

Towards the Description of English Idioms for EFL Learners from Learning and Teaching Perspective

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Abstract

In every part of the world, speakers and learners of English can be seen. For non-native speakers of English, the practice and handling of Idiomatic expressions is very important. Handling idioms successfully paves the path for getting proficiency in English language. To have knowledge and be competent in handling Idiomatic expression is essential for EFL speakers. The proper knowledge and use of idiomatic expression make the non-native speaker competent to communicate in English skillfully. Idioms establish a fundamental part in the phraseology block of the language. Idioms are the most disregarded field in EFL perspective irrespective of their multiplicity and vitality. EFL learners do not take interest in using idiomatic expressions artistically. For the EFL learners especially Pakistani EFL learners, handling of idiomatic expression is very taxing task. They show incompetency while using idioms. The undertaken research intends to explore the significance of idiomatic expressions for EFL English learners. The paper highlights the significance of learning and adequate understanding of idioms through authors' suggestions. The authors have attempted to show up the significance of idioms and how to handle idioms successfully.

Keywords: Idiomatic expressions, Phraseology, handling idioms, EFL speakers.

1. Introduction

English has become an international language and English speaking people are found in every corner of the world whether they belong to the field of marketing, business, trade, science, sports, literature and fashion etc. With the dawn of 21st century, an expansion is seen in the field of science and technology. All the nations of the world are trying to get the knowledge of English to keep pace with the advanced nations. For getting the knowledge of English, it is important to learn all major parts of this language and idiom is one of them.

Gibbs (1980) argues that idioms are fixed pattern of language and small or no difference is allowed in this structure. Ceaselessly it carries the meaning and from the individual word of idioms, we cannot

understand the meaning. Previously, EFL learners and teacher regarded figurative idioms as the unappreciated area but recently, much attention has been given to the figurative idioms. It is the multi dimensionality of English idioms that have attracted the attention of instructors and students. Cooper (1998) is of the opinion that idioms play an important role in the acquisition of EFL. Lionatas (2003) states that handling of figurative idioms is very hard job for EFL learners along with instructors in the classroom. It causes difficulties for learners because the meaning of various idioms may not be set considering their lexical and grammatical constituents. So, that specific thing badly affects the organized learning of idioms in the classrooms. (Gramely & Patzold, 2004).

Moon (1998) mentions that it proves effective to teach idioms as they occupy a great place in culture and civilization and reflect the community's image. In this context, it can be said that to reveal the etymology of idioms is essential due to the fact that during a specific time or moment, these idiomatic expressions had been devised. There are many

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cultural and traditional reasons which may not be defined by merely evaluating the constituent parts of the idiomatic expression itself. The research works and studies have proved that every type of idiom reflects a specific semantic context. so, the need of the day is that the EFL educators endeavor to explain and deliver this semantic context to EFL learners, it is possibility that they will become able to associate these idiomatic expressions with the figurative meaning. Due to the efforts of the instructors, the EFL learners definitely will achieve the ability to infer the meaning of idioms from the mentioned context. Politics, culture and linguistics are responsible to affect the semantic distinction in every idiom. While performing the task of teaching of English idioms, teachers or instructors are responsible to keep their pupils aware about the significance of the acquisition of idioms. If once EFL learners may be made realize about the connections which idioms have with the culture and history, they will show better interpretation about the learning of idioms.

Bobrow & Bell, (1973) reveal that being a lexical feature of informal speech, learning of idioms is very taxing task in in EFL background. According to Samani & Hashemian (2012), to understand the English language, this delicate situation is a big obstacle. Generally figurative language and idioms particularly is problematic area for learning of EFL. The awareness about the cultural context of the idioms will prove beneficial for learners to utilize the linguistic properties of the language magnificently. The aim of the undertaken research is to keep the learners aware about the importance of idioms.

In each language, Idiomatic expressions possess a prominent place. Boers (2008) argues in 'MED Magazine' that idioms are found in all languages and they are replete with idioms. Native people utilize idiomatic expressions instinctively without keeping in view their thinking figurative meaning. Undoubtedly, EFL speakers experience difficulties to comprehend idioms. They lack awareness about the background of idioms and they are unaware what the image of the idiomatic expression is based on. For example, if EFL learners come across the idiom "beat around the bush", it proves challenging for them to process. They may take it in the sense of uprooting the bushes because with the word of 'bush', they think about the image of destroying and uprooting the bushes. The reason behind this misinterpretation is that they are unaware with the usage of this idioms. EFL speakers find it difficult to

understand because they are unfamiliar with the fact that this idiom is used when someone avoids talking about the main topic or avoid answering the questions. Similarly, if EFL speakers are unaware with the idiom "show you the ropes, they face difficulties to comprehend it. They are unable to interpret that this expression is used when someone tells one how a task is performed. EFL learners can remember this idiom and understand its meaning if they are told that such an idiom is used in a sailing context where skilled sailors teach a beginner how to sail the boats by handling the ropes.

Idioms are described as fixed expression in Linguistics and they reflect figurative sense and possess arbitrary meanings. Meaning of idiomatic expressions are created coincidentally and by chance. It is stated that in Pakistan, EFL speakers are mostly instructed that no connection exists between an idiom and its meaning and they are advised to learn idioms by heart. But, the current research has discarded this concept. This research argues that there is a connection between idiom and its meaning. The connection between an idiom and its meaning depends on physical experiences, which are collectively shared or based on particular spheres, which are specific from cultural point of view.

No doubt, the native English speakers daily use the idioms instinctively. It holds the fundamental place in the lexicon and vocabulary of English language. For EFL learners, it is unavoidable the acquisition of Idiomatic expressions. Resultantly, the EFL learners should build the habit to use idioms. So, to get proficiency in EFL like native speakers, the EFL learners must memorize the idiomatic expressions and exercise how to utilize them. To fulfill this task, multi-words idioms should be included in EFL classrooms. So, the implication of figurative expressions and metaphorical speech is inevitable in EFL/ESL settings for achieving native like competency of English.

Statement of the Problem

In the process of learning and understanding idiomatic expressions, the EFL speakers face several issues and hindrances. This problematic area affects their overall skills of language. This conducted research is an attempt to highlight the importance of idioms for the EFL speakers and teachers.

2. Literature Review

We utter many concepts or ideas by the expressions of multi-words in our daily conversation

as 'break the Ice, (to release the social tensions via statements) or 'hit the road' (to leave). Pawley and Syder (1983) opine that in order to get native like competency, FL learners must acquire the knowledge of idiomatic expression by the side of words and rules which help them to produce meaningful sentences. Yet, Psycholinguistics has admitted the value of idiomatic expressions but still we are lagging behind about the knowledge of these processing items.

English language is replete with idiomatic expression and these idioms frequently occur. The estimate shows that English language has almost 25,000 idiomatic expressions (Idiomatic Expression, 2014). According to Laflin (1996), native speakers use idiomatic expressions in their formal or informal conversation. Whereas, EFL speakers' inefficiency is shown in expressing the Idiomatic expressions. They do not have the capability to utilize the idioms and they are unable to interpret the meaning effectively. This points out a problem that exists in the knowledge of EFL speakers and aptitude of the English language and is regarded as a gap in the process of acquisition of their language.

Ambrose (2008) investigates that comprehension of the lexicon of English stresses to learn more than getting knowledge of the denotative meaning of words. It is the need of the day to learn the connotative background of the words along with the comprehension. It requires its speakers to have connotative word comprehension and an understanding of figurative language. Idioms belongs to the second category are of figurative language.

It is opined that Idiomatic Expressions are an expression which meaning cannot be understood from the meanings of individual words which generate idioms (Idiomatic Expression, 2014). From another point of view, idiom is called as an expression, word, or phrase that reflects a figurative meaning that native people comprehend conventionally. These meanings differ from the actual meaning of the individual units of idiom. They reflect hidden meanings (Idiomatic Expressions, 2015). For instance, "to kick the bucket" is an idiomatic expression and apparently, it seems that to do something with your legs or feet. But its meaning is to die and it has no link with physical action.

Consequently, figurative meaning is conveyed through idiomatic expression, not a literal or actual meaning. Another idiom "to spill the beans", has no

concern with the physical activity to drop or spill a plate of beans whereas its meaning is to reveal a secret. It is observed that these multi-words idioms reflect figurative meaning instead of actual meaning (Cowie et al., 1983). Resultantly, in linguistics, multi-words idioms are known as figures of speech (figurative language) (Lyons, 1997). Hence, linguistics reveals that multi-words expressions idiomatic expressions contradict the rule of compositionality, which maintains that the complete meaning are generated from the meanings of the elements that construct the whole. It is maintained that the speakers should be in a state to comprehend the whole if they interpret the meanings of all its units that build the whole. (Wikipedia, 2015).

"Under the weather" is an idiomatic expression which describes the meaning "not feeling well. Another expressions of multi-words idiom is "till the cows come home" which means "for a long time" and "Piece of cake" means "very easy". "An arm and a leg" reflects the meaning of extremely expensive. Look at the example of an idiomatic expression to understand how it conveys the full meaning which differs from the literal or actual meaning of its units and this idiom is, "it is not rocket science" which describes that it is not difficult (Ibid).

It is called linguistically that multi-words idioms convey arbitrary meaning. It means that idioms reveals what they mean for no reason other than by chance. It is maintained by Boers (2008) that multi-words Idioms in linguistics reflect the meanings that they act. Whereas, it is proved that several idioms do not reflect the arbitrary meaning and they are understandable. Idioms are effected by the reasons to create meanings. Current research argues that Multi-words idioms are non-arbitrary traits of a language. If students are taught that idiomatic expressions convey non-arbitrary meanings, it will enable them to grasp their meanings and remember them. Therefore, to ask student to learn idioms by heart is very challenging task. Idioms should be taught in an organized way which makes easier the learning process of idioms for the speaker to comprehend and memorize (Ibid).

Idiomatic expressions describe what they mean for a purpose. "Pigs fly", idiom clearly shows that it means 'never'. Similarly, the multi-word idioms as "lend someone a hand", "try your hand at

something" and "have your hands tied" describe to do something. These idioms reflect the image of hands which clearly mean that generally hand are

used to do actions. Obviously, it is fact that EFL learners find it difficult to interpret and realize the meaning of idiomatic expressions but it is essential requirement to know the literal meaning for comprehension of idioms. They are a part of daily formal and informal discussion. Idiomatic expressions are spoken by natives in daily conversation naturally whereas the EFL learners are lagging behind in this skill. EFL learners, irrespective of their environment, are incompetent in handling idioms while participating in discussion and similarly are inefficient to comprehend their meanings. For EFL speakers, idioms are not a piece of cake to learn but they are considered the important unit of English. As Idioms use in daily formal and informal speech, they play vital role in standard business, media, and everyday life. No part of language whether it is written or spoken, their significance cannot be ignored.

Thus, for EFL speakers, it is inevitable to learn multi-words expressions so that they produce native like English and take a part in discussion efficiently. It is opined that the more EFL learners becomes able to interpret and handle the idioms, the closer they to the native competency of the English language (Teaching Idiomatic Expressions, 2015).

Additionally, multi-words idioms are originated to be culture-based. Rizq (2015) opines that idiomatic expressions have history, culture, traditions and legacy of the native people. It can be said that idiomatic expressions extracted from physical human experiences generally cultural-based. Though, idioms that are extracted from particular areas are typically dissimilar crosswise cultures due to the reason that these areas are not similarly vital crosswise cultures. To prove this point of view, an example of England can be given because several multi-words idioms in English language is extracted from sailing because the history of England has the history as a seafaring country.

Some idiomatic expression in English Language are taken from sports because England was famous for horse racing as "neck and neck" meaning "means not possible to say who will win" and "win hands down", gives the meaning of winning with a great ease. So, as specific domain is not similarly shared and is not similarly significant crosswise cultures. As such, multi-words idioms taken from such spheres are very challenging to learn and interpret for the EFL learners. Ovando and Collier (1985) define that with the acquisition of multi-words idioms, EFL learners get the knowledge about

the culture of that language. Resultantly, the more the EFL learners are aware of idioms and the meanings, the better interpretation that speakers carry about the culture and tradition of the English.

3. Methodology

It is observed that native and non-native teachers are different in the usage of multi-words idioms. Native English teachers use idioms while talking in EFL/ESL classrooms. Yet, non-native English educators do not use them and if use, use it in rare cases. Certainly, it has effect on academic performance and consequently, it motivates the author to examine this problem and to highlight the significance of learning and teaching idiomatic expressions in the class rooms. It is important to give more importance on the knowledge of idioms in EFL milieu and materials. Shortage of knowledge about idiom means that speakers have no knowledge of English language in general both in speech and written English, idioms are employed.

For the undertaking research, qualitative approach is employed as the methodology. It will highlight the analysis and explanation of the research works conducted about idioms and their significance. The undertaken research presents the analysis of past attestation and case studies. For this type of analysis and to study the data, results and data are accumulated. For this purpose, many research studies and works have been investigated to collect data. Then after collecting data, it has been compared and made it concise. The research works studied are about improving idioms and to make teaching effective for teaching idioms.

4. Result

To teach multi-words idioms to EFL learners is essential. It is also very important to teach them how to employ idioms. The more the EFL learners is able of employing multi-words expressions, the closer they to get the proficiency of English language. If the EFL learners learn sufficient amount of idioms likewise native people, they will be close to get the competency of English. Similarly, the shortage of knowledge about idioms connects them having no knowledge about English language.

To get the knowledge of idioms and use them is very hard task. The acquisition of idioms, the interpretation and their practice abundantly are

challenging tasks. Multi-words idioms should be incorporated in the environments of English Language acquisition and classrooms. It is the responsibility of instructors to keep their learners aware about idioms and shed light on their importance in the acquisition of English language. They should motivate their students to use the idioms in their conversation and the teachers themselves use idioms while communicating with students. This vital skill should not be ignored by the instructors and they should keep update their students about idioms and motivate their students to learn and use them.

5. Discussion

The idiomatic expressions can be taught to EFL learners with the meaningful strategies as Dialogues and Role-Play. The EFL speakers find suitable atmosphere to use idiomatic expression in general conversation with the help of Dialogues. The multi-words idioms should be presented in a way that the learners use them into action instead of just their reading loudly. Role-play is also meaningful activity for EFL students' oral conversation relatively in the protected milieu of the classroom before the learners should execute accordingly in a real environment. So, the dialogues, repleted with idioms, provide the learners chances to act and exercise the oral skill before facing the real world.

Dialogues and role-plays prove supportive in written as well as oral activities. Thus, students can be assigned a task to write down an essay, story or a paragraph by using the idioms taught in the classrooms. This task can be assigned individually or in a group form. Then, they present the dialogue in the following class. Learning idioms with the help of Dialogue can motivate the EFL learners to employ them in written or spoken form without difficulty. The activity to work with group and role-play can make easier for learners to keep in mind the dialogue which they compose while repeating them in practices. To learn idioms for them becomes easy and pleasant activity because in the company of their fellows, they enjoy learning of idioms by sharing knowledge. Therefore, the activities of dialogue writing and role-play are very productive and tempting for EFL learners because put great impact and are effective skills.

At this point, it is proposed that it is better to teach EFL learners the idioms which are frequently occurred that they may listen while watching any program on T.V or reading a book, or newspaper

and during the conversation with native people. Cooper (1999) argues that instructors can advise their learners to compose multi-words idioms which they experience while employing English language. It is taxing job to find the meaning of idioms as it is said. Its reason is that dictionaries generally do not have the meaning of idioms. In fact, we find the actual meaning of the words constructing idioms.

For those learners who have thirst for learning idioms can find a great variety of dictionaries loaded with idioms. According to Ambrose (2015), several sources are now available which can easily be used to learn idioms as newspapers and magazines, radio and T.V programs or films etc. For expanding their understanding and practice of idioms, Role playing, written and spoken drills as to match the relevant columns having accurate idioms are fruitful for EFL learners.

Hence, it is essential to use good dictionaries containing multi-words idioms along with their meanings. Modern technology can be viewed as supportive in this regard. Internet is the product of technology and meaning of idioms can be found easily with one click by using Internet. (Teaching Idiomatic Expressions, 2015). It is revealed by Rodriguez and Winnberg (2013) that in today world, manifold methods are available for learning and teaching idioms for EFL learners.

As stated by Nation (2001) points out that idiomatic expressions should be taught by keeping in mind their frequency and range of occurrence. If the idioms come frequently, it becomes imperative to teach them in EFL surroundings. So, it is explained that idiomatic expressions should be handled as they are individual words and a major unit of daily vocabulary. From the above mentioned point, it is proved that acquisition of idioms is same as the acquisition of single words. It is argued that idioms should teach clearly. (Ibid).

It is also recommended that the EFL pupils should take charge for their acquisition. Their main priority should be to utter English so that they may find their shortcomings. This will help them in finding the areas which require more attention. If the EFL speakers speak English more, they can comprehend more the gaps of their language. There are other methods of the acquisition and teaching idiomatic expressions which lay stress on the age of learners. Learners' age plays an important role in the accurate comprehension of the metaphorical meaning. Child's age is given preference because a certain aged child can learn

the proper knowledge of idioms. Nine years old child can comprehend the idioms literally and so before reaching a definite age, EFL speakers should not teach idioms (Ibid). Also, idiomatic expressions which appear in context are at ease to understand due to the reason that there are pieces of information on which speakers can depend for the realization of the meaning (Ibid:17).

It is highlighted in the undertaken research that EFL instructors should have awareness of idiomatic expressions and the backgrounds. If the EFL teachers will have the required knowledge about idioms, they can clarify the meaning and origins before their learners. To get them learnt such information enables the speakers to interpret and memorize the idioms. The students should be allowed to take part in discussion employing idiomatic expression in ESL/EFL classrooms and surroundings. Furthermore, the learners should be motivated to use idiomatic expressions outside of the classroom. Chen and Lai (2013) opine that instructors must motivate their students to watch T.V, listen to English news and go through such resources loaded with multi-words idioms.

Idioms occupy a prominent place in language and the history, traditions, legacy and culture of a country construct them. By the acquisition of the idioms of a specific language, the learner can easily acquaint himself or herself with the history, and social customs of the native people of a certain language. Ambrose (2008) is of the view that idiomatic expressions share traditional and ancient information and widens the interpretation of the speakers and handling of the language. It is seen true that native speakers become adults by listening and applying idioms in day to day life. Accordingly, it looks very problematic areas for EFL learners to acquire the idioms in the same way as native people learn whereas with practice and with the passage of time, they are taught (Ambrose, 2008). Maisa and Karunakaran (2013) reveal that No interpreter or instructors can take the risk of ignoring idiomatic expressions.

6. Conclusions

The complexity of the idiomatic expressions have intricacy because their roots are deep in the civilization of the specific language. Ethics, subjects, and tales are associated with the origin of idioms and EFL speakers avail no chance to read and understand them. Idiomatic expressions reflect the clear image

of civilizations, ethnic standards, specific structures, communal outlooks and customs of a nation.

Multi- words idioms should not be ignored and should not be regarded as granted. Idioms are used daily and repeatedly by native people daily utter, use or repeat the idiomatic expressions. They occupy a prominent place in the vocabulary of a language and are extracted from the historical, cultural and traditional background of the particular language. The acquisition of idioms enables the EFL learners to be fluent likewise the native people. To expand the vocabulary and lexicon of EFL learners, the acquisition of idioms is crucial. Furthermore, the knowledge of idioms provides the quality interpretation about the cultural and traditional values of that specific language. So, the effective learning and teaching of idiomatic expression is essential and instructors as well as learners should not neglect this principal subject matter in order to get native-like proficiency in English language.

The present research will help a lot to EFL speakers in identifying and understanding the idiomatic expressions semantically in order to improve their overall language skills and finally, they will become capable to employ the resources of linguistics in a creative way. This research is not also supportive for EFL learners and teachers but it is helpful for researchers to explore other scopes in the pedagogy and acquisition of English idioms.

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