A Phraseological Grammar

Andreas Buerki
Cardiff University

Phraseology is the study of set phrases and expressions in language. Historically, phraseologists have been preoccupied with the investigation of idioms (e.g. *to pull someone's leg*), proverbs (e.g. *better safe than sorry*) and other expressions with non-literal or otherwise non-compositional features, but today, our interest is much wider in scope and encompasses collocations (e.g. *to brush one's teeth*), communicative formulae (*How do you do?*), discourse markers (*on the other hand)*, and other usual word sequences (*'round about* or *including, but not limited to*). The existence of phraseological expressions poses problems for conceptions of linguistic knowledge as consisting of words (or morphemes, at any rate entries in the mental lexicon) and rules (the grammar, or syntax). Phraseology brings this neat 'dictionary and grammar book' model (as Taylor, 2007, put it) into disarray. Although multilinguals and language teachers in particular have long known the model to be too neat (how to explain to a student that in English, we don't *do* mistakes, but *make* them, while in French we request a caller not to quit (*ne quittez pas!*) rather than to hold the line), it took the emergence of constructionist approaches to grammar to give phraseological expressions a bona fide space in a theory of linguistic structure. Constructionists famously assert that linguistic knowledge consists of constructions 'all the way down' (Goldberg, 2006:18) and nothing else. In my talk, I present a number of examples from Welsh and English (including the paradigm for plurals in Welsh, some less than fixed fixed expressions and periphrastic patterns) to argue that we may well need a grammar that is even more phraseological than most constructionist grammarians might be comfortable with. Such a grammar begins with attention to predominantly lexically specific constructions, moving 'upwards' to more abstract patterns where required, rather than downwards from abstract patterns to lexically substantive expressions. This would finally normalise phraseology and reveal grammar in general to be largely phraseological.