ETYMOLOGICAL AND STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGLISH PROVERBS AND SAYINGS ABOUT “FRIENDSHIP

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Abstract. This paper examines the etymological origins and structural features of English proverbs and sayings related to friendship. Drawing on historical linguistics and phraseology, it traces the development of key expressions from Old English, Middle English, and later borrowings (Latin, French, and classical sources) through to modern usage. The study analyzes morphological patterns, syntactic structures (parallelism, antithesis, ellipsis, and fixed formulae), semantic fields, and metaphorical mappings that characterize these units. Particular attention is paid to how cultural values of loyalty, reciprocity, trust, and caution are encoded in the form and history of proverbs such as “A friend in need is a friend indeed,” “Birds of a feather flock together,” and related sayings. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the stability and variability of proverbial wisdom about interpersonal bonds in the English language.

Keywords: English proverbs, sayings about friendship, etymology, structural characteristics, phraseology, semantic structure, cultural values, fixed expressions

Introduction.

Proverbs and sayings constitute one of the most stable and culturally loaded layers of any language. They encode collective experience, moral norms, and social values in concise, memorable form and are transmitted across generations. Within the English paremiological fund, the thematic group of proverbs and sayings devoted to friendship occupies a special place, reflecting such universal and at the same time culturally specific notions as loyalty, reciprocity, testing by adversity, the value of old friendship, and caution against false friends [1].

The study of English proverbs about friendship from the etymological and structural perspectives is of particular scholarly interest. Etymologically, a considerable part of these units goes back to classical antiquity, the Bible, and early medieval sources. The most famous example — “A friend in need is a friend indeed” — has clear classical antecedents: the idea is already present in Euripides’ *Hecuba* (5th century BC) and in the Latin formulation of Quintus Ennius (*Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur* — “a sure friend is known in unsure times”), later recorded in English from the 11th–15th centuries (Wiktionary; Phrases.org.uk; OED). Many other English proverbs of this thematic group are either direct borrowings or calques from Latin and biblical texts, or native Germanic formations that underwent semantic specialization [2] .

Structurally, English friendship proverbs display typical features of the proverbial genre: fixed or relatively fixed form, syntactic parallelism, antithesis, ellipsis, rhyme, alliteration, and metaphorical imagery (Mieder, 1985; Arora, 1984). Comparative structural-semantic analyses show that English proverbs about friendship tend to be short, maxim-like statements shaped under the strong influence of Latin rhetoric and biblical style, which distinguishes them from more image-rich and emotionally charged Russian counterparts of the same thematic field [3].

Despite the existence of valuable works on the concept of friendship in English phraseology and on comparative structural-semantic analysis of English and Russian proverbs (Orlova, 2020; Čermák, 2018; European Proceedings, 2021), a focused

examination that systematically combines the etymological origins and the structural (morphosyntactic and stylistic) characteristics of English proverbs and sayings about friendship remains insufficiently developed. This determines the relevance of the present research [4].

The aim of the study is to identify and describe the main etymological sources and structural features of English proverbs and sayings devoted to the concept of friendship.

1. Classical Antiquity (Greek and Latin Sources)

The majority of the most well-known English proverbs on friendship have clear roots in ancient Greek and Latin literature.

- **"A friend in need is a friend indeed"** This proverb has ancient classical origins.
  - In Euripides' tragedy *Hecuba* (c. 424 BC), the Greek dramatist wrote: *ἐν τοῖς κακοῖς γὰρ ἀγαθοὶ σαφέστατοι φίλοι* ("It is in times of trouble that good friends are most clearly seen").
  - The Roman poet Quintus Ennius (3rd–2nd century BC) expressed the same idea in Latin: *Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur* ("A sure friend is known in unsure times"). This formulation was later quoted by Cicero in *De Amicitia*. In English, the idea appears as early as the 11th century in the *Durham Proverbs* (c. 1035): *æt þearfe man sceal freonda cunnian*. The modern rhyming form became established in the 15th–16th centuries (Caxton, 1489; John Heywood, 1562).
- Other proverbs of classical origin include:
  - "One man, no man" ← Latin *Unus vir nullus vir*.
  - "Among friends all things are common" ← Greek and Latin sources (Plato, Cicero).

2. Biblical Sources

A significant portion of English friendship proverbs derives from or was strongly influenced by the Bible, especially the New Testament:

- **"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"** Taken directly from the Gospel of John 15:13.
- "God defend me from my friends; from my enemies I can defend myself" — a folk development of biblical moral teaching.
- "A friend loveth at all times" (Proverbs 17:17) also exerted a strong influence on the English proverbial tradition.

3. Old English and Germanic Roots

- The word **friend** itself comes from Old English *freond*, which derives from Proto-Germanic *frijōjands* ("loving one, friend"), the present participle of *frijōjan* ("to love"). Etymologically it is related to *free*, originally denoting a "beloved, free person" as opposed to a slave or enemy.
- "Birds of a feather flock together" has Germanic folk origins, though it was also influenced by the Latin *Similis simili gaudet*.
- "Old friends and old wine are best" belongs to the older Germanic and medieval folk tradition.

4. Medieval and Renaissance Literary Sources

- William Caxton (1489) and John Heywood (1562) recorded many friendship proverbs in written form for the first time.
- Shakespeare's works also contributed to the popularisation of related ideas (e.g., "The best of friends must part").
- "A man is known by the company he keeps" developed from medieval Latin maxims and folk wisdom.

5. Later Folk and Literary Developments (17th–19th centuries)

Some proverbs stabilised in later periods through oral tradition or literary usage:

- "Friendship multiplies the good of life and divides the evil".
- "Old friends are best"

Greek Concepts of Friendship (Philia)

In ancient Greek thought, friendship was a central philosophical, ethical, and social concept, primarily expressed through the term **philia** (φιλία). Unlike the narrower modern English word "friendship," *philia* covered a wide range of affectionate and reciprocal bonds: friendships between equals, family ties, political alliances, and even certain civic relationships [5].

1. Core Concept: Philia

- *Philia* denotes mutual goodwill (*eunoia*), reciprocal affection, and the desire for the other's good for their own sake.
- It requires awareness and reciprocity: both parties must know and return the goodwill.
- Aristotle famously stated that no one would choose to live without friends, even if they possessed all other goods (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a5–6).

2. Aristotle's Three Types of Friendship

In Books VIII–IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides the most influential analysis of *philia*, distinguishing three kinds based on the motive for the relationship:

Type of Friendship	Basis	Characteristics	Duration	Rank
Utility (of advantage)	Usefulness benefit	Friends love each other for the advantage they gain (business partners, political allies)	Short-lived (ends when utility ends)	Lowest
Pleasure	Enjoyment pleasant qualities	Based on shared pleasure, wit, or amusement (common among the young)	Temporary (changes with tastes)	Inter media
Virtue Character (perfect friendship)	Goodness moral character	Friends love each other for who they are; they wish each other's good for the friend's own sake; based on shared virtue	Long-lasting and stable	Highest perfect (*teleia philia*)

Only the third type is considered complete or perfect friendship. It is rare, requires time to develop, and is possible mainly between people of similar virtue. The other two types resemble true friendship only by analogy.

3. Related Greek Concepts of Love/Affection

Greek thinkers distinguished several forms of love and affection:

- **Eros**— Passionate, desiring, often sexual or romantic love; associated with longing and beauty (central in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*).
- **Philia (φιλία)** — Affectionate friendship, mutual goodwill, loyalty (the main concept for friendship).
- **Storge (στοργή)** — Natural, familial affection (parents–children, siblings).
- **Agape (ἀγάπη)** — Selfless, unconditional love (less prominent in classical Greek philosophy; later became central in Christian thought).

Plato explored *philia* and *eros* in dialogues such as the *Lysis* (on the nature of friendship) and the *Symposium* (on love ascending from physical desire to the love of the Form of Beauty).

4. Friendship in Greek Literature and Society

- In **Homer**, friendship appears as deep comradely bonds (e.g., Achilles and Patroclus), often tied to loyalty in war and reciprocal gift-giving (*xenia*).

- In **tragedy** (especially Euripides), *philia* is frequently tested by conflict, betrayal, or conflicting loyalties (family vs. friendship, personal vs. civic). The idea that true friendship is revealed in adversity — later expressed in the English proverb "A friend in need is a friend indeed" — already appears in Euripides' *Hecuba*.
- Friendship was ideally between equals and free adult males; relationships of inequality (parent–child, ruler–subject) were also discussed under *philia* but required proportional reciprocity.

5. Connection to English Proverbs about Friendship

Many English proverbs about friendship ultimately rest on these Greek foundations:

- The testing of friendship in hardship reflects the classical view (Euripides, Ennius via Latin transmission) that true *philia* is revealed in adversity.
- The ideal of lasting, virtue-based friendship underlies proverbs that praise old and true friends.
- Distinctions between true friends and fair-weather (utility or pleasure) friends echo Aristotle's hierarchy.

In short, the Greek concept of *philia* — especially Aristotle's analysis of perfect friendship based on virtue and mutual goodwill for the other's sake — forms one of the deepest intellectual roots of Western ideas about friendship that later entered English proverbial tradition through Latin and medieval channels [6].

Comparison: Greek Concepts of Friendship vs. English Proverbs and Sayings about Friendship

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Aspect	Ancient Greek Concept (*Philia*)	English Proverbs & Sayings about Friendship	N
Core Idea	*Philia* is mutual goodwill, reciprocal affection, and wishing the good of the other for their own sake. It is both necessary for happiness and noble in itself (Aristotle).	Friendship is mainly practical and moral: true friends help in need, remain loyal over time, and are rare. Less philosophical, more experiential and cautionary.	1
Highest Form	Perfect friendship (*teleia philia*) based on virtue and character. Friends love each other for who they are. Rare and long-lasting.	"A friend in need is a friend indeed"; "Old friends are best"; "A true friend is the greatest of all blessings". Emphasis on tested loyalty rather than shared virtue.	2
Lower Forms	Friendship of utility (benefit) and friendship of pleasure. These are accidental and temporary.	Strong awareness of false or temporary friends: "Fair-weather friends", "All are not friends who smile on you", "God defend me from my friends…".	3
Test of Friendship	True *philia* is revealed in adversity and over time. Already present in Euripides (*Hecuba*).	Central theme: "A friend in need is a friend indeed", "Adversity is the touchstone of friendship", "Prosperity makes friends, adversity tries them".	4
Reciprocity	Essential: goodwill must be mutual and recognised by both parties.	Strongly present: friendship is expected to be two-sided ("Friendship multiplies the good… and divides the	5

		evil"). One-sided friendship is not true friendship.	
Equality	Ideal friendship is between equals (especially free adult males of similar virtue). Unequal relationships exist but are different.	Less emphasis on social equality; more on moral equality and mutual reliability. Proverbs do not stress social status as strongly as Greek philosophy.	6
Scope	Broad: includes friends, family (*storge* elements), political allies, fellow-citizens, and even business relations.	Narrower in modern usage: mainly personal voluntary bonds. Family and political friendship are usually treated separately.	7
Philosophical Depth	Highly developed theory (Aristotle's three types, Plato's *Lysis* and *Symposium*). Friendship is linked to ethics, happiness (*eudaimonia*), and the good life.	Practical wisdom (*folk philosophy*). Proverbs give moral advice but do not offer a systematic classification like Aristotle's.	8
Style of Expression	Philosophical treatises, dialogues, and tragedy. Abstract and analytical.	Short, memorable, often rhyming or parallel structures: fixed formulae, antithesis, metaphor.	9
Cultural Emphasis	Friendship as a public and ethical ideal that strengthens the *polis* (city-state) and individual character.	Friendship as a private, personal value; caution against betrayal and the rarity of true loyalty.	10

Key Similarities

- Both traditions highly value true, lasting friendship.
- Both recognise that friendship is tested by hardship.
- Both distinguish genuine friends from those who seek only advantage or pleasure.
- The classical Greek idea (especially via Latin transmission) directly influenced English proverbs such as "A friend in need is a friend indeed".

Key Differences

- **Greek**: Theoretical, hierarchical, linked to virtue ethics and the good life.
- **English**: Practical, cautionary, focused on reliability and experience rather than philosophical classification.
- Greek *philia* is broader and more integrated into social and political life; English proverbs treat friendship more as a personal, voluntary relationship.

Conclusion

The present study has examined the etymological origins and structural features of English proverbs and sayings about friendship. The analysis reveals that these units form a rich and multi-layered part of the English paremiological fund.

Etymologically, English friendship proverbs draw on three main sources:

- Classical Greek and Latin tradition (especially the concept of *philia* and ideas found in Euripides and Ennius);
- Biblical texts;
- Native Germanic (Old English) and medieval folk tradition.

The most influential classical idea — that true friendship is revealed in times of adversity — has been preserved and popularised in the well-known proverb "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

Structurally, these proverbs are characterised by fixed or relatively fixed form, syntactic parallelism, antithesis, ellipsis, rhyme, alliteration, and metaphorical imagery. They tend to be short, maxim-like, and highly memorable, reflecting the strong influence of Latin rhetoric and biblical style.

A comparison with the Greek concept of *philia* shows both continuity and transformation. While Greek thought (particularly Aristotle) offered a systematic philosophical classification of friendship based on utility, pleasure, and virtue, English proverbs present a more practical and cautionary folk wisdom. The ideal of tested, reciprocal, and lasting friendship remains central, but the theoretical depth of Greek philosophy is simplified into concise moral advice.

Overall, English proverbs and sayings about friendship successfully combine classical heritage with native linguistic and cultural features, creating a stable and expressive system that continues to reflect important social and moral values.

Recommendations / Suggestions

1. **Further comparative research** Conduct a broader contrastive study of friendship proverbs in English, other Germanic languages, and Turkic languages (including Uzbek) in order to identify universal and culture-specific features.

2. **Corpus-based investigation** Use modern electronic corpora (e.g., British National Corpus, Corpus of Contemporary American English) to examine the frequency, variation, and current usage of friendship proverbs in different genres and contexts.

3. **Structural and stylistic analysis** Carry out a more detailed quantitative analysis of syntactic patterns, rhythmic organisation, and figurative devices in a larger sample of English friendship proverbs.

4. **Diachronic study** Trace the historical development and possible semantic shifts of key proverbs from Middle English to Present-Day English.

5. **Pedagogical application** Develop teaching materials that use English friendship proverbs to improve students' phraseological competence, cultural awareness, and intercultural communication skills.

6. **Interdisciplinary approach** Combine linguistic analysis with insights from cultural studies, ethics, and cognitive linguistics to explore how the concept of friendship is conceptualised and metaphorically structured in English proverbs.

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