

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING BUSINESS IDIOMS TO STUDENTS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

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Any language has expressions, phrases, word combinations the lexical value of which differs more or less from the meaning of each word considered apart. They constitute a thesaurus in which the wisdom of the people, its life experience and way of thinking has become eternal. These word combinations are called phraseological units or idioms. In this article we will focus on the importance of teaching business expressions in English classes.

Keywords: *expression, phrase, word combination, phraseological unit, idiom, phraseology.*

IMPORTANȚA PREDĂRII EXPRESIILOR FRAZEOLOGICE DE AFACERI LA STUDENȚII DE LA FACULTATEA DE ECONOMIE

Orice limbă cunoaște expresii, locuțiuni, îmbinări de cuvinte, a căror valoare lexicală se îndepărtează mai mult sau mai puțin de sensurile fiecărui cuvânt luat aparte. Ele constituie un tezaur bogat, în care s-a înveșnicit înțelepciunea poporului, experiența de viață și modul de gândire al acestuia. Aceste îmbinări „sudate” au fost numite frazeologisme sau expresii idiomatice. În prezentul articol ne vom axa pe importanța predării a astfel de expresii din domeniul economiei la orele de limbă engleză.

Cuvinte-cheie: *expresie, locuțiune, îmbinare de cuvinte, expresie frazeologică, frazeologie.*

*„La traducere trebuie să ajungi până la intraductibil,
numai așa se poate cunoaște cu adevărat o limbă străină,
un popor străin.” (Goethe)*

Any language has phrases and expressions that cannot be understood literally, even if the meaning of each word is known and the grammatical structure of the expression is clear. The meaning of such an expression remains a mystery. All the attempts of word-for-word translation of such expressions can drive us to an unexpected or to an absurd result. If we do not know that the words have a special meaning together, we may misinterpret what someone is saying or be puzzled by why they are saying something that is untrue or irrelevant. For example, the English phrase “*not room to swing a cat*” (nu e loc de a oscila cu mîța) means – the smallest amount of space necessary to live in, do something – has the equivalent „spațiu redus; spațiu insuficient” [1]. Such expressions are called **idioms or phraseological units**.

Idioms exist in all languages and form an important part of the vocabulary. It is well-known that one of the keys to speaking like a native is the ability to use and <http://www.languagesuccesspress.com/understand> them. The English language as well as any other language is full of idioms. We may hear them all the time in everyday conversations. We will also meet them in books, newspapers, magazines, TV shows, and on the Internet. A very important assumption is that *idioms add color to the language*. They can be described as the most picturesque, colorful and expressive part of the vocabulary of any language. In this respect *phraseology* can be referred to as a kind of *picture gallery*.

Linguists have different opinions about the definition of the idioms. William Freeman, for example, describes *idioms* as “...established words or phrases with a special meaning that are independent of the dictionary definition and frequently of the rules of grammar as well. ...Idioms have become a fundamental part of any language; they are frequently nothing more than vigorous abbreviations of common phrases... They are a terror to any student with a logical and orderly mind. Many of them, indeed, are beyond any common-sense explanation whatever...Others are based on passages from the Bible, Shakespeare, on proverbs, and, in fact, on anything which can be employed to convey one’s thoughts briefly and effectively...” [2].

Idioms are defined as “non-motivated word-groups that cannot be freely made up in speech but are reproduced as ready-made units” [3]. This definition given by I. Ginzburg proceeds from the assumption that the essential features of idioms are stability of the lexical components and lack of motivation: the meaning of the idiom cannot be deduced from the meaning of its components and there exists a ready-made linguistic unit which does not allow any variability of its lexical component.

The special branch of linguistics which studies idioms is called **Phraseology**. British and American linguists use the word *phraseology* to describe “the way in which words are chosen, arranged and used, especially in the stated subject or field”.

It is generally known that the role of English *idioms and phraseological units* has increased dramatically in recent years. It is reflected in the dictionaries and practice books devoted to them which have recently appeared in Britain.

The famous English scientist in the field of lexicology Logan Pearsall Smith mentioned the following: “We have also in English a curious kind of compound verbs. In this kind of formation the 19th century was especially rich and gave birth to such modern expressions as *to boil down, to go under, to run across*. Verbs of this type are often colloquial, add an idiomatic power to the language, and enable it express many fine distinctions of thoughts and meaning” [4].

In general, idioms appear particularly discouraging both for students and teachers and, from my own experience, I can say that they are often neglected in English classes. Anyway, *idioms are a subject for more advanced English learners*.

In his article “*Without Slang or Idioms, Students are in the Dark!*,” David Burke discusses teachers’ unwillingness to teach idioms. Burke claims that teachers are averse to teaching idioms because they have been “equating them with obscenity.” This seems easy enough - there are many words that are vulgar - but when one pays close attention to idioms it becomes clear they can be found in even the most basic conversation. According to D. Burke, teachers’ most persistent request for books on teaching idioms is fewer examples and more activities. He suggests listening to dialogues with idioms and discussing what they might mean before revealing the meaning and contends that the students will be eager to learn what they consider “real” English for a change [5].

From a similar stance as Burke, Dimitrios Thanasoulas defends the place of the idiom in the English classroom. In his article “*An Introduction to ‘Befogging’ Idioms*,” he emphasizes the importance of context when teaching idioms. In his opinion, reference books are too often used in the introduction of idioms and make the student feel overwhelmed with “trivial and frustrating phrases and expressions.” D. Thanasoulas stresses that the importance of communicative English must not be underestimated when comparing to linguistic English. He has revealed an interesting distinction that may explain why idioms are so often ignored; they cannot be classified as “grammar” and easily simplified with rules, instead, they serve a communicative purpose that goes beyond the literal meaning of the words. Thus, idioms are not considered as important even though misunderstanding them would seriously limit one’s English. This is one area of English where rules and grammar must be put aside in favor of experience and context [6].

Some teachers of English as a second language think that students should not be taught English phraseology or idioms as it may “spoil” their English. It seems that such teachers have a very vague or a very narrow idea of phraseology. As I have already mentioned, English is extremely rich in idioms. I have been teaching English to students from the Department of Economics for several years and I have come to the conclusion that *teaching idioms is especially relevant for the students of Business English*. That is because my students are future businessmen and if we consider how important the relationship between client and businessman and between businessmen themselves is, idioms are extremely relevant for any Business English class. A businessman needs correct English grammar as well as the vocabulary of “business talk” to sound competent at his job.

Idioms teaching methods suggested matching games, fill in the blank, rewriting idioms as real meanings, and multiple choice definition matching. Most work with idioms in the classroom is written whereas most of its use will only be verbal. Whether it is because it is not an “essential” part of English grammar or it is too advanced to spend much time on, *idioms have not received their due attention*.

There are so many phraseological units belonging to common literary style that it does not even occur to native speakers that they make use of idioms which need to be explained to a foreigner. For example, *to be in two minds* means “to be undecided”, *to change one’s mind* means “to make a new and different decision or choice”, *it stands to reason* means “there is only one conclusion to be drawn”, etc.

The terminology of business, economics and finance should be taught in several stages. The learner is recommended to begin with mastering traditional lexical collocations and set expressions which show no signs of semantic transformation of their components.

Students reading business papers, economic periodicals and other publications related to their subject often come across expressions which are extremely difficult to understand because they are semantically encoded. In teaching Business English I try to teach my students idioms and specialized terms from specific domains related to business. I come with some examples from the following domains:

- advertising:
 - *prime time* – the time of day when the greatest number of people listen to the radio or watch television and when advertising rates are highest;
 - *reply coupon* – a printed form that can be detached from a magazine page, a leaflet, etc and used to ask for advertised goods;
- accounting:
 - *sales ledger* – a book or a computer file in which the money owed or paid to a company for the goods it sells is recorded;
 - *prudence concept* – an accounting principle in which expected losses are recorded at the highest possible rather than the lowest possible amount;
 - *above the line* – relating to a figure included in a statement of a company's profits and losses before tax has been paid, not after tax;
 - *to allow a claim* – to decide that an amount of money claimed for insurance, damages etc. is correct and should be paid;
- banking:
 - *the rate of interest* – the amount of money charged by the bank, or paid by the bank for the loan or use of money;
 - *refer to drawer* – words written on a check that the bank will not pay, usually because there is not enough money in the account;
 - *Basle ratios* – an international agreement on the amount of capital financial institutions must have in relation to the amount they lend out;
- business:
 - *a sleeping partner* – a person who provides a percentage of the capital of a business but who does not have a part in the management of a business;
 - *to shake hands on a bargain/ deal* – to express agreement that it is binding;
- buying and selling:
 - *to run up an account (with a shop)* – to buy a number of things on credit);
 - *hard sell* – a forceful way of getting people to buy things;
 - *good/ big seller* – a product that sells well;
- commerce:
 - *price ring* – a group of sellers in the same industry who have agreed to fix a minimum price for a product;
 - *market forces* – factors such as the amount of raw materials and goods available and the amount wanted by customers that influence the price of goods and the way they are distributed and sold;
 - *halo effect* – when people think that a company is good because it is owned by or connected with another company that is famous and important;
- economics:
 - *free market* – a market where prices are allowed to rise and fall according to supply and demand, without prices being fixed by governments;
 - *bilateral monopoly* – a situation where there is only one buyer and one seller in a market;
 - *essential industry* – an industry that a country considers is very important to its economy and may support with government money, taxes or imports, etc.;
- finance:
 - *revolving fund* – a source of money from which loans are made and repaid with interest so the fund is maintained and the money can continue to be lent;
 - *easy money* – money that is earned without difficulties;
 - *above par* – at a price that is above the original value when shares and bonds were first made available;
 - *bare squeeze* – when share prices rise because it is known that people have sold these shares without actually owning them, hoping to be able to obtain them more cheaply later, before they have to deliver them to the buyer;

- stock exchange:

- *government bonds* – securities issued by a government in the form of debenture stocks with a fixed interest that is paid at regular intervals;

- *hot money* – money that is passed quickly from country to country to take advantage of differences in interest rates and exchange rates;

- *above board* – honest and legal; etc.

I assume that all the idioms and other types of phraseological units that have been mentioned above are widely used in business, economics and management, and that is why I recommend my students to study them, so as it has already been stated, a businessman needs correct English grammar as well as the vocabulary of “business talk” to sound competent at his job.

In conclusion I can say that English idioms or idiomatic expressions have always been one of the trickiest topics for English as a Second Language learners. This is because the real meanings of English idioms are so far off their literal meanings. These real meanings are clarified to native English speakers through frequent English conversations that, unfortunately, not too many English as a Second Language learners get the chance to have. To make things more complicated for English as a Second Language learners, idioms are used in business negotiations, which are often important meetings that businessmen hold to buy, sell, grow, or guard their businesses. Idioms are part of the vocabulary and they should be taught to students and looked upon as a very important segment of any language.

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