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CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF FOOD-BASED IDIOMS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This study examines the cultural and cognitive dimensions of food-based idioms in English and Uzbek. Unlike traditional approaches focusing only on semantic equivalence, this research highlights how food-related expressions encode cultural values and conceptual thinking. The findings demonstrate that such idioms function as cognitive tools reflecting everyday experience and social structure.

Keywords: food idioms, cognitive linguistics, cultural semantics, metaphor, phraseology, cross-cultural analysis

Introduction

Language reflects not only communication but also the way people conceptualize reality. One of the most productive sources of figurative language is food-related experience, as it is universal and deeply embedded in daily life. Food idioms provide insight into how speakers interpret abstract concepts through concrete experiences.

While Uzbek linguistic traditions emphasize collective and social meanings in food expressions, English tends to use food idioms to describe individual experience and evaluation. This difference makes food-based idioms a valuable field for cross-cultural linguistic research.

Methods

The study employs comparative and cognitive-semantic analysis. A selection of English and Uzbek food-related idioms was analyzed based on their semantic structure, conceptual mapping, and cultural implications. The focus was on identifying differences in metaphorical patterns and cultural encoding.

Results

1. Conceptual metaphor patterns

Food idioms often rely on conceptual metaphors where physical experience is mapped onto abstract meaning. For example, in English, the expression “spill the beans” means revealing a secret. The action of spilling food metaphorically represents unintended disclosure.

In Uzbek, a similar meaning is expressed through non-food imagery, such as “sir ochilib ketdi”, showing that while the concept is universal, the imagery differs.

2. Idioms expressing difficulty and control

English frequently uses food texture and preparation to describe complexity. For instance, “a hard nut to crack” refers to a difficult problem or person. The physical resistance of a nut becomes a metaphor for intellectual or social difficulty.

In Uzbek, difficulty is usually expressed without food-based imagery, which indicates a lower reliance on gastronomic metaphors in this semantic field.

3. Idioms and emotional evaluation

Food idioms in English also express emotional states. The phrase “butter someone up” means to flatter someone excessively. Here, butter symbolizes smoothness and ease, reflecting a strategy of social manipulation.

Uzbek equivalents often rely on direct expressions rather than metaphorical ones, which shows a difference in expressive strategies.

Discussion

The findings suggest that English uses food idioms more extensively to structure abstract thinking, especially in areas such as social interaction, evaluation, and problem-solving. Uzbek, on the other hand, tends to use food expressions primarily in contexts of social unity and tradition.

This indicates that while food is a universal human experience, its linguistic representation is shaped by cultural priorities. English reflects individual cognition and evaluation, whereas Uzbek emphasizes collective identity and shared experience.

Conclusion

Food-based idioms represent an important intersection of language, culture, and cognition. They reveal how everyday experiences shape abstract thinking and linguistic expression. Cross-cultural comparison shows that differences in idiomatic usage are not random but reflect deeper cultural and cognitive patterns.

Understanding these differences contributes to both linguistic theory and practical communication, especially in translation and intercultural studies.

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