

FOOD-RELATED IDIOMS IN ENGLISH: A CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Annotation: This article targets at exploring the most common food-related idioms in the English language, analyze their figurative meanings and cultural origins, and discuss their equivalents in Uzbek. Moreover, it addresses the importance of these idioms in language learning and cross-cultural communication.

Key words: food-related idioms, figurative, idiomatic, literal meaning, "piece of cake ", cross-cultural awareness.

An idiom is a type of phrase or expression that has a meaning that can't be deciphered by defining the individual words. Appropriately, the word "idiom" is derived from the ancient Greek word "idioma," which means "peculiar phraseology". Idioms are a crucial part of any language, showing not only linguistic creativity but also the cultural and historical background of its speakers. Among various types of idioms, food-related idioms are particularly rich and vivid in English. These expressions often express meanings that are far from their literal interpretation, making them both intriguing and challenging for language learners. Because of understanding such idioms not only enhances communicative competence but also offers insight into the values and traditions of English-speaking cultures.

"Idioms and proverbs are linguistic expressions that have attracted the attention of many linguists. The basis of these interests lies in the fact that idioms and proverbs show the semantic depth of the language and reflect the people who communicate." This understanding statement is from Mukaddam Alihonova's article titled "Food Technology Terms in English Idioms and Proverbs: From Concepts to Alternatives", published in the European Scholar Journal in February 2024. Alihonova emphasizes that food-related idioms are not only decorative language elements but also they are deeply rooted in cultural and social contexts, reflecting the behaviors, positions, and concepts widespread in society.

English language is filled with food idioms that are utilized in everyday conversation, various field of science, journalism, literature, and also, politics. Some of the most commonly used food idioms as well as their meanings and examples are provided in the examples which are given in the below:

"Spill the beans" - such a phrase is used to a person who can not keep someone's secrets. Accurate meaning of this idiom is *"To drop beans accidentally"*. But its idiomatic meaning is different: *"To reveal a secret or confidential information"*. We can translate it into Uzbek like: *"Og 'zidan gullab qo 'ymoq, sirini aytib qo 'ymoq"*. For instance, "He spilled the beans about the surprise party before we even got there."

"Piece of cake" - one of the widely used idiom among both native and non-native speakers' speech. Literal meaning of the idiom is *"A slice of cake"*. Idiomatic - namely, figurative meaning of it is *"Something very easy to do"*. In Uzbek language, we can translate it as *" juda oson, xamirdan qil sug 'urgandek"*. For example, we can say : "Don't worry about the test—it's a piece of cake."

" Bring home the bacon" - the phrase is commonly understood to mean to earn money. It's word-by-word meaning is *"To return home with meat (especially pork)"*. *"To earn money to support one's family"* is the figurative meaning of this idiom. In Uzbek, it expresses *"Oilasi uchun pul topmoq, oilasini boqmoq"*. For instance, "She works hard every day to bring home the bacon."

"Apple of one's eye" - means something or someone very precious or dear. Simple meaning is *"A beloved apple"*(usually referring to the eye's pupil in older English). When it comes to figurative meaning that *"Someone who is deeply loved and cherished"*. We can translate it into Uzbek as *"ko 'zining nuri, ko 'zining oq-u qorasi"*. Example sentence: "His daughter is the apple of his eye."

"Cool as a cucumber" - we can come across this phrase rarely that has letter-by-letter meaning like, *"As physically cool as a cucumber"*. Figurative meaning is *"Extremely calm and composed under pressure"*, which means in Uzbek *" bosiq, vazmin "*. Such as, "Even during the interview, he remained cool as a cucumber."

"Couch potato" - this phrase is mostly used for describing a person. This stereotype often refers to a lazy and overweight person. Literal meaning of the idiom is *"A potato sitting on a couch "* (absurd literally) Figurative meaning: *"A person who spends a lot of time sitting and watching TV"*. Example sentence: "After work, he turns into a couch potato and watches TV all night."

When comparing food idioms in English with those in Uzbek or other languages, one can observe both similarities and distinctive expressions. While some idioms have close equivalents, others are deeply rooted in specific cultural experiences and are difficult to translate directly. However, due to differences in lifestyle and media habits, idioms such as "divan kartoshkasi" may not have a clear equivalent in Uzbek culture.

Attempting to translate literally (e.g., “divanda yatgan kartoshkasi”) would be meaningless or even humorous, leading to miscommunication.

This idiom highlights the importance of cultural awareness in translation. Translators and language learners must distinguish between literal and figurative meanings and take cultural contexts into account to preserve the intended message of the idiom.

The origins of food-related idioms often stem from historical, agricultural, or cultural contexts in which certain foods have symbolic significance. Understanding the etymology of these idioms contributes to a deeper understanding of their expression and meaning, and plays an important role in the relationship between language and culture.

For example, the idiom *"bring home the bacon"* dates back to the 12th-century English tradition of Dunmow, where, according to legend, the church there would reward a side of bacon to any man who could swear before God and the congregation that he had not quarreled with his wife for a year and a day. Over time, it came to mean "to earn a living."

Another example, *"spill the beans,"* may come from ancient Greek voting practices, where beans were used as ballots. A spilled container could reveal the results prematurely, for this reason the association with revealing secrets.

Meanwhile, idioms such as *"a piece of cake"* reflect the cultural attitude towards sweets as a simple pleasure and imply convenience and pleasure. This idiom became popular during World War II when Royal Air Force pilots used it to describe easy tasks. These examples show how idioms have acquired historical and social significance.

Food-related idioms, like all idioms, enrich language learning by exposing students to the thinking, humor, and worldview of native speakers. Mastering idioms can help with fluency, cultural competence, and more natural communication.

However, idioms also present challenges: Their figurative meanings are not always intuitive. They can have culturally embedded references. They often cannot be translated literally. Compare idioms across languages to build cross-cultural awareness. By focusing on both meaning and application, students can gradually master phrases and use them confidently in speaking and writing.

In conclusion, food-related idioms in English not only add to the richness of the language - they also reveal insights into cultural practices, values and history. From expressions of secrecy to symbols of affection or laziness, these idioms reflect people's attitudes towards food and each other. Studying food idioms also reveals the complexity of conveying meaning across linguistic boundaries, opening doors for cross-cultural understanding and translation studies. For English learners, mastering these idioms is a step towards deeper language knowledge and cultural literacy.

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