

# The Cat's Out of the Bag: Idioms are a Piece of Cake

Whether you realize it or not, you're surrounded by idioms every day. In the words of <https://www.theidioms.com/>, "There are a large number of idioms, and they are used very commonly in all languages. There are estimated to be at least **25,000 idiomatic expressions in the English language.**"

In school, you might have learned that idioms are phrases where the words you say have a meaning that one could not understand through the words themselves. Usually, only people who speak a language will understand what an idiom from the language means, so it almost resembles an elaborate inside joke.

Literally translated, these words often make little to no sense at all. Common examples include **"it's raining cats and dogs"**, **"piece of cake"**, or **"to pull someone's leg"**. While it's true that idioms can stand out in your sentences as much as these phrases do, they can slip into your speech without you always noticing. For example, look at some of these common phrases:

- **"So far so good"** = "things are going well so far"
- **"Get along with"** = "you have a good relationship with someone"
- **"Up for grabs"** = "available for anyone"
- **"Thanks to"** = "due to"

- **“Stay in touch”** = “stay in communication”
- **“Call it a day”** = “stop working on something”
- **“Get out of hand”** = “become out of control”
- **“Hang in there”** = “don’t give up”

If you’re like me, then you never really thought of these phrases as idioms- they were just normal things you said sometimes. Because of their broad definition, idioms can be as showy as the first few phrases or as discreet as the last you just read. Because there are so many, idioms can be a **pain in the neck** for new English speakers to learn and keep track of. Even native speakers can get confused! So why would anyone **go to the trouble** to **make up** such confusing phrases in the first place?

As I mentioned before, many languages have idioms, not just English. For example, a common Spanish idiom is the phrase “Gato con guantes no caza ratones”, which literally translates to “A cat with gloves catches no mice”. This phrase really means that if you’re too polite or careful, you might not get what you want. Here are some of my other favorite idioms from around the world:

- **Italian: “Trattare a pesci in faccia”** = “To treat with a fish in the face” = To disrespect
- **French: “J’ai d’autres chats à fouetter”** = “I have other cats to whip” = I have other things to worry about (“I have other fish to fry” in English)
- **Spanish: “Dar a alguien calabazas”** = “To give someone pumpkins” = To reject somebody
- **Japanese: “十人十色”** = “Ten people, ten colors” = Different people have unique personalities, thoughts, ideas, etc.

- **Hindi:** “[बूझा हुआ बूझा हुआ बूझा हुआ](#)” = “Clarified butter and sugar in your mouth” = May what you say become true
- **Mandarin:** “[画蛇添足](#)” = “Draw legs on a snake” = To improve something that doesn’t need it (“Gild the lily” in English)

Idioms are a cool way to spice up your speech and sound like a native speaker. They can spread wisdom and tell stories in a meaningful way, expressing difficult concepts in a way that is easier to understand. Now that you’ve learned all about idioms, why not explore some new ones? You never know when they could **come in handy**!

Other resources:

- [TED Summit 2016: TED Translators share idioms from around the world](#) This video by the TED Translators demonstrates how difficult it can be to translate speeches to other languages by using the example of idioms.
- [Learn the 100 Most Common Idioms in 30 Minutes \(with examples\)](#) This video describes 100 commonly used English idioms, with explanations and examples (extremely helpful for anyone new to English as well as any curious native speakers.)
- [S3 English: Idioms of Different Languages](#) This short video covers two interesting Japanese and Mandarin idioms that don’t translate well to English.
- [18 Common French Idioms, Expressions & Sayings](#) This short video covers a few common ranging topics about feelings, relationships, everyday conversation, food, and more.