

TASTE SENSATIONAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE GEORGIAN LANGUAGE: A LINGUACULTURAL ANALYSES

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ABSTRACT: *The article focuses on the linguoculturological analysis of Georgian idioms denoting gustatory sensations. The aim of the study is to explore how culinary terminology extends into metaphorical usage and reflects the worldview and cultural values of the Georgian people. The research examines core lexemes such as gemrieli ('tasty'), mariliani ('salty'), mzhave ('sour'), mts'utkhe ('over-salted'), mts'are ('bitter'), and tkbili ('sweet'), which acquire both literal and figurative meanings in idiomatic expressions. The analysis considers semantic diversity, regional variations, and ethnographic data, offering a comprehensive view of the linguistic and cultural contexts. The findings demonstrate that gustatory metaphors play a significant role in describing personal traits, emotional states, and social interactions, thereby contributing to the formation and preservation of national identity.*

Keywords: *idioms; gustatory sensations; linguacultural; metaphor; national identity.*

Introduction

Language, as a mirror of culture, reflects the worldview, values, and lived experiences of a nation. Idioms, with their artistic and expressive nature, play a particularly important role in this process. They not only enrich the lexicon but also offer insights into the deeper layers of a people's mentality.

As the Georgian linguist and academician Arnold Chikobava has noted, „*Idioms are the most distinctive component of a language's lexical stock, encapsulating the history, culture, and worldview of a nation*“.¹

This study focuses on idiomatic expressions related to taste and food—herein referred to as „**gastro-idioms**“. An analysis of collected material reveals that Georgian speech contains expressions which can be grouped into several categories:

- those describing the acts of eating (*ts'k'ua ts'ama* – „to eat one’s mind,“ *ch'iri moch'ama* – „to eat trouble“) or drinking (*sit'q'va gadak'vlapa* – „to swallow a word,“ *ts'ivi ts'q'ali dalie* – „drink cold water“);
- those referring directly to food (*enat'ap'liani* – „tongue-sweetened,“ *ts'q'alsi ch'aq'ara shroma* – „throw one’s work into water,“ *ghomi arasdros uch'amia* – „he has never eaten ghomi“);
- those involving gustatory adjectives (*t'kbili* – „sweet,“ *mts'are* – „bitter,“ *mzhave* – „sour,“ *mariliani* – „salty“);
- and those related to utensils (*ts'urchi zis* – „to sit in a pot,“ *jamshi tavi ch'aq'o* – „to bury one’s head in a bowl“).

Exploring these expressions offers an illuminating perspective on the ways in which taste and food imagery permeate Georgian idioms, reflecting not only material culture but also social attitudes, emotional states, and intellectual attributes. Although such expressions have diverse origins and timeframes—some surviving only in literary works and others absent from dictionaries—they collectively demonstrate the intricate interplay between linguistic creativity and cultural heritage.

In this paper, we focus specifically on gastro-idioms associated with **gustatory sensations**—particularly expressions containing the words *gemrieli* (“tasty”), *mariliani* (“salty”), *mzhave* (“sour”), *mts'utkhe* (“over-salted”), *mts'are* (“bitter”), and *t'kbili* (“sweet”). salted“), *mts'are* (“bitter“), and *t'kbili* (“sweet“).

1. ***Gemrieli* (“Tasty“) and *Mariliani* (“Salty“): Carriers of Positive Connotations**

In Georgian idiomatic usage, the adjectives *gemrieli* (“tasty“) and *mariliani* (“salty“) often extend beyond their literal gastronomic meaning to describe human qualities, states, or actions. Their metaphorical application highlights positive attributes, pleasure, and satisfaction.

For example:

- „**Gemrieli dzili**“ (“**tasty sleep**“) — This idiom refers to deep, comfortable, and satisfying sleep. Here, *gemrieli* is used metaphorically to evoke the pleasure and restorative quality of good rest. The metaphor reflects Georgian cultural attitudes toward sleep as an essential and enjoyable part of life.
- „**Gemrieli sic'ili**“ (“**tasty laughter**“) — This expression describes genuine, hearty, and pleasant laughter. *Gemrieli* conveys both intensity and enjoyment, underscoring the value Georgian culture places on open expression of emotion and the sharing of joy.
- „**Gemrielad ts'ama**“ (“**to eat tastily**“) — In this idiom, *gemrielad* functions as an adverb, referring not only to the pleasant taste of food but also to the enjoyment and satisfaction derived from the act of eating. The expression reflects the strong connection between Georgian culture, cuisine, and table traditions.

- **„Gemrieli musaifi“ (“tasty conversation“)** — Used to describe a pleasant, engaging, and interesting conversation, this metaphor connects the sensory enjoyment of taste with intellectual and emotional fulfillment, emphasizing the cultural value placed on communication and social interaction.
- **„Gemrieli ambavi“ (“tasty story“)** — Refers to an engaging and intriguing narrative or piece of news. Here, *gemrieli* denotes the appeal and desirability of the information, reflecting the narrative traditions and the significance of storytelling in Georgian culture.

The adjective *mariliani* (“salty“) also carries rich metaphorical potential in idiomatic expressions:

- **„Marili moaq’ara“ (“to add salt“)** — The saying *„madli hk’eni da marili moaq’are“* (“do a kindness and add salt“) refers to completing a good deed in a way that preserves or enhances its value, just as salt preserves food and intensifies its flavor. The idiom suggests that good actions should be brought to their optimal conclusion — neither exceeding nor falling short of what is needed.
- **„Umarilo khumroba“ (“unsalted joke“)** — Describes a dull, unfunny joke. Similarly, *umarilo k’atsi* (“unsalted person“) characterizes someone lacking charm or wit. These idioms highlight salt’s metaphorical role as an enhancer — in this case, of intellect or humor.
- **„Mariliani k’atsi“ (“salty man“)** / **„madliani adamiani“ (“gracious person“)** — These expressions denote someone pleasant, attractive, and helpful. The positive connotation parallels salt’s function as an enhancer of taste, transferring this quality to human personality traits.

Ethnographic data collected by the Institute of Kartvelian Dialectology record various traditional uses of salt as a symbolic medium. For example, during a newborn’s first bath, salt is sprinkled into the water in the shape of a cross, accompanied by the saying *„mariliani k’atsi dgeb“* (“he will become a salty man“), meaning a good, worthy person.

- **„Mariliani sit’q’va“ (“salty word“)** — Refers to a witty, intelligent remark, with salt here symbolizing mental sharpness and wisdom.
- **„Marilze tsaivana“ (“to lead [someone] to the salt“)** — Means to deceive or trick someone. This metaphor may originate from the practice of luring animals with salt, later extended to human interactions.
- **„Marilze gavida“ (“to go to the salt“)** — An idiom meaning to die, illustrating the diverse metaphorical associations of salt in Georgian.
- **„Marilis pasad“ (“for the price of salt“)** — Means „very cheaply,“ rooted in historical periods when salt was inexpensive and widely available.
- **„Marili ar ak’lia“ (“he does not lack salt“)** — Used to describe a clever or intelligent person, once again linking salt to wisdom and good judgment.

As Professor Aleksandre Glonti observes, *„Gemrieli and mariliani, as epithets, frequently transcend their direct meaning and acquire metaphorical load, reflecting the Georgian people’s fundamentally positive attitude toward life”*¹.

2. Sour and Astringent: Ambivalent Semantics

The terms „sour“ and „astringent“ in Georgian phraseology frequently carry ambivalent meanings:

- „*Sour smile*“ – an ironic or forced smile. A sour taste often causes the face to pucker; similarly, a „*sour smile*“ reflects this reaction – a smile that seems compelled and unpleasant. Metaphorically, the sharpness of the sour taste on the tongue can correspond to the intensity or acuteness of a situation or feeling.
- „*Astringent word*“ – a bitter word. The astringent taste is closely related to bitterness. An „*astringent word*“ reflects the word’s harshness, its potential to hurt or discomfort the listener.

Linguist Tamaz Gamkrelidze notes:

“‘Sour’ and ‘astringent’ migrate from gustatory sensations to the psycho-emotional domain, indicating the rich metaphorical potential of the Georgian language“.¹

3. Salty/Sharp (Mtchunt’e): A Lexeme with Negative Connotation

Mtchunt’e – excessively salty, overly sharp. Examples from Georgian usage include:

- “A *mtchunt’e* woman is one who scolds you over the smallest things.”
 - “I cannot bear *mtchunt’e* words, what can I do?”
 - “He scolded me so *mtchunt’e* that I don’t know what to do.”²
- In Georgian phraseology, *mtchunt’e* predominantly appears in negative contexts:
- “*Mtchunt’e life*“ – a difficult, harsh life.

Academician Giorgi Akhvlediani writes in his work *Historical-Etymological Dictionary of the Georgian Language*:

“As a lexeme, *mtchunt’e* reflects the Georgian people’s perception of hardship and severity through the prism of gustatory experience“.³

4. Bitter and Sweet: An Oppositional Pair

The terms „bitter“ and „sweet“ frequently appear in Georgian phraseology as an oppositional pair.

- „**Bitter truth**“ – This phrase denotes a painful but necessary truth. Here, „bitter“ expresses the unpleasant yet essential nature of truth. Metaphorically, it reflects the Georgian cultural attitude toward truth: although it may cause discomfort, it remains valuable and indispensable.
- „**Bitter fate**“ – This expression refers to a harsh or unfortunate destiny or life. „Bitter“ serves as a symbol of suffering and adversity. The phrase exemplifies the philosophical

1 Gamkrelidze, 2005: 92.

2 Javakhuri Dictionary / Giorgi Zedginidze; Tbilisi, 2014.

3 Akhvlediani, 1973:203.

approach of Georgian culture toward life's challenges, perceiving hardships as an inseparable part of fate.

- **„Bitter tears“** – This phrase describes crying caused by intense sorrow. „*Bitter*“ is associated with profound emotional pain, showing how gustatory sensations are metaphorically linked to emotional experience in Georgian culture.
- **„Bitter experience“** – This denotes a painful but beneficial experience. Here, „*bitter*“ conveys the unpleasant yet valuable character of the experience. It reflects the Georgian belief that difficulties can strengthen and educate a person.
- **„Bitter word“** – Refers to a harsh, offensive, or critical statement. „*Bitter*“ functions as a metaphor for the painful impact of words, highlighting their power to affect a listener's emotional state.
- **„Laughs bitterly“** – This expression describes ironic or sarcastic laughter. „*Bitterly*“ conveys the unpleasant and insincere nature of the laughter, illustrating the Georgian language's ability to express complex emotions, where an action expressing joy can simultaneously reflect negative feelings.

Professor Zurab Chumburidze observes:

“‘Bitter’ and ‘sweet’ in Georgian phraseology reflect two poles of life experience, closely linked to the dualistic nature of Georgian philosophical thought.”¹

- **„Sweet word“** – This phrase denotes a pleasant, benevolent, or comforting statement. „*Sweet*“ conveys the positive and pleasurable effect of speech on the listener. The metaphor reflects Georgian cultural attitudes toward communication, emphasizing the power of words to influence emotional states.
- **„Sweet sleep“** – Refers to a peaceful, comfortable, and enjoyable sleep. „*Sweet*“ functions as a metaphor for the quality of sleep and the pleasure derived from it. The phrase illustrates the cultural value placed on sleep as a pleasurable and necessary process.
- **„Sweet dream“** – Used to describe desirable, pleasant thoughts or imagined futures. „*Sweet*“ is associated with pleasure and positive emotions, demonstrating the metaphorical link between gustatory experience and abstract concepts in Georgian culture.
- **„Sweet memory“** – Refers to a pleasant or nostalgic recollection. „*Sweet*“ conveys the positive nature of the memory, reflecting the emotional aspect of remembrance in Georgian culture.
- **„Sweet lie“** – This phrase denotes a pleasant falsehood or a lie told to comfort or please someone. „*Sweet*“ serves as a metaphor for the apparent benefit of the untruth, highlighting the ethical tension between truth and benevolent intent in Georgian culture.
- **„Sweet fruit“** – While sometimes literal, this phrase often metaphorically denotes something desirable, enjoyable, or beneficial. It may refer to the fruits of labor or success: „*He worked hard to have his own roof, and in the end, he enjoys the sweet fruit.*“ As noted by the poet David Guramishvili: „*The root of learning is bitter, but the top becomes sweet.*“ The phrase reflects the Georgian cultural idea that effort and perseverance yield pleasurable results.
- **„Speaks sweetly“** – Describes someone who speaks pleasantly, politely, or persuasively. „*Sweetly*“ conveys a manner of speech attractive to the listener, reflecting the importance of communication and effective verbal skills in Georgian culture.

CONCLUSION

Gustatory-related phraseology in the Georgian language constitutes a rich corpus for linguocultural research. These expressions not only enrich the expressive means of the language but also provide insight into the worldview of the Georgian people. They demonstrate how culinary concepts are metaphorically transferred to various domains, including personal traits, social interactions, and intellectual abilities.

As linguist Tamaz Gamkrelidze notes:

*“Language is a code in which the cultural memory of a nation is encrypted. Phraseological units are the most informative elements of this code“.*¹

Further study of this phenomenon will allow a deeper understanding of the role of Georgian phraseology in the formation and preservation of national identity.

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1 ⁷Gamkrelidze, 1998:45.