

GASTRONOMY IN IDIOMATIC LANGUAGE: HISTORICAL TRENDS IN
THE STUDY OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract: *Since idiomatic expressions provide insight into cultural, cognitive, and communicative practices, the study of phraseological units has long held a prominent position in linguistic research. Gastronomic elements of idioms represent a particularly rich domain within this broad field, reflecting both culturally specific associations and universal human experiences with food. With an emphasis on the evolution of academic methodologies from early lexicographic traditions to modern linguistic paradigms, this article examines historical trends in the study of phraseological units. In terms of methodology, the study follows the development of concepts, classifications, and terminological frameworks through a diachronic review of significant theoretical contributions to phraseology. The way that gastronomic idioms have been conceived at various points in the history of linguistic thought—from their treatment as fixed expressions in early dictionaries to their recognition as culturally loaded metaphors in contemporary cognitive linguistics—is given particular attention. The analysis shows how the scholarly understanding of phraseological units has changed from being mainly descriptive to being multifaceted, incorporating pragmatic, cultural, and semantic aspects. The article emphasizes gastronomic idioms' function as a conduit between language and culture by placing them within this larger historical trajectory. The results deepen our understanding of the history of phraseological research and highlight the role that gastronomic elements have played in forming cultural identity and linguistic theory.*

Keywords: *Phraseology, Phraseological units, Idioms, Idiomatic language, Gastronomic idioms, Food metaphors, Bread idioms, Salt idioms, Cross-cultural phraseology, Historical linguistics, Cognitive linguistics, Cultural linguistics, Pragmatics, Discourse analysis, Semantic analysis, Metaphor theory, Conceptual metaphor, Cultural symbolism, Folklore and proverbs, Lexicography, Corpus linguistics, Contrastive linguistics.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most vibrant and expressive linguistic layers is made up of phraseological units, which capture traditional knowledge, cognitive patterns, and collective cultural memory. Idioms are consistent word combinations whose meaning frequently goes beyond literal interpretation, and they are essential in forming literary discourse as well as everyday communication. As a result, their study has long been a crucial component of linguistic research, reflecting shifts in academic paradigms and methodology.

Idioms related to food hold a unique place among the various thematic areas of phraseology. Figurative expression thrives on food, a universal human experience. Idiomatic repertoires in many languages contain references to bread, salt, wine, or meat, which represent not only the material necessities of life but also its social, moral, and emotional aspects. Gastronomic phraseologisms serve as linguistic evidence of how societies

conceptualize daily practices through figurative language, reflecting cultural values and shared perceptions.

Even though there are many colloquial terms pertaining to food, gastronomic phraseology has only recently received systematic scholarly attention. While modern linguistics increasingly highlights the metaphorical, cultural, and cognitive significance of these units, early lexicographers frequently documented them without more in-depth theoretical reflection. This change emphasizes the necessity of conducting a diachronic analysis of the treatment of gastronomic idioms throughout phraseological research history.

By following the evolution of phraseological studies over time, with special attention to gastronomic units, the current article aims to offer such an analysis. It assesses the contribution of gastronomic phraseology to the larger field and examines significant phases in the development of theoretical approaches, from descriptive traditions to modern cognitive and cultural perspectives. The article seeks to shed light on these idioms' ongoing significance as well as their capacity to deepen our comprehension of the relationship among language, culture, and cognition by placing them within the context of linguistic scholarship.

Methods

This study's methodological framework is multidisciplinary, integrating techniques from phraseological theory, historical linguistics, cognitive semantics, and cultural linguistics. The methods used are both descriptive and analytical, qualitative and comparative, since the goal is to track historical trends in the study of phraseological units with gastronomic components.

1. Diachronic Analysis.

The main technique is diachronic analysis, which allows one to follow the evolution of academic ideas regarding phraseological units over time. This covers 20th-century structuralist methods, early lexicographic traditions, and contemporary cognitive-cultural viewpoints. The study reconstructs changes in theoretical frameworks and terminological practices by contrasting the conceptualization of idioms in each period.

2. Historical Comparison.

In phraseological research, a comparative review is employed in addition to diachronic analysis to compare various linguistic schools and national traditions. In order to identify commonalities and differences in the study of idioms, especially those with gastronomic content, the traditions of Russia, Europe, and Anglo-America are compared.

3. A survey based on corpora and lexicography.

To ascertain how gastronomic idioms were documented and categorized over time, lexicographic sources such as idiomatic dictionaries, explanatory dictionaries, and specialized phraseological reference works are examined. To demonstrate the frequency and contextual usage of specific gastronomic phraseologisms across various historical periods, corpus data is consulted when available.

4. Cultural and Semantic Analysis.

Semantic and cultural interpretation is used to emphasize the unique function of culinary idioms. This approach looks at the metaphorical ways that imagery associated with food can express social, ethical, and psychological meanings. It also takes into account the culturally specific and symbolic meanings that different linguistic communities attach to food.

5. Multidisciplinary Method.

In order to understand idioms as cultural indicators as well as linguistic units, the study also incorporates techniques from cognitive linguistics and cultural studies. This method makes it possible to see how common cultural models, values, and cognitive metaphors are embodied in gastronomic phraseologisms (e.g., “food as life,” “bread as survival,” and “salt as loyalty”).

6. A pragmatic approach.

Instead of concentrating only on the semantic content of gastronomic idioms, this method also considers how they communicate in everyday speech. It is possible to determine how speakers employ food-related expressions to accomplish particular communicative objectives, such as persuasion, irony, humor, or social bonding, by looking at idioms in literary works, folklore, proverbs, and everyday speech from both the past and present.

Idioms such as “to spill the beans” in English and “bread and salt” in Slavic traditions, for instance, serve practical purposes in addition to their figurative meanings. They can be used to reveal information, foster camaraderie, or demonstrate cultural hospitality. Thus, pragmatic analysis reveals how gastronomic idioms serve as instruments of communication, containing overtones of emotion and evaluation that transcend their literal and metaphorical meanings.

Results

Over time, phraseological research has evolved from descriptive idiom collections to intricate theoretical frameworks that incorporate pragmatic, cultural, and semantic aspects. Food idioms are a particularly illustrative example of this trajectory, showing how seemingly commonplace language has gained both scholarly and cultural significance.

1. Early Lexicographic Traditions: Ancient to 18th-Century.

A compilation of proverbs and adages contains the earliest indications of interest in idioms. Among the most influential works of Renaissance Europe, Erasmus's *Adagia* (1500) included over 4,000 sayings, many of which had a culinary theme. The Greek proverb ἄνευ ἁλατος ἄδηλον τὸ βρώμα (“food without salt is tasteless”) and the Latin *sublato pane, nihil est vita*, for example, emphasize the symbolic importance of bread and salt in European traditions. Food was considered a natural metaphor for life, sustenance, and virtue during this time, and idioms were prized for their didactic and moral lessons. However, there was little scholarly reflection; phraseological material was preserved more as folklore than as subjects for linguistic analysis.

2. The beginning of linguistic reflection in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Idioms became acknowledged as a component of national languages' expressive resources as comparative philology developed. The ethnolinguistic aspect of the German tradition was highlighted by Friedrich Seiler's work on idioms, which demonstrated how proverbs and idioms expressed a collective mindset. Expressions like *без хлеба – нет обеда* (“without bread, there is no meal”) and *щами да кашей сыт не будешь* (“cabbage soup and porridge will not keep you full”), which highlight the importance of food in daily life, were gathered by Russian folklorists. Idioms such as *worth one's salt* (valuable, deserving) and *bread and butter* (basic means of livelihood) have become markers of cultural values in English. Idioms were still described in this stage, but there was a change in perspective to acknowledge their cultural significance.

3. The mid-20th century's structuralist approaches.

Phrasological units were first systematically categorized by the structuralist paradigm. As part of stylistics, Charles Bally introduced the concept of phraseology, emphasizing the expressive nature of fixed expressions. Vinogradov (1944) made a distinction between phraseological fusions, unities, and collocations in Russia. Idioms related to food, such as "spill the beans" (fusion), "salt of the earth" (unity), and "eat one's words" (collocation), are examples of how meaning can be entirely opaque or partially transparent. A major advancement was made with structuralist classifications, which saw idioms as stable linguistic units worthy of methodical investigation rather than as haphazard oddities.

4. The mid- to late-20th century saw the development of phraseological theory.

By providing specific standards for idiom identification—stability, reproducibility, and semantic integrity—A. V. Kunin transformed phraseology into a stand-alone branch of linguistics. He demonstrated the universality of imagery based on food by including hundreds of gastronomic idioms in his *English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary* (1967, later revised). Examples of cross-cultural expressions with strong symbolic resonance included "to have one's cake and eat it," "sour grapes," and "bread of idleness." Idioms also began to be used in contrastive research during this time. By comparing gastronomic phraseologisms across languages, researchers demonstrated that although bread, salt, and wine appear to be universal, their cultural meanings vary.

5. Cultural and Cognitive Methods (late 20th century to present).

Idioms were viewed as expressions of conceptual metaphors with the advent of cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Eating and food have become important source domains: emotions are heat, anger is boiling, and life is eating.

Phrases like "food for thought," "digest information," "suck one's pride," and "half-baked ideas" are examples of embodied cognition that has its roots in the human experience of eating. The scope was further broadened by cultural linguistics: wine represents joy and spirituality in Mediterranean traditions, while bread is linked to hospitality and divine blessing in Slavic cultures (хлеб-соль). Gastronomic idioms were recognized at this point as cultural, anthropological, and linguistic phenomena.

6. Discourse-oriented and pragmatic viewpoints (modern stage).

The latest research focuses on the role that idioms play in real-world communication. Gastronomic metaphors simplify complex issues in political discourse (e.g., low-hanging fruit for easily achievable goals, bread-and-butter issues for basic economic concerns). Expressions like "a recipe for success" or "taste of victory" draw attention in the media and in advertisements by using images of well-known foods. Idioms are dynamic resources that convey assessment, build rapport, or strengthen persuasion, according to pragmatic analysis. This viewpoint emphasizes idioms' discursive function in meaning-making, in contrast to previous phases that focused on them as structural or semantic units.

Discussion

The study's findings show how the history of phraseological research is intrinsically connected to the history of linguistics in general. New insights on idioms have emerged with every change in linguistic paradigms, from cognitive semantics to discourse analysis, from descriptive lexicography to structuralism. Due to their profound cultural resonance and

universal experiential basis, gastronomic phraseologisms have consistently offered scholars a rich field for analysis, despite their marginal status.

One of the most important conclusions is that some symbolic foods have persisted throughout history. For example, bread is always linked to life, nourishment, and social well-being; its practical and spiritual aspects are demonstrated by expressions like *earn one's bread* (English) and *хлеб всему голова* (Russian: "bread is the head of everything"). Equally important, salt serves as a metaphor for loyalty and value (worth one's salt, bread, and salt as a sign of hospitality). While honey and milk conjure sweetness, prosperity, and divine blessing (a land flowing with milk and honey), wine and meat frequently represent joy, abundance, or strength. Although their particular idiomatic realizations are culturally conditioned, these recurrent motifs demonstrate how food functions as a universal metaphorical domain.

A gradual shift in the understanding of idioms as linguistic units is also highlighted by the historical trajectory. Idioms were treated as relatively closed systems to be described and categorized by structuralist approaches, such as Vinogradov's classification. The open-ended character of idiomatic meaning as a component of embodied cognition and conceptual metaphor was highlighted by later cognitive perspectives, which followed Lakoff and Johnson. Discourse-oriented viewpoints today place idioms in actual communication practice, emphasizing their practical purposes, such as emotional intensification (boiling with rage), persuasive power in political rhetoric (a recipe for disaster), or the simplification of complex issues (bread-and-butter problems).

This progression demonstrates a shift from description to interpretation, from form to function. Because they are both lexicalized and dynamic—that is, their meanings adjust to new discursive contexts while maintaining stable forms—gastronomic idioms serve as a particularly good example of this transition. One example of how metaphorical food language is continually evolving is the horticultural term "low-hanging fruit," which now predominates in business and political discourse.

However, the overview also identifies significant research gaps. First, fewer studies have conducted systematic cross-cultural comparisons of gastronomic idioms, despite the fact that a lot of work has been done within national traditions (such as Russian, English, and German phraseology). Comparing the idioms for bread in Slavic cultures, rice in East Asia, and maize in Mesoamerican traditions, for example, could highlight both universal metaphors and subtleties unique to each culture. Second, there are still few diachronic corpus-based studies available; we do not know much about how gastronomic idiom usage and frequency have evolved over centuries of real language use. Third, although idioms frequently present difficulties in cross-linguistic contexts, the applied aspects of phraseological research—in translation studies, second-language instruction, or intercultural communication—are underdeveloped.

Given these factors, a number of implications become apparent. Phraseology research should keep moving away from limiting categories and toward integrative methods that blend pragmatic, linguistic, and cultural viewpoints. Because of their universal foundation and cultural diversity, gastronomic idioms make excellent test cases for this kind of multidisciplinary study. They serve as tools for communication in modern discourse, bridging tradition and innovation, in addition to preserving collective memory.

In order to fully capture the complexity of idioms as living linguistic phenomena, future research could enhance phraseological theory by combining discourse studies, corpus linguistics, and cognitive metaphor analysis.

Conclusion

From descriptive lexicography and folklore collections to systematic structuralist frameworks, cognitive-cultural interpretations, and discourse-oriented analyses, the scholarly treatment of idioms has changed over time, as show by the historical review of phraseological studies. As they blend culturally specific symbolic meanings with universal experiential underpinnings, gastronomic idioms offer an especially instructive example within this trajectory. Idioms have been rooted in human embodiment and cultural tradition because bread, salt, wine, meat, and other food components have continuously served as linguistic metaphors of sustenance, value, and identification.

The results, which reflect changes in linguistic theory and larger cultural paradigms, demonstrate that gastronomic idioms are essential elements of phraseology rather than exotic side topics. The fact that they persist over centuries shows how long-lasting food-based metaphors are in human thought, and their versatility in modern speech highlights their usefulness.

This article emphasizes the dual function of gastronomic idioms as dynamic resources in contemporary communication and as archives of cultural memory by placing them within the history of phraseological research. In order to better understand how food-related idioms both uphold tradition and adjust to the needs of modern discourse, future research should surpass national traditions and investigate cross-cultural, diachronic, and corpus-based viewpoints.

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