

TEACHING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS AND PHRASES: INSIGHTS AND TECHNIQUES

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Abstract: A substantial number of conventionalized spoken and written expressions have now been gathered, organized, and analyzed. In language teaching, this suggests that teaching grammar and vocabulary is more complex than simply focusing on syntactic rules and individual words. Both traditional and recent perspectives on the widespread use of idiomatic constructions present challenges as well as opportunities, making it essential for teachers to understand and become familiar with these language forms. This paper examines historical viewpoints and classifications of English idiomatic expressions, along with their use in conversation, speaking, writing, and instruction. It also proposes several teaching ideas and activities to support learning and applying idiomatic language in and beyond the classroom. Since most idiomatic and conventional expressions are specific to particular languages and cultures, their instruction can enhance learners' strategic fluency. Overall, teaching idiomatic language can improve both receptive and productive skills across different contexts.

Keywords: Idiomatic expressions, language teaching, vocabulary acquisition, communicative competence, strategic fluency, conventional language, teaching methodology.

Annotatsiya. Ogʻzaki va yozma nutqda qoʻllaniladigan koʻplab standartlashgan ifodalar hozirga kelib toʻplangan, tizimlashtirilgan va tahlil qilingan. Til oʻqitishda bu shuni koʻrsatadiki, grammatika va lugʻatni oʻrgatish faqat sintaktik qoidalar va alohida soʻzlarga eʼtibor qaratishdan koʻra ancha murakkab jarayondir. Idiomatik konstruksiyalarning keng qoʻllanishiga oid anʼanaviy va zamonaviy qarashlar ham muammolar, ham imkoniyatlarni yuzaga keltiradi, shu sababli oʻqituvchilar ushbu til shakllarini chuqur tushunishi va yaxshi bilishi zarur. Mazkur maqolada ingliz tilidagi idiomatik ifodalarning tarixiy qarashlari va tasniflari, shuningdek, ularning suhbatda, ogʻzaki nutqda, yozishda va taʼlim jarayonida qoʻllanilishi koʻrib chiqiladi. Bundan tashqari, idiomatik tilni oʻrganish va uni darsda hamda darsdan tashqarida qoʻllashni qoʻllab-quvvatlovchi turli pedagogik gʻoyalar va faoliyatlar taklif etiladi. Idiomatika va standart ifodalar koʻpincha muayyan til va madaniyatga xos boʻlganligi sababli, ularni oʻrgatish oʻquvchilarning strategik ravonligini rivojlantiradi. Umuman olganda, idiomatik tilni oʻrgatish turli kontekstlarda ham receptiv, ham produktiv koʻnikmalarni yaxshilaydi.

Kalit soʻzlar: Idiomatik ifodalar, til oʻqitish, lugʻatni oʻzlashtirish, kommunikativ kompetensiya, strategik ravonlik, standart ifodalar, oʻqitish metodikasi.

Аннотация. Значительное количество устных и письменных устойчивых выражений уже было собрано, систематизировано и проанализировано. В преподавании языка это показывает, что обучение грамматике и лексике является более сложным процессом, чем простое сосредоточение на синтаксических

правилах и отдельных словах. Как традиционные, так и современные подходы к широкому использованию идиоматических конструкций представляют собой как трудности, так и возможности, поэтому преподавателям необходимо понимать и хорошо знать эти языковые формы. В данной статье рассматриваются исторические взгляды и классификации английских идиоматических выражений, а также их использование в разговорной речи, устной речи, письме и обучении. Кроме того, предлагаются различные педагогические идеи и виды деятельности, направленные на развитие навыков понимания и использования идиоматического языка как в классе, так и за его пределами. Поскольку большинство идиоматических и устойчивых выражений характерны для конкретных языков и культур, их преподавание может способствовать развитию стратегической беглости учащихся. В целом, обучение идиоматическому языку способствует улучшению как рецептивных, так и продуктивных навыков в различных контекстах.

Ключевые слова: Идиоматические выражения, обучение языку, усвоение лексики, коммуникативная компетенция, стратегическая беглость, устойчивые выражения, методика преподавания.

Introduction. Defining what counts as an idiom, proverb, conventionalized expression, or grammatically irregular unit is widely recognized as difficult. Efforts to classify and describe such language forms have been ongoing since at least the 1940s. Consequently, these expressions are often challenging to explain in teaching, organize in learners' dictionaries, or systematically present in textbooks. With the development of computer technology and the growth of large language corpora across different texts and genres, there was hope that identifying and defining idiomatic expressions would become more systematic. However, corpus-based studies have instead highlighted their diversity, variability, and complexity, making classification even more complicated.

Research in the 1970s and 1980s on phraseology and lexicology provided important insights into the close relationship between vocabulary and grammar. Unlike traditional grammar approaches, studies of idiomatic constructions do not assume a strict separation between these two areas. Conventionalized expressions can range from single words or short phrases (such as *whatever* or *a piece of cake*) to full sentences (such as *actions speak louder than words*). Depending on their meaning and structure, these expressions form a continuum between vocabulary and grammar and are often treated as fixed units.

Linguistic research has also shown that many word combinations naturally sound correct to proficient speakers, and collocations are common in both spoken and written English. In contrast, combinations that rarely occur may seem unnatural, even if they are grammatically correct.

Classifications and Definitions As with practically all complex linguistic phenomena, various types of classifications and organizing schemes have been devised and debated to account for an extremely large body of idioms and conventionalized expressions. In the 1920s, Harold Palmer first addressed the utility of employing ubiquitous phrases and even whole sentences in learning English and developing conversational fluency (Palmer, 1925). According to Palmer's early findings, one of the fastest ways—if not the fastest way—to acquire facility in speaking was to memorize recurrent conversational expressions that could be useful recurrently. For a beginner,

Palmer stated, learning to speak in another language required the essential guiding principle: "Memorize perfectly the largest number of common and useful word groups!" (p. 187). In his subsequent work, Palmer (1933) identified and classified an enormous number of commonly occurring lexical phrases and phraseological units into content- and function-based groups that he called clusters. For the purposes of his pedagogical focus on practical language teaching and learning, Palmer also coined the term *collocation*, which, however, did not receive much notice until the 1950s. His definition of expressions and collocations for teaching was later adopted in many works on idiomatic phrases and has remained foundational to this day: "successions of words [that] must or should be learnt ... as an integral whole or independent entity, rather than by the process of piecing together their component parts" (p. 4). A seminal and groundbreaking work on idiom structure and meanings was further advanced by Adam Makkai (1972). Makkai divides idioms into two major classes: idioms of encoding (or phrasal/leximic idioms) when their meanings are transparent and deducible, and idioms of decoding (i.e., semantic idioms, with unpredictable meanings). In this taxonomy, polymorphemic words are categorized as idioms only when at least two free morphemes are present (e.g., free+way, sea+horse, or car+port), thus making the meanings opaque. On the other hand, the words that consist of free and bound morphemes together are not considered to be idiomatic because they require morphological knowledge and rules to decode their meanings, thus make their meaning more or less componential and deducible. For example, the meanings of such words as pre+view, im+possible, or bi+cycle that include one free and one bound morpheme can be decoded, even if approximately, based on the meanings of their components. Therefore, these cannot be classified as idiomatic. paraphrase entirely and keep the limit of words

Classifications and Definitions

Like many complex linguistic phenomena, idioms and conventionalized expressions have been categorized through various classification systems and frameworks. In the 1920s, Harold Palmer highlighted the importance of using common phrases and even full sentences in learning English and developing speaking fluency. His research suggested that one of the quickest ways to gain speaking ability was to memorize frequently used conversational expressions. He emphasized that beginners should focus on mastering as many useful word groups as possible. In later work, Palmer (1933) classified a wide range of recurring lexical phrases into groups based on their function and meaning, which he called clusters. To support practical language teaching, he also introduced the term *collocation*, although it only gained wider recognition in the 1950s. He defined such expressions as sequences of words that should be learned as complete units rather than assembled from individual parts, an idea that has remained influential in studies of idiomatic language.

Further advances were made by Adam Makkai (1972), who proposed two main types of idioms: encoding idioms, whose meanings are relatively transparent, and decoding (semantic) idioms, whose meanings are unpredictable. In his classification, words made up of at least two free morphemes may be considered idiomatic if their meanings are not easily inferred (e.g., *seahorse*). In contrast, words containing both free and bound morphemes, such as *preview* or *impossible*, are not treated as idioms because their meanings can be understood through morphological analysis.

In writing classes, conventionalized constructions can be practiced with or without variable components (e.g., The next issue/question to address/ consider/discuss

is...). A fundamental fact in regard to idioms, collocations, phrases, expressions, multi-word units, formulas, formulaic language, sentence stems, lexicalized constructions, chunks, lexical bundles, prefabricated routines, or clusters by any other name is that they are ubiquitous, pervasive, and astoundingly frequent. In language teaching and learning, they are essential. For most learners, the meanings of these constructions are usually impossible to figure out from the meanings of their component parts. The grammar features of most idiomatic phrases are irregular and un-derivable, and their logical analyses defy linguistic reason. Without learning, using, and being able to understand these language units, neither spoken nor written communication can be effective or even successful in accomplishing its goals. Teaching materials should incorporate these expressions whenever and wherever possible in any language skill. In language teaching, idiomatic expressions are far more important and prevalent than mere cultural peculiarities. For many L2 learners, these numerous, variable, and relatively long constructions can be difficult and work-consuming to learn and use. A great deal of exposure to and practice with naturally occurring formulaic phrases in speaking and writing would be to learners' best advantage, as it is likely to promote language analysis and acquisition. Currently, a relatively large number of spoken and written conventionalized expressions have been collected, catalogued, and systematized. In language pedagogy, a clear implication is that teaching grammar and vocabulary is likely to be more complicated than working with syntactic rules and single-word items. Old and new insights associated with the sheer ubiquity of idiomatic constructions can present both challenges and opportunities, but it seems vital for teachers to be aware of and become familiar with these language units. This may be as good a place to start as any.

Teaching idiomatic and routine expressions can benefit learners at all proficiency levels. For beginners, starting with a limited number of fixed or slightly variable expressions is effective, as these can be learned as complete units of language. In speaking instruction, commonly used conversational patterns are both practical and engaging, while in writing classes, standard expressions can be practiced with or without variation (e.g., *The next issue to consider is...*).

A key point is that idioms, collocations, phrases, formulaic language, sentence stems, lexical bundles, and other multi-word units are extremely common and widespread. They play a crucial role in language learning and use. For most learners, the meanings of these expressions cannot be easily understood from their individual components. In addition, their grammatical features are often irregular and cannot be logically derived. Without mastering these units, effective communication in both spoken and written forms is difficult to achieve.

Therefore, teaching materials should include such expressions across all language skills whenever possible. In fact, idiomatic language is not just a cultural feature but a central element of communication. However, for many second language learners, these numerous and often complex constructions can be challenging and time-consuming to learn. Regular exposure to and practice with authentic formulaic expressions in speaking and writing is highly beneficial, as it supports language development and understanding.

Today, many conventionalized expressions have already been collected and organized. This suggests that teaching grammar and vocabulary is more complex than focusing only on rules and individual words. Although the widespread nature of

idiomatic language presents both challenges and opportunities, it is essential for teachers to recognize and become familiar with these expressions as a starting point for effective instruction.

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