

The role of idioms in teaching English

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Nowadays as the use of English is increasing, becoming the one language that everybody needs to know to be effective in the world of internet commerce, international business, even social media connections, so the number of English learners is also increasing. English idioms, proverbs, and expressions are an important part of everyday English. They come up all the time in both written and spoken English. Because idioms do not always make sense literally, you will need to familiarize yourself with the meaning and usage of each idiom. That may seem like a lot of work, but learning idioms is fun, especially when you compare English idioms to the idioms in your own language. Learning to use common idioms and expressions will make your English sound more native, so it is a good idea to master some of these expressions. If English is not your first language, or even if English is, idioms can be a little confusing. So often people fail to understand what exactly an idiom is, how to use it in everyday conversations, or how to spot or use them in writing.

The definition of idioms varies in the literature. As Lennon states, language is more or less idiomatic in the scale of idiomaticity [Lennon:11]. Scholars such as Cooper, however, address that idioms are a type of multi-word units that have non-literal meaning [Cooper:12]. Fernando puts idioms into three categories: pure idioms (kick the bucket = die, bread and butter = main income, earning activity), semiliteral idioms (use something as a step stone) and literal idioms (according to) [Fernando:20]. While Oxford English Dictionary defines idioms as “a form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase etc., peculiar to a language; a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language, and often having a significance other than its grammatical or logical one. Russian linguist Vinogradov who adheres to the narrow approach classifies idioms according to their features into three groups: phraseological unions (the basic characteristics are their semantic indivisibility, impossibility to infer the meaning from their components); phraseological unities (the idiom’s meaning can be inferred from the merged meaning of its components); phraseological combinations (the idiom’s meaning can be derived from the meaning of its components) [Vinogradov:13]. Cowie applied the following terms to the above mentioned categories of idioms which accurately reveal their essence: pure idioms (e.g., beat around the bush), figurative idioms (e.g., steal someone’s heart) and restricted collocations (e.g., meet the demands). [Cowie:32] There are a lot of definitions of idioms by different scholars, and the majority of these define idioms as semantically complex, compositionally permanent, morphologically and syntactically fixed.

Methods of teaching English idioms

Some students with good English grammar and vocabulary think that they can communicate in English. However, they still fail to communicate when they discover that the language English speakers actually talk to them is different from what they have been taught. The integrated skill approach, in which all the language skills are presented in the theme-based models or task-based instruction focusing on communicative purposes to help students to speak English communicatively [Oxford 2001:17]. This approach not only helps students focus on language in use in its right contexts but also includes knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar to support student learning. In this way, students can get “the benefit of practicing all the language skills in an integrated, natural, communicative way, even if one skill is the main focus

of a given volume” [Oxford 2001:18]. The teachers in the study attempted to apply numerous techniques and skills in teaching vocabulary to deal with idioms. With their creativeness, these vocabulary teaching techniques were realized in integrated skills tasks, ranging from listening and reading activities to provide the input to speaking and listening to practise.

It is not easy to teach the meaning of an idiom. That’s why, if teachers teach English idioms- they must use new methods of teaching English. The best way to decide which expressions to teach is to listen for them when you are having a conversation in English, watching English television programs, or listening to English-language radio stations. Teachers can also ask their students to bring in examples of expressions that they find while they are reading, watching television, listening to the radio. Watching videos of native speakers conversing is a great way to give your students demonstrations on how idioms are used in the real world. Teachers will be able to teach their students with immersion and even search for specific idioms with the video dictionary.

To conclude, the effects of using activities to teach English idioms support for the idea of acquiring the meaning more easily. Using idioms in the classroom is very beneficial, due to them favorable environment is created the learning process becomes more enjoyable and interesting.

References

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