

ENGLISH IDIOMS

The colourful expression of the language

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Abstract: This Article is about the importance of learning English idioms, sources of difficulties in learning and understanding them, and strategies used to learn and understand idioms and use them in daily speech.

The Paper also indicates that EFL learners were aware of the difficulty of learning idioms. Their difficulties mainly came from a lack of cultural knowledge behind idioms and a lack of analogues for English idioms. in their first language, and lack of context. Furthermore, the writer used numerous strategies to learn and understand idioms. The study recommends instructors incorporate idioms in their teaching activities. There are given idioms with explanations.

Keywords: Idiom learning, Tips, Types of Idioms, Culture, and Idioms.

Introduction

An idiom is a phrase or expression that typically presents a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to the phrase; but some phrases become figurative idioms while retaining the literal meaning of the phrase. Categorized as formulaic language, an idiom's figurative meaning is different from the literal meaning. Idioms are an important part of the English language, and mastering them is essential for fluency. For example, a study by Erman and Warren (2000) revealed that idioms are widely used in everyday communication. They add colour, humour, and cultural references to conversations, making them more interesting and engaging. Idioms are often used in casual conversation, but they also appear in formal writing and speeches. According to Cooper (1999), avoiding the use of idioms by EFL learners may make them sound unnatural and influential. The origins of many idioms are shrouded in mystery, but they often reflect the values, beliefs, and experiences of the people who use them. For example, the idiom "spill the beans" means to reveal a secret. Its origins are unclear, but some speculate that it may have come from a practice in ancient Greece where people voted by placing beans in a jar. If someone accidentally knocked over the jar and spilled the beans, the outcome of the vote would be revealed. Another commonly used idiom is "the ball is in your court," which means it is now your turn to take action or make a decision. This expression comes from tennis, where players take turns hitting the ball across the net. The phrase "barking up the wrong tree" means to pursue a mistaken or misguided course of action

The most important types of Idioms in English

There are different terms used for idioms in the literature, e.g., complex unit, a fixed expression, fixed phrase, phraseme, and phrase lexeme (Everaert et al., 2014). Alexander (1987, p. 178) defined an idiom as “multiword units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatic rule of use.” According to Richards and Schmidt (1990), an idiom is an expression that functions as a single unit and its meaning cannot be understood from its constituent parts. Van de Voort and Vonk (1995) defined an idiom as “an expression whose overall figurative meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of its parts.” Generally speaking, there are four types of idioms: pure idioms, binomial idioms, partial idioms, and prepositional idioms. Some people may consider clichés, proverbs, and euphemisms to be types of idioms as well, but I will explain why they are different from idioms.

1. Pure idiom

This is your typical idiom, the meaning of which can't be deduced by its individual components. When someone says, “Spill the beans,” they're asking someone to reveal a secret, not to pour out a can of beans. But you wouldn't know that by looking at each word of that phrase.

2. Binomial idiom

This idiom is a phrase that contains two words joined by a conjunction or a preposition. Some examples include “by and large” (everything considered), “dos and don'ts” (guidelines on what to do and/or avoid in a certain situation), and “heart-to-heart” (a candid conversation between two people).

3. Partial idiom

This idiom is one that's been shortened into one part, with the second part generally being understood by fluent speakers. People often use the partial idiom “when in Rome,” with the understanding that the other person knows the second part: “do as the Romans do.”

4. Prepositional idiom

This idiom is a phrase that combines a verb and a preposition to create a verb with a distinct meaning. The phrase “agree on” is a prepositional idiom that combines the verb “agree” with the preposition “on” and is used to express that you share an opinion with someone

Teaching English culture and English idioms in English classes

When teaching English, it's important to include cultural references and idioms in the curriculum. This will help students understand the nuances of the language and connect with English-speaking cultures. One way to incorporate idioms into the classroom is to introduce a new idiom each week and encourage students to use it in conversation and writing. You can also provide examples of idioms used in popular

media, such as movies or TV shows, and discuss their meanings and origins. In addition, it's important to teach idioms in context. For example, if teaching the idiom "spill the beans," you can provide a scenario where someone might use that expression, such as a friend confiding a secret to another friend. It's important to be aware of cultural differences when teaching idioms. Some idioms may not translate well into other languages or cultures, and it's important to explain the context and meaning behind them. According to Dixon (1994), idioms are crucial for successful communication in English be it listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Cowie et al. (1983) believed that the correct and proper use of idioms by EFL/ESL learners demonstrated that they had a native-like proficiency in English and it could be used as a reliable criterion for measuring proficiency of EFL/ESL learners. They further stated that it was essential to EFL/ESL learners to learn English idioms in order to successfully integrate into the culture of the target language. By incorporating idioms and cultural references into English classes, students will not only improve their language skills but also gain a deeper understanding of English-speaking cultures.

How to teach Idioms effortlessly.

EFL learners experience different types of difficulties in learning and understanding idioms. They find it hard to consider the figurative or the literal meaning of idioms in a particular context. It might come from the fact that idioms are different in their level of formality and many of them have literal equivalents (Irujo, 1986). According to Hussein et al. (2011), arbitrariness and nonliterally of idioms is other challenges for EFL students to learn and understand them. The arbitrariness of idioms makes them hard for EFL learners to comprehend their meaning based on the meaning of their constituent words. Therefore, they cannot be taught systematically. Further, cultural differences make it hard for EFL students to learn and understand idioms because some English idioms require cultural knowledge to be understood. There is not a perfect strategy for learning or teaching idioms (Kennedy, 2008). However, a number of strategies are presented in the literature that EFL learners can utilize to learn idioms. According to Kirsner (1994), EFL learners can learn idioms by meeting them frequently in the context, and the more often the learners are exposed to idioms, the better they can use them in their communication. They cannot learn idioms in an encounter in a single context. They should meet idioms in many different contexts to be able to use them fluently (Nation, 2001). Guessing from the context is another way considered useful for understanding idioms (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997), and contextual knowledge can help learners to understand idioms quickly (Liu, 2008; Webb, 2007).

Here are the 10 Tips to make the idiom learning process easier.

1. Start with common idioms: Begin by teaching the most common idioms used in everyday conversation. This can include idioms related to time, weather, animals, and food.

2. Provide context: Give examples of how idioms are used in sentences and provide the context behind them. This will help learners understand the meaning behind the idioms and how they are used in different situations.

3. Use visual aids: Use pictures or videos to illustrate the meaning of idioms. This can make it easier for learners to understand the concept and remember it.

4. Role-play: Encourage learners to use idioms in role-playing activities. This can help them practice using idioms in context and improve their communication skill.

5. Create quizzes: Use quizzes and games to test learners' knowledge of idioms. This can make learning fun and engaging while also reinforcing what they have learned.

6. Encourage practice: Encourage learners to use idioms in their everyday conversations and writing. This will help them become more comfortable with using idioms and improve their language skills overall.

7. Consider cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences: Be aware that idioms may not have the same meaning or imagery across different languages and cultures. Take this into consideration when teaching idioms and provide cultural context where necessary.

8. Provide explanations: Explain the origins and history behind idioms, as well as any cultural references they may contain. This can help learners better understand the meaning and context behind the idioms.

9. Use authentic materials: Incorporate idioms from authentic materials such as movies, TV shows, and literature. This can expose learners to idioms used in natural contexts and help them better understand their usage.

10. Personalize learning: Tailor your approach to teaching idioms to the needs and interests of your learners. This can help keep them engaged and motivated to learn.

The ways of using Idioms in writing and speaking

Idioms can add colour and personality to your writing, but it's important to use them correctly. Here are some tips for using idioms in your writing and speaking.

1. Understand the meaning: Before using an idiom, make sure you understand its meaning and context. Using an idiom incorrectly can make your writing confusing or even comical.

2. Use idioms sparingly: Using too many idioms in your writing can make it seem forced or unnatural. Use idioms sparingly and only when they add value to your writing.

3. Consider your audience: If you're writing for a global audience, be mindful of idioms that may not translate well or may have different meanings in other cultures.

4. Use idioms appropriately: Make sure the idiom you're using is appropriate for the tone and style of your writing. For example, using a slang idiom in a formal essay may not be appropriate.

Examples of idioms

Here are some common examples of idioms:

1. Break a leg: This is a way of wishing someone good luck, often used in the entertainment industry.
2. Cry over spilled milk: This means to dwell on something that can't be changed or undone.
3. Hit the nail on the head: This means to get something exactly right or to accurately identify a problem.
4. Let the cat out of the bag: This means to reveal a secret.
5. Piece of cake: This means something is very easy.
6. Pull someone's leg: This means to tease or joke with someone.
7. Spill the beans: This means to reveal a secret.
8. Under the weather: This means to feel sick or unwell.
9. When pigs fly: This means something is impossible or unlikely to happen.
10. You can't judge a book by its cover: This means appearances can be deceiving and you can't know everything about something or someone just by their outward appearance.

Conclusion

Idioms are an integral part of English culture and language. They reflect the history, traditions, and customs of the people who speak English as their first language. Understanding idioms is essential for effective communication and building relationships with English-speaking people. Idioms provide a deeper insight into the culture and history of English-speaking countries, and they help learners understand the nuances of the language. By learning idioms, students can express themselves more effectively, and their language skills will improve overall. Additionally, idioms can be a fun and engaging way to learn English, as they often have interesting origins and stories behind them.

Idioms can be challenging for non-native speakers to understand, but they are worth learning. They add depth and nuance to conversations, and they help you connect with English speakers on a cultural level. Plus, using idioms correctly can make you sound more fluent and confident in your language skills. To learn more about English idioms, there are many online resources available, including websites, books, and podcasts. Practice using idioms in your own conversations and writing, and soon you'll be speaking like a native English speaker. Remember, when it comes to idioms, the sky's the limit!

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