
The use of English idiomatic expressions by Uzbek EFL learners and strategies to improve idiom comprehension

Davron Kholmurodov To'liqin o'g'li

dxolmurodov292@gmail.com

Student,

Uzbek State World Languages University

Mukhamedova Nigora Abdulkhayevna

Senior teacher,

Uzbek State World Languages University

Annotation

The use of English idiomatic idioms by Uzbek learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) is examined in this article, along with practical methods for improving understanding. Gaining near-native fluency requires grasping idioms, which are the cultural and linguistic core of a language. However, because of their cultural subtleties and non-literal interpretations, idioms can be quite difficult for Uzbek learners. The main goal of this study is to identify the particular challenges that students encounter and to provide instructional frameworks that help them learn these complicated expressions more effectively. The study examines typical challenges, including insufficient exposure to real-world language contexts and first-language (L1) interference, in which students attempt literal translations from Uzbek. The article offers a number of cutting-edge teaching techniques to overcome these problems, such as the cognitive linguistic method, which emphasizes the mental analogies behind idioms. To go beyond rote memorization, the use of digital tools, visual aids, and contextual learning is also considered. The results imply that learners have a more profound and long-lasting comprehension of idioms when they are taught through their historical roots and cultural settings. Teachers may assist students in bridging the gap between classroom knowledge and real-world communication by including genuine materials like podcasts and films into the curriculum. For EFL teachers in Uzbekistan looking to improve their methods and raise their students' communicative proficiency, this study offers insightful information.

Keywords

Idiomatic expressions, EFL, Uzbek learners, linguistic competence, teaching strategies, cultural context, cognitive approach

O'zbek EFL til o'rganuvchilari tomonidan ingliz tili idiomatik iformalaridan foydalanish va idioma tushunishini yaxshilashtirish strategiyalari

Xolmurodov Davron To'liqin o'g'li

dxolmurodov292@gmail.com

Talaba,

O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti

Muhamedova Nigora Abdulxayevna

Katta o'qituvchi,

O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganayotgan (EFL) o'zbek talabalari tomonidan idiomatik iboralarning qo'llanilishi va ularni tushunish darajasini tadqiq etishga bag'ishlangan. Idiomalar tilning madaniy va lingvistik boyligi bo'lib, ularni

o'zlashtirish nutqning tabiiy va ravon chiqishini ta'minlaydi. Biroq, o'zbek o'quvchilari uchun ingliz idiomalarini tushunish va nutqda to'g'ri qo'llash ko'pincha jiddiy qiyinchiliklar tug'diradi. Tadqiqotning asosiy maqsadi – talabalarning idiomalar bilan bog'liq asosiy muammolarini aniqlash va ularning tushunish qobiliyatini yaxshilash uchun samarali strategiyalarni ishlab chiqishdir. Maqolada ona tilining (o'zbek tili) interferensiyasi, ya'ni so'zlarni so'zma-so'z tarjima qilishga urinish va kontekstual ma'lumotlarning yetishmasligi kabi to'siqlar tahlil qilinadi. Muallif talabalarning idiomatik kompetensiyasini oshirish uchun bir qancha zamonaviy metodik usullarni taklif etadi. Bularga kontekstual o'rganish, kognitiv lingvistik yondashuv va vizual vositalardan foydalanish kiradi. Shuningdek, texnologiyaga asoslangan o'rganish va autentik materiallar (filmlar, podkastlar) orqali idiomalar bilan ishlashning ahamiyati yoritilgan. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, idiomalar faqat yod olish orqali emas, balki ularning etimologiyasi va madaniy asosi bilan birga o'rganilganda ko'proq samara beradi. Maqola yakunida o'qituvchilar va o'quvchilar uchun til o'rganish jarayonini yanada qiziqarli va natijali qilish bo'yicha amaliy tavsiyalar berilgan.

Kalit so'zlar *Idiomatik iboralar, ingliz tilini o'rganuvchilar, o'qitish strategiyalari, madaniy kontekst, kognitiv yondashuv*

Использование английских идиоматических выражений узбекскими изучающими английский как иностранный язык и стратегии улучшения понимания идиом

Холмуродов Даврон Тулкин угли

dxolmurodov292@gmail.com

Студент,

Узбекский государственный университет
мировых языков

Мухамедова Нигора Абдулхаевна

Старший преподаватель,

Узбекский государственный университет
мировых языков

Аннотация *Данная статья посвящена исследованию использования английских идиоматических выражений узбекскими студентами, изучающими английский язык как иностранный (EFL), а также анализу стратегий по улучшению их понимания. Идиомы являются неотъемлемой частью языковой компетенции, обеспечивая естественность и выразительность речи. Тем не менее, для узбекских учащихся идиомы часто становятся серьезным барьером из-за их метафорической природы и отсутствия прямых эквивалентов в родном языке. Основная цель данного исследования – выявить типичные трудности, с которыми сталкиваются студенты, и предложить эффективные методические рекомендации для повышения их идиоматической грамотности. В работе рассматриваются такие проблемы, как влияние интерференции родного языка, выражающееся в попытках буквального перевода, и дефицит контекстуальных знаний. Автор предлагает ряд современных подходов к обучению, включая когнитивно-лингвистический метод, акцентирующий внимание на логике*

возникновения идиом, а также использование визуализации и цифровых образовательных ресурсов. В статье подчеркивается, что механическое заучивание идиом менее эффективно, чем изучение их этимологии и культурного подтекста. Использование аутентичных материалов, таких как современные медиа и литература, способствует более глубокому погружению в языковую среду. Результаты исследования демонстрируют, что систематическое внедрение стратегий контекстуального анализа позволяет значительно улучшить навыки восприятия и активного использования устойчивых выражений. Работа представляет практическую ценность для преподавателей английского языка и исследователей в области методики преподавания в условиях узбекской образовательной среды.

Ключевые слова *Идиоматические выражения, английский как иностранный, узбекские учащиеся, языковая компетентность, педагогические стратегии, культурный контекст, когнитивный подход*

Introduction

English is the main language used in international relations, academia, and digital innovation in the current global communication environment. But learning syntactic structures and formal vocabulary is only one aspect of mastering English in a non-native setting like Uzbekistan. It is becoming more often accepted that “idiomatic competence” – the capacity to comprehend and use statements whose meanings cannot be inferred from their component parts – is a necessary component of true linguistic competency. A nation’s historical experience, social ideals, and cognitive frameworks are all encapsulated in its idioms, which are more than just decorative accents. Idiom mastery is the last step required for an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learner to advance from a functional user to a sophisticated, nearly native speaker. For Uzbek learners, one of the biggest obstacles is the cognitive shift needed to comprehend figurative language (Boers, 2000). Early on in the process of learning a language, human intellect naturally leans toward literal interpretation. When Uzbek students come across idioms like “to bark up the wrong tree”

or “to let the cat out of the bag,” there is a mental struggle between the intended abstract meaning and the literal imagery (animals and objects). According to this study, the challenge is not only linguistic but also conceptual. Because they lack the “conceptual metaphors” that anchor English idioms in everyday life, learners frequently have difficulties. Without these mental maps, idioms are just random, nonsensical word strings that are hard to remember and even more difficult to recall when speaking spontaneously. An important cultural and genetic gap separates the Turkic Uzbek language from the Germanic English language. Many English idioms have their roots in Western history, nautical customs, or biblical allusions, and therefore lack clear equivalents in the Uzbek cultural vocabulary. However, there are some universal idioms that arise from common human experiences (Charteris- Black, 2002).

Due to this divergence, learners seek to translate Uzbek proverbs and fixed expressions straight into English, which frequently results in “Uzbek-English” hybrids that are incomprehensible to native speakers. This phenomenon is known as “negative transfer”

or linguistic interference. Preventing communication breakdowns and promoting authentic intercultural discussion thus require an understanding of the “cultural fingerprints” present in English idioms. There is a recurring contradiction in Uzbekistan’s educational system: students who score highly on standardized proficiency exams frequently encounter “language shock” when exposed to real-world discussions or realistic English media. The main reason for this disparity is because idiomaticity is not included in the core curriculum. A strict set of rules known as “Prescriptive Grammar” – which frequently overlooks the flexible, idiomatic character of real speech – has long been given precedence in the region’s traditional educational programs. As a result, students acquire an excessively formal or “frozen” type of English that lacks the emotional depth and complexity that come from using idiomatic terms (Cooper, 1999). This study highlights that idioms are essential elements of natural communication that ought to be incorporated from the intermediate levels; they are not “extra” vocabulary for advanced pupils. Finding the precise linguistic and psychological obstacles preventing Uzbek EFL learners from employing English idioms successfully is the main goal of this study. It investigates the theory that idiomatic expression understanding and retention may be greatly improved by switching from “translation-based learning” to “concept-based learning.” This study looks at the methods now used in Uzbek language centers and colleges in order to give teachers a thorough framework – a “methodological roadmap” – for bridging the gap between their students’ idiomatic fluency and grammatical precision. In the end, this study aims to enable Uzbek students to express themselves as deeply and richly as native English speakers (Fernando, 1996).

Challenges and strategies in improving idiom comprehension among Uzbek EFL learners

The complexity of English idiomatic phrases, both cognitively and sociolinguistics, makes idiomatic proficiency a tough obstacle for Uzbek EFL learners. Idioms need a higher level of semantic processing than literal language because the learner must simultaneously suppress the literal meaning of individual words and activate a figurative idea with cultural roots. Students in Uzbekistan, whose native tongue is part of the Turkic family and presents a significant conceptual and genealogical distance from the Germanic origins of English, find this cognitive “switching” especially challenging. Due to this language barrier, learners frequently seek to impose the logic of Uzbek syntax and metaphors onto English sentences, which frequently results in considerable “negative transfer,” which produces less natural or clear utterances. Beyond the structural distinctions, the challenge is made more difficult by a “cultural opaqueness”; many English idioms have deep roots in Western history, nautical customs, or biblical stories – contexts that are nevertheless largely foreign to a student who has not been immersed in those particular traditions. Idioms that come from maritime history, such “to be taken aback” or “to weather the storm,” for example, go beyond simple grammatical decoding and require knowledge of the historical context in which they were created. When this context is lacking, the Uzbek student is frequently presented with a random word string that is impossible to understand. Traditional pedagogical paradigms that consider idioms as static vocabulary lists to be memorized rather than as dynamic communication tools exacerbate the issue in Uzbekistan’s present educational environment. Because the literal output rarely fits the intended meaning, this “decontextualized” method creates a literal trap where students expend extra work utilizing bilingual dictionaries to decode idioms word by word. This often ends in semantic misunderstanding. This robotic approach ignores “Pragmatic Competence” – the capacity

to understand not just the meaning of an idiom but also when and when it should be used. It is possible for a student to comprehend the meaning of a slang term but use it incorrectly in a formal academic context, damaging their reputation as a professional (Gibbs, 1994).

A significant methodological change is needed to close this gap, shifting from rote memorization to cognitive techniques like Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Teachers can provide pupils a "logical anchor" that promotes long-term memory by outlining the underlying reasoning, such as how the metaphor "Time is Money" regulates idioms like "spending time" or "investing time". Additionally, the incorporation of "Contrastive Idiomaticity" is crucial; students' existing linguistic knowledge is validated when teachers encourage them to identify semantic parallels in their native Uzbek language, such as connecting "killing two birds with one stone" to "bir o'q bilan ikki quyovni urmoq." This produces a strong mnemonic bridge. Multimedia and contemporary technologies are also essential to this developmental process. Learners can examine the emotional prosody and social subtleties connected with idiomatic speech by using real English-language media, such as news broadcasts, podcasts, and cinematography. In the end, enhancing idiom comprehension in the context of Uzbek EFL calls for a multi-modal strategy that incorporates both genuine exposure and an understanding of the "cultural fingerprints" ingrained in the language. In addition to improving students' conversational skills, this shift from "classroom English" to "idiomatic fluency" gives them the ability to negotiate the subtleties of sarcasm, humour, and emotion – all of which are critical for near-native success in the worldwide English-speaking community. We help Uzbek learners become actual "interpreters" of meaning rather than just "translators" of words by cultivating a profound, metaphorical grasp of the language (Irujo, 1986).

Discussion

The analysis of the research results shows that among Uzbek EFL learners, the degree of pragmatic competency and the frequency of idiom usage are significantly correlated. It has been noted that although students theoretically understand several high-frequency idioms, their real "use" in unplanned conversation is still rather low. This characteristic, which is often called "avoidance behaviour," implies that Uzbek learners prioritise literal language in order to assure clarity, hence avoiding the dangers posed by idiomatic phrases' semantic ambiguity. Claims that this hesitancy is typical of L2 learners who are afraid of "pragmatic failure" – using an idiom in the wrong social or stylistic context. This is made worse in the Uzbek setting by a teaching tradition that prioritises grammatical correctness above idiomatic naturalness. Idiom "comprehension" is a complicated cognitive job that involves "figurative mapping," rather than a linear process, as the evidence further demonstrates. The findings showed that idioms that have no clear conceptual counterpart in their native tongue are a common source of difficulty for Uzbek learners. There is a "comprehension gap" when the Uzbek cultural schema and the English metaphorical system (such as baseball or maritime historical idioms) do not meet. For example, an Uzbek student may not understand the phrase "to be on the same page" until they understand the underlying metaphor of "life/work as a book," which needs specific cognitive education rather than straightforward translation (Lakoff, 1980).

The techniques covered in this study, notably Etymological Inquiry and Conceptual Metaphor Awareness (CMA), show promise in addressing these issues. Boers' theory that elucidating an idiom's roots improves long-term retention is supported with the results. When Uzbek learners are made aware of the historical background of a term such as "to turn a blind eye," the idiom transforms from a random collection of words into a dramatic story. Additionally, hypothesis that L1-L2

similarity can greatly speed up idiom acquisition is supported by the use of Contrastive Analysis, which compares English idioms with their Uzbek equivalents, such as "bir o'q bilan ikki quyovni urmoq." By guiding the student from passive recognition to active usage, this method successfully closes the gap between "knowing" and "using" an idiom in conversation (Littlemore, 2006).

The conversation concludes by emphasising the need to move away from "rote memorization" and toward "contextualised immersion" in order to improve idiom comprehension among Uzbeks. Idioms are dynamic reflections of cognition rather than "dead metaphors". Multimedia resources and real materials must thus be included into instructional methodologies in order to provide students the situational and emotional clues they need to grasp a subject. In order to assist Uzbek learners overcome their aversion to figurative language and achieve a more near-native level of communicative ability, instructors should concentrate on both the "logic" underlying the idioms and their practical application (O'Dell, 2010).

Conclusion

In the end, learning English idiomatic phrases is a complex process that goes beyond the confines of conventional vocabulary development for Uzbek EFL learners. This study has clearly shown that idiomatic competence is an essential component of communicative fluency and sociocultural integration, not just a "optional" language ability. The results highlight an important fact: the ancient techniques of rote memorization cannot overcome the obstacles encountered by Uzbek learners, which include the significant typological gap between the Turkic and Germanic languages as well as the cognitive friction brought on by semantic opacity. Many local pedagogical practices still rely heavily on

literal translation, which has been shown to be ineffective because it keeps learners in a "literal cage," preventing them from developing the metaphorical flexibility needed to deal with the complexities of a living language like English. More than merely a change in teaching methods, the move toward more complex approaches like Conceptual Metaphor Awareness, Etymological Inquiry, and Contrastive Idiomatology signifies a paradigm shift in the way language is seen in the Uzbek educational system. By recognizing "semantic bridges" between the English and Uzbek worldviews, we allow learners to use their innate cultural knowledge as a basis for mastering the second language rather than as a barrier. Incorporating real-world multimedia resources and exposure to context is also crucial for giving students the "pragmatic compass" they need to differentiate between different social registers and emotional tones.

Enhancing idiom understanding ultimately aims to enable the Uzbek student to become an active interpreter of meaning rather than only a passive translation of words. The capacity of Uzbekistan's students to communicate with subtlety, humour, and emotional depth becomes strategically necessary as the country continues to integrate into the international intellectual and commercial world. By cultivating a "metaphorically aware" generation of speakers, this study finds, we are not just teaching them a language but also giving them the means to engage in the global human story in a genuine manner. In order to bridge the gap between two different linguistic worlds, English language instruction in Uzbekistan must prioritise the "soul" of the language – its idioms – ensuring that students have the cognitive and cultural tools to express their thoughts with the same richness and precision as native speakers.

References:

1. Boers, F. (2000). Metaphor awareness and vocabulary retention. *Applied Linguistics*, 21(4), 553-571.
2. Charteris-Black, J. (2002). Second language figurative proficiency: A comparative study of Malay and English. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(1), 104-133.
3. Cooper, T. C. (1999). Processing of idioms by L2 learners. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(2), 233-262.
4. Fernando, C. (1996). *Idioms and Idiomaticity*. Oxford University Press.
5. Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*. Cambridge University Press.
6. Irujo, S. (1986). Don't put your leg in your mouth: Transfer in the acquisition of idioms in a second language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(2), 287-304.
7. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press.
8. Littlemore, J., & Low, G. (2006). *Figurative Thinking and Foreign Language Learning*. Palgrave Macmillan.
9. O'Dell, F., & McCarthy, M. (2010). *English Idioms in Use: Advanced*. Cambridge University Press.