Food and Drink Idioms in English

Food and Drink Idioms in English:

"A Little Bit More Sugar and Lots of Spice"

By

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Cambridge
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Publishing

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To the wonderful people whose love saved me

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PREFACE

"Food and drink idioms in English: "*A little bit more sugar and lots of spice*" is the new title of this book originally published as "'Sugar and Spice'…Exploring food and drink idioms in English". The decision to provide this work with a title that re-echoes the first but is a variant of it illustrates the nature of this new edition, which is completely revised, updated, and rewritten: where possible the data have been updated, the observations and reflections reviewed, and the whole text rewritten. For example, all the information included from the *Oxford English Dictionary* has been updated to reflect the changes issued from the ongoing revision programme, with the consequent important updates to chapter four. New insights into the study of metaphor have also determined a wholly revised third chapter too. We decided not to extend the lexicographical coverage beyond 2009, corresponding to the date of the last dictionary analysed in the original research, because no substantial changes were found in the latest editions to justify a new research, which would have consequently also implied the extension of the corpus linguistic analysis beyond the same date. Notwithstanding this, chapters five and six present the findings of the lexicographical and corpus linguistic analyses in a much fresher manner, outcome of a new awareness from more recent studies in phraseology and corpus linguistics.

My heartfelt thanks go to Giovanni Iamartino for his insight, support, and friendship, to Gabriele Stein for her warmth and encouragement, and to prof. Gabriele Knappe, whose precious advice and positive review of "Sugar and Spice…" in the *International Journal of Lexicography* inspired this wholly new edition.

FOREWORD

> C'est pendant le repas que durent naître ou se
> perfectionner les langues soit parce que c'était
> une occasion de rassemblement toujours
> renaissante, soit parce que le loisir qui
> accompagne et suit après le repas dispose
> naturellement à la confiance et à la loquacité
> (Brillat-Savarin 1826: 201).

Commensality, generally thought and considered to be the gathering of
people "to accomplish in a collective way some material tasks and
symbolic obligations linked to the satisfaction of a biological need"
(Grignon 2001: 24), is a much more deeply-meaningful social act.
Consuming food and drink is a profound expression of social belonging. It
defines individuals and groups in society providing them with an identity
of the social, political, economic, cultural, and linguistic kind.

Aware of this, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have
increasingly researched eating and drinking over the last decades in order
"to explore the changing nature of these ingestibles within both traditional
and transforming societies" (Wilson 2006: 11-12). Some of the themes
that have been explored are, for example, how food and drink
commodities act as elements in the economic and social processes of
production, distribution, and consumption; the behavioural processes of
eating and drinking and their relationship to social customs; food and
drink as signifiers of an ethnic, national, class or gender identity. It is this
last topic that comes closest to our research interests, which will focus
upon the way in which the English-speaking community has used food and
drink elements to express itself.

"Food and drink continue to delineate the boundaries of group
membership and values, in localities, regions, nations and beyond"
(Wilson 2006: 16). Notions of national identity are still portrayed by them,
such as pasta referred to the Italians, frogs to the French, beef to the
English, porter to the Irish, sauerkraut to the Germans, and cheese to the
Swiss. Despite the clichéd value of such associations, especially in the
face of the Europeanization of food and drink produce, the persistence of
this food-peoples bracket underlines the importance of food in the history

of nations. As Wilson (2006: 20) points out "the history of our food is a history of ourselves", or in other much reiterated terms 'we are what we eat'.

What the English eat and have eaten might be successfully learned– among the many works that treat this subject–from works of reference containing the lexicon that has composed the English language since its very beginnings. One such work is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (from now on the OED).[1] Two other interesting works are *Roget's Thesaurus* (1984),[2] and James Howell's *Lexicon Tetraglotton* (1659-1660).[3] Some of the first items recorded in these works date back to Anglo-Saxon times and include *MALT, MEAD, HERRING,* and *WINE*. From the mid-twentieth century onwards there appear in English a multitude of terms that mark the globalization of eating and drinking habits. Chinese *YUAN HSIAO* (1956), Indonesian *TEMPEH* (1966), Catalan *PARELLADA* (1979), Pakistani *BALTI* (1982), Italian *CARBONARA* (1999) demonstrate how the English have extended their gastronomical tastes by adopting new dishes and their accompanying denominations from all over the world.

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[1] The *Oxford English Dictionary* is the current name for the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, the monumental historical dictionary of the English language published by Oxford University Press. It was promoted by London's Philological Society in 1857. Its compilation started in 1879 under Sir James Murray's supervision. The first volume of the OED was published in 1884 and its tenth in 1928. A second edition of the OED was published in 1989. It consists of 20 volumes and 4 supplements available on CD-Rom too. Since the year 2000 the OED has been available online and has been undergoing revision for the publication of a completely revised third edition. The definitions of the lemmas, listed in alphabetical order, take into consideration the date of each word's first appearance in the English language and are illustrated by quotations principally taken from literary sources.

[2] *Roget's Thesaurus* is a widely-used English thesaurus, created by Dr. Peter Mark Roget (1779–1869) in 1805, and released to the public on 29 April 1852. The original edition had 15,000 words, but since then each new edition has been larger. The last edition was published in 1982. *Roget's Thesaurus* is composed of six primary classes. Each class is composed of multiple divisions and then sections. The section labelled "Food: eating and drinking" appears within the division of "motion" under the second primary class dedicated to "space". For a detailed history of Roget's *Thesaurus* see Hüller (2004).

[3] The *Lexicon Tetraglotton* is an English-French-Italian-Spanish dictionary, to which is adjoined a large nomenclature of the proper terms (in all four languages) belonging to several arts and sciences, recreations, and professions. It is divided into fifty-two sections. Food and drink items appear in the fourteenth section and continue right through to the twentieth section. For a detailed account of James Howell's *Lexicon Tetraglotton* see Hüller (1999).

What the English have eaten through the course of time can also be gauged from the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (from now on HTE). This is the largest thesaurus in the world. It is a complete database of all the words in the second edition of OED, arranged by semantic field and date. The HTE arranges the whole vocabulary of English, from the earliest written records in Old English to the present, alongside types and dates of use. It is the first historical thesaurus to be compiled for any of the world's languages and contains 800,000 meanings for 600,000 words, within 230,000 categories, covering more than 920,000 words and meanings. This makes it double the size of Roget's work. This collection contains an ample section related to the English people's eating and drinking habits. The terms disclose all the different types of beverages, baked products, cereals, condiments, dairy products, fish, fruit, herbs, liquor, meat, nuts, pulses, sauces, soups, spices, sweetmeats, and vegetables that the English have consumed over the centuries. Like most people inhabiting Western European countries, the English have had the privilege of a varied diet, right from the documented start of their linguistic existence.[4]

Having collected 510 food and drink terms from all four works (Howell 1660, Roget 1984, OED, and HTE), it appears that about a fifth originate from the Old English period and cover all the categories mentioned above (for example, *ALE, APPLE, BEAN, BROTH, CHICKEN, GINGER, HAZELNUT, HERB, LEEK, LOAF, RYE, WATER, WHELK, WHEY*).[5] The only two categories not covered until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are condiments and sweetmeats (for example, *SUGAR* and *VINEGAR*). These categories of food were in fact introduced by the Normans. It is undoubtedly to the French that the English owe much of their culinary terminology. From the thirteenth century onwards, over a quarter of the food and drink items in this collection have either a genuine or mediated French etymology (for example, *BOUILLON, CASHEW, CORIANDER, COURGETTE, EAU-DE-VIE, GRUEL, LEMON, LEMONADE, LENTIL, MAYONNAISE,*

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[4] For the thorough investigation into the food and drink habits of the English see Drummond & Wilbraham (1958).

[5] The chronological analysis of the food and drink items was initially conducted on the lexemes collected from Howell (1660), Roget (1984), and OED. While the original wordlist amounted to about 477 food and drink items, the current collection includes 510 terms, owing to the important additions taken from HTE. The wordlist is clearly not exhaustive, but does hope to contain the more significant food and drink items that have marked the English people's eating habits and consequently their language. This collection of food and drink items will be expounded in chapter 3.

PARMESAN, PATTY, RISSOLE, SARDINE, THYME). This is of course the natural consequence of the political and social role held by the French in England, and of their primacy in matters related to food and culinary practices in the whole of Europe for so many centuries.

From the fifteenth century onwards, the etymologies of food and drink lexemes reflect the increasing ties established between England and other European countries besides France, either for political and/or economic reasons, or for simply social and cultural interests. Contacts with Italy have led to the introduction of items such as *ARTICHOKE* (1531), *VERMICELLI* (1669), *SEMOLINA* (1784), *RAVIOLI* (1760), *LATTE* (1989), *SPAGHETTI* (1845), *SALAMI* (1852), *MINESTRONE* (1871), *SPUMANTE* (1908), *SCAMPI* (1928), *TORTELLINI* (1937), *CAPPUCCINO* (1948), *CARBONARA* (1962). Contacts with Spain: *CHOCOLATE* (1604), *MAIZE* (1544), *GUAVA* (1555), *POTATO* (1565), *VANILLA* (1662), *TORTILLA* (1699), *COCAO* (1555), and with Portugal: *MARMALADE* (1480), *MANGO* (1582). From contacts with Holland come the terms *BRANDY* (1640), *GHERKINS* (1661), *COOKIE* (1754), *WAFFLE* (1744), *COLESLAW* (1794). From Germany come *SCHNAPPS* (1818), *LAGER* (1853), *FRANKFURTER* (1894), *MUESLI* (1939). From Russia come *VODKA* (1803) and *BORSCH* (1884), and from Turkey we have *YOGHURT* (1625). From this very brief overview, it is possible to see how many countries have influenced English eating habits. Particularly interesting is the role Italy has had. Aware of the history of English relations with foreign countries, it is certainly not owing to the strength of the contact between England and Italy that has favoured the intake of so many Italian food and drink items, but surely the cultural and social prestige attached to eating in an Italian manner.[6]

However, it is not only from European languages that English has adopted food and drink items. Also from beyond Europe have the number of food and drink intakes been quite numerous. Owing to the political and social role played by Britain at the time of the British Empire, Indian terms (just to mention one Asian country) have not only enriched the English people's table but their language too. It is the case of the Anglo-Indian items *BASMATI, DAL, CHUPATTI, KEDGEREE, JALEBI, MULLIGATAWNY,* and *POPPADOM*. With the spread of English all over the world, each variety of English now has its own culinary specialities too, which have consequently found their way back into British English. From American English, for instance, come *CHEWING GUM, CORNFLAKES, CRULLER, HAMBURGER, MICKEY FINN, SEAFOOD*, and *SUNDAE*.

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[6] For a more exhaustive treatment of Italian food and drink items adopted by the English language see Pinnavaia (2006-7).

   If the English are what they eat, it may be confirmed that the English have throughout their history been influenced by many and differing cultures and traditions. The number of food and drink items and the range of etymologies composing them proves what is an already well-known fact: contacts with other peoples on local and foreign soils have created a mixed English language and community. That said, the nature of these items in English also shows us that, while the English people have always been open to new acquisitions, they have never lost track of what was already theirs. This can be gauged by the number of new terms related to food and drink that are not foreign adoptions but rather indigenous creations. *BUTTERSCOTCH, NUTMEG, SWEETBREADS* as well as *CRUMBLE, DUMPLING, STUFFING* are only a limited number of the many compounds and derivatives belonging to this semantic area that mark the English people's will to turn to and exploit the resources of their own acquired linguistic heritage. This is facilitated by the versatility of the English language in creating or adapting new lexemes from old ones.

   Another way in which the English word-stock serves as a base for new ideas and events is through the metaphoric extension of old meanings. It has been noted that just over a third of the food and drink lexemes collected have developed metaphoric meanings, almost three quarters of which have become idiomatic expressions. For example, the fact that *CAVIARE* is generally unpalatable to those who have not acquired a taste for it, leads Shakespeare to coin the well-known idiomatic expression *TO BE CAVIARE TO SOMEONE*, first attested in Hamlet (II. ii. 439) in 1603 and still in use today.[7]

   Such conventional and metaphorical expressions are hard to die: once coined they tend to resist time and can be a mirror of a linguistic community's social and cultural past as well as its present consuetude. While the vehicles of metaphoric structures depict social behaviours typical of the period in which they arise, their tenors point to attitudes that are often timeless, and generally true to all mankind living in an area characterized by a certain culture. So, even though the well-known expression *BE WORTH ONE'S SALT* frames the ancient custom of paying workers with salt, its metaphorical meaning (the value of one's labour) is free of spatial and temporal boundaries. Consequently, this expression continues to live on even in the twenty-first century.

   If by analysing the food and drink lexemes composing the English language an insight into the historical course of the English and their

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[7] For as I remember, It [*sc.* the play] pleased not the vulgar, it was cauiary To the million: but to me..an excellent play" (cf. OED s.v. *CAVIARE*).

language may be gained, then by analysing the figurative expressions stemming from such lexemes, it might be possible to glean how the English think and communicate. The food item that has first and foremost been associated with the English is beef. Shakespeare portrays the English as eating great meals of beef and since then the association has evolved into a commonplace repeated in poems, plays, songs, novels, and pictures (Spiering 2006: 32). Being a meat product high up in the food chain, beef has always enjoyed the emblematic qualities of strength, aggression, and passion (Spiering 2006: 36). This symbolic quality has come to be fossilized in the idiomatic language of English too. *BEEF* in the idiomatic expression *WHERE'S THE/ONE'S BEEF* refers to something of quality and substance. Despite all the warnings issued against eating too much meat nowadays, beef-eating remains in English idiomatic use a positive action and is a token of traditional English ideological thinking.

By exploring food and drink idioms in English this work seeks to uncover what food and drink idioms have characterized the history of the English language since the year 1755. This is the year in which the first edition of Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was published. With the advent of this dictionary, the English people felt that they had finally been graced with a reliable dictionary that could provide their language with a standard. Johnson's *Dictionary* is therefore an important landmark, not only in the history of lexicography, but in the history of the English language itself. Having been judged as the first 'modern' dictionary, it became the first real authority for the English language.

In order to explore the food and drink idioms that have made the history of the English language, Johnson's *Dictionary* is the first of a series of monolingual dictionaries to become the object of this investigation. In this research twelve synchronic native-speaker and learner's monolingual dictionaries become the archives in which to look for and examine the food and drink idioms that have been part of the English language from the year 1755 to the year 2009.

As linguistic studies, and in particular lexicographical practice, become more and more empirically and electronically-based from the 1980s onwards, it was deemed important to support this lexicographical analysis with data issued from two linguistic corpora. Two of the most recent and largest general reference corpora–the *British National Corpus* (BNC) and the *Bank of English* (BoE)–were chosen to provide a further testimony of the way in which food and drink idioms have been used in English since the mid 1960s.

Through the close examination of the dictionaries and the corpora, this work intends to pinpoint a reasonable number of the food and drink idioms attested in the English language from 1755 to 2009. It will unveil their degree of idiomaticity, their level of intelligibility, and the dates and sources of their first attestation in the English language. By comparing and contrasting the lexicographical descriptions and the corpus data, the frequency and usage of the idioms will also be shown. It is an investigation that will offer results of the quantitative and qualitative kind. The elaboration of such data will ultimately disclose the linguistic characteristics of the food and drink idioms in English. It will show how these idioms have been treated in the lexicographical samples and what kind of communicative instrument they are. This exploration will be actualized in six chapters.

The first chapter offers a brief overview of the studies that have characterized idiom research in the last three decades. This overview is naturally centered on studies in the English language and does not claim to be exhaustive. It aims to show how research in the field of phraseology has progressed immensely, revolutionizing many of the traditional ideas. Idioms, on the par with any other discrete unit, have now become the object of syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic studies. Unlike the early twentieth-century linguists, current linguists have learnt to approach idioms scientifically. The only ambiguity that remains is the term itself. The term 'idiom' is never consistent. For some linguists, it includes all multi-word units, regardless of the level of metaphoricity; for others, it is employed in relation to multi-word metaphoric expressions only. In this research, idiom refers to any expression composed of two or more words labelled as figurative or idiomatic in the dictionaries examined.

The second chapter explains the method followed to carry out this research. It describes the monolingual dictionaries chosen and the way in which the idioms were selected, with careful attention to the criteria involved. It was important, in fact, to retrieve only the expressions having a food-and-drink related meaning. This turned out to be a little more complicated than expected, especially within the lexical domain of animals, where the living creature often has the same denomination as its meat. Lastly, in this chapter details are provided about the way in which the idioms were examined both in the dictionaries and in the general reference corpora.

The third chapter is centered on exposing the literal and non-literal structures of the idioms. In the first section, focus is placed on the food and drink lexemes belonging to the 510-item collection discussed earlier,

which compose the idioms and have undergone metaphoric extension. Etymological and semantic observations are provided to explain the idiomatic productivity of these lexemes. In the second section, the 276 idioms selected are presented according to their syntactic and semantic layouts. By evaluating their level of compositionality, the non-compositional expressions are distinguished from the compositional ones, thus establishing different levels of meaning transparency for the two categories. The third section deals with the relationship between the idioms' literal and non-literal meanings. Following the more recent psycholinguistic hypotheses on idiom interpretation, the idioms are divided into three groups (decomposable, partly-decomposable, and non-decomposable). According to the level of decomposability, the force of the motivation underlying each idiom type is settled.

Even where the motivational force is weak and does not transpire from the idiom's literal meaning, every idiom has a reason for being. Chapter four takes a step back to gain insight into the etymological origins of the food and drink expressions collected. Thanks to Flavell & Flavell (1992) and Brewer (2001) some of the origins of these food and drink idioms are exposed. More important than the actual origins, however, are the dates and sources that secured these expressions as idiomatic in the English language. Through the close analysis of each idiom in the OED, the major periods and literary sources that recognized the use of these idioms in English will be submitted.

In chapter five the idioms recorded in the lexicographical works are examined. Divided into three sections, this chapter is a critical appreciation of the way in which the idioms have been managed in four centuries of English monolingual lexicography. The first section devoted to eighteenth-century lexicography describes the selection and treatment of the food and drink idioms in Johnson (1755, 1773). The second section devoted to the nineteenth century describes the selection and treatment of the idioms in Richardson (1855). The third section is devoted to the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. Three dictionaries are representative of the twentieth century: COD5 (1964), OALDCE3 (1974), LDOCE1 (1978). Seven are the dictionaries that represent the twenty-first century: LDOCE4 (2003), CALD2 (2003), CED1 (2004), COED3 (2005), OALD7 (2005), MED2 (2007), CCAD6 (2009). This last section examines the selection, the position, and the linguistic features of the idioms. Even though new editions of the twenty-first-century dictionaries have been published since the first publication of this research, we decided not to extend the lexicographical examination to include the latest editions because, firstly, the editions originally selected reflect the first important

innovations in twenty-first-century English monolingual lexicography and secondly, the information reported in the latest editions has not changed substantially enough to justify a whole new analysis. Any significant changes observed in the latest editions will nonetheless be accounted for.

In the sixth and last chapter, the data collected from the lexicographical analysis is underpinned by an extensive corpus linguistic analysis. The idioms will be examined in two general reference corpora, the BNC and the BoE. The results will, firstly, show their rate of frequency in general English from the mid-twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century in order to cover the same period as the lexicographical analysis; secondly, account for the systematic syntactic variations they undergo; thirdly, contemplate their communicative functions. The information gathered from the lexicographical and corpora analyses will be the working ground for the observations and reflections that ensue.

CHAPTER ONE

RECENT ENGLISH STUDIES

1.1. Introduction

The attitude to research on idiomatic expressions has changed enormously since Yakov Malkiel in 1959 (113) wrote:

> One does well to steer clear of any reference to the ill-defined category of idioms or phraseological formulas. These have been variously spoken of as sequences yielding imperfectly to routine grammatical analysis, as passages strikingly rebellious to literal translation, as semi-autonomous pieces of congealed syntax, as word groups whose aggregate meaning cannot be fully predicted even from a thorough knowledge of each ingredient, and, in stylistic or aesthetic terms, as clichés, i.e. as combinations once suffused with fresh metaphoric vigor but gradually worn thin by dint of use.

Up until the mid-to-late twentieth century, Western European studies of the English language largely neglected idioms.[1] Possibly owing to the difficulty in defining the category with some precision and to the evident discrepancy between form and meaning, even the structuralists Bloomfield and Sapir, first, and the generativists Harris and Chomsky, later, did not account for idioms in their linguistic models. Among the first English studies (both British and American) to consider idiomatic expressions are Smith (1925), Roberts (1944), Hockett (1958), Katz and Postal (1963), Chafe (1968), Firth (1968), Fraser (1970), Makkai (1969, 1972), and Weinreich (1969). Thanks to the work produced by these scholars, idioms were finally deigned consideration, and consequently commenced to become the target of closer lexical and semantic analyses next to the other "regular" morpho-syntactic units of the English language.

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[1] In Eastern Europe, and in Russia especially, scholars started to concentrate on idioms much earlier, around the 1940s (Cowie 1998a). Important exponents of such studies include Mikhail Bakhtin, Igor Mel'čuk, N.N. Amosova, Igor Anichov.

Since the 1970s, English studies regarding idiomatic expressions have become more and more numerous. Countless articles and volumes have been published, but more importantly, different theoretical and applied approaches have been developed to investigate their syntactic, lexical, semantic, and stylistic nature.[2] It is especially in the last thirty years that work on idioms has really proliferated, the quantity and quality of which has surely been determined by the advent of corpus linguistics. With this innovative tool, the pervasiveness of idiomatic structures in the English language in a variety of text-types has become visible so that many assertions, previously ascertained as linguistic intuitions, have finally become confirmations supported by official numbers and examples. As a result, Malkiel's (1959) description of the syntactically congealed, semantically obscure and pragmatically ineffective idiom can no longer be considered as valid. Linguists would now all concur that English idiomatic expressions are syntactically versatile, semantically motivated, and pragmatically useful tools of communication.

1.2. The syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic nature of idioms

Descriptive studies in the last thirty years have confirmed that in real English use idiomatic expressions can be subject to syntactic variations. One of the first linguists to dwell upon this, after Nunberg's (1978) initial announcement, is Barkema (1994a, 1994b), who illustrates with due care some of the morpho-syntactic transformations idioms can undergo, such as the deletion, the substitution, the addition and/or the permutation of elements composing them. Since then, descriptive linguists focusing on idioms with the aid of corpora have insisted on highlighting the variability of idiom structures. Nuccorini (2001), for example, collects articles that show different instances of idiom flexibility in different English contexts (spoken and written), while Moon (1998a) closely examines a series of idioms in the *Oxford Hector Pilot Corpus* to describe and comment in detail the variety of morpho-syntactic layouts.

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[2] The literature on idioms starting from the 1970s is so vast that it would be an arduous and laborious task to account for all the works and authors that have treated the subject. For this reason, space will be given only to the major findings in the last few decades. That said, among the numerous contributions in the theoretical and applied fields of research on idioms appearing before the last decade of the twentieth century, mention must go to Cowie et al. (1975, 1983) and Strässler (1982).

The existence of idiom variation has not just been clearly highlighted, it has also come to be motivated through studies in cognitive semantics and psycholinguistics. One important contribution among many in this direction is represented by Everaert et al. (1995). Mindful of the fact that metaphors are not simply linguistic expressions but the realization of underlying cognitive structures (see Searle 1979, Lakoff & Johnson 1980), cognitive semanticists are now inclined to agree that idiomatic expressions are governed and determined by the conceptual metaphors and the encyclopaedic knowledge of the world that underlie human thought (Kövecses & Szabó 1996). In view of this, Langlotz (2000, 2001) argues that idioms can be attributed a motivated internal semantic structure, which can influence their syntactic and lexical flexibility. By creating a cognitive semantic model of the variation potential of idioms, Langlotz (2006) seeks to demonstrate that the stronger the link between an idiom's literal and non-literal meaning, the greater its potential for variation. The absence of variation in fact proves that the relationship between the two structures, syntactic and semantic, is not arbitrary, but dependent upon elements and contents that belong to our world of experience and especially to our physical and perceptive area of that experience (Casadei 1997: 109).

The advantages of idiom variation have, moreover, been endorsed by recent studies centred on text analysis. Barkema (1996a), Gläser (1998), Howarth (1996) and Moon (2001) illustrate how the manipulation of idioms can restore the "metaphoric vigor gradually worn thin by dint of use" referred to by Malkiel. By manipulating idiom structures according to their communicative needs and according to the texts in which they are performing, speakers can in fact add freshness to the idiom functions, identified by Fernando (1996) as referential, relational, and textual. One genre that takes good advantage of the communicative potential of idioms is journalistic prose, as, for example, Howarth (2002), Minugh (1999) and Pinnavaia (2007) have shown. The structural variations such as addition, substitution, deletion, and permutation may be used to create a multitude of stylistic effects. One striking pragmatic function of variation is to allow speakers to express their opinions discretely without appearing outwardly biased or prejudiced.

Recent research has thus knocked the belief that idiomatic expressions are unclassifiable elements of the English language. Idioms are, instead, eligible components of the English lexicon with definable syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties. As a result, they have become a very popular target for applied linguistic studies too, especially in the fields of English teaching and lexicography.

In the field of language teaching, Granger (1998) and Howarth (1998a, 1998b), document the extent of focus idioms have gained. By analysing learner corpora, researchers have been uncovering the real hurdles involved in encoding and decoding idiomatic expressions, which has in turn inspired the heavy load of lexicological and lexicographical material catering for learners' needs.

In fact, research in English language teaching, along with research in lexicology, now based on Machine Readable Corpora either produced by learners (such as the *International Corpus of Learner English*), or by native speakers (such as the *Bank of English* and the *British National Corpus*), has revolutionized many of today's dictionaries and language handbooks, and the way in which they deal with idioms. Aware of their threefold nature, lexicographers now take into consideration their syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features when recording them in works of a generic nature (see, for example, *CALD2*, *LDOCE1*, *MED*2), or of a specific one (see, for instance, Brewer 2001; D'Elia 2007; Manser 1997; McCarthy & Walter 1998; Sinclair & Moon 1995; Speake 1999; Stern 1998). The consequential metalexicolographical studies that have arisen since, as represented by Herbst & Popp (1999), Prat Zagrebelsky (2001), Cowie (2006), Burger et al. (2007), Granger & Meunier (2008) provide the further guidance needed to sustain this line of work.

1.3. The ambiguity of the term 'idiom'

If, on the one hand, linguists have managed to agree that, like any other discrete lexical unit, an idiom can be examined from a syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic perspective following different theoretical, descriptive, and applied approaches, on the other hand, they have still not been able to concur upon one unique definition of it. This is certainly not for wont of trying: on the contrary, the "ill-defined category" of idioms is paradoxically over-defined now. The term 'idiom' can have two acceptations, a generic[3] and a specific one[4]. Consequently, to try and overcome this confusion,

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[3] "A form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc., peculiar to a language; a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language, and often having a signification other than its grammatical or logical one" (OED s.v. *IDIOM* 3a). Note that by including the adverb "often" in this definition, the compilers hint at the fact that the phraseological unit does not necessarily have to be metaphoric.

[4] An 'idiom' is "a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words". (see OALD7: s.v. *IDIOM*). This is not to be confused with 'collocation' which is "a combination of words in a language, that happens

new denominations such as 'multi-word unit', 'phraseological unit', 'phraseme', 'fixed expression' have come into being to distinguish the more generic meaning, referring to any expression made up of more than one word (see Cowie 1998b; Hudson 1998; Moon 1998a), from its specific meaning of two or more words whose meaning is not the combination of its syntactic elements (see Moon 1998a and Jaeger 1999). However, this distinction remains a purely denominational one; linguists still do not draw the same boundaries around the term idiom. While agreeing that idioms are a sub-category of the generic category of multi-word units, phraseological units, phrasemes, or fixed expressions, which range from the two-word 'compound' or 'binomial' to the sentence-long 'saying', 'proverb', 'cliché', 'catchphrase', 'quotation', 'allusion', what exactly belongs to the sub-category varies greatly. It depends on the scholar and the classifying methodology applied, which may give prevalence to syntactic properties or to semantic ones. For example, Hudson (1998) identifies idioms by means of their syntactic functions, whereas Wray (2002) by means of the degree of semantic transparency. Where the selection depends on syntactic properties some linguists might exclude from the category of idioms two-word units (such as binomials or compounds) or sentence-long expressions (such as proverbs). Where the selection depends on semantic properties, some linguists might distinguish semi-idioms, made up of some literally interpreted elements (e.g. A WATCHED POT NEVER BOILS), from pure-idioms, where none of the components are interpreted literally (e.g. TO KICK THE BUCKET). The inclusion and exclusion of phraseological types from the sub-category of idiom is in fact not univocal but at the discretion of each linguist.

In this research, by the term 'idiom' we mean any expression made up of two or more words defined as idiomatic or figurative in the dictionaries under survey. It does not, however, include phrasal verbs and lexicalized compound nouns, as will be explained in chapter 3.

1.4. Conclusion

Idioms are such sophisticated features of language that any one linguistic definition might be easy to contradict. As already stated, not all idioms are idiomatic to the same degree. This means that not all idioms can be characterized by the same linguistic properties.

Firstly, on a semantic level, to define idioms as constructions having

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very often and more frequently than would happen by chance" (see OALD7: s.v. *COLLOCATION*).

two meanings, a literal and a non-literal one, is not always true. Indeed, there are idioms whose literal meaning (or the vehicle) is geographically, historically and culturally bound, while the non-literal meaning (or the tenor) tends to be cross-cultural, as well as spatially and chronologically boundless. For example, the tenor of SPILL THE BEANS (to reveal a secret) is timeless, unlike its vehicle that refers to a voting practice used in Ancient Greek times. However, there are also idioms that do not have a literal interpretation, such as SPIC AND SPAN (neat and clean), implying that a motivated relationship between the two levels of interpretation does not necessarily exist. Where it does, however, it might explain why idioms with two meanings tend to vary more syntactically than those that do not, and why the non-literal meaning is not lost in the process of the structural transformation.

Therefore, also from a syntactic point of view, idioms having only a non-literal meaning are very different from those with a literal one too. For instance, the idiom KICK THE BUCKET (to die) remains essentially an SVO clause made up of a verb, article, and noun, even after undergoing pre- and post-modification: HE DAMNED WELL KICKED THE BUCKET TOO EARLY re-echoes the syntactic pattern of its literal meaning. Instead, the idiom TRIP THE LIGHT FANTASTIC (to dance nimbly or lightly), which has no literal meaning and is made up of a verb, article and two adjectives,[5] has an odd syntactic structure that is more likely to be resistant to variation.

From a pragmatic point of view, an exhaustive definition for idioms is also difficult to provide. Even though it can generally be stated that they convey referential, personal, and textual information in a more convincing manner than literal paraphrases, they are not effective and expressive to the same extent. An idiom's communicative potential will depend on its communicative purpose within a set context of situation.

From a historical and sociolinguistic perspective, little can be said to differentiate idioms from the lexicon in general. Just like discrete units, they are products of a social and cultural moment and, if needs be, become obsolete at another. Moreover, as Welte (1992: 575) postulates, the institutional characteristic of idioms cannot be an exclusive feature, as all lexical terms are conventional tokens of one linguistic system.

What this really shows is that idioms share many of the features characterizing the entire lexicon of a language. Just like ordinary lexical items, they need describing from different angles, and within each angle often necessitate further classification. Idioms are units with intricate

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[5] Welte (1992: 568) points out that both LIGHT and FANTASTIC were adjectives modifying a deleted head noun TOE.

semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic features and originate from extra-linguistic situations, which determine their socio-cultural strength. Like non-idiomatic lexical items, idioms compose the *langue* of a linguistic system, thus belonging to all native-speakers' linguistic 'competence'. They reside in the minds of speakers and survive in the lexicographical repositories of their language.

CHAPTER TWO

THE METHODOLOGICAL PURSUIT

2.1. Introduction

Regarded as a repository of the English language and its culture, the English monolingual dictionary represents the English people's collective memory and as such the *langue* to which idioms belong. It is thus upon English monolingual lexicography that this research will be based: firstly, dictionaries will be searched to seek the food and drink idioms; secondly, the dictionary entries will be observed to obtain the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic information accompanying the idioms; thirdly, this dictionary data will be analysed and compared with the data obtained from a corpus linguistic analysis to understand the frequency and usage of the idioms in English. The data gleaned from the three stages of the research will provide an insight into the number and quality of the food and drink idioms that have dominated the English language from the mid-eighteenth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century.

2.2. The lexicographical sources

The first stage of the research was devoted to collecting the food and drink idioms on which the lexicographical and lexicological observations would successively be based. This was accomplished in two moments. The first, already mentioned in the foreword, consisted in selecting the food and drink lexemes that have characterized the history of food in the English-speaking world from Howell (1659-1660), Roget (1984), OED, and HTE. The selection of the lexical items was limited to nouns because it is on this part of speech that metaphors normally focus (Moon 1998a: 127). The selection was, moreover, restricted to lexemes such as herbs, fruit, vegetables, cereals, red and white meat, fish, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, thus excluding non-edible or non-drinkable elements associated with the semantic field (for instance, crockery, cutlery, eating practices

such as *BREAKFAST, PICNIC*, or lexemes derived from elements such as *TEA-CUP, TEA-PARTY*). From this procedure 510 items were collected.[1] The second moment regarded refining this list to lexemes that have generated food and drink idioms only. This was carried out by closely examining the entries in the OED and excluding the idiomatically non-productive ones, as well as those with metaphorical senses only. The lexical collection was reduced to 121 words, for each of which we recorded the first date and source of citation registered in the OED.

   The second stage of the research was centred on looking up the 'idiom-productive' lexemes in the twelve English monolingual dictionaries representing two and a half centuries of English lexicography. For each one found, all the lexicographical data provided was recorded (definition, example of use, register label, origins, possible cross-references). More precisely, the analysis started with Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* because it represents a landmark in English lexicography; a work that breaks with the past owing to its innovative lexicographical art. Although it is not the first English monolingual dictionary to include idiomatic expressions,[2] it is considered the first monolingual English dictionary that accounts for the polysemic nature of words, with meanings extended by means of metaphor. One hundred years later Richardson's *New Dictionary* was published and because it has been considered an important pre-cursor of the modern twentieth-century dictionary–a milestone in between Johnson's work and the OED (see Béjoint 2010), its inclusion was also indispensable. That does not mean that in between Johnson and Richardson's dictionaries there are no works of significance: among others published in the eighteenth century were further editions of Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, and of the Scott-Bailey (1755), John Entnick's *The New Spelling Dictionary* (1764), Frederick Barlow's *The Complete English Dictionary* (1772), William Kenrick's *New Dictionary of the English Language* (1773), James Barclay's *The Complete and Universal English Dictionary* (1774), John Ash's *The New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language*, and Thomas Sheridan's *A general Dictionary of the English Language* (1780). However, as Knappe (2004) shows, most of these works were influenced by Johnson's, notwithstanding the rivalry between lexicographers. Because lexicographical method was greatly dependent upon preceding

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[1] For a full list of the food and drink lexemes see chapter 3, section 3.2. While it is hoped that most items characterizing the history of the English language have been included, we cannot claim that they all have.

[2] Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1730) was the first dictionary to treat idiomatic expressions explicitly (see Moon 2000: 512).