

Cultural and lexical features of gastronomic metaphors

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Abstract: Gastronomic metaphors constitute a significant component of linguistic worldview formation, reflecting cultural values, embodied experience, and national traditions related to food and eating practices. This study examines the cultural and lexical features of gastronomic metaphors in French and Uzbek, focusing on their conceptual foundations, semantic functions, and intercultural variation. Drawing on the theory of conceptual metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson, the research analyzes metaphorical expressions related to food, taste, and consumption as mechanisms for representing abstract concepts such as emotions, personal qualities, social relations, and moral evaluation.

Keywords: gastronomic metaphor, conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, food discourse, cultural linguistics, phraseology, intercultural comparison, translation strategies, French language, Uzbek language

In recent decades, metaphor and metonymy have become the subject of numerous studies in the field of cognitive linguistics, and scholars have developed a range of theoretical approaches in this domain. It is well established that metaphor and metonymy function as conceptual mechanisms involved in shaping the human conceptual system. A particularly significant contribution to the development of metaphor and metonymy theory was made by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson [1], Lakoff and Turner [2], Kövecses [3], as well as Ruiz de Mendoza and Pérez Hernández [4], who demonstrated their fundamental role in linguistic analysis.

The study of gastronomic metaphors in linguistics is of great importance for the analysis of worldview, emotional expression, and human culture. This is due to the fact that food-related images are frequently used to express emotions, social relations, intellectual qualities, and social phenomena. The present study aims to analyze the linguistic features of gastronomic metaphors, the conceptual systems they reflect, and the intercultural differences in their usage. The theoretical framework of the research is based on the conceptual metaphor theory developed by G.Lakoff and M.Johnson [1].

Metaphor is one of the most important means of expressing human thought and language; it not only reflects ways of perceiving the world but is also closely connected with cultural codes, everyday experience, and bodily sensations. In this sense, gastronomic metaphors - linguistic units related to food, taste, cooking processes, and food consumption - are formed on the basis of one of the key domains of human experience and serve as a means of expressing various abstract concepts.

Gastronomic metaphor is shaped by centuries of human experience, historical culture, and value systems and represents one of the richest and most expressive figurative devices in the languages of the world. Gastronomic metaphors in each nation rely on food traditions, meal rituals, symbolism, and cultural values, thus forming a gastro-linguistic worldview specific to a given language.

Especially in literary texts, gastronomic metaphors provide a high degree of imagery and expressiveness. Through such metaphors, authors vividly and emotionally convey the inner world of characters, interpersonal relations, and attitudes toward events. For example, love may be described as “sweet as honey,” while hatred may be portrayed as “a bitter taste in the mouth.” Such expressions not only enrich linguistic imagery but also exert a strong emotional impact on the reader.

When translating literary works into other languages, the problem of preserving gastronomic metaphors or recreating them adequately becomes one of the key issues in translation theory and practice. This can be explained by the fact that gastronomic experience, taste perception, and cultural codes related to food differ across languages and cultures. This section examines the translation of gastronomic metaphors into Uzbek in literary texts, as well as the difficulties and possibilities of their adequate rendering. The analysis is grounded in the conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson [1] and takes intercultural differences into account.

In this context, T. Pisanova notes that “in a developed society, food becomes an integral element of a large number of situations, transmitting specific information. Food, as a universal lexicalized concept existing in all ethnocultural domains, is specified in a particular way, acquiring national characteristics” [5]. Indeed, gastronomic metaphors manifest differently in each language and culture. Their formation is closely linked to lifestyle, values, and national food traditions. From this perspective, the analysis of gastronomic metaphors in French and Uzbek allows us to identify not only linguistic differences but also divergences in worldview, food culture, and spiritual values of the two nations.

Russian scholar Maria Sadykova, in her study *Semantics of French Gastronomic Metaphor*, conducted a comparative analysis of French phraseological units containing a gastronomic component [6]. E.V.Smirnova examined phraseological units with a gastronomic component in Spanish [7]. V.A.Zhelonkin focused on gastronomic metaphors primarily expressing the concept of “poverty” in French folklore and idioms [8].

Isabel Negro, in her work *Metaphor and Metonymy in Food Idioms*, analyzed in detail the role of food names and food consumption in the formation of metaphors and metonymies in English and Spanish [9]. The scholar notes that the lexeme *food* is widely used in both languages to characterize a person’s external appearance and inner qualities. For her analysis, Negro applies the “25 + 25” method, comparing 25 metaphors and 25 metonymies from English and Spanish dictionaries (*Diccionario de dichos y frases hechas* by Buitragi; *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms* by Siefrig). Examples include: *top banana* (an important person in a group), *bad egg* (a dishonest or unreliable person), *tough cookie* (a strong, determined person), *smart cookie* (an intelligent person), *a big cheese* (a very influential person), *the cream / la flor y nata* (“the elite of society”), *un pedazo de pan* (“a piece of bread,” meaning a very kind person), *un bombón* (a beautiful woman), and *un coco* (an unattractive person).

Based on the conceptual model “HUMAN-FOOD,” the researcher demonstrates that the appearance or taste of a particular product (fruit, vegetable, or dish) is transferred to the description of a person’s character or appearance. Thus, *lemon* is associated with a “foolish person” due to its sour taste, while *peach* is used to denote a “pleasant or attractive person,” referring to the fruit’s sweetness and smoothness. Similar patterns can be observed across languages, where food products, taste, and consumption processes are associated with certain qualities or properties. For example, in Uzbek, the expression *olma yuzli* (“apple-faced”) is used to describe a beautiful or round face, while *chakka kabi nordon* (“sour like gooseberry”) characterizes a person who is constantly dissatisfied.

Uzbek also features numerous gastronomic metaphors describing physical appearance, such as *olma yuzli* (“apple-faced”), *olmadedek qizil* (“red like an apple”), *asal labli* (“with honey-like lips”), *bodom yurak* (“almond-hearted”), *bodom qovoq* (“almond-shaped eyes”), and *qovun kalla* (“melon head”). Character traits are expressed through metaphors such as *bir qop yong‘oq* (“a sack of nuts”), *achimagan qattiq* (“hard like unripe food”), *achigan qatiq* (“soured yogurt”), and *bemaza qovun* (“tasteless melon”).

Gastronomic metaphors are also actively used to express emotional states. For example, in French, *Aujourd'hui, j'ai la pêche !* literally means "Today I have a peach," but metaphorically it conveys "I'm in a great mood today." Gastronomic metaphors in French are also used to describe situations, as in *J'ai travaillé tout le week-end pour des prunes*, which literally translates as "I worked all weekend for plums," but metaphorically means "to waste time or effort."

In Uzbek, gastronomic metaphors are often rooted in Eastern traditions of hospitality and are formed through categories of taste, food, spices, and related semantic components. Examples include *shirin so'z bilan shirin* ("sweet like kind words"), *achchiq so'z - bo'yniga arqon* ("a bitter word is a noose around the neck"), *til zahar* ("the tongue is poison"), and *tili o'tkir* ("a sharp tongue"). Their semantics may be positive, negative, or emotionally evaluative.

A comparative analysis of French and Uzbek gastronomic metaphors reveals both similarities and differences. Similarities are generally manifested in imagery, evaluative function, and cultural coding. In French culture, metaphors are widely used to describe personal qualities, character, and emotions. Metaphorical components in French gastronomic expressions (cheese, sausage, bun) often serve to characterize a person's physical appearance, for example: "fat as a sausage," "plump like a bun," or "round as cheese."

Consider the expression *être une crème*, which means "to be a very kind, gentle, and noble person." In Uzbek, this can be rendered as *nihojatda mehribon va oliyjanob inson*. Another example is *Avec toutes ces idées, j'ai la tête comme une pastèque*, which has Uzbek equivalents such as *Boshim shishib ketdi* ("My head is swollen from too many thoughts"). The French expression *être un chou* is used as an affectionate term meaning "to be sweet or lovable," as in *Mon petit chou, tu es trop mignon!*

Expressions such as *avoir la banane* or *le sourire banane* denote being in a good mood, while *être poire* metaphorically refers to being naïve or overly simple. The phrases *être chocolat* or *rester en chocolat* literally translate as "to remain in chocolate" but metaphorically mean "to be deceived" or "to end up with nothing."

The expression *faire tout un fromage* ("to make a whole cheese out of it") corresponds to the Russian idiom "to make a mountain out of a molehill," while *retomber comme un soufflé* ("to collapse like a soufflé") means to suddenly lose popularity or enthusiasm.

Such metaphorical expressions in French vividly reflect cultural and linguistic reality, with gastronomic terms serving as tools for expressing emotional states and social evaluations. In Uzbek, gastronomic metaphors are most commonly found in proverbs and sayings conveying moral or emotional states, such as *Shirin so'z jon ozig'i* ("Sweet words are food for the soul") and *Haqiqat achchiq bo'ladi* ("Truth is bitter").

In literary translation, several strategies are used to render gastronomic metaphors effectively: the use of an equivalent, calque, adaptation, or explanatory translation. The analysis demonstrates that gastronomic metaphors in both languages are deeply rooted in national-cultural values, traditions, and historical experience. In French, gastronomic metaphors tend to be vivid, humorous, and evaluative, whereas in Uzbek they are more restrained and moralizing in nature. Successful translation requires a careful balance between preserving the original imagery and conveying the intended meaning, taking into account the audience, genre, and cultural context.

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