

# A Corpus-Based Study of Proverbs in Colloquial Jordanian Arabic: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis

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**Abstract**—The current study aims at investigating the colloquial Jordanian proverbs and sayings used among Jordanian people in different contexts. This qualitative study employed two instruments to collect the data, namely, semi-structured interviews and self-report observations. This study, in fact, is based on the corpora of food proverbs, idioms and sayings in Jordanian Arabic. The sources of these proverbs are taken from Jordanian people, books, magazines, articles, internet websites and TV programs. The corpus consisted of 5634 running words that were built from Jordanians' recorded natural conversations. Those conversations were transcribed into textual data and analyzed using the function of Keyword Analysis of Lancsbox Programme (version 6.0). This study specifically analyzed the proverbs from a pragmatic-linguistic perspective and came up with a set of conclusions. Those proverbs are classified into four different categories as follows: Proverbs Including Body Organs Associated with Eating, Proverbs Referring to the Eating Process Itself, Proverbs Including Tools Used in Eating and Proverbs Including Edible Items.

**Index Terms**—corpus, corpus-based, colloquial, proverb, saying

## I. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are important in our life. They are an integral part in any culture to convey messages. They are used among people for many reasons. For example, people are using them to give a piece of advice, criticize a situation or describe it in brevity utterances. According to Mollanazar (2001, p. 53), the proverb is a “unit of meaning in a specific context through which the speaker and hearer arrive at the same meaning”. In addition to that, Mieder (2004, p. 1) stated that “proverbs fulfill the human need to summarize experiences and observations into nuggets of wisdom that provide ready-made comments on personal relationships and social affairs”. With that in mind, proverbs can be short statements that encode people’s beliefs, experiences or feelings. Actually, proverbs are the special language people use to summarize long descriptions in a short statement. They assist people to evaluate actions or behaviors.

In ancient times, people use proverbs as the medium of communication to impart instructions. On the contrary, those proverbs are not used as a means in books to educate people, but they are still frequently used and found in newspapers and people’s daily communication. Arabic proverbs are means to reflect people’s morals, values, customs, traditions and development from one period to another as stated in Mingazova and Shamsutdinova (2014). To be precise, proverbs are always playing significant roles in the Arab’s life.

Jordanian people, like other people in all societies, shed light on proverbs in their interpersonal communication. To illustrate, Jordanians punctuate their interpersonal communications with proverbs to deliver long messages with short and brief utterances. Also, the most interesting thing is that Jordanian people utilize those proverbs as the flavor of recipes. As a result, the current study intends to identify Jordanian proverbs related to food and eating. To conclude, the present study will attempt to identify the colloquial Jordanian proverbs related to food and eating to answer the following questions:

1. What proverbs related to food and eating are used in Jordanian Society?

2. What are the classifications of Food proverbs and sayings in terms of pragmatic-linguistic aspects?

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As aforementioned, Jordanian people punctuate their speeches with proverbs to deliver long messages with short and brief utterances. It is safe to say that proverbs were thoroughly investigated by different scholars. However, the topics of proverbs are varied. There are a variety of methods used to investigate them. Food and eating proverbs in the Jordanian context have not been examined, particularly their categories. As a result, there is a pressing need to identify food and eating proverbs used in Jordanian society since they have not been investigated comprehensively.

## III. RELATED STUDIES

Proverbs are statements or fixed statements that have a figurative meaning. Generally, scholars have found that proverbs are an interesting area to be studied. Consequently, there was no consensus about an exact definition of a proverb. For instance, some scholars (see, for example, Meider, 1985; Norrick, 1985; Taylor, 2003) agreed that a proverb is a brief statement of folk that has morals, truth and wisdom. It is a formula that is transferred among generations orally.

Proverbs have been investigated from different linguistic perspectives as they are considered a linguistic phenomenon. For example, Jaradat (2007) conducted a study to investigate the syntactic features of proverbs. On the other hand, other studies (see, for example, Al-Azzam, 2018; Fahmi, 2016) have been conducted to investigate the difficulties that translators face while rendering proverbs. Additionally, some studies (see, for example, Dabaghi et al., 2010) were conducted to analyze the proverbs from a psycholinguistic perspective. Badarneh (2016) conducted a study that investigated the figurative and symbolic forms of proverbs. Based on the aforementioned literature, it is safe to say that proverbs are able to serve multi purposes such as instructions, advice or praise.

### A. Importance of Proverbs

Proverbs are to be found all over the world with their different usages in cultures, languages and customs. They, in fact, occupied widespread omnipresent styles of folklore regardless of time, place or development. Mieder (2005) stated that proverbs were a reason for attracting scholars to be searched for many centuries due to their vital role in some traditional societies' aspects. In addition to that, educated people are also in need for the pithy wisdom of proverbs as they might be able to fulfill human needs in order to summarize experiences in many different contexts (Mieder, 2004). The value of proverbs as cultural and rhetorical expressions was argued by Bartlotti (2000). He stated that the literature is still in a need for conducting many studies to gather proverbs, especially in Africa and Asia. In contrast, Samovar et al. (2009) conducted a study, and they claimed that any country can be judged by the quality of proverbs used among its citizens.

Moreover, they revealed that proverbs may offer a significant set of values and beliefs for the members of the culture. Regarding their important role in cultural aspects, Moosavi (2000) conducted a study about proverbs. The researcher revealed that proverbs could be utilized to be a title of a book or a literacy work, to be hot news is circulated through a proverb in the heading or text which reflect new topics or to be used among statesmen and government authorities in different occasions.

### B. Topics of Proverbs

Due to the nature of proverbs, they are popular. Moreover, their role in society makes them so popular. Many topics were covered by proverbs. The researchers found that proverbs cover different themes related to human beings and their roles in communities. Precisely, they discussed different issues ranging from insignificant to the most important or complicated ones. In support of this observation, proverbs according to Valiulytė (2010) are classified into different topics. The former is that proverbs reflect human beings' inner world. Such proverbs focus on the importance of the psychological side of personality; hence, emotional aspects and spiritual beliefs are highlighted. The second is that proverbs reveal human beings' outer world; such proverbs center on physical facets of human beings, hence, one's sensible thoughts, suitable actions, and personal troubles are encoded in some proverbs with a relationship to the outer world. The latter is that proverbs deal with human beings' social world; such proverbs concentrate on one's relationships with family members, relatives, friends and strangers.

It seems that proverbs' classifications have been revealed to be associated with a variety of topics that dealt with human life and their components whether they are related to the inner, outer or social world. However, the aim of this section is to shed light on the importance of proverbs in covering different topics of human beings since they can be applied to the food theme.

### C. Contrastive Studies

Proverbs are more contrastive in nature in the Arab World. In this section, a number of contrastive studies are presented in order to show the similarities and differences between the use of proverbs in a certain society and another

one. Concerning the Arabic language, some studies (see, for example, Al-Kasu, 1983) tackled proverbs from different dialects. The result was that Arabic proverbs are identical in terms of sharing the same attitudes, views and topics. Migdadi (2015) stated, "Such a situation stems from the fact that all dialects have mutual cultural, social and religious backgrounds". This fact is supported by Nabtti's (1990) study that examined Moroccan and Palestinian proverbs and Al-Kasu's (1983) study "A comparison between Iraqi and Tunisian Proverbs", to mention a few. However, the situation of proverbial mutuality strengthens Bergman's (1996, p. 223) assumption that "a number of works on proverbs are called simply 'Arabic Proverbs' without any indication of date or place of origin or collection, implying that details of chronology, geography and language variety are no more than superficial".

Other studies compared and contrasted Arabic and other languages. Jasim (2006) conducts a contrastive study of Iraqi and Spanish proverbs. In this study, he explains that some proverbs originally came from the Arabic language. The reason for that is Arabs were in Spain for around eight centuries. In other words, it is a cultural influence due to their existence for this long period of time. Therefore, proverbs, whether in Iraqi or Spanish languages, are in common with some features such as semantic or sociocultural similarities. Moving to Georgian and Syrian proverbs, Tumanishvili (2007, para. 5) states that "national (ethnic) specificity is especially evident in the proverbs in which the thematic material derives from the characteristic of the given world". In other words, Syrian and Georgian proverbs are very similar except in some terms related to geographical, cultural and social backgrounds. The similarity between Georgian and Syrian languages is that they can be generalized to other languages; each proverb, according to Tumanishvili (2007, para. 5), has "a similar one in the proverbs of another nation not only on the level of its main meaning, but often the form, i.e. wording is identical or very similar", and that suggests the universality of the proverb phenomenon.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a corpus-based approach to collect the data, which has been widely acknowledged that it can provide empirical observations of naturally-occurring language use (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). The researchers follow the steps of building the spoken corpus since the aim is to investigate the usage of Jordanian proverbs and sayings with reference to food and eating in Jordanian informants' natural conversations.

Moreover, the corpus was compiled from naturally recorded speeches produced by 23 Jordanian informants who live in Irbid city and its surrounding villages. The corpus of the current study includes 148 (810 tokens) proverbs and sayings. Whereas, all informants' conversations were transcribed. As a result, the corpus consisted of 5634 running words that were built from Jordanians' recorded natural conversations. Those conversations were transcribed into textual data and analyzed using the function of Keyword Analysis of Lancsbox Programme (version 6.0). Those proverbs and sayings were investigated to exclude all proverbs without reference to food and eating. 28 proverbs and sayings were selected from the corpus. Those proverbs are related to food and eating.

##### A. Instruments and Data Collection

The current study employs two instruments to gather the data. They are interviews and self-report observations. The purpose of interviewing Jordanian people was to get more information about the cryptic meaning of these proverbs and sayings. The informants' participation, in fact, helped the researchers to go into deeper analysis in the current study. Moreover, those proverbs and sayings were collected from different sources, for example, websites, books, articles, magazines or TV programs. The researchers were part of the conversations as the instrument was a semi-structured interview. The reason for their participation was to collect a sufficient and adequate corpus of data. The informants were requested to provide the latest proverbs or sayings they heard. All proverbs and sayings were transcribed to be analyzed. The table below illustrates the corpus of the current study.

TABLE 1  
CORPUS OF COLLOQUIAL JORDANIAN PROVERBS AND SAYINGS

Sources	Number of Proverbs	Number of Tokens
Jordanian informants	79	537
Websites	13	65
Magazines	16	89
TV programs	3	17
Books	21	102
Total	148	810

The table above reveals that our corpus has a small size as it contained only 810 tokens. According to Gut (2012), most of the conversational spoken learner corpora were relatively small.

##### B. Analytical Procedures

Due to the nature of the study, the analysis was principally guided by classifying all 148 proverbs into different categories. The main categories were those who have a reference to food and eating proverbs and sayings. 28 proverbs and sayings were concerned with food and eating. After that, the researchers transcribed those proverbs in order to analyze them. Finally, those proverbs and sayings were classified into four different categories, they are proverbs

referring to the eating process itself, some are related to those who include edible items, some are those who include tools used in eating, and finally, some are those who include body organs associated with eating.

## V. RESULTS

### Classifications of Food Proverbs

Proverbs with reference to food and eating are related to different categories. An appropriate categorization should be represented to clarify proverbs related to food and eating in order to explain them according to an appropriate order. As a result, those proverbs have been classified into four categories as follows:

#### *Proverbs Referring to the Eating Process Itself*

This category of proverbs comprises those that have some linguistic items associated with the process of drinking and eating. In other terms, those proverbs include nouns associated with meals such as *supper, dinner, lunch, breakfast* ...etc., some verbs such as *swallow, eat, drink, taste* ...etc., specific sensations experienced in the mouth such as *sourness, sweetness, bitterness, stiffness or softness*, and finally some needs like *thirst* and *hunger*. The tables below illustrate those proverbs from different perspectives.

TABLE 2  
PROVERBS INCLUDING VERBS RELATED TO THE EATING PROCESS

Proverb	Literal Meaning	Figurative meaning
<sup>1</sup> iSbir 9al-Hisrim <u>ibtuklu</u> 9inab	Give time to sour grapes, so you can eat them when fully grown	Desires are nourished by delays
ba9rif min wein to?kal al-katif	I know from where a shoulder is eaten	To know on which side one's bread is buttered
<u>akil</u> w mar9a u qillit san9ah	Eating, grazing and lack of workmanship	the life of Riley [a comfortable and happy life]
laQini wla <u>ittaTmini</u>	Welcome me and do not feed me	warm and friendly reception is better than alimentation

The preceding table comprises many proverbs and idiomatic expressions with (underlined) verbs related to eating and drinking, compare the following tables:

TABLE 3  
PROVERBS INCLUDING EXPRESSIONS RELATED TO MEALS

Proverb	Literal Meaning	Figurative meaning
<u>ityada</u> witmadda <u>wit9aša</u> witmaša	Lunch and stretch, dine and walk	After dinner sit (sleep) a while, after supper walk a mile
<u>ityadda</u> fiih Qabil ma <u>yit9aša</u> fiik	Lunch on him before he dines on you	steal a march on someone (to gain an advantage over someone by doing some earlier action than expected)
ka0rit il-TabbaXiin bitXarrib <u>ittaTbXah</u>	Plenty of cooks destroy the meal	Too many cooks spoil the broth.
Qa9id <u>butBox</u> almauDuu9 9ala naar haadiah	I am cooking the issue on soft fire	soft fire makes sweet malt.
bisuum wi <u>biftar</u> 9la basalah	Fasting for a long time and breakfasting only on one onion	A clean fast is better than a dirty breakfast

Some proverbs indicate some feelings or needs such as *thirst* or *hunger*, and some indicate specific sensations experienced in the mouth such as *softness, stiffness, bitterness, sourness* or *sweetness*.

TABLE 4  
PROVERBS INCLUDING NOUNS RELATED TO FEELINGS

Proverb	Literal Meaning	Figurative meaning
<u>il juu9</u> kaafir	Hunger is an atheist	A hungry belly has no ears.
uQ9ud <u>juu9an</u> wla tmid ?iidak la mannaan	Sit hungry and not stretch your hand to a maleficent giver	to endure hard circumstances is better than losing one's dignity
ma Hada biQuul 9an dibsuh <u>HaamiD</u>	No one calls his treacle sour	don't cry stinking fish.
iflan 9admuh <u>Tari / Qasi</u>	His bones are soft/solid	= he is a na 9e/ an experienced person
laHmuh <u>mur</u>	His flesh is bitter	he is an unforgiving person
<u>aHla</u> 9ala Qalbi min al-9asal	It's sweeter to my heart than honey	gladly accepted or received

The table above contains a lot of proverbs and sayings with (underlined) nouns related to feelings.

#### *Proverbs Including Edible Items*

There are many proverbs associated with food and eating including keywords with reference to edible items, in other words, they contain things fit to be eaten such as *meat, fruit* or *vegetable*. According to Migdadi (2015), it is noteworthy to admit that the previous and the following categories may intersect and interweave in many ways, that is to say, proverbs including edible items may also include a reference to the eating process itself or an indication to some tools

<sup>1</sup> See the appendix to find the list of phonetics symbols

or body organs used in the process of eating. Therefore, it is safe to say that the division given here is not clear-cut, but it is only a simple classification with the purpose of clarification and exemplification. However, in what follows is a list of proverbs containing edible items:

TABLE 5  
PROVERBS INCLUDING EDIBLE ITEMS

Proverb	Literal Meaning	Figurative meaning
<u>fuulih</u> winQasmat nussein	A bean that is divided into two halves	as like as two peas
la tit9alaQ biliQŠuur wa tinsa libDor	Do not hang on the hulls and forget the seeds	Catch not at the shadow and lose the substance
illi bisriQ <u>beiDah</u> bisriQ <u>jamal</u>	Who steals an egg steals a camel	He that will steal an egg will steal an ox
<u>ilbanduurah</u> ilim9afnih ibtinza9 il-buksih	A rotten tomato damages the whole box	One drop of poison infects the whole ton of wine.

It appears from the previous table that edible items include some vegetables like *ilbanduurah* (tomatoes) and *basalah* (onions); fruits like *9inab* (fresh grapes or dried); seeds like *fuulih* (beans); animals and their products such as *jamal* (camel). The edible items, mentioned above, are the most basic and commonly used foods in Jordanian society.

#### *Proverbs Including Tools Used in Eating*

Food and eating proverbs and sayings included within this section contain either kitchen utensils used for cooking and baking or eating tools used to carry food to the mouth. The table below is illustrative:

TABLE 6  
PROVERBS INCLUDING TOOLS USED IN THE PROCESS OF EATING

Proverb	Literal Meaning	Figurative meaning
<u>Tonjarah</u> wa laQat <u>yaTaaha</u>	A pan that found its cover	every Jack must have his Jill
laa ityarbil innas binaxluuk	Do not sift people since they will sieve you out (denude you)	cast not the first stone (do not criticize people)
La ituHuT kul beiDak <u>ibsallah</u> waHadeh	Do not put all of your eggs in one basket	don't have too many irons in the fire
Banfux <u>ibQirbih</u> maxzoQah	To blow in a severed water skin	a cold coal to blow at= do useless things
inwalad wib@ummuh <u>mil9aQah</u> min Dāhab	He was born with a gold spoon in his mouth	he was born rich so he does not need to work hard to get his living

In such proverbs or sayings, it seems that there is a reference to many kitchen and eating tools such as sieves, baskets and spoons, pan covers, water skins and pans.

#### *Proverbs Including Body Organs Associated With Eating.*

This section includes food proverbs and sayings with reference to the digestive system or tract, particularly to two basic organs, namely, stomach and mouth, as it appears in the following table:

TABLE 7  
PROVERBS INCLUDING BODY ORGANS ASSOCIATED WITH EATING

Proverb	Literal Meaning	Figurative meaning
ilTaariiQ laa Qalb ilzalamih min mi9dituh	The way to a man's heart is through his stomach	The way to a man's heart is through his stomach
Ta9mi i@um ibtistahi al-9ain	Feed the mouth, the eye becomes bashful	get their loyalties by money, meals, gifts ...etc.
illi buukil 9ala Dirsuh binfa9 nafsuh	Who eats on his sprocket benefits himself	The idea is that 'self sufficiency is of most benefit to people' i.e. do not rely on others, they will let you down.
Saar 9ilkih ib@um innas	He became a chewing gum in people's mouth	= he has been disgraced by doing dishonorable deeds, so he became the subject of people's gossip

To sum up, the result section provided a simplified categorization of proverbs and idiomatic expressions with reference to food and eating in order to illustrate the main groups under which these proverbs are listed. It appears from the previous tables that the reference to food and eating includes four major semantic fields as follows: the eating process itself, edible items, tools used in eating and organs associated with eating.

## VI. DISCUSSION

Proverbs and sayings related to food and eating in the Jordanian speech community are discussed from a socio-pragmatic perspective. The discussion of food proverbs is divided into different headings in order to facilitate the comprehension of this linguistic phenomenon. Proverbs and sayings are categorized into different classes according to specific groupings. It is noticed that proverbs with reference to food and eating are related to different categories. An appropriate categorization should be presented to clarify food proverbs and explain them according to an appropriate order. As a result, proverbs and sayings have been categorized into four categories; they were illustrated and discussed

in the previous subsections, they are: Proverbs Including Body Organs Associated with Eating, Proverbs Referring to the Eating Process Itself, Proverbs Including Tools Used in Eating and Proverbs Including Edible Items.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Proverbs are important, interesting and complicated to be examined. Thus, many different views have evolved to analyze them. This paper offers a primarily corpus-informed overview of colloquial Jordanian proverbs and sayings with reference to food and eating. This analysis has laid the ground for further studies on different topics in the Jordanian context. The researchers hope that even a small corpus combined with knowledge of existing literature has much to help other researchers to design their future studies.

## APPENDIX. LIST OF PHONETIC SYMBOLS

### 1. Consonants:

Symbol	Description	Arabic Consonant
ʔ	Glottal stop	أ
b	Voiced bilabial stop	ب
t	Voiceless dento-alveolar stop	ت
θ	Voiceless interdental fricative	ث
j	Voiced post-alveolar affricate	ج
H	Voiceless pharyngeal fricative	ح
X	Voiceless velar fricative	خ
d	Voiced dento-alveolar stop	د
Ḍ	Voiced interdental fricative	ذ
r	Voiced alveo-palatal trill	ر
z	Voiced alveolar fricative	ز
s	Voiceless alveolar fricative	س
š	Voiceless alveo-palatal fricative	ش
S	Voiceless alveolar emphatic fricative	ص
D	Voiced alveolar emphatic stop	ض
T	Voiceless dento-alveolar emphatic fricative	ط
t̪	Voiced interdental emphatic fricative	ظ
ʁ	Voiced pharyngeal fricative	ع
y	Voiced velar fricative	غ
f	Voiceless labio-dental fricative	ف
k	Voiceless velar stop	ك
l	Voiced alveolar lateral	ل
m	Voiced bilabial nasal	م
n	Voiced alveolar nasal	ن
h	Voiceless glottal fricative	ه
w	Voiced labiovelar glide	و
y	Voiced palatal glide	ي
Q	Voiced velar stop	ق (العامية)

### 2. Vowels:

Vowel	Description	Symbol
◌َ fatHah	Short low vowel	a
◌ُ Dammah	Short high back vowel	u
◌ِ kasrah	Short high front vowel	i

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