

## METAPHORICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION IN THE ENGLISH IDIOMS THAT BELONG TO THE ALIMENTARY CODE

Soldatkina T. A.<sup>1\*</sup>, Mitrofanova T. A.<sup>2</sup>, Trubyanova I. V.<sup>3</sup>, Bogdanova N. V.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assoc. Prof., Mari State University, RUSSIA, fia.solta@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Assoc. Prof., Mari State University, RUSSIA, mitrofanowa.ta@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup>Assoc. Prof., Mari State University, RUSSIA, opleva@mail.ru

<sup>4</sup>Senior. Lect., Mari State University, RUSSIA, natali100879@mail.ru

\*Corresponding Author

### Abstract

Figurative structure of idioms reflects cultural codes that make linguistic picture of the world. Food and national cuisine represent a specific culture area. Idioms specify an English alimentary code and its axiological vector. The purpose of the article is to analyze metaphorical models presented in the idioms of the English alimentary code. 256 idioms of the English alimentary code make the object of the research. The idioms under analysis have been selected by the continuous sampling method from the bilingual 'Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary' by A. V. Kunin. The descriptive method and the elements of the comparative-historical method were applied in the course of analysis. Metaphorical model GASTRONOMIC IMAGES is STATE OF A PERSON is represented by the frames 'Physical parameters of a person', 'Satiety', 'Emotional state of a person'. The frame 'Physical parameters of a person' is represented by the slots 'Constitution', 'State of health'. The slot 'State of health' is represented by lexemes denoting food and cooking attributes. Frame 'Satiety' is represented by slots 'Basic need for food', 'State of intoxication'. Hunger and satiety are verbalized through anthropomorphic, natural and artifact metaphors. Frame 'Emotional state of a person' is represented by the slots 'Pleasure', 'Confidence', 'Suffering/Humiliation'. Idioms of the English alimentary code corresponding to the given metaphorical models have been revealed. It was stated that they reflect gastronomic images. The analysis suggests the predominance of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and artifact metaphors. Key components are represented by the lexemes denoting food, feelings of satiety and hunger, the process of eating.

**Keywords:** Metaphor, metaphorical model, frame, slot, idioms, alimentary code, attitude component.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the linguistic and culture paradigm, researchers' attention has been drawn to the study and description of the actualization of different cultural codes in the language (N. F. Aliferenko, D. B. Gudkov, F. N. Gukelova, V. V. Krasnyh, M. L. Kovshova, M. V. Pimenova, V. N. Telia, G. V. Tokarev, L. A. Shestak) [1, 3 p. 112, 6 p. 77]. Linguistic and culture codes possess national and cultural specific features, that is why they reflect cultural peculiarities of a certain community [2 p. 111, 5 p. 129, 7 p. 60]. Food products, national cuisine presented in the idioms reflect the specifics of the alimentary code of the English linguistic and culture studies and its axiological vector [6, p. 77]. Idioms convey the features of a particular language as well as the originality of the worldview of people speaking it. Stylistic coloring and imagery are the main properties of idioms [4 p. 101, 8 p. 112]. Imagery can make the expression more colorful, emotional, and it is embodied in speech through metaphors [13, p. 316]. The analysis of the frame

structure of the metaphorical models provides typical for each model frames and slots and allows us to compare them with a view to identify universal and specific features of the world conceptualization by peoples [12, p. 182]. **The purpose of the article** is to analyze metaphorical models presented in the idioms of the English alimentary code.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The object of the study is the metaphorical models created by the idioms of the English alimentary code. 256 idioms of the English alimentary code, selected by means of continuous sampling method from the bilingual Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary by A. V. Kunin, were used as the material for the research. The descriptive method and elements of the comparative historical method were applied in the course of analyses.

## 3. RESULTS, DISCUSSION

Semantics of the idioms of alimentary food code reflects both physical and emotional state of a person. During the research, as a part of the metaphorical model GASTRONOMIC IMAGES is STATE OF A PERSON the frames 'Physical parameters of a person', 'Satiety', 'Emotional state of a person' were identified. Each frame is represented by a group of slots.

Frame 'Physical parameters of a person'.

Metaphorical expressions of the alimentary code of the English phraseology precisely define anthropocentric parameters of a person and his health. The frame 'Physical parameters of a person' is represented by the slots 'Constitution', 'State of health'.

Slot 'Constitution'

The slot 'Constitution' is represented by the idioms which often ironically characterize person's appearance. The idioms of this slot can have a negative assessment. For instance, *the baron of beef*<sup>1</sup> emphasizes fullness as a physical defect, having nothing to do with the title of 'Baron' which confirms the noble origin. The lexeme *butter* reflects the perception of a person's appearance in the idiom *as fat as butter*<sup>2</sup>. A comparison with such a product as butter, which has a certain percentage of fat content, gives grounds to say that the mentioned person has a stout figure. The idiom *a pudding face*<sup>3</sup> implicates dismissive and negative attitude to the person's appearance. This slot also includes such idioms that emphasize the change in the constitution not only due to overeating but also due to pregnancy. People all around notice that the body of a pregnant woman changes. In English cultural reality, this feature is associated with pudding that is sweet and flour in general: for example, *in the pudding club*<sup>4</sup>. It is known that the food preferences of a pregnant woman change, and it allows to attribute them to a kind of 'a club', i.e. a separate group with their own preferences.

Thus, the idioms of this slot are represented by the alimentary lexemes. As a rule, these are the products that are associated with weight gain – fatty food and sweets, in particular: *beef*, *butter*, *pudding*. Negative semantics of these idioms leads to the conclusion about the negative attitude to the stout people on the part of the English linguistic culture.

Slot 'State of health'.

Health depends on proper nutrition. This concept is reflected in the English phraseology. The idioms of this slot are more often represented by lexemes denoting fruits and vegetables. For instance, the lexeme *apple* symbolizes healthy, natural food, eating which a person feels good. When people have proper and balanced nutrition, which is based mainly on vegetables and fruits, they are less likely to seek medical attention due to the absence of health problems. One of the most famous examples is the proverb *an apple a day keeps the doctor away*<sup>5</sup>. The basic human need is the need for food, so the lack of nutrition has a significant impact on health. This feature is confirmed in the idiom *be off one's feed*<sup>6</sup>. However, not only lexical units symbolizing food are associated with health. The study examined artifacts and household items directly related to the

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<sup>1</sup> Kunin A.V. Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary. 4th ed., Rev. M. : Russian language, 1984. P. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms (2004) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. P. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Kunin A.V. Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary. 4th ed., Rev. M. : Russian language, 1984. P. 258.

<sup>4</sup> Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture Text (1992) Edinburgh Gate. Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd. P. 256.

<sup>5</sup> Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (1996) Oxford : Oxford University Press. P. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Kunin A.V. Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary. 4th ed., Rev. M. : Russian language, 1984. P. 268.

alimentary code: *go under the knife*<sup>7</sup>. In the usual sense the lexeme *knife* means a table-ware actively used for cooking, but as an artifact metaphor in phraseology this lexeme has been associated with a medical instrument.

Thus, the slot 'State of health' is represented by various lexemes (for example, *apple, knife*), which symbolize not only food and eating, but also attributes that contribute to cooking.

Frame 'Satiety'.

Metaphorical expressions of the alimentary code of the English phraseology very accurately convey the human's attitude towards hunger and alcohol, denote ways to get food. The frame 'Satiety' is represented by the slots 'Basic need for food', 'State of intoxication'.

Slot 'Basic need for food'.

The most relevant human conditions associated with the alimentary code are hunger, appetite and satiety. Two mutually exclusive concepts related to this slot 'Hunger'/'Satiety' are closely connected. They can be verbalized by means of the idioms. Hunger is a strong feeling that significantly affects human condition and emotions. The state of anger and irritation is reproduced by the natural metaphor of the idioms. To express its significance, hunger is often hyperbolized and compared to the hunger of a dangerous predator which can do anything to get a prey: *hungry as a wolf*<sup>8</sup>. Idioms symbolizing the borderline state between hunger and the feeling that hunger occurs during a meal have been identified. For example, *appetite comes with eating*<sup>9</sup>. The artifact metaphor *play a good knife and fork*<sup>10</sup> through the lexemes *knife* and *fork* also means a good appetite. Word for word translation of this metaphor '*to play with a knife and fork with pleasure*', i.e. to eat food with an appetite, can help to connect the primary and metaphorical meanings. However, if the appetite comes during a meal, there is not always the feeling of satiety: *one's eyes are bigger than one's belly*<sup>11</sup>. This idiom symbolizes the satiety of a person who feels that he has not addressed his need for food to the end. Satiety is represented by the lexeme *belly*, and hunger is represented by the lexeme *eyes*. The idioms denoting gluttony are also close to them by their meaning: *to be given to one's belly*<sup>12</sup>. Thus, hunger and satiety in phraseology are verbalized through anthropomorphic, natural and artifact metaphors. A key lexeme, which is typical for these slots, has not been identified.

Slot 'State of intoxication'.

There are a lot of idioms connected with alcohol or state of intoxication in the English linguistic culture. Most of the idioms reflect the state of strong intoxication through the stylistic technique of comparison. For example, *blind drunk*<sup>13</sup>. A person has drunk so much alcohol that he '*goes blind*', trying to understand and realize something. The lexeme *blind* has a metaphorical meaning; it is related to real loss of vision to temporary 'blindness' of consciousness. Natural metaphor *drink like a fish*<sup>14</sup> dates back to the XVII century. The fish open their mouths while breathing, it gives the impression that the fish are constantly drinking. Idioms of this slot may contain a color component: *drinking till all's blue*<sup>15</sup>. The lexeme *till all's blue* with the connotation 'to the limit, endlessly' is the key component. Therefore, this idiom means that a person drinks until alcoholism reaches the last, most destructive and dangerous stage. In addition to obvious mockery and disapproval the idioms of this slot can have an edifying meaning: *Bacchus has drowned more people than Neptune*<sup>16</sup>, i.e. wine has killed more people than the sea. The images of the ancient Greek gods used in allegorical form means the truth about which people should remember. Thus, the lexemes *drunk/drink* and *feast (a Dutch feast)*<sup>17</sup> are the key ones in the idioms of the slot 'State of intoxication'. The idioms of this slot are characterized by comparisons and irony, which allow to convey the imagery of idioms more vividly.

Frame 'Emotional state of a person'.

In many ways emotions define human actions, perception of a view of the world and, as a consequence, are

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<sup>7</sup> Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture Text (1992) Edinburgh Gate. Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd. P. 427.

<sup>8</sup> Kunin A.V. Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary. 4th ed., Rev. M. : Russian language, 1984. P. 405.

<sup>9</sup> Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (1996) Oxford : Oxford University Press. P. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture Text (1992) Edinburgh Gate. Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd. P. 427.

<sup>11</sup> Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture Text (1992) Edinburgh Gate. Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd. P. 254.

<sup>12</sup> Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (1996) Oxford : Oxford University Press. P. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Kunin A.V. Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary. 4th ed., Rev. M. : Russian language, 1984. P. 228.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms (2004) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. P. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Kunin A.V. Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary. 4th ed., Rev. M. : Russian language, 1984. P. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (1996) Oxford : Oxford University Press. P. 267.

reflected in culture. The emotional state of a person is widely reflected through the idioms of the alimentary code. This frame is represented by such slots as 'Pleasure', 'Confidence', 'Suffering/Humiliation'.

Slot 'Pleasure'.

Fun is more often associated with holidays, feasts, meals. For example, *make good cheer*<sup>18</sup>. The lexeme *cheer* reflects the state of fun, enjoyment of delicious food and feast. Thus, the phraseology *cakes and ale*<sup>19</sup>, first used by W. Shakespeare, has a similar connotation. In addition to their direct meaning the lexemes *cake* and *ale* have a strong association with positive emotions and fun. However, the component '*fun*' has not only a reclamation characteristic. In the semantics of some idioms, fun and festivities can harm a person. For example, *life is not beer and skittles*<sup>20</sup>. The lexemes *beer* and *skittles* accurately convey the image of fun and pleasure. However, there are more worthy ways of spending leisure time in life and, therefore, it is foolish to limit yourself to entertainment and make it your priority.

Slot 'Confidence'.

The semantics of confidence in one's words and actions is also embedded in the idioms of the alimentary code. We agree with S. B. Kozinets that the lexeme can lose its primary meaning [5] and be used in a metaphorical sense: *I'll eat my boots*<sup>21</sup>. In this case, the key component is the lexeme *eat*, which is only used in its metaphorical meaning. It is obvious that the speaker would not eat his shoes, he only uses an artifact metaphor to express confidence in his words. The idiom *I'll eat my hat*<sup>22</sup> has the similar connotation. The idioms of this slot are usually used when a person is confident in his arguments about what he sees or hears, about what is happening. However, not only the lexeme *eat* is used as the key component of such idioms, but the lexemes denoting food are used, for instance, *it is dollars to doughnuts*<sup>23</sup>. In this case, it is not only about confidence, but also about the suggested bet: '*dollars to doughnuts*'. However, as dollars are monetary currency, and donuts have no monetary value any bet in the context of this phraseology is out of the question.

Slot 'Suffering/Humiliation'.

Person's emotional state is not always associated with positive emotions and pleasure. The semantics of the state of humiliation and suffering is embedded in the idioms of the alimentary code. For example, *eat the bread of affliction (humiliation/sorrows)*<sup>24</sup>. The alimentary component of the idiom expressed by the lexeme *bread* points to an obvious opposition of concepts. Bread is a source of food and energy, it has a positive connotation. However, it is associated with humiliation and grief in this context. Thus, food products convey many aspects of real life English linguistic culture. Bread can be bitter, but it is the only food product and livelihood, and humiliation is the only form of emotional state and attitude to the person. The lexeme *eat* is the key component in other idioms of this slot. As it has been mentioned above, the connotation of the lexeme *eat* is not only 'to consume food', but also in a metaphorical, figurative sense. For example, *eat one's heart out*<sup>25</sup>. If a person suffers and 'torments himself', then negative emotions affect his state of mind. The anthropomorphic metaphor of this phraseology provides certain associations. In a metaphorical sense the emotional state of a person and his rueful feelings are closely related to the heart, which means a person 'eats his own heart out', succumbing to the rueful feelings more and more.

The study found that the frame 'Emotional state of a person' is represented by such slots as 'Pleasure', 'Confidence', 'Suffering/Humiliation', and the lexemes denoting the meal *eat*, *feast*, as well as the individual lexemes (for example, *cake*, *ale*, *beer*, *skittles*, *doughnuts*, *bread*), the lexemes denoting food products are the key components. Depending on the context, they can have both positive and negative connotations, some of them sometimes lose their original meaning, have meaning only in the form of a full-fledged idioms. Idioms are often used to express the person's success/failure. As a part of the metaphorical model GASTRONOMIC IMAGES are PROSPERITY OR FAILURE, the following frames can be distinguished: the frame 'Success' and the frame 'Failure'. Each frame is represented by a group of slots.

Frame 'Success'.

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<sup>18</sup> Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms (2004) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. P. 144.

<sup>19</sup> Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture Text (1992) Edinburgh Gate. Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd. P. 120.

<sup>20</sup> Kunin A.V. Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary. 4th ed., Rev. M. : Russian language, 1984. P. 74.

<sup>21</sup> Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms (2004) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. 604 P. 236.

<sup>22</sup> Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture Text (1992) Edinburgh Gate. Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd. P. 361.

<sup>23</sup> Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms (2004) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press P. 221.

<sup>24</sup> Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (1996) Oxford : Oxford University Press. P. 106.

<sup>25</sup> Kunin A.V. Big English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary. 4th ed., Rev. M. : Russian language, 1984. P. 373.

This frame is represented by the idioms that reflect the successful human activity. For subsequent analysis, the frame 'Success' can be divided into the following slots: the slot 'Progress', the slot 'Profit', the slot 'Abundance'.

#### Slot 'Progress'.

The idioms of this slot contain lexemes denoting the process and method of cooking. To convey the state of progress and prosperity metaphorically the construction *have something done* is used, for example: *have one's cake baked* [1]. In English the pattern *have something done* assumes that some action was performed for the speaker by another person. As a rule, this pattern reflects the service provision. So, in this context, you need to have material wealth in order to pay for the baker's services at any time. In other words, if there are funds, then there will be performers who want to get them for the work performed. The idiom *have one's bread buttered on both sides* has similar connotation [2, p. 107]. This example means that a person is surrounded by benefits and he reaps the fruits of his labour in all possible spheres. The artifact metaphor is represented by a small group of idioms of this slot: *cook with electricity* [3, p. 174] is a great example of how the idioms serve as a reflection of history. Only wealthy people could afford cooking using electric stoves in England at the end of the nineteenth century. Progressive-minded people of that time interested in the technological innovations could appreciate this novelty. The lexeme *electricity* is the key component that symbolizes prosperity and success.

#### Slot 'Profit'.

Alimentary idioms can symbolize not only the success of an individual but also the profits of financial companies. As an example, we give two idioms similar in meaning *cut the melon* and *melon-cutting* [1, p. 497]. Traditionally, the lexeme *melon* refers to a fruit, but it has acquired the meaning of a large profit in banking. Melons are large and fleshy. By analogy with the fruits, the profit may be large and there will be a need to distribute it among all shareholders.

#### Slot 'Abundance'.

In material terms the idioms with the alimentary component have the semantics of abundance. Metaphorical transfer in the idioms conveys the excess or absence of any deficiency: *a land flowing with milk and honey* [2, p. 434]. The lexemes *milk* and *honey* are the key components which symbolize the supposed district, nature. The supposed component *river* would serve as a key component of the natural metaphor, but in this case association is based only on alimentary components. Milk and honey are also symbols of prosperity and well-being. In the case when in the country given in the example these products are presented in sufficient numbers, we can talk about true abundance. However, this slot is not always represented by the idioms which verbalize wealth and prosperity. Sometimes it is only about large numbers: *as common as blackberries* [3, p. 87]. The lexeme *blackberry*, which is the key component, means the sufficient or excessive amount of something. This berry grows in clusters, so the blackberry bush can bring a large number of berries during the harvest.

Thus, the study has shown that the frame 'Success' reflects the human prosperity in a certain field of activity and it is represented by the slots 'Success', 'Profit', 'Abundance'. The key components of the idioms which represent them are: *cake*, *bread*, *butter*, and new lexemes *melon*, *milk* and *honey*, *blackberry*, denoting food products. Depending on the context, they can have both positive and negative connotations, some of them sometimes lose their original meaning, have meaning only in the form of a full-fledged idioms.

#### Frame 'Failure'.

This frame is represented by the idioms with semantics 'difficulty', 'failures', 'financial difficulty', which are included in the slots 'Difficulties' and 'Poverty'.

#### Slot 'Difficulties'.

After the analysis of the idioms it was revealed that difficulties are expressed by the lexemes denoting both food and the process of food consumption: *hard cheese* [1, p. 144]. Hardened cheese is not suitable for eating, therefore, some obstacle will be undesirable. Obstacles can be expressed using the lexemes that represent the process: *bite off more than one can chew* [4, p. 85]. If you bite off an enormous piece, it will be impossible to chew it, the process of eating will become difficult, the alleged pleasure will disappear. Similarly, a person in the pursuit of success can take on a very complicated task that he cannot afford. A similar semantics is presented in the paroemia *it's very hard to shave an egg* [3, p. 239]. As a rule, cleaning eggs does not cause difficulties, but in this case the idiom is associated with a complex matter because the phrase 'to shave an egg' seems illogical and impossible.

Slot 'Poverty'.

Sometimes failures are closely related to the financial situation of a person. In case of an unfavorable fate, a person is unlucky, he can lose all his possessions and lose his wealth: *take the bread out of smb's mouth* [1]. The lexemes *out of smb's mouth* and *bread* are the key components of this idiom. Bread does not only represent food and nutrition, but it is also a guarantee of existence and a symbol of prosperity. A person deprived of bread is forced to starve, just as a person deprived of his livelihood will be left with nothing. The image of the '*dish*' is also reflected in the idioms of the alimentary code: *humble pie* [2, p. 236]. Word for word translation means that this dish is not distinguished by delights. The lexeme *humble* focuses on deprivation, poverty and lack of material goods. *A battalia pie* was considered as a food of the poor, who could not afford a meat pie.

Thus, the analyzed idioms of this metaphorical model of the frame 'Failure' have the semantics of 'difficulty', 'failure', 'financial difficulty'. The lexemes *bite off*, *hard to shave an egg*, *humble pie* are the key components. The analyzed idioms of this metaphorical model can be a symbol of wealth or poverty. The lexemes denoting dishes and products which embody the connection with the economy and banking are also significant.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Idioms of the English alimentary code corresponding to the given metaphorical models and reflecting gastronomic images have been revealed. The analysis suggests the predominance of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and artifact metaphors. The predominant key components are represented by the lexemes denoting food, feelings of satiety and hunger, the process of eating.

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