

LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF FOOD NAMES: A CROSS-CULTURAL
ANALYSIS

Bobojanova Shoiri Yoldoshevna

Researcher of the Urgench state university named after Abu Raykhon Beruni

Annotation: This article examines the linguocultural characteristics of food names across different languages and cultures, with particular focus on Uzbek, English, Russian, and other linguistic traditions. Food nomenclature serves as a significant cultural marker, reflecting historical developments, geographical influences, religious practices, and social customs. Through etymological analysis and semantic investigation, this study reveals how food names encode cultural values, traditional knowledge, and collective identity. The research demonstrates that food terminology functions not merely as lexical units but as carriers of cultural memory and symbolic meaning systems.

Keywords: linguoculturology, food names, cultural linguistics, etymology, semantic analysis, culinary terminology

Food names represent a fascinating intersection of language, culture, and social practice. As Wierzbicka (1997) notes, vocabulary related to food and eating provides crucial insights into cultural values and worldviews[1]. The study of food nomenclature within the linguocultural paradigm reveals how linguistic communities conceptualize, categorize, and transmit knowledge about culinary traditions through language.

Linguoculturology, as established by Vorobiev and Teliya examines the relationship between language and culture, investigating how cultural meanings are encoded in linguistic structures[2]. Food names, as a specialized lexical domain, offer rich material for such investigation, as they frequently preserve historical information, reflect cultural contact, and embody symbolic associations specific to particular linguistic communities.

The significance of studying food nomenclature extends beyond purely linguistic interest. As Lehrer argues, semantic fields related to food reveal cognitive categorization patterns and cultural prioritization[3]. Different cultures segment the culinary domain differently, and these distinctions manifest in their naming practices.

Linguocultural Approach to Lexical Semantics. The linguocultural approach to analyzing food names draws on several theoretical foundations. Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in its moderate form, suggests that language influences thought patterns and cultural perception [4]. In the context of food nomenclature, this manifests in how different cultures linguistically segment and categorize culinary concepts. Cultural concepts, as defined by Stepanov are multilayered mental formations that include factual knowledge, emotional associations, and behavioral patterns[5]. Food names frequently encode such complex cultural concepts, serving as linguistic markers of cultural identity.

Food names typically arise through various naming motivations:

- **Descriptive motivation:** based on physical characteristics (color, shape, taste)
- **Geographical motivation:** reflecting place of origin

- **Personal motivation:** named after individuals
 - **Metaphorical motivation:** based on perceived similarity
 - **Cultural-symbolic motivation:** reflecting cultural beliefs and associations.
- Linguocultural Features of Food Names in Different Languages**

Uzbek Food Nomenclature. Uzbek cuisine, as a representative of Central Asian culinary tradition, demonstrates unique linguocultural features in its food terminology. The names of traditional dishes encode centuries of cultural history and ethnic interaction.

Palov (плов/ош): The central dish of Uzbek cuisine bears multiple names reflecting dialectal and regional variations. The etymology traces to Persian pilāv, ultimately from Sanskrit pulāka (ball of rice)[6]. The semantic field surrounding this dish includes numerous variants: osh (native Turkic term), palov (borrowed form), with each carrying slightly different cultural connotations.

Manti (манты): This steamed dumpling dish, whose name derives from Chinese mantou through Turkic mediation, exemplifies cultural borrowing through the Silk Road[7]. The linguistic form adaptation (mantou → manti) reflects phonological naturalization while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Shurva (шурва): The soup name originates from Persian shūrbā (salty water, soup), demonstrating the Persian cultural influence on Central Asian culinary terminology. The word has generated productive word-formation models: mastava (yogurt soup), lagman (noodle soup).

English Food Nomenclature. English food names reveal the language's history of cultural contact and borrowing. Ayto (1993) provides extensive documentation of food word etymologies in English, demonstrating multiple linguistic strata[8].

Sandwich: Named after John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich (18th century), this term exemplifies personal naming motivation. The term has achieved international status, being borrowed into numerous languages while retaining cultural associations with British tradition.

Beef, Pork, Mutton vs. Cow, Pig, Sheep: This lexical distinction reflects the Norman conquest's sociolinguistic impact. The French-origin terms (beef < boeuf, pork < porc) designated prepared meat consumed by aristocracy, while Anglo-Saxon terms denoted living animals tended by lower classes[9]. This linguistic stratification preserves medieval social hierarchy.

Ketchup: Derived from Malay kēchap/kicap (fish sauce) through Chinese kê-tsiap, the term underwent semantic transformation as the referent changed from fish-based to tomato-based sauce[10]. This exemplifies how borrowed food terms can undergo radical semantic shifts while maintaining phonological similarity.

Russian Food Nomenclature. Russian food terminology reflects Slavic cultural foundations with various historical borrowings.

Borsch (борщ): This iconic soup name has contested etymology, possibly from Pre-Slavic bŕščь (referring to hogweed, originally used in the soup)[11]. The dish name has become a

cultural symbol, with regional variants carrying geographical modifiers: ukrainskiy borsch, moskovskiy borsch.

Bliny (блины): These traditional pancakes derive from Proto-Slavic mlinъ (related to grinding, milling). The dish carries deep cultural-ritual significance, associated with Maslenitsa (Butter Week) celebration, demonstrating how food names connect to cultural-religious practices[12].

Kasha (каша): The porridge term exemplifies semantic broadening, originally referring specifically to buckwheat porridge but now covering various grain preparations. The phrase shchi da kasha – pishcha nasha (cabbage soup and porridge – our food) encapsulates traditional Russian culinary identity.

Cross-Cultural Food Name Borrowing. Globalization has accelerated food terminology borrowing. Certain terms achieve near-universal recognition:

- **Pizza** (Italian → global): Maintains original form across languages
- **Sushi** (Japanese → global): Borrowed with minimal adaptation
- **Kebab/Kabob** (Arabic/Persian → multiple languages): Shows various orthographic adaptations

The borrowing process reveals cultural prestige associations. Lehrer (1983) observes that borrowed food terms often carry connotations of the source culture's perceived sophistication or exoticism[13].

Semantic Categories and Cultural Concepts. Metaphorical Extensions. Food names frequently undergo metaphorical extension, creating idiomatic expressions:

- English: He's toast (he's in trouble), the icing on the cake (perfect addition)
- Russian: каша в голове (porridge in head = confusion), заварить кашу (to start trouble)
- Uzbek: osh atmoq (to throw pilaf = to hold celebration)

These metaphorical usages demonstrate how food concepts penetrate broader cognitive domains, becoming vehicles for abstract conceptualization.

Cultural Symbolism. Many food names carry symbolic cultural meanings:

Bread in European cultures symbolizes life, sustenance, and hospitality (breaking bread together). Slavic khleb and Germanic bread occupy central positions in proverbs and ritual practices.

Rice in Asian cultures holds similar symbolic status. Chinese 米 (mǐ, rice) appears in expressions related to livelihood and prosperity.

Salt across cultures symbolizes preservation, value, and covenant (salt of the earth, Russian khleb-sol hospitality ritual).

Diminutive and Augmentative Forms. Slavic languages extensively use diminutive suffixes in food terminology, expressing cultural attitudes:

- Russian: khleb (bread) → khlebushek (beloved bread, diminutive)
- Polish: chleb → chlebek (little bread, affectionate)

These morphological elaborations encode emotional relationships and cultural values regarding food.

Conclusion. Food names constitute a rich linguistic domain encoding cultural history, social practices, and collective identity. The linguocultural analysis reveals that food nomenclature functions as more than mere referential labels; these terms carry layered cultural meanings, preserve historical memory, and reflect ongoing cultural dynamics.

Key findings include:

1. **Cultural stratification:** Food names preserve historical layers of cultural contact and influence
2. **Semantic complexity:** Terms encode not just referential meaning but symbolic, emotional, and social dimensions
3. **Cultural values:** Naming patterns reflect cultural prioritization and worldview
4. **Dynamic nature:** Food terminology continuously evolves, responding to globalization, technology, and social change

Future research directions include computational analysis of large food terminology corpora, cross-linguistic comparative studies of metaphorical extensions, and investigation of emerging food discourse in digital spaces.

Understanding food nomenclature's linguocultural dimensions enhances appreciation of linguistic diversity and cultural richness encoded in everyday language. As Lévi-Strauss famously noted, food is "good to think with" – and food names are equally good to think linguistically and culturally.

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