

Hasmik Mkrtchyan

YSU

FOOD AT THE CROSSROADS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Appearing in a culture one should always be supported by its language. In any culture or region, language is much more than semantics, much more than what the written page or the spoken word can contain. This especially becomes clear when studying a foreign language and learning the ways of a particular culture. For example, the use of introductions, salutations, everyday sayings, etc. This area in particular gives more weight to culture than to the words themselves. Anyone studying a foreign language has to be bicultural as well as bilingual to speak the new language in a way that it is not disparaging to the culture and its origin. Language does not end at the meaning or the use of words associated to a culture words representing beliefs, history, food and the culture of their origin and they must be used accordingly.

Key Words: *language and culture, food idioms, cross-cultural communication, national food, anthropological study.*

We can try to discover the world and its people through the medium of its universal constant: food. While on the great

open road to anywhere, all but the dullest palate can experience the fearsome need, the roaring passion, the lust, to consume the world. And in consuming it, to make it our own. To consume and assimilate the physical world is to make us with it.

Food – its smells, textures, colors, flavors and rituals – is tied intrinsically to place. It nourishes and sustains us, teaches us about other cultures and creates community and connection with others. As we sample new food, we sample new cultures, new histories, new ways of thinking. And no matter how hard we try, the same ingredient never tastes the same back home.

Culture takes the natural biological urges and teaches us how to express them in particular ways. People have to eat, but culture teaches us what, when and how. In many cultures, people have their main meal at noon, but Americans prefer hot cakes and cold cereals. Brazilians put hot milk into strong coffee, whereas Americans pour cold milk into a weaker brew. Midwesterners dine at five or six, Spaniards at ten. Europeans eat with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. Meat cut by the knife is immediately conveyed to the mouth with the fork, which Americans switch to the right hand before eating.

For the Betsileo of the Madagascar, there is no way of saying *to eat* without saying *to eat rice*, their favorite and staple food. So strong is their preference for rice that they garnish it with beans, potatoes, and other starches. In contrast to the Betsileo of Madagascar, for Armenians there is no way of saying

to eat without saying *to eat bread*. We cannot eat anything without a piece of bread. Bread is very important for Armenians and this importance is expressed in the Armenian language. There are so many idioms with the word *bread*.

Recent interest in the culture of food as is evident in the popularity of celebrity chefs and various forms of food writing has underlined the need for their critical study. Food is essential part of anthropological studies. The interest towards this topic of material culture is relatively new, but provides a broad perspective in studying culture in general and also touches some aspects of intercultural communication.

The culture of food and its design are of great importance nowadays. We observe the phenomenon in two ways of its representation. On the one hand these are the restaurants, the cafes, all other kinds of eating-out places, on the other hand, on settled TV program one can watch weekly culinary performances or one can say cuisine fests for a great number of women, who feel elated and even more excited to watch the program rather than if they watch painting exhibition, concerts, etc.

People eat out more than ever before, and most business discussions take place while *eating*. Cookery is the subject of all manner of books, magazine articles, radio and TV programs and conversations, and shops are full of all types of exotic ingredients.

Food also touches aspects of international

communication, examples of which are even found in our daily life. McDonald's, for example, is a result of cultural interwoven practices. Each day, on the average, a new McDonald's restaurant opens somewhere in the world.

Remarkably, when Americans travel abroad, even in the countries noted for good food, many visit the local McDonald's outlet. The same factors that lead us frequent McDonald's at home are responsible. Because Americans are thoroughly familiar with how to eat and more or less what they will pay at McDonald's, in its outlets overseas they have a home away from home.

Anthropologists have long recognized that food is not just feed. Once past the point of basic food security, to the people who consume it, food is never perceived as a value-free and symbolically neutral source of nutrition, which has come haphazardly into being. It is an anthropological commonplace that particular foods, meals, or cuisines are emblematic of nations, ethnicities, regions and communities. Indeed, *cultural biographies* are constructed to show how certain foods acquire particular meanings and associations, how these change over time, and how they may be mobilized for social, economic, or political ends.

In spoken English such phrases as: *Would you like a cuppa* if we try to translate the word *cuppa* we cannot, because it belongs to the non – standard English and we may not find it in the dictionaries. The word *cuppa* is contrived by British

people in order to shorten the phrase *a cup of tea*. So instead of saying *a cup of tea* they say *cuppa*.

Another phrase connected with the tea-drinking tradition in Britain is *Let me be mother* or *Shall I be mother*. The phrase implies the tea-host to pour out the tea from the teapot.

In Armenian reality there are no either cultural or linguistic links between *mother* and *tea* and thus no similar phrase can be traced. The difference between Armenian and English thought and culture can be related to different historically shaped heritage. The British like to drink tea so much that they associate it with mother, who is the most beloved person.

Cup of tea means something one enjoys or does well. So this is one more proof that tea is a very pleasant thing for the British people. If something is not quite to your taste, it is probably *not your cup of tea*. E.g. *tennis is not my cup of tea*.

Tea idioms mentioned are typically British, and in any other country they may not be perceived adequately.

Pie, is another typical, popular traditional food for British people, and thus *pie* has got several idiomatic usages in the world of English.

A piece of the pie - a share of something such as money, profits, etc.

As *pie* is considered to be a very delicious thing, people use this word in this idiom to express the best and the most important part of something.

Strange as it may seem, the word *pie* may somehow correspond to Armenian either regional dialectic or borrowed word “փայ” (lot/portion). They appear to be homonyms.

Bread and butter which is the favourite every-day food for British people is also expressed in their language as a basic need of life.

Bread and butter - basic needs of life (food, shelter, clothing)

The roots of *bread* as a linguistic idiom have come from the ancient times. As we know, in the Bible Jesus Christ gave a piece of bread to his disciples saying that it would be his body, that always reminded them his sacrifices for the irreproachable earthly life. Thus, when we say *bread* we understand not only *basic needs of life* but also our spiritual nourishment. That is *to eat bread* in literature is understood to be responsible for the purity of our soul. So in this British idiom we may understand the word *bread* as a spiritual nourishment and *butter* as a physical one. And generally, in many linguistic traditions some basic food components are resulting in idiomatic usages regarding the family's well-being or vice versa, that is being rich or poor.

Another food idiom I would like to introduce is the following:

Cream of the crop - best of a group, the top choice

As in some kinds of food the cream is the essential and the tastiest ingredient, in this idiom it means *the best*. The word *crop* here is identified with crowd as a collective noun. We can find this idiom in other languages as well with the same meaning. For example in Russian *сливки общества* and in Armenian *հասարակութեան սերուցք*. The Armenian equivalent is most probably the clichéd translation.

British people like to eat eggs very much. It is the main food of their breakfast. So, many idioms are found with *egg*.

Bad egg - a bad person, bum

Egg on - urge someone on

Here the word *egg* can be treated in different ways. In the first case the word *egg* due to its importance for British people is exaggerated to human's position. *Egg* means person.

In the second case the word *egg* means something that can be rotten, that is why it can be parallel to a *rotten* person.

The meaning of the idiom *egg on* can be rooted from the Creek tradition. Many years ago Greek people used to throw tomatoes on the actors during the performance if it was not so interesting. In such a way people express their dissatisfaction. In Britain tomatoes were replaced by eggs. Though not very much related but it should be mentioned that eggs are considered to be archetypical symbols.

National food, in virtue of contact and interaction of different nations appears in other cultures causing some translation problems. Here the background knowledge is an important means to realize intercultural communication, that is awareness of a certain culture realia. That is why the translator should be true bilingual, who is considered to be a member of two different linguistic and cultural communities at the same time. The way bilingual people translate words is quite different from the dictionary translation of the same words. Words denoting objects have rather similar meanings when translated, but words denoting ideas, emotions, clothing, food etc. have different meanings in different languages and cultures. The meanings people attribute to them are different from culture to culture. It plays a crucial role in respect of belongings in the *translation* process. Two words sometimes do not refer to the same thing even if they are given as dictionary equivalents of each other.

So, it is a very difficult task to translate the traditional dishes of different nations. The wrong or incomplete translations may often bring to the jest and put the people in a ridiculous situation. For example, if a translator does not know what is the *High tea* for British people, the word for word translation which sounds in Armenian *Բարձր թեյ* may give rise to fun and the translator will be under delusion.

To translate traditional food, we must be guided by the verbal thinking of the nation and not by the dictionary

meanings. We need to know more than one grammar: the grammar of the text and the grammar of culture. Actually this is the main problem and should be an approach in translating *food* from one language into another.

There are many stories about the waitress and customers speaking different languages. For example, once a customer asked mushrooms but the waitress brought an umbrella.

Food, being one of the most important parts of our life, is expressed in our verbal thinking, that is to say in our speech we often use food idioms, collocations and phrases. For example, tea break, High tea, tea time, tea party, tea towel and many more terms have derived from the tradition of drinking tea. But if in the country, where people do not have such kind of tradition they do not have the appropriate words and phrases either. So each nation has its own culture which influences the language and makes it special. It means, that if we want to learn a foreign language, particularly its vocabulary, we must study the culture too, in order to be able to understand the whole and real meaning of words and expressions.

References

1. Barthes, R. (1961) *Toward a Psychology of Contemporary Food Consumption* // Ed. by C. Counihan and P. Van Esterik, 23–30. New York: Routledge.
2. Douglas, M. (2003) *Standard Social Uses of Food:*

- Introduction. In Food in the Social Order*, edited by M. Douglas, 1–39. New York: Routledge.
3. Inness, S.A. (2006) *Race, Gender, and Class at the Dinner Table*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
 4. Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966) 2013. *The Culinary Triangle* (translated from the French by Peter Brooks) In *Food and Culture. A Reader* edited by C. Counihan and P. V. Esterik, 41–47. New York: Routledge.
 5. McGee, H. (1984) 2004. *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen*. New York: Scribner.
 6. Powers, W.K., and M. M. N. Powers (2003) *Metaphysical Aspects of an Oglala Food System*. In *Food in the Social Order* (edited by M. Douglas), 40–96. New York: Routledge.
 7. Vogt, E.Z. (1976) *Tortillas for the Gods, A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacanteco Ritual*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

ՀԱՍՄԻԿ ՄԿՐՏՉՅԱՆ - Ուտելիքի լեզվամշակութային դրսևորումները - Անհերքելի փաստ է, որ լեզուն և մշակույթը միաձուլված են, և որպեսզի իսկապես փորձել սովորել որևէ օտար լեզու, պարզապես անհրաժեշտ է թափանցել տվյալ լեզվակիրների ներաշխարհ՝ ասել է թե մշակույթ: Մեր լեզվամտածողությունը հիմնված է մշակույթի վրա, և այս պարագայում բավականին բարդանում է թարգմանիչների գործը՝ հատկապես առնչվելով օրինակ ազգային ուտեստների հետ: Հողվածում փորձ է արվում մի

քանի դարձվածքների միջոցով հայտնվել լեզվի և մշակույթի խաչմերուկում՝ վեր հանելով որոշակի թարգմանական խնդիրներ:

Հիմնաբառեր. լեզու և մշակույթ, միջմշակութային հաղորդակցություն, ուսելիք պարունակող դարձվածքներ, մշակութային մարդաբանություն:

АСМИК МКРТЧЯН - Лингвокультурные проявления еды - Это неоспоримый факт, что язык и культура объединяются и действительно пытаться выучить любой иностранный язык просто необходимо проникнуть в их культуру. Наше лингво-мышление основывается на культуре, и это усложняет работу переводчиков, особенно вступая в контакт, например, национальными блюдами. В статье при помощи некоторых фраз старались оказаться на пересечении языка и культуры, прояснив некоторые вопросы в переводе.

Ключевые слова: язык и культура, межкультурная коммуникация, национальная еда, идиомы, антропология.