



ORIGINAL PAPER

Idioms related to Food and Drink Used in Travelling-Related Situations

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Abstract:

Travelling-related situations are abundant in words and expressions or even idiomatic expressions related to food and drink which reflect the inventiveness of the English language. Therefore, it gives birth to highly suggestive combinations of words which sometimes cannot be understood within a certain context. This article has tried to bring a new approach on a list as comprehensible as possible, comprising words, expressions or idiomatic constructions which we have encountered especially in tourism social-media and to reveal an interesting linguistic area of the English language. My interest in idioms has arisen when gathering materials for a dictionary on Tourism terminology. Moreover, this interest took the form of finding out the origin and then providing clear explanations of these expressions and idioms.

Each English idiom and expression mentioned in this paper carries a food or drink constituent and as a result, the number of this kind of idioms commonly used in travel-related situations is 56 through the close examination of a corpora which has been selected to assist the research. The article reveals not only their degree of idiomacity but also, their level of intelligibility.

Keywords: *a different approach, literal meaning, linguistic tool, dual meaning, suggestive combinations, certain combination, etc.*

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is threefold; firstly it offers a short overview of the studies that have characterized the idiom research in recent years, secondly it explains the method followed to carry out this research, to be more precisely the idioms were selected with particular attention being paid to the criteria involved in this process, to retrieve only the expressions containing a food and drink constituent. The last but not the least, the third part is centred on exposing the linguistic characteristics of food and drink idioms in English therefore revealing the fact that English language is extremely abundant in idiomatic expressions which reflect the wisdom and the inventiveness of the English people.

Up until the mid-to- late twentieth century Western European studies of the English language largely neglected idioms (Pinnavaia, 2010 : 21).

Possibly owing to the evident discrepancy between form and meaning, even structure scholars Bloomfield and Sapir first, then the generativists Harris and Chomsky later did not account for idioms in their linguistic models. Since the 1970-s English studies regarding idiomatic expressions have become more and more numerous. It is especially in the last twenty to thirty years that work on idioms has proliferated and the quantity and quality of which has surely been determined by the advent of corpus linguistics. With this innovative tool the pervasiveness of idiomatic structures in English language in a variety of text types has become visible. So that many assertions previously ascertained as linguistic intuitions have finally become confirmations.

2. Materials and methods

For this paper a large amount of authentic materials were collected from official tourism websites, both from Britain and from USA, travelling blogs, online newspapers and magazines and even social media. The outcomes of this research on one hand will contribute to a better understanding and translation of word and expressions used in travel-related situations and on the other hand they will be helpful for further studies in this field.

The article has a practical direction by offering a list of some common/uncommon English idioms related to food and drink used in tourism and their meanings are better explained by the examples provided. The material is presented alphabetically so that to have a quick access to a selection of food and drink idioms which may be used in tourism/ travelling vocabulary.

3. Practical approach

Idioms are such sophisticated features of language that any linguistic definition might be easy to contradict. This means that not all idioms can be characterized by the same linguistic properties. On a semantic level, first, to define idioms as constructions having two readings a *literal* meaning (or the vehicle) is geographically , historically and culturally bound, while the *figurative* reading (or the tenor) tends to be cross-cultural, as well as spatially and chronologically boundless.

For example, the tenor of the idiom *to spill the beans (to reveal a secret)* is timeless, unlike its vehicle that refers to a voting practice used in Ancient Greek times. However, there are also idioms that do not have a literal interpretation at all, such as *spic and span (neat and clean)*. So a more or less motivated relationship between the two levels of interpretation does not always exist for all idioms. According to Laura Pinnavaia (Pinnavaia, 2010 : 93) ,, the descriptions of food and drink elements, the utterance

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meanings will vary from being negatively connoted; or else they will just be neutral descriptions". Among the structures labelled as idiomatic in the dictionaries it is possible to identify food and drink idioms that are compositional because their meanings are the combinatorial result of the basic and derived senses of the lexical items and of the syntactic relations in the construction. In order of frequency, this category idioms include verb, noun and prepositional phrases. All these idioms are made up of a food or drink item whose meaning is extended and explained:

a) The verb phrase

The most frequent syntactic structure for food and drink idioms is the verb phrase, usually having a V+Od structure:

to be apples- all is going well

Everything has **been apples** during our holiday in Greece.

be caviare to the general- to be something good unappreciated by the masses

Unfortunately, many destinations **are caviare to the general!**

be as keen as mustard- to be very enthusiastic about something

*She went to Europe for a vacation and came home **as keen as mustard** to go back.*

be meat and drink (to somebody)- be something that a person enjoys very much or is very interesting

*Going to Greece this summer seems to be everybody's **meat and drink**.*

not be one's cup of tea- not to be what one likes or is interested in

Booking a trip full of adventure is **not my cup of tea!**

to cut a melon- to decide a question

I have just cut a melon: we are flying to Greece!

to cut the mustard- to meet requirements, to reach the required standard.

According to our expectations the accommodation **has cut the mustard!**

eat salt with- to be guest of

On this time next week we will be **eating salt with** our friends in Sicily!

feel like a jelly - feel nervous or frightened

*When he got on the cable way he **felt like a jelly** because he was afraid of heights.*

feel one's oats- to be lively and energetic

I always **feel my oats** during my summer holiday!

to have/put all one's eggs into one basket - to invest in one thing only

I should buy shares in a lot of different companies, and not **put all my eggs in the one basket.**

have a finger in the pie- to be involved in a matter

As **I have a finger in the pie**, I have felt so embarrassed by the whole situation!

have one's cake and eat it- to want everything and the benefits

You **cannot have your cake and eat it** - if you want more local services, you cannot expect to pay less tax.

to know one's onions- to have experience

I trust this guide for our itinerary, he seems to **know his onions!**

make a meal of/out of- to spend more time or energy than is necessary

I only asked for a summary of the main sights but she **has made a real meal of them** all.

to live in clover- to be accommodated in a luxurious resort

The resort was impressive so **we live in a clover** for a whole week.

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to live off the fat of the land- to have the best of everything

The Romanians always choose Greek islands as holiday destinations because they **live off the fat of the land** there!

put some mustard on it- to do something with increased effort or physical strength

Doing some sport during your holiday means **putting some mustard on it**.

to squeeze the orange- to take all the good from anything

This business is like **squeezing an orange**: it does not matter who is doing the squeezing, you will still get orange juice.

to take the biscuit- to be the most surprising, annoying thing that has happened or somebody has done. (a naval expression from around the 1700's) If you were on a long voyage and having a hard time, all food gone except the ship-biscuit or hardtack, then the last misfortune was to run out of it, or lose it through spoilage. If **the biscuit was taken**, then things were desperate.

take the gilt off the gingerbread- to remove what is attractive from something
Have you seen our room before being refurbished? Talk about taking the **gilt off the gingerbread!**

tell chalk from cheese- not distinguish one thing from another

I am not surprised George still cannot decide whether to go on holiday or not. That boy is so obtuse; he could not **tell chalk from cheese**.

to upset the applecart- to spoil someone's plans

Look, he is not trying to **upset the applecart**—he just needs to meet later in the day now, that is all.

wine and dine- go to restaurants and enjoy food and drink

If you **wine and dine** during your holiday means going to expensive restaurants and spending a lot of money.

b) The noun phrase

The second largest syntactic structure displayed by the food and drink idioms is the noun phrase. These contain a nominal head which is pre- or post-modified.

apple of sodom- something that does not live up to expectations
Nobody likes it; it's nothing but **an apple of Sodom**.

an apple -pie order- neat and very well organized
*She keeps all her rooms in an **apple-pie order**.*

apples and oranges- used for a situation in which two things/ alternatives are completely different
*Which do you think we should choose: going to Greece or to Iceland? That is **apples and oranges**; you cannot compare the two.*

the big enchilada- the most important thing or person
When it comes to environmental issues, the **big enchilada** is carbon dioxide.

bowl of cherries- a very pleasant situation
Booking a holiday in Thailand as a gift for his wife has been a **bowl of cherries** for him!

cherry on the cake- the best of a situation
He put the **cherry on the cake** by buying a beautiful souvenir for his new house.

cream of the crop- the best of a situation
*She is really the **cream of the crop** and I highly recommend her as your guide for your trip in the Sahara.*

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a curate's egg- something that has good and bad points
The whole holiday has been something of **a curate's egg**.

dead sea apple- something that does not live up to expectations
The trip to the Sahara was **a dead sea apple** for us, as it was really hot!

the icing on the cake- something attractive which is added to something which is already good
Cook could become **icing on the cake** for Super Bowl 58 contenders seeking one more ace for their hand.

money for jam- profitable return for little effort
I'm getting paid to stay in my neighbours' mansion while they're on holiday and that will be **money for jam** for me!

jam tomorrow- something promised that never happens
I do not know what to believe anymore because going to Thailand seems to **be a jam tomorrow!**

pie in the sky- plan/hope that will never come true
Their plans to set up their own business are **just pie in the sky**.

the toast of...- the most popular
Lindos beach **is the toast** of Crete Island!

c) Prepositional phrases

Turning to nominals that are linked by coordinating conjunctions as you can see below:

as nice as a pie- very kindly and friendly
*I highly recommend choosing this hotel because the manager is **as nice as pie**.*

beer and skittle- pleasure and fun
Our holiday was all **beer and skittle**, as everything was fine.

cake and ale- fun and laughter
Cake and ale are the necessary ingredients for a great holiday!

from soup to nuts (Amer.)- from beginning to end
I attended the official lunch **from soup to nuts**.

good wine needs no bush- good quality needs no advertising
The offer I have just received is so excellent that it needs no ad campaign, just **as good wine needs no bush**.

a grain of mustard- a small or seemingly insignificant thing that has the potential to grow or develop into something formidable
This little village seems **to be a grain of mustard**, indeed.

in the egg- very early
Having all of you here with in my holiday has really been wonderful. This gift **is icing on the cake!**

land of milk and honey – a place where life is pleasant and easy and the people are very happy
Everybody says that America is **the land of milk and honey**.

neither fish, nor flesh, nor good red herring- neither here or there
The first attempt at a flying car was **neither fish nor fowl**. It was not quite a car and not quite an airplane.

not a sausage- nothing at all
There was nothing left from the previous lunch! **Not a sausage!**

not made of salt- not disturbed by the wet weather
You will not melt in the rain; you are **not made of salt!**
peaches and cream- delightful thing
Life really can be all *peaches and cream*, especially when you travel a lot!
real jam and fritters- a real treat
For me eating seafood is a **real jam and fritters !**
a square meal – a large and satisfying meal
How about today's special? It was a **square meal**, indeed .
sugar and spice- kind and friendly
Our guests have been **sugar and spice** so I highly recommend them!
the world is one's oyster- there is no limit to the opportunities offered to you
Hire a car during your holiday in Canary islands **and the world is your oyster!**

4. Results and discussion

The number of food and drink items that appear in idioms used in travelling-related situations is 56. This figure takes into account all the lexemes regarding food and drink that appear in all idioms. To fruit category belong the following lexemes: *apple, orange, melon, cherry, etc.* To the baked category belong the following lexemes: *biscuit, bread, cake, pie, toast, etc.* To the beverages category belong 2 lexemes: *beer* and *ale*. To the sweets category belong 3 lexemes: *icing, jelly, pudding*. General terms regarding food and drink include the 3 common lexemes: *food, drink and meal*. All the expressions listed above are registered in the monolingual dictionaries as being idiomatic, even though they are composed of a series of lexemes with basic and derived senses. In other words, only one item in each expression has a metaphoric meaning or a derived sense. The transfer from concrete to metaphoric is incidentally more transparent for the meanings of some nouns than it is for others. The nouns with transparent metaphoric meanings are *beef or meat* indicating substance, *bread/ toast* meaning money or material goods, *cream* meaning the best, etc.

5. Conclusions

This study aims at showing that idioms related to food and drinks used in travelling-related situations are not intricate and certainly not uncomplicated features of language, they are actually much more accessible and enjoyable than commonly believed. Food idioms are conventional and metaphorical expressions which are hard to die: once coined they tend to resist time and can be a mirror of a linguistic community's social and cultural past as well as its present consuetude. While the vehicles of metaphoric structures depict social behaviours typical of the period in which they arise, their tenors point to attitudes that are often timeless, and generally true to all mankind living in an area characterized by a certain culture. Having explored the world of food and drink idioms used in travelling and tourism this paper has unveiled some of the mystery that surrounds idioms for both language learners and for native speakers. In other words while being intricate and certainly not complicated features of language, they are actually much more accessible and enjoyable than commonly believed and as a result, our approach has shown how much research in this field of phraseology has progressed ; bringing traditional ideas into a brand new light. Having considered the communicative functions of the food and drink idioms the information gathered from lexicographical and corpora analyses recorded will be working ground for future observations.

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Article Info

Received: April 13 2025

Accepted: May 20 2025

How to cite this article:

Marin, C. G. (2025). Idioms related to Food and Drink Used in Travelling-Related Situations. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, no. 86, pp. 157 – 163.