

A phraseological take on ‘freedom’ in a globalizing world

This paper undertakes a lexical-phraseological analysis of the terms ‘freedom’, ‘free’, ‘liberty’, ‘liberal’, ‘liberalization’, and related lexemes. In times of corporate globalization one of the most often employed words in journalistic, business and political communication in English appears to be ‘freedom’ or related terms. The surrounding and accompanying discourse seems to be similarly widespread. This study sets out to see whether this appearance can be empirically verified in any way.

The dictionary definitions of ‘freedom’ are multiple. Several are discussed. The different uses and meanings correlate with collocational and colligational features. What exactly people understand by ‘freedom’ can vary according to circumstances apparently. George W. Bush referred in his State of the Union speech to freedom as a ‘force of history’ in 2005. He noted that liberty is ‘the plan for humanity and the best hope for progress here on Earth’. Other users of the concept and the lexical field tend to be more pragmatic and down to earth, as investigation of texts in the business press such as *The Economist* will demonstrate. When the phrase ‘economic freedom’ is employed, however, opinions as to its range and denotation may well vary too. The adjective ‘free’ likewise has a wide range of applications in business and journalistic discourse.

This paper aims to investigate some of the collocational patterns accompanying a simple four letter word in English – ‘free’. Both its meaning and its formal relations to the noun ‘freedom’ will also be looked at. Does it represent a culture specific notion which L2 English learners may need to negotiate as a novelty, as compared with their first languages (Wierzbicka 1977)? The important role of phraseological units in business English texts in articulating the language culture-mesh in the L2 learning process is discussed (Alexander 1978, 1992, 2007). The prominence of ‘free’ in business English usage in numerous phrases and collocations with nouns such as ‘free trade’ and ‘free market’ is worthy of note. But the meaning of these terms and phrases is by no means as self-evident as may appear at first sight. By referring to the *COBUILD Direct* corpus and comparing concordances drawn from it some idea of the scope of these words can be assessed.

The English language allows varying notions or models of freedom to be distinguished. Sometimes the ‘prepositional’ addition of either ‘from’ or ‘to’ seems to make the difference between negative and positive models. Both the phraseological and the metaphoric properties of ‘freedom’ are seen to be activated in certain types of business and commercial discourse. Along with related terms such as ‘liberalization’ a close interlocking between lexical-phraseological, business, economic, political and sociocultural aspects can be brought to light.

References

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