

*Never judge a wolf by its cover.* An investigation into the relevance of phrasemes included in advanced learners' dictionaries for learners of English as an additional language in Australia

Julia Miller, MA (Flinders University, Australia); BA Hons (Cambridge University)

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in the department of French, Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law, Flinders University, Australia

Date submitted: June 2011



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Thesis summary</b>	vii
<b>Declaration</b>	ix
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	xi
<b>Chapter One Introduction</b>	
Introduction	1
1. Conceptual framework and research questions	3
2. Communicative competence	8
3. Pedagogical lexicography	10
3.1 Issues with monolingual English learners’ dictionaries	13
3.2 Australian and British English	16
4. Phrasemes	21
5. Outline of methodology	25
Conclusion	28
<b>Chapter Two Lexicography and EAL learners in Australia</b>	
Introduction	31
1. Lexicography	33
2. Pedagogical lexicography	37
2.1 Monolingual English learners’ dictionaries	37
2.2 Phrasemes in learners’ dictionaries	41
2.3 Phraseme headwords	43

2.4 Labels in learners' dictionaries	46
3. Other dictionaries for learners	54
3.1 Australian learners' dictionaries	54
3.2 Learners' dictionaries in other languages	55
3.3 Bilingual dictionaries	56
3.4 Bilingualised dictionaries	57
3.5 Dictionaries of idioms	58
4. Electronic and online dictionaries	59
5. Dictionaries in relation to EAL learning and teaching	62
6. Users of monolingual English learners' dictionaries in Australia	66
6.1 EAL learners	67
6.2 EAL teachers	70
Conclusion	72

### **Chapter Three    Literature Review: Phraseology**

Introduction	74
1. Phrasemes	77
2. Metaphor	79
3. Collocation	82
4. Characteristics of idioms	88
4.1 Length	90
4.2 Institutionalisation and currency	91
4.3 Frequency	93
4.4 Semantic opacity	96

4.5 Variation	98
5. Similes	101
6. Proverbs and sayings	102
7. The interpretation of phrasemes	104
8. Phrasemes and culture	106
9. EAL learners and phrasemes	109
Conclusion	114

## **Chapter Four Methodology**

Introduction	118
1. Compilation of a phraseme list from the Big 5	121
2. The questionnaire	129
2.1 Recruitment of participants	136
3. Analysis of results	138
4. Limitations	140
Conclusion	142

## **Chapter Five Findings**

Introduction	143
1. – 84. Presentation of results for the 84 phrasemes	146
85. Overall findings for familiarity throughout the questionnaire	404
86. Overall findings for frequency of use throughout the questionnaire	406
87. Overall findings for occasions on which phrasemes are used throughout the questionnaire	407
88. Sources of phrasemes throughout the questionnaire	408
89. Other phrasemes elicited from participants	413

89.1 Phrasemes elicited most from the youngest group	414
89.2 Variations	417
89.2.1 Humorous answers	417
89.2.2 Reversals	418
89.2.3 Regional variations	419
Conclusion	419
<b>Chapter Six Discussion</b>	
Introduction	421
1. Familiarity and interpretation of phrasemes	422
1.1 Familiarity	422
1.2 Sources of phrasemes	426
1.3 Opacity and interpretation	427
2. Usage	432
2.1 Frequency of use	432
2.2 Where the phrasemes are used	436
2.3 Familiarity and usage compared	438
3. The regional and generational models	439
4. Coverage by the Big 5	441
4.1 Overall coverage	441
4.2 Headwords used in the Big 5	445
4.3 Labels used in the Big 5	448
5. Other phrasemes elicited from participants	453
Conclusion	454
<b>Chapter Seven Conclusion</b>	457

<b>List of Appendices</b>	469
<b>Appendix 1</b>	
Phrasemes in the questionnaire classified by type	471
<b>Appendix 2</b>	
Phraseme origins, citations and current meanings	475
Introduction	475
1. Biblical	475
2. Literary/Historical	487
3. Australian	496
4. British	499
5. Older reference	502
<b>Appendix 3</b>	
Phrasemes in the questionnaire according to category	507
<b>Appendix 4</b>	
Phrasemes in order of familiarity	515
<b>Appendix 5</b>	
Frequency of use	521
<b>Appendix 6</b>	
Headwords and labels in the Big 5	527
<b>Bibliography</b>	535



## **Thesis summary**

Native speakers of English use idioms, proverbs and similes, collectively known as ‘phrasemes’, to communicate in a variety of settings and in a variety of ways. However, phrasemes can cause problems for learners of English as an additional language (EAL). Not knowing that a word belongs to a phraseme, they may look for the item in their monolingual English learners’ dictionary (MELD), but MELDs often vary in their choice of headword, and consistency is not guaranteed even within a single dictionary. After finding the meaning of an item, learners may not know with whom the phraseme should be used, since native English speakers in different countries, such as Australia and the UK, may not use the same phrasemes, and usage may vary according to age group. Such differences may not be reflected in MELDs.

This thesis addresses an original area of investigation at the intersection of three related fields: (1) the concept of communicative competence, with regard to EAL learning and teaching; (2) lexicography, particularly in relation to MELDs; and (3) phraseology, in regard to the use of phrasemes by native speakers of English. The investigation aimed to discover which phrasemes are used by which age groups in the UK and Australia and whether age and country usage need to be addressed by MELDS more accurately in their inclusion and labelling of phrasemes. The two hypotheses investigated are that (1) people in the same geographical location will have similar knowledge, and perhaps similar use, of phrasemes, regardless of their age (a regional model); and (2) age has a greater influence than location, so that people in the same age group in two locations will have similarities in phraseme knowledge and use (a generational model).

Literature regarding lexicography, EAL learning and phraseology is addressed, and a gap in research into phraseme use by native speakers of English

is identified. The methodology takes an emic (intralingual) and etic (interlingual) perspective, providing qualitative and quantitative data. Data were collected through an online questionnaire completed by over 1000 participants from different age groups of native English speakers in the UK and Australia. It was found that the generational model of phraseme use is more accurate than the regional model.

The results provide a description of phraseme use that should be applied to the coverage of phrasemes in future MELDs used in Australia, with two major implications for lexicographers and publishers. First, future research needs to ascertain if the label 'British English' in MELDs means that these items are used in the UK rather than the US, or whether these items are only used in the UK and not in other English speaking countries such as Australia. Secondly, the *old-fashioned* label should be clarified or a *youth* label introduced. These changes would greatly benefit the communicative competence of EAL learners in the use of phraseology.

**Declaration**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

.....

Julia Miller



## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Colette Mrowa-Hopkins for all her helpful feedback and suggestions, and Bill Winser for his invaluable input. I am also grateful to Graham Tulloch for his additional comments.

Thanks are also due to Paul Bogaards, Amy Chi, Dmitrij Dobrovolskij, Dilin Liu, Rosamund Moon, Chris Mulhall and Pam Peters, all of whom patiently answered my emailed questions about terms to use in the thesis, previous research in the area, or specific phrasemes.

Michael Rundell kindly sent me a copy of the *Australian learners dictionary*.

Ann Atkinson, Bruce Moore, Pius ten Hacken, Antje Töpel, Maik Walter and Ewa Zegler-Poleska gave me important publishing details and information relating to learners' dictionaries in several European languages.

I am grateful to Peter Murdoch for helping me to create the accompanying CD-ROM, and for his suggestions on formatting and style in the bibliography.

In particular, I am indebted to John Dainty, who has been my untiring critic and patient reader, helping me to mould each chapter into a clearer format and examine each claim I make, in order to ensure better communication of my ideas.

Any failings or mistakes in the thesis remain, of course, my own.

