

Helena Bažec¹, Melita Lemut Bajec²

¹University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities

²University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education

helena.bazec@fhs.upr.si, Melita.LemutBajec@pef.uni-lj.si

How the English, Italians, and Slovenians *break bread*: Phraseological units with *bread* across three languages and cultures

The paper presents a contrastive-comparative research on English, Italian, and Slovenian phraseological units with the word *bread*. First, it focuses on the etymological origins, and then it explores the similarities and differences in the meanings of the word *bread* and its phraseological units. Additionally, common and distinctive phraseological units, their frequency, and their intrinsic cognitive ideals are examined. The findings reveal that the three languages share the same Proto-Indo-European ancestry and sentimental anachronism. Nonetheless, different cultural, historical, political, and societal traditions have generated phraseological units distinctive of the three languages. Slovenian excels in the overall use of phraseological units and in the use of proverbs, whereas English and Italian mirror extensive influences of the Bible. The Italian language also reflects close ties to Roman heritage. Even if it may seem as though the proverbs are declining in use, examples of modifications more in touch with the present times prove their relevance. Lastly, the canonic pieces of literature influence the emergence and use of phraseological units.

1. Introduction

Language and culture are inextricably intertwined. The former reflects the culture and cultural practices while the latter shapes our understanding of life and thus influences individual and communal identities (Furlong and Bernaus 2017; Ichim 2020). A language is a cultural object, a form of sociocultural behavior defined by a set of sociocultural norms, which influence the language's vocabulary, a treasure trove of concepts and notions significant for a culture (Kekeya 2018; Renard 2021). One such concept is the word *bread*. Namely, societies and cultures depended on the abundance or lack of it and consequently thrived or collapsed (Benson 2013).

Its consumption has always defined individuals and communities economically, politically, and culturally, and therefore a profound expression of social belonging has been attached to it (Pinnavaia 2015). As one of the most essential survival foods in human culture and history, it has naturally acquired deep symbolic value (Jakop 2022) and found its way into numerous culturally bound expressions (Palma Fahey 2019) that accumulate and mirror human wisdom, while serving as a way of exchanging experience (Mieder 2004: 15).

Bread became part of the world heritage with bread-centered myths, symbols, and rituals promoting its metaphysical connotations (Nistor et al. 2014). On the one hand, it signifies absolute appreciation (Savin 2012), abundance, provision, independence, and success, on the other hand, it is associated with poverty, ruin, dependence, and negative personality traits (Jakop 2022). In an attempt to classify phraseological units containing the word *bread*, several studies researching its symbolic and semantic values, including the Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Romanian, Russian, Slovenian, and Spanish languages, were taken into account (Savin 2012; Pinnavaia 2015; Kac 2018; Jakop 2022; Markova et al. 2022) and the following eight semantic fields were identified: work, job or livelihood; poverty or simple life; generosity, goodness, and kind-heartedness; arrogance or greed; impossibility to do something; importance, indispensability; sustenance, survival, nourishment; gain and power.

Despite much research conducted in this field, a systematic cross-linguistic study including English, Italian, and Slovenian phraseological units involving the word *bread* has not been done so far. Therefore, the following paper presents a contrastive comparative analysis, based on the premise that the three languages do to some extent share some sentimental anachronism since bread has been the archetypal symbol of sustenance from the onset of our civilization and gained prominence with the translation of the Bible into European languages (Pinnavaia 2015). On the other hand, it can also be inferred that the different cultural, historical, political, and societal traditions the three languages underwent mirror many phraseological units distinctive of the three individual languages (Pinnavaia 2015). Therefore, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1) What is the etymological origin of the word *bread* in English, Italian, and Slovenian?

RQ2) What are the similarities and differences in the meanings of the word *bread* and its phraseological units in English, Italian, and Slovenian?

RQ3) Which phraseological units are shared and which are distinctive of each language?

RQ4) Which phraseological units are most frequently used?

RQ5) What cognitive ideals are associated with phraseological units?

2. Theoretical framework

Phraseological units are stable idiomatic phrases where the meaning is not the sum of individual words but contains an idea of its own or this idea can be deduced through the imagery it creates (Keber 2011; Espinal and Mateu 2019; Harmon 2021). The term *phraseological unit* coined by Russian linguists is mostly used in Eastern Europe whereas the Anglophone world resorts to the word *idiom* and *idiomatic* for something holding figurative meaning, and emotional expressiveness (Masimova 2018). Therefore, it quickly becomes evident that the study of phraseology is to a certain extent bound by different linguistic traditions. Nonetheless, the base is the same: phraseological units are relatively stable lexico–semantic, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic combinations of at least two lexemes (Shtoltzel 2018). While the individual words within these units may typically remain unchanged or have very limited variability (Keber 2011; Muradullayeva 2022) they do manifest a certain amount of phonetic, grammatical, lexical, and syntactic variations and modifications (Jakop 2022).

This paper focuses on sayings, folk proverbs, and quotations from literary works (Pyskach et al. 2023) that function as mental images put into concise linguistic units of folklore that were and still are handed down from generation to generation. Even if they tend to be spoken, they constitute an important part of all canonical texts as they reflect the norms and guidelines that were or still are a guide to the moral and dignified life of an individual or a community (Syzykov 2014). They encompass folk wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views (Mieder 2015: 297) as well as reveal the nation's self-awareness and self-identification (Kržišnik 2008). Despite embracing the uniqueness and peculiarities of a community or a nation on one hand they also show that people across the globe follow relatively similar cognitive principles and patterns, which explains their universality (Dobrovol'skij 2013; Madmarova et al. 2021).

Phraseological units perform specific communicative functions and add to the naturalness of the conversation (Palma Fahey 2019). Acting as interpreters of life, they shape(d) and determine(d) our perception of reality (Konstantinova 2021). They are an important drive in the process of socialization since they strengthen cultural norms and help understand social ones (Madmarova et al. 2021). Attempting to express generalized, culturally, and universally approved observations, they can be applied to recurrent situations within numerous diverse contexts (Lewandowska and Antos 2015; Konstantinova 2021). Sayings, folk proverbs, and quotations from literary works as lingua–cultural items are dynamic in the sense that they are constantly emerging and flourishing but also withering as new ones appear and enter common use (Mieder 2010).

According to the cognitive–ideals hypothesis, when creating proverbs, people construct an ideal or standard, collectively perceived as holding authority for its truthfulness, after that a mental image is formed which then transpires into a

linguistic item that due to specific socio–historical context gains traction and gets used across larger groups of people or communities (Honeck and Welge 1997). This interaction between a certain event, its mental image, and a cognitive–ideal is constantly being challenged, either to be conformed or due to social changes re-adjusted (Schwarz–Friesel 2008).

When trying to classify the units across the languages through the cognitive–ideals they embrace, a semantic fields analysis proves to be very useful as it constitutes a set of units that share an identifiable semantic affinity (Finegan 2008). Nonetheless, a warning is to be applied here as a thorough analysis requires the consideration of language and non–language elements within a context (Cruse 2011). Therefore, the act of running comparative research and applying a semantic fields analysis must be taken with caution.

3. Methodology

Our research was conducted in two steps. First, to explore the etymological origin of the word *bread* in all three languages we applied qualitative research methodology and extracted data from *Slovenski etimološki slovar* (*The Slovenian Etymological Dictionary*) (Snoj 2016), *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo–European Roots* (Watkins 2000), and *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana* (*The Etymological Dictionary of the Italian Language*) (Pianigiani 1994). Next, we made a list of all definitions of the word *bread* as given in *The Merriam–Webster.com Dictionary*, *Slovar Slovenskega knjižnega jezika* (*The Standard Slovene Dictionary*), and *Vocabolario Treccani* (*Treccani Dictionary*), which helped us answer the question of consistency and divergence of the literal and figurative meaning. Furthermore, to compile complete lists of the phraseological units containing the word *bread* we additionally used *IdiomsThe free dictionary.com*, *TheIdioms.com*, *Slovar slovenskih frazemov* (*Dictionary of Slovenian Phrasemes*) (Keber 2011), *Slovar pregovorov in sorodnih paremioloških izrazov* (*Dictionary of Slovenian Proverbs and related paremiological terms*) (Meterc 2020), *Dizionario dei modi di dire* (Quartu and Rossi 2023), and *Dizionario dei proverbi italiani* (Lapucci 2007). Having compiled one list for each of the languages, we verified their use in the language corpora.

The main criteria for the selection of the language corpora was to ensure that they maximally overlap in terms of the period they cover, the genres they include, and their respective sizes. Achieving a total match was out of our reach, nonetheless by carefully scrutinizing the available options online, we decided to use CJVT *Gigafida 2.0* (*Corpus of Written Standard Slovene*), CORIS (*Corpus of Written Italian*), and COCA (*The Corpus of Contemporary American English*). Our decision for COCA as the closest fit to the other two corpora automatically meant our context was limited to the American linguistic environment, which also explains the earlier use of the Merriam–Webster Dictionary for the semantic analysis research. Therefore, when we refer to the findings in the English language, English is just a generic term for the American version of the English language. However, it needs to be stressed

that the great majority of phraseological units used in American English today were imported via British texts (Mieder 2010).

The Slovenian and the American language corpora are almost identical in size (they contain slightly more than a billion words) whereas the Italian corpus is much smaller with 150 million words. The Slovenian and American language corpora cover the period between 1990 and 2019, and the Italian from 2001 to 2021, however, when it became available online, it also included texts from the 1980s and 1990s (Tamburini 2022). The Slovenian and American language corpora include the same genres, i.e. daily newspapers, magazines, a selected set of online texts (including news), and various book publications (fiction, textbooks, factual literature). With the Italian corpus, we did not have the choice to select the genres (as was the case with the American corpus) so the Italian corpus contains also academic, legal, and administrative prose (Rossini Favretti 2000). However, by analogy with the American corpus, where academic texts were only marginally represented (and later excluded from the total sum), we might assume the same goes for the academic, legal, and administrative prose in Italian and their inclusion in the corpus should not affect the overall frequency order. Therefore, we deduced that the corpora are comparable and the results reliable.

After verifying the use of phraseological units in the three corpora a quantitative analysis was conducted that helped us assign the units according to the following taxonomy: units that occur in all three languages with their corresponding frequency rates, in two languages only (Slovenian and Italian; Slovenian and English; English and Italian) and units used in one language only. Finally, we attempted to categorize all phraseological units according to their corresponding semantic fields/cognitive-ideals and see to what extent they align with the existing classifications.

4. Findings

4.1. The etymology of the word *bread* in Slovenian, Italian, and English

First, we investigated the etymological origin of the word *bread* in the three languages. The Slovenian word *kruh* etymologically derives from Old Church Slavonic **kruhъ* meaning ‘a broken piece, a crumb’. The roots of the word may be reconstructed to Proto-Slavic **krǫxъ*, where it meant ‘a piece torn off’, which was derived from Proto-Slavic **krǫšiti*, meaning ‘to break, to crumble’ (Snoj 2016). The origins of the English word *bread* are not quite clear-cut. One theory claims that it comes from the Proto-Germanic **brautham*, which evolved from the Proto-Indo-European root **bhreu-*, meaning ‘to boil, bubble, burn’, and was used in reference to the leavening (Watkins 2000). Another explanation is that the Old English word is derived from Proto-Germanic **braudsmōn-*, meaning ‘fragments, bits’ and is related to the root of the verb **bhreg-*, meaning ‘to break’ (Simpson and Weiner 1989). The etymology of the Italian word *pane* resides in Latin *panem*, also meaning *bread*. This word comes from the Proto-Indo-European root **pā-*, which is related to the con-

cepts of food and nourishment but also protection and care. It is interesting to note that the same root yielded the Sanskrit word for drinking, the Latin word for nourishment *pascor*, and the Old Slavic *pitati* ‘to feed’ (Pianigiani 1994).

4.2. Bread in dictionaries

A semantic analysis revealed that the word displays a multi-layered semantic range. Its primary meaning remains consistent in all three languages, it refers to the aliment, one of the staple foods of our civilization, made from flour, water, and yeast. Next, it denotes livelihood, a means of financial survival (e.g. *to earn one’s bread and butter*), the third meaning is religious, *bread* symbolizes the body of Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion. In slang English *bread* is a colloquial synonym for money (e.g. *to be short on bread and honey*). In Italian it can be used poetically to refer to wheat which would correspond to the English *bread basket*, designating a fertile area that yields a significant amount of produce, especially grains. Similarly, in Slovenian, it is used as a synonym for harvest, with the implication on various cereals e.g. *Toča je uničila ves kruh* ‘The hail destroyed all the bread’. There is a particular meaning in Italian used for any kind of substance having the form of bread, e.g. *un pane di burro* ‘a bread of butter’.

4.3. Quantitative analysis of phraseological units

The dictionaries and idiom database sources yielded a total of 35 phraseological units in Slovenian, 31 in English, and 40 in Italian (Figure 1). Here, it is important to emphasize that Lapucci’s *Dictionary of Italian proverbs* (Lapucci 2007, VI) documents 100 entries, which we decided to omit, since we deem that the author’s choice is too loose. Namely, he included everything, from different variations of the same proverb to citations from literature and dialectal forms that have never found their way into standard Italian. Besides, not a single unit out of the omitted body was found in CORIS.

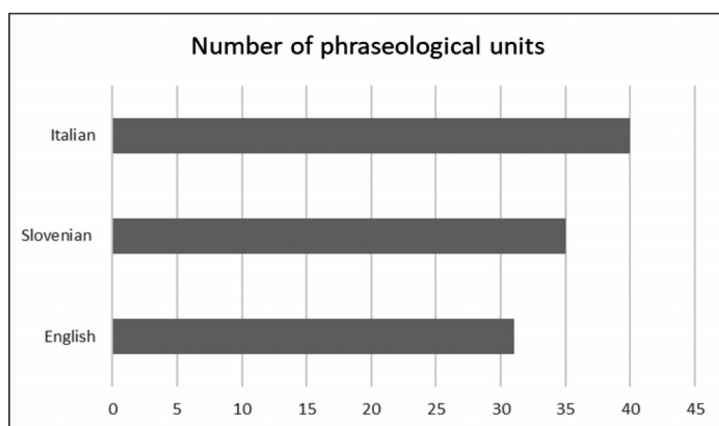


Figure 1: Comparison of phraseological units in English, Italian, and Slovenian as per dictionary entries and idiom database resources

However, only 28 phraseological units were recorded in *CJVT*, 20 found their way into *COCA*, and 20 into *CORIS* (Figure 2), which amounted to 68 phraseological units altogether recorded in the language corpora. Next, to find out the total number of different units, we counted as one those that have equivalents in meaning and form in at least two languages (e.g. *bread and circus/kruha in iger/ pānis et circēnsēs*), additionally, we added the ones that were distinctive of a language. The final count reached a total of 48 different units. The data revealed that 9 (19 %) were shared in all three languages, 2 (4 %) were common to Slovenian and Italian, and 1 (2 %) was common to Slovenian and English. The combination of Italian and English produced 1 (2 %) phraseological unit. All the others, that is 35 units (73 %), appeared in individual languages; namely 18 (37 %) in Slovenian, eight (17 %) in English, and nine (19 %) in Italian (Figure 3).

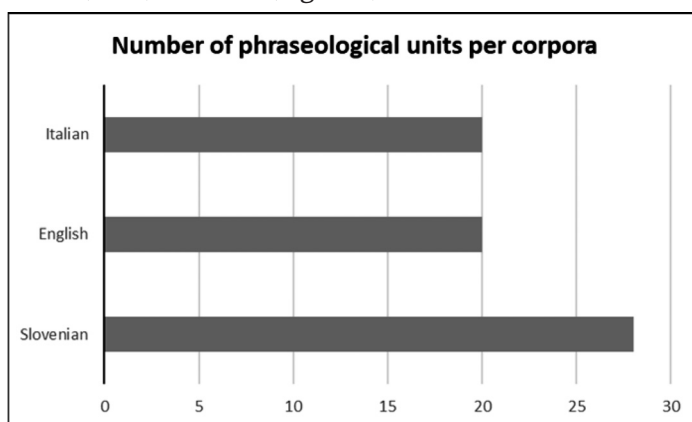


Figure 2: Number of phraseological units appearing in *CJVT*, *COCA* and *CORIS*

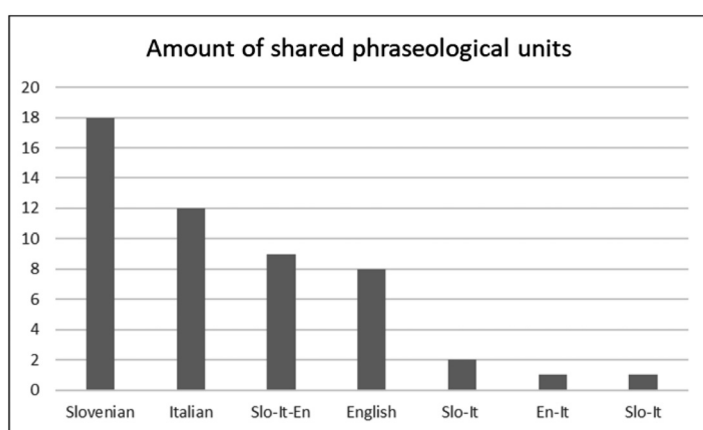


Figure 3: Amount of shared phraseological units

Analyzing the three sets of the top 10 most frequently used units it becomes noticeable that 2/3 of them point to a common historical background; they either

reflect the Biblical origins or emphasize bread as an essential source of food and therefore people's dependency on it. Examining the lists individually, it is evident that half of the units in Slovenian are distinctive of the language, which is a lot more than in the other two languages. On the list of the most frequently documented units in Slovenian, the first four are connected to work and job. In English five out of 10 refer to food, three of them to spiritual one. In Italian, there are several semantic fields included, but statistically speaking, the phraseological units of Biblical origins outnumber all the others.

4.4. Qualitative analysis

4.4.1. Shared phraseological units

Five out of nine shared phraseological units have Biblical origins. These are *bread of life* (Slo. *kruh življenja*, Ita. *pane della vita*) referring to Jesus Christ himself; *give us this day our daily bread* (Slo. *daj nam danes naš vsakdanji kruh*, Ita. *dacci oggi il nostro pane quotidiano*), referring to the Lord's Prayer and asking for material and spiritual provision; *man cannot/does not live by/on bread alone* (Slo. *človek ne živi samo od kruha*, Ita. *non si vive di solo pane*), people need more to live than just material possessions; *earn your own bread* (Slo. *služiti si kruh*, Ita. *guadagnarsi il pane*), to support oneself through hard work and *break bread* (Slo. *lomiti kruh*, Ita. *spezzare il pane*), with the meaning of sharing a meal or knowledge.

It needs to be stressed that these units are not necessarily used in the same context. An example of this kind is *to break bread*, with a shared ecclesiastical meaning across the three languages. However, in English, it has an additional meaning of sharing a meal, usually as a gesture of kindness and generosity, while in Italian it has a slightly patronizing connotation and refers to sharing knowledge as in *spezzare il pane della scienza* 'to break the bread of science'. Although Slovenian dictionaries do not document the secular meaning, we found individual instances of this kind in CJVT and discovered that they are all syntactic calques that happened in the process of translating. Therefore, the original sentence: "He broke bread with us" was translated to *Z nami je lomil kruh*, which does not align with Slovenian cultural and linguistic tradition. However, it does not sound wrong, only slightly unusual. On the other hand, this cannot be claimed for the next case *Ljudje, ki so mi lomili kruh in mi dajali piti iz svoje steklenice*, ... 'The people who broke bread with me and gave me to drink from their bottle'. This phraseological unit *in fieri* produced by a Slovenian author is a case of a spontaneous production most probably coined under the influential nature of the English language, similarly observed in the case of črni petek 'black Friday' (Bažec and Milioni 2020).

The analysis of the remaining four shared phraseological units reflect different aspects of common European history, thereby being referred to as Europeanisms (Kac 2018: 105). One of them is *bread and circuses* (Slo. *kruha in iger*, Ita. *pane e giochi*), which is attributed to the ancient Roman poet and satirist Juvenal (late first and early second centuries BE) who used *pānis et circēnsēs* in his *Satires* (X, 81)

for the first time. A finding peculiar to the Italian context is the preference for the use of the Latin form over the Italian one, which proves that the Italian language and culture are more strongly linked to Roman heritage in comparison with the other two languages. The remaining Europeanisms e.g. *to take bread out of someone's mouth* (Slo. *jemati nekomu kruh od ust*, Ita. *levare il pane di bocca*), *to earn your own bread* (Slo. *služiti kruh*, Ita. *guadagnarsi il pane* and *a crust of bread* (Slo. *skorja kruha*, Ita. *pezzo/tozzo di pane*) reflect the common European history of dependence on bread as a staple food when its abundance or scarcity defined the times of poverty and well-being. Whereas in the case of *to be put on bread and water* (Slo. *biti ob kruhu in void*, Ita. *mettere a pane e acqua*) allusion to a more recent history is drawn, emphasizing the circumstances prisoners or those who were being disciplined had to endure (Quartu and Rossi 2023).

Another finding refers to the unit *a crust of bread* which is not listed in any of the English dictionaries and idiom database resources as an idiomatic expression of any kind. However, when we applied an analogy with Italian and Slovenian and checked the English corpus, numerous examples carrying the very same implications, that is of a quantifier signifying 'a little amount of something' were found. As the unit functioned in the same way in all three languages this proves similar cognitive processes that our brain undergoes (Heine 1997). Additionally, it being used as a quantifier *little* is a case of grammaticalization (cfr. Traugott 2008).

Next, there are two pairs of units shared by Italian and Slovenian e.g. *dober kot (beli) kruh/buono come il pane* 'to be as good as (white) bread' where the characteristics of bread as something good are applied to a person, stressing one's kind, loving, and generous nature; while with *manicare del pane/bitì v pomanjkanju kruha* 'to be bread-deprived' we refer to one being impoverished. Further, there is one phraseological unit shared between English and Italian, i. e. *to eat the bread of idleness/mangiare il pane dell'ozio* that has a distinctly religious touch in Italian but can occasionally also be used in profane contexts in English, implying a criticism against laziness and consequences resulting from that. And finally, there is a phraseological unit shared by Slovenian and English i. e. *dajati kruh/butter your bread*. Yet, it is necessary to stress that the verbs in it do not fully align whereas the overall meaning does, which proves once again that there is a universal tendency to express certain concepts despite distinctive heritages and legacies (Dobrovol'skij 2013; Madmarova et al. 2021).

4.4.2. Phraseological units distinctive of the three languages

Distinctive phraseological units are not shared among languages but are unique to a language. These units often derive from an oral tradition and are linked to the socio-cultural customs and practices of a nation (Pinnavaia 2015). Therefore, when we tried to explain the meaning of those phraseological units, we were primarily interested in their origins and their first mention as they could relate to different customs and traditions of a particular nation. In the case of the phraseo-

logical units distinctive of the English language, a much larger body of information was found than in the case of Slovenian and Italian. To be more explicit, we could always rely on the Merriam–Webster Dictionary to get the first use of a unit, additionally, we could find an explanation regarding the origins of the unit elsewhere. Whereas in Slovenian the units were not so easily traced back in time. Sometimes Keber (2011), Snoj (2016), and Meterc (2020) added a mention of an earlier use of the unit in one of the previous dictionaries such as *Slovensko–nemški slovar (Slovene–German Dictionary)* (1894–1895) by Maks Pleteršnik or *Slovar slovenskega jezika* (1936) by Joža Glonar, etc. Nonetheless, the information was much less comprehensive than in the case of English. For Italian, we had to resort to the bibliographic material of the *Accademia della Crusca* online which consists of words and phraseological units whose origins can be traced back to literary works.

English

The phraseological unit unique to the English language and also most frequently used is *bread and butter*, meaning an essential component that sustains one's livelihood (job, skill, service, main source of income). However, it can also be used as an adjective to emphasize something basic and essential as in *the bread-and-butter issue*. This phraseological unit was first used in the nominal function in 1770 and adjectival in 1837 (Merriam–Webster.com Dictionary, n. d.). However, the phrase is thought to have been in use since the Middle Ages when buttered bread was oftentimes the only entire course consumed by peasants (theidioms.com, n. d.). The combination of *bread and butter* is also found in another idiomatic unit, distinctive of the English language, i. e. *to know which side one's bread is buttered (on)*, meaning to understand where one's advantage lies. It is in the 7th place among the most widely used phraseological units. However, the proverb with similar origins *Bread always falls on the buttered side* did not make it into COCA.

Unique to English is also the phraseological unit *the best/greatest thing since sliced bread* used informally and signifying an excellent person, innovation, or an improvement (Merriam–Webster.com Dictionary, n. d.). Its origin is attributed to the invention of the sliced bread technique in 1928 in the States and its subsequent advertising campaigns in the baking industry but gained traction only in the 1950s (theidioms.com n. d.). It is found in the 2nd place among phraseological units unique to the English language and the 6th place in the list of most frequently used phraseological units in the English language. To our knowledge, this unit can be claimed as the only American unit containing the word *bread* as all the other ones entered American English through British English (Mieder 2010).

In use is also a phraseological unit *Bread is the staff of life* which signifies the importance of bread as a staple food. This unit with biblical origins (Isaiah 3:1) was first used in 1607 (Merriam–Webster.com Dictionary, n. d.) but gained prominence

after Jonathan Swift incorporated it in his work *A Tale of Tub* in 1704: “Bread, dear brothers, is the staff of life.” (The Free Dictionary, n. d.). Of biblical origin is also the phraseological unit *to cast/throw your bread upon waters*. It is used when we want to express that someone is ready to invest their time, money, or effort without expecting anything in return. This unit originates from the Bible, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (11:1) which says: “Cast thy bread upon waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” (The Free Dictionary, n. d.).

Apart from proverbs of Biblical origin, there are two additional ones unique to the English language. The first one, *Half a loaf is better than no bread* was used in 1546 by John Heywood in *A Dialogue of Proverbs* with the meaning of ‘it’s better to have something than nothing at all’ but was later shortened to *Half a loaf is better than none*. The use of its original version in COCA was therefore unexpected. The other one *All bread is not baked in one oven*, emphasizes diversity and appreciation of individual differences. Its origins are unknown.

Slovenian

We found 18 phraseological units distinctive of the Slovenian language documented in CVJT. Five units refer to bread as a source of nourishment or a means of survival:

- *(ne) imeti za kruh* ‘to not have for bread’ means that someone lacks provisions;
- *kruha stradati* ‘to starve bread’ and *biti kruha lačen* ‘to be hungry of bread’ mean to live in extreme poverty and deprivation;
- *Kdor rano vstaja, kruha ne strada* ‘He who rises in the morning shall not starve bread’ means that being an early bird pays off;
- *Kdor jezika špara, kruha strada* ‘He who uses his tongue sparingly, starves bread’ is used with a reference to a person who does not try to ask or seek help will therefore most likely end with nothing;
- *potrebovati kot kruh* ‘to need as bread’ stresses the essentialness of this once staple food.
- Another category comprising four units alludes to job or employment:
 - *rezati kruh* ‘to slice bread’ means to give someone a job;
 - *biti pri kruhu* ‘to be at bread’ is used for a financially independent person;
 - *iti s trebuhom za kruhom* ‘to go after your stomach searching for bread’ and *(jesti) tuj kruh* ‘(to eat) foreign bread’ are used for people who go abroad in search of a better life.

Two units convey the idea of arrogance over having too much, these are *biti od belega kruha pijan* ‘to be drunk on white bread’ and *preobjesti se belega kruha* ‘to gorge on white bread’. One unit i.e. *dober kot bel kruh* ‘as good as white bread’ emphasizes one’s good qualities, kindness, and generosity.

Six of the units have random meanings, not restricted to any semantic field:

- *Iz te moke ne bo kruha* ‘This flour shall yield no bread’ implies the impossibility to do something unless all the criteria are sufficed’;
- *Če kruhek pade ti na tla, poberi in poljubi ga* ‘If the bread falls upon the ground, pick it and kiss it’ refers to a gesture of respect towards the food that was once an important symbol of well-being;
- *Zarečenega kruha se največ poje* ‘Sworn bread gets to be eaten the most’ is used for a person who is forced to embrace the unwanted consequences of his own doing’;
- *Smejati se kot cigan belemu kruhu* ‘to laugh like a gypsy at white bread’ means to be extremely happy over something which was deemed out of your reach;
- *Četudi človek pol sveta preteče, najboljši kruh doma se peče* ‘Having traveled half the world, the best bread is baked at home’ means ‘Home, sweet home’;
- *Ne naredi kruha moka, ampak roka*, ‘It’s not the flour that makes the bread, it’s the man’s hand’ emphasizes one’s effort.

We would also like to touch upon 2 units registered in the dictionaries and idiom database resources but not in CVJT:

- *spreti se s kruhom* ‘to fall out with bread’ means that one argues with their employer;
- *Kar je preveč, še s kruhom ni dobro* ‘too much of everything is not tasty even with bread’ means that having too much of something, especially something good is not desirable, acceptable, or sustainable.

Italian

Only 20 out of 40 recorded phraseological units are in current use, nine of which are unique to Italian. four of these are used in the sense of comparing two equal elements:

- *dire pane al pane (e vino al vino)* ‘say bread to bread (and wine to wine)’ means that a person should speak clearly and directly about things, even embarrassing or unpleasant ones. The origins of this unit, even if diachronically unspecified, can be rooted in the fact that bread and wine represent common Mediterranean heritage, emerging from wheat and vine as the quintessential staples in this geographic area, and so parallel the commonly associated metaphors of Christ’s body and blood (Cusmano 2009–2010). It is unique to Italian as it contains the word *bread*, however, it has equivalents in meaning in English where *bread* is replaced with the word *spade* and in Slovenian with *bob* ‘horse bean’.

- *rendere pan per focaccia*, ‘to give back bread for bread’ which originates from the period of the Roman empire when it had no particular connotation whereas today it implies a sense of vengeance and corresponds to the English one *to give someone a taste of their own medicine* and Slovenian *vrniti milo za drago* ‘to repay kind with dear’.
- *trovare pane per i propri denti* ‘to find bread for one’s teeth’, a very popular saying, second on the frequency list. It is used when someone has to deal with a demanding person or a challenging situation. This unit was documented for the first time in 1892 in a literary work by De Amicis (CRUSCA, n. d.).
- *se non è zuppa è pan bagnato* ‘If it’s not soup it is soaked bread’ we ironically say that two things are equivalent, whereas we emphasize the lack of any substantial differences, and add a touch of resentment. It originated in the Middle Ages when *zuppa* (in modern Italian it only means soup) meant a slice of bread soaked in wine (CRUSCA, n. d.).

The second semantic field conveys the idea of gratitude and unites two sayings, *mangiare il pane a ufo* ‘to eat bread without paying’ and *mangiare il pane a tradimento* ‘to eat bread on betrayal’; both mean that ‘someone is living on someone else’s expenses’, the second implying also lack of gratitude. The first one occurred in Manzoni’s *The betrothed* from the 1820s, the second appeared in the 3rd edition of Crusca’s *Vocabulary* as a citation from Lasca’s *Rime* (originally published in the 16th century).

Further on, *mangiare pane e cipolle* ‘to eat bread and onions’ refers to subsistence, implying ‘sb’s satisfaction with bare essentials’. It corresponds to the English unit *bread and cheese* and is used for a person who opts for a modest lifestyle away from material possessions, cherishing spiritual values such as freedom and independence.

The saying *si vende/va come il pane* ‘It sells like bread’ stresses that an item is very desirable and in great demand and corresponds to English *to go/sell like hot-cakes*, and Slovenian *gre za med* ‘It goes for honey’ where honey is used instead of bread.

A proverb worth pointing out is *Sa di sal lo pane altrui* ‘Other people’s bread is hard to digest’ coined under the influence of Dante Alighieri (Paradise XVII 59), meaning ‘life financed by someone else is hard’. It is interesting that otherwise not listed in any of the consulted dictionaries was found in the corpus. We came across it when we inserted some of the keywords in search for the proverb *Il pane altrui è duro a digerire* ‘You shall find out how salt is the taste of another man’s bread’.

5. Discussion

The investigation of etymological origins reveals that despite the same Proto-Indo-European ancestry, the three languages, nonetheless, undertook some distinctive courses of their own. While the origins of the Italian and English word can be found in Indo-European roots **pā* and **bhreg-/bhreu* respectively, in Slovenian the last step from Proto-Slavic to Proto-Indo-European is missing, which means that the original root of the Slovenian word for *kruh* is unknown and left to speculation. Overall, despite stemming from different Proto-Indo-European roots, the word in its broadest sense refers to the semantic field of nourishment, and more widely to maintenance across all three languages. A more detailed analysis, however, shows that the Slovenian and English words share some affinities regarding the physical properties of bread (piece, crumb), which was also demonstrated by Simpson and Weiner (1989) and Snoj (2016), while the Italian word is etymologically more linked to the action of feeding (Pianigiani 1937).

Regarding the similarities and differences in the meanings of the word *bread* we found that the dictionaries share the majority of the same connotative and denotative nuances. However, phraseological units show a different picture; only a small part of them match, with the Bible and common European heritage being their source. The former proved to be a very powerful vehicle for new linguistic formations as it vastly influenced the cultural, linguistic, and moral development of Western society, shaping the mentality of the people, and taking on the role of a moral guide (Mieder 2010; Pinnavaia 2015). Particularly the 1611 *King James Version of the Bible* exerted an unprecedented influence on the formation of the English language, by adding to the existing vocabulary in the form of numerous words, idioms, metaphors, proverbs, and sayings (Kang 2013). By analogy, a similar influence is detected in Slovenian and Italian. Just as the Bible shaped our narratives and values, prominent public figures exert(ed) a similar influence. Our study shows that names like Dante Alighieri, and Jonathan Swift helped certain units to gain traction. Other such examples are found in Shakespeare; first used by him many of the units later became the world's linguistic heritage (Shtoltzel 2018). Looking for more recent examples one could easily find them among well-established orators such as politicians, religious leaders, etc. (e.g. Pope Francis, John F. Kennedy) (Konstantinova 2021).

Thus, it needs to be stressed that shared phraseological units do not necessarily apply to the same context. For example, in Slovenian, the phrase *white bread* symbolizes abundance and well-being, while brown bread symbolizes ordinariness, poverty, and hard times (Keber 2011). Similarly, in Italian white bread was regarded as a symbol of wealth though no such units as in Slovenian were generated. Likewise, in English, no unit would specifically emphasize white bread as such, though there is an adjective *white-bread* that implies a contempt for the values of the white middle class (Free Dictionary, n.d.).

Before answering the question of the frequency of phraseological units, we need to clarify that comprehensive compilations might fail to reflect reality. As an example, a notable discrepancy was observed between the number of entries in Lapucci's *Dictionary of Italian proverbs* (2007) and the number of units found in corpora. Nonetheless, caution needs to be applied. Namely, the absence of a unit in corpora does not necessarily mean that it is not used in a language; likewise, an occurrence does not mean that the proverb is commonly used – what frequency rate indicates is simply that a particular phraseological unit is alive and to some extent also used (Lambertini 2022).

All in all, frequency analysis of the language corpora indicates that the Slovenian language outperforms the other two in the overall use of phraseological units and in particular in the use of proverbs, which we speculate might be connected to specific socio-political circumstances. Namely, being under foreign rulers from 788 when Carinthia, the first Slovenian state, was annexed into the Frankish Empire, and up to 1991, the year when Slovenia declared its independence, might have impacted the development of a rich oral tradition due to the fact that Slovenian people were mostly peasant people. Ultimately, it can be hypothesized that the legacy of such modest circumstances marked by extensive periods of poverty when Slovenian man relied on bread as their staple food and an everyday central aspect yielded a wealth of proverbs. This recognition aligns with Kržišnik (2008) who claims that the language reflects a nation's cultural, religious, and intellectual property which is always defined within unique historical and geographical contexts. Similarly, Markova et al. (2022: 1004) claim there is a close connection between grain as a Slavic staple food and its representation in phraseological units. This also resonates with Wierzbicka (1997), who demonstrates that every language has its key concepts expressed in key words that reflect the core values of the culture in question. Additionally, it aligns with Sperber (1965) who highlights that abundantly represented semantic fields of universal status tend to function as radiating and absorbing centers and thus strengthen the interplay of linguistic and cultural elements.

Furthermore, it cannot be empirically proven that the proverbs related to bread are getting out of everyday use, yet corpora analysis leads us to hypothesize that many of them are becoming outdated due to different times and value systems. Such an observation was also proposed by Markova et al. (2022: 1001) who saw bread-related phraseological units as part of the older generations' vocabulary for whom the bread was a value setting the norm for food security. Nonetheless, even in this technologically sophisticated era people still need to embrace their observations, experiences, and wisdom into concise paremiological units and pass them on. Thus, new proverbs, sayings, and phrases are coined that are more in touch with the current state of affairs, or the older ones are modified to reflect a new state of the art (Mieder 2010). An example of this would be the once well-established proverb *Nima za kruh* 'he doesn't have for bread', which is being replaced with *Nima za burek*, with the meaning being retained, 'not having the money to provide for the

necessities' with a touch of negativity added to the present form. The word *burek* (oriental puff pastry with filling) entered the Slovenian vocabulary in the 20th century when Slovenia was part of the Republic of Yugoslavia, thus under strong Serbo–Croatian influence (Snoj 2016). When Balkan migrants for whom *burek* was one of the staples brought it into Slovenia, the dish as well as the word fell on fertile ground and gained traction. It would also be worth investigating if there is any connection between the before–mentioned negativity and the fact that the vast majority of the migrants were engaged in poorly paid manual labor. This, however, calls for another future socio–linguistic investigation.

While a similar example of rewording of a unit was not found either in the Italian or in the English language this does not exclude the premise that it might be documented in different corpora or be used among the people. Even more, it is quite conceivable that it might come into existence once bread gains its former status. The fact is that phraseological units are living entities and constantly detect and reflect the conditions and state of affairs. To set an example, by analogy from *Make peace, not war* a unit reflecting contemporary socio–political climate was coined *Build bridges, not walls*. The phrase was first used by Pope Francis calling for a more peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive world. It soon gained traction and became widely used (e.g. the title of Tot Miller's book *Build Bridges, Not Walls: A Journey to a World Without Borders* (2021), UNESCO's report *Building bridges, not walls* (2019) etc.) Sometimes, however, other motifs influence the re–wording of the existing unit. For example, once the well–established unit *Home is where the heart is* becomes *Home is where the computer is* to ironically emphasize our over–reliance on modern technological devices as well as the re–establishment of norms and values (Mieder 2010).

Finally, numerous cognitive ideals associated with bread are found in phraseological units, touching upon a plethora of situations and meanings such as (1) essential nourishment linked to one's physical and spiritual well–being, (2) work and employment, (3) altruistic as well as covetous qualities of a man, (4) the essentials, (5) making gain, (6) laziness, (7) diversity, (8) respect, (9) fate and (10) other individually represented semantic fields. Our findings are in accordance with the previous studies (Savin 2012; Pinnavaia 2015; Kac 2018; Jakop 2022; Markova et al. 2022) yet we confirmed the existence of an even more diverse classification.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, having conducted a holistic analysis of the units with an eye on understanding the sociological, cultural, economic, and political aspects that shaped the languages, we prove that English, Italian, and Slovenian do share a common cultural heritage, and a similar socio–political development built on bread as a staple food and a crucial element in the existence of our civilization. Hence, the overlapping of cognitive–ideals. Nonetheless, there are some distinctive features

attributed to each of the languages, which point to individual socio–linguistic developments of the three nations and their corresponding cultures and languages. The wealth of proverbs in Slovenian might infer a strong national connection to bread existing to this day and age, while no such indication could be drawn from either Italian or English. This, however, does not allow for generalization of the results. Provided other keywords were chosen in these three languages, different results might be obtained. Be it one way or the other, it has been proven once again that languages, particularly phraseological units, are not only the recorders of culture but also its most obvious promoters.

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Kako Englezi, Talijani i Slovenci lome kruh: frazeološke jedinice s riječju kruh u tri jezika i kulture

U radu je prikazano kontrastivno-komparativno istraživanje engleskih, talijanskih i slovenskih frazeoloških jedinica s riječju *kruh*. Prvo se razmatra etimološko podrijetlo, a zatim se istražuju sličnosti i razlike u značenju riječi *kruh* i frazeoloških jedinica u kojima se pojavljuje. Dodatno se ispituju zajedničke i jezično osobite frazeološke jedinice, njihova učestalost i intrinzični kognitivni ideali. Rezultati otkrivaju da tri jezika dijele isto proto-indoeuropsko podrijetlo i osjećajni anakronizam. Ipak, različite kulturne, povijesne, političke i društvene tradicije stvorile su različite frazeološke jedinice u svakom od ta tri jezika. Slovenski ima daleko najveći broj frazeoloških jedinica i poslovice u uporabi, dok engleski i talijanski odražavaju velik utjecaj Biblije. Talijanski jezik također pokazuje bliske veze s rimskim naslijeđem. Iako se naizgled čini da se poslovice rabe sve manje, primjeri promjena koje ih dovode u dodir s današnjim vremenom i dalje pokazuju njihovu važnost. Naposljetku, kanonska književna djela utječu na pojavu i uporabu frazeoloških jedinica.

Ključne riječi: kruh (etimologija), frazeologija, poslovice, engleski jezik, talijanski jezik, slovenski jezik
Key words: bread (etymology), phraseology, proverbs, English, Italian, Slovenian