



THE ROLE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Annotation:

The study of foreign languages, particularly English, cannot be complete without a thorough understanding of phraseology, one of the most challenging and integral components of language acquisition. Phraseological units, such as idioms, phrasal verbs, fixed expressions, proverbs, and aphorisms, enrich communication by adding depth, nuance, and expressiveness to speech and writing. This paper explores the essential role these units play in developing learners' productive language skills, highlighting how phraseological competence enhances vocabulary, fluency, and cultural awareness. Emphasizing the importance of communicative activities that simulate real-life contexts, the study advocates for systematic and culturally informed teaching of phraseological units. Mastery of these expressions enables learners of English as a foreign language to achieve more natural, effective, and authentic communication.

Keywords: Phraseological units, idioms, communicative competence, English language learners, vocabulary development, language fluency, cultural awareness, foreign language teaching.

The study of any foreign language, particularly English, is incomplete without engaging with phraseology—one of the most complex levels of language acquisition. Idioms, being essential units of spoken communication, should be taught through communicative activities that simulate real-life speech situations. It is widely acknowledged that mastery of English as a foreign language necessitates familiarity with a wide range of complex lexical items. To gain a deep command of a foreign language, learners must develop their skills in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary—with phraseological units playing a central role.



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The English language is notably rich in phraseological units. These include idioms, phrasal verbs, fixed expressions, proverbs, maxims, and aphorisms, all of which are essential for making speech dynamic, nuanced, and engaging. Without such units, both spoken and written language would lack depth and expressiveness.

The ability to use these expressions is a strong indicator of advanced language proficiency. A well-educated individual who possesses a strong command of phraseological resources is often able to communicate ideas more clearly, concisely, and persuasively. For this reason, all language learners—particularly those aiming for fluency—should actively incorporate commonly used expressions into their speech. Phraseological competence not only broadens vocabulary but also enhances fluency and communicative effectiveness. In fact, a strong knowledge of phraseological units is fundamental to sounding more natural and native-like in both oral and written English. Therefore, phraseology as a branch of linguistics should be systematically and thoroughly explored by learners. Understanding the origins, characteristics, and cultural context of these units is essential for developing fluency, accuracy, and cultural sensitivity in English. In short, studying phraseological units enables EFL learners to construct more complex, authentic, and effective speech.

Phraseology can be viewed as a rich "gallery of images," reflecting a nation's cultural identity through vivid expressions that capture its customs, traditions, historical memories, and fragments of folklore, such as songs and fairy tales. Every language contains phrases or sentences that defy literal interpretation. Even when a learner understands all the individual words and grammatical structure, the overall meaning may still remain unclear. These expressions are referred to as idiomatic. Many idioms have their origins in literary works, particularly in quotations from well-known authors like William Shakespeare. For instance, the expression "at one fell swoop" is taken from Macbeth, while "cold comfort" appears in King John. Over time, the meanings of some of these idioms have evolved, diverging from their original literary context.

Teaching phraseology plays a crucial role in the cultural dimension of foreign language pedagogy. While the cultural approach emphasizes the sociocultural background of expressions, a linguistic approach focuses on understanding the



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internal structure and meaning components of phraseological units. As the renowned Kazakh writer Abay once remarked, effective learning requires students to be genuinely enthusiastic and motivated to read and explore. Therefore, it is essential for educators to adopt the most engaging and effective teaching strategies to make phraseology accessible and memorable.

The primary aim of this research is to explore effective methods for teaching phraseological units, recognizing their importance in both language mastery and cultural competence.

Phraseology can be seen as a vivid “picture gallery,” capturing a nation’s cultural memory, including its customs, values, folklore, songs, historical events, and shared beliefs. Every language contains phrases or expressions whose meanings cannot be interpreted literally. Even if a learner understands all the individual words and grammar in an expression, its overall meaning may remain unclear. Such constructions are known as idioms.

Many idioms in English have literary origins—particularly from the works of Shakespeare. For instance, the phrase “at one fell swoop” comes from Macbeth, while “cold comfort” is from King John. Interestingly, many idioms have evolved in meaning over time and now differ significantly from their original usage /

Teaching phraseological units is a key element of the cultural approach in foreign language education. This method emphasizes the importance of culture in language learning. In contrast, the linguistic approach focuses on analyzing the internal structure and component meanings of phraseological expressions. As Kazakh writer Abay wisely noted, “For your students to study well, your students need to have a great deal of enthusiasm and interest in reading.” Therefore, language educators should adopt the most engaging and appropriate instructional strategies to foster curiosity and ease in learning phraseology.

The study of any foreign language, particularly English, cannot be considered complete without attention to phraseology. Phraseological units—especially idioms—are among the most complex linguistic elements and require specialized instruction. Since idioms function as units of speech communication, they are best taught through communicative, contextualized exercises that mirror real-life



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dialogue and interaction. Such methods allow students to perform speech acts in situations that feel genuine and relevant.

It is widely recognized that achieving fluency in English as a foreign language requires mastery of a wide range of complex lexical items. While pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary form the foundation of language learning, phraseological units are arguably the most essential of all. English is particularly rich in these units, including idioms, phrasal verbs, set expressions, aphorisms, proverbs, and maxims. These elements bring depth, nuance, and color to language. Without them, both written and spoken English would appear flat or monotonous.

The ability to use phraseological expressions accurately is a hallmark of fluency and linguistic maturity. A well-educated individual who possesses a deep understanding of phraseology is often capable of expressing thoughts clearly, succinctly, and persuasively. Therefore, for students and learners seeking fluency, frequent and accurate use of idiomatic and set expressions is essential.

Phraseological units also expand learners' vocabulary, enhance expressiveness, and add stylistic variety. Their importance in second language proficiency is well-established. Mastery of phraseology enables learners to speak more fluently, express themselves with greater precision, and sound more native-like in both oral and written communication. Because idioms and other fixed expressions are widely used in authentic discourse, phraseology should be taught systematically as a distinct area of linguistic study.

In short, learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) must study phraseology in depth—its meanings, origins, structural features, cultural contexts, and proper usage. Doing so allows them to construct more complex, natural, and culturally appropriate speech, enhancing both fluency and comprehension.

Teaching methods play a central role in language instruction and are one of five core components in the learning process—alongside the student, teacher, materials, and assessment. Teaching methods encompass everything that facilitates language acquisition. In the context of phraseology, it is not enough to merely explain meanings; learners must also be taught how to use phraseological units correctly and appropriately in context.



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Teaching materials vary widely and include printed resources (e.g., textbooks), digital tools (e.g., corpora and software), and audiovisual media (e.g., videos and visual aids). However, this study focuses specifically on paper-based materials, particularly textbooks. The choice of appropriate teaching materials and methodologies is critical. A non-native speaker who uses an idiom accurately can convey fluency and confidence. Conversely, incorrect or awkward use of idioms can have the opposite effect, undermining communicative success.

Given the limited instructional time typically allocated to foreign language study in educational institutions, it is unrealistic to expect grammar and phraseology to develop independently without structured guidance. Thus, explicit and effective instruction in phraseological units is not just beneficial but essential for developing learners' productive skills in English.

To enhance students' spoken language proficiency, idioms and phraseological units should be introduced orally rather than in written form. It is essential to emphasize their conversational and informal nature, clarifying that such expressions are primarily used in colloquial spoken English, not in highly formal writing. Educators are encouraged to incorporate these expressions into dialogue-based practice, allowing students to actively use them in realistic speech scenarios. This promotes both fluency and communicative confidence.

Rather than overwhelming learners with extensive lists of idioms, a selective approach is more effective. Teachers should focus on a small, manageable set of 5–10 phraseological units per lesson. Each unit should be clearly explained in context, with attention to meaning, usage, and typical speech situations. This targeted method enhances both retention and accurate usage.

The original contribution of this study lies in developing a communicative approach that integrates phraseological units into speaking exercises, aiming not only to strengthen speaking skills but also to boost learner motivation. Given the growing importance of vocabulary acquisition in second language (L2) learning—especially in recent years—teaching phraseological units is a crucial component of modern language pedagogy.

Teaching idioms by thematic categories enhances student comprehension. Many English idioms are grouped naturally by themes—such as weather, animals, sports,



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or food. By organizing instruction around a theme, learners can recognize patterns and contrasts within a semantic field, making abstract meanings easier to grasp.

For instance:

Weather idioms: "under the weather," "storm in a teacup"

Animal idioms: "let the cat out of the bag," "a wild goose chase"

Food idioms: "spill the beans," "piece of cake"

This thematic structure improves learner engagement and facilitates associative learning.

Visual tools, such as pictures or humorous illustrations, are especially effective when teaching idiomatic expressions. Presenting a literal visual interpretation of a phrase—such as a cat literally being let out of a bag—can provoke laughter and simultaneously aid comprehension. These images stimulate visual memory and support the learners in making cognitive connections between literal and figurative meanings.

Flashcards, memes, or hand-drawn sketches can all serve this purpose. Once students view the image, the teacher can ask them to infer or guess the meaning, thereby engaging critical thinking and interpretive skills before providing the correct usage in context.

One engaging classroom activity involves writing three or four idioms centered on a single theme—such as animals or body parts—on the board. Students are then divided into groups and challenged to guess the meanings of these phraseological units collaboratively. While students work, the teacher circulates around the room to monitor progress, awarding points for correct definitions. Afterward, the class discusses the correct meanings and the teacher provides contextual examples to reinforce understanding. The game continues with another set of idioms based on a different theme, and the first team to accumulate ten points wins. This activity promotes active participation, reinforces thematic connections among idioms, and fosters cooperative learning.

Another highly effective method for teaching phraseology in universities and schools is the incorporation of authentic foreign literature. Despite its proven potential, this approach has not received sufficient attention in language teaching



discourse. Literary texts provide a rich source of phraseological units due to their artistic and emotive nature, making them ideal for contextual learning.

The use of authentic literature serves as a powerful tool for enhancing students' vocabulary and broadening their knowledge of idiomatic expressions and set phrases. Exposure to such texts not only increases lesson engagement but also makes learning more memorable and meaningful. Integrating foreign fiction into home reading assignments can thus serve as an effective supplementary method for mastering phraseological units

Phraseology plays a critical role in improving learners' abilities in reading and listening comprehension, as well as enhancing fluency and accuracy in spoken and written production. Activities such as speaking exercises, discussions, and pair work—when focused on phraseological units—are both challenging and highly motivating. They make the language appear more natural and authentic, thus fostering deeper learner engagement.

Teaching idioms effectively and creatively enables students not only to understand the language better but also to master it consciously. Such activities help overcome common difficulties associated with idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and sayings, while simultaneously illustrating how cultural elements permeate language.

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