

# The Big Picture

*Idioms as Metaphors*

把握英语脉搏

## 习语中的 隐喻

Kevin King / 著

为什么习语的字面意思往往不是其实际意思？  
在字面意思和实际意思之间我们丢失了什么？  
读了本书，您就会明白我们丢失的是一种思维：隐喻思维。

# 把握英语脉搏

——习语中的隐喻

Kevin King 著

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[The Big Picture: Idioms as Metaphors]

[Kevin King]

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## 前 言

本书是从隐喻的角度讲解习语，也就是把习语看作隐喻。为此，我们先要了解什么是习语，什么是隐喻。

### 什么是习语？

习语是字面意思非实际意思的一个单词或者一组单词。这就是说，即使你知道习语中每个单词的意思，你也有可能错误地理解该习语。习语通常用于非正式语境中。习语的使用受一定的规则限定。本书有大量的例句能帮助我们明晰习语使用的语境。

### 什么是隐喻？什么是基础隐喻？

隐喻是一种理解事物的方法，即用一种事物去理解另一种事物。比如，你可以用战斗来理解争辩、辩论，借助旅行来理解人生。请比较：

a. The earthquake destroyed her house.

b. They destroyed her argument.

例句(a)中的 *destroy* 是字面意思，即“毁坏”。但是例句(b)中的 *argument* (论据) 怎么可能被“毁坏”呢？所以，例句(b)中的 *destroy* 就是一种比喻用法。在这里，*argument* 就被理解成一场战斗。

请再比较：

c. I walked into the house.

d. I walked into a new job.

例句(c)中的 *walked* 的意思是其字面意思，表达的是跟身体相关的、空间的和非抽象的概念。例句(c)中的 *walked* 就不是跟身体相关的，也不是跟空间相关的。我们要想理解例句(c)就要知道一个基础隐喻，那就是人生是场旅行 (*Life is a journey.*)。既然人生是场旅行，那么人生中的任何事件，例如工作都可以看成是旅行。我们之所以把人生是场旅行 (*Life is a journey.*) 和辩论是场战斗 (*Argument is a battle.*) 称为基础隐喻，是因为通过它们你可以学到更多的习语。而且，你会发现基础隐喻不只是适用于英语，也适用于其他多种语言。

要注意不是所有的习语都是隐喻。只是许多难以理解的习语往往可以通过隐喻来解释。本书中的习语都能从隐喻的角度进行解释。本书还配有插图，这能帮助你更好地领悟习语和隐喻的联系。如果你明白了某个表达(习语就是一种表达)是如何达意的(此意非其字面意思)，那么记住这个表达就非常容易。这样，即使习语有了变化，你也能够明白它们的意思，因为你知道这些习语的起源。

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----------------------	-----------
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-

## chapter 1

## BASIC METAPHORS

- Ideas Are Balls
- Ideas Are Food

## Introduction

英语中, 思想观点往往被看作球或者食物。思想从一个人那里交流到另一个人那里。在很多游戏中, 我们也是把球从一个人那里传递到另一个人那里。于是, 球在人之间的传递就被应用于思想在人之间的传递。

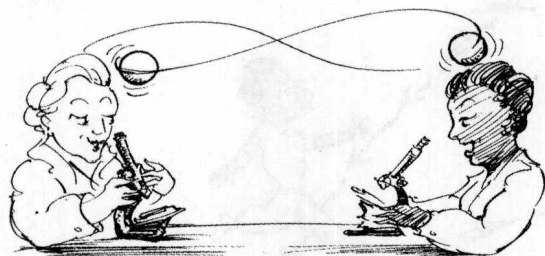
思想更被人熟知的表现形式是食物。正如食物于人类不可或缺, 思想于人类也是大脑的必需品。

本章节中的习语有的是关于一般意义上的思想, 有的是关于某种特别的思想(例如, 建议), 有的甚至关于思想的某种衍生品(例如, 故事)。将习语看作隐喻(或者说, 用一种事物理解另一种事物)能够使我们更容易地理解并记住习语。

## Warm-up

食物有什么比喻意义吗? 我们可以列个食物表格, 想想它们分别代表什么。例如, 在某些国家, cabbage 代表金钱。

## IDEAS ARE BALLS



**1** bounce an idea off you  
Get your opinion

## Picture it!

Bounce is what a ball does when you throw it against a wall and it comes back. The *idea* is a ball that I throw against your head and it comes back to me with your impression. In other words, I tell you an idea, and you tell me your impression of it.

## Example:

Dr. Chomsky, I have an **idea** I'd like to **bounce off you**: What do you think about the idea that idioms are metaphors?



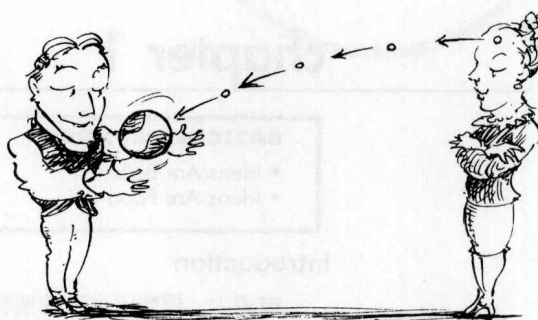
**2** **toss out a suggestion**  
Make a suggestion

Picture it!

The suggestion is an idea. *Toss* means "throw," and the suggestion is being compared to a ball being tossed.

Example:

I'd like to **toss out a suggestion**: Coffee should be free for students.



**3** **catch**  
Understand, hear

Picture it!

The idea is a ball. If you *catch* it, you understand it or you have heard it.

Example:

Did you **catch** what he said? I couldn't hear because the music was too loud.

(Note: You will also hear **catch on**, meaning "understand." And you will hear **catch my drift**, which means "understand the general direction of my thought.")



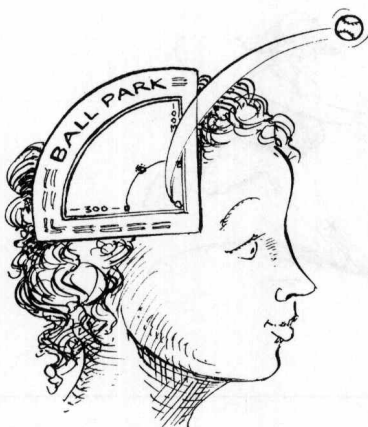
**4** **kick around**  
Discuss, think about

Picture it!

When a group of people give their opinions about an idea, they are kicking that idea (ball) around.

Example:

Bart, I think you should go to Brandeis University, but New York University is also a possibility. Why don't you **kick it around** with your parents and let me know what you think?



**5 a ballpark figure**  
A reasonable estimate

**Picture it!**

The ballpark is a stadium in which baseball is played. An estimate (idea) is a ball that can be hit inside the ballpark or out. The ballpark has definite measurements, so you know approximately how far the ball must go to go out. *Outside* the ballpark is an unreasonable figure; *inside* is reasonable, that is, a **ballpark figure**.

**Example:**

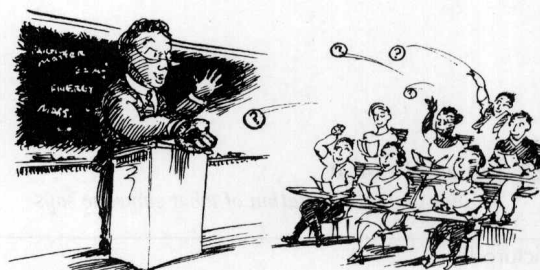
I asked the mechanic to give me a **ballpark figure** for fixing the radiator in my car, and she said it would be somewhere around \$200.



**7 be on the ball**  
Be smart, capable

**Picture it!**

If you are on the ball, you are in close contact with ideas. Therefore, you are smart. Imagine a soccer player who is always close to the ball, or a hitter in baseball who swings his bat and is on the ball.



**6 field questions**  
Answer questions

**Picture it!**

To *field* means to catch bouncing balls on a baseball field.

**Example:**

Professor Wise is very good at **fielding** tough questions.



**Example:**

If Ralph **were on the ball**, he wouldn't keep missing the bus.

(Note: You will also hear *have a lot on the ball*, which means the same as *be on the ball*.)



**8 put a spin on it**

*Provide one interpretation of what someone says*

**Picture it!**

When you throw a ball, you can put a spin on it to make it go right, left, up, or down. What someone says is an idea that can be interpreted in many different ways. Putting a spin on what someone says causes the interpretation to go in the direction you want, just like a ball. You can therefore interpret information the way you want.

**Example:**

Arnold said that his new movie would be a love story. But when journalists asked him about it later, he **put a different spin on it**. He said that people would love the story of the action hero.

**IDEAS ARE FOOD**



**9 spill the beans**

*Reveal a secret*

**Picture it!**

To *spill* is to let something fall out of a container. Of course, you are not supposed to spill beans, and you are not supposed to tell secrets.

**Example:**

Come on, Sandra, **spill the beans**. Who are you going to the dance with?



**10 leave a bad taste in my mouth**

*Leave an unpleasant feeling or impression*

**Picture it!**

The idea of an event or a person is experienced as a food that leaves a bad or disgusting taste.

**Example:**

I had an uncomfortable conversation with my ex-girlfriend about marriage. It **left a bad taste in my mouth**.



### 11 be full of baloney

*Have nonsensical ideas (often used to signal disagreement)*

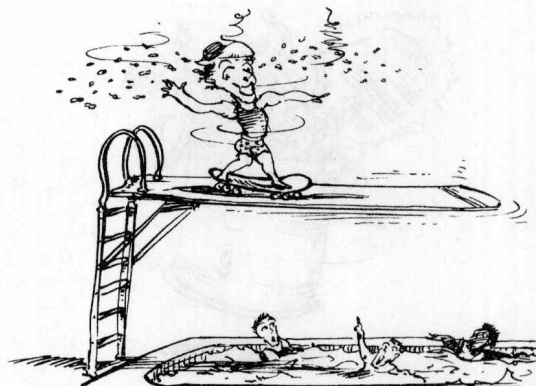
#### Picture it!

*Baloney* (or bologna) is a kind of sausage. It is widely regarded as bland, that is, having little taste. Thus, baloney represents ideas that are not very good.

#### Example:

Holden says he is going to get all A's this semester, but I think **that's a lot of baloney**. He never studies. Holden **is full of baloney**.

(Note: You will also hear **Baloney!** and **That's a lot of baloney.**)



### 12 go (be) nuts

*Become (be) crazy*

#### Picture it!

A person with nuts in his head instead of ideas will appear crazy.

#### Example:

Holden wants to ride his bicycle from New York to California! His mother thinks he's **nuts**.

### 13 be (sound) fishy

*Appear dubious or suspicious*

#### Picture it!

If fish has a strong, unpleasant odor, you will suspect that it is not good to eat. Bad ideas are like bad fish.

#### Example:

I heard that you could get a round-trip ticket from New York to Puerto Rico for just \$99, but that **sounds fishy** to me. You probably have to stop in ten cities along the way.





#### 14 open a can of worms

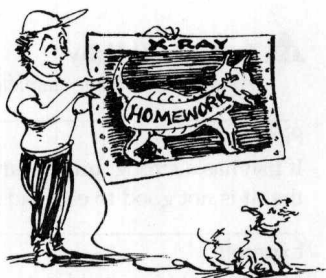
*Bring up an idea or subject that makes people uncomfortable; bring up a complex and unexpected problem*

##### Picture it!

Suppose you open a can of food for your guests and it has worms in it. This presents an unexpected problem. You and your guests will feel uncomfortable. Now imagine that this can of food (worms) is the ideas in someone's head.

##### Example:

When Willy was interviewing for a job as a salesperson, he asked what had happened to the previous salesperson. Willy unknowingly **opened a can of worms** because the interviewer did not want to reveal that the previous salesperson had a nervous breakdown from too much work.



#### 16 eat it up

*Believe without question and perhaps foolishly; love it*

##### Picture it!

Just as we can be very attracted to food, we can be very attracted to an idea.



#### 15 food for thought

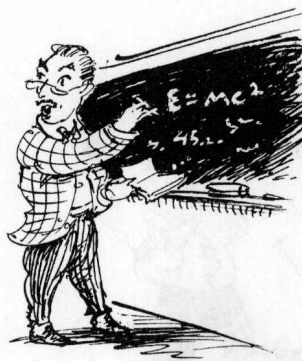
*Interesting idea(s) to think about*

##### Picture it!

Just as food is necessary for the body to develop, ideas are necessary for the mind to develop.

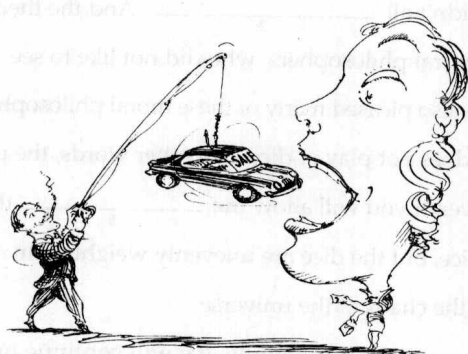
##### Example:

Ernesto says that large estates should be divided into many small farms and that the land should be redistributed to peasants. That's **food for thought**.



##### Example:

I didn't do my homework, and I told my teacher that my dog ate it. It wasn't a very good excuse, but the teacher **ate it up**!



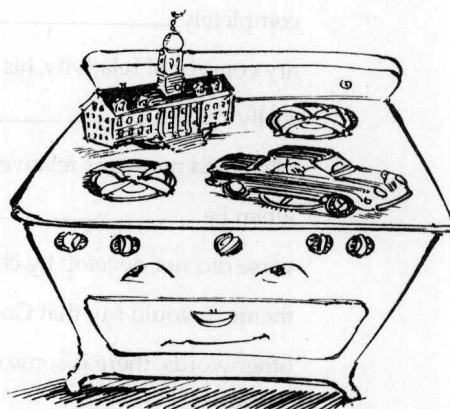
- 17 swallow it hook, line, and sinker**  
*Be completely and probably foolishly persuaded*

**Picture it!**

Fish are attracted to lures (artificial fish) with hooks and get caught. The line is the string attached to the fishing pole, and a sinker is a weight that keeps the lure underwater. The fish that swallows the hook, line, and sinker is a foolish fish, because it is going after a false promise of food.

**Example:**

The used car salesman told us that the two-year-old Mercedes was only \$10,000—an amazingly low price—just because the tires were bad, and we **swallowed it hook, line, and sinker**.



- 18 put it on a back burner**  
*Postpone thinking about an issue or working on a project*

**Picture it!**

A stove top usually has four burners, two in front and two in back. The food you are currently working on is usually on a front burner, so you can reach it easily. The food that does not demand immediate attention is put on a back burner.

**Example:**

Johnny is not going to college for three years, so let's **put that on a back burner** and think about how we're going to pay for this Mercedes today.



## Understanding and Using Idioms

Complete the sentences with idioms from the list.

tossed out the idea

food for thought

nuts

kick around

on a back burner

eat it up

baloney

to put my spin on

opened a can of worms

leaves a bad taste in  
our mouths

### **Food for Thought:** Professor Mandel Lectures on Chaos Theory

"You may have heard about chaos theory. Scientists are very excited about it. But what exactly is it? Imagine a butterfly in Beijing stirring its wings, and this results in a hurricane in Costa Rica. Why? Because small changes in initial conditions can have extraordinary effects. Now, before you go thinking that Professor Mandel is



completely \_\_\_\_\_<sup>1</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, recall that when Einstein introduced his revolutionary concept of relativity, his colleagues didn't all \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup>\_\_\_\_\_. And the theory really \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ for many moral philosophers, who did not like to see ethics and morals as relative. But Einstein also pleased many of these moral philosophers when he \_\_\_\_\_<sup>4</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ that 'God does not play at dice'.\* In other words, the universe did not develop by chance. However, if you will allow me \_\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ this theme, I would say that God *does* play dice, but the dice are unevenly weighted. In other words, there is some order within the chaos of the universe.

"Putting morality \_\_\_\_\_<sup>6</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ for a while, we will continue our look at chaos theory. It may seem a little complicated, but here is another idea for you to \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ together: why is it that we see trees against a stormy sky as beautiful, while the sight of a random group of apartment buildings against any sky \_\_\_\_\_<sup>8</sup>\_\_\_\_\_? The answer is that our feeling of beauty is inspired by the harmonious arrangement of order and chaos in natural objects. The trees represent order and the stormy sky represents chaos. Well, at least I know that you are listening, because some of you are making faces, as if I were full of \_\_\_\_\_<sup>9</sup>\_\_\_\_\_. Let me be the first to admit that not everyone agrees with me. In fact, art critics have always maintained that order is necessary for beauty, and what I am suggesting is just the opposite! Now there is some \_\_\_\_\_<sup>10</sup>\_\_\_\_\_."

Continue reading Professor Mandel's lecture, and complete the sentences with idioms from the list.

*spill the beans*

*field questions*

*ballpark figure*

*on the ball*

*fishy*

*catch*

*bounce another idea off you*

*swallow this hook, line,  
and sinker*

"Did you know that our lungs contain more surface area than a tennis court? I know that sounds completely \_\_\_\_\_<sup>11</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, but it is true. Strange? OK, then let me \_\_\_\_\_<sup>12</sup>\_\_\_\_\_: the length of the coastline of England is

\* dice =

