THE DOMAIN OF BREAD IN ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE

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Summary: The language signs denominating different aspects of the concept of *bread* and the development of the semiosis in this domain have been described. Some examples from the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary and texts are reviewed and instances of language sign functioning are categorized and explained.

Language is a sophisticated code which was formed in the social history. It fixed human experiences in notions and words, their semantics being marked by the impact of certain cultural environment. Thus, language signs represented in the dictionaries and texts of Anglo-Saxon culture make it possible to reconstitute the concept sphere of Anglo-Saxon life and, in particular, the part connected with the domain of *bread*.

The concept of *bread* is one of the constants of the English culture, which is «концепт, существующий постоянно или, по крайней мере, очень долгое время как некий постоянный принцип культуры» [«the concept which is constantly, or at least for a very long time, existing as a certain permanent principle of culture»] [Степанов 1997: 76]. This concept arose in the process of cultivating and using of cereals by the English people for many centuries. The content of the analyzed concept is about the ideas, associations, notions, and appraisals concerning the denotatum *bread*, which were formed in the course of the English people's history and are culturally determined.

In the beginning of the period of the Celtic settlement on the British Isles, husbandry was mainly agricultural. This was because the biggest parts of the islands consisted of fertile lowlands and the climate was favorable for crop farming. On the British Isles, the considerable part of crops consisted of bread-stuff, oats, barley, vegetables, and fodder crops. Owing to this, these crops became part of the basics of the British diet. They were recognized as the most important condition for surviving and well-being. All this could not but result in mythologizing, sanctification, symbolization, and poeticizing of bread as a symbol of existence.

In the Anglo-Saxon dictionary [Hall 1991] the following language signs are related to the verbalization of the concept *bread*:

- 1) those naming bread as a kind of food:
- **andbita** m unleavened bread; **bread** n bit, morsel, bread; **foca** m cake (baked on the hearth); **gebyrmed** n leavened bread; **grút** f coarse meal, grains; **hlaf** m loaf, cake, bread, food, sacramental bread; **hláfgebrecu** f bit of bread; **hláfgebroc** n bit of bread; **osterhláf** m oyster-patty; **peorf** n unleavened bread; **peorfhláf** m loaf of unleavened bread; **peorfling** m unleavened bread/loaf;
- 2) those naming the raw products for baking bread: **áte** *f* oats; **beorma** *m* barm, yeast, leaven; **béow** *n* barley; **bere** *m* barley; **corn** *n* corn, grain; **corngebrot** *n* corn dropped in carrying to barn; **cornséd** *n* a grain

of corn; **dærst** f leaven, barm; **fahame** n peeled barley, pearl-barley [polentum]; **hláfhwáte** m bread-wheat; **melu** n meal, flour; **ryge** m rye; **smedma** m fine flour, pollen meal, meal; **spelt** m spelt, corn [L];

- 3) those naming the periods of time related to the production of bread: **ríptíma** m time of harvest, harvest-time; **rípð** f harvest; **Rugern** m rye-harvest, month of rye-harvest, August;
- 4) those naming the instruments and places for making and keeping bread: **bæcering** m gridiron; **bæcern** n bakery, bake-house; **byrðenstán** m millstone; **cornhús** n granary; **cornhwicce** f corn-bin; **corntrog** m corn-bin; **cweorn** f quern, hand-mill; **cweornstán** m mill-stone; **handcweorn** f hand-mill; **hláfofn** m baker's oven; **hláfræce** f oven-rake; **meluhúdern** n meal-house; **meluhús** n meal-house; **ofen**, m furnace, oven;
- 5) those naming the baking actions and processes: **ábacan** *sv/t6* to bake; **ábrædan** *wv/t1b* to bake; **bacan** *sv/t6* to bake; **bewelian** *wv/t2* to knead, mix together; **brædan** *wv/t1b* to roast, toast, bake, broil, cook; **gebirman** *wv/t1b* to ferment, leaven [beorma]; **gebyrman** *wv/t1b* to ferment with barm, to ferment, leaven;
- 6) those naming the people who make bread: **bæcere** m, **bæcestre** f baker; **cóc** m cook [L coquus]; **dæge** f (female) bread maker:
- 7) those naming the person's actions and states related to bread: **hláfgang** *m* attendance at, or participation in a meal; **hláfléast** *f* want of bread;
- 8) those naming the social and institutional status related to bread: **corngesceot** n payment in corn; **corntéoðung** f tithe of corn; **gafolbere** m barley paid as rent; **hlæfdige** f mistress (over servants), chatelaine, lady, queen, the Virgin Mary; **hláfæta** m (loaf-eater), dependant; **hláfbrytta** m slave in charge of the bread-store; **hláford** m lord, master, ruler, husband, the Lord, God; **melugescot** n payment in meal;
- 9) those naming the sacramental status of bread: **ælmeshláf** m dole of bread; **hlæfdige** f mistress (over servants), chatelaine, lady, queen, the Virgin Mary; **hlaf** m loaf, cake, bread, food, sacramental bread; **hláfgang** m attendance at, or participation in a meal, partaking of the Eucharist; **hláfhús** n Bethlehem (domus panis); **hláfmæsse** f Lammas (August 1st); **hláfmæssedæg** m Lammas-day; **hláfmæssetíd** f Lammas-tide; **hláford** m lord, master, ruler, the Lord, God; **hláfsénung** f blessing of bread (on Lammasday); **oflæthláf** m bread used for the sacrament; **offrunghláf** m shew-bread; **beorfdæg** m a day on which unleavened bread was to be eaten; **beorfdagas** m pl days of unleavened bread; **beorfnes** f freedom from leaven, purity, unleavenedness; metaphorically, freedom from impurity, purity; **beorfsymbel** n feast of unleavened bread.

Now the groups of naming units will be discussed in detail.

Group 1. Among the naming units of the first group, one can distinguish between two main kinds of bread products: the leavened bread and the unleavened bread. The etymological analysis, which allows to reconstitute the most ancient ideas of the speakers about the arrangement of the world as a whole and about the place of bread in the value model of the world in particular, shows that the word *bread* was borrowed from the Gothic word *broe* which was re-

lated to the notion of brewing (fermentation; Mod. Engl. (to) brew). The word hlāf came to the Anglo-Saxon language from the Gothic word hlaifs (Proto-Germanic *hlaiba), denoted the unleavened bread and was contrasted with the Proto-Germanic *brauða on the grounds that nearly in all Germanic languages the latter is related to the process of «brewing» [Степанов 1997: 206]. Thus, in nominating bread, two language signs opposing each other were bread (the leavened, or sourdough, bread) and hlāf (the unleavened bread).

As is seen from the definitions of the language signs nominating bread, the meaning of the lexeme $hl\bar{a}f$ was rather broad: it denoted not only bread but food as a whole¹; the abundance of semes reflects the stage of semiosis which had not been quite completed by the end of the Proto-Germanic period. Thus, the conclusion is that because of its origin this lexeme is older than the lexeme *bread*. Incidentally, it should be noted that the development of word-meanings in any language does not always go from «the concrete» to «the abstract», for instance, from the meaning «bread» or the meaning «meat» (Anglo-Sax. *mete*) to the meaning «food». Sometimes, as is seen in this case, the general notion (here «food») began to denote some certain item as if this was the main one in the given cultural area. This was also the case with the semantic structure of the lexeme $hl\bar{a}f$: in the course of time its meanings parted; some of them went out of use, and the denomination «the unleavened bread» verbalized by this lexeme began to be associated only with rituals (**hlāf** m sacramental bread).

The derivational zone of the lexeme $hl\bar{a}f$ was rather extensive and included the derivatives formed by means of word-composition and denoting: a) objects as $hl\acute{a}fhw\acute{e}te$ m bread-wheat; b) social status as $hl\acute{a}f\acute{e}ta$ m (loaf-eater), de-pendant; c) states as $hl\acute{a}fl\acute{e}ast$ f want of bread; d) sacramental phenomena as $hl\acute{a}fmæsse$ f Lammas. The notion of bread, verbalized by the lexeme $hl\bar{a}f$, as the basic food is connected with the more general notions of «that one who makes bread» and «that one who guards bread». Later the Anglo-Saxon $hl\bar{a}f$ -weard (lit. «bread-guard», «defender», and perhaps «food-guard» in general) transformed into lord «master» and Lord «God». Simultaneously, the Anglo-Saxon hlæf- $d\bar{i}ge$ (lit. «that one who makes the dough», «kneader») denoted the mistress and later, the lady imparting them to the connotation of the most influential and respected women. The derivatives of the word $hl\bar{a}f$ which entered the Middle English dictionary in a form of loaf were laferd-dom (lordship), laverd-scipe (lord-ship).

The derivational zone of the lexeme *bread* in the examined period included only the verb *bredian* which was semantically related to the meaning «to regenerate, restore», as it can be seen in the following lines from the poem «The Phoenix» [Phoenix www]:

¹ Cf. the modern meaning of the word *loaf*: 2. (usu. in comb.) food prepared in a solid piece: a meat loaf, a slice of loaf [LDELC 1992].

«370 Forpon he drusende deað ne bisorgað, sare swyltcwale, þe him symle wat æfter ligþræce lif edniwe, feorh æfter fylle, þonne fromlice þurh briddes had **gebreadad** weorðeð eft of ascan, edgeong weseð under swegles hleo».

«Wherefore drooping he sorroweth not for death, the sore pain of parting, since ever he wotteth of new life after the fireys raging, spirit after death, when surely, in feathered state, he shall be **restored** from the ashes, grow young again under the span of heaven».

At present, this lexeme is a key means for the objectification of the concept of *bread* in English; it belongs to the native vocabulary; it entered the core of the English mentality, and has a narrow semantic structure which consists of two meanings².

Groups 2-3. The denominations of the raw products for baking bread include various kinds of corn and yeast. The choice of the corn depended on the place of living, the season, and traditions. Oats, barley, and rye were widely spread. The latter gave the name to August – the month of harvesting the rye (*Rugern m rye-harvest, month of rye-harvest, August*). White wheat bread was served to the rich people; the poor made dough from barley, rye, oats, buckwheat, adding dried beans, acorns, hazelnuts, alder knobs and, during famines, the seeds of weeds and the tree bark to increase the resulting amount of bread. The great worthiness of corn is confirmed by the Anglo-Saxon word *corngebrot n corn dropped in carrying to barn*.

Groups 4-7. The grain was ground in a hand mill with two rotating wheels. All the devices of one type of mill consisted of two stones with a clearance between them. The upper stone had a hole with the diameter of 5 centimeters, into which the grain was put. The stones were connected with a gear (the purposefulness of the millstones is reflected in the word *byrðenstán m millstone* where *byrðen* is a load, weight). The best millstones were made from the Rhine lava brought from Northern Europe. After the millstones had been worn out, they were used as building stones for porches and walls.

It should be mentioned that there is no word for *mill* at all in the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary denoting a device (either a water, or wind, or steam one) for the common use. In England mills began to spread only in the XI c. and, according to the «Doomsday Book» (1086), by the end of the XI c. mills had already added up to 5624 [Ле Γ офф 2007: 259]. In the Early Middle Ages each family had a hand mill of its own.

The dough was kneaded in a wooden trough which was cut out of a split log. The leaven was made by souring a handful of flour stirred in water or milk and left in the open for fermentation because wild yeasts were present in the air. After that small birch sticks were dipped into the leaven and dried; they could be soaked whenever needed. Such leaven was not always working, so the bread was probably coarse and hard, especially if the flour and the other ingredients had not been ground thoroughly. As brewing and baking went hand in hand, the

² Bread – 1) a common food made of baked flour: *a loaf of bread*; 2) food considered as a means of staying alive: *to earn one's (daily) bread as a labourer* [LDELC 1992].

foam from fermenting the beer with hop was also added to the dough; such kind of leaven (*barm* < Anglo-Sax. *beorma*) produced lighter, softer, and more flavored bread.

If the bread was offered for sale its shape and weight were monitored by the local laws. The Bread Purity Law has been recognized as one of the oldest because the idea of controlling the quality of the bread ingredients arose already during the Roman governance of the British Isles: about 275 A.D. the Roman Emperor Aurelius established the weight minimum and the price maximum, and the Emperor Constantine continued developing the same law in 330. In Anglo-Saxon England the Bread Purity Law («The Hlafclaenness Dōm») was declared in 1047 by King Edward the Confessor (r. 1042-1066) after he had tasted the bread on his way to London:

«King Edward kept Christmas with all due solemnity at York and immediately afterwards set out by the direct road for London. In this journey he found a deficiency in the measures of bread, for it seemed to him the baking trade was more indifferently observed than it should be, what he had formerly commanded. He broke some loaves and tasted others, and, finding the character lacking, he ordered the bread to be made of fairer ingredients. Henceforth in the realm bread should be made from only these four things: fine flour, water, barm [yeast], and salt. And those who broke this law should be heavily fined; for the first offence, with xxx [thirty] shillings; and for the second offense, the like; and for the third, with cxx [120] shillings to the king» [Bread Purity... www].

The Bread Purity Law remained unchanged up to 1266 when there appeared an Assize on Bread.

Baking as well as many other kinds of housework took place in the yard in order to reduce the fire threat and to provide enough light for working (it was rather dark inside the house). The unleavened loaves were baked on a stone plate, on flat stones, or on an iron griddle (*bæcering m gridiron*) put on the cinder and sometimes covered with an iron bowl (which built a kind of oven). The hot steam from under the bowl could even raise the unleavened paste and produce a soft texture. Only rich people could afford making clay ovens (*ofen m furnace, oven*) in which loaves were placed on a hearth-stone, a charcoal was put under the hearth, and the oven hole was closed with the oven door which kept the steam inside [Hagen 2006: 251]. In spite of the fact that in Anglo-Saxon England each family usually cooked food themselves, there were professional cooks and bakers for the rich people (*bæcere*, m; *baecestre*, f).

In the Late Middle Ages ordinary people did not make bread. Those growing rye and wheat carried the harvest to the mill for grinding, then they carried the flour to the baker. Other people just bought bread from the baker. In the Middle Ages the shape of bread was round with the top cut crosswise. The guilds of millers and bakers flourished. Thus, in 1303 the London baking company received the profit which defrayed the bakers' expenses on firewood, candles, transportation and carters, salt, yeast, the millers' services, keeping their houses, dogs, cats, and wives [Scully 1995: 12]. Even the millers bought bread. An example can be seen in «The Canterbury Tales» by Geoffrey Chaucer

(1340) where the Miller sent his daughter to town to buy bread because suddenly the whole company came to his place. Due to this availability of bread, the recipes were practically not put down to the cookery books. There was no point in writing down the recipe if everyone knew it by heart. From the recipes which survived, it is evident that the baking technology has changed very little, and except for the quality of the ingredients, the homemade bread still resembles the medieval one. Besides, according to the Bread Purity Law, a food item could only be called «bread» if it contained the four ingredients mentioned above.

Bread was eaten during each meal, sometimes it was the main or the only dish. In cloisters they baked a pound of bread for each monk every day. Rich people flavored their bread with fresh butter, cheese, meat or gravy. Sweet bread made for feast days was spiced with caraway and poppy seeds, parsley, dried fruits, and honey [Hagen 2006: 257]. As one of the characters of Ælfric's «Colloquy» noted, «without bread all your food would become vomit» (...buton hlafe ælc mete to wlættan byþ gehwyrfed) [Ælfric's Colloquy, www].

Group 8. Among the naming units related to the social status there can be made a distinction between the denominations of various payments made with corn and flour – not only the metayage to the lord (corngesceot n payment in corn; melugescot n payment in meal) but also the ground rent (gafolbere m barley paid as rent) and the tithe given to the church (corntéodung f tithe of corn). The compound language signs with the element hlaf denoted the status of the household (lord, master, lady, mistress over servants, dependant, slave). Thus, bread was originally understood as a measure of richness and well-being, a product on which the life of the home and – wider – of the entire society depended. The consequence was that in the course of time the hlaford and the hlafdige received the deific status (the Lord/ God and the Lady/ Virgin Mary). By this, the value component in the domain structure of bread had been fixed.

Group 9. A big group of naming units is connected with the sacramental status of bread. In Europe and Western Asia, where the basis for life were wheat, barley, cows, and sheep, the sacral symbols or mythologems, or metaphors were corn, an ear (of wheat), a sheaf, bread, beer, milk, butter, cattle and their horns (the cornucopia – the horn of plenty, the ornament of horns in decoration, the cusp of the crescent), the bull's hide, the sheep's wool (the Golden Fleece), lambs, and so on [Арутюнов, Рыжакова 2004: 101]. No wonder that the heathen Anglo-Saxons recognized bread as a sacrificial thing, as an object for worshipping, and as a denomination of the important events and time periods of life. As is noted in [Маковский 1999: 73], food in the heathen worldview symbolized the internal contact with all those magic properties inherent in the plants and animals that were eaten. The eatable plants and animals, in the opinion of the ancient people, were the sacrificial offerings to gods. Bread as well as other items made of corn were also offered to gods (Indo-Europ. *bhlad 'sacrifice', Gothic blot 'sacrifice', Anglo-Sax. bled 'crop') and symbolized fertility and reproduction (breeding). The leavened bread was considered to be the receptacle of the soul and was thought to be «breathing» (bread, bræd – breath, bræð).

The wedding bread embodied a grave mound. Before the wedding the bride had to firstly «bury» her maidenhood and only after that she could be considered to be a spouse, a future mother, a woman. At the same time the grave mound, embodied in the wedding bread, symbolized the «covering» of the dead body with the earth, which in the wedding rite was reflected in the covering of the bride's head with a headscarf (later – a bridal veil) (cf. *bread*, the Engl. dial. *brot* 'covering' with *bride*) [Маковский 1999: 73].

Bread was an object of veneration; it was considered to be a protection against evil; it personified a godhead, which was thought to be capable of miracles. Thus, in the Anglo-Saxon «Charm for Unfruitful Land» it is used as an offering to Mother Earth:

«Then take meal of every kind and let a **loaf** be baked as broad as the inside of the hands and knead it with milk and holy water, and lay it under the first furrow. Then say: 'Field full of food for mankind, brightly blooming, be thou blessed / In the holy name of Him who created this heaven / And this earth we live on. May God who wrought these lands grant us growing gifts, / So that every kind of grain may prove of use.' Then say thrice, 'Crescite, in nomine patris sitis benedicti'. Amen and Paternoster thrice» [Charm... www].

The same magic properties were thought to be characteristic of corn, barley³, oats, and rye. M.Makovsky says [Маковский 1999: 267] that in old times there was a mystical rite in which a bread grain was put on an altar as an offering to gods. Then the grain was contemplated in silence by the present people: it symbolized the eternity of alternation of life and death, the changing of seasons, the eternity of the grain's death and its resurrection in the earth. Cereals as a whole were used as amulets driving off evil spirits. Thus, bread and cereals represented the deep cognitive structures of the Anglo-Saxon existence.

After the Conversion, bread did not lose its sacramental meaning. Besides nominating the main persons of the Christian religion (*hláford* m the Lord, God; hláfdige f the Virgin Mary), the words denoting bread also participated in nominating the religious rites, for example, ofláthláf m bread used for the sacrament (oflátan sv/t7 to let go; cf. Russian οδπαmκα/ oblatka – unleavened bread used as an element of the Eucharist), and the time periods important for the Christian doctrine (*peorfdæg* m a day on which unleavened bread was to be eaten). For example, the national holiday Lammas is held on August, 1st and dates back to the heathen harvest festival («loaf-mass»), when the Anglo-Saxons made offerings in loaves from the first harvest of the year. In the Roman Catholic tradition Lammas became the feast of Saint Peter who was miraculously freed of confinement on August, 1st. The Anglo-Saxon word hláfmæsse was transformed into hlammesse, lammesse in Middle English, and Lammas, or Lammas Day in Modern English.

³ Cf. the folklore legend (in a verse by R.Burns) about John Barleycorn who yielded no death either in earth or in water or on fire and revived again and again.

The language units with the component *hláf* were used for nominating qualities (*peorfnes f freedom from leaven*, metaphorically, *freedom from impurity*) and deeds worthy of the Church and the committed Christians, such as, for instance, giving alms and donations in bread (*ælmeshláf m dole of bread*). With the help of the language sign *hláf* the town of Bethlehem was denoted in Anglo-Saxon as *Hláfhús*. According to the Book of Genesis, Bethlehem was surrounded with gardens and fields, and it is in this town that Ruth was gathering crops. Owing to this, the town received its first name Eufrata which meant «fertile», and later another name «The House of Bread» (Anglo-Sax. *Hláfhús*) [Полная популярная... www]. Thus, this word was borrowed by the English language as a translated loan-word.

The importance of bread in the Anglo-Saxon culture was testified by the ritual of determining the guilt or innocence of the suspected person – The Ordeal (*ordāl m ordeal [Ger. Urteil]*) – the trial by water, iron, fire, or bread: in the latter case the guilt or innocence was proven in the process of eating the bread. If the person died (s)he was announced guilty «by Heaven's will». Before this trial the person had to get through a certain procedure:

Of him who gives wed for an ordeal.

24. If any one gives wed for an ordeal, then let him come three days before to the mass-priest who is to hallow it; and let him feed himself with **bread** and with water, and salt, and herbs, before he shall go to it; and let him attend mass each of the three days, and make an oblation, and go to the house on the day that he shall go to the ordeal: and then swear the oath that he is, according to the folkright, guiltless of the charge, before he goes to the ordeal (The Laws of King Æthelstan 924-939 A.D.) [The Laws... www].

Incidentally, sudden deaths during these trials were one of the reasons why King Edward the Confessor passed the Bread Purity Law: if any poison had been put into bread, leading to death, this death should be considered violent; therefore, it was a sacrilege – an attempt to tamper with God's justice.

Thus, it should be stated that while analyzing the semantics of the language signs denominating bread and other things connected with bread in Anglo-Saxon culture, the anthropological factor can be deduced: those features which are important for mankind and its vital activities are represented most frequently. Bread was: 1) a source of satisfying hunger; 2) a symbol of wealth; 3) a symbol of life, growth, and development; 4) a symbol of faith and justice; that is, in the Anglo-Saxon model of the world bread symbolized practically any value – including spiritual and material ones⁴. This conclusion confirms the thesis that words witness the evolution of people's culture, their environment, traditions and customs, the entire model of the world of the nation. Being one of the key components of the Anglo-Saxon culture, the concept of *bread* is a means to measure and describe national values of the Early Middle Ages and

⁴ In the examined period the denomination «scant food» in the semiosis of bread could not be observed yet; it arose in the later periods.

represents the most important categories, guidelines, and aims of the Anglo-Saxon life.

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