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FOOD AS A LINGUOCULTURAL SYMBOL IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH LITERARY TRADITIONS

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Abstract: This article argues that food, as depicted in Uzbek and English literary texts, functions not merely as a backdrop for storytelling but as a linguocultural symbol that conveys social norms, emotional expression, and cultural identity. By analyzing ceremonial and everyday food references in *O'tkan kunlar* and *Great Expectations*, the study demonstrates how authors use culinary imagery to articulate themes of community, power, class, and human connection within their respective cultural contexts.

Keywords: Linguoculturology, food symbolism, ritual meals, ceremonial food, class and culture, literary anthropology, cultural identity, sociolinguistics of food.

Аннотация: В данной статье утверждается, что пища, изображаемая в узбекских и английских литературных текстах, выступает не просто фоном повествования, но и как лингвокультурный символ, отражающий социальные нормы, эмоциональные состояния и культурную идентичность. Анализируя ритуальные и повседневные упоминания пищи в романах «O'tkan kunlar» и «Большие надежды», исследование показывает, как авторы используют кулинарные образы для раскрытия тем сообщества, власти, классовых различий и человеческих связей в рамках соответствующего культурного контекста.

Ключевые слова: Лингвокультурология, символизм еды, ритуальные трапезы, обрядовая пища, класс и культура, литературная антропология, культурная идентичность, социолингвистика еды.

Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada ta'kidlanishicha, o'zbek va ingliz adabiy matnlarida tasvirlangan taomlar voqea rivoji uchun fon emas, balki ijtimoiy normalar, hissiy holatlar va madaniy o'zlikni ifodalovchi lingvokulturologik ramz sifatida xizmat qiladi. «O'tkan kunlar» va «Great Expectations» asarlaridagi marosim va kundalik taomlarga oid tasvirlar tahlili orqali ushbu maqola mualliflarning ovqat tasvirlari orqali jamoaviylik, kuch, sinfiy farq va insoniy aloqalar kabi mavzularni qanday ifodalaganini ochib beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: Lingvokulturologiya, taom ramzlari, rasmiy ovqatlanish marosimlari, marosim taomlari, sinf va madaniyat, adabiy antropologiya, madaniy o'zlik, taom so'zi sotsiolingvistikasi.

Introduction. Food is far more than a means of sustenance; it is a powerful cultural symbol that carries deep social, emotional, and spiritual significance. Across diverse societies, food acts as a conduit for expressing identity, forging communal ties, and enacting ritual practices. In literature,

these dimensions of food are frequently amplified and symbolically rendered, offering insight into the values, beliefs, and social structures of a given culture. This article explores the linguocultural role of food in both Uzbek and English literary traditions, with particular attention to how food functions in ceremonial, social, and symbolic contexts. Drawing on examples from Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar* and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, the analysis reveals how food-related lexicon reflects cultural codes, interpersonal relationships, and social hierarchies. Through a comparative lens, this study highlights how food operates as a narrative tool and a cultural artifact, shaping and reflecting the human experience in profoundly meaningful ways.

Methodology. This study adopts a qualitative, comparative, and interpretive methodology grounded in the principles of linguoculturology, literary anthropology, and sociolinguistics. The research centers on two primary literary texts: *O'tkan kunlar* by Abdulla Qodiriy and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. These texts were selected for their rich cultural content and frequent use of food-related imagery within ritual, social, and symbolic contexts.

The analysis proceeded in several stages. First, a close textual reading was conducted to identify and extract references to food, meals, and culinary practices in both novels. These references were then categorized according to their thematic function—ritual (e.g., funerals, matchmaking), social (e.g., family meals, hospitality), and symbolic (e.g., metaphors of class or emotion). Lexical items related to food were analyzed through a linguocultural lens to uncover their cultural connotations and semiotic significance within the narrative.

Secondly, the study employed comparative analysis to juxtapose Uzbek and English cultural codes surrounding food. This involved correlating culinary symbols in the source texts with their respective cultural practices, informed by secondary sources on Uzbek traditions (e.g., non *sindirish*) and Victorian English customs (e.g., wedding feasts). Contextual and ethnographic insights were drawn from scholarly articles, cultural encyclopedias, and historical records to enhance interpretation.

Ceremonial Meals in Literary Traditions. Ceremonial meals are deeply ingrained in both Uzbek and English cultures, with their significance vividly portrayed in literature. In Uzbek culture, meals are central to life's major milestones, such as weddings, funerals, and religious holidays. For instance, in Uzbek literature, funeral gatherings, where *osh* (*pilaf*) is prepared and served to guests, highlight themes of solidarity, remembrance, and the community's collective spirit. Such occasions are not just about nourishment but also about the symbolic act of honoring the deceased and fostering communal support during times of grief. In particular, the preparation and distribution of traditional dishes such as *halim* or *osh* during funerals exemplify food's symbolic role in solidarity and collective mourning.

Ceremonial meals are deeply ingrained in both Uzbek and English cultures, with their cultural and emotional significance vividly portrayed in literature. In Uzbek tradition, meals are central to major life events such as weddings, funerals, and religious holidays. Funeral gatherings, in particular, where dishes like *osh* (*pilaf*) and *halim* are prepared and shared, highlight themes of solidarity, remembrance, and the collective spirit of the community. These meals serve not only as physical nourishment but also as symbolic acts of honoring the deceased and reinforcing communal bonds. Such rituals underscore the culturally embedded belief that food unites people in times of both joy and sorrow, fostering a sense of collective identity and support. (Urayeva & Tosheva, 2023).

Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar* provides a poignant example of this cultural tradition when Yusufbek hoji organizes an **osh** ceremony upon learning about his son Otabek's death. The text notes: "Yusufbek hoji xatmi qur'on qilib yurtka osh berdi, O'zbek oyim qora kiyib ta'ziya ochdi."

This excerpt reflects key cultural and symbolic elements of **osh** in funerals. Firstly, shared meals after the *xatmi qur'on* (recitation of the Quran) depict the connection between food and

religious observance, reflecting both mourning and communal support. By hosting a memorial feast, Yusufbek hoji brings the community together in sorrow, prayer, and renewed fellowship.

Moreover, preparing and sharing **osh** serves as a means of honoring the deceased and seeking blessings for their soul. It becomes a symbolic act where the deceased's memory is intertwined with the sustenance provided to the community.

In addition, hospitality holds paramount importance in Uzbek culture, even during times of sorrow. Hosting an **osh** during a funeral reflects the values of respect and generosity, offering comfort and unity to those who gather. As the text highlights, the **osh** is part of a structured mourning process, which includes Quranic recitation (**xatmi qur'on**) and formal condolences (**ta'ziya ochdi**). This underscores how deeply rituals are embedded in the Uzbek worldview.

Finally, through this example, Qodiriy illustrates the profound role of **osh** as a culinary and cultural symbol in moments of loss. It serves not only as nourishment but also as a medium for spiritual and emotional connection, fostering a sense of unity and collective memory within the community.

Food as a Social Code in Matchmaking Rituals. In Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar*, the line "Ota-otaning kutkanlari shunday tegu taxtlik kuyav bo'lg'ani uchun birinchi martaba sovchilarni yaxshi so'zlar va quyuq-suyuq oshlar bilan jo'natib, ikkinchi kelishka o'ylashib javob beraturgan bo'ldilar" offers a vivid example of the way food functions as both a social and symbolic instrument within Uzbek culture. The phrase "quyuq-suyuq oshlar" transcends its literal meaning — which denotes thick and liquid dishes — and embodies the cultural concept of abundance and variety, reflecting the deep-rooted importance of hospitality in Uzbek society. Typically, quyuq (thick) dishes refer to substantial and nourishing foods such as osh (pilaf), halim, or dimlama, while suyuq (liquid) dishes encompass lighter options like sho'rva (soup) or mastava. The combined expression signals that the hosts prepared a complete and generous meal, which fulfills not only the physical needs of their guests but also the cultural expectations of respect and warmth.

In Uzbek traditions, especially during matchmaking rituals (sovchilik) or social negotiations, the act of offering a diverse and plentiful table functions as a non-verbal declaration of the family's status, respect, and generosity.

Food as an Expression of Unity and Connection. In Uzbek literature, food-sharing is a recurring motif symbolizing unity and mutual support. The act of breaking bread together—whether during a simple meal of non (traditional Uzbek bread) or during elaborate gatherings—represents trust, hospitality, and the strengthening of interpersonal bonds. This cultural emphasis on communal eating underscores the belief that food connects individuals beyond their personal boundaries, creating a collective identity.

Bread and Hospitality in Uzbek Traditions. One of the most vivid examples of this tradition is the "Non sindirish" ceremony, a significant pre-wedding ritual practiced among Uzbek families and other Central Asian communities. Non sindirish, which literally means "breaking bread," is more than a symbolic gesture — it marks the moment when the bride's family formally agrees to the marriage proposal sent by the groom's family. The ceremony varies slightly across regions; for example, in the Fergana Valley, the bread is broken immediately after the father of the bride gives his approval, while in Surkhandarya, the ritual takes place after the bride price (qalin) has been negotiated, with the bread divided equally and shared among relatives of both the bride and groom. Traditionally, the scale and manner of the Non sindirish gathering depended on the families' economic standing. In earlier times, Non sindirish and the fотиha to'y (engagement ceremony) were celebrated as separate events, but in modern practice, they are often combined into one streamlined occasion. Interestingly, during Non sindirish, the bride-to-be and the groom are expected to avoid direct interaction with each other's close

relatives as a sign of modesty and respect, subtly reinforcing the social etiquette that shapes Uzbek family life.

One literary example that beautifully illustrates this tradition of hospitality and food-sharing appears in **Abdulla Qodiriy's** novel *O'tkan kunlar*. In one scene, Ziyo aka, upon sitting at thoughtfully prepared **dasturxon** (a tablecloth laid with food), adjusts the arrangement and **breaks kulcha bread** — a round, slightly thicker type of **non** — before inviting Hasanali and Qutidor to join him: "Ziyo aka To'ybekaning yozgan dasturxonini tuzatib, kulchalarni sindirdi. Hasanali bilan qutidorni nong'a taklif qilib o'zi maqsadni ochiqroq onglatmoqchi bo'ldi." This simple yet meaningful gesture of breaking and offering bread is more than an act of nourishment; it is an invitation to dialogue, trust, and mutual understanding. Linguoculturally, the word **non** in Uzbek does not merely denote "bread" in the physical sense — it embodies a profound symbol of hospitality, peace, and social connection. In Uzbek culture, **non** is treated with deep respect: dropping or wasting it is considered a moral fault, and sharing it creates a sacred bond between hosts and guests. In this scene, the act of breaking **bread** signals not only readiness to share food but also to open one's heart and intentions, reflecting the Uzbek worldview where food serves as both a physical and spiritual bridge between people.

The Symbolism of Food in Dickens' Great Expectations. In English literature, the role of food often emphasizes connection but can also highlight division based on class or social standing. In Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, food reflects social hierarchies and power dynamics. Lavish feasts portray the wealth and exclusivity of the upper class, while the scarcity of food among the working class symbolizes poverty and struggle. However, Dickens also uses shared meals to emphasize themes of compassion and equality, particularly in scenes where characters from different social classes come together over a modest meal.

Example 1: Miss Havisham's Wedding Feast: "On the table were cake and wine, now spread out as if a feast were about to begin, but covered in dust and cobwebs." In this scene, the cake and wine, traditionally associated with joy, celebration, and union, are linguoculturally recontextualized. In English culture, especially in Victorian times, the wedding cake symbolized prosperity, purity, and new beginnings—meanings reinforced by the use of white icing, which was costly and required finely refined sugar. Wine, meanwhile, represented festivity, elegance, and social refinement, often reserved for celebratory occasions among the upper class. As John J. Lee notes, "White icing on wedding cakes became a symbol of wealth and status because the fine white sugar required was expensive and difficult to produce" (Lee, 2022).

However, Dickens subverts these meanings: the wedding feast has long since passed, yet the food remains, untouched and decaying. The presence of dust and cobwebs over what should be symbols of happiness transforms them into metaphors of emotional ruin, lost love, and the hollow grandeur of the upper class.

Example 2: Pip's Bread-and-Butter Meal: "My sister had a trenchant way of cutting our bread-and-butter for us, that never varied. First, with her left hand she jammed the loaf hard and fast against her bib — where it sometimes got a pin into it, and sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got into our mouths. Then she took some butter (not too much) on a knife and spread it on the loaf, in an apothecary kind of way, as if she were making a plaster — using both sides of the knife with a slapping dexterity, and trimming and moulding the butter off round the crust. Then she gave me the slab of bread and butter."

In stark contrast, this brief yet telling moment from Pip's early life depicts the austerity of working-class sustenance. Bread and butter in English culture has long represented the bare essentials of a meal—basic nourishment without indulgence. (Mintz, Sidney, 1985) Dickens adds a layer of rough domestic reality by describing how Pip's sister cuts and spreads the butter "in an apothecary

kind of way,” likening it to applying a plaster. This metaphorical description implies a lack of care and joy, suggesting that even simple food is served with strictness and discipline in the Gargery household. From a linguocultural perspective, the phrase “bread and butter” also functions metaphorically in English idioms to denote one’s basic income or livelihood (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). Here, it grounds the reader in the harsh realities of Pip’s lower-class upbringing. So, The meal reflects poverty, strictness, and austerity.

Both examples highlight how food in literature reflects more than just physical sustenance; it conveys cultural attitudes, emotional states, and social roles. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens uses food not merely to paint a setting but to comment on the disparities in class structure and the emotional lives of his characters. The decayed cake and wine embody the grotesque side of wealth and obsession, while the plain bread and butter evoke discipline, modesty, and survival.

Conclusion. The exploration of food as a linguocultural symbol in both Uzbek and English literary traditions reveals its powerful role in shaping narratives and reflecting deeper cultural values. From the communal act of sharing food in Uzbek rituals to the stark contrasts in Dickens' portrayal of class and identity, food transcends its physical function to become a vehicle for conveying themes of unity, power, and social cohesion. Through detailed analysis of ceremonial meals, social gatherings, and symbolic food imagery in *O'tkan kunlar* and *Great Expectations*, this article demonstrates how food is intricately tied to cultural norms and emotional expressions. In both traditions, food serves as more than sustenance; it embodies cultural identity, social relationships, and the complexities of human experience. As such, these literary representations highlight the multifaceted role of food in literature, providing valuable insights into the intersections of language, culture, and society.

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