

Business

English

Folge 3:

Idiome – ein Stück Kuchen!

Mit »a piece of cake« meint Ihr englischer Gesprächspartner nicht unbedingt ein Stück Kuchen. Und wenn er zwei Vögel mit einem Stein tötet, ist er noch

lange kein Tierquäler. Im dritten Teil unserer Business-English-Serie zeigt Sprachtrainer Gary Castle, dass Redewendungen mit Vorsicht zu genießen sind.

Sie machen Schluss für heute? Then you are calling it a day!

“Well, I did have cold feet before the meeting and I was thinking about chickening out, but as usual I kept a stiff upper lip, and to my surprise I found out we got on like a house on fire – it really was a piece of cake.”

How much of this sentence did you understand? Here’s exactly how Google translates this: “Nun, ich habe kalte Füße vor der Sitzung, und ich war etwa kneifen denken, aber wie üblich hielt ich eine steife Oberlippe, und zu meiner Überraschung fand ich heraus, bekamen wir auf wie ein Haus in Brand – es war wirklich ein Stück Kuchen.”

I’m not sure this makes it any clearer! The problem with Google, Leo and co is that they function through science, not sense and therefore have problems in translating idioms. Although idioms are the salt in the language soup, they can be very con-

fusing. Sometimes they are the same as in German, for example, “to have cold feet”: “kalte Füße bekommen”. Often there are just small changes: “strong as an ox” is “bärenstark” (although “bärenstark” can also mean “super”). Sometimes the meaning is very clear: “I lost the game and was as sick as a parrot” we have the idea that I wasn’t happy. But, unfortunately we often have no idea what the idiom means. If you can imagine what a foreign visitor with good German knowledge would think when you talk about a colleague: “Ich warne Sie, er ist ein Schlitzohr, er hat es faustdick hinter den Ohren. Er scheint 08/15 zu sein, aber er ist mit allen Wassern gewaschen.” They may look at you and say they have understood every word but have no idea what you’re talking about! That’s why idioms should be generally avoided between non-native speakers.

For those of you who would like to know more, here's a short list with some examples. Please remember to use them only when you're sure that 1) the person you're speaking to has a very good level of English and 2) you know exactly how to use these phrases. If you're not sure, keep to the KISS principle – Keep it Short and Simple and choose phrases that are easier to understand.

Oh, and in case you're not too sure how to trans-

late the opening paragraph, here's the German version: "Vor der Besprechung hatte ich ziemlich viele Manschetten. Ich dachte, ich müsste den Schwanz einziehen, aber ich hielt die Ohren steif und zu meiner Überraschung entdeckte ich, dass wir wie dicke Freunde waren. Es war wirklich ein Kinderspiel."

So, when someone asks you next time what does "it's a piece of cake" mean, you can smile and say "Ach, das ist ein Kinderspiel!"

Da liegt der Hase im Pfeffer!	That's the snag!
Da platzt mir der Kragen.	That was the last straw.
Das ging beinahe ins Auge.	That was a close shave.
Das ist der wahre Jakob.	It's the real McCoy.
Das ist ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln.	It's a closed book.
Das ist Ihre Sache!	It's your funeral!
die Katze im Sack kaufen	to buy a pig in a poke
die Ruhe selbst sein	as cool as a cucumber
Du gehst mir auf die Nerven.	You're a pain in the neck.
ein Tropfen auf den heißen Stein	a drop in the ocean
für ein Butterbrot	for a song
Ich habe Wichtiges zu tun.	I've other fish to fry.
Ich mache Schluss für heute.	I'm calling it a day.
Ich verstehe nur Bahnhof.	It's all Greek to me.
in der Klemme	in deep water
In der Not frisst der Teufel Fliegen.	Beggars can't be choosers.
mit den Wölfen heulen	when in Rome (do as the Romans do)
Probieren geht über studieren.	The proof of the pudding is in the eating.
vom Regen in die Traufe	out from the frying pan into the fire
zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen	to kill two birds with one stone



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To finish this article, here's a quiz to test your knowledge on some of the most-used idioms. Can you match the meaning to the idiom? The answers you'll find up to the 30th June on www.facebook.com/ALEX.Forum.

1	the last straw	a	to be nervous
2	cut corners	b	saying something you shouldn't have, a faux pas
3	on the ball	c	saying something which is not true but should be funny, in German "veräppeln"
4	missed the boat	d	something that rarely happens
5	sitting on the fence	e	almost too late
6	butterflies in my stomach	f	The final problem in a series of problems.
7	feeling a bit under the weather	g	To get some information through gossip or informal talk.
8	put your foot in your mouth	h	In control of the situation
9	in the nick of time	i	being too late in taking an action
10	hear it on the grapevine	j	save money or time
11	once in a blue moon	k	not making a clear decision
12	pulling your leg	l	not having a lot of energy or health