



STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS TO NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

Najat Ali Alhaddar Alazraq

English language department, Faculty of Arts, Zawiya, University of Zawiya

EMAIL: n.alazrag@zu.edu.ly

Received: 05/05/2024 Accepted: 15/05/2024 Available online: 30/06/2024

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the different teaching strategies and techniques that can be used to teach idiomatic expressions, their meaning, and usage, to non-native speakers of English. This is a topic of importance, on the one hand, because idiomatic expressions are rarely found in other languages. For example, for a non-native speaker of English, if he cannot find an equivalent in his language to an idiomatic expression, it feels almost impossible to understand it. On the other hand, it is very difficult for teachers or grammar materials to teach idiomatic expressions to foreign students in a good way. In recent years, some teachers, researchers, and linguists have proposed several methods, approaches, or techniques that can help students comprehend idiomatic expressions.

Key words: strategies, techniques, comprehension, idiomatic expressions, teaching strategies.

استراتيجيات تعليم التعبيرات الاصطلاحية لغير الناطقين بها

نجاهة علي الهدار الأزرق

قسم اللغة الانجليزية - كلية الآداب الزاوية - جامعة الزاوية

EMAIL: n.alazrag@zu.edu.ly

تاريخ الاستلام: 2024/05/05 تاريخ القبول: 2024/05/15 تاريخ النشر: 2024/06/30

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية استراتيجيات وتقنيات التعليم المختلفة التي يمكن استخدامها لتدريس التعبيرات الاصطلاحية ومعانيها واستخداماتها للناطقين بغيرها من اللغة الإنجليزية. يُعتبر هذا الموضوع ذا أهمية من جهة، لأن التعبيرات الاصطلاحية نادراً ما توجد في اللغات الأخرى. على سبيل المثال، بالنسبة لمتحدث غير ناطق بالإنجليزية، إذا لم يتمكن من إيجاد مكافئ للتعبير الاصطلاحي في لغته، فإن فهمه يصبح شبه مستحيل. ومن جهة أخرى، من الصعب جداً على المعلمين أو مواد النحو تدريس التعبيرات الاصطلاحية للطلاب الأجانب بطريقة جيدة. في السنوات الأخيرة، اقترح بعض المعلمين والباحثين وعلماء اللغة عدة طرق ومناهج أو تقنيات يمكن أن تساعد الطلاب على فهم التعبيرات الاصطلاحية.

1. Introduction

Despite the significance of idiomatic expressions in language teaching and learning, many learners of English, particularly non-native students, are either ignorant of these expressions or cannot use them naturally. They have difficulty using idioms with correct meaning and form and adapting them to the environment of their speech without compromising their communicative intention. To help non-native English learners master idiomatic expressions, more emphasis has been given by many researchers on the importance of teaching idioms and the difficulties students usually face when they want to deal with that aspect of the language. Teachers' quotations and some research findings suggest that learners have difficulty understanding and using idiomatic expressions in context.

Idiomatic expressions are an important aspect of natural communication in English. Research indicates that native speakers of English use idiomatic expressions frequently and that idiomatic expressions are commonly found in English text. Idiomatic expressions highlight the difference between a speaker whose language is learned as a mother tongue and one learned in a foreign country. Non-native speakers have difficulty understanding and using idioms because they have learned English not in a 'natural' environment but in a classroom. The recent shift towards a more communicative and natural approach within English language teaching has led to a focus on collocations and idiomatic language, thus enhancing the status and significance of idiomatic expressions in English language teaching and learning.

2. Understanding Idiomatic Expressions

The characteristics of idioms and idiomatic expressions can be divided into two categories: form and context. These characteristics can help L2 teachers determine which phrases may seem foreign or unusual to their students. In terms of form, idiomatic expressions are composed of more than one word (Zeng and Bhat, 2021). They are usually a combination of a noun and a verb or a preposition and a verb. Additionally, idioms have a fixed order of words and generally cannot be changed, even when the phrase is put into a different tense. In context, the phrasal meaning of an idiom is often normal, logical, and ordinary. Some idioms are composed of short words, but others may be quite lengthy and complex. That is to say, English idioms can range from simple, everyday speech to more complex and formal speech. At times, these expressions can contain prepositional and propositional phrases that also contain prepositional phrases. For

example, the idiomatic phrase "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" is a long phrase composed of even longer, prepositional phrases. Depending on culture, the meaning of the idiomatic expression will most likely change. Furthermore, idiomatic expressions are closely tied to certain countries or regions and might seem unusual or even contradictory in the context of that nation.

Idioms are unique phrases in language that add depth to conversations. They have a hidden meaning not obvious from their words. For instance, the phrase "It's raining cats and dogs" doesn't involve pets falling from the sky. Non-native speakers need cultural understanding to interpret it as heavy rain. Incorporating idioms in English learning enhances language skills and makes lessons more engaging. It also brings joy to students and teachers alike.

2.1. Definition and Characteristics

Idiomatic expressions, which have such characteristics, also include various aspects of linguistics and expressions. That is, idiomatic expressions, which have various meanings from today's expressions, include social and cultural aspects, grammatical aspects, and lexical aspects and related aspects of human function and psycholinguistics (Maria, 2022). This means that idiomatic expressions need a broad perspective to teach and practice, and the specific meanings and functions of idiomatic expressions covered in this case clarify social-cultural factors, grammatical and usage features, and ways of expressing idiomatic expressions that must be taught how to use them.

Idioms are expressions with figurative meanings based on cultural connotations. They cannot be understood literally and depend on usage and context, resembling set phrases or idiomatic forms.

3. Challenges Faced by Non-Native Speakers

The distinct forms and pragmatic contexts of expression in idiomatic phrases are certain to irrevocably root idiomatic terms deeply inside the cultural matrix, ensuring their comprehension will be a daunting challenge among those from a different geo-cultural society (Mokhtari2020). Given that idiomatic rubrics for certain psychosocial scenarios and attitudes can differ across cultures, culture clashes can occur when expressions are attempted at the idiomatic level. For instance, when some English expressions are converted into non-idiomatic Persian, nonsensicality or unnaturalness is the most probable outcome.

Non-native speakers face barriers when encountering idiomatic language. It is difficult to deconstruct and learn idiomatic expressions. Different idiomatic languages do not correspond well. Idioms connect words, worldviews, language, and culture. Understanding these linkages is essential for non-native speakers to interpret and use non-standard phrases effectively.

3.1. Cultural Differences

Idiomatic expressions vary far more than their translations, let alone lexical creations, and this fact should be remembered in setting up data bases. Seymour Chapman's *Cocoa* has been quite outspoken about the clumsy and obvious effects of translating or expounding idioms in most bilingual technical and scientific manuals (Haagsma et al.2020). It's not surprising, however, that idiomatic expression and style take a long time to receive the "citizenship" of university courses in affect that follow in the wake of liberal inclusion.

Idiomatic expressions are a barrier for non-native speakers. Sacrificing the peculiarity of idiomatic speech is inconceivable. Translated idioms do not serve as a basis for discussing creativity or language learning. The role of idioms in intercultural communication is clear. Certain nuclear words are commonly used in idiomatic expressions.

4. Effective Strategies for Teaching Idiomatic Expressions

The number of increased idiomatic productions is low but significant. It should be noted that researchers and practitioners may be affiliates and it is to our advantage to have contextual techniques to teach idiomatic usage that cognitively provide knowledge about the functions in which an idiomatic allows discriminant judgments about sentence acceptability and reference. On the other hand, tutors can present idiomatic function in lower context pedagogical settings that make properties of usage salient to language learners (Mancuso et al.2020). This was evidenced by a printer coinfection. Use of an axiom analytic (AA) theory can provide learners insights into highly felicitous uses by elucidation of functional explanations for infelicitousness (in tantos) wrong students up on a way not to produce the phrase.

Teachers of English as a second language are encouraged to use helpful strategies and techniques, such as timers to improve non-native speakers' idiomatic knowledge. Traditional methods of teaching idiomatic expressions do not prioritize communication. Fluency in idiomatic usage can be enhanced through both lower and higher context settings.

4.1. Contextual Learning

There are several teaching techniques to help guide non-native speakers through understanding idiomatic expressions. One of the most common methods of teaching idiomatic expressions is to provide descriptions that paraphrase the meaning of the entire expression, which can also be accomplished by providing possible synonyms. Another strategy is to describe idiomatic expressions as simply a part of the English language and can often be expressed as just as concisely as idiomatic ones. This tactic, again, emphasizes drawing

connections between the idiomatic expressions and language familiar to non-native speakers. Sometimes, it is easier to learn about a very specific idiom through context (Arifuddin et al.2020). The social context for an expression is frequently embedded in the definition of the idiom, i.e. the idiom's cultural underpinnings are highlighted in its definition, which provides both a clarification of the expression and a stimulus for discussing social knowledge and cultural factors in the language learning classroom.

To teach idioms, we use contextual learning. It helps learners understand and remember better by imagining real-life situations. For food-related idioms like "spill the beans" or "work against the clock," we provide cooking examples.

5. Incorporating Idioms in Language Activities

When incorporating idiomatic expressions into activities such as role-playing, the educator opens the door to an infinite number of settings. Stakić & Arsić (2022) pointed out that These decisions should match the students' abilities and the vocabulary they employ. For instance, the first day at an airport will always involve the interaction between people checking luggage and airport staff. Police officers might question a security suspect in another setting. Educators can stick to idiomatic language that has previously been taught or can resist the temptation of testing language that hasn't been introduced yet (an educator can utilize this type of role-play to see if a student can function on their own – ask them to hold an advanced conversation, then the teacher uses idiomatic language to see if they can follow). Additionally, the tone of the role-play should reflect the people involved. Students address it

Many strategies for teaching idiomatic expressions have been discussed in classes, but none have focused on incorporating them into role-playing exercises. Using role-playing exercises is a dynamic way for non-native speakers to practice using idiomatic language in different scenarios. Instead of teaching and drilling, educators should motivate students to communicate naturally. Native speakers often use idiomatic expressions in everyday conversations, so presenting information through lectures and textbooks is not enough. Linguists emphasize the importance of full interaction in language learning.

5.1. Role-Playing Exercises

Using role-play exercises in teaching idiomatic expressions is important. The exercises are highly visual and provide a clear link to particular scenarios where the expressions can be used, which puts the idioms into a context that students understand. They are also interactive and incorporate a high level of physical activity, which simultaneously helps to energize students and teaches them practical as well as formal uses of these expressions (Maria, 2022).

This interactive approach seems to be relatively effective at activating students' prior experiences that can be connected with idiomatic expressions as well as at helping them to develop proper intonation, facial expression, and body language, which are useful cues for interpreting the idioms.

6. Utilizing Technology in Teaching Idioms

Moreover, digital cultural phenomena, such as memes, also provide learning opportunities for learners with little fear of failure. Memes rely upon images (often cartoons or other vector-based illustrations), meaning that the core meanings of the idioms they contain can often be inferred from the images (Smith, 2023). Using a search engine for the web or social media to collect memorable memes based on your key idioms can create valuable teaching and revising tools for preparation before the first lesson devoted mainly to idiomatic expressions or for revision before the exam when all the previously studied material should be revised.

Technology can be used to teach learners idiomatic expressions. Online resources, such as idiomatic examples, forums, and news, can encourage learners to explore idioms. Authentic writings with illustrations and audios can help learners understand idioms' meaning. Apps like "Idiom Land" provide a playful language environment for learners to actively practice idioms.

6.1. Online Resources and Apps

These databases can be of use to language teachers and learners in that they offer a list of idiomatic expressions. There is not much digital content available for the teaching of idiomatic expressions on the web, which is possibly why they remain an area of relative difficulty for non-native learners. Idioms have not traditionally been given much importance in the English language learning curriculum, even though they crop up in all of the skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. There are games available online, such as 'playbuzz,' that offer users the ability to practice idioms in a fun, non-threatening way (Barriga and McCandless2020). Websites like 'busyteacher' also offer online or downloadable activities to practice idiomatic expression use in various forms. The commonly shared belief using technology is that when it works well, it allows learner autonomy and provides learning opportunities that encourage discovery.

There are lists and dictionaries of idiomatic expressions in different languages. They are often written by students of the language and include comical illustrations to explain the meanings. There are also apps for learning idioms, such as multiple-choice quizzes. For example, my learners use a Google Assistant app to test their knowledge of idioms during lunch.

7. Assessment and Feedback in Idioms Instruction

It is an important principle in teaching that learners should be made aware of their individual goals and be fully involved in their learning. Because of the nature of idiomatic expressions, it would be very beneficial for learners to know how well they are doing with this language feature. For this reason, a number of regular, ongoing feedback techniques to be used in the language teaching classroom are explored. These techniques are formative. According to Kim (2020) They are intended to inform the learner how near they are to successfully understanding or using idiomatic expressions, with a result that learners become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in the use of idiomatic expressions.

Assessment and feedback are key in language teaching. Idiomatic expressions are challenging to acquire, so instructional programs should include assessment and feedback strategies. However, other studies rarely mention idiomatic expressions in language assessment. The following sections outline ways to assess and provide feedback for idiomatic expression comprehension and use. These techniques are formative and aim to develop non-native speakers' ability without condemning them. They are valid and reliable for assessing comprehension and accurate use of idiomatic expressions.

7.1. Formative Assessment Techniques

The students were asked to include the idiomatic expressions in their compositions. By observing the sentences written by the students, the teacher was able to assess the degree to which the students had grasped the expressions within both sections of the lesson. Their success in including idiomatic expressions in their texts demonstrated their understanding and ability to use the expressions. Ahmed et al. (2022) claimed that If they had difficulty using the idiomatic expressions, feedback could be given by the teacher in the form of support materials and opportunities to practice them in class based on the individual performance perceived in the practice work. This includes extra homework that aims to support individual students in improving their achievement based on the feedback given by the marker.

Formative assessment determines non-native speakers' grasp of idiomatic expressions and aids in providing targeted feedback for improved mastery.

8. Professional Development for Teachers

A study examining the role of creative invention of idioms in the learning process revealed that creativity helps students interrelate idiomatic expressions with concepts or wordings that are different from their languages of origin, where translation is usually addressed.

Wang (2020) argued that budding language professionals and prospective language teachers should be provided with such exercises to think and come up with their idiomatic expressions. It has been suggested that presenting and explaining idiomatic expressions in isolation should be supplemented by collocational analysis and the analysis of language corpora. Considering idiomatic expressions in their broader textual, contextual, and collocational value has appealing and constructive aspects.

Professional development for teachers teaching idiomatic expressions to non-native speakers requires special knowledge and skills beyond expertise in isolated words and phrases. Workshops or training programs should cover the metapragmatics of idiomatic research, recent findings, and lesson planning. Teachers can exchange materials and discuss assessment methods.

8.1. Workshops and Training Programs

This part of the program helps future teachers increase a range of active and passive vocabulary, as well as learn a wider context for idiomatic expression production. The practicalities of language, i.e. idiomatic expressions, include a great deal of everyday language use and transmission of more lexis than other words put together, with a lot of words in the languages of the world occurring as idiomatic expressions. Blanco Rodriguez (2021) summarized that Idiomatic expressions form expressions, phrases, single words, or proverbs, claiming about 11% of the English TGM lexis and about 21% of the American School Center Lease Vocabulary List (ASCL) in English. There are over several thousand idiomatic expressions involving the word "take", which is used by native speakers from about puberty. The significance of idiomatic expressions in natural languages has made some professionals present lists of essential idioms/colloquialisms/proverbs or require that they be included in the teaching syllabus.

The practicalities of idiomatic expressions in daily language use, along with modern technology, promote an idiom-friendly language. However, teachers and trainers often lack professional training in this area. This chapter describes workshops for English students interested in becoming lower-secondary school teachers. The workshops, offered as short courses or summer programs, are designed to meet trainee teachers' needs and provide training on teaching idiomatic expressions to non-native English speakers.

9. Research Trends in Idiomatic Expressions Teaching

Research on idiomatic expressions teaching can inform pedagogy by indicating what and how to teach. Nonetheless, there is still a scarcity of qualitative analyses that can inform practices about idioms in textbooks and learners' views of its relevance. Furthermore,

trends in idioms can point out current contexts in which idiomatic expressions are essential and thereby deserve more attention in educational contexts (Peel, 2020). Peel's article investigated beginners to advanced language learners from preschoolers to seniors representing Anglo-Saxon, Byzantine, European, East, and South Asian cultural-linguistic backgrounds learning English in different contexts.

Lack of materials, time, and knowledge are challenges to idiomatic expressions teaching. Recent studies in EFL and ESOL contexts and different educational levels show that idioms are taught within various topics. They address learners' needs in authentic language use and assessment. Some focus on understanding and producing idioms, while others explore their pragmatic, sociolinguistic, affective, and cognitive aspects. These studies represent a shift towards more specific approaches in idioms research.

10. Conclusion

It is no overstatement that language plays an instrumental role in communication and, as a result, can heavily influence comprehension and action. Because idiomatic expressions can be used to enhance both accounts, much research holds widespread value for EFL/ESL learners and educators. The strategies unveiled in this chapter have been crafted for various learner types and can be quickly implemented in the classroom due to the ease of construction and implementation of their activities. However, educators could still benefit from research that identifies issues with teaching "disadvantaged" students compared to the "advantaged" profile on communications, course, or language proficiency. Other research could focus on differences verified between the aforementioned sociodemographics in language learning such as initial stages of language acquisition, language processing, cognitive accumulation of vocabulary quantities, "surface-acting" ability (fluency), and effects of individual and other factors (e.g., motivation). Furthermore, instructors and learners alike may find value in research related to the use of idiomatic expressions and how they can modify approaches by individual students or L1 backgrounds.

References:

- Arifuddin, A., Arafiq, A., Sujana, I. M., & Apriyanto, K. (2020). The mastery of and strategies for understanding the idiomatic expressions applied by the students of hospitality and tourism. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 32 (3), 167-177.
- Barriga Fray, J. I., & McCandless, M. J. (2020). The effects of using American idioms in the development of the speaking skills in L2 students. *Horizontes Revista de Investigación en Ciencias de la*

- Educación, 4 (16), 432-438. <https://scielo.org.bo.com> Accessed March 12, 2024
- Blanco Rodriguez, M. (2021). An ESP course taught through a technical textbook for computer science students at INCOS–El Alto Institute. <https://repositorio.umsa.bo>. Accessed March 26, 2024
- Haagsma, H., Bos, J., & Nissim, M. (2020). MAGPIE: A large corpus of potentially idiomatic expressions. In 12th Language Resources and Evaluation Conference: LREC 2020 (pp. 279-287). European Language Resources Association (ELRA). <https://rug.nl> Accessed February 09, 2024
- Kim, D. (2020). Learning language, learning culture: Teaching language to the whole student. ECNU Review of Education. Sage Publications.
- Mancuso, A., Elia, A., Laudanna, A., & Vietri, S. (2020). The role of syntactic variability and literal interpretation plausibility in idiom comprehension. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 49, 99-124.
- Maria, Z. (2022). The importance of learning idioms in boosting EFL student's communicative skills. <https://univ-biskra.dz> Accessed January 26, 2024
- Mokhtari, A. (2020). Language learning strategies and beliefs about language learning: A study of university students of Persian in the United States. In *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian* (pp. 591-630). Routledge.
- Peel, K. L. (2020). A beginner's guide to applied educational research using thematic analysis. *Practical Assessment Research and Evaluation*. <https://usq.edu.au> Accessed March 04, 2024
- Smith, C. A. (2023). One does not simply teach idioms: Meme creation as innovative practice for virtual EFL learners. 54 (2) 23. *RELC Journal*.
- Stakić, M. & Arsić, Z. (2022). Opportunities and challenges in mastering polysemous words and idioms in foreign language learning based on analogous procedures in the native language. <https://kg.ac.rs> Accessed February 12, 2024
- Wang, X. (2020). Applying cognitive linguistics to second language idiom learning. <https://wgtm.ac.nz> Accessed March 03, 2024
- Zeng, Z., & Bhat, S. (2021). Idiomatic expression identification using semantic compatibility. *Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, 9, 1546-1562. <https://mit.edu> Accessed February 22, 2024
- Ahmed, A. A. A., Widodo, M., Komariah, A., Hassan, I., Sukmana, N., Ali, M. H., ... & Rohi, A. (2022). Assessing the effects of gamification on developing EFL Learners' idiomatic knowledge: Do attitudinal factors contribute to the learning of the idioms with the game? *Education Research International*, 2022 (1), 2482570. <https://wiley.com> Accessed May 24, 2024