

Hook, Line and Sinker II

Last time on this series we looked at an expression consisting of three short nouns linked by the conjunction “and”: *hook, line and sinker*. Every American English speaker recognizes this as a verbal formula suggesting gullibility. Someone who believes a fabulous tale is often said to swallow it, *hook line and sinker*, like a hungry fish devouring the whole of the angler’s tackle.

Another cliché identical in construction is *lock, stock and barrel*. Literally, these words describe the components of a firearm. The *lock* is the firing mechanism, the *stock* is the handle, and the *barrel* is the tube through which the bullet passes. These three elements are pretty much the sum of the weapon.

But most of us know this formula in its extended, figurative meaning, which is “everything, the entirety of, all the parts,” as in *she bought the ranch, livestock, machinery, lock, stock and barrel*.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the phrase showed up in print in 1842, and it still has legs. The NYT featured the expression in an article dated May 13, 2016.

Do you like to study clichés and popular slang terms? I recommend onlineslangdictionary.com, which focuses on American, British and urban slang terms, with thousands of citations from popular media sources.