



LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF FOOD RELATED IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN THE KOREAN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the linguocultural features of food-related idiomatic expressions in the Korean language. Phraseological units serve as important carriers of national culture, reflecting the history, traditions, values, and worldview of a particular people. The study analyzes Korean idioms containing food-related concepts such as kimchi, bap (rice/meal), and tteok (rice cake), revealing their figurative meanings and cultural significance. The findings demonstrate that food-related phraseological units not only enrich the Korean language but also preserve and transmit cultural knowledge, social norms, and national identity. The research highlights the close relationship between language and culture and emphasizes the importance of phraseological studies in understanding the Korean linguistic worldview.

The richness of a language is also measured by the diversity and expressiveness of its lexicon and the depth of its phraseological layer. Phraseological units play an invaluable role in the study of a nation's mentality and worldview. This is because they reflect the unique customs, traditions, cultural values, and historical experiences of a particular people. It is well known that every nation possesses its own distinctive patterns of communication. In everyday speech, people employ various forms of linguistic expression, including slang, idioms, proverbs, and other figurative expressions. Among these, idiomatic expressions, or phraseological units, occupy a particularly important position.

There is no nation in the world that does not possess its own unique set of phraseological expressions. Among such nations, the Korean people stand out for the richness and abundance of their phraseological repertoire. Since ancient times, Koreans have preserved numerous idioms and phraseological units that have been transmitted orally from generation to generation and refined through continuous usage. The study of Korean phraseological units provides valuable insights into Korean history, traditions, customs, and cultural heritage. One of the most prominent among them is food and cuisine. Given the central role of food in everyday life, it is unsurprising that culinary concepts have become deeply embedded in language and culture, finding extensive representation in phraseological expressions. Therefore, the analysis of food-related phraseological units in Korean offers a

valuable perspective on the cultural significance of cuisine and its role in shaping the Korean worldview.

• **파김치가 되다** (*"to become green-onion kimchi"*). This phraseological unit means *to become extremely exhausted, worn out, or fatigued*. Since green onions become limp and wilted when made into kimchi, the expression metaphorically describes a person who is completely drained of energy.

• **김치국부터 마시다** (*"to drink kimchi soup first"*). This idiom refers to *acting as though a desired outcome has already been achieved before it actually occurs*. It may also imply making decisions independently without considering the opinions of others or prematurely enjoying the anticipated benefits of an unfinished undertaking. The expression is comparable to the English proverb *"Don't count your chickens before they hatch."*

• **밥을 먹다** (*"to eat rice/a meal"*). Beyond its literal meaning, this expression is frequently used to mean *to make a living, to earn one's livelihood, or to sustain oneself financially*. For example:

그런 직업을 가지고 밥을 먹을 수 있을지 모르겠다.

I am not sure whether one can make a living with such an occupation.

• **밥값도 못 하다** (*"not even earn the value of one's meal"*). This expression refers to a person who fails to fulfill their responsibilities or contribute meaningfully, implying that they are not worth the food they consume. It is used to criticize someone who is ineffective, incompetent, or unproductive.

• **밥맛이 떨어지다** (*"the taste of food has disappeared"*). This idiom is used to describe a state of disappointment, irritation, or a bad mood. It signifies a loss of appetite caused by unpleasant circumstances or emotions.

• **밥술가락을 놓다** (*"to put down one's spoon"*). This phrase serves as a euphemistic expression meaning *to die or to pass away*. Since eating is associated with life and survival, putting down one's spoon symbolizes the end of life.

• **밥술이나 먹다** (*"to eat rice porridge/rice gruel"*). This expression refers to maintaining one's livelihood or managing to live without severe hardship. It is often used to indicate a modest but stable existence.

• **밥알을 세다** (*"to count grains of cooked rice"*). This idiom describes a person who eats reluctantly or with little appetite, as if carefully counting each grain of rice while eating.

• **밥알이 곧 두서다** (*"the grains of rice stand upright"*). This expression is used metaphorically to indicate extreme anger, fear, or shock, comparable to the English expression *"one's hair stands on end."*

• **떡을 만들다** (*"to make rice cake"*). Contrary to its literal meaning, this idiom means *to ruin or spoil something that was progressing well*. For example:

별것도 아닌 녀석이 잘난 체만하다가 이겨 놓은 경기를 떡을 만들어 놓았다.

A foolish fellow, overestimating his abilities, ended up ruining a match that had already been won.

• **그림의 떡** (*"a rice cake in a picture"*). This idiom refers to something desirable but unattainable, or something that exists only in imagination and cannot be enjoyed in reality. It is comparable to the English expression *"a pie in the sky."*

그 여자는 나에게 그림의 떡이야. 일찍 포기하는 게 좋아.

That woman is beyond my reach; it would be better to give up early.

•누워서 떡 먹기 (“*eating rice cake while lying down*”). This expression means to accomplish a task very easily, similar to the English idiom “a piece of cake.” It is used to describe an activity that requires little effort or presents no significant difficulty.

•떡고물이 떨어지다 (“*rice cake crumbs fall down*”). This idiom means to receive an unexpected benefit or profit from someone else's activity. It is often used when a person hopes to gain some advantage by assisting others.

옆에서 일 좀 거들면 떡고물이라도 떨어질까 했는데 아무것도 남는 것이 없어 섭섭했다.
I thought that if I helped those around me, I might receive some benefit as well, but nothing came of it, which was disappointing.

•떡국을 먹다 (“*to eat tteokguk (rice-cake soup)*”). Traditionally, Koreans celebrate the Lunar New Year by eating *tteokguk*. According to Korean custom, eating a bowl of *tteokguk* symbolizes becoming one year older. Therefore, this expression means to gain another year of age.

떡국 한 그릇 더 먹은 게 무슨 위세라고 그렇게 떠벌리고 다니는 거야.

Why are you boasting so much just because you have become one year older?

•떡국을 먹이다 (“*to make someone eat tteokguk*”). This expression refers to delaying a task beyond the end of the year, forcing it to continue into the following year. It is comparable to the Uzbek expression “*qolgan ishga qor yog‘ar*” (“unfinished work drags on”).

아무리 늦어도 연말까지는 끝낼 수 있으니까 떡국 먹이는 일은 없을 거야.

No matter how late it gets, I will finish this work by the end of the year, so it will not carry over into the next year.

•떡심이 풀리다 (literally “*one's tteok-strength loosens*”). This idiom means to lose heart, become discouraged, or have one's hopes shattered. It is similar to the Uzbek expressions “*hafsalasi pir bo‘lmoq*” or “*tarvuzi qo‘ltig‘idan tushmoq*.”

마지막 희망이 무너지자 아버지는 떡심이 풀렸는지 그 자리에 주저앉았다.

When his last hope collapsed, my father lost all motivation and sank down where he stood.

•떡이 생기다 (“*a rice cake appears*”). This expression means to receive an unexpected gain or benefit without prior expectation.

아무 생각 없이 일을 하었는데 생각지도 않은 떡이 생겼다.

I started the work without any particular expectations, but unexpectedly gained a benefit from it.

•떡 주무르듯 하다 (“*to knead rice cake as one wishes*”). This idiom means to handle people or situations entirely according to one's own will, often implying excessive control or manipulation.

우리 반 반장은 애들을 떡 주무르듯이 한다.

The class leader treats the students however he pleases.

•떡 해 먹을 집안 (“*a family fit only for making and eating rice cakes*”). This phrase is used to describe a disorderly, problematic, or constantly troubled family. It carries a strongly negative connotation regarding family relationships and domestic harmony.

이런 떡 해 먹을 집안에서는 도저히 살 수 없다.

It is impossible to live in such a chaotic and troubled family..

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