

VEGETABLES IN IDIOMATIC REALMS: A CONTRASTIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

This study explores the use of vegetables in idiomatic expressions across four languages—English, French, Italian, and Romanian—employing a contrastive approach to highlight both similarities and divergences. Idiomatic expressions involving vegetables provide a rich field for examining how cultural contexts shape language and meaning. By analyzing idioms from each of these languages, the research reveals how vegetables symbolize various cultural values, social norms, and emotional states.

In English, idioms such as "cool as a cucumber" illustrate how vegetables can convey composure and status. Similarly, French idioms like "*tomber dans les pommes*" (to fall into the apples, meaning to faint) and "*être dans le pétrin*" (to be in the kneading trough, meaning to be in trouble) reflect a blend of humor and traditional imagery. Italian expressions, such as "*essere un cetriolo*" (to be a cucumber, meaning to be calm), further demonstrate the role of vegetables in conveying personal traits and social actions. Romanian idioms, including "*a fi în pom*" (meaning to be in a difficult situation) and "*a se face roșu ca un ardei iute*" (to turn red as a hot pepper, meaning to blush), offer insights into how vegetables are used metaphorically to express emotional states and social interactions.

This contrastive analysis highlights how idiomatic expressions involving vegetables are deeply rooted in cultural practices and perceptions. The study underscores the importance of understanding these idiomatic nuances for more effective cross-cultural communication and translation. By examining the metaphorical use of vegetables across languages, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how language reflects and shapes cultural attitudes and practices.

Key words: idiomatic expressions, contrastive linguistics, vegetables, cross-cultural analysis, English, French, Italian, Romanian

Idiomatic expressions are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of a language, often reflecting unique social norms, historical contexts, and shared human experiences. They carry meanings that are not always transparent to non-native speakers, making them fascinating subjects for linguistic studies. One particularly rich area of idiomatic expression involves vegetables, which serve as metaphors for human traits, social situations, and emotional states across various languages. This study undertakes a contrastive analysis of idiomatic expressions involving vegetables in English, French, Italian, and Romanian, aiming to uncover both the cultural similarities and differences that shape these expressions.

In recent years, studies on idiomatic expressions and metaphors have increasingly focused on the cultural and cognitive aspects of language, emphasizing the importance of cross-linguistic analysis. Idioms involving food, particularly vegetables, provide a unique window into the interplay between language and culture. For example, Kövecses (2015) highlights the significance of metaphors in different cultural

contexts, demonstrating how idiomatic expressions reflect cultural attitudes and values. This idea is further supported by Wierzbicka (2014), who explores the role of cultural scripts in shaping metaphorical language, arguing that understanding idiomatic expressions requires a deep understanding of the cultural context from which they arise.

Recent studies also emphasize the challenges of translating idiomatic expressions across languages (Petrea E., 2017). Baker (2018) points out that the figurative nature of idioms often makes them difficult to translate directly, requiring a nuanced understanding of both the source and target cultures. This challenge is particularly evident in idioms related to food, where cultural connotations of certain vegetables can vary significantly between languages. Fernández and Cairns (2015) add that understanding the psycholinguistic processing of idiomatic expressions is crucial for accurate translation, particularly in bilingual and multilingual contexts.

Moreover, Johansson (2020) examines sound symbolism and its role in metaphorical expressions, offering insights into how idioms can carry both literal and figurative meanings. Her

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work suggests that metaphors involving vegetables are often linked to sensory experiences, further complicating their translation across linguistic boundaries.

Overall, recent research underscores the importance of cultural and cognitive factors in understanding idiomatic expressions. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication and the complexities involved in translating metaphorical language. The study of vegetable-based idioms provides a valuable case for exploring these broader linguistic phenomena.

Vegetables, being a fundamental part of human existence across all cultures, have naturally found their way into language as symbols for various concepts. For example, the English idiom *cool as a cucumber* uses a vegetable to convey a sense of calmness and composure, while the Romanian idiom *a se face roșu ca un ardei iute* (to turn red as a hot pepper) refers to blushing, a common emotional reaction. This research seeks to investigate these idiomatic uses of vegetables in order to gain a deeper understanding of how language and culture intertwine to reflect human behavior and societal norms.

The study will focus on the following research questions: How do idiomatic expressions involving vegetables differ across English, French, Italian, and Romanian? What cultural factors contribute to the specific use of vegetables in these idioms? And finally, how can these differences inform cross-cultural communication and translation efforts? By addressing these questions, the research aims to contribute to the fields of linguistics, translation studies, and cultural anthropology.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Selection of Languages

The four languages selected for this study—English, French, Italian, and Romanian—represent different linguistic and cultural traditions within Europe. English, as a global lingua franca, has a rich repertoire of idiomatic expressions influenced by diverse cultural interactions. French, known for its precision and tradition of literary expression, offers a glimpse into a culture where gastronomy plays a central role. Italian, deeply influenced by its agrarian roots, reflects a culture where food metaphors are prevalent. Romanian, a Romance language with significant Slavic influences, offers a unique perspective due to its cultural and historical context in Eastern Europe.

Data Collection

Idiomatic expressions involving vegetables were collected from a variety of sources, including dictionaries of idioms, linguistic corpora, and native

speakers of each language. Online resources such as linguistic databases and idiom websites were also consulted. For the purpose of this study, only idiomatic expressions that specifically involve vegetables were selected. Examples include *cool as a cucumber* (English), *tomber dans les pommes* (French), *essere un cetriolo* (Italian), and *a fi în pom* (Romanian). All the idiomatic expressions that were gathered from each language ensure a diverse representation of cultural metaphors involving vegetables.

Contrastive Analysis

The selected idioms were analyzed using a contrastive approach, which involves comparing idiomatic expressions across languages to identify similarities and differences. This method is particularly useful in highlighting how different cultures use language to express similar or divergent ideas. Each idiom was examined for its literal meaning, figurative meaning, and cultural significance. The findings were then categorized based on the cultural themes they reflect, such as emotional states, personal traits, and social situations.

Sociocultural Contextualization

In order to understand the cultural significance of each idiom, a sociocultural framework was applied. This framework considers factors such as historical context, agricultural practices, and culinary traditions, which may influence the choice of vegetables in idiomatic expressions. For example, in cultures where cucumbers are associated with coolness (as in English and Italian), this vegetable is used metaphorically to represent calmness. In contrast, cultures where certain vegetables are linked to labor or hardship may use them in idioms to express difficulty or trouble, as seen in the French idiom *être dans le pétrin* (to be in the kneading trough).

Translation Challenges

A secondary objective of this study was to explore the challenges of translating idiomatic expressions involving vegetables. Idioms often pose difficulties for translators due to their figurative nature and cultural specificity. For each idiom, potential translation strategies were discussed, including direct translation, adaptation, and paraphrasing. The aim was to identify the most effective methods for conveying the cultural nuances of idiomatic expressions in cross-linguistic contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

English Idiomatic Expressions Involving Vegetables

In English, vegetables are often used in idiomatic expressions to describe personal traits and social situations. One of the most well-known examples is "cool as a cucumber," which suggests composure and emotional control. The cucumber's

association with coolness in English may stem from its physical properties, as cucumbers are often served cold and are believed to have cooling effects. This idiom reflects a cultural value placed on maintaining calmness under pressure.

Another interesting English idiom is "small potatoes," which refers to something insignificant or unimportant. Potatoes, being a staple food, are often viewed as ordinary and unremarkable, making them an apt metaphor for trivial matters. This idiom illustrates how common, everyday vegetables can be used to express ideas about social status and importance.

French Idiomatic Expressions Involving Vegetables

French idiomatic expressions involving vegetables often carry humorous or ironic undertones. For example, *tomber dans les pommes* (to fall into the apples) means to faint, a phrase that likely developed as a playful way of describing a sudden loss of consciousness. The idiom *être dans le pétrin* (to be in the kneading trough) is another example of a food-related expression, where being in a difficult situation is likened to the hard work of kneading dough. This reflects the French culture's deep connection to bread-making, an essential part of the national identity.

Vegetables in French idioms often serve as metaphors for common life experiences, with a focus on humor and tradition. The use of apples and bread in these idioms demonstrates how everyday foods can be used to convey complex social meanings, while also revealing the French cultural tendency toward witty, food-based metaphors.

Italian Idiomatic Expressions Involving Vegetables

Italian idiomatic expressions involving vegetables frequently reflect personal traits and social actions. One such expression is *essere un cetriolo* (to be a cucumber), which, like the English *cool as a cucumber*, conveys a sense of calmness and emotional stability. The similarity between the English and Italian use of cucumbers to symbolize calmness suggests a shared cultural perception of this vegetable as a symbol of composure.

Italian idioms involving vegetables often center on physical characteristics and human emotions. For example, *fare il fagiolo* (to act like a bean) refers to someone who is acting foolishly, reflecting how vegetables are used to personify human behavior.

Romanian Idiomatic Expressions Involving Vegetables

Romanian idiomatic expressions offer a unique perspective due to the country's agricultural history and its blend of Eastern and Western influences. One such idiom is *a fi în pom* (to be in the tree), which means to be in a difficult situation. While this expression does not explicitly mention vegetables, it reflects the Romanian cultural connection to nature and agriculture. Another expression, *a se face roșu ca un ardei iute* (to turn red as a hot pepper), vividly illustrates the use of vegetables to describe emotional states, such as embarrassment or anger.

Vegetables in Romanian idioms often symbolize strong emotions, with a focus on physical sensations like blushing or sweating. This suggests that Romanian culture values direct, visceral expressions of emotion, in contrast to the more restrained metaphors found in English or Italian idioms.

Cross-Linguistic Comparisons

The contrastive analysis reveals both similarities and divergences in how vegetables are used metaphorically across the four languages. English and Italian share common themes of calmness and composure, as seen in the idioms involving cucumbers. French and Romanian, on the other hand, tend to use vegetables to express emotional states and social situations, with a focus on humor and physical sensations.

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping these idioms. For example, the French use of bread-related metaphors reflects the country's long-standing culinary traditions, while the Romanian focus on nature and agriculture is rooted in its rural history. These cultural differences offer insights into how each society views food, emotions, and social interactions.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the rich cultural tapestry that underpins idiomatic expressions involving vegetables in English, French, Italian, and Romanian. While some idioms reflect universal human experiences—such as the use of cucumbers to symbolize calmness—others are deeply rooted in specific cultural practices, such as the French association with bread-making or the Romanian connection to agriculture.

The findings underscore the importance of understanding idiomatic expressions in their cultural contexts, particularly for translators and language learners. Idioms often carry meanings that cannot be easily conveyed through direct

translation, requiring careful consideration of the cultural nuances behind each expression.

In conclusion, idiomatic expressions involving vegetables offer a unique window into the ways in which language and culture shape human perception and behavior. By exploring these expressions across multiple languages, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication and the role of food in metaphorical language.

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