

# Analysis of Informal Food-related Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions in the English Language

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## Abstract

The article deals with the informal food-related idioms and idiomatic expressions which are used in the English Language. The study of idioms has quite a long history in linguistics. They constitute one important part of the language and culture. Knowing a language includes knowing idioms in that language. The use of idioms is so wide-spread that an understanding of these expressions is essential to successful communication, whether in listening, speaking, reading, or writing. As a large number of idioms are not intelligible to learners at first sight and their meanings typically cannot be guessed through the analysis of the components, teaching and learning idioms have always been a problematic and challenging part of language. It is recognized that idiomatic expressions add grace and exactness to the language. The paper also reveals that it is often difficult to translate an idiom from one language to another and attempts to translate them literally from the student's native tongue usually lead to roundabout expression of meaning and, more often, to confusion. For that reason, we should make their study an integral part of the teaching process. The given paper includes an overview of the definitions of idioms existing in different linguistic dictionaries and in the works of famous linguists and researchers. Moreover, it also emphasizes that idioms are fun to learn and they make the language much more colourful. The main goal of our study was to find out some informal food-related idioms being used in the English language and make their lexical-semantic analysis.

***Keywords:** English language, food-related idioms, linguistics, semantic analysis, translation problems*

## Introduction

When we put words together to create a meaning that is different from the meaning of the individual words, we create what we call an idiomatic expression or an idiom. Idioms come from spoken language and they are basically new vocabulary that we create using old vocabulary because we are too lazy or unimaginative to think of new words. Or perhaps because by using words that already exist, we can give a clue to the meaning. Idioms constitute one important part of the language and culture. Knowing a language includes knowing idioms in that language. Idiomatic expressions have long played an important role in the English language too. In fact, the use of idioms is so wide-spread that an understanding of these expressions is essential to successful communication, whether in listening, speaking, reading, or writing. As a large number of idioms are not intelligible to learners at first sight and their meanings typically cannot be guessed through

the analysis of the components, teaching and learning idioms have always been a problematic and challenging part of language.

We may learn grammar and, with time, acquire adequate vocabulary, but without a working knowledge of a number of idioms our speech will remain awkward and ordinary.

It is recognized that idiomatic expressions add grace and exactness to the language. It is often difficult to translate an idiom from one language to another and attempts to translate them literally from the student's native tongue usually lead to roundabout expression of meaning and, more often, to confusion. For that reason, we should make their study an integral part of the teaching process.

It should also be pointed out that English language is especially rich with idioms which require further study and analysis.

The given paper presents a brief overview of the idioms and idiomatic expressions, their definitions given by different famous scholars and analyzes food-related idioms in the English language.

### **Defining Idioms (Literature Review)**

We have looked through several linguistic dictionary definitions of an idiom and as we have found out an idiom is a phrase that means something different from what the words themselves imply, and is meant to be interpreted figuratively. Idioms are expressions we hear in everyday speech or see in writing, though we may not realize them. Idioms may require some imagination to interpret their meaning. If we are trying to identify an idiom, there is no specific formula we can use to decide if an expression is an idiom or not. However, if we encounter an expression that cannot be understood through a literal interpretation of the words used, it is likely an idiom. Besides, it should be mentioned that idioms are not complete sentences, but rather phrases that express a specific idea.

In Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, an idiom is defined as “an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts”(Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p.246). According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, A. S., 2004, p.643) “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.” Fernando (1996) considers idioms as “conventionalized multi-word expressions often, but not always non-literal” (pg. 1). Gramley and Pátzold (2003) have added more to that definition and define idiom as a “complex lexical item which is longer than a word form but shorter than a sentence and which has a meaning that cannot be derived from the knowledge of its component parts” (pg. 55).

According to The Oxford Companion to the English Language (MacArthur, T., 1992), idiom is an expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning that is comprehended in regard to a common use of that expression that is separate from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which it is made. It is speech form or an expression of a given language that cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements.

A more detailed definition is suggested by David Crystal in his Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. According to Crystal (2008), an idiom is “A term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit”.

Here are the definitions of idioms proposed by some other scholars as well: Thawabteh (2011) illustrated that idioms are one of the universal aspects of all languages; they are considered

to be an intrinsic part of human communication. Further, they baffle beginner learners to a great extent. They may cause not only linguistic but also cultural and technical problems for non-native speakers; hence, these problems might affect communication negatively. Dixon (2003) stated that idioms are essential to successful communication, whether in listening, speaking, reading, or writing. According to Cowie, Mackin, & McCaig (1983), the accurate and appropriate use of idioms is a distinctive mark of native-level command of the language, and it is a reliable measure of the proficiency of foreign learners. It is a fact that ignoring idioms would cause a learner various problems. The authors added that foreign language learners must learn not only the grammatical structures and vocabulary of the target language but also the idioms to integrate into the culture of the target language.

Furthermore, Lundblom & Woods (2012) emphasized the importance of understanding idioms. They believe that idioms are clearly presented in academic settings; consequently, failure to comprehend idioms could affect academic performance, written composition, reading comprehension, and vocabulary, especially because the occurrence of idioms in classroom language increases as students advance in age and grade. Several language researchers have commonly believe that a sound knowledge of idioms is required for English language proficiency and fluency, and a lack of such knowledge can cause significant misunderstanding (Liu, 2008; Shirazi & Talebinezhad, 2013; Wray, 1999, 2002). Thus, the more idioms one knows, the more native-like one's English will sound.

### **Usage of idioms**

A speaker or writer often uses idioms to convey a message to someone else in a more creative way. They are thought as a type of spice that prevents our conversation or writing from being too bland. So,

idioms can be used to prevent [our writing](#) from appearing too dry or formal, but they can also be used to help the writer connect with the reader.

There is another type of idiomatic usage used by fluent English speakers, and it's called collocations, or a combination of words that have a specific meaning. That is why idioms are challenging for language learners because their meanings can't be deciphered from the meanings of the individual words. It's like giving someone a jigsaw puzzle containing pieces that look like one thing, only for the finished product to be something else entirely. But as we mentioned before, that's also true of people from different parts of the same country who speak the same language.

Because there are no steadfast rules for idioms, the only way for language learners to become familiar with them is to speak with native speakers and have them explained. Accordingly, by learning idioms, one learns about the culture of the community that speaks the language (Al-kadi, 2015).

### **Studying and analyzing informal food-related idioms**

In the given paper we present informal food idioms we have collected, studied and analyzed. Materials for the analysis were found and taken from the English Language Dictionaries of Idioms, they are as follows: 1) Essential Idioms in English by Robert J. Dixon (2003); 2) The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms by Cristine Ammer (2013); 3) Oxford Dictionary of Idioms by Judith Siefring (2004); 4) McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs. (2005).

After looking into the idioms, it became quite obvious that there exist a great number of idioms and idiomatic expressions related to the concept of 'food' in the English language. Here are some of them along with their meanings.

1. ***a couch potato***

Meaning: a person who spends a lot of time sitting and watching TV

Example: 'Can I watch telly, Mum?' 'No, you've watched enough television today. You'll turn into **a couch potato**.

2. ***be paid peanuts***

Meaning: to receive very little money

Example: She loves her job, but she's **paid peanuts**.

3. ***in a nutshell***

Meaning: expressed clearly and in few words

Example: I'll tell you all about my holiday later, but **in a nutshell**, it was enjoyable but not fantastic.

4. ***be out to lunch***

Meaning: behaving strangely

Example: As an artist, he's very talented, but as a person, he's totally **out to lunch**.

5. ***spill the beans***

Meaning: give away a secret

Example: The team has sacked their manager, but neither side will **spill the beans** about what happened.

6. ***go pear-shaped***

Meaning: to go badly wrong (of a plan)

Example: His plan to sell his house and move to France has **gone pear-shaped**.

7. ***be full of beans***

Meaning: be full of energy and enthusiasm

Example: The kids **are full of beans**. They've just played tennis and now they want to play football.

8. ***butter somebody up***

Meaning: say nice things so that someone will help you or give you something

Example: If you want to borrow his car, you'll have to **butter him up first!**

9. ***pie in the sky***

Meaning: something which someone talks about that is very unlikely to happen

Example: Our plan to buy a holiday home in Positano turned out to be **pie in the sky**.

10. ***have a lot on one's plate***

Meaning: be very busy, with a lot of things to do and think about

Example: Julie **has got a lot on her plate** at the moment, what with her school exams and the tennis team.

11. ***apple of one's eye***

Meaning: Special favorite, beloved person or thing

Example: The youngest son was the **apple of his father's eye**.

12. ***go bananas***

Meaning: to act crazy,

Example: When it comes to animal rights, some people **go bananas**.

13. ***egg on***

Meaning: to incite, urge ahead, provoke

Example: Seemingly quiet, Margo actually **eggs on** Donald to quarrel with his staff.

14. ***piece of cake***

Meaning: Something easily accomplished

Example: I had no trouble finding your house — **a piece of cake**.

**15. cool as a cucumber**

Meaning: Calm and composed, self-possessed

Example: Despite the mishap Margaret was **cool as a cucumber**.

**16. be meat and drink to**

Meaning: be a source of great pleasure or encouragement to.

Example: the elements of the Jack The Ripper story **are meat and drink** to film-makers.

**17. burn the midnight oil**

Meaning: Stay up late working or studying

Example: The semester is almost over and we're all **burning the midnight oil** before exams.

**18. stew in one's own juice**

Meaning: Suffer the consequences of one's actions

Example: He's run into debt again, but this time we're leaving him to **stew in his own juice**.

**19. meat and potatoes**

Meaning: The fundamental part or parts of something

Example: This paragraph is the **meat and potatoes** of the contract.

**20. salad days**

Meaning: The time of youth, innocence, and inexperience

Example: Back in our salad days we went anywhere at night, never thinking about whether it was safe or not.

**Conclusion**

The study has shown that only few numbers of idioms with the concept of “food” found in the English language are easy to guess because of the words that make them, but mostly they have some hidden meaning that we cannot guess without using the dictionary. Idioms are usually unique to a language so it is important that we do not try to translate an idiom into our native language or we will get confused. We consider that learning idiomatic expressions is important when learning English because they are a common and natural way that native speakers communicate, but also useful in helping us to sound more fluent and natural when speaking or writing in English. Using them correctly can also help us to convey our message more effectively, packing a lot of meaning into a few words. Furthermore, idiomatic expressions are often used in informal settings such as conversations with friends, and they can help us to connect with native speakers and understand the culture better. Learning idiomatic expressions is therefore an essential aspect of mastering English language proficiency and fluency. Besides, idioms are fun to learn and they make the language much more colourful.

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## საკვებთან დაკავშირებული არაფორმალური იდიომებისა და იდიომატური გამოთქმების ანალიზი ინგლისურ ენაში

ნახუცრიშვილი ეკატერინე

ძამიაშვილი ელენე

იაკობ გოგებაშვილის სახელობის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, თელავი

### აბსტრაქტი

სტატია ეხება ინგლისურ ენაში არსებულ საკვებთან დაკავშირებულ არაფორმალურ იდიომებსა და იდიომატურ გამოთქმებს. აღსანიშნავია, რომ იდიომების შესწავლას ენათმეცნიერებაში საკმაოდ ხანგრძლივი ისტორია აქვს. იდიომები ენისა და კულტურის ერთ მნიშვნელოვან ნაწილს შეადგენენ. ენის ცოდნა გულისხმობს ამ ენაში არსებული იდიომების ცოდნასაც. იდიომების გამოყენება იმდენად ფართოდ არის გავრცელებული, რომ ამ გამოთქმების გაგება აუცილებელია წარმატებული კომუნიკაციისთვის, იქნება ეს მოსმენა, საუბარი, კითხვა თუ წერა. ვინაიდან იდიომათა დიდი რაოდენობა ერთი შეხედვით ბუნდოვანია და მათი მნიშვნელობის გამოცნობა, როგორც წესი, შეუძლებელია მხოლოდ მათი შემადგენელი კომპონენტების გაანალიზების გზით, იდიომების სწავლება და სწავლა ყოველთვის გარკვეულ სირთულეს წარმოადგენს. აღიარებულია, რომ იდიომატური გამოთქმები ენას სიზუსტეს მატებს. ნაშრომი ასევე ცხადყოფს, რომ ხშირად რთულია იდიომის ერთი ენიდან მეორეზე თარგმნა, რაც გარკვეულ დაბნეულობას იწვევს. სწორედ ამიტომ მათი შესწავლა სასწავლო პროცესის განუყოფელ ნაწილად უნდა ვაქციოთ. მოცემულ ნაშრომში, ასევე, წარმოდგენილია სხვადასხვა ლინგვისტურ ლექსიკონში და ცნობილი ლინგვისტებისა და მკვლევართა ნაშრომებში არსებულ იდიომათა მიმოხილვა. უფრო მეტიც, სტატია ასევე ხაზს უსვამს იმ ფაქტს, რომ იდიომების გაანალიზება საკმაოდ სახალისო პროცესია, რაც ენას უფრო მრავალფეროვანს ხდის. ჩვენი კვლევის მთავარი მიზანია არსებული საკვებთან დაკავშირებული არაფორმალური იდიომების მოძიება ინგლისურ ენაში და მათი ლექსიკურ-სემანტიკური ანალიზი.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** ინგლისური ენა, საკვებთან დაკავშირებული იდიომები,

ლინგვისტიკა, სემანტიკური ანალიზი, თარგმნის სირთულები