

## TEACHING IDIOMS

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The English language is particularly rich in idioms, without which it would lose much of its variety and humour both in speech and writing. The background and etymological origins of most idioms is at best obscure. This is the reason why studying idioms is somewhat difficult.

If you look up the word idiom in Webster's dictionary you'll find the following definition: "An idiom is an expression whose meaning cannot be predicted from the usual meaning of its constituent elements" as *dog's dinner*, which means-ничтожество, презренный человек. "U talk to me as if I was the dog's dinner" - Вы со мной так разговариваете, словно перед вами не человек, а пустое место. (A. Sillito, 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning', p.II, ch.XIII).

T.C. Cooper gives another definition of idiom. "An idiom can have a literal meaning, but its alternate, figurative meaning must be understood metaphorically" [1].

Why teach idioms? Native speakers of a language use idioms all the time. Idioms are the grease that makes language flow. Students are often embarrassed if they cannot understand the idioms, because in some cases misunderstanding can lead to disaster. Communication is everything!

A strong knowledge of idioms will help students to be better speakers and negotiators and they will be in a much better position to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way.

"Since idiomatic expressions are so frequently encountered in both spoken and written discourse, they require special attention in language programs and should not be relegated to a position of secondary importance in the curriculum" [1].

Cooper did a research on the frequency of the use of idiomatic expressions. He transcribed the idioms from three hours of taped television programs and the result was amazing: idioms occurred at the rate of about three per minute, understanding those idioms was crucial to understanding the plot.

Research on idioms proves that, firstly, the more language teachers use figurative language in classroom discourse, the better students master idiom interpretation; secondly, people acquire more easily the idioms that are syntactically frozen and those whose literal meaning is close to their figurative one, e.g. *dirty money*. Syntactically flexible idioms retain their figurative meaning even if transformed into passive. Transparent idioms have close relationship between literal and figurative meanings. Opaque idioms have obscure relationship between literal and figurative meanings [2].

For all learners the comprehension of idiomatic expressions is facilitated by contextual support.

Idioms can be grouped according to the main words they contain: verbs or nouns, e.g. *Time is money*, *argument is war*.

Choosing idioms is very important. Which ones should be taught?

- ✓ Choose idioms that are frequently encountered in target language.
- ✓ Choose expressions that do not present special problems with vocabulary and grammar.
- ✓ Choose expressions with transparent figurative meanings.

It's also advisable:

a) to compare an idiom with its slang, colloquial and standard speech registers, e.g. *to calm someone down*:

- chill out (slang);
- take it easy (colloquial);
- Don't worry about it, everything will be alright (standard).

b) to divide idioms into thematic categories, which will make them easier to learn. The examples of categories:

– body parts (*big/good hand* – *Give a little girl a great big hand.* – Давайте устроим малышке овации);

– animals (*selling the bear skin before catching the bear* – делить шкуру неубитого медведя);

– idioms expressing emotions (*in high spirits* – в хорошем настроении, *in a black mood* – в плохом настроении);

– idioms describing people (*a lazy-bones* – ленивый, *round the band* – сумасшедший);

– idioms connected with money (*be flush with money* – денег куры не клюют);

– idioms used in business (*fat cat* - богатч, денежный мешок, *rat race* - жестокая конкуренция) etc.

c) to draw idioms: it is effective for showing the contrast between the literal and figurative meanings.

d) to dramatize idioms: act them out to compare in a humorous way literal and figurative meanings.

e) retelling exercise: the teacher tells a story containing several idioms and the students have to retell it.

f) to discuss idioms from newspaper comic strips.

g) to collect cartoons and discuss idioms in them.

h) to compile idioms from TV shows ( sitcoms, films), view in class and discuss.

i) to practice idioms through music.

j) to work in groups. There are a lot of ways for this activity, for example, we can assign each group a set of idioms ( at least five idioms per group of five students) where each student in turn explains his/her idiom and makes a sentence with it even using drawings or pictures from magazines or newspapers. Let's take as an example an idiom '*out of the blue*' which means suddenly and unexpectedly.

-*Did you know they would move you to a different project?*

-*Not at all. It was completely out of the blue.*

To make a conclusion, we should state that it is very important to have a plan of instruction that incorporates various intelligences in order to give a chance to all students to succeed in learning idioms. Using idioms appropriately generates confidence in the student and respect in those with whom he/she comes in contact.

### ***Literature references:***

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