

Teaching Idioms in English as a Second Language: An Analysis of Issues and Solutions

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Abstract: Idioms are said to mirror the culture of the language. As it happens with most culturally-determined language aspects, idioms pose great difficulties for learners. The study explored the area of idiomatic expressions as being important linguistic units for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Idiomatic expressions are phrases that consist of two or more words and hence; acquire an idiomatic sense which differ from the literal meaning of the individual words. The study aimed at investigating the role of idiomatic expressions in improving writing and communicative competence and whether these expressions have effective role in improving the students' performance in language. The study highlighted the important part that idiomatic expressions play in English as a foreign language.

Key words: Idioms, phrasological expressions, transparent idioms, opaque idioms, semantic opacity, and compositional fixity, semantic function, partial idioms, lexical idioms.

During independence years in the Republic of Uzbekistan special attention is paid to the study of foreign languages. We all understand perfectly well that today, in the context of global integration, widespread introduction of computer technologies and the Internet into everyday life, there is no future without knowledge of foreign languages and fluency in them.

As English language is rich in idioms, learning the idioms in English language constitutes the soul of the language. Yet the plethora of human situation makes it imperative to reduce them to manageable proportion.

Students learning English are destined to face difficulties in understanding idioms; bearing in mind that, in order to be accepted as proficient; one must acquire sufficient knowledge of idiomatic expressions.

Idioms are the most difficult part of the vocabulary to teach. They are not considered to be taught in the elementary level. Students might be faced with idiomatic expressions like phrasal verbs since the third and the fourth grade such as: switch on the TV, wake up, turn on/off the light, hurry up, stand up, sit down, hands up (in the air), etc. they often use to learn from the teachers phrases like: carry on, raise up your voice, look at the blackboard, etc. Even though this expressions are not called idioms they comprise figurative meaning which is made up of a verb and a particle or adverb. Idioms are usually not taught in the L2 classroom due to the fact that teachers either don't know their meaning or they don't know their origin. Idioms are not treated in L2 classrooms as regularly as might be, because of time pressures. According to exercises of problem-solving nature can help learners to discover the metaphors in idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, Lennon believes that students will become highly motivated to translate their language's metaphors into the target language so as to share with the class their own culture the method of metaphor encoding. It is very important to integrate students in the four skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) because they integrate idiom knowledge in the four skills. Teachers should design various activities for students to use with English idioms so that students can collaborate with peers and utilize idioms.

A number of questions arise from researchers as to when to teach idioms, what level, age, in the primary or secondary school, etc. Since idioms represent the status of highly idiomatic language, an idiomatic expression. In addition to this apparent incongruity between form and meaning, the scarcity of teaching materials and the lack of a clear methodology make idioms a stumbling block for EFL students.

Learning idioms is one of the fundamental aspects of language learning that is postponed until the learners reach their advanced levels. It is very important to choose the idioms which are necessary, those which are more frequent in reading texts and conversations. She indicates that comparing and contrasting literal and figurative meanings of idioms will enable students to recognize idiomatic usage and to interpret idioms accordingly. Most students are very interested in learning idiomatic expressions so it will be a wrong decision to postpone learning them until students reach advanced levels. A research study showed that English idioms with illustrations could increase college students' idioms understanding better. By knowing the origins of idioms, students can more easily figure out the metaphorical meanings. He carries on that discussions focused on the origins of words and phrases help students understand how language transforms over time and, thereby, enables them to hypothesize in a more meaningful way the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases. When teachers encourage students natural inclinations toward narrative forms of meaning making, in conjunction with text-based lessons, the students appear more engaged with textual content and demonstrate less resistance to reading material that might otherwise be challenging or frustrating. We sums up that students respond to texts through narrative approaches, encouraging them to engage in role-playing and to allow memories, images, and stories to surface as they begin to develop interpretations. They are more likely to understand, recall, and care about what a metaphor means after having played with the word through a highly personalized, storied exploration of their own experiences of metaphorical language. According to the internet site (w.w.w.teachingenglish.org.uk) the following tips are given to teach idioms:

- The teacher deals with proverbs and idioms when they crop up in their contexts, such as in reading and listening tasks or when you use one naturally in class.

- The teacher teaches several 'body idioms' together. E.g. to be head and shoulders above the rest, to be long in the tooth, to shoot yourself in the foot, etc. It will be easier for students to remember some of them if they're in groups.

- The teacher uses visuals and pictures to help learners remember them. For example, draw a bird in the hand and two in the bush.

- The teacher does some matching activities. For example, give students five proverbs that have been cut in half and get them to match them up.

- The teacher asks students if any of the proverbs translate directly into their own language. Most of the time students will know a similar expression in their language and it can help them to remember them if they compare the differences between English and their language.

- The teacher tires put idioms into context. Try to use situations when people actually use the expressions and get students to create dialogues or role-play and to use a few of the proverbs or idioms to reinforce the meaning.

- The teacher explains to students that it may be more useful for them to be able to understand the expressions when they hear them than to be able to produce them. Ask them how they would react if you used this type of expression in their language. Would they find it a bit strange?

- The teacher doesn't overload students with too many at a time. Five is probably a good number of one class.

Teaching idioms in class has shown to be a difficult task. The study has revealed difficulties in choosing which strategy to teach. This varied on the level of the class. Teachers of primary education find effective translation by using an idiom with similar form and meaning in the target language while teachers of secondary one could use as an alternative method translation by paraphrase. They use it because it expands students vocabulary, develops critical thinking, they can understand better and clearly idiom meaning. Teachers find it useful. However, they tend to use translation into the mother tongue in most of the cases because they are sure all the students of all the levels have understood the idiom properly. Based on the quantitative data, 59% of the teachers used sometimes translating idioms. There is almost the same percentage of students when acquiring better idiom meaning which seems that teachers use almost in the same proportion of paraphrasing and idiom translation into Uzbek language. Idioms resulted to be difficult because students do not use them in situational contexts thus not encouraging using them.

They find their usage and remembering difficult. Students need teacher's help. They should be given contextual support and many exercises to demonstrate the right usage. It has come to a conclusion that teachers find them difficult to teach because there is no equivalent idiom in the target language and the language is too idiomatic. Moreover, the lower the grade, the lower the percentages of idiom use. Idiomatic language is used very little due to the lack of necessity and there is a different form and meaning in English and Uzbek which makes students difficult to use them. From the questionnaire statistics 76% of students have shown little interest in knowing idiom origin and background. Most of the teachers were against idiom teaching through internet because of the misunderstanding led from the meanings they read, the necessity of the teacher presence in class; they get inappropriate connotations of meaning and do not interact and put idioms in practice. Some teachers accepted the fact that they use internet as entertainment and not for the learning process. A few of them shared the opposite opinion. 85% of the teachers commented that idioms help improve and increase idiomatic language competence. A few shared a negative answer. The results of the questionnaire for the effects of using translation activities to learn English support for the idea of acquiring the meaning more easily and use idiom in everyday English, specifying the understanding of idioms. It is necessary to comprehend, remember and produce foreign language while some of the teachers agree with the opposite idea considering the process as threshold to develop their communicative ideas. They suggest these activities for the early beginners and not to be used as a common practice. The organization of teaching idioms in an English class should take into consideration the usage of some materials to teach the idiom meaning. Games, flashcards, role-plays, and pictures have resulted to be the most useful. They learn easily and put them in the long term memory. It is an easier and faster method for students to acquire and understand through visual perception in partly motivated idioms. Teachers should use a variety of methods and strategies depending on the topic and module. Mother tongue should be left apart and teach idioms through paraphrasing. This develops their critical thinking, enlarge the vocabulary and make students think in English. This study intends to be helpful for L2 teachers who encounter difficulties and problems in such idiomatic languages suggesting what methods to use and exactly what strategies do Uzbek teachers find useful in the foreign language teaching in primary and secondary schools, fulfilling thus teachers' needs and requirements.

Conclusion

Therefore, as a result of the research, we came to the following conclusion:

1. Language instructors may be able to upgrade L2 learners' everyday language by introducing different idiomatic expressions that serve various functions, and by raising L2 learners' awareness of the importance of this language phenomenon.
2. Teachers of English should be encouraged to include such items of language as a part of teaching and learning process.
3. Although teaching idioms is not an easy task, but students need to be familiarized with them.
4. It is also highly recommended to use effective methods while teaching idiomatic expressions as: using stories, teaching idioms in context using rich illustrations such as pictures and diagrams.

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