

Tasting Language: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Food Idioms in Albanian and English

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Abstract

This study explores how material culture specifically food shapes everyday language through idiomatic expressions in Albanian and English. By examining and comparing a corpus of 207 food-related idioms across both languages, the research reveals how culturally significant items like bread, eggs, and apples serve as metaphors for survival, emotion, morality, and social behaviour. In Albanian, idioms rooted in agrarian life reflect values of dignity, hospitality, and resilience, with bread emerging as a central symbol of livelihood and emotional warmth. English idioms, while similarly grounded in daily experience, often emphasize humour, abstraction, and metaphorical play. Through cross-linguistic comparison, the paper highlights how food idioms encode cultural priorities and emotional nuance, offering insight into how language reflects and preserves everyday life. This analysis contributes to the broader understanding of metaphor, cultural identity, and the linguistic embodiment of material experience.

Key words; idioms, material culture, cross-linguistic, cross-culture, linguistic relativity, figurative language

1. *Linguistic relativity*

There is a correlation between language and culture and some cultural-specific ways of thinking can be traced back to the views of Herder and von Humboldt in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Humboldt made his innovative and radical statement “one nation, one language” Whereas the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on linguistic relativity, expresses the notion that different languages lead their speakers to different conceptualizations of the same extralinguistic reality, which seems to be most evident in the way that reality is segmented by the lexicon. In Worf’s words *we cut nature up, organize its concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way; an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.* [Lamarque 1997, 86].

Language determines the way a person views the world. Or the person’s perception of the world corresponds to the person’s spoken language. It goes without saying that the mere content of language is intimately related to culture. In the sense that the vocabulary of a language more or less faithfully, reflects the culture whose purposes it serves it is perfectly true that the history of language and the history of culture move along parallel lines [Sapir, 1921: 104]

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also known as linguistic relativity, proposes that the language we speak shapes how we experience and think about the world. According to this view, the structure, vocabulary, and categories of a language influence what its speakers notice, recall, and deem important, guiding attention and shaping perception.

Linguistic relativity is the idea that the structure and vocabulary of a language can shape and influence the way its speakers perceive and think about the world. This suggests that language determines thought and that speakers of different languages experience the world in fundamentally different ways. Language shapes cognition

Language determines the way a person views the world. Or the person's perception of the world corresponds to the person's spoken language. Even though few linguists would fully agree with a strict reading of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis today, it is generally accepted that a language, especially its lexicon, influences its speaker's cultural patterns of thought and perception in various ways, for example through a culture-specific segmentation of the extralinguistic reality, the frequency of occurrence of lexical items, or the existence of keywords or key word combinations revealing core cultural values.

Culture and language are deeply intertwined, shaping, and being shaped by one another in multiple, interconnected ways. Social norms and communication styles rooted in cultural context influence speech patterns, politeness, formality, and the use of silence or indirectness. Lexical culture generates specialized vocabularies tied to daily life, technologies, rituals, and environments, encoding practices and values central to a community. Worldviews and categories shaped by culture influence how concepts are organized linguistically, shaping metaphors, salient categories, and how speakers partition reality (e.g., colour terms, kinship systems, and spatial orientation). Narrative and discourse traditions guide how information is framed and emphasized, while pragmatics and politeness norms determine directness, humour, and confrontation, influencing idioms and conversational styles. Language socialization processes family talk, schooling, religious practices, and communal activities, transmit identities and cultural knowledge.

2. Idioms

Idioms serve to condense complex ideas into concise, visually evocative expressions, yielding language that is memorable and imagery rich. They also function as carriers of culture, history, and social norms, often reflecting shared experiences, humour, values, and historical events within a language community. The use of idioms can signal membership in a linguistic or regional community and may indicate aspects of the speaker's education, age, or familiarity with the associated culture. The desire to be original, authentic, irreplaceable, and culturally bounded permeates every aspect of linguistic creation and production, idioms are no exception.

Idioms are traditionally described as multi-word constructions, usually semantically opaque and in most of the cases figuratively transferred. The fussy nature of idiomaticity is usually emphasized in many traditional scientific research works.

In the main literature on the topic, different scholars have given idioms different definitions. Yet, they all agree that what is essential to an idiom is that its meaning cannot be deduced from its constituent parts. Healey (1968: 71 as cited in Halawachy 2013,4) defines an idiom as "any group of words whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of the individual words".

Idioms are also said to be “groups of words with set meaning that cannot be calculated by adding up the separate meaning of the parts” (Bolinger, 1975: 100)

Research in language acquisition suggests that language is learned, stored, and retrieved and produced in holophrases and other multi-word items, not just as individual words, and terms. [Moon, 1998, 30]

Each language manages to express a unique world view by the way it slices up reality into its own language. Idiomaticity is a universal linguistic phenomenon in natural languages. Phraseology is a kind of picture gallery in which are collected vivid and amusing sketches of nation's customs, traditions, and prejudices [Antrushina 2004, 73].

The study of idioms has been generally considered problematic and controversial for many linguists. Langlotz argues that “idioms are peculiar linguistic constructions that have raised many eyebrows in linguistics and often confuse newcomers to a language” [Langlotz, 2006:1] Whereas Cermak states that “In idioms, nothing is what it seems to be: words are not words, they do not have the familiar meaning one knows from dictionaries, while, perhaps, the worst anomaly of there is to be found in their specific and unpredictable function, especially a pragmatic one” [Cermak, 2017: 8] Idioms are traditionally described as multi-word constructions, usually semantically opaque and in most of the cases figuratively transferred.

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Idioms typical properties are conventionality (non-compositionality), inflexibility, figuration, proverbiality, informality, and affect. Since the acquisition, representation, and processing of idiomatic constructions are shaped by usage, a usage-based perspective underlines the idea that different features such as syntactic idiosyncrasy, variability, semantic irregularity, lexical specification, and cognitive entrenchment prevail at all levels of constructions. [Wilinski, 2022, 118]

Idioms have been so far indicated as the most expressive and colourful part of a language's lexicon. Idioms play a distinctive and influential role in language. Idioms are the unique product of their immediate context and do not obviously obey universal rules [Flavell L and R, 1997, 36]. They show some characteristics that are difficult to be explained in terms of language universals. Idioms are anomalies of language, mavericks of the linguistic world.

2. 1. *Cultural background and idiomatic expressions*

Idioms are essential elements of any language. They add colour, depth, and cultural richness to communication, enabling speakers to convey complex ideas and emotions succinctly and vividly. A language community's cultural background profoundly shapes its idioms in several interconnected ways. Put differently: idioms reveal culture in use.

Idioms appear in the structure of the language as an effect, as a cause, it resides in the experiences and predilections of the speakers of the language. Idiom is the attitude of mind common to all members of a linguistic community and inherent in all their thinking. [Roberts, 1044, 291]

Nida states that “Idioms usually carry more impact than non-idiomatic expression because of their close identification with a particular language and culture” [Nida, 2011, 139]

Cultural objects and daily life feed idiom imagery. Idioms encode collective memories—wars, migrations, social upheavals, local histories, struggles, and notable figures—embedding a nation’s memory in everyday speech. Examining the imagery behind idioms illuminates how historical economy, daily life, and social practices shaped their form. For example, objects touched daily, utensils, clothing, tools become recurring images, with food imagery often rooted in shared culinary practices. Likewise, weapons and armour evoke strength, danger, or conflict, reflecting historical concerns about security and identity. Machinery, infrastructure, buildings, monuments, and ornamentation introduce modern and traditional symbolism, while writing materials and records influence proverbs about truth, memory, and authority.

Environment and daily life also shape metaphor. Idioms reflect a culture’s environment agriculture, urban life, and the natural world translating practical experience into figurative language. Dress signals status, warmth, modesty, or identity, and clothing imagery appears in idioms about appearance, virtue, or social expectation. Hospitality, sharing, and appetite anchor many phrases in tangible culinary experiences, reinforcing social norms around generosity and communal life.

Dialects, registers, and group vernaculars further diversify idiom imagery. Regional, occupational, and subcultural varieties generate distinctive figurative expressions that reinforce group identity and solidarity while highlighting sociolinguistic variation. Religious narratives, saints, and moral tales filter into figurative language, with biblical or folk motifs shaping metaphor, moral instruction, and cosmology in idioms. Dress, utensils, and dining practices along with sacred spaces and artifacts provide a broad palette for symbolic language about virtue, ritual, and social order.

Proverbs and idioms are thus not merely decorative language but vessels of cultural knowledge. They carry implicit norms about hospitality, elders’ respect, modesty, communal harmony, and independence, signalling what a culture prizes or warns against. For instance, in societies that prize communal harmony, idioms may emphasize collective action or indirect communication in more individualistic contexts, idioms may encourage initiative and self-reliance.

In recent years, studies on idiomatic expressions have increasingly focused on the cultural and cognitive aspect of language.

3. Food idioms

Food imagery acts as a powerful cultural lens. Idioms lean on everyday food items to express complex ideas about social roles, economics, emotions, and risk, making language vivid and memorable. Material culture, the objects, practices, and routines around food shapes the meanings these idioms carry. As kitchens, markets, meals, and provisioning routines evolve, so too do the associations and connotations of the expressions we use. Additionally, food imagery can signal status, hospitality, generosity, or restraint, depending on context. Overall, food-based language links daily life with social values, history, and identity, turning simple phrases into rich cultural artifacts.

Food idioms are more than playful language, they are cultural tools that help us express complex ideas with simplicity and flavour. Whether describing a person’s character, a financial struggle, or a risky situation, these idioms bring warmth, humour, and relatability to everyday speech. Food idioms add colour and immediacy to language, using everyday culinary imagery to convey complex ideas with vivid clarity. They translate abstract concepts humour, generosity, risk, appetite, or restraint into tangible, memorable phrases that resonate across cultures.

From tasting opportunities and savouring moments to biting off more than one can chew, these expressions encode social values (hospitality, gratitude, moderation) and practical wisdom drawn from daily life in the kitchen, market, or dining room. Food metaphors also reveal relationships between abundance and scarcity, status and taste, and community versus individuality, often balancing positive and negative connotations to guide behaviour or reflect shared experiences. In sum, food idioms are windows into a culture's priorities, humour, and collective memory, turning meals into meaningful metaphors that travel beyond the table.

4. Analysing English Food Idioms: How Culinary Language Shapes Meaning

4.1 English idioms related to Food

- apple of my pie- someone you care a lot about
- egg on your face- feeling embarrassed
- the icing on a cake-something extra that makes a good thing better
- tough cookie- a strong person who does not give up easily
- as cool as a popsicle- very calm and not nervous
- nuts about something-like very much something
- put all eggs in one basket- rely only on one plan
- cool beans- that is great
- one small cookie- a clever or smart person
- sell like hotcakes- sell very quickly
- that is the way cookie crumbles- that is the way things happen
- bear fruit- get favourable results
- finger in the pie- get involved
- pie in the sky- an empty promise or dream
- everything from fruit to nuts- a variety of things
- in a nutshell- in summary
- eat humble pie- make a humble apology
- butter up- flatter someone to do something
- half a bread is better than one- something is better than nothing
- not knowing beans about- having no idea
- bread and butter- main source of income
- breadwinner- the person who earns money for the family
- know which side your bread is buttered on- to know what is best for you
- break bread- to start eating in a friendly way
- put bread on the table- to earn money for your family
- the best thing since sliced bread- a good invention or idea
- cash for bread- money for essential thing
- cut the mustard- to meet the requirements
- break bread- to share a meal, to make peace
- salt of the earth- a very good and honest person
- be in a jam- be in a difficult situation
- butter fingers- someone prone to throw things

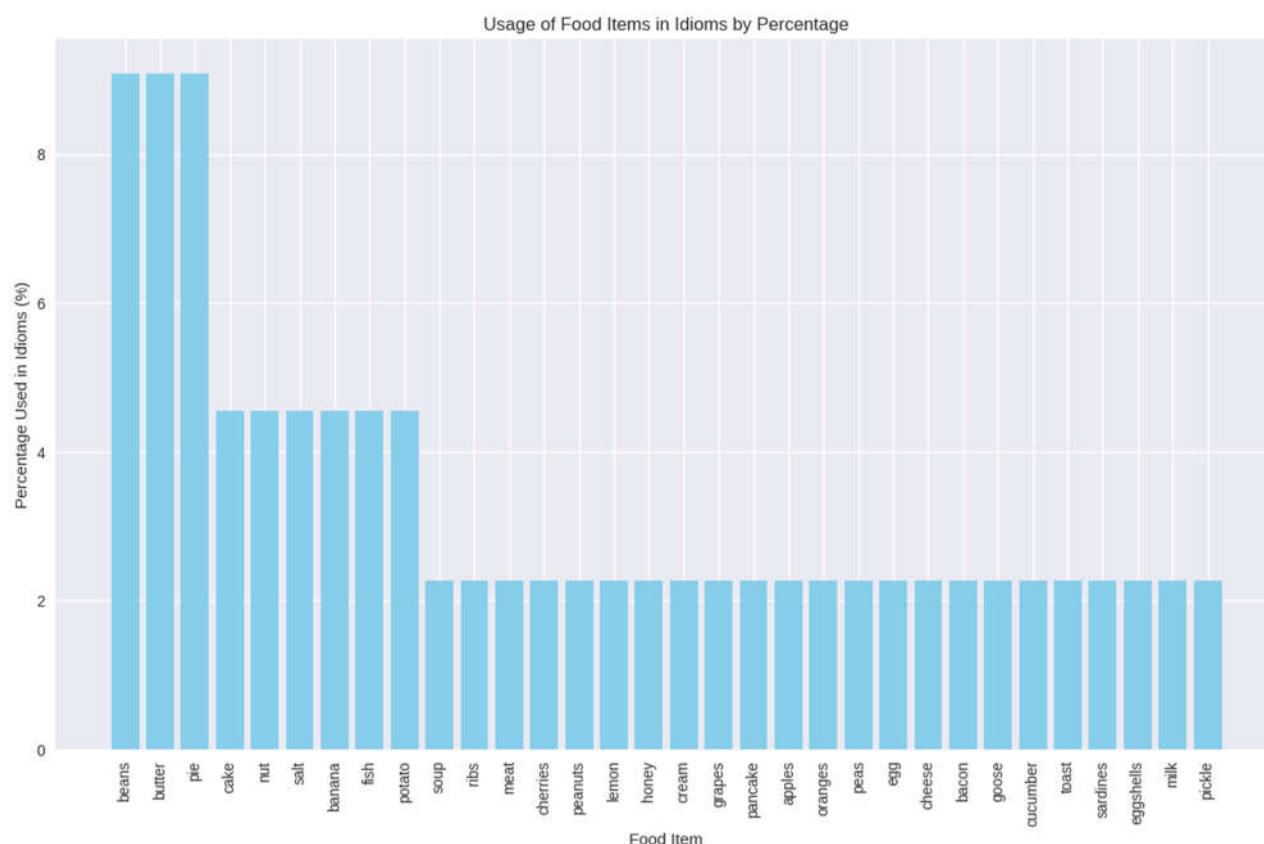
- Piece of cake / As easy as pie- very easy task
- Have one's cake and eat it too- wanting two incompatible things
- Finger in the pie- involved in many activities
- Meat and potatoes- basic or essential part
- Stick to your ribs- filling and satisfying
- Everything from soup to nuts- a wide variety of things
- Life is a bowl of cherries- life is pleasant
- For peanuts- very cheap
- buy a lemon- buy unnecessary things
- As sweet as honey- very kind and pleasant person
- A pinch of salt- skepticism or doubt
- The cream of the crop- the best of the group
- butter up- flatter to gain favour
- sour grapes- pretending not to care out of envy
- Pie in the sky- unrealistic dream or promise
- as flat as a pancake- extremely flat
- salt of the Earth- honest, good- natures people
- Comparing apples to oranges- comparing two different things
- Like two peas in a pod- very similar people or things
- Full of beans- lively and energetic
- not knowing beans about- have no idea
- Not worth a hill of beans- worthless, insignificant
- go bananas- act crazy or excited
- top banana- leader or boss
- Bad egg- dishonest
- big cheese- very important and influential person
- couch potato - a lazy person who watches TV all day long
- carrot and stick- a mix of reward and punishment used to get something
- know your onions- be smart, know a lot of things
- As red as a beet- very red in the face
- Dangle a carrot- to offer something to get someone to act
- Small potatoes- very small things
- Hot potato- a very problem to deal with
- Beet around the bush- to avoid saying something directly
- Bean counter- someone who focuses a lot on money
- As green as grass-very new
- Sour grapes- pretend you did not want something after you have not received it
- Pick of the crop- the best
- Cool as a carrot- calm and collected
- Bring home the bacon- make money for the family
- Have bigger fish to fry- have more important things to do
- Fine kettle of fish- A messy or difficult situation
- Goose is cooked- In serious trouble or finished
- Like a lamb to the slaughter- not knowing that something is dangerous
- Beef up-to make it stronger
- Where is the beef- asking for proof or evidence

- Tough meat- something or someone hard to deal with
- A beef with someone- a disagreement
- Ham-handed- clumsy and not careful
- Cook someone's goose- to ruin someone's plans
- Like a piece of meat-treated without respect
- Bacon beats- small pieces of something
- Make mincemeat of- to easily defeat someone
- Bone to pick- a complaint or problem to talk about
- Beefcake- a very muscular man
- Have bigger fish to fry- have more important things to do
- Packed like sardines- very crowded
- Cool as a cucumber- calm
- As warm as toast- cosy and comfortable
- Walk on eggshells- extremely cautious
- spill the beans- reveal a secret
- cry over the spilled milk- regret something that cannot be changed
- In a pickle- in a difficult situation
- drop like a hot potato- abandon quickly
- eat your cake and have it too- to enjoy two desirable but contradictory things
- have a finger in two pies- get involved in different activities
- cheesy grin- a big fake smile
- say cheese and die- a warning or bad thing after taking a photo
- as cheesy as a pizza- very silly and not serious
- like cheese on macaroni- a very perfect match
- make holes than Swiss cheese- something full of problems and mistakes
- a cheesy joke- a silly joke
- hard cheese- bad luck
- the cheese stands alone-someone is left out
- like melted cheese- warm and soft inside
- melt like cheese- become very weak
- say cheese or else- a playful warning to smile
- carrot top- a person with red or orange hair
- egg someone on- urge someone to do something
- peach fuzz- small amount of hair growth
- spice thing up- make things more exciting

4.2 English Food Idioms' Quantitative analysis

This study analyses a corpus of **114** English food idioms to examine the most productive and influential food imagery within idiomatic usage. The central imagery centers on beans, butter, pie, cake, and nuts, which function as core anchors for metaphorical expression. The scope of the analysis draws on established reference works, including the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006), the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2006), English Idioms and How to Use Them (2000), and the Dictionary of Idioms (1992). These sources provide

canonical exemplars and usage notes that anchor the investigation in widely recognized lexical resources.



Analysing the chart, appears that beans and butter have extremely high usage in idioms, each around 9–9.5%. This suggests these two terms are core cultural anchors in food-themed idioms. They symbolize basic nourishment, frugality, and reliable provisioning. Pie is also high, around 4–5%. These items act as the core, most productive metaphors in the corpus. This suggests pie is a recognizable, versatile metaphor. Pies are associated with meals, holidays, and festive occasions in many English-speaking cultures. After the top two (beans, butter), the percentages quickly decline to around 4.5–4.6% for several items like (cake, salt, tar, banana, fish, etc. These are solid, frequently used idiom ingredients but not as dominant as beans or butter. The items likely cover diverse semantic domains (cakes and celebrations; salt and tar for preservation or hazard; fish for pragmatism or luck). A long trailing tail of many food items (potato, shrimp, onion, meat, cheese, etc.) sit around the 2.0–2.5% range. These are still used but far less frequently in idiom usage. The tail items (pumpkin, grape, eggs, pepper, etc.) hover near 2% or less, indicating occasional usage but not core idiomatic staples.

The generation and use of these idioms tie them to material culture and the cultural backgrounds from which they emerge. Beans and butter stand out as everyday universally recognizable pantry items. Beans symbolize frugality, nourishment, and self-reliance—values historically tied to agrarian and working-class life in England (and later industrial Britain). Butter, as a rich, common dairy product, signals abundance, hospitality, and preparation for meals. Their prominence in idioms reflects a cultural emphasis on plainspoken sufficiency and the ability to provide for others with limited resources.

4.2.1. Classification of the English food idioms grouped into thematic categories based on their metaphorical meaning and usage.

English food idioms are employed to encode a range of personal and social dimensions, including personality traits, emotional states, salient behavioural dispositions, cognitive processes, demonstrations of cleverness, as well as indicators of financial condition and social stability. More precisely, the idioms enumerated above can be classified within these categories.

Relationships, Personality and Emotions

Idioms that describe people's traits, relationships, or emotional states.

- *Apple of my pie* – Someone you care a lot about
- *Tough cookie* – Strong person who does not give up
- *One small cookie* – Clever or smart person
- *Cool beans* – That is great
- *As cool as a popsicle / Cool as a cucumber / Cool as a carrot* – Calm and collected
- *As sweet as honey* – Kind and pleasant person
- *Salt of the earth* – Honest, good-natured person
- *Bad egg* – Dishonest person
- *Big cheese / Top banana* – Important or influential person
- *Cheesy grin / A cheesy joke / As cheesy as a pizza / Like cheese on macaroni / Melt like cheese / Like melted cheese / The cheese stands alone* – Silly, fake, or emotional expressions
- *Peach fuzz* – Small amount of hair growth
- *Carrot top* – Person with red/orange hair
- *Beefcake* – Muscular man
- *Sour grapes* – Pretending not to care out of envy
- *Full of beans* – Energetic and lively
- *Go bananas* – Act crazy or excited
- *As red as a beet* – Very red in the face
- *Spice things up* – Make things more exciting

Work, Money, and Livelihood

Idioms related to earning, spending, or economic survival.

- *Bread and butter / Cash for bread / Put bread on the table / Know which side your bread is buttered on / Breadwinner / The best thing since sliced bread / Half a bread is better than one* – Income and essentials
- *Bring home the bacon* – Earn money for the family
- *For peanuts* – Very cheap
- *Buy a lemon* – Buy something worthless
- *Bean counter* – Someone focused on money
- *Small potatoes* – Something insignificant
- *Hot potato* – A difficult issue
- *Have bigger fish to fry* – More important matters
- *Cut the mustard* – Meet expectations
- *Make mincemeat of* – Easily defeat someone

Intelligence, Cleverness and Decision-Making

Idioms about smart thinking, judgment, or knowledge.

- *Know your onions* – Be knowledgeable
- *In a nutshell* – In summary
- *Not knowing beans about* – Have no idea
- *A pinch of salt* – Scepticism or doubt
- *Pick of the crop / The cream of the crop* – The best
- *Where is the beef?* – Asking for proof
- *Bone to pick* – Complaint or issue

Food and Eating Metaphors

Idioms that use food imagery to describe actions, situations, or qualities.

- *Piece of cake / As easy as pie* – Very easy task
- *Have one's cake and eat it too / Eat your cake and have it too* – Wanting two incompatible things
- *The icing on the cake* – Something extra that makes it better
- *Eat humble pie* – Make a humble apology
- *Break bread* – Share a meal or make peace
- *Stick to your ribs / Meat and potatoes* – Filling or essential
- *Everything from soup to nuts / Everything from fruit to nuts* – Wide variety
- *Life is a bowl of cherries* – Life is pleasant
- *Finger in the pie / Have a finger in two pies* – Get involved
- *Pie in the sky* – Unrealistic dream
- *Sell like hotcakes* – Sell quickly
- *That is the way the cookie crumbles* – That's how things happen

Trouble, Risk and Caution

Idioms that express danger, embarrassment, or difficulty.

- *Egg on your face* – Feeling embarrassed
- *Put all eggs in one basket* – Relying on one plan
- *Be in a jam / In a pickle* – In trouble
- *Drop like a hot potato* – Abandon quickly
- *Walk on eggshells* – Be extremely cautious
- *Cry over spilled milk* – Regret something irreversible
- *Goose is cooked / Cook someone's goose* – In serious trouble
- *Fine kettle of fish* – Messy situation
- *Like a lamb to the slaughter* – Unaware of danger
- *Tough meat / A beef with someone / Ham-handed* – Difficult or clumsy
- *Hard cheese* – Bad luck
- *Make holes like Swiss cheese* – Full of flaws

Food and meals are central to social life in English-speaking cultures: hospitality, family gatherings, celebrations, and orderliness (meals at set times, hosting). Idioms anchored in these practices convey social meaning efficiently (generosity, timing, reciprocity, hospitality),

making them persistent in language. England's historical diet and economy emphasized staples and provisioning. Over generations, these experiences become conventional metaphors for thrift, generosity, work, and success. Long-standing cultural memory sustains these expressions.

4. 3 Analysing Albanian's Food Idioms: How Culinary Language Shapes Meaning

4.3.1. Albanian idioms related to food

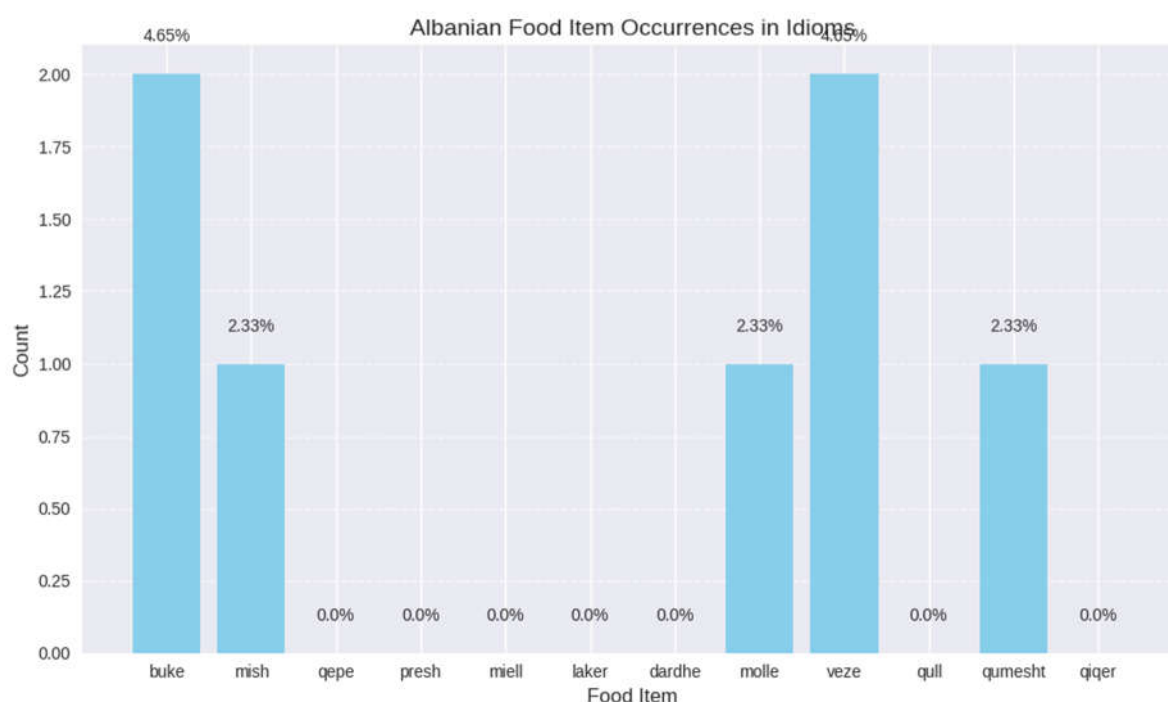
- bëj bukën- earn one's living
- m'u bë zemra bukë- cherish, enjoy
- bukë pa brumë- tasteless, unattractive person
- me bukë të ëmbël- may you live happily
- për bukën e gojës- just to live, just to keep yourself alive
- si buka që ha- surely, without any doubt
- buka dhe kripa- the most important, fundamental, essential thing
- me bukë e kripë- with what we have but with love and kindness
- buka e vjetër- old friend, a long-time friend with whom we have shared our troubles and problems
- ha bukë- it is valuable, it is beneficial
- nuk ha bukë- it's worthless, it's useless, no one wants it
- i ha bukën- take something that is due to them, take something necessary
- i ha bukën gomari- He is very stupid, he is clumsy
- ha bukën dhe përmbys kupën- He is very ungrateful he is not thankful to what you have done to him
- ha bukë vec- It's very different from the others, it's the best
- ha bukën time- live on my won expenses, earn my own living
- e ka ngrënë turpun me bukë- They are not at all ashamed of the inappropriate things they do.
- s'më hahet buka- I don't have good relations, not in good terms
- është bukë e djathë- is closely related to someone, they get along well with each other
- ia merr pula bukën nga dora- he is clumsy, incompetent
- iu qep me bukë në trastë- It was sewn from behind without being separated.
- e ruan bukën ndër dhëmbë- He is grateful, he does not forget the honor that has been done to him.
- shkon në bukë të vet- grows and starts its own life
- u thye buka- The friendship broke up
- u bw mish për hell- tried, exhausted
- hyn mish e del peshk- learns nothing, remains the same ignorant
- as mish as peshk- without any distinguishing feature, undefined
- mish me presh e presh me mish- it's the same thing, there's no difference
- mishi të piquet e helli të mos digjet- to do a job carefully without harming anyone
- mish pa kocka- An unstable person, who can manipulate others as they please
- ngul qepë e shkël hudhra- It's a useless, completely pointless job, it does more harm than good

- peshku ne det, tigani ne zjarr- to make plans without having anything certain, to make useless plans
- e prish jahninë për një qepë- ruining all the work done for something small
- sikur qeni qepën ta hajë- under any circumstances, definitely
- e kam presh në kopësht- I have no relationship with anyone
- e la presh ne diell- He took everything, left nothing behind
- me presh në dorë- at the very moment when he was stealing or doing something bad
- bluan miell të hollë- He says wise things, he is very smart.
- i lirë në miell e i shtrenjët në krunde- spends on something worthless and saves on something less valuable
- i ka marre era miellin- has lost a lot and is unable to win anymore
- marr miell hua- I have a good relationship with someone, we are good friends
- e mban shtëpinë me miell hua- He has no income, he is poor.
- miell i pasitur- something of poor quality, immature person
- miell i nje thesi- similar people
- miell nga thesi i botës- someone else's work, taken from others
- i shet krundet per miell- sells you something worthless, deceives you
- shto miell e shto uje- He/She enlarges a task, does not close it or complete it
- u be lakër- was broken, was shattered, was torn apart
- i dolën lakrat lakrorit- secrets that someone wanted to keep to themselves were revealed
- grin lakra- talks a lot but no one listens
- i bie shiu në lakra- He's doing very well, he's lucky
- i ndaj lakrat- I clearly define my attitude towards someone, I finally break away from someone
- ia nxori lakrat në shesh- He revealed the evil deeds he had done, exposed his lies
- e kapi nder lakra- caught him doing a bad job, caught him in a bad act
- ka rënë nen dardhë-is in trouble
- ka rënë nga dardha- He has gone through a lot of hardship, he has suffered
- është poshtë në dardhë- is close to good things and benefits from them
- kërkon dardha në dimër- seeks the impossible, expects something that is impossible to happen
- sillet rredh dardhës- to come around to someone in the hope that someone will help them
- mollë e kalbur- a person who was healthy but has completely fallen ill
- mollë e krimbur- A seemingly healthy and beautiful person with internal illness
- sheh molla mollën e piqet- does an action by copying someone else
- vete te molla e kuqe- Word spreads very quickly
- e do vezën të qërruar- He likes everything ready, he doesn't make the effort himself, he wants others to make it ready for him.
- ecen si mbi vezë- walk slowly, quietly and with more caution
- jam si ne vezë- I don't feel calm, I'm afraid I'll do something wrong
- ta jep vezën pa të verdhë- He is very good, he is agile
- nuk e le vezën të ftohet- He is very impatient, he doesn't wait for the right time to do something
- i ngeci veza kryq- There is a big problem that I can't solve.
- vezë me dy të verdha- a person of many values, a wealthy person
- vezë kllukë- an unhealthy and weak person who gets sick often or is easily affected by diseases

- si veza në kulac- surrounded by all good things, with prosperity
- vezë e prishur- a worthless and evil person you don't want to be around
- të vjedh vezët nën kllockë- He is a cunning and cunning thief, I can't catch him.
- më shterngoi veza- I have different needs, I have a problem that can't wait any longer.
- u dogj nga qulli dhe i fryn dhe kosit- Someone has suffered badly once and shows care even when it is not necessary.
- të vraftë qulli- You are upset about something small you are not able to do easy work, you are very incompetent.
- i mbeti luga në qull- The word didn't reach even ordinary people they didn't listen to it.
- u bw qumësht- He has calmed down, his anger has gone
- i ra luga në qumësht- Things are going well, life is good and easy.
- ra nga qulli ne uthull- He became furious, his anger and rage increased, he became angry.
- i doli qumështi mbi përshesh- He lives very well, he is in good financial condition.
- e hollon qumështin- It softens the conversation, makes things seem easier than they are
- ta shet hirrën për qumësht- deceives you into taking and presenting something worthless as something more valuable
- kërkon qumësht nga cjapi- asking for something impossible
- u bë qiqër- He recovered completely and is in very good health
- e ka mendjen qiqër- He is in a very good mental state, has a sharp memory and is alert
- kërkon qiqra në hell- is asking for something that cannot happen or cannot be done
- e do qofte- wants others to do it for him, without trying, without tiring himself
- s'ka me qofte te daja- the time has passed when you found everything ready
- per buken e gojes- just to earn my living

4.3.2. *Albanian Food Idioms' Quantitative analysis*

This study examines a corpus of 94 Albanian food-related idioms to illuminate how culinary imagery functions within Albanian phraseology. The investigation draws on established lexicographic authorities, notably the *Fjalori Frazologjik i Gjuhës Shqipe* (Albanian Phraseological Units Dictionary, 2010) and the *Fjalori i Gjuhës së Sotme Shqipe* (Albanian Monolingual Dictionary, 2006), as primary references for itemized idioms and their uses. The analysis reveals that Albanian speakers have constructed a substantial portion of their food idioms around a core set of staple items, including bukë (bread), mish (meat), qepe (onion), presh (leek), miell (flour), lakër (cabbage), dardhë (pear), mollë (apple), vezë (egg), qull (gruel), qumësht (milk), and qiqër (chickpea). These items function as salient cultural symbols and cognitive anchors, shaping metaphorical extensions that encode a range of social meanings, from sustenance and prosperity to simplicity and moral qualities. By mapping idiomatic expressions to this curated inventory of foods, the study highlights the centrality of everyday staples in Albanian figurative language and suggests a cohesive imagery set that reinforces cultural continuity and communicative efficiency across contexts.



Food Idiom Spectrum analysis

Buke (bread) emerges as the dominant item in the idiom sample, appearing in 4.65% of the expressions. This high frequency establishes bread as the top anchor and a foundational reference in Albanian food idioms, often signalling sustenance, stability, and daily provisioning. Bread as sustenance and provisioning aligns with universal socio-economic symbolism—security, daily life, and endurance. The prominence of bread may reflect Albanian cultural values tied to daily bread as basic necessities and symbol of stability.

Mishi (meat) is the second-most frequent item at 2.33%, placing it in the mid-range cluster alongside several other terms. This suggests that while meat is a common cultural image, it does not carry the same universal anchor status as bread. Its usage conveys more nuanced or context-specific meanings (e.g., hunger, richness, or ceremonial contexts) rather than a universal anchor. Molle (apple) (interpreted here as a meat/fish-associated item) and Vezë (eggs) show the next tier of high points. Vezë (eggs) particularly matches bread, with an identical 4.65% share, underscoring its dual role as a versatile symbol representing nourishment, everyday life, and a touch of abundance similar to bread in many idioms. Molle (apple) appears at 2.33%, indicating it is a steady, familiar image but not a primary anchor. **Eggs (vezë)**, often associated with fragility and abundance, mirror the delicate balance of life and the hope for prosperity. **Apples (mollë)**, while less central, symbolize health, temptation, and imitation concepts that are universally understood but culturally nuanced in Albanian storytelling.

4.3.4. Classification of the idioms grouped into thematic categories based on their metaphorical meaning and usage:

Albanian food idioms serve as expressive tools for conveying interpersonal relationships, personality traits, emotional conditions, conflict, economic hardship, danger, and instability.

More specifically, the idioms listed above can be systematically categorized according to these thematic domains.

Personality, Character, and Mental State

Idioms that describe traits, intelligence, emotional resilience, or behaviour.

In examining personality, character, and mental state through idioms, this collection uses food items to metaphorically signal traits, intelligence, resilience, or behavior. For Bukë, phrases like “bukë pa brumë,” “i ha bukën gomari,” “ha bukë veç,” and “e ka ngrënë turpin me bukë” point to foolishness, uniqueness, shamelessness, or a stubborn self-sufficiency that borders on imprudence. Mollë captures hidden illness or moral decay with expressions such as “mollë e kalbur” and “mollë e krimbur,” suggesting underlying rot beneath an outward appearance. Vezë conveys worthlessness, agility, or fragility through “vezë e prishur,” “ta jep vezën pa të verdhë,” and “vezë kllukë,” signaling delicacy or easily compromised states of mind or behavior. Together, these idioms illustrate how everyday foods are leveraged to encode nuanced assessments of a person’s inner life and conduct. In describing personality, character, and mental state through idioms, these food-related phrases signal a spectrum of traits and states. For Qiqër, expressions like “u bë qiqër, e ka mendjen qiqër” point to health or sharp mental focus, suggesting vigilance or keen thinking. Miell contrasts immaturity or resemblance with phrases such as “miell i pa situar” and “miell i një thesi,” which imply underdeveloped maturity or a sense of sameness. Lakër conveys emotional volatility or fruitless chatter through “u bë lakër” and “grin lakra,” indicating emotional collapse or meaningless or repetitive speech. Qumësht captures transitions between calmness and sudden anger with “u bë qumësht” and “raq nga qulli në uthull” (interpreted as a shift from smooth to sour). Peshk, with “peshku ne det, tigani ne zjarr,” signals haste and impulsive decision-making, reflecting a mindset driven by quick, spur-of-the-moment choices. Together, these idioms illustrate how everyday foods can encode nuanced assessments of inner life and behavior.

Communication, Relationships and Social Behaviour

Idioms that reflect how people interact, express themselves, or relate to others.

In exploring communication, relationships, and social behavior, these food-related idioms illuminate how people interact and convey themselves. For Bukë, phrases like “me bukë të ëmbël,” “me bukë e kripë,” “buka e vjetër,” and “e ruan bukën ndër dhëmbë” highlight enduring bonds, gratitude, and love built through shared nourishment. Lakër uses actions such as “i ndaj lakrat,” “ia nxori lakrat në shesh,” and “e kapë ndër lakra” to depict revealing secrets and breaking ties, signaling how trust and loyalty can be tested. Qumësht, with “e hollon qumështin” and “ta shet hurrën për qumësht,” points to softening speech and the potential for deception in interpersonal exchanges. Vezë, through “të vjedh vezët nën klockë” and “e do qofte,” evokes cunning behavior, illustrating how social navigation can involve manipulation or crafty moves. Together, these idioms show how everyday food imagery encodes nuanced patterns of communication, relationship dynamics, and social strategy.

Hardship, Risk, Conflict

Idioms that express danger, suffering, or difficult situations.

In exploring hardship, risk, and conflict, these food-related idioms capture how people confront danger and difficult circumstances. For Bukë, expressions like “për bukën e gojës, s’ha bukë” and “nuk me hahet buka” touch on survival, worthlessness, and tension under pressure. Dardhe conveys sudden trouble with phrases such as “ka rënë nën dardhë” and “ka rënë nga dardha,” signaling how misfortune can strike abruptly. Qepë, through “ngul qepë e shkul hudhra” and “prish jahninë për një qepë,” reflects futile effort and overreactions over minor issues. Qumësht, with “ra nga qulli në uthull,” illustrates the escalation of conflict from calm to sour outcomes. Vezë, via “i ngeci veza kryq” and “më shterngoi veza,” signals unsolvable problems and urgent pressures requiring swift action. Together, these idioms demonstrate how everyday foods encode the dynamics of hardship, risk, and conflict in social life.

Work, Livelihood and Value

Idioms that relate to earning, effort, and economic survival.

In exploring work, livelihood, and value, these food-related idioms link daily labor and economic reality to shared imagery. For Bukë, expressions such as “bëj bukën, ha bukën time, ha bukë, i ha bukën, për buken e gojes” highlight earning, value, and the necessity of sustenance tied to one's labor. Miell evokes financial constraints and dependence with “bluan miell të hollë,” “marr miell hua,” and “e mban shtëpinë me miell hua,” suggesting wisdom gained through poverty and habits of borrowing. Qumësht offers a straightforward signal of prosperity with “i doli qumështi mbi përshesh,” while Krunde points to misplaced priorities with “i lirë në miell e i shtrenjtë në krunde,” contrasting affordability of staple goods with costly indulgences. Together, these idioms reveal how economic survival and the valuation of effort are embedded in everyday food language.

Wisdom, Judgment and Learning

Idioms that express insight, ignorance, or learning.

In exploring wisdom, judgment, and learning, these food-related idioms reveal patterns of insight, ignorance, and personal growth. For Miell, phrases like “bluan miell të hollë” and “miell nga thesi i botës” touch on intelligence and the risky terrain of plagiarism, suggesting how knowledge can be exploited or misused. Mish contrasts ambiguity and identity with expressions such as “hyn mish e del peshk” and “as mish as peshk,” signaling a lack of clear substance or self-definition. Qepë presents inevitability and certainty through “sikur qeni qepën ta hajë,” underscoring how some outcomes feel predetermined. Together, these idioms map how people reason, misinterpret, and learn from their experiences using everyday food imagery.

Everyday Life, Certainty, Routine

Idioms that describe common experiences, habits, or truths.

In exploring everyday life, certainty, and routine, these food-related idioms capture common experiences, habits, and truths. For *Bukë*, expressions like “si buka që ha, buka dhe kripa” underline the idea of essentials and certainty in daily needs. *Vezë* uses imagery such as “ecën si mbi vezë” and “jam si në vezë” to signal caution and anxiety, reflecting the careful stance people adopt in routine or potentially risky situations. *Qumësht*, with “i ra luga në qumësht,” conveys ease and comfort, suggesting smoothness in ordinary tasks. *Presh*, through “me presh në dorë,” evokes being caught in the act, highlighting moments of exposure or accountability in everyday life. Together, these idioms show how familiar food imagery encodes predictable patterns of behavior and the rhythm of daily existence.

Overviewing food related Albanian idioms analysed it can be noted that, bread (*bukë*) functions as a foundational anchor in Albanian idioms, signalling basic traits such as foolishness or shamelessness in phrases like “bukë pa brumë.” In contrast, fruits, and dairy *mollë*, *vezë*, and *qumësht*—signal vulnerability, health, or fragility, as illustrated by metaphors such as the rotten apple or the broken egg. Together, these images reflect a spectrum from internal weakness to visible fragility, highlighting how bodies and health become metaphorical mirrors for emotional and moral states.

Bread imagery also carries relational weight, continuing to symbolize connections, reciprocity, and gratitude think of friendship, loyalty, and love expressed through bread-related idioms. Secrets and trust, however, are linked to produce imagery such as *lakër* (cabbage/lettuce), underscoring social dynamics, disclosure, and the boundaries of intimacy.

Egg imagery introduces subtler social cues: it signals persuasion, deceit, or softening language in interactions, revealing how speech can be calibrated to influence others. In terms of hardship and tension, bread again anchors survival, pointing to fundamental needs under stress.

Certain fruits and vegetables *dardhë* (pear) and *qepë* (onion) signal layered trouble and escalating problems, with each layer representing added complexity or adversity. Milk imagery contrasts calm with escalating conflict, while eggs emphasize urgent, sometimes unsolvable issues, underscoring the tempo and gravity of a situation.

In the realm of work and livelihood, bread remains central to motifs of earning and necessity. Flour (*miell*) appears in expressions tied to wisdom, poverty, or borrowing, signalling financial prudence or dependence. Prosperity, conversely, is linked to dairy products, suggesting a positive economic signal.

Overall, bread and a subset of dairy/egg terms recur across multiple categories, marking them as core cultural anchors in Albanian idioms. They ground discussions of livelihood, certainty, and social bonds, while other items enrich nuance and context, shaping a rich, interconnected symbolic system.

5. Cross-Cultural Perspective on How Albanian and English Food Idioms Are Shaped Linguistically

207 food idioms used in both Albanian and English languages have been investigated for the scope of this study.

Idioms illuminate the cultural bridges across languages and reveal how language carries the cultural roots of Albanian and English alike. By tracing two languages and shared imagery, we see that idioms do more than convey meaning in everyday conversation; they reflect the cultural backgrounds, social practices, and collective memories embedded in each speech community. The comparative lens shows how Albanian and English idioms emerge from

distinct yet intersecting worlds, shaping, and being shaped by daily life. Everyday expressions carry forward the heritage of folklore, material culture, and communal imagination, allowing speakers to navigate identity, tradition, and contemporary experience across both languages. Idioms figuratively embed these elements, showing how linguistic constructions illuminate the realities that surrounded them.

It seems that in Albanian everyday life context, dairy and eggs signal abundance and vulnerability: milk, eggs, often represent nourishment and stability, or the risk of shortage. Their presence in idioms reflects traditional dairy-centred rural economies and seasonal fluctuations. Hospitality is a core cultural value in Albanian life, with food imagery encoding gratitude, loyalty, and reciprocity; sharing bread epitomizes trust and friendship. Provisions and provisioning rituals are closely tied to family networks, mutual aid, and collective farming or seasonal work, with terms tied to work, barter, and survival echoing these social economies. Food items thus function as mnemonic devices that anchor lessons in everyday life, blending wit with practical wisdom.

Harvest cycles influence which foods are most salient at different times of the year, shaping the prominence of items like onions, pears, or cabbage in idioms. Albanian identity—shaped by histories of isolation and national revival reinforces the use of familiar, locally resonant food symbols to express authenticity and communal memory.

Albania's interior has long depended on self-sufficiency, livestock, and small-scale farming. This fosters strong associations with staples like bread (*bukë*), milk (*qumësht*), and flour (*miell*) as symbols of provisioning, reliability, and daily subsistence. Coastal communities emphasize seafood and dairy imagery, while inland regions may foreground produce such as onions (*qepë*) and pears (*dardhë*).

Whereas in English historical and cultural context the transition from agrarian to industrial society, influenced food idioms to reflect urban life, labour, and economic survival. Phrases like *bring home the bacon* and *breadwinner* emerged from working-class realities where food symbolized income and responsibility. Moreover, England's global trade networks introduced exotic foods and spices, enriching the idiomatic palette. Items like *hot potato*, *banana*, and *cheesy grin* reflect not just local produce but imported goods that became culturally embedded. English idioms often favour humour, irony, and double meanings. Food items like are used in light-hearted ways to describe personality traits, reflecting a cultural preference for wit and understatement. English idioms frequently use food metaphorically to describe abstract concepts. These expressions rely on metaphorical extension rather than literal cultural symbolism. English idioms mostly reflect a culture that values personal status, uniqueness, and physical presence. Food becomes a tool for expressing individuality and social hierarchy and emotional intensity through humour or exaggeration. In some cases, English food idioms show how food idioms encode social rituals and emotional closeness.

Contrasting English and Albanian idioms it can be noticed that bread is the most culturally central metaphor in Albanian idioms, representing survival, dignity, and emotional depth. Bread stands as a universal signifier, a near-constant metaphor for life-sustaining basics, hospitality, and social bonds, mirroring norms around sharing meals, hosting guests, and providing communal support. In English, it also symbolizes livelihood but shares prominence with meat, cake, and cheese and it is generally used in economic context, associated to income and responsibility. At the same time in English *bacon*, *cookies*, and *cake* are used metaphorically for success, whereas these food items appear to be completely

unknown to Albanian context. Eggs in both languages convey fragility, caution, and value, often used in idioms about risk and emotion.

Albania's agrarian roots have deeply influenced its idiomatic expressions, with staple foods like bread (*bukë*), milk (*qumësht*), flour (*miell*), and eggs (*vezë*) symbolizing survival, dignity, hard work, and emotional strength. These everyday essentials are woven into the language, often used to convey vulnerability or deceit—for example, *vezë e prishur* (spoiled egg) to describe emotional fragility, or *ta shet hirrën për qumësht* (sells whey as milk) to imply deception.

In contrast, English idioms reflect a more playful and diverse use of food imagery, shaped by industrialization, global trade, and consumer culture. Foods like cookies, cheese, bananas, and hotcakes appear frequently in expressions that convey humour, abstraction, or social commentary. Eggs in English idioms often relate to risk and caution (*walk on eggshells*, *put all eggs in one basket*), while milk is associated with regret (*cry over spilled milk*).

Symbolism also differs; in Albanian, apples (*mollë*) can represent hidden decay (*mollë e kalbur*), whereas beans and cheese are rarely used. Meanwhile, English idioms commonly feature cheese and beans to describe personality traits (*cheesy grin*, *full of beans*) or social awkwardness.

Albanian idioms reflect a heritage rooted in subsistence living and strong communal values. They often carry moral weight and emotional intensity, shaped by oral traditions and the rhythms of rural life. In contrast, English idioms tend to mirror capitalist influences and individualistic perspectives, favouring situational humour, behavioural caution, and metaphorical play.

The food vocabulary used in idioms highlights these cultural differences. Albanian expressions typically draw from essential, locally significant items—such as bread, milk, and eggs—imbued with emotional and symbolic meaning. These idioms emphasize themes of dignity, resilience, and moral character. English idioms, shaped by global trade and culinary diversity, incorporate a wider range of foods like cheese, cookies, bananas, and beans, often used to convey humour, personality quirks, or abstract ideas.

This divergence in food symbolism reflects each culture's material realities and creative linguistic traditions. While Albanian idioms prioritize emotional depth and moral resonance, English idioms lean toward variety, abstraction, and social commentary. Together, they offer distinct yet complementary insights into how language mirrors the lived experiences and values of a society.

Conclusions

Each idiomatic corpus offers a distinct lens through which language reflects cultural and psychological realities. Food idioms particularly serve as rich indicators of societal values, emotional frameworks, and material conditions. A comparative analysis of Albanian and English idiomatic expressions reveals divergent emphases shaped by historical, economic, and linguistic contexts. Albanian food idioms are deeply rooted in agrarian life and oral tradition, often highlighting themes of morality, emotional resilience, and communal responsibility. These expressions frequently centre on staple items such as bread, milk, eggs, and flour—foods that carry symbolic weight tied to survival, hospitality, and social cohesion.

The tone of Albanian idioms tends to be serious, cautionary, and emotionally charged, reflecting the cultural importance of subsistence and reciprocity. In contrast, English food idioms are shaped by industrialization, global trade, and media influence. They exhibit greater lexical diversity, incorporating a wide range of foods such as cookies, bananas, beans, cheese, and hotcakes. These idioms often convey individual behaviour, social dynamics, and emotional nuance, with a tone that leans toward humour, irony, and metaphorical play. Their evolution is closely linked to advertising, pop culture, and urban life, resulting in expressions that are more fluid and contextually adaptive. Hospitality and food in Albanian idioms are closely tied to social reciprocity and familial obligation. Regional variations may emphasize generosity toward guests and the cultural standards of hosting. In English, idioms related to sharing or hospitality are comparatively rare; food imagery more commonly signals abundance, indulgence, or celebration. Cooking-related idioms in English often express caution or pragmatism, whereas in Albanian, food preparation can symbolize social harmony, respect for tradition, and intergenerational bonds. Furthermore, symbolic associations differ significantly. In English, food idioms frequently relate to work, wealth, and moral judgment, often drawing from Western culinary traditions and tavern culture. Albanian idioms, by contrast, incorporate traditional foods and agricultural references, reflecting a more prosaic worldview grounded in rural life and communal meals. Everyday staples in Albanian idioms serve as cultural markers of identity, belonging, and obligation, reinforcing the social fabric through language.

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