

TEACHING PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS RELATED TO MONEY AS METAPHORS THROUGH AWARENESS ACTIVITIES AND AI TOOLS

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Abstract. *This study examines the teaching of money-related phraseological units as metaphors in EFL contexts. Such expressions are often difficult for learners due to their figurative meanings. The research investigates the effectiveness of awareness-raising activities combined with AI-supported tools, such as chatbots and language learning applications. Intermediate-level students participate in tasks including context analysis, matching exercises, and guided discussions. A mixed-method approach is used, incorporating pre- and post-tests, classroom observation, and student questionnaires. The findings are expected to demonstrate that integrating awareness activities with AI support enhances learners' comprehension, engagement, and ability to use idiomatic expressions accurately in communication.*

Keywords: *phraseological units, idioms, metaphor, learners, vocabulary teaching, artificial intelligence, learning tools, communicative competence.*

Introduction

Phraseological units, particularly idioms, play an essential role in achieving communicative competence in English. However, learners often struggle with these expressions because their meanings are figurative rather than literal. Money-related idioms are especially common in everyday communication but difficult to interpret without cultural and metaphorical awareness. Recent pedagogical approaches emphasize awareness-raising activities that encourage learners to notice patterns and infer meaning. At the same time, developments in artificial intelligence (AI) have introduced new opportunities for interactive and personalized language learning. This study aims to explore how combining awareness-raising techniques with AI tools can improve learners' understanding and use of money-related phraseological units.

Methods

The study uses a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative analysis with a small-scale experimental design. Some phraseological units denoting to money were chosen from an English data. These units were chosen based on their frequency in everyday communication and their metaphorical nature. The methodology consists of three stages: selection of phraseological units, awareness-raising instruction supported by AI tools, and comparative analysis of learner performance. The analysis focuses on three criteria: semantic understanding, metaphorical awareness, and correct usage in context. The study is grounded in cognitive linguistic theory, which views idioms as conceptual metaphors shaped by embodied experience and cultural knowledge. The integration of AI is expected to enhance learners' ability to interpret and apply phraseological units more effectively.

Results and discussion

The results into a table will make our analysis much clearer and more academic. As shown in Table 1, learners' understanding shifted from literal interpretations to

metaphor-based meanings. The results indicate that conceptual metaphor awareness significantly improved comprehension and usage of money-related idioms.

Table1

Phraseological units	Literal Interpretation (Before Instruction)	Conceptual Metaphor	Metaphorical Meaning (After Instruction)	Learner Outcome
Money talks	money can speak	Money is power	money has influence	Partial improvement
Break the bank	damage a bank physically	Money is value/sacrifice	spend too much money	Correct usage in context
Save for a rainy day	saving for bad weather	Difficulties are bad weather	save money for future problems	Correct interpretation
Throw money away	physically throwing money	Money is a disposable object	waste money	Correct usage
This phone eats my money (learner production)	literal expression	Money is a consumable resource	spending a lot of money (non-standard form)	Partial understanding
Tighten one's belt	make a belt tighter	Economic control is physical constraint	reduce spending	Appropriate usage

The results show that students improved not only in recognizing idioms but also in understanding their metaphorical meanings. Before the instruction, many learners interpreted idioms literally. For example, the expression “*break the bank*” was often understood as physically damaging a bank. After the awareness-raising and AI-supported activities, most students correctly interpreted it as “*spending too much money.*” Similarly, the idiom “*cost an arm and a leg*” was initially confusing for learners, but after instruction, students understood it as ‘*very expensive.*’ This improvement suggests that learners began to recognize the conceptual metaphor money as *value or sacrifice*, where high cost is associated with losing something important.

Another example is “*save for a rainy day.*” At first, some students associated it only with weather. However, after contextual practice, they correctly interpreted it as ‘*saving money for future problems*’, reflecting the metaphor difficult times are bad weather.

In productive tasks, students also showed progress. For instance, in writing activities, learners used expressions such as “*I don’t want to break the bank when buying a phone*” or “*This car costs an arm and a leg.*” These examples demonstrate improved **contextual usage**. However, some difficulties remained. A few students produced mixed or incorrect expressions, such as “*This phone eats my money,*” showing partial understanding of the concept but inaccurate idiomatic use. Moreover, frequently used expression, “*tighten one’s belt,*” was understood through the metaphor economic control is physical constraint. Students learned that reducing spending is conceptualized as physically restricting oneself, reinforcing the embodied nature of metaphorical thinking. Despite these improvements, some learners produced non-standard

expressions such as “*this phone eats my money.*” While incorrect idiomatically, this reflects an emerging conceptual mapping aligned with money is food or consumable resource, indicating partial metaphorical awareness but insufficient exposure to conventionalized forms.

Conclusion

This study has explored the effectiveness of teaching money-related phraseological units as metaphorical expressions through awareness-raising activities supported by AI tools. The findings demonstrate that idioms are not arbitrary linguistic forms but are systematically structured by underlying conceptual metaphors. By helping learners recognize these metaphorical patterns, instruction can move beyond rote memorization toward deeper cognitive and semantic understanding. The results indicate that awareness-raising activities significantly enhance learners’ ability to interpret idioms metaphorically and use them appropriately in context. Students showed clear progress in shifting from literal interpretations to conceptual mappings such as money is a resource, money is value, and difficulties are bad weather. At the same time, the integration of AI tools provided valuable support through immediate feedback, contextualized examples, and increased opportunities for independent practice. This combination contributed not only to improved comprehension but also to higher levels of engagement and learner autonomy.

However, the study also highlights several important challenges. Not all idioms are easily interpretable through metaphorical analysis, particularly those that are culturally specific or semantically opaque. In addition, some learners produced mixed or non-standard expressions, indicating that conceptual understanding does not automatically lead to accurate usage. These findings confirm that explicit instruction, cultural explanation, and teacher guidance remain essential components of idiom teaching, especially in EFL contexts with limited exposure to authentic language. Pedagogically, the study suggests that an integrated approach is the most effective. Awareness-raising activities, conceptual metaphor theory, AI-supported learning, and traditional techniques such as memorization and translation should be used in combination rather than in isolation. Such a balanced methodology allows learners to benefit from both cognitive understanding and practical reinforcement.

Finally, while the results are promising, the study is limited by its small sample size and short duration. Future research could investigate long-term effects, include learners of different proficiency levels, and further explore the role of advanced AI technologies in language education. Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the growing body of research supporting cognitively informed and technology-enhanced approaches to teaching idiomatic language in EFL settings.

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