

# The Syntactic Formulas Used in Food and Eating Proverbs in Jordanian Arabic: A Linguistic Analysis

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**Abstract**—The present study focuses on studying colloquial Jordanian proverbs and sayings, particularly food and saying proverbs. It employs a descriptive research design to examine the syntactic aspects of those proverbs and sayings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the data from the informants. The current study came up with a set of conclusions. Proverbs related to food and eating are similar to other kinds of proverbs regarding the utilization of syntactic aspects. Furthermore, it appears that these proverbs are limited to specific syntactic structures, namely, imperative, interrogative and verbless clauses in terms of their syntactic structures. To be more accurate, the verbless clause is the most 51 prominent structure (11 proverbs), then the imperative form (8 proverbs) and the interrogative (5 proverbs) one respectively.

**Index Terms**—proverb, syntactic formulas, saying, colloquial proverbs

## I. INTRODUCTION

The proverb is a brief, memorable traditional saying or statement that expresses a general truth or advice about life (Winick, 2003). They are, in fact, short statements that do not consist of long parts; they cannot be a paragraph. Due to their brevity; they can be memorable. Proverbs express a general truth about our life. Their usages in our life provide us with a pearl of wisdom about a certain issue. In addition to that, people use proverbs to deal with general issues, for instance, they use them to deliver their long messages with short utterances.

Proverbs are so popular due to their nature and role; this suggests that there are a lot of topics covered by proverbs. Based on the researcher's observation, proverbs cover a wide range of themes associated with human beings and their social roles in communities. It is safe to say that proverbs discuss issues ranging from the most trivial to the most complicated.

Regarding the Arabic language, some studies examine proverbs from different dialects, and they show that Arabic proverbs are identical in the case of the messages delivered; most, if not all, Arabic proverbs share similar topics, views and attitudes. Such a situation stems from the fact that all dialects have mutual cultural, social and religious backgrounds.

Regarding their formal properties, they are fixed utterances i.e. none of their parts can be omitted or replaced. In other words, if there is any change in their content or form, they are no longer proverbs. According to Norrick (1985), proverbs have a fixed form. There was a consensus among some scholars (see, for example, Russo, 1983 and Abrahams, 1968) that proverbs are to be complete sentences. In fact, such a claim cannot be generalized. For instance, there are many incomplete-sentence proverbs in terms of formality such as *like father like son*.

The popularity of acceptance of proverbs among people is a reason to show their important role in language and culture. They are generally in most spheres of social life, if not at all. It is safe to say that proverbs constitute part and

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parcel of languages whether in verbal or written forms. Such a position is not restricted to specific groups of people featured with certain characteristics such as educational, social, financial or regional backgrounds.

This study is significant to the domain of linguistics as it extended the knowledge base that currently exists in the field. However, the specific significance of the study stems from several factors. First of all, it deals with a new category of proverbs that is related to the food and eating theme. Such a topic has not been investigated by other researchers from the perspective of their syntactic patterns. Therefore, the researchers select the proverbs related to food and eating as they have not been investigated comprehensively. There was only one study conducted by Faycel (2012) in which he listed proverbs in Tunisian societies. The researcher classified them and clarified their metaphorical meaning. In this study, the researchers investigate proverbs of food and eating used in Jordanian society with regard to their syntactic aspects.

As aforementioned, there are very few studies conducted on food proverbs. To be more precise, there are no previous studies on Jordanian proverbs containing reference to food and eating in terms of their syntactic aspects. They, in fact, had received little attention from researchers. Consequently, the current study is intended to study Jordanian food proverbs and sayings in terms of their syntactic formulas. To conclude, the overarching purpose of conducting this study is to analyze the syntactic patterns of Jordanian proverbs related to food and eating.

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Taking into consideration the previous problems related to the study of proverbs with reference to food and eating, this study is hoped to lead to a great understanding of the topic since it is conducted on the Arabic-speaking community, namely, Jordanian society. It also intends to examine food proverbs from their structural aspects. The researchers attempt to prove that food proverbs are systematic and rule-governed due to the existence of syntactic patterns.

## III. RELATED STUDIES

Proverbs, in fact, have been the interest of many researchers. Those researchers (see, for example, Migdadi & Bader, 2015, Almomani & Al-Ajlouny, 2015) attempted to examine and investigate them from different perspectives. They attempted to investigate their linguistic features such as their stylistic and syntactic aspects. Others attempted to investigate their content (see, for example, Migdadi & Bader, 2015, Almomani & Al-Ajlouny, 2015). Giang (2013) conducted a study to analyze the general syntactic, semantic and cultural properties of marriage proverbs. The study showed that marriage proverbs in English and Vietnamese languages are expressed in sentences or phrases. Regarding the sentence-type proverbs, English proverbs take the form of simple sentences. On the other hand, Vietnamese language prefers the use of compound sentence. Regarding phrasal proverbs, English proverbs are mainly noun phrases, on the contrary, Vietnamese takes mainly the form of both noun and verb phrases. The study also showed that marriage proverbs in both languages employ similar stylistic devices such as simile, metaphor and hyperbole.

Proverbs are structurally systematic in the sense that they have two basic constituents, a topic and a comment. According to that, proverbs are binary in nature at the deep level. Moreover, their duality can also be seen in their content. Dundes and Bronner (2007) stated that the majority of proverbs are oppositional or contrastive in which either the topics can be in opposition, or the comments can be in opposition, or both topics and comments can be in opposition. Examples of the latter case would be "Here today, gone tomorrow," "Last hired, first fired," and "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (p. 128).

On the other hand, proverbs can be non-oppositional or identificational in which both of topic and comment are in equal and equivalent terms. This type can be found in proverbs like "time is money" (one descriptive element) or "like father, like son" (two descriptive elements). However, Dundes (1962) showed that the binary nature of proverbs is applicable not only to English but also to other languages such as Lithuanian, North American Indian (Dundes, 1964) and some African languages (Dundes, 1971).

Moreover, syntactic studies showed that proverbs follow a limited number of grammatical structures. For instance, Škara (1995) conducted a study entitled *Comparative Analysis of Proverbs: Universals and Specifics* that revealed the similarities in grammatical structures of proverbs regarding three languages: Italian, English and Croatian. It also confirmed that proverbs in these languages are the same concerning the following syntactic issues: the first is that the smallest linguistic frame used in proverbs is the sentence, and its structure is fixed and frozen with no redundant elements. (E.g. Time flies). The second is that the most frequent tense is the simple present, for example, *the cow does not make the monk* and *He lives long who lives well*. Whereas, if the past tense is used, it refers to an action that may happen at any time. The third is that most proverbs are verbalized impersonally, that is to say, proverbs utilize neutral statements with the third person singular and metaphorical techniques in order to make the message more objective and universal, for example, *one swallow does not make summer* and *Homer sometimes nods*. The fourth is that most proverbs use indicative form and abstract or omitted subject, for example, *Hope springs eternal* and *out of sight, out of mind*. Finally, most proverbs have a balanced form of two parts (or four minor segments), and these parts or segments are in a balanced and organized relationship to one another both in their form and content, for example, *New brooms, sweep clean; soon ripe, soon rotten; A fair exchange, is no robbery*.

With reference to this discussion, it appears that Italian, English and Croatian proverbial language is characterized by a set of syntactic markers. However, what is valid in the aforementioned languages can also be seen and verified in other languages such as Irish (Coinnigh, 2012), Welsh (Agozzino, 2007), Igbo (Ezejideaku & Okeke, 2008), Russian (Levin, 1968), Cairene Arabic (Mahgoub, 1968), Yiddish (Silverman-Weinreich, 1981) and Philippine (Lopez, 2006).

IV. METHODS

The data of the current study were gathered randomly. This is due to the nature of the study, in other words, it is concerned with the qualitative approach. The researchers interviewed the informants separately. Those informants were Jordanian people aged from 40 to 60 years old. The reason for selecting them at this age was due to their experience in using such proverbs and idiomatic expressions. The researchers also audio-taped the interviews in order to extract the Jordanian proverbs related to food and eating. As a result, the gathered data reflect genuine occurrences of such linguistic expressions. Food proverbs are concluded from dialogues and explications that provide the context. All food proverbs were classified and analyzed syntactically.

V. RESULTS

A. Syntactic Aspects

The morphological and syntactic features of proverbs related to food and eating are examined. In fact, proverbs have some morphosyntactic constructions, different from other linguistic expressions. In order to reach a better insight into the syntactic aspects, an examination of the internal structure needs to be done. Admittedly, the proverbs under discussion reveal that they are divided into three divisions, and that gives rise to the fact that they are limited to a set of specific sentence types, they are imperative sentences, interrogative sentences and verbless sentences.

(a). Imperative Sentences/Clauses

The type of sentences or clauses does not have a subject, however, it is understood to be the second person singular *you*. Imperative sentences or clauses are used to command or advise the addressee to do some righteous acts or to prevent him/her/them from doing evil deeds, or simply they are used to highlight and encourage some healthy habits, the proverbs below illustrate the imperative form.

Proverb	Literal Translation	Equivalence/ Figurative meaning	Function
iSbir 9al-Hisrim ibtuklu 9inab	Give time to sour grapes, so you can eat them when fully grown	Desires are nourished by delays	Giving advice
laQini wla ittaTmini	Welcome me and do not feed me	warm and friendly reception is better than alimentation.	Giving advice
Ta9mi i@um ibtistahi al-9ain	Feed the mouth, the eye becomes bashful	get their loyalties by money, meals, gifts ...etc.	Giving advice
ityada witmadda witaša witmaša	Lunch and stretch, dine and walk	After dinner sit (sleep) a while, after supper walk a mile	Giving advice
ityadda fiih Qabil ma yit9aša 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)	Giving advice
uQ9ud juu9an 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	Giving advice
i9Ti il-xubiz la xabbaazuh	Give the bread to its baker	put the saddle on the right horse	Giving advice
la ituHuT kul beiDak ibsallah waHadeh	Do not put all of your eggs in one basket	don't have too many irons in the fire	Giving advice

These types of sentences/clauses are used to target the statement to the addressee since he/she is the receiver of the command or advice. Based on the table above, all proverbs were used to give advice not commands. Based on the previous proverbs mentioned in the table, the second person singular 'you' is related to males not females, that is, this may be misleading in the sense that such proverbs are directed to males only. In fact, such a supposition is completely wrong since these proverbs are targeted to the addressee regardless of gender.

To conclude, the typical form of an English imperative sentence uses the base verb without a subject. Those sentences can be either positive or negative form. The main functions of imperative sentences are to give advice, command or instruction. Regarding the aforementioned proverbs in the table above, the function of using them was to give advice.

(b). Interrogative Sentences/Clauses

This type of sentence is used when asking a question to know about something. It is used also to gather information about something. Generally, it is the sentence that asks a question or makes a request for information. To be more precise, it has the form or force of a question.

In the following table, the researchers found that Jordanian proverbs related to food and eating have the form of interrogative sentences/clauses.

Proverb	Literal Translation	Equivalence / Figurative meaning
Šuu inta ma ibtiŠba9iiŠ	Cannot you get satiated?	do you want jam on it? (what more do you want? used to a person who has just got an advantage and then asks for more)
maŠi 9ala beiD Šuu ya9ni ixyar wa faQuus	Are you walking on eggs? What does it mean? Cucumber and another cheaper kind of cucumber?	why are you so slow? why do you discriminate depending on nonstandard criteria
Šuu hii il Šaylih Šuurabah	Is it a soup?	this issue is not that simple (you cannot do whatever you like)
Qamah walla iŠi9iireh	A wheat or a barley?	what is the result? Is it good or bad?

As aforementioned, this type of sentence is usually used to elicit some information from the addressee. The expected purpose of such a structure is not applicable in the case of proverbs of food and eating since proverbs with the interrogative construction are not utilized to get information, but in sharp contrast, to give information. They are used to express the speaker's frustration, anger and other negative feelings (except in the last case, the proverb is used to elicit information, in the typical usage of interrogative sentences).

### (c). Verbless Sentences/Clauses

A verbless clause is a clause-like construction in which a verb element is implied but not present. They are comprised, semantically, of a predicand, expressed or not, and a verbless predicate. In this study, the researchers classified proverbs related to food and eating into three main syntactic categories concerning the predicate, namely, prepositional phrases, adjectival phrases and noun phrases.

### B. Prepositional Phrases

The table below illustrates the proverbs in terms of their literal translation and their equivalent/figurative meaning.

Proverb	Literal Translation	Equivalence / Figurative meaning
aHla 9ala Qalbi <u>min al9asal</u> <u>fi beinna</u> xubz wa miliH	It's sweeter to my heart than honey Bread and salt are between us	gladly accepted or receive we lived together and had shared experiences / we have strong bonds
Dammuh <u>zai il-9asal</u> il-jiizih <u>mi9il al-baTiixah</u> , intah wa HaDDak	His blood is like honey Marriage is like a watermelon, it depends on your luck	he is fun / he has a sense of humor in marriage luck plays a major role (what must be must be)
ilTariq la Qalb ilzalamih <u>min mi9dituh</u>	The way to a man's heart is through his stomach	The way to a man's heart is through his stomach
Sar 9ilkah <u>ib9um innaas</u>	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

The underlined words in the table above revealed the prepositional phrases used in the proverbs related to food and eating. In such clauses, the verb is omitted, and the main components are the subject and the predicate.

### C. Adjectival Phrases

The table below illustrates the proverbs in terms of their literal translation and their equivalent/figurative meaning.

Proverb	Literal Translation	Equivalence / Figurative meaning
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

The underlined words in the table above show the adjectival phrases used in the proverbs and sayings in Jordanian Arabic. The main components of those phrases are the subject and the predicate.

### D. Noun Phrases

The proverbs below include the noun phrases. The table illustrates the literal translation of proverbs and their equivalent/figurative meanings.

Proverb	Literal Translation	Equivalence / Figurative meaning
akil wa mar9a wa <u>Qillit San9ah</u>	Eating, grazing and lack of workmanship	the life of Riley [a comfortable and happy life]
iddinya <u>yuum 9asal wa yuum baSal</u>	Life includes a honey day and an onion day	take the rough with the sweet (life is not easy)
Darb il-Habib <u>zbiib</u>	a beating from one's beloved is as sweet as raisins	accepting everything a lover does, a posy from the beloved is a ruby (Love is blind)

The underlined words above are the noun phrases used in the colloquial Jordanian Arabic proverbs with reference to food and eating.

VI. DISCUSSION

As a final point, it seems that proverbs with the verbless clause construction have the prepositional phrase as the prominent part since it prevails in most cases in this category. Actually, proverbs and sayings related to food and eating are similar to other kinds of proverbs regarding the utilization of syntactic aspects. Furthermore, it appears that these proverbs and sayings are limited to specific syntactic structures, namely, imperative, interrogative and verbless clauses in terms of their syntactic structures. To be more accurate, the verbless clause is the most 51 prominent structure (11 proverbs), then the imperative form (8 proverbs) and the interrogative (5 proverbs) one respectively.

VII. CONCLUSION

The present study intends to study the colloquial Jordanian food proverbs and sayings in terms of their syntactic formulas. Analyzing the syntactic patterns of Jordanian proverbs and sayings with reference to food and eating is the overarching purpose of conducting this study. This study hoped to fill a gap and lead to a great understanding of the topic since it is conducted on the Arabic-speaking community, namely, Jordanian society. The researchers attempt to prove that food proverbs are systematic and rule-governed due to the existence of syntactic patterns. Finally, the study findings revealed that these proverbs are limited to specific syntactic structures, namely, imperative, interrogative and verbless clauses in terms of their syntactic structures.

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
ṭ	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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