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## TEACHING IDIOMS WITH A COLOR COMPONENT REFLECTING A PERSON'S INTERNAL WORLD

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### ABSTRACT

*The present article aims at providing a comprehensive account of demonstrating the importance of the cognitive linguistic approach in teaching idioms with color components. This way of teaching can be considered as worthwhile and enjoyable substitute to the traditional method of teaching idioms, and hence to create more colorful and enjoyable atmosphere in the English classroom.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Idioms as a Phraseo logical Unit, Fixed Expressions, Idiomatic Expressions, Idiomatic Usage, Idiom in Figurative Language.*

### INTROUCTION

Idioms are studied in phraseology, investigating different types of set expressions, like words name various objects and phenomena and they exist in the language as ready-made units. Idioms are set expressions the meaning of each component is entirely lost and the new meaning created by the whole, as *in the nick of time, red tape*.

Idioms are considered as “incomprehensible” for nonnative speakers and the traditional teaching methods are stated to be inefficient in conducted experiments of scholars worldwide, it is crucial to opt for alternative ways of teaching.

Idioms are explained as “a system of expression, grammatical construction, phrase utilized in a distinctive way in a particular language, dialect, or language variety; specifically, a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from the meanings of the individual words.” (Oxford English Dictionary) To be more precise, idioms are fixed, which means they cannot be modified in context. Due to this fact, teachers have a tendency to teach idiomatic expressions through the popular traditional approach, which means language units are memorized and their core meanings and origins are simply ignored.

We cannot sidestep the fact that, idioms have always been excluded from the syllabuses and as a result, from teaching process owing to their complex nature. In case figurative expressions, especially, idiomatic expressions with more word content are included into English classes, they are merely learnt by heart without paying more attention to its usage. EFL learners are not provided any connections or choices for making links with their prior knowledge, but rather familiarized with the core meaning of the idioms.

Teaching a language is an ongoing complex process which involves an earnest attempt and mental exertion to succeed. Every part of a language is vital and inevitable in pursuing remarkable achievements. In contemporary language teaching it has been implied that idiomatic expressions are regarded as the utmost essential part of a language.

Owing to this statement, more and more teachers are eager to incorporate idioms in education. Whether it is academic or plain English, formal or informal language we may witness the excessive use of idioms and, as a result, it provides the speech with genuineness and vividness. Moreover, since they are utilized actively in native speakers’ daily speech it is of paramount importance to include them in teaching for this way it is much easier to sound like a native speaker and have access to a universal productive communication.

However, if we carefully observe the current situation of secondary school education in Uzbekistan, we are likely to witness the poor usage of idiomatic language both in textbooks and teachers’ lexicon. Unfortunately, the minority of teachers are used to incorporating idioms as supplementary materials. Conversely, the vast numbers of instructors hardly use idioms at their lessons. Thus, in fact, it is requisite that we are to have a deep knowledge of figurative language and, then, extend it to the young generation. As figurative language, in general, is an inseparable part of English culture teaching it is necessary to the utmost extent? Here, we cannot ignore the fact that cultural awareness is the best asset to learning a language much more efficiently. Idiomatic expressions saturate English with a peculiar flavor and give it an amazing diversity, bright character and color. They support learners to understand English culture, dive into customs and lifestyle of English people, and make a deeper insight into English history too.

Furthermore, so as to uphold genuineness, humorousness and variety of the English language idiomatic expressions should be put to use in education.

At present, many teachers admit the essentiality of idioms owing to the fact that teaching and learning idioms is always interesting for language learners, students and even for teachers as well. Moreover, the learners of the language perform much better when they are provided with activities because they can interact with fun. According to the popular belief, the most productive way of teaching idioms is teaching them through diverse activities. Moreover, there are some

arguments on teaching them in context. That is to say, making the brain work harder via the use of cognitive approach so that the idiom can be understood and memorized better

There have been carried out a great deal of researches on idioms and every of them shed some light on the general understanding of idiomatic expressions.

Lindblom and Woods (2012) stated explicitly that idioms “appear in conversation, print (magazines and newspapers), and media (movies, radio, and television)”. This statement proves the idea that figurative language is common both for spoken and written speech equally.

In addition to this idea, Cooper (1998) argues that when idioms are on TV-shows, for example, to understand the plot, the viewer often needs to be able to comprehend the idiom in question as its meaning is not inferred on the spot. Furthermore, “if the four kinds of nonliteral expressions, idioms are the most frequently encountered in its course” (Ibid., p. 255). Consequently, since idioms are such a big part of the English language, students should learn them so as to be fluent and coherent in the target language.

Burke (1998) declares specifically the position of idioms in nonnative speakers’ “understanding that inferring or comprehending any American movie, talk show, program or music is troublesome in most cases for the English language is filled with nonstandard English as slang and idioms” (p. 1). He also goes with further explanation that if nonnative speakers do not understand idioms at all, there is a strong likelihood of failing in incorporating them in their practice, and, as a result, they are supposed to be considered unconnected outsiders.

Moreover, Burke (1998) is of the opinion that nonliteral language or figurative language should be taught to students who are capable of using them out of classroom. In other words, learners are expected to include idioms frequently or on a daily basis as a practice. Otherwise, learners with no good knowledge of figurative language might end up with the wrong usage of idioms and have a hard time due to awkward situations they have created themselves.

In turns, Cooper (1998) also agrees with the ideas of Burke and states that in any situation the poor knowledge or the imprecise idiomatic usage may lead to problems even for a learner with an excellent knowledge of grammar and a high level of vocabulary range.

Of course, it is no news that idioms are of complex nature and acquiring or learning them is a matter of time and effort. However, as it is already mentioned idiomatic expressions common for native speakers and, therefore, they occur in every sphere: both in academic and formal English, in television, in informal situations and on a daily basis of communication. So, it turns out that the only way to succeed in conquering the language is to learn idiomatic expressions.

D’Angelo Bromley (1984) assumes that idioms “add confusion and difficulty to the learning of language”. So, since idioms are complicated, learners are likely to experience difficulties in comprehending and learning them. The complexity of this area within language learning is another reason why teachers need to explain and teach idioms in teaching process.

On the contrary, according to Lindblom and Woods (2012) idioms “occur frequently in classroom language. Students with literacy or language weaknesses are often challenged by idioms; therefore, the failure to comprehend idioms can impact academic performance”. This hypothesis might be reasonable at some point for students who are not good at learning languages are likely to fail to learn idioms. As a consequence, they lose interest in language.

Even though modern linguistic textbooks contain a little of figurative language or have omitted it, figurative language is not just only for decorative purpose, but it is paramount for either academic or formal language as well as for everyday language (Dancygier and Sweetster 2014).

Taking the aforementioned fact into consideration, Dancygier and Sweetster (2014) claim that idioms are vital and ubiquitous in language. Furthermore, according to their perspective the relevant cognitive structures are important and pervasive in thought. This perspective clearly manifests the urgent necessity of teaching idioms for along with learning and memorizing idiomatic expressions we can improve our perception and cognition skills.

As can be seen more and more investigators are interested in the concept of idiom and they have approved the importance of teaching figurative language, more specifically idioms, in classroom. According to the popular belief, idioms are to be taught at very early stages of foreign language learning because before getting acquainted with the lexical and syntactic systems of a language, students are more acceptable to acquiring any chunks of language for better abilities in communication (Bolinger 1976; Bilkova 2000). Yet, according to Bilkova (2002) idioms are often considered as the most complicated and fixed in foreign language vocabulary for the student to master due to the difficulties in comprehension, therefore teachers often decide not to teach them.

Abel (2003) agrees with most scholars present their point of view saying that learners do not encounter idioms as frequently as native speakers do, which means that non-native speakers are often faced with bigger difficulties in idiom comprehension. One classic example for this is owing to the absence of English-speaking-atmosphere in Uzbekistan educational establishments. There is a problem of understanding and utilizing idioms in a variety of domains as education, businesses and communication.

As Liu (2008) considers it is a worldwide conception that high-frequency idioms must be presented before low-frequency idioms as they are mostly used in language. He also thinks that it is better to teach most utilized idioms instead of least used ones. Least frequently appearing idioms are waste of time and effort due to the fact that they are not encountered and, consequently, practiced much. Additionally, based on his research in 2003 he argues that most study materials on English idioms are often intuition-based, which means that the idioms are randomly chosen and include seldom-used idioms, which he deems useless to EFL students. Having completed his study, Liu was able to compile a small database of the most used idioms from the corpus data.

On the contrary, Panou (2013) disagrees with the aforementioned standpoint saying that the practicality and the value of idioms rests on the learners. She is of the opinion that an idiom which is valuable and frequent for one group of students may not be the same for another group (Panou 2013).

In addition, as idioms are characteristic for native speakers it is necessary to be aware of all idioms as much as possible. Cooper (1998) accentuates the essentiality of teaching idioms and sheds some light on how to teach idioms accurately and systematically. He represents 16 concrete teaching suggestions as follows:

1. *The right choice of idioms* – It is vital to choose those that are often used on a daily basis that are not complex or too long and have transparent figurative meanings. For the beginning it is

recommended to present idioms which are easy to remember and comprise only one or word. For example, idioms as “black soul”, “black sheep” or “red-handed” can be suitable.

2. *The discussion of idioms* – As we know the majority of learners’ face difficulties in comprehending idiomatic expressions and this is the main reason why teachers (mostly in schools) do not opt for figurative language at all. To get a better insight into any idiom it is suggested that learners should be acquainted with the basic knowledge of figurative language at first. For instance, before presenting an idiom the teacher can lead a discussion about metaphors, similes, and idioms and the purpose they fulfill in speech and writing. Having had an overall understanding about idioms being an inseparable chunk of figurative language, learners are likely to digest the idiom introduced without much effort.

3. *The definition of idioms* – Having finished the discussion, the teacher should present a new idiom within the larger context of a short paragraph or a dialogue. Here learners are to implement their perception and cognition to guess the meaning. If the information about how the figurative meaning originated is available this can be used to contrast the literal and figurative meaning. The degree of formality should also be explained before letting students practice idioms in different constructed situations.

4. *The category division of idioms* – Dividing idioms into thematic categories will make them easier to learn, for the student can study them as groups composed of elements that have common features rather than as lists of unrelated expressions to be memorized.

5. *The illustration of idioms* – The relationship between the denotative and figurative meaning of an idiom can be illustrated by using pictures. The class could create a dictionary of idiomatic sayings, which then can be illustrated or developed by interviewing relatives about their favorite idioms. As a result, the picture of the idiom being learnt accelerates the comprehension and memorization processes on the spot.

6. *The dramatization of idioms* – As misconceptions of idioms can easily cause to awkward conditions, these can be acted out. By creating skits or playing charades the class can create a game where the literal meaning is acted out and the figurative one has to be guessed. This step makes the lesson both funny and memorable.

7. *The story of idioms* – This step requires learners to be more creative and compose a story with idioms. The students retell a story made up by the teacher, using as many idioms as possible.

8. *Add-on story* – The teacher starts the narrative by using one of the idioms written on the board, after which each student adds a sentence including one of the idioms.

9. *The discussion of idioms from newspaper comic strips* - Each student selects a comic strip containing an idiomatic expression. These are then written down on the board and discussed. This activity adds more fun to the lesson.

10. *Idioms in cartoons* – The teacher collect samples where the denotative meaning and the figurative meaning are used to achieve humorous situations and discusses it with the students.

11. *Idioms from TV Shows* – Running lists of idioms can be compiled from TV shows, shows can be shown in class and the idioms discussed.

12. *Paragraph completion* – Students completes a paragraph or dialogue with the appropriate idiom and can be shown that they were able to use the correct one because of the context



provided. This activity is appropriate for the consolidation part of the lesson to check out whether learners have understood idioms or not.

13. *Interview classmates* – By interviewing native speakers, learners can be taught the meaning and appropriateness of the certain idioms in specific situations.

14. *Idiom-of-the-day mobile* – Mobiles created by the students with idioms can be hung from the ceiling. Due to its uniqueness and creativeness learners have more fun and they memorize the idiom better as well.

15. *Idiom Board Game* – The suggestion is that students create a game using idiomatic expressions and clues connected with their meaning. For example, “How do you say you’re really happy in idiomatic language? Hint: *You’re high in the air!* Answer: *I’m in seventh heaven or I’m on cloud nine*”.

16. *Idiom Jazz Chants*– Students can create the chants and even lead the class in the practice stages.

Cooper (1998) proposes that students benefit from activities that appeal to their various intelligences such as linguistic, musical and intrapersonal intelligence. Since the activities are of great diversity and creative teachers may benefit from the total engagement of learners for, they are suitable for all learning styles.

As it is seen from listed idioms and is generally known, colors have different symbolic meanings in different cultures. For instance, white is the color for weddings in western societies as well as in the Middle East (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirgizstan and so on) but for funerals in traditional Chinese culture. Red is generally related to anger for English speaking countries and Uzbek culture, while it is the symbol of happiness in China. In Asia orange is a positive, spiritually enlightened, and life-affirming color, while in the US it is a color of road hazards, traffic delays, and fast-food restaurants.

Colors can symbolize a rite of passage, differentiate a premium from a discount brand, and distinguish between fun and serious, young and old, male and female. We see colors everywhere, we relate our lives to colors; so, we find it reasonable that colors are an indispensable part of figurative language. To state the facts precisely, many idiomatic expressions have been coined so far in the English language.

As it is stated, there are 11 basic colors and all of them are fruitfully used in the creation of idioms. Without these language units and of course, the rest of phraseological units English would not be as colorful and genuine as now it is. Idiomatic expressions with a color component are of both, artistic and popular origin, and are, more or less, widely used in English language by native speakers.

Colors bring more life into idiomatic expressions. What is more, interestingly, being aware of color symbolism of a particular language assists in understanding those “riddles”. In other words, a good knowledge of colors: their origins, backgrounds, psychology and meanings can definitely serve as the key to idioms. Idioms which are the same in English and Uzbek can be classic examples: *to know black from white (English)* and *“oq-qoranitani moq”*. These idioms stand for understanding what is good and what is bad.

Based on the results of comparison, we can conclude that the English language is one of the richest languages with regard to idioms with a color element manifesting human emotions and feelings. In contrast to English, the Uzbek language lacks idioms with a color component in general. However, color symbolism and the way they are expressed in idiomatic expressions are identical in measure. Moreover, in both languages the most frequently used colors in coining idioms are white, black and red.

As we have discussed, in both languages black is associated with malevolence, evil, hatred and so on. In two words, this color expresses only negative emotions. On the contrary, white is purely the color of positivity in Uzbek and in English it is partially considered to be the symbol of goodness. Hence, we would argue that being aware in colors and their meanings is of paramount importance and this knowledge surely serves as an irreplaceable asset in inferring idioms with a color component.

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