

Phrasemes in German as a Foreign Language Teaching for Chinese Learners

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Abstract: This paper proposes a systematic, four-step phraseology lesson (focusing on *Schwein haben*) for B1-level Chinese German Studies students. A survey of 39 Chinese students (B1-C1.1) confirmed difficulty with phrasemes, especially full idioms like *nicht alle Tassen im Schrank haben*. The conclusion recommends introducing phraseology as a systematic, individual subject from the third semester (B1 level) to improve communication and prepare students for further studies.

Keywords: Phrasemes; Four-Step Didactic Model; Phraseodidactics; German Studies

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1. Introduction

Phraseologisms are crucial for successful communication and limited knowledge can cause failures and professional advancement, particularly for German Studies students^[1]. In Germany, phraseology is often a compulsory subject in postgraduate studies. A survey was conducted on 39 Chinese German Studies students to assess their phraseological mastery; the results will be presented in the paper. Since phraseodidactics in China is phraseodidactic slumber compared to other countries, this paper aims to show how it can gain attention in Chinese universities and convey basic knowledge about phrasemes.

2. Practice and Teaching Materials

Teaching material selection is based on academic criteria, focusing on everyday, situational content like the idiom *Schwein haben* where students have prior experience^[2]. Lessons require texts integrated with phrasemes, advocating a text-oriented, pragmatic approach to understanding phraseological meaning^[3]. Illustrations are essential in phraseodidactics to convey phraseological, not literal, meaning. *Deutsche Welle* is used as the primary, free online source for topic-specific materials, supplemented by exercises from other workbooks. Teachers should prepare slides covering the knowledge, incorporating phraseological illustrations, and printing exercise sheets for practice.

3. Didactic Theories for Phrasemes

The phraseological lesson is based on the four-step didactic model: discover (recognize in text), decipher (decode meaning using aids), consolidate (passive mastery via exercises^[4], added by Lüger), and use (active mastery^[5], derived from Kühn). The lesson supplements this with basic phraseological theory, leveraging students' prior experience with Chinese phraseologisms.

Learner motivation is boosted by creating personal portfolios at the end of each lesson, which track individual efforts and progress^[6].

4. Phrasemes in Teaching

This trial phraseology lesson, addressing a gap in Chinese university curricula, targets third-semester German Studies students who start German with little prior knowledge and are currently at the B1 CEFR level. The 90-minute class focuses on phraseologisms, utilizing a projector, and is guided by a prepared tabular plan.

Table 1. Teaching Steps for a Phraseology Lesson (B1 Level)

Step	Content	Time(90 Min.)
Introduction	What are phrasemes?	20/20
Discover & Decipher	Reading the analysis text	15/35
Consolidate and Stylistics	Doing exercises	12/47
Supplementary Exercise	Idiomacity	8/55
Extended Knowledge	Discussion: Functions of Phrasemes	10/65
Use	Oral Production (Group work)	15/80
Standby (Buffer Time)	If the time is left over, learners can start homework.	10/90

The first lesson step involves asking learners to identify well-known, school-taught Chinese idioms based on slide illustrations. **Figure 2**, which is ironically interesting and uses youth language (e.g., “Stay optimistic, my friend!” Translated by author), is included to relax the classroom atmosphere.



Figure 1^[7]



Figure 2^[8]

Then the teacher informs German Studies students that the previously discussed idioms are various forms of German phraseologisms, and states that their main characteristics are as follows:

Phrasemes are fixed, polylexical structures (at least two words) whose overall meaning is not deducible from individual components (idiomaticity) and which possess literal or figurative meanings^[1,9].

The literal and figurative meanings of the illustrations are as follows:

Table 2. literal and figurative meanings of the illustrations

	literal	figurative
Figure 1	To play a lute instrument to a cow	To talk into the wind.
Figure 2	To place a green hat on her husband.	To make the husband a cuckold.

A 20-minute introduction to basic phraseme knowledge is essential before the recognition phase, where students underline hidden phrasemes in a text and guess their meaning. The teacher provides the total number of phrasemes. The specific phraseme, *Schwein haben*, is easily recognized and is the focus of the lesson, while others like *etwas lässt jemanden im Stich* (to let someone down) may be harder for beginners.

Das Schwein hat es nicht leicht. In vielen Kulturen gilt es als unrein und faul. Will man jemanden beleidigen, bezeichnet man ihn schon mal als „Schwein“. Aber wenn jemand „Schwein hat“, ist das ein Grund zur Freude.

Alfred gehört zu den Menschen, die immer den Kick suchen. Er braucht Abenteuer und Aufregung, weil er sich sonst schnell langweilt. Dazu passt auch sein Hobby: das Glücksspiel. Ob Sportwetten oder Roulette, Alfred liebt es, bis zum Schluss dem Ergebnis entgegenzufiebern. Seine Frau streitet sich deswegen regelmäßig mit ihm und ist langsam mit ihrer Geduld am Ende. Sie glaubt, dass Alfred bisher nur Glück gehabt hat und befürchtet, dass er irgendwann sein ganzes Geld verlieren wird. Alfred ist anderer Meinung. Er glaubt, dass er einfach ein guter Spieler ist. Neulich kam er total aufgeregt nach Hause und ruft: „Barbara, stell dir vor, ich hatte heute beim Roulette fast alles verloren. Aber ich habe einfach weitergemacht und habe jetzt das Doppelte meines Einsatzes gewonnen!“ Alfreds Frau greift sich an den Kopf. „Alfred, du hast wieder mal *Schwein gehabt*!“ stöhnt sie genervt. „Aber das war jetzt das letzte Mal! Ich verbiete dir, jemals wieder ins Casino zu gehen. Denn wenn dich das Glück irgendwann *im Stich lässt*, trenne ich mich von dir.“ Ob Alfred verstanden hat, dass er schon wieder *Schwein hatte*? Eine letzte Chance bekommt man nicht so oft^[10].

Students verify assumed phraseme meanings using the accompanying image, specialized dictionaries *Deutsche Idiomatik* or *Duden-Redewendungen*, or online source <https://www.redensarten-index.de/suche.php>. The teacher provides visual hints to enable students to deduce the figurative meaning. Students then must paraphrase the meaning in their own words and provide a mother tongue equivalent, following the guidance of Ettinger^[11]. They complete a worksheet (Table 2), after which the teacher shows the correct sample table (15 minutes are allocated).

The consolidate phase begins with *Deutsche Welle* exercises (1-3) based on the text (5 minutes), followed by the teacher checking solutions and addressing questions. The teacher must clarify the conditions of use — especially the colloquial limitation, noting that usage can be summarized “with the help of W-questions (Who? To whom? When? Where? With what intention)^[11]”. A total of 12 minutes is allocated for practice and explanation.

Exercise 1: Read the text. What does “Schwein haben” mean? (a, c, d)

- a) Glück haben
- b) alles verlieren
- c) durch Zufall etwas Positives erleben
- d) bei einer riskanten Tätigkeit Erfolg haben

Exercise 2: If someone did not have “Schwein”, you can say: He had bad luck. In which situations does which reaction fit?

Ich bin sehr schnell gefahren und habe die Kuh auf der Straße zu spät gesehen. Ich konnte gerade noch bremsen! (a)

- a) Da hast du aber Schwein gehabt!
- b) Da hast du aber Pech gehabt.

Exercise 3: Complete sentences with the idiom “Schwein haben”.

A: viel Schwein haben, B: so ein Schwein haben

- (1) Er hat in seinem Leben _____. Sonst wäre er jetzt ein Niemand. (A)
- (2) Wir _____, dass wir den letzten Zug noch bekommen haben! (B)

Exercise 4 focuses on idiomaticity; students work in groups, and then share results (eight minutes total). (1-b, 2-a, 3-c, 4-d)

Exercise 4: Match the expressions to their meaning.

- (1) Nicht alle Tassen im Schrank haben
- a. etwas nicht mehr ertragen können

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (2) die Nase voll haben | b. leicht verrückt sein |
| (3) nur Bahnhof verstehen | c. nichts verstehen können |
| (4) die Daumen drücken | d. j-m Glück / Erfolg wünschen |

Following passive mastery, the lesson shifts to discussing the functions of phrasemes. The teacher concludes this discussion by drawing an exemplary mind map of the functions on the board.

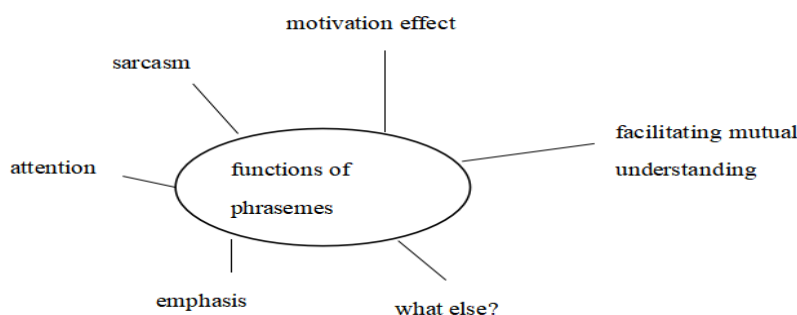


Figure 3. Exemplary mind map of the functions

The teacher illustrates the vivid, emphatic function of phrasemes using the example: “Der Polizist hat eine Fußgängerin über die rote Ampel gehen gesehen. Aber er hat ein Auge zugeedrückt” (turned a blind eye). Simple rephrasing *...er tut so, als...* loses impact. Concrete examples must always be provided for clarity. Ten minutes are allocated for this.

The next phase is active mastery (15 minutes), where students produce oral expressions by discussing the topic “Schwein haben” based on personal experience. The teacher must ensure students converse strictly in German.

- (1) Describe a surprising stroke of luck to your partner, using the phraseme “Schwein haben”.
- (2) If a friend did something bad, would you turn a blind eye? Why/Why not?

Although 10 minutes remain, the teacher should plan for spare time, as lessons rarely run exactly as scheduled.

Homework:

Semester homework: Create a handmade, personalized portfolio/dictionary after each lesson containing covered phrasemes, usage conditions, and formed sentences, culminating in a presentation at semester end.

Lesson homework: Using Table 2 as a model, create a two-column table listing the German phrasemes and their analogous Chinese equivalents.

5. Statistical Assessment

A survey of 39 Chinese students (B1 Goethe and B2.2/C1.1 GaF Master students) using lesson exercises showed non-optimistic results for lower-level students (60% accuracy on multi-choice, poor on completion/matching). GaF students performed much better (73% on matching), but struggled significantly with fully idiomatic phrasemes like “nicht alle Tassen im Schrank haben” (33.3%) and “die Nase voll haben” (50%), potentially due to low frequency. Conversely, their accuracy was high for easily relatable or semantically transparent phrasemes: “nur Bahnhof verstehen” (100%) and “J-m die Daumen drücken” (91.7%, due to cultural similarity).

6. Conclusion

Despite difficulties faced by advanced learners, phraseology should be systematically introduced as a standalone subject in Chinese universities starting from the third semester (B1 level). Since phrasemes are culturally significant and common, this knowledge, including methods like the Four-Step approach and some theoretical aspects, is necessary to facilitate communication, aid students pursuing postgraduate German Studies in Germany, and allow for interesting cross-linguistic

comparisons.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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