

Phraseological Research of the 16th-Century Slovenian Literary Language

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Introduction

In modern standard Slovenian language, the majority of phraseological research is based on large corpora that offer a wide array of tools and options for optimizing searching and sorting results (e.g. GANTAR 2006; GANTAR 2007; KRŽIŠNIK 2013; METERC 2019). In addition, the importance of spoken language and the survey method (particularly of native speakers) have been given more prominence (e. g. METERC 2019, pp. 42-43; cf. KRŽIŠNIK 1996, pp. 136-37). However, in phraseology research of past periods of Slovenian literary language (specifically the 16th century), the research methods differ significantly because those methods (corpus approach and survey methods) are not applicable. Also, although there are many works dedicated to the Slovenian literary language of the 16th century, only a few deal with phraseology. This is why the methods for historical and diachronic phraseological research of the Slovenian language are still being developed and refined. The pursuit for the optimal way of research is still ongoing and many basic questions remain (at least partly) unanswered. This article¹

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brings attention to the much underresearched field of phraseology of the Slovenian literary language of 16th century, presents sources, methods and specific characteristics of historical phraseological research based on actual language use in written texts rather than drawing data exclusively from older dictionaries.

1. Fixed Multi-Word Units and Phraseological Units

In Slovenian linguistics the term fixed multi-word units (or fixed MWUs) is usually used as a hypernym for different types of fixed MWUs, the common feature of which being the fact that they are a part of the speakers' mental lexicon as a whole and therefore constitute a single lexeme (VIDOVIČ MUHA 2013, p. 109). Unlike free MWUs, which are formed spontaneously, fixed MWUs are recalled by speakers from memory as a whole (*ibidem*).

One of the types of fixed MWUs are phrasemes or phraseological units (or PUs). In the beginning of Slovenian phraseological research in 1970s, there were many different definitions of the basic unit of phraseology and many terminological inconsistencies and variants (KRŽIŠNIK 2013, pp. 16-21), but in the past decade or so these have mostly been resolved. The most common definition in Slovenian phraseology nowadays defines PUs as a fixed MWUs with the following features: relative stability in form (as some variation is anticipated), partially or fully figurative (idiomatic) meaning (not motivated by the sum of its components; the degree of their idiomaticity ranges from more or less transparent to completely opaque), expressiveness and, as all MWUs they are an essential part of a human vocabulary, the lexicon, they are reproducible and lexicalized (GLIHA KOMAC ET AL. 2015, pp. 56-57). It is important to note that with this broader definition of PU the majority of paremiological units (such as sayings and proverbs) also fall within the scope of phraseology.

Modern phraseology increasingly emphasizes that PUs are not as concrete units as traditional lexicography presents them (KRŽIŠNIK 1996, p. 133; MOON 1996, p. 246; GANTAR 2003, p. 212; JESENŠEK-ULČNIK

2014, p. 282; GEERAERT ET AL. 2017, p. 87; HANKS 2017, p. 95; METERC 2019, pp. 34-35). «The misconception that idioms are frozen is probably due to the fact that much of the literature on idioms and collocations is based on data derived via introspection» (FELLBAUM 2016, p. 419). Especially with the use of the corpus approach, it has been shown that PUs are much more unstable as corpus material shows a great diversity and variability of these language units (JESENŠEK-ULČNIK 2014, p. 282; FELLBAUM 2016, pp. 412, 419). In modern conceptions variability of idioms is understood as their inherent property and not an error (JESENŠEK-ULČNIK 2014, p. 285). Stability is still considered a defining feature of PUs, but the actual use indicates greater freedom in choosing individual components of the idiom, which calls into question not only the previously registered Slovene phraseology in dictionaries, but also the notion of phraseological stability and stability in general (GANTAR 2003, p. 212; cf. GANTAR 2007, pp. 99-101).

2. 16th-Century Slovenian Literary Language

2.1. Sources and Historical Background

In the second half of the 16th century Slovenian language was established as a literary language as a result of two European movements: Renaissance humanism and the Reformation (HERRITY 2016, p. 4). «The linguistic principle of the Reformation was that the liturgical language should be intelligible to all, and this gave rise to a stimulus to create a literary language based on the vernacular for proselytising purposes» (HERRITY 2016, p. 5). In 1550 the first Slovenian printed books (*Catechismus* and *Abecedarium vnd der klein Catechismus* both authored by Primož Trubar) were published, marking the beginning of the Slovenian literary language. Until 1603 a total of 53 books were published in the Slovenian language (MERŠE 2011, p. 7). The authors were Protestant reformers whose main goal was religious reform, and thus most of the works are of a religious nature: Bible translations, catechisms, postils (a collection of Bible passages and sermons about them), Agenda etc.

The most prominent and comprehensive among them is Jurij Dalmatin's full translation of the Bible in 1584, which remained the only full Slovenian Bible translation for 200 years (GUTHRIE 1984, p. 74). In addition to religious texts there were also some linguistic works published: primers, the first grammar of the Slovenian language (written in Latin, Adam Bohorič: *Arcticae horulae fuccifivae*)² and two multilingual dictionaries that include Slovenian lexemes (HIERONYMUS MEGISER 1592: *DICTIONARIVM QVATVOR LINGVARVM* and Hieronymus Megiser 1603: *Thefaurus Polyglottus*)³.

These 53 Protestant works represent the material for the *Dictionary of the 16th-Century Slovenian Literary Language*, the first volume of which (A-D) was published in 2021 (SSKJ16) and was converted in 2022 into digital form and published at the Fran dictionary portal⁴ (eSSKJ16)⁵. The source material constitutes a paper corpora composed of paper slips with text fragments excerpted from the 16th-century Slovenian Protestants' texts. These paper slips make up a complete list of all occurrences of all words from all 16th-century Slovenian printed Protestant texts (which means that every occurrence of every word is listed in alphabetical order and can be analysed), which contains approximately three million alphabetically arranged paper slips (MERŠE 2011, p. 7). The most extensive text is Dalmatin's Bible, which represents about one third of this paper corpus. Paper slips are in A6 format, with the lemma written in the top left corner, the main part is the word in context and below is information about the exact location of the word

- 2 Most of the works are written in the Bohorič alphabet *bohoričica*, named after Adam Bohorič, who codified it in his grammar. The Bohorič alphabet was in use until it was replaced by Gaj's Latin alphabet *gajica* in the early to mid-19th century (HERRITY 2016, p. 10).
- 3 Although published in 1603 (and thus in 17th century) it is commonly included in research about 16th century, because it contains much of the vocabulary that was in use in the 16th century (MERŠE 2011; AHAČIČ ET AL. 2021).
- 4 <https://fran.si/>
- 5 Instead of waiting to finish and publish the whole second volume (E–J) in approx. 2028, it is planned that new dictionary entries will be added each year to this online version of the dictionary.

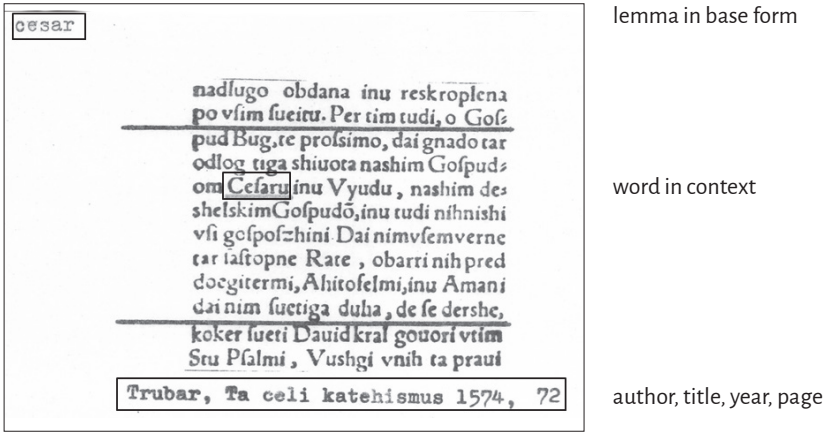


Image 1 A quotation slip of the lemma *cesar* (*caesar*) from the paper corpus

in the text, work, author and year, so that the word can be checked in the primary source if necessary.

Having a complete list of occurrences for each lemma has proved to be a great advantage as it gives us a thorough overview of the material. Because of this, paper concordances are very reliable, but the analysis is time-consuming and prone to human errors in sorting the language material. In phraseological research this means that in order to conduct a thorough analysis, you have to analyse all occurrences of all words that make up the PU, sometimes even the whole word family (families).

For this reason, there have been efforts to digitize this material to make it more accessible and convenient and the first version of corpus (Korpus 16)⁶ is available. It contains 45 of the 53 source books. The books were transcribed by a company and transcriptions were then revised by students and researchers (AHAČIČ ET. AL. 2021, p. 8). This produced a better final result than scanning and optical character recognition, but there are still errors in transcription due to the length and complexity of the texts (*ibidem*). The corpus is searchable, but not

6 <https://fran.si/korpus16>

yet lemmatized. The search is conducted character-by-character with some most common spelling variations taken into account. For example: if you enter the letter *a* in the search box, it finds the letter *a* with different superscript marks: *à, á, â, ã*; the entry *nj* finds results *n, nj, jn, jnj, inj* and the entry *š* finds *sh, ſh, ſsh, fſh, ſsh*⁷. Because of the inconsistent orthography and many diverse word forms the search unfortunately rarely covers all relevant phenomena. The corpus it is not yet lemmatized, which decreases its reliability and usefulness for phraseological studies (as multi-word search is not available) in comparison with the paper corpus.

2.2 Language of 16th-Century Texts

The Protestant reformers were well aware of the vast dialectal diversity of Slovenian and strived towards a written language understood by all Slovenians. The language was based on the central dialect without its more local peculiarities, but every author slightly modified it with influences from their own or other dialects (HERRITY 2016, p. 5; GREENBERG 2006, p. 10).

In historical linguistics it is crucial to be aware that the language of past eras is very different from modern language. This is most apparent in the use of different alphabet, spelling (sound-letter relation), word forms and many dialectal features, but it affects all linguistic levels, including denotative and connotative meanings, which are essential for phraseological research. In connection to the connotative meaning, the word *baba* ‘woman’, for example, is always used pejoratively in the modern Slovenian language⁸, but in 16th-century texts neutral uses can be observed as well. Similarly, difference in denotative meaning can be

⁷ <https://fran.si/korpus16/o-portalu?page=Search>

⁸ Modern Slovenian words and their meanings and use are from *Dictionary of the Slovenian Standard Language, 2nd and 3rd Edition* (SSKJ2, eSSKJ) and the information about 16th-century Slovenian literary language is from eSSKJ16 unless stated otherwise.

observed with the adjective *čemern*, which today means ‘gloomy, sullen’, but in 16th-century Slovenian literary language it is attested with a very different meaning: ‘poisonous’ (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2020, p. 277). Another example is the word *črka*. In modern Slovenian it denotes 1. ‘symbols used to write a language, letter’ and 2. ‘what represents the external side of what is said’. In 16th century Slovenian it had three different meanings of which only the last one is partially equivalent to the first modern meaning: 1. ‘a short line’, 2. ‘a graphic superscript mark indicating a particular pronunciation or accent of the sound(s) marked by a letter’ and 3. ‘character used when writing text: a line, period, comma, letter’.

These examples also illustrate the fact that the researcher’s interpretations can sometimes be biased by his or her linguistic intuition derived from the modern language. As such linguists cannot rely on the linguistic intuition that they have as native speakers of the language more than 450 years after texts were produced, because it can often be misleading (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2015, p. 451; LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2020, p. 267). Conclusions must be drawn based on the data from the texts themselves and not on assumptions. When trying to describe a linguistic reality of the past, which often differs from the modern reality both in terms of expression and meaning, we often do not have a precise understanding (JELOVŠEK 2018, p. 464). In historical lexicology there is always «inevitably a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of problematic quotations» (HAWKE 2016, p. 179). Hawke continues that not having sufficient context can lead to misinterpretation. How much context is needed, varies greatly: from a complete sentence to a paragraph (*ibidem*) and in some cases even the entire opus of an author (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2017, p. 41). Some of the meanings in 16th-century Slovenian cannot be unambiguously determined even with the overview of the very broad context, all occurrences of the lexeme and comparison with the original text in foreign language (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2015, p. 454).

The functional needs of the Slovenian literary language of the 16th century were different than they are today. Polysemy is more common as lexemes were more semantically burdened (LEGAN RAVNIKAR

2017, p. 48). In translating religious texts translators often faced lexical gaps in Slovenian, and in order to resolve them, new meanings were added to existing borrowed and domestic lexemes as this was easier than creating new words and believed to be more appropriate than loan translations or uncritical borrowings from foreign languages (*ibidem*). Most of the Slovenian texts in the 16th century are translations or adaptations of foreign (mostly German) texts. An important method used to determine meaning of lexemes is a comparison of the Slovenian translation with the original text (JELOVŠEK 2018, p. 467; LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2015, p. 451; LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2017, pp. 41-42; LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2020, pp. 267, 270) and comparison of foreign language equivalent in historical dictionaries of other languages, most often German or other Slavic languages (JELOVŠEK 2018, p. 467; LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2020, p. 267).

Additionally, the knowledge we have at our disposal today is far broader than the knowledge the writers in 16th century had. It is not uncommon that the modern meaning of the lexeme (for example in modern biblical translations) and the one from the 16th century do not match, because today's perception of a given denotatum differs from that of the 16th century (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2020, p. 279). Having at least some basic knowledge and understanding of the broader socio-historical, cultural and ideological context in which the texts originated is a necessity when dealing with centuries old texts (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2015, p. 451). For the 16th century, mainly knowledge of the fields of theology, church and cultural history is required (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2017, p. 42), as well as knowledge of religious Protestant movements in the 16th century, Old and New Testament events etc. (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2020, p. 270).

2.3 Phraseology of the 16th-Century Slovenian Literary Language

Researching 16th-century phraseology is challenging because phraseologization is a long and gradual process (AHAČIČ ET AL. 2020, p. 74) and PUs historically represent the end point in development (VRBINC

1997, p. 140, following COWIE 1983). In 16th-century Slovenian literary language these processes were just beginning and it is essential to make conclusions based on the features that a MWU exhibits in the 16th century Slovenian (AHAČIČ *ET AL.* 2020, p. 74). In the source material of the 16th-century Slovenian literary language some modern PUs are non-phraseological MWUs that only later developed into PUs (KRŽIŠNIK 1986, p. 441).

It is also important to note that most texts from the 16th century are of a religious nature and there is not a lot of diversity in text types, as mentioned above. This is not necessarily a reflection of the general language use in the 16th century or even in older periods of language history (LEGAN RAVNIKAR 2017, p. 39). Today it is established that many PUs are more often used in spoken than in written communication (METERC 2017, p. 186), and from the past periods only written sources are preserved. For this reason, it is not possible to say with absolute certainty which PUs really were in use. Therefore, if a PU is not attested in the preserved sources, this does not necessarily mean that it was not in use in that period in other contexts or in spoken language.

The problem of distinguishing between different types of MWUs is a universal problem, but it gets significantly more difficult trying to do so in texts hundreds of years old for reasons discussed earlier (cf. 2.2). When distinguishing between different types of MWUs, the main guidelines are the defining features of the different types of MWUs, on the basis of which the criteria are formed. But although this may sound easy in theory, it is far more difficult when dealing with actual language use. At the semantic level, it is especially difficult to distinguish between PUs and (non-phraseological or non-terminological) fixed MWUs as the boundaries are not always unambiguously definable, neither at the level of motivation nor expressiveness (JAKOP-KRŽIŠNIK 2015, p. 422). Nowadays it has become more and more obvious that phraseological theory is the most complex and inconsistent when it comes to defining features (GANTAR 2007, p. 79). The two main problem areas of phraseology of the 16th century Slovenian further presented below are: (in)stability and expressiveness.

2.3.1 Stability

The revised defining feature relative stability (cf. 1) is even further loosened in 16th century Slovenian as the variation across all linguistic levels is far greater than in modern Slovenian due to the fact that written norm was not yet established. What can be defined as stable in a language whose main feature is its instability? And how much variation is still acceptable for something to be considered a fixed MWU or PU? In case of phraseology not all variation is equally significant. The orthographic and phonetic variations are not as significant for phraseological research because they do not influence the (denotative and/or connotative) meanings or usages of the PU. More important to note are word-formational, lexical and syntactic variations and limitations of use⁹. Some examples are presented below in order to illustrate the many types of variations that occur in the 16th-century Slovenian literary language¹⁰.

a) word-formational variants (separated by /):

- variation in aspect (perfective and imperfective verb forms):
dati/dajati kaj na dan [lit. give something to the day] ‘to make

⁹ There are some grammatical changes or transformations which also affect some PUs that are (at least in Slovenian phraseology) not considered a variant but form of usage. They can affect one component (e.g. the negation of verb in Slovenian demands a change of the case of the noun/noun clause from accusative to genitive which is reflected in a different ending: *mlatiti prazno slamo* [lit. to beat empty straw] ‘to talk without any content’ → *ne mlatiti prazne slame* [lit. to not beat empty straw]) or the PU as a whole. The latter has three types: passivization (→ *prazna slama se mlati* [lit. empty straw is beaten]), nominalization (→ *mlatenje prazne slame* [lit. the beating of empty straw]) and relativization (→ *prazna slama, ki jo (kdo) mlati* [lit. empty straw, that someone is beating]) (all based on KRŽIŠNIK 2018). It is also important to note that PUs are highly anomalous lexical units, which means: not all PUs with a similar surface structure allow the same transformations (GANTAR 2007, p. 72). The example used here is a one of very few PUs that can undergo all of the transformations listed above.

¹⁰ The examples are either from eSSKJ16 or based on the author's own analysis of paper concordances.

something known', closest English PU with similar components and meaning: *see the light of day*

- diminutive and non-diminutive form: *zgubljena ovčica/ovca* [lit. the lost (little) sheep] 'a person without a goal or meaning in life'

b) lexical variants (separated by /):

- *žalostna/revna dolina* [lit. sad/poor valley] 'a place of suffering, especially earthly existence as opposed to afterlife'

c) syntactic variants (separated by //)

- variation in part of speech (noun + noun in genitive // adjective + noun): *dolg krvi // krvavi dolg* [lit. debt of blood // bloody debt] 'guilt, responsibility before God for spilled blood'
- variation in word order: *vinograd božji // božji vinograd* [lit. vineyard of God // God's vineyard] 'a community of people who believe in God'
- variation in verb valency (verb + accusative // verb + instrumental): *biti (celo) dejano za koga/kaj // biti (celo) dejano s kom/čim* [lit. to be given (whole) for who/what // to be given (whole) with who/what] 'expresses that the existence or the duration of who/what has come to an end'

d) combination of different types of variants

- variation in preposition and a lexical variant: *držati na uzdi/vbrzdah* [lit. to hold on bridle/in bit] 'to control, to restrain'
- lexical variant and variation in word order: *po desnici ino levici // z levico ino desnico*, [lit. on the right hand and the left hand // with the left hand and right hand] 'in every way, by all means'

Sometimes, especially concerning paremiological units, the degree of variation is so high that it is impossible to set a base from that would cover all occurrences of the paremiological unit in the source material.

An example of such unit are the four occurrences of the same PU that is derived from the Bible passage: «You can see the speck in your friend's eye. But you don't notice the log in your own eye.» (Luke 6,41; similar also Matthew 7,3-5)

- «Inu bersh v'drusih ozhéh bijl, kakòr v'foih trame vidio» (KRELJ 1567, p. VIb)
- «drugim Trohu videti Vozheh, febi pak Bruuna nepozhutiti» (JURIČIČ 1578, p. II,181a)
- «drugim eno Troho vide vnyh Oku, febi pak Bruuna vlastnem Oku nepozhute» (JURIČIČ 1578, p. II,108)
- «Ti vidish eno troho v'eniga drusiga okej, ampak v'tvoim okej trama nepozhutish» (DALMATIN 1584: p. III,78)

The next relevant question connected to stability concerns frequency: how many occurrences does it take to consider a MWU a fixed MWU, or in our case a PU, as only usage in different contexts in which the meaning of the phrase as a whole is preserved (AHAČIČ ET AL. 2020, p. 75) can truly prove its presence and prevalence in a language. In modern lexicography five occurrences in the Slovene reference corpus *Gigafida*¹¹ are often used as a frequency threshold for inclusion in the eSSKJ (METERC 2019, p. 35), but sometimes even less is considered enough if the examples are very convincing or if we have other sources indicating its stability and frequent use (*ibidem*). In the corpus of the 16th century Slovenian language five occurrences is too high of a threshold for many PUs. If there is only one occurrence of a MWU, it is most often classified as a metaphor (cf. TRIVUNOVIĆ 2022, p. 37). In some cases, however, even one occurrence can be enough to confirm the presence of a PU in the 16th century Slovenian. Sometimes its context provides information on its general use in the Slovenian language of that time. Text introducers such as *kakor pravimo* 'as we say' are strong

¹¹ Corpus *Gigafida* is available in multiple versions (*Gigafida 1.0*, *Gigafida 1.1*, *Gigafida 1.1 deduplicirana*; *Gigafida 2.0*, *Gigafida 2.0 deduplicirani*). The updated *Gigafida 2.0* was published in 2019 (<https://clarin.si/noske/>).

indicators that something was a fixed expression (AHAČIČ *ET AL.* 2020, p. 75.) and together with idiomatic meaning and expressive function of a unit in the text we can be more certain that we are dealing with a PU even with as little as one occurrence.

2.3.2 Expressiveness

PUs differ from other fixed MWUs as they carry an additional connotative meaning and are expressive in use, but these properties as a criterion are very subjective and therefore challenging. Usually an expressive language unit (such as PUs) has a neutral variant or homonym in the language system, but in the thematically and quantitatively limited corpus of 16th century Slovenian that is often not the case.

There are three basic factors that can help with discerning expressive function and connotative meaning: context, culture and dictionary labels, but in the 16th-century Slovenian language all of them are to a certain extent problematic. Not all the texts are preserved in whole and the context is often difficult to understand as it deals with theological or philosophical issues that are difficult to be fully grasped, which makes it harder to not only determine denotative meanings but also connotative ones as well. Expressiveness is closely linked to culture and as mentioned before (cf. 2.2): the socio-historical, cultural and ideological context in which the texts were written differs significantly from today. In some cases, a good indication that a lexical unit was used expressively in past periods are the dictionaries written at that time and the use of labels. Unfortunately, the 16th-century multilingual dictionaries do not provide such additional information.

Conclusion

The distinction between different types of MWUs in historical linguistics is a demanding task and there are no definitive answers or perfect quick solutions, but a key guideline is to always take into account all of

the defining features rather than just one. Furthermore, it is important to examine and analyse all the components that make up the PU to truly accurately determine its features and try to take into account the extralinguistic circumstances as well. One must not be discouraged just because it requires hard and tedious work. 16th century is an important milestone in Slovenian literary language development and it often surprises researchers with its richness, diversity and timeless relevance.

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Abstract The paper deals with phraseology of the Slovenian literary language of the 16th century and tries to fill the gap in this field of linguistic research. Firstly, definition and types of multi-word units are presented, one type of them being phraseological units. Secondly, sources, methods and some linguistic features of 16th century Slovenian literary language are presented. Finally, some phraseological dilemmas of dealing with centuries old texts are presented; main focus is on the relativization of the definitional features of phraseological units: relative stability and expressiveness.

