

IRSTI 16.01.11

DOI: [10.59102/kufil/2025/iss1pp181-196](https://doi.org/10.59102/kufil/2025/iss1pp181-196)

M.T. Khassanova

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, 050040, Republic of Kazakhstan

THE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC EVOLUTION OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

The widespread use of idioms across languages highlights their cultural significance and the shared cognitive frameworks that shape their evolution. This cross-linguistic presence underscores the role of cultural exchange in the development of idiomatic expressions. For instance, idioms like spill the beans exhibit syntactic flexibility, allowing for adaptations such as spill the tea or spill your guts, which acquire new meanings in different contexts. In digital communication, particularly on platforms like TikTok and Twitter, spill the tea has emerged as a central phrase in discussions of gossip, emphasizing its role in contemporary discourse.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the idiom spill the tea, tracing its historical origins, cultural relevance, and ethical considerations, as well as examining its evolving usage in modern contexts. Using a dataset of millions of tokens, we analyze the frequency and concordances of both traditional and modified idioms. Additionally, we investigate the historical background of these expressions, incorporating insights from a survey conducted among American students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. While idioms are often considered fixed linguistic units, their ongoing transformation—driven by cultural shifts, social media, and youth language—illustrates the dynamic nature of language and its adaptability to societal change.

Key words: spill the beans, spill the tea, idioms, survey, cultural shift.

MAIN PROVISIONS

The idiom “spill the tea” showcases the evolution of language as shaped by cultural and technological shifts. It originated in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and became widely recognized through LGBTQ communities. In the 20th century, this term gained popularity in informal way of speaking. Its rise was accelerated by digital platforms such as TikTok and Twitter. Scholars such as Raafat [16,] in “The application of memes on English learners' idiomatic and motivation” and Nurbayani [12] et al. in “Dualism of digital society's acceptance of spill the tea actions of victims of sexual violence” highlight how social media platforms promote the adoption of idioms. These digital spaces have transformed “spill the tea” into a central expression in modern online communication. In contrast, the idiom “spill the beans” has a long history tied to ancient Greek voting practices. Beans were used to cast votes and spilling them prematurely revealed secrets. This phrase retained its meaning of disclosing confidential information over centuries. Holmes in “The man from tall timber and Everaert [17] in Idioms: Structural and psychological perspectives” documented its historical and linguistic significance. Although it remains in use today, “spill the beans” is less prevalent among younger generations. Džanić and Berberović [13] in “Conceptual integration theory in idiom modifications”, explain that idioms like this evolve through cultural adaptation. These changes make them relevant to contemporary discourse. Research conducted at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University examined preferences for these idioms. Surveys indicated that American students chose “spill the tea” over “spill the beans”. Younger participants associated “spill the tea” with humor and gossip, making it more appealing. Statistical analyses using Sketch Engine supported these findings. While “spill the beans” appeared more frequently overall, “spill the tea” dominated in modern digital contexts. This illustrates the adaptability of language to meet the needs of informal communication. The evolution of idiomatic expressions also raises ethical concerns. Yoon [11] in “Liberatory practices for learning: Dismantling social inequality and individualism with ancient wisdom” discuss how phrases like “spill the tea” encourage openness. However, they caution that this openness can lead to oversharing or breaches of privacy. The alteration from “spill the beans”

to “spill the tea” highlights the interchange between tradition and innovation. It demonstrates how societal trends and technological changes reshape language, reflecting broader shifts in communication.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of idiomatic language surrounding tea serves as a fascinating lens through which to examine broader cultural shifts and societal norms. The aim of this research is to analyze the historical development, cultural importance, and modern usage of the idioms “spill the beans” and “spill the tea” especially focusing on their evolution in digital and cultural diversity contexts. Idioms such as “spill the beans” traditionally associated with the act of revealing secrets, have modified into more modern options as “spill the tea” and “spill your guts” reflecting an idea on gossip and social discourse in the area of digital communication. This linguistic transformation underscores the fluid nature of language and highlights how the symbolism of tea has shifted from a representation of formality and tradition to a medium for modern social interaction, fostering humor and camaraderie in personal narratives.

Additionally, as we follow the global adventure of tea from its origins in China to its cherished place in British culture, it is clear that these sayings are filled with rich historical meaning, echoing the intricate stories of trade, colonialism, and cultural sharing. As idiomatic expressions surrounding tea have evolved, they also reflect broader cultural shifts and societal norms. For instance, as Goodwin [1] claims, the transition from “spill the beans” which implies revealing secrets, to “spill the tea” captures a more contemporary emphasis on gossip and social discourse, particularly within digital communication platforms. This linguistic shift not only highlights the evolving nature of idioms but also emphasizes how tea, once a symbol of formality and tradition, now serves as a social tool that brings humor and connection to everyday conversations.

Furthermore, as we explore the global journey of tea from its origins in China to its prominent role in British culture, it becomes evident that these phrases carry historical weight, resonating with the complexities of trade, colonialism, and cultural exchange [3]. Consequently, we examined the preferences individuals hold regarding the traditional or modified iterations of idioms in the context of gossiping. In external contexts beyond the United States, it is commonplace to encounter expressions among Generation Z, such as: “Let’s Tea,” which signifies “Let’s Gossip.” Therefore, we decided to analyze the evolution of idioms related to revealing secrets through corpus analysis and surveys.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the frequency of usage of idioms “spill the beans”, “spill the tea” and “spill your guts”?

RQ2: What factors contribute to the transformation of the idiom “spill the beans” into “spill the tea”?

RQ3: Which form of idioms (traditional or transformed) is preferred by American “Flagman” students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University?

Literature Review

Modified Idioms

Many researchers analyzed the modified idioms via corpus analysis. However, there are several new tools appearing, and each author has their own methodology of identifying transformed idioms. Variations may appear due to several factors, including regional dialects, individual speaker preferences, or the evolution of language over time. Ordinary changes or variations refer to the natural evolution of idioms over time or to regional differences in their usage [13]. Corpus studies frequently examine these variants to comprehend how idioms are employed in diverse contexts and by various speakers.

On the other hand, intentional modifications of idioms are deliberate changes made by speakers for communicative purposes. Such alterations can serve specific functions, such as adding humor,

emphasizing a particular idea, or applying a rhetorical device. That is why we decided to explore the modification of idioms. The ideas from the sayings “spill the beans” to “spill the tea” (or simply “tea”) can be viewed through the perspective of linguistic development and cultural changes. This alteration showcases how language evolves in response to emerging social environments and cultural factors, influenced by processes similar to those found in biological evolution. The replacement of “beans” with “tea” exemplifies how idiomatic expressions adapt to remain pertinent and impactful within modern conversations. Kazakh linguists such as Akhmetova [14] and Alipova [15] have explored the adaptation of idioms in multicultural contexts, highlighting parallels in the evolution of Kazakh and English idiomatic expressions. That’s why we think analyzing idioms is crucial from both linguistic and corpus linguistic perspectives in order to identify the evolution of new idioms.

Spill the Beans

Idioms are complex linguistic units that challenge both structural and psychological frameworks due to their fixed yet sometimes flexible nature. The syntactic behavior of idioms varies, with some being more resistant to change than others [17].

The idioms “spill the beans” is believed to have originated from an ancient voting system in Greece, where beans were used to cast votes. Spilling the beans prematurely could reveal the outcome of a vote before it was officially counted, thus metaphorically representing the act of revealing secret. As time passed, the expression underwent a transformation into a broader term for the disclosure of sensitive information. Its usage in English has been documented since the early 20th century, reflecting its integration into everyday language as a metaphor for disclosure [12].

The journey of understanding idioms includes both parts that can be broken down and those that cannot, and this can influence how we understand and adapt these expressions.

The shift from beans to tea may involve a recontextualization of the idiom’s components to align with modern cultural narratives. Therefore, the idiom “spill the tea” has gained the viral popularity in these years, especially within online communities and social media platforms. This reflects a cultural shift where “tea” symbolizes gossip or revealing information, resonating with contemporary communication styles and cultural references. The transformation of idioms is also influenced by factors such as salience and context. As new expressions become more salient within a community, they can replace older idioms that may no longer hold the same cultural significance [8]. The idioms “spill the beans” and “spill the tea” have historical and cultural background, showing their unusual and special roles in both language and society. While both idioms convey the act of revealing secrets, their etymologies and cultural contexts differ significantly. Below, we explore the history and development of these idioms.

Spill the Tea

The idiom “spill the tea” came from an older phrase, “spill the beans.” These phrases have interesting histories. The idiom “Spill the beans” refers to the 1900s . It likely comes from an ancient voting practice where people used beans to cast their votes, and spilling the beans accidentally would reveal the results too soon.

Eric Partridge, in his book *The Routledge Dictionary of Historical Slang*, mentions that “spill the beans” was already used before 1914. The phrase means revealing a secret or sharing information, which has stayed its meaning over time.

“Spill the tea” on the other hand, is much newer. This phrase was originated from African American Vernacular English and namely LGBTQ communities in the 20th century and became more popular in the 21st century. This idiom refers to sharing gossip or juicy details, often in a fun or dramatic way. Dr. E. Patrick Johnson and cultural media played a big role in popularizing it.

Although “spill the tea” doesn’t appear in older slang dictionaries, it reflects how language changes with culture and time. Wheres the “spill the beans” has a longer history, “spill the tea” adds a modern, colorful idea to the idea of sharing information. Together, these idioms show how language evolves with society.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A mixed-methods approach was adopted in this research, using quantitative techniques to address RQ1 and RQ3, and qualitative methods to address RQ2. Two quantitative instruments were employed: a survey carried out with Flagman foreign students at Kazakh National University and the Sketch Engine, which facilitated the analysis of historical changes in favored words and phrases.

To explore the structural changes in idioms, a corpus study was conducted that involved analyzing idioms within the Sketch Engine. Sketch Engine is an online tool that provides an extensive array of corpus analysis capabilities for researchers and linguists. It is tailored to handle large corpora across different languages, allowing users to investigate linguistic patterns, carry out research, and obtain insights into language usage [2]. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of the idiomatic expressions in use. By analyzing both the frequency of usage and the contextual transformations of the idioms, the research aims to uncover deeper linguistic trends. The survey conducted among Flagman students provides insights into their preferences for traditional versus transformed idioms. The findings from this research could contribute to enhancing the teaching of idiomatic expressions within cross-cultural contexts. The research will also utilize statistical analysis to interpret the survey results effectively. As a tool for survey Google form was used among participants. Responses were collected three-day period, ensuring a diverse range of opinions and experiences related to the use of idiomatic expressions in various contexts. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research, including gaining informed agreement from all participants and ensuring the confidentiality of their answers. The goal of this research is to close the gap between linguistic theory and real-world language teaching practice.

RESULTS

Initially, the study focused on identifying the concordances of the three different idioms, as shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

	Details	Left context	KWIC	Right context
1	obj.ca	April 13th on Food Network Canada.	She can't spill the beans	on how far she made it in the show, or whether she won
2	hnn.us	ss threatened to investigate.	The whistleblower spilled the beans	to Congress on September 25 and to the public the next
3	hnn.us	olunteered to raise \$1 million to keep the burglars from	spilling the beans (March 21, 1973).	But it wasn't until 1996, after a
4	hnn.us	m and the Iraqi leadership were to be captured they will	spill the beans	and expose the involvement of many supposedly friendl
5	hnn.us	n removed before the war.	Someone must have spilled the beans	before those items could be looted again.
6	hnn.us	ng tone, especially about Butler, who was the man who	spilled the beans	at hearings held by the U.S. House of Representatives i
7	w3.org	l or language-dependent) meaning.	In English, " spilling the beans "	means "revealing a secret."
8	rt.com	ler shows us that the Establishment's support of those	spilling the beans	' is highly selective.
9	rt.com	ng the crew to police lines.	Chester wasn't done spilling the beans	He admitted that the media in general focuses i
10	ew.com	ior's body.	Before the newly freed O'Connor can	spill the beans on who hired her, she's murdered by a fast-moving bla
11	rt.com	den family members in order to get one of the others to	spill the beans ?	Apparently not.
12	rt.com	s of undercover interviews with network employees who	spilled the beans	on bias in the newsroom has Trump's attorneys threater
13	ew.com	atch up.	And by catch up, I mean that Veronica	spills the beans that Gladys is looking to revive the Fizzle Rocks trade, ε
14	imt.lie	iting here about it.	The arrangement is simple; I	spill the beans , the Editor pays me and I send on his cheque to the Go
15	rt.com	ier subjects a false enough sense of security that they'll	spill the beans	, and thus deliver two or three headline-grabbing zinger
16	rt.com	as Hamlet, knifed by someone he knows, as Cummings	spills the beans	on Downing Street's Covid strategy on Wednesday.
17	rt.com	, who was fired by Trump in May 2017, tried hard not to	spill the beans	, he let out one startling confession – the FBI did not ver
18	ew.com	s."So, it's official (and thank you, Josh, for accidentally	spilling the beans !): Ron Moore (creator of Outlander and one of my creat	

Figure 1. Concordances of the idiom “Spill the beans”

Figure 1 reveals that the idiom “spill the beans” can be found in informal conversations. It frequently appears in contexts such as gossip, politics, and storytelling, highlighting the intrigue

around confidential matters. Its connotation can vary; it may be playful in casual discussions but imply betrayal or lack of discretion in more serious situations. Culturally, its significance can differ, with some regions treating it as light - hearted while others see it as a breach of trust.

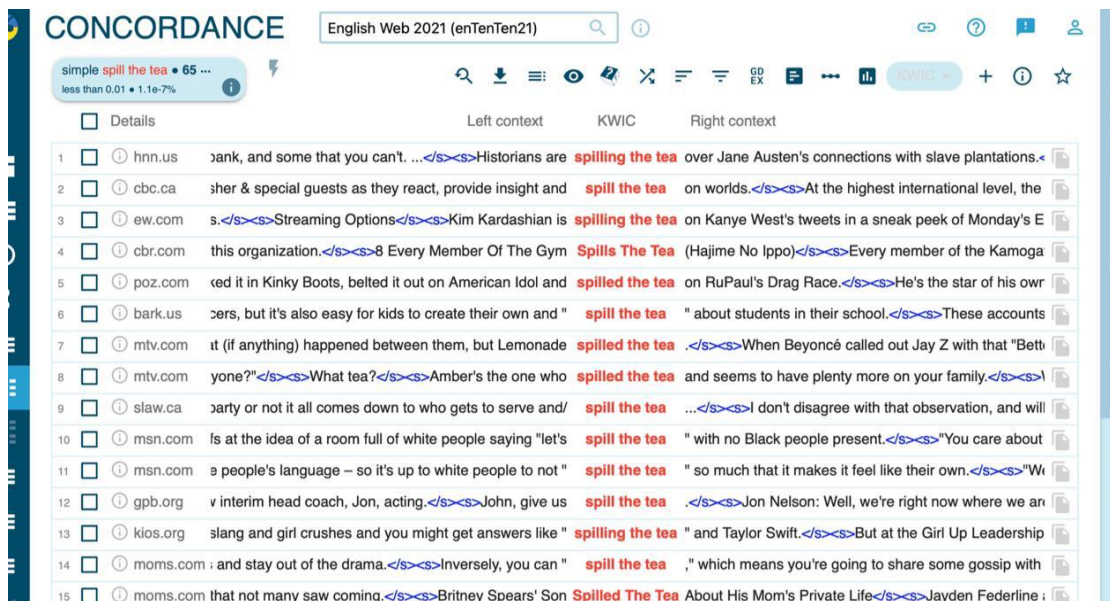


Figure 2. Concordances of the idiom “Spill the tea”

Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the concordance analyses of the idioms “spill the tea” and “spill your guts”, respectively. This type of linguistic examination helps illustrate how these phrases are used in various contexts across different media. The data reveals not just the popularity of these idioms, but also their adaptability in contemporary conversations.

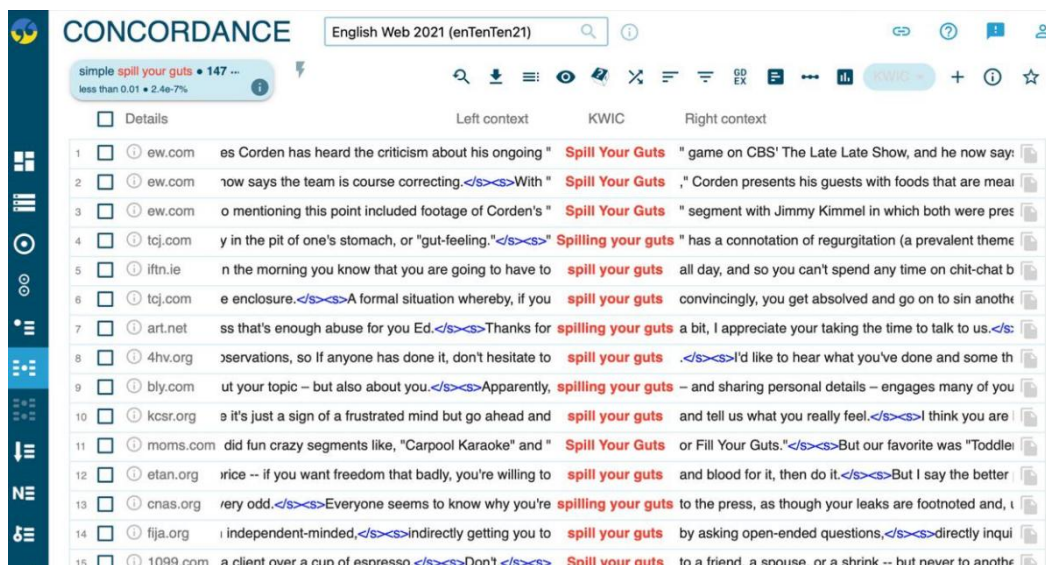


Figure 3. Concordances of the idiom “Spill your guts”

As [7,] claims, both idioms illustrate the dynamic nature of language and how cultural practices influence linguistic expressions. “Spill the beans” reflects historical practices, while “spill the tea” highlights modern social interactions and cultural exchanges. Therefore, we decided to deeper analyze this topic via several tools as : Sketch Engine, Survey and Discourse analysis.

RQ1: What is the frequency of usage of idioms “spill the beans”, “spill the tea” and “spill your guts”?

According to Oxford dictionary “spill the beans” or “spill the tea” means to tell somebody something that should be kept secret or private, whereas “spill your guts” means to tell somebody everything you know or feel about something, because you are upset [10]. It is clearly seen in the examples provided by the Oxford dictionary below that three different idioms mean the same meaning which is related to gossiping.

Examples:

1. We don't want to spill the beans yet.
2. She made the mistake of spilling the tea on her sister's love life.
3. He has spilled his guts in his new autobiography.



The screenshot shows a 'RESULT DETAILS' table for the idiom 'spill the beans'. The table has four rows of data:

RESULT DETAILS	
simple spill the beans	
Number of hits	18,366
Number of hits per million tokens	0.3
Percent of whole corpus	0.00002982%
Corpus size (tokens)	61,585,997,113

Figure 4. Result details and number of hits of idiom “spill the beans” (source: Sketch Engine)

We decided to analyze three idioms in Sketch Engine corpus and give detailed concordances. The phrase “spill the beans” has been found 18,366 times in the corpus. The total size of the corpus is 61,585,997 tokens, which is a substantial amount of text, indicating a comprehensive dataset or collection from which these statistics are derived. Traditional version of the idiom is used more frequently compared to modified ones.

After traditional idioms have been commonly used, modified version also occurs in Sketch Engine. While the total size of the corpus is over 61,5 billion tokens, the phrase “spill the tea” appeared 1215 times within this large dataset. Additionally, it may be favored by the older generation, which is why the traditional versions tend to be more widely embraced than their modern versions.



The screenshot shows a 'RESULT DETAILS' table for the idiom 'spill the tea'. The table has four rows of data:

RESULT DETAILS	
simple spill the tea	
Number of hits	1,215
Number of hits per million tokens	0.02
Percent of whole corpus	0.000001973%
Corpus size (tokens)	61,585,997,113

Figure 5. Result details and number of hits of idiom “spill the tea” (source: Sketch Engine)

“Spill your guts” is an idiomatic expression typically meaning to divulge secrets or personal feelings, often in a cathartic manner. Understanding its usage can provide insights into social norms, the context of confession, and the linguistic trends in conversational English. The idiom appears 751 times in the analyzed corpus. While the absolute frequency seems moderate, it prompts further investigation into what contexts or texts feature this expression.

The figure suggests that for every million words in the corpus, “spill the guts” is used only 0.01 times. This might indicate that while the idiom has cultural recognition, it is not frequently used in academic discussions, implying it is more of a characteristic of casual speech or writing. The index

of frequency of idiom can show us that people can use this primarily in discussions related to personal matters and communication.



The image shows a screenshot of the Sketch Engine search results for the idiom "spill your guts". The title is "RESULT DETAILS" in blue. Below it, the search term "simple spill your guts" is displayed in red. A table with a light blue border contains the following data:

Number of hits	751
Number of hits per million tokens	0.01
Percent of whole corpus	0.000001219%
Corpus size (tokens)	61,585,997,113

Figure 6. Result details and number of hits of idiom “spill your guts” (source: Sketch Engine)

Overall, it can be seen that the evolution of idiomatic language, such as the transition from "spill the beans" to “spill the tea” and “spill your guts” reflects broader linguistic and cultural shifts. Idioms, as fixed expressions with meanings not deducible from their individual words, are subject to changes in usage and interpretation over time. This evolution is influenced by factors such as cultural context, syntactic flexibility, and the cognitive processes underlying language comprehension.

RQ2: What factors contribute to the transformation of the idiom “spill the beans” into “spill the tea”?

The Notion of “Spill the Beans”:

The idiom “spill the beans” reflects the act of revealing secrets and serves as a fascinating lens through which to examine the cultural significance of secrecy and disclosure in communication. This expression, believed to have originated in ancient Greece where beans were used for voting, highlights how language evolves alongside societal norms of privacy and honesty [11].

In modern contexts, such idioms can shape perceptions around trustworthiness and transparency, making it essential to consider their implications in various settings, including political discourse and personal relationships. By studying phrases like this, we gain insight into how language influences our understanding of complex social dynamics, much like historical films that affect students' perceptions of the past [4].

The idiom “spill the beans” involves both literal and idiomatic meanings. Traditional models suggest that the literal meaning is rejected in favor of the idiomatic one, but alternative approaches propose that literal meanings help constrain and generate novel idiom variants [17]. In conversational contexts, idioms are typically understood more quickly in their conventional forms. However, when context supports a literal interpretation, people can accurately comprehend the literal meaning as well.

As Michael Rurup Andersen indicates that the idiom “spill the beans” first emerged in the United States in the early 20th century, with its earliest known usage dating back to 1908. The phrase gained literary recognition in Thomas K. Holmes' 1919 novel, “The Man From Tall Timber,” marking its first recorded use in literature [5]. A popular folk etymology suggests that the expression may have roots in ancient Greek voting practices, where beans were used to cast votes. Accidentally spilling these beans would prematurely reveal the results, thus connecting the phrase to the idea of disclosing secrets [7]. This notion of revealing hidden information aligns with the negative connotations associated with the word “spill” which has Old English origins meaning “to kill” and evolved to signify causing something to fall or pour out. Overall, the idiom encapsulates a blend of historical usage, literary documentation, and cultural practices, illustrating how language evolves through various societal influences.

The Notions of “Spill the Tea”

The expression “spill the tea” constitutes an intriguing phrase with a profound history that has transformed over time to become an essential component of contemporary vernacular, particularly

among users of social media. The phrase’s evolution from its inception to its present-day prominence is captivating and underscores the dynamic nature of language and culture. In the realm of historical gossip, think about Marie Antoinette. People loved to spill the tea about her in 18th century France. From her extravagant lifestyle to the infamous (and probably misattributed) “Let them eat cake” quote, she was the subject of endless rumor. This demonstrates that, even centuries ago, people were keen on spreading rumors.

In the early 200s, a book named “Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil” by John Berendt played a crucial role in bringing the idiom “spill the tea” to a wider audience. The book, set in Savannah, Georgia, delves into the quirky and mysterious lives of its residents. One of the characters frequently uses “the tea” to refer to juicy bits of information, bringing the phrase into the literary spotlight. This exposure helped it seep mainstream culture, where it continued to evolve and gain popularity. In the 18th century, for example, social classes, such as intellectuals, artists, and politicians gathered in salons in France where they exchanged ideas. Madame de Pompadour was often a part of those gatherings, also being well-known for her salons, which were often the center of gossip and political discussions. These gatherings were an early form of “spilling the tea,” where secrets and stories were shared in an exclusive, informal setting [12].

Moreover, there is a notion that the expression “spill the tea” finds its origins within drag culture, where the letter “T” signified truth. It was employed to signify that an individual was poised to disclose some tantalizing details or gossip. Gradually, “T” transitioned into “tea”, rendering the phrase even more whimsical and broadly acceptable [12, 5].

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phrase’s historical context, the following table outlines milestones in the its journey, encompassing its cultural importance and influence. In addition, On TikTok, hashtags as #SpillTheTea have gained millions of views, with creators often using the phrase in humorous or confessional videos. Similarly, Twitter users employ the phrase in trending threads to react to celebrity gossip or controversies.

Table 1. Timeline of how the idiom “spill the tea” evolved over the years and social media influence

Year	Event	Cultural Reference	Social Media Influence	Impact
1990s	Emergence in drag culture	Drag shows and ball culture	Not applicable	Initially used to signify sharing truths, particularly gossip
2001	“Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil”	Book by John Berendt	Limited online discussions	Popularized the phrase outside of drag culture
2008	The Urban Dictionary entry	Social media and online forums	Urban Dictionary as a digital archive	Further cemented in internet slang
2010s	RuPaul’s Drag Race	Reality TV show	Clips shared widely on YouTube and Twitter	Mainstream adoption, especially among LGBTQ communities
2017	Twitter and TikTok trend	Social media platforms	Viral hashtags like #SpillTheTea	Wide usage among younger demographics
2019	Pop culture references	Memes, TV shows, music lyrics	Trending memes and viral tweets	Became a part of everyday language among teens and young adults
2020s	Standard slang in social media language	Various online communities	Frequently seen in Instagram captions, TikTok videos	Regularly used in everyday conversations

The table provides a clear and accessible timeline of how the idiom “spill the tea” evolved over the years. By examining these milestones, we observe how the phrase transitioned from niche subculture to mainstream usage.

Examples from Television, Popular Culture, and Mass Media

The phrase “spill the tea” gained widespread popularity, in large part, due to its frequent use on the reality TV show RuPaul’s Drag Race. Within the context of the show, contestants – referred to as “Queens” – commonly use the phrase during their confessionals to reveal truths about themselves or to criticize their fellow contestants. This consistent usage helped propel the phrase beyond niche circles into mainstream consciousness.

Another major boost to the phrase’s mainstream usage came from celebrity social media battles, particularly on Twitter. High-profile public disputes, such as those involving Taylor Swift and other celebrities, garnered immense public attention, with fans and onlookers encouraging one another to “spill the tea” on unfolding events. These celebrity feuds, amplified through mass media coverage, created a social environment where gossip became a hared spectacle, further embedding the phrase into contemporary digital discourse.

In addition to its presence on reality TV and social media, “spill the tea” has found its way into other forms of entertainment, such as stand-up comedy. Comedians on Netflix specials and other platforms often use the phrase as a trendy way to signal that they are about to share humorous or revealing information. Its use within stand-up routines shows how the phrase has transcended its origins, becoming a versatile tool for building rapport with audiences and eliciting laughter through its association with gossip and humorous revelations.

The phrase has also been absorbed into modern literature, particularly in the young adult genre. Characters in contemporary novels often use “spill the tea” in their dialogues, reflecting the phrase’s integration into everyday language among younger generations. This literary inclusion underscores the widespread acceptance and usage of the expression in informal settings, where it conveys a sense of authenticity and reliability.

Finally, viral internet memes have played a critical role in promoting the phrase. The well-known meme of Kermit the Frog sipping the tea has become a symbol of “spilling the tea.” The image, which features Kermit drinking his tea while observing something contentious or gossipy, encapsulates the spirit of gossip without overtly participating in it. The meme’s popularity underscores the role of social media in the dissemination and normalization of contemporary idiomatic expressions like “spill the tea.”

Table 2. Examples of the idioms “spill the tea” and “spill the beans” from social media.

1. “In RuPaul’s Drag Race, queens often use the phrase “Let me <i>spill the tea</i> ” during confessionals to share shocking truths about other contestants.”	Reference: Popular usage on RuPaul’s Drag Race (Season 6, Episode 1). (TikTok, Reels).
2. During the infamous Taylor Swift-Kim Kardashian feud, fans on Twitter posted, “Who’s <i>spilling the tea</i> on what really happened between them?”	Reference: Twitter discourse around celebrity feuds (The Guardian, 2016).
3. In her Netflix comedy special, Ali Wong joked, “Let me <i>spill the tea</i> – I thought maternity leave would be relaxing!”	Reference: Ali Wong’s Baby Cobra (Netflix, 2016).
4. In Angie Thomas’s The Hate U Give, a character says, “ <i>Spill the tea</i> already – what did he say about you at school?”	Reference: The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas (Instagram).
5. “On the reality TV show Big Brother, contestants are constantly pressured to <i>spill the beans</i> about their alliances and strategies.”	Reference: Common phrase used in competitive reality TV (Big Brother, CBS, multiple seasons).
6. “When Tom Holland accidentally <i>spilled the beans</i> about the Avengers: Endgame plot in an interview, fans were both shocked and amused.”	Reference: Tom Holland’s reputation for revealing spoilers (Entertainment Weekly, 2019).
7. “During a classroom discussion in the novel To Kill a Mockingbird, Scout almost <i>spilled the beans</i> about Atticus’s plans to defend Tom Robinson.”	Reference: To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (1960)

RQ3: Which form of idioms (traditional or transformed) is preferred by American “Flagman” students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University?

The survey included five multiple-choice and open-ended questions designed to explore how familiar participants were with specific idioms and their preferences for using them. Questions as “Which idiom do you associate most with humor or gossip?” aimed to uncover not only usage patterns but also participants’ personal connections to these phrases. Over a three-day period, 14 participants shared their responses, providing a snapshot of idiom usage among a small, diverse group.

The participants were undergraduate and graduate students from universities across the United States, aged between 18 and 28. There was an even gender split (50% male and 50% female), and students represented a mix of regions, including California, Texas, New York, and Illinois. By capturing this socio-demographic range, the survey aimed to reflect the diversity of idiom use across different backgrounds. The survey was conducted online to make participation convenient, and all responses were collected anonymously.

The study used a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the data. The multiple-choice questions provided numerical insights into which idioms participants were most familiar with, while the open-ended questions added depth, offering a glimpse into their thought processes and personal associations with these idioms. Responses from the multiple-choice questions were used to calculate percentages, highlighting trends in idiom preferences. For example, 85.7% of participants chose “spill the tea” as the idiom they most associate with gossip, reflecting its popularity in contemporary culture. The data were visualized using a pie chart (Figure 7), making it easy to interpret the findings at a glance.

Open-ended questions allowed participants to share their thoughts on why they preferred certain idioms. Their answers were categorized into themes such as “humor,” “modern slang,” or “traditional language.” For instance, many participants linked “spill the tea” to social media culture, describing it as a phrase they frequently encounter in memes or online discussions. Meanwhile, “spill the beans” was often described as more traditional or formal, showing that it still holds a place in participants’ linguistic repertoire, albeit to a lesser extent.

By looking at responses across age and region, some interesting patterns emerged. Younger participants (18–22) overwhelmingly preferred “spill the tea,” while older students (23–28) were slightly more familiar with “spill the beans.” Regional differences were less pronounced, but it’s worth noting that participants from urban areas seemed more inclined to use modern slang as “spill the tea.”

While the survey provides a glimpse into idiom usage, the small sample size of 14 participants limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the regional representation, while diverse, is not exhaustive, and future studies could expand to include more states or even international participants. Open-ended responses were subjective, offering valuable personal insights but not necessarily a complete picture of idiom usage in broader context.

When it comes to gossiping or revealing secrets, which of the following idioms do you commonly use?
14 ответов

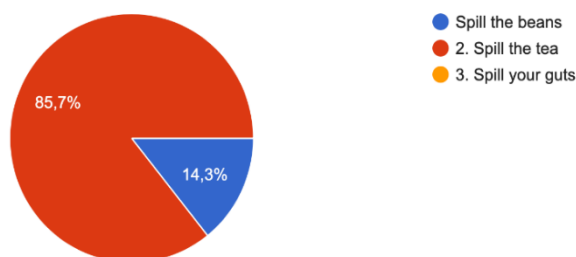


Figure 7. The result of responses of American students

The pie chart effectively summarizes the responses of 14 participants, clearly distinguishing between three idioms: “spill the beans”, “spill the tea” and “spill your guts”. The use of color coding enhances clarity, allowing viewers to quickly identify the proportions of each idiom. The largest segment, represented in red, indicates a significant preference for the idiom “spill the tea”, capturing 85,7 % of responses. This indicates that a majority of participants associate this idiom strongly with gossiping.

Conversely, the segment for “ spill the beans” indicated in blue, represents 14,3% responses. This suggests a minimal but notable interest in this traditional idiom. The idiom “spill your guts” which does not appear in the presented chart’s colour legend, indicates negligible usage, potentially suggesting a lack of resonance or familiarity among participants. As we think British people mostly use this idiom and next researchers will identify this question asking the British.

Overall, the visual data serves as an insightful representation of idiomatic preferences related to gossip among American students. It emphasizes a cultural affinity for traditional expressions while hinting at the evolving nature of language in contemporary discussions of gossip. Further investigation could explore the reasons behind these preferences, including generational shifts in language usage or cultural influences.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a detailed comparison of the idioms “spill the beans,” “spill the tea,” and “spill your guts.” The frequency and usage data, presented in Figures 4, 5, and 6, reveal clear differences in how these idioms are employed across contexts. “Spill the beans,” with 18,366 occurrences in the corpus, remains the most frequently used of the three. It is commonly associated with traditional communication, where it conveys the act of revealing secrets in both formal and informal settings. However, its usage is declining among younger generations, as shown in Figure 7, where only 14.3% of survey respondents preferred this idiom.

In contrast, “spill the tea” appears less frequently in the corpus, with only 1,215 occurrences (Figure 5). Despite this lower frequency, it has gained significant popularity among younger audiences, particularly in informal and digital contexts. (*See the given examples from social media, Table 2*). Figure 2 highlights its dominance in social media environments, where it is often used in conversations related to gossip and humor. This trend aligns with the observations of Džanić and Berberović (2020), who emphasize how idioms evolve to reflect contemporary cultural values [13]. The data underscores a generational shift in idiom preference, driven by the rise of digital platforms like TikTok and Twitter, which have amplified the appeal of “spill the tea”.

The evolution of “spill the tea” is further illustrated in Table 1, which outlines its development from niche drag culture in the 1990s to mainstream usage in the 2020s. This timeline demonstrates how cultural references and media exposure have shaped the idiom’s meaning and relevance. Initially associated with LGBTQ communities and shows as RuPaul’s Drag Race, the idiom has become a staple in everyday informal language. Its adaptability reflects broader linguistic trends, where idioms must remain relatable and engaging to survive.

The “spill the tea” demonstrates openness and humor, it can lead to consequences, such as the spread of misinformation. Figure 3 highlights this dual nature, where the idiom can either strengthen social bonds or create conflict depending on its context. This duality aligns with the findings of Nurbayani , who explore the risks of oversharing in digital communication [12]. Survey respondents echoed similar concerns, emphasizing the need for balance between openness and discretion when using idioms as “spill the tea.”

“Spill your guts,” the third idiom analyzed, appears only 751 times in the corpus (Figure 6). This limited frequency suggests it is less relevant in contemporary discourse. However, it retains cultural significance, particularly in contexts involving personal confessions or emotional sharing. Unlike the other two idioms, “spill your guts” is often associated with more serious or intimate

conversations, making it less versatile in casual or digital communication. Its minimal representation in the survey results (Figure 7) further confirms its reduced resonance with younger audiences.

The survey results in Figure 7 provide a clear visualization of idiom preference among the respondents. A substantial 85.7% selected “spill the tea” as their preferred idiom, reflecting its alignment with modern cultural norms. This strong preference for “spill the tea” over “spill the beans” and “spill your guts” underscores the linguistic and cultural shifts driving the evolution of idioms. These results are consistent with the observations of Yoon et al. (2021), who highlight the role of idioms in fostering community and informal communication [11].

In summary, the analysis reveals how idiomatic expressions evolve to meet the needs of their users. “Spill the tea” exemplifies this evolution, emerging as a dominant phrase in informal and digital contexts. Its widespread adoption reflects a cultural shift toward conversational openness and relatability, especially among younger generations. The findings highlight the dynamic nature of language and its ability to adapt to changing social and technological landscapes.

CONCLUSION

Language is always changing, and phrases as “spill the tea” illustrate how our culture and communication influence our self-expression. This research emphasizes the shift from classic idioms to contemporary ones, fueled by social media, shifts between generations, and evolving cultural trends. It’s captivating to see how expressions originally tied to specific historical moments, such as “spill the beans” have been transformed into terms as “spill the tea” that associated with the young, so called Generation Z audience of today.

Future studies might delve deeper into how idioms adapt within non-English-speaking cultures. Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have emerged as main source of linguistic evolution, and examining their impact could provide new and interesting ideas into how language changes through the ages.

Thus, examining idiom preferences across different cultural landscapes such as British English versus American English could reveal important subtleties. This exploration could enhance our understanding of how cultural principles shape the language we utilize to convey secrets, humor, or gossip. For educators and linguists, these findings could spark innovative and effective methods for teaching idiomatic expressions in a world that is always in change.

Ultimately, idioms represent more than mere words they symbolize our identities, our connections, and our ability to adapt to the surrounding world. Whether it involves spilling the beans, tea, or something entirely new in the future, one thing is clear: language will continue to evolve.

Nonetheless, this phenomenon transcends trends. It encapsulates cultural transformations and the ways in which we consume and disseminate information. Generation Z is unlikely to share the same perspectives as Baby Boomers; in fact, they may not even make references to tea at all. It is conceivable that by the year 2030, we may find ourselves “spilling the bubble tea.”

Furthermore, this research delves into the usage and preferences of the idioms “spill the beans”, “spill the tea” and “spill your guts” among American “Flagman” students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The findings reveal a dominant preference for the transformed idiom “spill the tea” which resonates with 85.7% of participants, highlighting its strong association with gossiping within this demographic. In contrast, the traditional idiom “spill the beans” garnered a modest 14.3% of responses, indicating a growing but limited acceptance among students. The negligible usage of “spill your guts” suggests a lack of familiarity or relevance, particularly in American contexts, warranting further exploration into its cultural implications. We think that “spill your guts” is commonly might used by the British and further research can survey also the British. This study not only underscores the enduring appeal of traditional idioms but also signals the dynamic evolution of language in contemporary discourse. Future research could benefit from examining the factors influencing these preferences, including generational shifts and cultural influences, particularly in comparative studies with British speakers to understand the broader linguistic landscape.

REFERENCES

- 1 Goodwin, J. (1991), *A Time for Tea: Travels Through China and India in Search of Tea*, Knopf, First Edition, USA.
 - 2 Yang, H.-T. (2005), "Tea-making device with a time control", available at: <https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/f7/ff/eb/fff6d533ce2e84/US20060288873A1.pdf> (Accessed 28 December 2006).
 - 3 Saberi, H. (2010), *Tea: A Global History*, Reaktion Books, UK.
 - 4 Poulsen, J. A. (2018), "Kan spillefilm bruges som kilder i historie", *Radar – Historiedidaktisk Tidsskrift*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 120-126.
 - 5 Holmes, T. K. (1919), *The Man from Tall Timber*, Kessinger Publishing, USA.
 - 6 Watts, C. (1999), "Dendritic cells spill the beans. *Nature Cell Biology*", *Nature Cell Biology*, vol. 6, pp. E152-E154.
 - 7 Hayes, R. S., and Baker, C. R. (2004), "Using a folk story to generate discussion about substance over form", *Accounting Education*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 267-284.
 - 8 Keysar, B., and Bly, B. M. (1995), "Intuitions of the transparency of idioms: Can one keep a secret by spilling the beans?", *Journal of Memory and Language*, vol. 34, Issue 1, pp. 89-109.
 - 9 Hu, C., and Yang, B. (2015), "Using Sketch Engine to Investigate Synonymous Verbs", *International Journal of English Linguistics*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 29-41.
 - 10 Akyalçın, N., and Aydoğan, D. (2022), "Oxford Dictionary of Idioms adlı sözlükteki deyimler ve deyim olmayan söz öbekleriyle ilgili bir değerlendirme (VIII)", *Homeros*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 169-173. (In Turkish).
 - 11 Yoon, J., Gomez, L., Gonzales, J., Martinez, R., Torres, K., Williams, V., Davis, M., and Cammarota, J. (2021), "Spill the Tea", *Liberatory Practices for Learning: Dismantling Social Inequality and Individualism with Ancient Wisdom*, pp.47-68.
 - 12 Nurbayani, S., Sartika, R., Wahyuni, S., and Rahayu, T. Dualism of Digital Society's Acceptance of Spill the Tea Actions of Victims of Sexual Violence // Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Law, Social Sciences and Education, ICLSSE 2022, Singaraja, Bali, Indonesia.
 - 13 Džanić N. D., Berberović S. (2020), *Conceptual integration theory in idiom modifications*, Universitat de València, T. 17.
 - 14 Akhmetova G. S. Lexical semantic modeling as a means of effective vocabulary acquisition and expansion // Bulletin of the Karaganda university Pedagogy series. – 2023. – T. 112. – №. 4. – С. 123-132.
 - 15 Alipova A. T., Bekkozhanova G. H. Some peculiarities in the usage of Kazakh, English and Russian phraseological units: proverbs, sayings and idioms // The Buckingham Journal of Language and Linguistics. – 2012. – T. 5. – С. 9-18.
- Received: 03.03.2025

Шай уақыты: идиомалық тілдің эволюциясымен танысу

М.Т. Хасанова

Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Алматы, 050040, Қазақстан Республикасы

Идиомаларды әр түрлі тілдерде кеңінен қолдану олардың мәдени маңыздылығын және олардың эволюциясының негізінде жатқан жалпы когнитивті шеңберді көрсетеді. Бұл тілдерлік қатысу идиомалық тілді қалыптастырудағы мәдени ілгерілеудің рөлін көрсетеді. "айтып қою" сияқты идиомалар синтаксистік икемділікті көрсетеді, бұл оларға "өсек айту" немесе "шер тарқату" сияқты жаңа жағдайлар мен қолданыстарға бейімделуге мүмкіндік береді. TikTok немесе Twitter-ді қарап отырып, біз соңғы өсектерден хабардар болуға тырысамыз. "Өсек айту" тіркесі осы өзекті пікірталастардың негізінде жатыр. Бізді құпиялармен бөлісуге және соңғы жаңалықтарды білуге шақырады. Бұл мақалада біз "өсек айту" туралы білуге болатын барлық нәрсені қарастырамыз – оның тарихи алғышарттары мен өзектілігінен бастап этикалық ойлар мен болашақ тенденцияларға дейін. Бұл мақалада

біз миллиондаған токендер(сөздер және тыныс белгілер) үшін танымалдылық пен сәйкестікті көрсететін дәстүрлі және өзгертілген пішіндерді пайдалану жиілігін көрсетуге тырыстық. Сонымен қатар, идиомаларды қолданудың тарихи алғышарттары және шетелдік студенттердің сауалнамаға жауаптары көмекші фактор ретінде көрсетілді. Жұмыс барысына Қазақ ұлттық университетінде Америкадан келген шетелдік студенттері тартылды. Идиомалар көбінесе тұрақты тіркестер ретінде қарастырылады, олардың эволюциясы тілдің динамикалық табиғатын көрсетеді. Мәдени ілгерілеу, әлеуметтік желілер және жастар тілі – бұл қоғам мен коммуникациядағы кеңірек өзгерістерді көрсете отырып, идиомалық тілдің үнемі өзгеруіне ықпал етеді.

Кілт сөздер: айтып қою, өсек айту, идиомалар, сауалнама, мәдени ілгерілеу, Sketch Engine.

ӘДЕБИЕТТЕР ТІЗІМІ

- 1 Goodwin, J. (1991), *A Time for Tea: Travels Through China and India in Search of Tea*, Knopf, First Edition, USA.
- 2 Yang, H.-T. (2005), “Tea-making device with a time control”, available at: <https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/f7/ff/eb/fff6d533ce2e84/US20060288873A1.pdf> (Accessed 28 December 2006).
- 3 Saberi, H. (2010), *Tea: A Global History*, Reaktion Books, UK.
- 4 Poulsen, J. A. (2018), “Kan spillefilm bruges som kilder i historie”, *Radar – Historiedidaktisk Tidsskrift*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 120-126.
- 5 Holmes, T. K. (1919), *The Man from Tall Timber*, Kessinger Publishing, USA.
- 6 Watts, C. (1999), “Dendritic cells spill the beans. *Nature Cell Biology*”, *Nature Cell Biology*, vol. 6, pp. E152-E154.
- 7 Hayes, R. S., and Baker, C. R. (2004), “Using a folk story to generate discussion about substance over form”, *Accounting Education*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 267-284.
- 8 Keysar, B., and Bly, B. M. (1995), “Intuitions of the transparency of idioms: Can one keep a secret by spilling the beans?”, *Journal of Memory and Language*, vol. 34, Issue 1, pp. 89-109.
- 9 Hu, C., and Yang, B. (2015), “Using Sketch Engine to Investigate Synonymous Verbs”, *International Journal of English Linguistics*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 29-41.
- 10 Akyalçın, N., and Aydoğan, D. (2022), “Oxford Dictionary of Idioms adlı sözlükteki deyimler ve deyim olmayan söz öbekleriyle ilgili bir değerlendirme (VIII)”, *Homeros*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 169-173. (In Turkish).
- 11 Yoon, J., Gomez, L., Gonzales, J., Martinez, R., Torres, K., Williams, V., Davis, M., and Cammarota, J. (2021), “Spill the Tea”, *Liberatory Practices for Learning: Dismantling Social Inequality and Individualism with Ancient Wisdom*, pp.47-68.
- 12 Nurbayani, S., Sartika, R., Wahyuni, S., and Rahayu, T. Dualism of Digital Society’s Acceptance of Spill the Tea Actions of Victims of Sexual Violence // Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Law, Social Sciences and Education, ICLSSE 2022, Singaraja, Bali, Indonesia.
- 13 Džanić N. D., Berberović S. (2020), *Conceptual integration theory in idiom modifications*, Universitat de València, T. 17.
- 14 Akhmetova G. S. Lexical semantic modeling as a means of effective vocabulary acquisition and expansion // Bulletin of the Karaganda university Pedagogy series. – 2023. – T. 112. – №. 4. – С. 123-132.
- 15 Alipova A. T., Bekkozhanova G. H. Some peculiarities in the usage of Kazakh, English and Russian phraseological units: proverbs, sayings and idioms // The Buckingham Journal of Language and Linguistics. – 2012. – T. 5. – С. 9-18.

Материал 03.03.2025 баспаға түсті

Время чаепития: знакомство с эволюцией идиоматического языка

М.Т. Хасанова

Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, 050040, Республика
Казахстан

Широкое использование идиом в разных языках подчеркивает их культурную значимость и общие когнитивные рамки, лежащие в основе их эволюции. Это межъязыковое присутствие подчеркивает роль культурного обмена в формировании идиоматического языка. Такие идиомы, как “проболтаться”, демонстрируют синтаксическую гибкость, что позволяет им адаптироваться к новым условиям и употреблением, таким как “сплетничать” или “излить душу”. Просматривая TikTok или Twitter, мы стараемся быть в курсе последних сплетен. Выражение “сплетничать” лежит в основе этих актуальных дискуссий, побуждает нас делиться секретами и узнавать самые свежие новости. В этой статье мы расскажем обо всем, что следует знать о “сплетничать” — от его исторических предпосылок и актуальности до этических соображений и будущих тенденций. В этой статье мы попытались продемонстрировать частоту использования как традиционных, так и модифицированных форм, что указывает на популярность и соответствие для миллионов токенов (слов и знаков препинания). Кроме того, были продемонстрированы исторические предпосылки использования идиом и ответы иностранных студентов на опрос в качестве вспомогательного фактора. В ходе работы были привлечены иностранные студенты из Америки в Казахском национальном университете. Идиомы часто рассматриваются как устойчивые выражения, их эволюция демонстрирует динамичную природу языка. Культурные сдвиги, социальные сети и молодежный язык — все это способствует постоянной трансформации идиоматического языка, отражая более широкие изменения в обществе и коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: проболтаться, сплетничать, идиомы, опрос, культурный сдвиг, Sketch Engine.

СПИСОК ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ

- 1 Goodwin, J. (1991), *A Time for Tea: Travels Through China and India in Search of Tea*, Knopf, First Edition, USA.
- 2 Yang, H.-T. (2005), “Tea-making device with a time control”, available at: <https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/f7/ff/eb/fff6d533ce2e84/US20060288873A1.pdf> (Accessed 28 December 2006).
- 3 Saberi, H. (2010), *Tea: A Global History*, Reaktion Books, UK.
- 4 Poulsen, J. A. (2018), “Kan spillefilm bruges som kilder i historie”, *Radar – Historiedidaktisk Tidsskrift*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 120-126.
- 5 Holmes, T. K. (1919), *The Man from Tall Timber*, Kessinger Publishing, USA.
- 6 Watts, C. (1999), “Dendritic cells spill the beans. *Nature Cell Biology*”, *Nature Cell Biology*, vol. 6, pp. E152-E154.
- 7 Hayes, R. S., and Baker, C. R. (2004), “Using a folk story to generate discussion about substance over form”, *Accounting Education*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 267-284.
- 8 Keysar, B., and Bly, B. M. (1995), “Intuitions of the transparency of idioms: Can one keep a secret by spilling the beans?”, *Journal of Memory and Language*, vol. 34, Issue 1, pp. 89-109.
- 9 Hu, C., and Yang, B. (2015), “Using Sketch Engine to Investigate Synonymous Verbs”, *International Journal of English Linguistics*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 29-41.
- 10 Akyalçın, N., and Aydoğan, D. (2022), “Oxford Dictionary of Idioms adlı sözlükteki deyimler ve deyim olmayan söz öbekleriyle ilgili bir değerlendirme (VIII)”, *Homeros*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 169-173. (In Turkish).

11 Yoon, J., Gomez, L., Gonzales, J., Martinez, R., Torres, K., Williams, V., Davis, M., and Cammarota, J. (2021), “Spill the Tea”, *Liberatory Practices for Learning: Dismantling Social Inequality and Individualism with Ancient Wisdom*, pp.47-68.

12 Nurbayani, S., Sartika, R., Wahyuni, S., and Rahayu, T. Dualism of Digital Society’s Acceptance of Spill the Tea Actions of Victims of Sexual Violence // Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Law, Social Sciences and Education, ICLSSE 2022, Singaraja, Bali, Indonesia.

13 Džanić N. D., Berberović S. (2020), *Conceptual integration theory in idiom modifications*, Universitat de València, T. 17.

14 Akhmetova G. S. Lexical semantic modeling as a means of effective vocabulary acquisition and expansion // Bulletin of the Karaganda university Pedagogy series. – 2023. – T. 112. – №. 4. – С. 123-132.

15 Alipova A. T., Bekkozhanova G. H. Some peculiarities in the usage of Kazakh, English and Russian phraseological units: proverbs, sayings and idioms // The Buckingham Journal of Language and Linguistics. – 2012. – T. 5. – С. 9-18.

Материал поступил в редакцию журнала 03.03.2025