INTEGRATING LINGUOCULTURAL APPROACHES IN TEACHING ENGLISH IDIOMS TO UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract. This article explores the integration of linguistic and linguocultural approaches in teaching English idioms to Uzbek EFL learners. Idioms are examined not only as fixed lexical expressions but also as units that reflect cultural experience, national mentality, and patterns of figurative thinking. The paper focuses on the specific difficulties learners face when dealing with idiomatic language, including literal translation, misunderstanding of context, and limited cultural background knowledge. It also highlights several practical teaching techniques such as contextual explanation, comparison with native-language expressions, visual associations, and communicative classroom tasks. The study argues that a linguocultural approach makes idioms more understandable, memorable, and functionally useful in real communication. As a result, students improve not only their vocabulary and speaking skills but also their intercultural awareness and ability to interpret meaning more naturally in authentic English discourse.

Key words: linguocultural approach, idioms, EFL, cultural competence, English language teaching

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируется интеграция лингвистического и лингвокультурологического подходов при обучении английским идиомам узбекских изучающих английский язык. Идиомы рассматриваются не только как языковые единицы, но и как носители культурного опыта, образного мышления и коммуникативных традиций народа. В статье освещаются основные трудности, возникающие при обучении идиомам, включая дословный перевод, неправильное понимание контекста и недостаток фоновых культурных знаний. Также показывается значение контекстуального анализа, сопоставительного объяснения, визуальных ассоциаций и коммуникативных упражнений в эффективном обучении английским идиомам. Делается вывод о том, что лингвокультурологический подход способствует более глубокому усвоению идиом, их естественному употреблению в речи и развитию межкультурной компетенции учащихся.

Ключевые слова: лингвокультурология, идиомы, EFL, культурная компетенция, обучение английскому языку

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada o'zbek EFL auditoriyasida ingliz idiomalarini o'qitishda lingvistik va lingvokulturologik yondashuvlarni uyg'unlashtirish masalasi tahlil qilinadi. Idiomalar faqat til birligi emas, balki xalqning madaniy tajribasi, obrazli tafakkuri va kommunikativ an'analari bilan bog'liq hodisa sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi. Maqolada idiomalarni o'qitishda uchraydigan asosiy qiyinchiliklar, xususan, so'zma-so'z tarjima, kontekstni noto'g'ri tushunish va madaniy fon bilimining yetishmasligi yoritiladi. Shuningdek, ingliz idiomalarini o'zbek talabalariga samarali o'rgatishda

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kontekstual tahlil, qiyosiy izoh, vizual assotsiatsiya va kommunikativ mashqlar kabi usullarning ahamiyati ko'rsatib beriladi. Tadqiqot natijasida lingvokulturologik yondashuv idiomalarni chuqurroq o'zlashtirishga, ularni nutqda tabiiy qo'llashga va talabalarning madaniy kompetensiyasini rivojlantirishga xizmat qilishi asoslanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: lingvokulturologiya, idiomalar, EFL, madaniy kompetensiya, ingliz tili ta'limi

Introduction

In modern foreign language education, teaching a language only through grammar rules and isolated vocabulary is no longer considered sufficient. Language is closely connected with the history, values, worldview, and everyday life of the people who speak it. For this reason, successful language learning requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural understanding. This idea becomes especially important when students encounter idiomatic expressions, because idioms often carry meanings that cannot be understood through direct translation alone [1].

English idioms represent one of the most expressive and culturally loaded parts of the language. They reflect national traditions, metaphorical thinking, and communicative habits formed over many generations. Expressions such as break the ice, spill the beans, or once in a blue moon are widely used in authentic speech, but they are often difficult for Uzbek learners to understand correctly. Students may know the meaning of each separate word, yet still fail to grasp the real message of the whole expression. This problem appears because the meaning of an idiom is usually shaped by culture, context, and shared background knowledge rather than by the literal meanings of its components [2].

For Uzbek EFL learners, idioms present both linguistic and cultural challenges. In many cases, students try to translate them word for word into Uzbek, which leads to confusion or incorrect interpretation. In other cases, learners avoid using idioms at all because they are afraid of making mistakes. As a result, their speech may remain grammatically correct but sound unnatural or limited in real-life communication. Therefore, the teaching of idioms should go beyond memorization and include explanation of cultural images, communicative situations, and figurative meanings [3].

The purpose of this article is to examine how linguistic and linguocultural approaches can be integrated in teaching English idioms to Uzbek EFL learners. The article also aims to identify the main difficulties in idiom instruction and to suggest practical classroom strategies that can help students understand, remember, and use idiomatic expressions more effectively. By combining language analysis with cultural interpretation, teachers can make idiom learning more meaningful and communicatively relevant.

Literature Review and Methodology

The relationship between language and culture has been widely discussed in modern linguistics and foreign language teaching methodology. Researchers emphasize that language is not simply a system of grammar and vocabulary but also a reflection of social experience and cultural identity. Kramsch states that language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality, which means that every language unit can carry cultural meaning [1]. This idea is highly relevant to the teaching of idioms, since idiomatic expressions often emerge from historical experience, collective imagination, and traditional ways of perceiving the world.

Byram also stresses that foreign language teaching should develop intercultural communicative competence rather than only structural knowledge of the target language [2]. According to this view, students should learn how meanings are shaped by cultural context and how language reflects different patterns of thinking. Idioms are one of the clearest examples of such interaction between language and culture. If learners study them only as fixed phrases to memorize, they may fail to understand their pragmatic force and communicative value.

From a linguistic perspective, idioms are commonly described as fixed or semi-fixed expressions whose overall meaning cannot be fully predicted from the meanings of individual words [3]. This semantic opacity makes them difficult for learners. However, many scholars note that idioms are easier to learn when teachers explain the metaphorical image behind them. Boers and Lindstromberg argue that figurative motivation, visual support, and contextualized teaching help learners remember idioms more effectively and use them more naturally in speech [4].

The present article uses descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods. First, several common English idioms were selected and examined from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. Second, their meanings and use were compared with Uzbek expressions that have similar communicative functions. Third, common difficulties observed among Uzbek learners were analyzed in order to propose practical teaching recommendations. This approach makes it possible to view idioms not only as lexical material but also as elements of intercultural communication.

Discussion and Results

One of the main problems in teaching English idioms to Uzbek learners is literal translation. Students often try to understand each word separately and then build the meaning from those individual parts. For example, when learners first meet the idiom spill the beans, they may imagine an action involving actual beans rather than understanding the idiom as "to reveal a secret." This type of misunderstanding happens because the learner focuses on the surface form rather than the figurative message [5]. In such cases, the teacher should explain the idiom within a real communicative context and show how it functions in natural speech.

Another difficulty is the absence of direct equivalents between English and Uzbek idioms. Some English idioms can be explained with a similar Uzbek phrase, while others require descriptive interpretation. For instance, once in a blue moon can be rendered through expressions meaning "very rarely" or "from time to time," but there is no exact lexical equivalent that reproduces the same cultural image. Likewise, break the ice may be explained as starting communication in an awkward or formal situation, yet its figurative basis may remain unclear unless students imagine the social situation behind the phrase. This shows that idiom teaching should include semantic explanation, cultural commentary, and functional usage rather than simple translation.

A linguocultural approach helps solve these issues by connecting idioms with cultural images and communicative practices. When students learn why a particular image is used in an idiom, they usually remember it better. For example, the idiom break the ice becomes easier to understand if students imagine a situation where emotional distance exists between people and one person says or does something to make interaction easier. The teacher can present a short dialogue, ask students to identify the communicative problem, and then introduce the idiom as the natural solution. In this way, the idiom is learned not as an isolated phrase but as part of a meaningful situation.

Visual association is also highly effective in idiom instruction. If students see a picture, short story, or classroom role-play linked to the idiom, they are more likely to retain both its image and its meaning. For example, to teach hit the books, a teacher can show a student preparing seriously for an exam and ask learners to guess whether the phrase refers to physical action or intensive studying. This creates curiosity and makes the lesson more memorable. Visual and situational presentation supports both comprehension and long-term retention [4].

Comparison with the native language can also play a productive role when used carefully. Teachers may ask students whether Uzbek has expressions with a similar communicative purpose. This does not mean looking for exact translation in every case; instead, it means helping learners notice how two languages express meaning differently. Such comparison develops both language awareness and cultural sensitivity. Students begin to understand that every language has its own logic, imagery, and preferred ways of describing reality.

In addition, idiom teaching should be connected with communicative practice. Students should not only identify idioms in reading texts but also use them in speaking and writing activities. Short dialogues, role plays, story completion tasks, matching exercises, and situational discussions can all be effective. For example, learners may be asked to create a short conversation using under the weather, cost an arm and a leg, or piece of cake. Through repeated contextual use, idioms become part of active vocabulary rather than passive recognition.

The analysis shows that teaching idioms through a purely linguistic approach is not enough for Uzbek EFL learners. Although students may memorize definitions, they often struggle to understand idioms in authentic texts and spontaneous speech. When idioms are taught with cultural explanation and communicative context, however, comprehension becomes deeper and usage becomes more accurate. Learners are able to connect form, meaning, and context more successfully.

The study also demonstrates that a linguocultural approach increases student motivation. Idioms are often interesting because they contain unusual imagery and reflect a different way of seeing the world. When teachers explain the background of these expressions and compare them with Uzbek communicative patterns, students become more engaged in the learning process. They begin to see idioms not as strange expressions to memorize, but as meaningful elements of real language use.Another result is that contextual and visual teaching techniques improve retention. Students remember idioms more effectively when they hear them in dialogues, see them in stories, or associate them with specific situations. This confirms that idiom learning becomes more successful when cultural explanation is combined with communicative activity and not limited to dictionary meaning alone.

Conclusion

In conclusion, English idioms should be taught as both linguistic and cultural units. Their meanings are closely linked to metaphor, cultural memory, and communicative tradition, which makes them an important component of foreign language education. For Uzbek EFL learners, idioms are often difficult because of literal translation habits, limited background knowledge, and lack of contextual practice. Therefore, integrating linguistic and linguocultural approaches is essential for more effective idiom instruction.

Several practical recommendations can be suggested. First, teachers should introduce idioms in context rather than in isolated lists. Second, cultural explanation should accompany semantic interpretation, especially when the idiom contains unfamiliar imagery. Third, visual materials, mini-dialogues, and role-play activities should be used to make idioms memorable and communicatively relevant. Fourth, comparison with Uzbek expressions may be helpful when it clarifies function and meaning without encouraging mechanical translation. Finally, idioms should be recycled regularly through speaking, reading, and writing tasks so that students can move from passive understanding to active use.

Such an approach can enrich vocabulary learning, improve communicative fluency, and develop intercultural competence. As a result, students become more confident users of English and more attentive readers of cultural meaning in language.

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