

CALL FOR PAPERS

Thematic Issue of the Journal *Neophilologica* (No. 38)

Phraseological Universals in Natural Languages

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The study of linguistic universals, closely tied to linguistic typology, seeks to identify features shared across natural languages despite their diversity (e.g., Comrie, 1989, 2003; Croft, 1990; Greenberg, 1963, 1969). These universals — traditionally classified as phonological, grammatical, semantic, and symbolic (e.g., Greenberg, Osgood, Jenkins, 1963) — aim to formalize the invariants of human language, often in connection with cognition and perception (e.g., Coşeriu, 1974; Saffi, 2005; Sułkowska, 2025). While linguistic typology focuses on differences between languages, the study of universals defines their constraints, delineating the boundaries of possible variation (e.g., Comrie, 1989, 2003). This line of research, strongly rooted in Chomsky's work on universal grammar (1957, 1965), was initiated by Greenberg (1963), who proposed forty-five syntactic universals based on a sample of about thirty languages.

In this view, the opposing principles formulated by Jespersen (1971 [1924]) — free combinatorics and fixed combinatorics (Fr. *la combinatoire libre et la combinatoire figée*) — which explain the coexistence of free combinations and phraseological units (i.e., non-free multi-word expressions (Mel'čuk, 2013), or phraseologized syntagmas (Mel'čuk, 2010)), are found in all natural languages, thus constitute one of the universal facts (e.g., Gréciano, 1991; Gross, 1996; Martin, 2021; Mel'čuk, 2023; Mejri, 2008, 2023). This systemic universal is key to exploring translinguistic and transcultural regularities of phraseological units, which Dobrovol'skij (1988, 1992) named *phraseological universals* — a term later adopted in other works (e.g., Gréciano, 1991; Messina Fajardo, 2009; Mejri, 2010; Kovács, 2015; Hamdane, 2021; Aliyeva, 2025; Sułkowska, 2025).

According to Dobrovol'skij (1992), phraseology must be connected with other areas of general linguistics to construct a coherent model of natural language, justifying the need for continued research into phraseological universals. This inquiry is further motivated by both practical considerations, e.g., the development of more effective phraseodidactics (e.g. Messina Fajardo, 2009; Aliyeva, 2025), and theoretical exploration.

From this theoretical standpoint, phraseological universals fall within the scope of contrastive phraseology (Gréciano, 1991), a field that has been emerging since the second half of the 20th century (Chen, 2021). However, for example, Colson (2008) pointed out the theoretical fragility of comparative studies, which are often limited to descriptions of fixed expression inventories in different languages. Research into phraseological universals offers a promising way to overcome these descriptive limitations and strengthen this subdiscipline's epistemological foundation. Despite the current popularity of phraseology (Mel'čuk, 2013), the topic of phraseological universals remains largely unexplored, although it holds significant theoretical and heuristic potential for comparative studies (Sułkowska, 2025).

To further develop the notion of phraseological universals and help fill the current research gap, *Neophilologica* — founded in the late 1970s — launches a call for contributions on this topic for its upcoming issue (No. 38). Contributions may address, among other topics, universal phenomena already observed in phraseological units across languages (e.g., Messina Fajardo, 2009; Sułkowska, 2025), such as:

- the expression of emotions or psychological states (e.g., despair, joy, irony);
- the recurrence of certain lexical classes (e.g., body parts, animals, natural elements);
- the recurrence of semantic relations such as polysemy, homonymy, synonymy, or antonymy;
- morphosyntactic or semantic correspondences (absolute or partial) between phraseological units across languages;
- the organization of phraseological units into typologically comparable categories (e.g., proverbs, collocations, pragmatemes) and
- etymological and functional convergence of phraseological structures.

Beyond the analysis of these phenomena, articles may also:

- identify and define other common features among phrasemes in diverse languages;
- contribute to the theorization of the concept of phraseological universals;
- explore the implications of phraseological universality in applied fields (e.g., language teaching, lexicography, translation studies);
- examine the limitations and gradational nature of these universals.

Papers must be written in Romance languages or in English and should rely on contrastive data involving at least one Romance language. Including languages from other families, in addition to Romance languages, is also encouraged.

Timeline

- Article submission deadline: 31 March 2026
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