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## THE ROLE OF IDIOMS IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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*Проаналізовано роль ідіом у викладанні англійської мови. Представлені основні групи ідіом та описані головні методи їх викладання.*

*Ключові слова: ідіома, викладання, класифікація, метод, контекст.*

*The role of idioms in teaching English has been analyzed. The main groups of idioms have been presented and basic techniques of teaching English idioms have been described.*

*Key words: idiom, teaching, classification, technique, context.*

In recent years, there has been heightened awareness of the critical role of vocabulary in English language learning and teaching. Within this broad area of academic inquiry, there is also general consensus that the vocabulary of a given language is much more than a list of individual words. A speaker's mental dictionary (or lexicon) also contains a wide range of **multiword units** such as phrasal verbs ("put up with"), social routines ("take care"), collocations ("plastic surgery"), and idioms ("bite the bullet"). There is good reason for focusing on multiword units: research suggests that a large proportion of language, perhaps as high as 50 percent – is composed of such sequences [1]. Many of these multiword units contain one or more figurative elements, such that the meaning of the entire phrase is not easily predicable.

Idiom is a phrase or expression whose total meaning differs from the meaning of the individual words. For example, to blow one's top (get angry) and behind the eight ball (in trouble) are English-language idioms. Idioms come from language and generally cannot be translated literally (word for word). Foreign language students must learn them just as they would learn vocabulary words. Idioms come to be a very numerous part of English. Idioms cover a lot of drawbacks of the English language and it is one-third part of the colloquial speech. While some teaching materials may ignore idioms, or try to demote their importance, it is best for teachers to take the time to explain, discuss, and make their students use them. *"Avoiding the use of idioms gives*

*language a bookish, stilted, unimaginative tone"* [1]. Students can benefit greatly from direct instruction of specific idioms within context and also as part of developing their word consciousness. Overall, allowing the time for investigation, practice, and use of idioms in the classroom will benefit all of students' abilities to understand and use these useful expressions.

There is a classification of idioms according to the **parts of speech** [3]. There are four groups: nominal phrases: hard luck (misfortune); adjective phraseological units: all fingers and thumbs (clumsy); verbal: to get on like a house on fire (to make progress); adverbial: vice versa (conversely). Idioms can be divided into such groups as: **everyday expressions** (it takes the conversation back to an earlier point, from my point of view); **idioms describing people**: his fingers are all thumbs (he's clumsy), she has iron nerves (she's composed); how people relate to the **social norm**: I think Mary has a secret to hide (She keeps something from us); **feelings or mood**: to get on someone's nerves (to exasperate), to have a horror of (to disgust), to be as happy as the day is long (extremely content); **physical feelings and states**: to burst into tears (to cry); **people's fear or fright**: she was scared stiff (very scared); **problematic situations**: a hard luck (failure); idioms connected with *easing the situation*: to do well (recover), to get off lightly (escape). Idioms connected with **praise and criticism**: to go on at someone (criticize); **talk in discussions, meetings, etc.**: to strike up a conversation (to start a conversation); **idioms based on names of the parts of the body**: to lend an ear (to listen to); **daily routine**: to do up (tidy up) etc.

There are also single idioms which cannot be included into described above groups: to run out (to come to an end), all in all (as a result), all of a sudden (unexpectedly).

There is no pedagogy exclusive to idioms; most research suggests using a wide range of techniques. Teachers can rest assured that most vocabulary teaching strategies will be applicable to idioms as well. An important first step is exposing students to idioms in **context**. Students should be encouraged to infer the meaning of the idiom by using contextual clues, conceptual knowledge, and first language equivalents. The role of context is central in language learning. It's common that students don't really understand the various meanings of new words in different contexts. That's why

students don't know how to apply the words they have learned practically in various contexts. It's fundamental for teachers to provide a rich context for students' language learning and practice. There are several techniques to make learners aware of the link between the idiom's literal and figurative meanings.

A first step would be to raise students' awareness of idioms so that they develop a habit of noticing them in everyday situations, including reading and listening. Students can be asked to keep an idiom notebook; they can later share their examples in class and ask questions about appropriate usage. Teachers can draw attention to new idioms by embedding them into regular vocabulary and reading activities.

If we assume that idioms are best learned through exposure to authentic language (rather than contrived examples), teachers should take advantage of natural language source passages (e.g., TV, newspapers). Authentic examples can be easily modified for classroom purposes depending on the students' proficiency level.

Students can draw pictures to represent the literal meaning; this can be particularly effective for lower-proficiency learners or for idioms that have image-evoking potential (e.g., to be down in the dumps).

After presenting idioms in context and helping students infer their meaning, teachers should force retrieval of the idioms that have been studied. This can be done in numerous ways, including typical vocabulary exercises like matching idioms to their meanings, filling in blanks with the appropriate idiom, replacing underlined expressions with an idiom, etc. Finally, to promote output and creative language use, students can write dialogues using the idioms or tell stories based on pictures. Students are likely to be passive learners when they receive lectures only in classrooms. On the contrary, small group discussion could stimulate students to be involved in the active process of constructing knowledge. Furthermore, during group discussions, students will learn from each other, whether consciously or unconsciously. Accordingly, teachers can apply group discussion in students' active learning of English idioms before explaining the meaning of idioms to them. Students in group discussion can understand English idioms better than when they are introduced to English idioms within a story only. This demonstrates the significant effect of group talk on students' understanding of English idioms.

Incorporating idioms into a curriculum may seem like a daunting task because of the sheer number of idioms that exist in any language. To approach the task, teachers and students should remember that an idiom learning is a lifelong process. Another important point is that by teaching idioms in class using some of the techniques mentioned, teacher is also providing students with coping strategies for dealing with figurative language in general. Through a greater awareness of idioms, their literal meanings, and underlying conceptual metaphors, students will be better equipped to “unpick” figurative language and make sense of it without teacher guidance.

A student with advanced skills would need and want to learn idioms in order to better his comprehension of the English language as well as students on a lower level would enjoy learning an occasional idiom because these phrases make the English language more colorful and unique.

Since it is vital for students to learn English idioms in order to master English, it is important for teachers to design various activities for students, use English idioms and subsequently acquire them efficiently. Moreover, students learn better when they are provided with collaborative activities because they can interact with peers and share fun in learning. Finally, when teachers integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing activities together in teaching English idioms, students can be involved in the application of English idioms in four skills. Thus, it is effective to teach students English idiom when they are provided with various activities to practice and utilize English idioms in different contexts.

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