

INTERACTIVE APPROACHES TO TEACH IDIOMS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: Without idioms our language would become dull and dry. Most idioms contain an extremely profound and rich meaning. This article explores the challenges of teaching English idioms and proposes interactive pedagogical approaches to enhance learner engagement and comprehension. It examines the limitations of traditional methods and advocates for techniques that leverage technology, collaborative activities, and learner-centered strategies to foster deeper understanding and retention of idiomatic expressions. The article highlights the importance of contextualization, authentic materials, and opportunities for meaningful practice in successful idiom acquisition.

Keywords: Idiom instruction, English language teaching (ELT), interactive learning, technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), collaborative learning, learner-centered approach, contextualization, authentic materials, vocabulary acquisition.

Introduction

Idioms, non-literal expressions whose meaning cannot be derived from the individual words, pose a significant challenge for English language learners (ELLs). Their figurative nature and cultural embeddedness often lead to misunderstanding and inaccurate usage. Traditional methods of idiom instruction, such as rote memorization or simple definition provision, often prove ineffective, leading to poor retention and limited practical application. This article argues that interactive approaches are crucial for overcoming these challenges and fostering effective idiom acquisition. We will explore several interactive strategies, demonstrating how they can improve learner engagement, comprehension, and ultimately, fluency.

An idiom is a phrase or expression that largely or exclusively carries a figurative or non-literal meaning, rather than making any literal sense. Categorized as formulaic language, an idiomatic expression's meaning is different from the literal meanings of each word inside it.[1] Idioms occur frequently in all languages; in English alone there are an estimated twenty-five thousand idiomatic expressions.[2] Some well known idioms in English are spill the beans

(meaning "reveal secret information"), it's raining cats and dogs (meaning "it's raining intensely"), and break a leg (meaning "good luck").

Literature review

Idioms are essential for developing fluency and comprehension in English since they are frequently employed in daily speech. They make language more colourful and expressive, which enables speakers to explain complicated ideas clearly and concisely. However, because idioms include cultural allusions and nonliteral meanings, learners frequently find them difficult to understand. Idiom understanding is crucial for improving reading comprehension and listening abilities as well as for efficient communication. As a result, idiomatic education needs to be given top priority in curriculum.

While Russian scholars use the word "phraseological unit," which was coined by V. V. Vinogradov [3], Western scholars use the term "idiom." Although some scientists believe that these ideas are different, the terminology listed above are used interchangeably in this article. "Idiom" is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "a collection of words in a specific order that have a specific meaning that differs from the meanings of each word alone." [4]. An "idiom" is "a group of words which have a different meaning when used together than the one it would have if the meaning of each word were taken individually," according to the dictionary of idioms [5, p. 4].

The entirety of the characteristics that set phraseological units apart from free word-groups (non-phraseological word-groups) are reflected in these two definitions. There are the following characteristics:

- Since idioms have semantic unity - that is, a persistent structure - words in them cannot be substituted with synonyms.
- Idioms possess grammatical invariability, meaning that most of the time, when someone employs phraseological units, the words' form cannot be altered.
- Idioms typically have a metaphorical connotation, therefore their meaning cannot be regarded in its main sense.

Prodromou (2005) proposes a classification of idioms based on a combination of their form and meaning, singling out four types [6]:

- a) Formulae, which include prepositional phrases e.g. at home, and transparent bi-/trinominals, e.g. bed and breakfast (i.e. whose meaning may be understood by combining the meanings of the constituents, which makes this approach radically different from the ones cited above).

b) Collocations, which can be open, e.g. sun+rise, or restricted, e.g. spur sb's memory.

c) Phrasal Verbs (e.g. to turn around in the meaning of 'radically change one's mind')

d) Cultural Idioms. This subtype of English phraseological lexicon includes 'colourful binominals' (e.g. chalk and cheese) or 'trinominals' (e.g. lock, stock and barrel), metaphors and figurative expressions (e.g. to fight fire with fire), similes (e.g. [to get on] like a house on fire), proverbs and sayings (e.g. an apple a day keeps the doctor away), literary allusions (e.g. quotes from Shakespeare) and a range of other similar multi-word units like nursery rhymes, or pop-song lyrics [7].

Some English idioms and phrases with meaning:

- a drop in the bucket: very small or insignificant
- once in a blue moon: very rarely
- to be head over heels: to be very much in love
- to kill two birds with one stone: to accomplish two tasks at the same time
- to pull someone's leg: to tease or trick someone
- to be in the same boat: to share the same problem or experience
- out of the blue: unexpectedly

It is difficult for English students to master English idioms, let alone students because the figurative meanings of English idioms cannot be predicted through an analysis of their individual word meanings. It is not surprising, "The trouble with foreigners in this country is that they take everything Americans say literally" (Buchwald, 2000, p. 104). However, idioms are common in American daily life and provide a rich source of American culture (Cooper, 1999).

Idiomatic expressions seem to be ubiquitous in English. Crystal (1995) asserts that idioms are found across genres and registers, including media (journalism and advertising), political as well as spoken discourse, and everyday conversation [8]. Academic prose is not devoid of idioms either. Drawing on corpus data, Bieber et al. (1999) comes to a surprising conclusion, however, that informal idioms are actually more frequently used in fiction by authors who imitate oral conversation, rather than in real conversation per se [9].

The most famous Russian classification of phraseological units is Vinogradov's classification, which is based on the cohesion degree of the idioms components. V. V. Vinogradov identified three types of idioms:

- Phraseological fusions. The idiom meaning is not based on the meaning of each single word, e.g., at sixes and sevens. Such idioms used to be figurative expressions, but now native speakers do not understand them.

- Phraseological unities. The idiom meaning is determined by the meaning of each word. The figurative meaning is understood by native speakers, e.g., to play the first fiddle. This type of idiom can have a homonymous word combination, which is used in its primary meaning, e.g., a fat cat.

- Phraseological combinations. In this type of idioms one of the words is used in the primary meaning and the other in a figurative meaning, e.g., to break a promise [10].

The teacher can select the most effective idiom teaching strategies thanks to this classification. For instance, learning the term "white elephant" is difficult for students. This expression describes phraseological fusions, implying that its meaning is unclear. In this instance, the pedagogue can explain the origin of the idiom by telling the tale of how the King of Siam gave a white elephant to a courtier who couldn't afford to care for it but couldn't get rid of it [11]. Accordingly, this expression refers to something that is expensive yet has no practical use [12]. By using this technique, learners can establish a connection between an idiom and its meaning. Consequently, the idiom meaning is permanently fixed in their memory.

Discussion and results

Classifying phraseological units according to a theme premise is the conventional approach. Because it categorises idioms into subject groups—such as nature, animals, food, etc.—it is most well-liked by EFL students. It facilitates the retention of idiom meanings and enables the correlation of lesson subjects with thematic groups of idioms. The benefit of this classification is that a foreigner can choose the appropriate theme group and an idiom that fits the speech context when they encounter a certain speech circumstance.

There is a certain sequence of working with idioms:

1. Read the idiom meaning and examples of its use in speech.
2. Practice using them (write, read and pronounce this idiom).
3. Make sentences of your own, using this idiom.

The best way to remember idioms is to work in this order. The teacher can also employ the following strategies in addition to the ones listed above: listening, watching TV show video clips, and learning idioms through visual aids. Having discussions, describing the idiom's history, engaging in a game of word association, and looking for the main meaning. Using online resources (Dave's ESL Cafe, The Idioms Largest Idioms Dictionary, and Idioms Online).

There are mobile apps (English Idioms, English Idioms and Phrases, Idioms Land: Learn English Idioms with Flashcards) and YouTube channels (English Idioms Online, English Grammar and Idioms, Idioms Explained).

The stylistic effect that is caused by idioms is a degree of informality that the text acquires, as they lend a "vivid colour to an otherwise serious discussion".

Teaching English Idioms in Contexts. Context's Function in Language Learning. Context plays a crucial part in language acquisition. Students frequently struggle to grasp how new words can signify different things in different contexts. Students are therefore unable to practically apply the terms they have learnt in a variety of circumstances. It is essential that teachers give their students a rich setting in which to study and practise the language. For example, adolescents' understanding of idioms is improved by linguistic contextual information. The meaning of a word can be conveyed to readers through its surrounding context. On the other hand, readers will find it difficult to accept language that lacks context. As a result, learning language in context is more beneficial for students than learning words one at a time through drill and memorisation.

Introducing English Idioms in Story Contexts. It's common practice to utilise stories to instruct and amuse language learners. Students are typically drawn to and readily captivated by captivating stories. It is crucial for teachers to give their pupils rich context since contextual knowledge greatly helps them grasp English idioms. Therefore, it may be possible to improve students' comprehension and memory of English idioms by incorporating them into engaging stories.

Teaching English Idioms with Rich Illustrations. The Function of Pictures in Reading. Some academics assert that reading materials with images will be easier to understand, notwithstanding the ongoing controversy on the impact of visuals on reading comprehension. When presented together, words and images improved pupils' recall more than when they were presented separately. It is effective to support and reinforce vocabulary acquisition with engaging visuals. Visual aids must therefore be engaging, captivating, and inspiring in order to improve pupils' reading comprehension and retention.

Teaching English Idioms with Group Discussion. Reading comprehension group discussion. One useful technique to improve understanding is for students to discuss what they have read. Group discussions can give students excellent chances to gain the language and social skills they need to comprehend new materials they come across. During content reading, students engaged in collaborative discussion, helping one another to grasp difficult vocabulary,

grasp the major ideas, and respond to questions regarding what they had read. Consequently, group discussions seem to be a useful method for improving students' reading comprehension.

Applying Group Discussion in Understanding English Idioms. When lectures are solely given in class, students are more likely to be passive learners. Conversely, discussions in small groups may encourage students to actively participate in the process of knowledge construction. Additionally, whether consciously or unconsciously, students will learn from one another during group conversations. As a result, you used group discussions to help pupils actively learn English idioms before elucidating their meanings. When students participated in group discussions, they were able to comprehend English idioms more effectively than when they were merely exposed to them in a tale.

Teach English Idioms with Retelling and Rewriting. Reading a story again. Retelling has proven to be an effective method for assessing students' learning and improving their comprehension. Because retelling exercises can motivate students to attempt recall, they can help kids with reading retrieval. Teachers are better able to gauge how much knowledge their students have acquired thanks to their recollection.

Applying Retelling and Rewriting to Practice English Idioms. This encourages you to use retelling exercises while teaching English idioms since they are effective strategies for helping pupils retrieve what they have read. After explaining English idioms to your students, you encouraged them to work in pairs to recount the material using their own words rather than the idioms and to rework class-provided phrases using the idioms. Students had additional opportunities to understand the meanings of English idioms and become acquainted with the ones they had just learnt thanks to the recounting and rewriting exercises.

Teach English Idioms with Dialogue Writing and Role-Play, Dialogue Writing and Role-play in Reading. In addition to giving students plenty of experience with fundamental speaking abilities in context, dialogues can give them scenarios in which to practice everyday conversation. First of all, dialogues can be thought of as little dramas that are read aloud to pupils and then acted out. Additionally, the student-written dialogues serve as fundamental forms of communication at all levels. Additionally, assigning students to pairs for the role-play in everyday conversations is a successful method of oral practice for students of all ages and skill levels. Before they must talk in a real-world setting, role-plays are also great ways for students to practise speaking in a somewhat safe setting. As a result, conversations give pupils a chance to practise speaking and acting out scenarios before they face the actual world.

Teaching Idioms through Stories and Anecdotes. Idioms can be effectively taught via stories and anecdotes because they add context and enhance student interest. When students come across idioms in a story, they are better equipped to understand the figurative meanings within the context of the story. This technique makes it simpler to remember and apply the idiomatic terms by integrating them into memorable situations. Students can learn the meaning and application of this idiom, for example, by using a short tale in which a character "bites the bullet" before making a tough choice. Instructors might use pre-existing literature that contains colloquial language or they can write their own stories. Following reading, students can have group discussions about the idioms, examine how the context aids in understanding their meanings, and analyse their meanings.

Idioms can be introduced to students in authentic settings through the use of books, films, TV series, and music. Idiomatic expressions abound in literature, and educators can choose texts that include pertinent idioms for discussion and study. In a similar vein, media outlets offer illustrations of idioms in common usage. Learners can hear and observe how native speakers use idiomatic terms by watching a movie clip or listening to a song that contains them.

Illustrations and visual aids are effective teaching resources for idioms. Diagrams, cartoons, and pictures can illustrate both the literal and figurative meanings of an idiom. A person "barking up the wrong tree" picture, for example, can depict someone genuinely barking at a tree and then explain the idiomatic meaning of taking the incorrect path. Abstract ideas become concrete through visual representations, which facilitate understanding and memory.

Learning through games. Games with an idiom theme, like memory matching, bingo, or online tests, can make learning fun and interesting. In a low-stakes setting, these activities foster active engagement, teamwork, and the reinforcement of learning through application and repetition.

Technology-Assisted Education. Multimedia tools, interactive internet platforms, and language learning applications provide entertaining methods to learn idioms through interactive exercises, audio, and graphics. These resources offer chances for self-directed practice, individualised learning pathways, and instant feedback.

Contextual Learning. Teaching idioms in the context of a sentence, narrative, or conversation as opposed to separately is known as contextual learning. This approach aids students in comprehending the practical applications of idioms. For instance, the phrase "let the cat out of the bag" can be used in a story about a surprise party where someone unintentionally divulges a secret, rather than being presented alone. This method makes idioms'

meanings more understandable and remembered by assisting students in seeing how they fit into a broader story or discussion.

Teaching idioms can be difficult for a number of reasons. To begin with, students might have trouble connecting idiomatic terms to their own linguistic experiences. Second, pupils may become confused if they try to take idioms literally due to their abstract character. Furthermore, a lack of contextual exposure may make it more difficult for students to employ idioms correctly in discourse. In order to overcome these obstacles, interactive teaching strategies that encourage participation and contextual awareness must be implemented.

Idioms are dynamic and contextual, and traditional methods that emphasise definition-based learning and isolated practice fall short in this regard. Students frequently struggle to use the term correctly in many settings when only given a meaning. Additionally, learning idioms by heart without comprehending their cultural meaning and roots impedes deep learning and inhibits fluid, organic usage.

Conclusion

Since mastering English requires that students learn English idioms, teachers should create a variety of activities that allow students to practise using English idioms and consequently learn them effectively. Furthermore, because they can engage with peers and enjoy studying together, children learn better when given collaborative activities. Lastly, students can participate in the application of English idioms in four skills when teachers combine speaking, listening, reading, and writing exercises when teaching them. Therefore, giving children a variety of tasks to practise and apply English idioms in diverse circumstances is an excellent way to teach them the language.

Teaching idioms effectively requires a shift from traditional, passive methods to interactive, learner-centered approaches. By incorporating games, technology, collaborative activities, and contextualized learning, educators can create engaging and effective learning environments. These interactive strategies not only enhance learner motivation and participation but also lead to better comprehension, retention, and ultimately, more fluent and natural use of idiomatic expressions in the target language. Further research could investigate the effectiveness of specific interactive techniques across different learner populations and proficiency levels, providing more concrete evidence to inform best practices in idiom instruction.

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