

FOOD-BASED PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: The present study examines English phraseological units containing food-related lexical components, with particular attention to idioms formed with apple, bread, bean, bacon, banana, berry, and breakfast. These expressions constitute a culturally marked and semantically productive group within English phraseology. The article analyses their semantic structure, etymological origins, stylistic stratification, and pragmatic functions. Special emphasis is placed on idioms of biblical and mythological origin, as well as on colloquial and slang expressions, revealing the interaction between elevated and everyday language. The study demonstrates that food-based idioms reflect fundamental human experiences such as survival, labour, morality, prosperity, deprivation, and social relations.

Phraseology occupies a central position in the lexical system of any language, as phraseological units encode not only meaning but also cultural memory, social norms, and evaluative attitudes (Kunin, 1970). In English, idioms and set expressions with food components represent one of the most extensive and semantically rich thematic groups. This phenomenon is not accidental: food is a universal element of human life, closely associated with survival, labour, comfort, deprivation, and communal interaction.

Expressions such as daily bread, bread and butter, and bring home the bacon demonstrate how basic nourishment becomes metaphorically linked with economic stability and professional activity (Cowie, 1998). At the same time, idioms like eat the bread of affliction, not have a bean, or the apple of Sodom reflect hardship, moral disillusionment, and existential suffering (Baker, 2011). Thus, food-based phraseological units function as linguistic instruments for conceptualizing both material and abstract aspects of human existence.

The research is grounded in classical and modern theories of phraseology, particularly those developed by A. V. Kunin and A. P. Cowie. According to Kunin, phraseological units are characterized by semantic integrity, structural stability, and reproducibility (Kunin, 1970). Cowie emphasizes the importance of idiomaticity and conventionalized metaphor in phraseological meaning (Cowie, 1998).

The methodology employed includes semantic analysis, etymological interpretation, stylistic classification, and contextual analysis based on literary examples, which is a standard approach in phraseological studies.

Food-based idioms can be grouped into several semantic fields:

1. Livelihood and economic activity (daily bread, bread and butter, earn one's bread, bring home the bacon).
2. Poverty and deprivation (not a bean, without a bean, eat the bread of affliction).
3. Moral and ethical evaluation (cast one's bread upon the waters, quarrel with one's bread and butter).
4. Emotional and psychological states (go bananas, full of beans).
5. Social relations and influence (apple of one's eye, rotten apple injures its neighbours).
6. Conflict and deception (apple of discord, apple of Sodom).

This classification reflects the metaphorical extension of food-related concepts into abstract semantic domains (Cowie, 1998).

The lexeme apple is among the most symbolically charged food components in English phraseology, largely due to its role in biblical and classical traditions.

The anatomical term Adam's apple, though originally metaphorical, has undergone semantic bleaching and functions as a neutral term in modern English. In contrast, apple of discord, derived from Greek mythology, retains strong figurative meaning and is typically used in bookish or academic contexts (Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms, 2015).

The idiom the apple of one's eye, of biblical origin, expresses strong positive evaluation and emotional attachment. Conversely, the apple of Sodom denotes illusory pleasure and moral disappointment, often appearing in philosophical or evaluative discourse.

Proverbial wisdom is encoded in the rotten apple injures its neighbours, which reflects the idea of moral corruption spreading within a social group. Such proverbs demonstrate cross-cultural semantic universality (Baker, 2011).

Idioms containing bread form the most extensive group and are primarily associated with livelihood and social relations. Expressions such as daily bread, earn one's bread, and make one's bread symbolize economic survival and are stylistically neutral.

Biblical influence is especially evident in ask for bread and be given a stone, which conveys injustice and violated expectation. The idiom break bread with someone emphasizes hospitality and social unity, reflecting communal values encoded in religious discourse.

Economic dependence is denoted by eat someone's bread, whereas material comfort is conveyed by have one's bread buttered on both sides. The pragmatic warning quarrel with one's bread and butter illustrates the close link between phraseology and social pragmatics (Baker, 2011).

The lexeme bean is characteristic of colloquial and slang phraseology. The idiom full of beans denotes energy and vitality, while not a bean and without a bean emphasize complete lack of money.

The expression spill the beans, originally American, refers to the disclosure of confidential information and demonstrates the dynamic nature of phraseological expansion. Punitive semantics appear in get beans, illustrating metaphorical reinterpretation.

The idiom bring home the bacon metaphorically represents success and financial responsibility. Emotional instability is expressed by the slang phrase go bananas, while (as) brown as a berry functions as a descriptive evaluative idiom (Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms, 2015).

The classical borrowing bread and circuses illustrates political manipulation through material provision and entertainment, demonstrating the persistence of classical imagery in modern discourse. The informal expression dog's breakfast denotes disorder and evaluative negativity.

Food-based idioms display clear stylistic differentiation:

- bookish: apple of discord, bread and circuses,
- neutral: daily bread, earn one's bread,
- colloquial: full of beans, not a bean,
- slang: go bananas, dog's breakfast.

Such stratification allows these idioms to function across diverse communicative contexts (Kunin, 1970).

The pragmatic functions of food-based idioms include evaluation, emotional intensification, irony, moral judgement, and cultural reference. Their metaphorical density enhances expressiveness while maintaining communicative economy.

Conclusion

Food-related phraseological units form a semantically rich and culturally significant subsystem of English phraseology. Through metaphorical extension, concrete notions of nourishment evolve into abstract representations of economic status, moral values, emotional states, and social relations. The coexistence of biblical, mythological, and slang idioms reflects both historical continuity and linguistic adaptability.

References

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