

## The Important Features of Learning and Teaching<sup>1</sup> Idiom in TFL

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**Annotation:** the article illustrates some vital features of teaching English idioms in English classroom. If we teach idioms along with the other simple word lists, we believe, that the English teacher has to help the learners get to know how to use the vocabulary and dictionaries very effectively. The article discusses some challenging tasks of teaching pronunciation, functional category, distinct layers of meaning, usage and model sentences along with idioms and phrasal verbs. It offers some innovative strategies to apply while using C1 idioms in EFL. We hope that students will further develop their understanding of figurative language thanks to this article.

**Key words:** methods, idiom principle, teaching English, formulaic languages, idioms.

As a vivid and forceful part of language idioms have an important role to acquire a language and often indicate a proficient language user. Having been described as the crystallization of language, English idioms are a part of the cultural elements of the language in mastering the language by EFL learners. It is suggested that using idioms and idiomatic expressions in our speech prevent it from becoming dull and dry.

The term ‘idiom’ comes from Greek word meaning ‘own’ or ‘peculiar’. An idiom is a figurative expression that can usually be interpreted literally but that takes a non-literal meaning when used in a specific context (Rohani & Ketabi, 2012). It is known that many idioms are quite informal, so it is important to be careful to use them. In fact, it is required to be able to understand a lot of idioms if we want to read English fiction, newspapers, magazines, TV shows, films and songs. In addition, they are often used for humour to communicate or to comment on the other people and situations among the public.

The idiom principle postulates the chunks of language ( i.e. word strings that habitually appear together, such as collocations, idioms and discourse markers), are initially processed as unanalyzed entities, from which language speakers can derive the subtle semantic and morphosyntactic regularities underlying a pattern<sup>1</sup> The semi-constructed phrases that can be classified under the idiom principle are a heterogeneous class<sup>2</sup>. Sinclair (1991) includes idioms, proverbs, clichés, technical terms, jargon expressions and phrasal verbs. It is known that these lexical items exhibit certain features, they have an indeterminate extend, allowing internal, lexical, syntactic and word order variation, many words and phrases show a tendency to strong collocations, to certain grammatical choices and certain semantic environments. From this point of view Moon (1997) argues that the class of the multi-word combinations consists of compounds (e.g. living room), phrasal verbs (e.g. get along with), (e.g. shoot the breeze), fixed phrases (e.g. how do you do) and

<sup>1</sup> Wang, Y. (2016): *The Idiom Principle and L1 Influence: A contrastive learner-corpus study of delexical verb + noun collocations*, Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Andreou, G., & Galantomos, I. (2008): *Teaching idioms in a foreign language context: preliminary comments on factors determining Greek idiom instruction*, *Metaphoric.de.*, 15, p 8.

preferabs (e.g. I am a great believer in...). These different categories, however, are not stable and close-ended since language is a flexible and dynamic system open to many changes.

The following tables illustrate the categorization of formulaic language and the classification of idioms in which the three criteria used by McCarthy and O'Dell (2017). They consider idioms as a type of formulaic language that consists of fixed expressions which you learn and understand as units rather than individual words.

Table 1

Type of formulaic language	Examples
Greetings and good wishes	Hi there! See you soon! Happy birthday!
Prepositional phrases	At the moment, in a hurry, from time to time
Sayings, proverbs and quotations	It is a small world! Don't put all your eggs in one basket. To be or not to be – that is the question.
Compounds	Car park, bus stop, home-made
Phrasal verbs	Take off, look after, turn down
Collocations	Blonde hair, deeply disappointed

In contrast to the classification of Badger who referred the idioms can be broken simile idioms, phrasal verbs idioms, metaphorical idioms, aphorisms, cultural and historical idioms O'Dell and McCarthy indicate the following categorization of idioms.

Table 2: Classification of Idioms

Types of idioms	Examples
Verb + object + preposition	take a shine to; put somebody's foot in it; draw the line at something
Idiomatic noun phrases	a flash in the pan; a debt of dishonour; a domino effect; the icing on the cake
Binomial (word + word)	safe and sound; neat and tidy; hit and miss; wear and tear; black and blue
Simile (as + adjective + as + noun)	as thin as a rake, as smooth as silk; as fresh as a daisy; as dry as a bone
Clichés and fixed statements (conversational phrases)	There are plenty more fish in the sea; Look on the bright side; It's not over until the fat lady sings; Get your skates on; Take it easy; Fair's fair
Proverbs/sayings/maxims	Every cloud has a silver lining; Where there's a will, there's a way; Nothing ventured, nothing gained

According to Nurul Asri and Rochmawati (2017), we would like to present some innovative strategies to use idioms in writing skill. For the first strategy, it is integrated the teaching of metaphorical idioms into the teaching of narrative and descriptive essay writing. This strategy is one of the ways to present idiomatic expressions in EFL contexts is by integrating it into the teaching of essay writing as suggested by Chen and Lai (2013). It consists of eight sub stages in it as illustrated below:

1. Asking the students to write a three to four paragraph essay on any theme, such as describing an experience of being extremely angry.
2. The students are introduced to the concept of metaphors.
3. Two-page handouts are distributed whose content was a few idioms as examples.

4. A short article about issues of emotion controls is given to illustrate the concept of metaphor and asked the students to read over the article and to circle the idiomatic expressions used in it.
5. Having been circled the idiomatic expressions, the students are led to think about general metaphoric themes of the idiomatic expressions and to draw linking diagrams.
6. The students are then directed to complete the exercise on the second page of the handout.
7. After completing the exercise, the students hand in the handouts.
8. The students are told to revise their first draft at home and are encouraged to integrate as many idiomatic expressions as possible. In a week, the students submitted both the original and the revised essays to be analyzed by the teacher to examine the students' ability to use idiomatic expressions.

Now, again we are eager to continue presenting a few ways of teaching idioms, recommended by the authors mentioned above, to develop the students' productive skill.

As the second suggested strategy, it is useful not only the students to understand idioms; they also learn how to use them in context. The students are asked to have some categories, e.g. idioms with parts of the body, fruit, animals, time, and etc and find some sample idioms under the chosen categories. Then, they can use them in their speech where the meanings of the idioms are clearly understood. This teaching process is presented through these strategies.

1. To introduce the idiom "to be a chicken" the teacher may take the following dialogue:

Jack: Ooh, wow. Look at that roller coaster, Jane! It goes upside-down!

Jane: My stomach aches just looking at it. I will not ride that.

Jack: Ah, come on. Don't be a chicken!

In addition to this, watching videos of native speakers conversing is recommended by the website FluentU as a great way to give the students demonstrations on how idioms are used in the real world.

2. Having been introduced the conversation, the students can be asked to figure out or guess the meaning of the idiom. The teachers may correct if there are any misunderstandings and then, they can move on to another dialogue for another idiom.

3. The next stage is carried on by having the students write conversations with the given idioms. Primarily, the group is divided into pairs. Each pair of students must write the conversation getting one or two idioms.

- 4 In the final stage, the students may perform the conversations which they written.

As the third strategy, we would like to offer using real life or authentic materials according to the scientists Nurul Asri and Rochmawati (2017). According to Berardo (2006), the sources of authentic materials that can be used in the classroom are infinite. Moreover, anything can be used as an authentic material: for example, newspapers, magazine articles, songs, cartoons, videos and advertisements. The important thing of using authentic materials is that the students can understand how the idioms used in a newspaper headline. Besides, they need to know that there are real people out who actually speak and say such idioms. Afterwards, they may feel ready to start using some of these themselves.<sup>3</sup> The Internet may be the another source of authentic materials and it is full of

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<sup>3</sup> Pesce, C(n.d). How to Teach Idioms Their Meaning. Retrieved from <http://busyteacher.org/3712-how-to-teach-english-idioms-and-their-meaning.html>.

teaching materials that contain teaching idioms such as discussions, definitions, divisions of idioms into categories, dramatization, drawing, storytelling, games, audio and video activities etc.

Using exercises of problem solving was recommended as another useful strategy in teaching idioms by the authors. In this strategy, the students are provided with exercises of problem solving to be helpful to understand the hidden meaning of the idiomatic expressions. As suggested by Lennon (1998) to compare differences between the metaphors in the target language and the student's native language is effective in learning idiomatic languages<sup>4</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, idioms, indeed, constitute a notoriously difficult area of foreign language learning and teaching because, by definition, idioms are conventionalized expressions whose overall meaning cannot be determined from the meaning of their constituent parts. Moreover, they are culturally-determined.. Understanding idioms are often problematic for EFL learners. To teach idiomatic expressions with innovations, a teacher may apply the following strategies: (1) using idioms in essay writing, (2) creating conversations using idioms, (3) using authentic materials, (4) using exercises of problem solving. These are useful ways to teach and review idioms. Using these strategies in class environment enhance learners' language learning and makes easier to overcome some challenges.

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<sup>4</sup> Rohani, G & Ketabi, S (2012). The Effect of Context on the Iranian EFL Learners' Idiom Retention. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 4(4), 52-67.