere, dopo aver ricevuto un torto, vuol dire che vuole vendicarsi appena possibile: Ieri mi hai umiliato davanti a tutti. A buon rendere!

To get some evidence for this usage from authentic usage let us look at the following corpus examples (CORIS):

(iii) Certo che sei davvero idiota. Comunque, a buon rendere. Speriamo di non rivederci più.

(iv) Vabbé, allora io vado, ti saluto vecchio mio, grazie del panino e buone vacanze – Anche a te, ah Martino aspetta un attimo... – Si Cesare dimmi – Hai letto come si chiama la ragazza? – Quale ragazza? – Bravo Martino, a buon rendere.

(v) Riforma Senato: Un regalo di Berlusconi a Renzi... a buon rendere (Il Fatto Quotidiano 6/8/2014)

To sum up, I propose the following phraseoframe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phraseme</th>
<th>a buon rendere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>type of phraseme</td>
<td>pragmateme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROSODY</td>
<td>intonation falling, focus stress on rèndere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORPHOLOGY</td>
<td>finite verb none, variable elements none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNTAX</td>
<td>syntactic function usually: a sentence of its own (holophrastic), possible: a buon rendere as a modifier (adjective); s. corpus example further below (vi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal syntax</td>
<td>basic structure a buon rendere, optional elements grazie, preceding a buon rendere, sometimes introduced by come si dice (in questi casi): a buon rendere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collocations</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external syntax</td>
<td>syntactic function may be used as an apposition sometimes used together with dire, gridare (see corpus example (ii) above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modifiers</td>
<td>SEM_PRAGM meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status of speech act(s)</td>
<td>(a) you say a buon rendere when you want to thank your interlocutor for a personal, special or often little favour he did to you, such as having offered you a drink or something else, expressing simultaneously that you will return the favour. (b) you may also use a buon rendere in order to make your interlocutor understand that the words he/she said or the things he/she did annoyed or hurt you; you might say this, too, in an ironic or witty manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>situational setting</td>
<td>semantic field(s) gratitude (a), irritation (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference to hearer</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference to speaker</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference to third person</td>
<td>possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speech act(s)</td>
<td>(a) gratitude; (b) criticism, reproach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status of speech act(s)</td>
<td>rather direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivation</td>
<td>(a) you feel obliged to return a favour, (b) you express your irritation and let your interlocutor know that you will think of paying him back for he/she said or did to you; your anger may be real or ironic or humorous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>variety</td>
<td>face-to-face (or in computer mediated communication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>style</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frequency</td>
<td>slightly old-fashioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decreasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCOURSE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(introducing) new topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(causing) topic change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse function</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usually at the end of a conversation expressing (once more) gratitude (a) or annoyance (b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metalinguistic function</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possible, e.g. when saying come si dice (in questi casi); a buon rendere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOR L2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORPUS EXAMPLES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5. Phraseoframe for the construction a buon rendere

*e poi – colpo di scena*

The last case study is to illustrate again the shortcomings not only of learners’ lexicography but of monolingual and bilingual (Italian) lexicography in general. Pragmatemes may not be part of the basic learning material of a L2 programme, but they are, as I said, as far as communicative effects are concerned, nonetheless important and should therefore not be limited to native speakers. Such as in the case of epoicolo di scena(literally plot twist, referring to a “radical change in the expected direction or outcome of the plot” of a story, a novel or a film; OED), which is a rhetoric strategy used in a story or a tale someone tells (or in a newspaper article or novel) in order to increase suspense or to capture the listeners’ attention 29, similar to Italian ta-ta-ta-ta♫, a sort of fanfare mimicry, another construction not mentioned in a dictionary even once.

Uttered with a pause after e poi (‘and then’) and colpo di scena (‘surprising twist’) it announces the climax of a story or something unexpected – in English something like surprise! or and this is the surprising part!, woven into an utterance or a written text 30.

Linguistic corpora (païsà, WEBBIT, La Repubblica Corpus) give good evidence of this pragmatic pattern:

(i) Avevamo visto nascere l’amore tra lei e Lucas e poi... colpo di scena, le cose non si erano rivelate per niente come avevamo creduto che fossero!

(ii) Dekker, proseguendo le indagini, trova che durante la rapina il gruppo di criminali invece di rubare direttamente il denaro, nel computer della banca avevano inserito un virus che trasferisse elettronicamente i soldi (un miliardo di dollari ) sul loro proprio conto corrente; trova poi, colpo di scena, che l’assassino dell’ostaggio all’inizio delle vicende era in realtà stato York, non Conners.

(iii) Nel pomeriggio poi ilcolpo di scena, perché Cesare Zaccone, il legale della Juventus, ha preso la parola tentando la via del patteggiamento ed ammettendo così, di fatto, la colpa. Su precisa domanda del presidente della Caf Ruperto infatti, l’avvocato difensore del club bianconero ha dichiarato: [...] .

(iv) Le sanzioni previste per chi contravveniva al divieto d’abbattimento furono notevolmente inasprite nel 1985, grazie al settimapedo Gigetto Cristini, fondatore nel ’70 di “Quercia Amica”. Poi, nel 1998 ilcolpo di scena: Mentre nel resto d’Italia cresceva l’attenzione verso gli alberi monumentali, la Regione Marche, per mezzo della tristemente nota legge 33, riduceva drasticamente le sanzioni fino a renderle praticamente ridicole.

(v) Ma niente “mondiali”, se mancano i documenti necessari. Così tutti, fino all’altro ieri, avevano pensato che queste gare iridate si sarebbero svolte in ogni caso fidatevi che il costo che improntate per un qualsiasi prodotto della Apple è un investimento a buon rendere! |

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29 This construction is similar to Italian ta-ta-ta-ta♫, a sort of fanfare mimicry, not mentioned in any dictionary even once.

30 I admit that there are similar constructions, such as e poi, un altro problema, so that one might argue that we are rather dealing with a phraseotemplate (e poi X), which is indeed worth being examined, but e poi... colpo di scena is (besides perhaps e poi, colpo di genio) entrenched in a double sense: Formally and with respect to the situation in which it is used.

31 New insights into digital and electronic lexicography are offered by Granger (2012), Granger and Paquot (2012) and L’Homme and Cormier (2014).
considering or not holistically describing phrasemes in general are based on the lack of awareness of innovation and new lexicographical techniques. Besides, it involves a lot of hard work to renew a dictionary which goes deeply into the microstructures... The reality looks somewhat different, as we can see when:

**colpo di scena** is, in fact, described in *Zingarelli 2015* and *Garzanti 2009*, but only as a compound, not mentioning the whole pragmateme and not telling us in a satisfactory way when and how it used and what for.

*Zingarelli 2015*: (s.v. *colpo*): *colpo di scena*, colpo di teatro, improvviso e sorprendente mutamento di situazione; (s.v. *scena*): *colpo di scena*, (fig.) avvenimento improvviso che produce notevoli cambiamenti.

*Garzanti 2009*: (s.v. *colpo*): *colpo di scena* n. 1 (teat., cine.) avvenimento imprevisto che coglie di sorpresa e cambia il corso dell’azione 2 mutamento improvviso e sorprendente di situazione: *colpo di scena: arriva il marito*.

Without appropriate situational context the example given in Garzanti’s meaning no. 2 is not comprehensible. I therefore feel it is of utmost importance to describe phrasemes in a comprehensive manner, the way it could be realized in a digital learners’ dictionary of Italian illustrated here by another phraseoframe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phraseme</th>
<th>e poi – <em>colpo di scena</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>type of phraseme</td>
<td>pragmateme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROSODY</td>
<td>first rising (<em>e poi</em>), then falling or falling-rising (<em>colpo di scena</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intonation</td>
<td>on <em>poi</em> and on <em>scena</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus stress</td>
<td>(secondary stress on <em>cólpo</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pitch</td>
<td>on <em>poi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORPHOLOGY</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finite verb</td>
<td>[e poi] or [poi]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>variable elements</td>
<td>[colpo] or [il colpo]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[colpo] or [colpone] (augmentative): non frequently, but recorded in texts (e.g. WEBBIT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNTAX</td>
<td>simple sentence (without verb), generally used as an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syntactic function</td>
<td>apposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal syntax</td>
<td><em>e poi – colpo di scena</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basic structure</td>
<td>[e poi] (can be omitted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>optional elements</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collocations</td>
<td>external syntax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syntactic function</td>
<td>often used as an insertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modifiers</td>
<td>(parenthesis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEM_PRAGM</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meaning</td>
<td>semantic field(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference to hearer</td>
<td>unspecific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference to speaker</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference to third person</td>
<td>possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speech act(s)</td>
<td>expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status of speech act(s)</td>
<td>indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivation</td>
<td>situational setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone wants to be original</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>while speaking or writing</td>
<td>variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>face-to-face or author-reader in spoken language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when someone is telling something: in written language, too.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral style</td>
<td>neutral, slightly artificial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frequency</td>
<td>no corpus-based frequency results, but familiar in everyday language, especially in the situation of telling something (interesting or exciting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORPUS EXAMPLES</td>
<td>see above, and (vi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (vi) Tutti attendono con ansia quel giorno, perché è l’unico giorno dell’anno in cui ci si
The author hereby declares that there is not any ethical issue or conflict of interest arising from the present article or the research on which it is based.

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BADIP = BAnca Dati dell’Italiano Parlato. http://badip.uni-graz.at/en


Treccani.it. http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario


