



DEVELOPING LEARNERS' LANGUAGE COMPETENCE THROUGH ACQUISITION OF IDIOMS

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Abstract. Idiomatic expressions constitute an essential part of the English language lexicon. They are, therefore, considered inevitable for non-native speakers of English. In the process of learning English non-native speakers should get accustomed to using these expressions; they need to learn idiomatic expressions and practice how to use them. The article suggests some methods and ways of working with idioms targeted at their better comprehension and acquisition.

Key words: idiomatic expressions, ESL/EFL classroom, image.

In the English language the section of idiomatic expressions constitutes an essential part of the whole lexicon. Idiomatic phrases are, therefore, considered inevitable for non-native speakers of English. The latter needed to learn these units and practice how to use them, parallel to native speakers.

Idiomatic expression is defined as a fixed group of words with a special meaning different from the meanings of the separate words and this is why its meaning cannot be inferred from the meanings of the words that make it up. For example, **to spill the beans** is not at all connected with beans: it means 'to say something that is secret'. On the other hand, it is also defined as an expression, or phrase that has a figurative meaning conventionally understood by native speakers. This meaning is different from the literal meaning of the idiom's individual elements. In other words, idioms do not mean exactly what the words say. They have, however, hidden meanings [2]. For example, in the idiomatic expression **a fine kettle of fish** denoting 'a confused and difficult state of affairs' it is not possible to explain exactly the connection between its literal words – the kettle filled with fish – and the metaphorical meaning that it has developed. So, an idiomatic expression carries a figurative meaning, not a literal one.

Idiomatic expressions carry within them the history, heritage, culture and customs of its native users. This means that they are culture-based. It can be said that idioms that are derived from physical human experiences are, in general, culturally

equal. That is, idioms that are based on physical human experiences, such as anger being associated with heat are easier to recognize and understand by non-natives. Due to the strong similarities across different cultures in basic physical experiences such as, being sick or well, hot or cold, idioms that are derived from such images are often the same and fairly easy to understand [1]. Among such idioms in English and Uzbek we can find the following examples: **lovey-dovey** (very romantic, esp. in public) – *севги кабутарларга хос*; **kill two birds with one stone** (to fulfill two purposes with one action) – *бир кесак билан иккита қарғани /қуённи урмоқ; бир оқ билан иккита қуённи/қушни урмоқ, etc.*

But at the same time there are many idiomatic expressions in the English language that completely differ from the learners' native language because they are based on different images. This is why this group of units is harder and more difficult to process and understand. Comparison of English and Uzbek idioms has made it possible to find the following equivalents: **blue blood** (noble descent) – *оқ суюк*; **cat nap** (a short sleep, especially during the day) – *қуш уйқуси*; **when pigs fly** (never) – *туяни думи ерга текканла/ қизил қор ёққанда* [4].

Learning idioms, learning their meanings and the ability to use them appropriately is not easily attainable. Nevertheless, idiomatic expressions must be included in English language learning environments, materials, and EFL / ESL classrooms.

There are multiple methods that can be used in EFL / ESL classroom for the purpose of teaching idiomatic expressions.

It is advisable for teachers to ask their students to write down idiomatic expressions they come across when using English language.

The more frequent the idiom occurs, the more important it is to be taught in ESL / EFL environments. In this way, idioms are dealt with as if they were single words and a part of everyday vocabulary. Such an approach to idioms supports the use of repetition when teaching idiomatic expressions.

In learning English idiomatic expressions it is of vital importance to study literature. Fiction has a large cognitive significance of getting acquainted with the country of the studied language, its important historical events, its cultural development and the country's achievements in the sphere of economy and so on. The literature is not only an important reflection of the information about the past and present of the country, but at the same time many literary works are a significant phenomenon of national culture.

Role-playing, writing and interactive activities such as matching the parts of idioms are some activities that can also help second language (L2) speakers expand their knowledge and use of idioms. Together with this, extension of information in regard to idioms can also be contributed by using special dictionaries that not only

provide explanation of idiomatic expressions and their meanings, but also give notes on the origins of the units in question as well as comments on their usage.

One may also search the internet in order to find the meaning of an idiomatic expression.

Teachers shouldn't keep themselves aside from this work. They also should provide their learners of English with a thorough coverage of the most common idioms in use. The example sentences should be drawn from a variety of written and spoken sources – books, newspapers, recorded conversations, radio and television programs, films and chosen for simplicity of sentence structure and language.

One more strategy worthy to be taken into account is that learners of English should take responsibility for their own learning. In the process of speaking the target language what is valuable for learners is the use of special dictionaries where they can find the necessary notes as regard to definitions as well as the origin of many idiomatic phrases[3].

Furthermore, idiomatic expressions that occur in both the learners' first and target language are easier to remember and interpret, despite some interference. Due to the strong similarities across different culture idioms that are derived from similar images are often the same and fairly easy to understand [1].

At the same time it has been found that idiomatic expressions that completely differ from the learners' native language are harder and more difficult to process and understand. So, at the initial stage of working with idioms it would be appropriate to direct learners' attention to idioms having identities in L1 and L2. And only after that proceed to the second group of idioms.

Additionally, many idiomatic expressions are based on images, for example, "**I'm so hungry I could eat a horse**", is used to show the listener just how hungry the speaker is and this is why he/she eats an enormous amount of food. One more example of such kind of idiom is: **to flog a dead horse** having the meaning of 'wasting his/her energy by supporting a cause that is already lost'.

When dealing with the idiomatic lexicon, it is of great importance to reveal the link between an idiom and its meaning. Being aware of these links, the origin of the idiom and the image that the idiomatic expression is based on is one the basic ways to better help students learn and remember idioms.

When teaching idiomatic expressions teachers should bear in mind that English contains a lot of similes. These are the expressions built according to the pattern [as.....as.....], in which someone or something is likened to something else because of a particular characteristic – either real or imaginary. What unites these units into one layer is their comparative structure and semantic uniqueness. Though the set similes are figurative, their inner form is easily perceptible and, therefore, the distinctive features of a nation's life, customs, history and culture are revealed in them directly and strikingly.

It must be said that many of these similes refer to animals, so we can say that someone is **as brave as a lion** or **as gentle as a lamb**. These two examples refer to qualities in the animals which we would probably all agree about, but we also can say that someone is **as quiet as a mouse**, even though mice are not really very quiet if they are living in our houses.

Some similes refer to food, so we can use the expressions: **as soft as butter**, **as flat as a pancake**, **as sweet as honey**. Others refer to vegetables, and we can say that identical twins are **as like as two peas in a pod** and a person who keeps very calm is **as cool as a cucumber**.

Thorough study of this group of fixed similes can help to reveal the social norms typical for the people speaking the target language, their behavior and attitude towards one another. In addition, it is also possible to identify such feature of some idioms that the characteristics referred to is largely imaginary which is difficult to explain and this, in its turn, creates certain barriers in their quick and proper acquisition. For example, we say that a well-behaved child is '**as good as gold**' and that someone with a sun-tan is '**as brown as a berry**'.

In the process of learner's acquisition of the idiomatic vocabulary a great role is played by the teacher. English language teachers should be aware of idioms and their origins and provide their students with a thorough coverage of the most common idiomatic phrases in use. The example sentences can be drawn from a variety of written and spoken sources and chosen for simplicity of sentence structure and language. Teaching information and explaining the images that an idiom is based on is sure to simplify the learner's acquisition of the idioms.

The teacher should also create possibilities for learners to communicate using idioms in classrooms and ESL/ EFL environments. Moreover, teachers should encourage their students to apply this new knowledge outside classrooms and to learn more in their spare time. Learners should be encouraged to listen to news, watch programs and read materials that include idioms and idiomatic expressions.

Since idiomatic expressions are culturally bound and they carry the cultural beliefs and customs of their native language users, learning idiomatic expressions will enable the English language learner to become more knowledgeable and better aware of the English culture and customs.

Learning idiomatic phrases has a number of advantages. It leads non-naïve speakers to better English proficiency, helps their second or foreign language seem more native-like, and more creative and this is why this category of vocabulary units should not be overlooked to be taken for granted.

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