

Research Article

Exploration of English Idioms about Fruit and the Frequent Usage in Different Language Culture

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Abstract: English idioms are commonly found in the oral and written English, which are quite vivid, concise and carried with a large amount of information. It makes up the major part of English language. In English idioms, fruit ones are a unique expression, which are widely accepted and applied in the daily life of English-speaking countries and carried with heavy cultural connotations. This study made an exploration of the historical origins of English idioms about fruit based on Greek mythology and Bible of Christianity. Besides, it made a detailed analysis of their frequent usage from the perspective of daily life. With the deeper understanding of culture of English-speaking countries, there will be gradually enhanced skills of interpersonal communication between different cultures.

Keywords: English idiom, frequent usage, fruit

INTRODUCTION

English idioms are the essence of language of western English-speaking nations. They are often found in the form of phrases and short sentences distilled from complex sentences during the long social practices (Xue, 2013). Idioms are composed of the richest contents in the simplest form, which are quite vivid, active and full of vitality.

Liu (2014) raised in his study that idioms were the essence of language culture, which were phrases in a concise form and carried with pointed connotation and cultural information applied by language users over a long period of time, including idiom, proverb, motto, slang and two-part allegorical saying (Liu, 2014). Qin and Xie (2014) showed that there were three obvious features in English idioms: an integrated language, a fixed structure and irreplaceability. To be specific, idioms cannot be segmented. In phrases or short sentences made up of idioms, every word within cannot be replaced and the order is fixed as well. Any change about diction and collocation will leave damage to the very idiom, or even lead it to be pointless (Qin and Xie, 2014).

This study made an exploration and analysis of historical origins and frequent usage of idioms about fruit based on Greek mythology, Bible of Christianity and the routine lives of English and American nations.

IDIOMS ABOUT FRUIT IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Apple of discord or golden apple (any subject of disagreement and contention, the root of trouble): There are some records in Greek mythology. In the

feast for all gods held by Zeus, Eris (goddess of discord-who had not been invited) left a golden apple when leaving this feast with the inscription "For the fairest". Hera and Athena and Aphrodite all claimed it and they had no choice but to ask Zeus to solve this conflict finally. However, Zeus made Paris (prince of Troy) the judgment. In order to acquire this golden apple, all three goddess stood before Paris in private and promised him some benefits. Hera promised him power and riches, Athena glory and renown in war and Aphrodite the fairest of women for this wife, each attempting to bias his decision in her own flavor. Paris decided in favor of Aphrodite (goddess of lover and beauty) and gave her the golden apple, thus making the two other goddesses his enemies. Later Paris, aided by Aphrodite, persuaded the fairest woman Helen to elope with him, whence arose the famous Trojan War (Wang, 2014).

Mercury fig (the first achievement): Mercury is the courier for all gods in Roman mythology and he is called Hermes in Greek mythology. He is the business god with several identities so there are many businessmen respecting him as their patron saint. It was said that in order to express thanks for the help from Mercury, Greek and Roman businessmen sent him the first ripe fruits from fig trees (Xie, 2012). At present, "Mercury fig" is applied to express the first achievement.

IDIOMS ABOUT FRUIT IN BIBLE OF CHRISTIANITY

Apple is a common word in Bible. "Adam's apple" (laryngeal prominence) (Dong, 2013) is derived from

the first man and woman in western culture, namely Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden fruit apple in the Garden of Eden. According to first chapter Genesis of Bible, God fashioned Adam and Eve by dust and placed them to live in the Garden of Eden. Eve was tricked by the serpent into disobeying the order of God and eating the forbidden fruit, namely the apple. Later Eve tricked her companion Adam to eat apple and he also disobeyed the order of God. Adam heard that God was looking for them in the Garden when he was eating the apple in a hurry. Thus a piece of forbidden fruit was embedded into his throat by accident and a bump was left, which turned the laryngeal prominence and was the evidence of eating forbidden fruit.

The idiom “The apple of one's eye” enjoys no point in literal meaning. It is recorded in the Deuteronomy of Old Testament. Under the arrangement of God, Moses left his father-in-law with his family for Egypt and conveyed the order of God to people around Israel, namely leaving Egypt. Thus God was protecting him from any injury along the way to Egypt. “Apple of one's eye” in sentence” He found him on a desert land. And on the waste land, a howling wilderness, he enriched him, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.” means someone's favorite or beloved thing or person. Eyes are precious parts of human beings and the pupil of eyes is shaped like an apple. Thus this phrase is extended in meaning as the beloved thing or person nowadays (Huang, 2013).

The idiom “Apple of Sodom” means something that is not worth its value, which can also be expressed as “Dead Sea apple”. This idiom comes from “Genesis of Old Testament” (Zhang, 2010). It is recorded that there was a Sodom city near Dead Sea in ancient times. Citizens in Sodom all committed too many crimes, thus the God brought a big fire to burn it down. Finally, there was an apple tree grew from the dust and the apples on the tree were rather attractive. But they turned into ashes once picking by hand. Thus “Apple of Sodom” is applied as the metaphor for something that is not worth its value and far from substantial.

IDIOMS ABOUT FRUIT IN DAILY LIFE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING NATIONS

Apple pie is an ornament with specific American characteristics, while the literal translation of “Apple pie order” has no relations with diet. This idiom means that everything is arranged in perfect order. It was said that the immigrants from European to America enjoyed a rather poor life. The housewives would make seven pies every Sunday and then put every pie in every lattice of stand, while every lattice represented the food every day. Those capable housewives could always keep everything in good order (Wu, 2014). Therefore, this phrase today is no more concerning food. It is often applied with collocation of a preposition “in”, such as

“Like a good secretary, she kept the boss's desk in apple pie order”.

From the content as stated above, it is shown the love of Americans for apple. However, “Apple polisher” is a derogatory term, which comes from the school language in US. Students usually place an apple on the platform when attending class. As to those students with a poor performance, they will rub and polish the apple to give a bright shine and then place it in a prominent location. Students hope that such a gift may make teachers shut their eyes to their poor work and give him a good mark. At present, this phrase is also applied to refer those playing up to their leaders on purpose, which is close to the “kiss-ass” in Chinese (Yu, 2012). This phrase “apple polisher” gradually turns into “kiss-ass” or “lackeys and hangers” in daily life. Its verb form is “polish the apple”.

There are some other idioms about apple, for example, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” (Guo and Sun, 2014). Besides, a nickname for New York is “Big apple”. It is said that although there are apples from New York, the output is much less than that of California in the west bank. One year, there was an apple failure in California but a bumper harvest in New York. Therefore, apples from New York rescued the California from the plight of apple for export sales, which made citizens in New York feel very proud. New York acquired the nickname of “Big Apple” hereafter.

In the idiom “As like as an apple to oyster”, apple and oyster are two radically different objects. There is nothing in common between the two objects. There are a lot of words which can take place of oyster, such as orange so that this idiom can be expressed as “as like as an apple to orange”. There is nothing in common between apple and orange as well. Orange can also be squeezed into juice. Thus “squeeze the orange” can be taken to express taking full advantage of all merits or claiming profits from one person or thing. This idiom can thus serve as a metaphor for those who have been utilized to the fullest extent and are good for nothing yet (Shi, 2013).

Rotten apple can refer to a scoundrel or a black sheep. One sentence is derived from this phrase “The rotten apple injures its neighbors”.

“From the egg to the apple” means from head to toe or from beginning to end. In west, some people usually take an egg before meals and apple is served as the fruit after meals. Therefore, the diet of English-speaking countries can also be found in idioms. “Throw away the apple because of the core” is extended in meaning as stopping eating for fear of choking or being put off easily by a slight risk.

“Sour grapes” refers to pretending to look down upon those objects out of reach. In Chinese, “it is just sour grapes” is a common saying as well. This idiom comes from a well-known story. One hungry fox was hanging around in a vineyard. It started drooling when

seeing so many clusters of grapes over its head. This poor fox made it best to jump but still failed to reach the grapes. Finally, it was so exhausted and left alone angrily, murmuring” Humph! Who wants to eat such grapes, as sour as green lemons?”

“Banana” in English idioms refers to comedians (He, 2011). “Second banana” refers to the subordinate comedian; “top banana” refers to the protagonist or famous stars; “big banana” refers to boss, or the aquiline nose. There are a number of English idioms derived from the word Banana; such as “Go bananas” refers to that someone goes mad, exciting and crazy suddenly. It is said that monkeys are likely to turn rather exciting in the face of bananas and jump up and down. Therefore, in sentence” I will go bananas if you don't stop”, “go bananas” here equals to crazy and nuts.

Idiom of “Banana Republic” is a political proper noun, which refers to a country which confers no rights to people and possesses a government in a turmoil situation. This country depends on the interruptions of foreign power and a single cash drop (Zheng, 2002). This idiom comes from the railway entrepreneur.

Henry Meiggs in US, who built a railway between US and Costa Rica in 1871.

This railway transported bananas from Central America to the US, while there were no bananas before in US. In 1904, the American writer O Henry first applied the word” banana republic” in his own works, so as to refer to those countries in Central America under control of the US.

Lemon is such a sour fruit that there are no other fruits sourer than it. However, as an idiom, it refers to something in a poor quality. Americans usually call the car in poor quality as the “sour lemon”.

There are some idioms about cherry, such as “Make two bites at a cherry” refers to undertake a task by stages and in batches. “A bowl of cherries” refers to wonderful and fabulous objects. “Life isn't always a bowl of cherries” refers to that life is not so beautiful as always.

“Play gooseberry” refers to a third person joining a couple in social context (Qian, 2013). In the early stage of English and American countries, the young females were usually accompanied by adult females in social activities. However, these adult females were too responsible even when the young were dating with their couples, they would find different excuses to stay together with them. For example, they would pick the gooseberry where the date took place. They were just similar to the third wheel.

“A plum job” refers to the most desired and the very best job. In 18th century, one thousand dollars was a great sum of money, while plum was the nickname of a thousand dollars. If the salary for one job was one thousand dollars, this job was a rather good job and a plum job then. Therefore, this idiom is applied to refer

to the most ideal job in western countries in modern times.

The idiom “peaches and cream” is carried with no points in literal form. In the US, fruits are usually cut into cubes, or taken together with cheese or cream. Thus if we both have peaches and cream, everything will be perfect and fine. In some cases, peach refers to the beauty or the best one in objects of the same kind. However, in Chinese, there are lots of words about fruit describing the beautiful girls, such as apple face and cheery mouth literally.

CONCLUSION

Language is an expression and carrier of one national culture, a necessary part in the development of culture, as well as an important expression of cultural existence. It is safe to say that there is no expression of culture without language. Idioms in different types and different culture connotations represent the wisdom of human beings (Zhao, 2014). It is hard to be skilled in applying English idioms. It is shown in all examples as stated above that in English idioms about fruit; basically all these fruits are carried with radically different meaning from their literal one. Of course, in addition to fruits, there are some other kinds of objects enjoying a different meaning from the literal one, when applied in idioms. Owing to some limitation, they failed to be mentioned in this study. Besides, this study shows an obvious cultural difference between the Chinese and Western countries. These idioms cannot simply be explained in literal meaning. They can only be applied accurately with some understanding of their cultural background and social customs. Only when obstacles between different cultures are removed, can we achieve an accurate and skilled application of idioms.

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