



# A Lesson on English



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## *Lagniappe: a little extra*

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If you shop in southern Louisiana or Mississippi, you might get an unexpected bonus with your purchase: an extra piece of what you're buying, or some other small item sold by the shop. We call this bonus "lagniappe;" by extension, it may mean "an extra or unexpected gift or benefit."

According to the Free Online Dictionary, the word *lagniappe* derives from a New World Spanish word, *la ñapa*, "the gift," ultimately from Quechua *yapay*, "to give more." The Quechua language is spoken in the Andes Mountains of South America. How did a word from the Quechua language make its way to Louisiana and into the English language? Spanish soldiers first began to use the word when they were stationed in the Andes Mountains. Later, when the soldiers were stationed in Spanish Louisiana, they introduced the word and the custom of lagniappe. The word entered the Creole dialect mixture of New Orleans and acquired a French spelling.

Even today, in Andean markets, it is customary to ask for a *yapa* when making a purchase. The seller usually responds by throwing in a little extra. Street vendors, especially fruit vendors, are expected to throw in an extra apple or a small bunch of grapes with a decent-sized purchase. This custom is also widely practiced in southeast Asia.

There's a subtle yet powerful psychological principle of marketing at work here: the amount (or quality) of something you actually receive is not as important as how it compares to what you were anticipating. For example, let's say you see an ad on TV for "X-Treme Clean" shower cleaner. You think, "Wow, I have to buy this!" When your package arrives in the mail, you discover it contains not just what you ordered, but as a special thank-you gift, a certificate redeemable for a free bar of rose-scented soap. Because what you got was more than you thought you paid for, you're likely to feel happier with your purchase and more favorably disposed toward the merchant.

Lagniappe is simply a friendly way to make a one-time customer into a repeat customer. The cost of the unexpected gift may be very small, but the idea of getting something for free is a powerful incentive for the customer to come back again.



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### A Baker's Dozen

*A baker's dozen: Thirteen or, more rarely, fourteen items, instead of the customary twelve items in a dozen.*

It's widely believed that this phrase originated from the practice of medieval English bakers giving an extra loaf when selling a dozen in order to avoid being penalized for selling short weight. This is an attractive story and, unlike many that inhabit the folk memory, it appears to be substantially true. We can say a little more to flesh out that derivation, though.

Firstly, the practice appears to have originated several centuries before the phrase. England has a long history of regulation of trade and bakers were regulated by a trade guild called "The Worshipful Company of Bakers," which dates back to at least the reign of Henry II (1154-89).

The law that caused bakers to be so wary was the "Assize of Bread and Ale." In 1266, Henry III revived an ancient statute that regulated the price of bread according to the price of wheat. Bakers or brewers who gave short measure could be fined, pilloried or flogged, as in 1477 when the Chronicle of London reported that a baker called John Mund[e]w was 'schryved upon the pyllory' for selling bread that was underweight.

Secondly, it's not quite so neat that whenever bakers sold twelve loaves they then added another identical loaf to make thirteen. They would have had just as much concern when selling eleven loaves, but there's no baker's eleven. Remember that the Assize regulated weight, not number. What the bakers were doing whenever they sold bread in any quantity was adding something extra to make sure the total weight wasn't short. The addition was

called the inbread or vantage loaf. When selling in quantity to middlemen or wholesalers they would add an extra loaf or two. When selling single loaves to individuals they would offer a small extra piece of bread.

"The Worshipful Company" still exists and reports that this practice carried on within living memory, and that a small 'inbread' was often given with each loaf. So, that's the practice—then what about the phrase? That goes back to at least 1599, as in this odd quotation from John Cooke's *Tu Quoque*:

"Mine's a baker's dozen: Master Bubble, tell your money."

The phrase is related to the practice in John Goodwin's *A Being Filled with the Spirit*, referring back to a quotation from 1665:

"As that which we call the in-bread is given into the dozen, there is nothing properly paid or givn for it, but only for the dozen."

By 1864 Hotten's *Slang Dictionary* gives this explicit definition for Baker's dozen:

*"This consists of thirteen or fourteen; the surplus number, called the inbread, being thrown in for fear of incurring the penalty for short weight."*

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/Bakers%2odozen.html>



Sara and Jarda Tusek with Klaus

"A Lesson on English" is a series of short lessons created for people who want to become fluent in conversational English.

The lessons are practical and useful for students learning English in a traditional classroom setting or on their own.