

USING MYTHOLOGICAL IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM - BRIDGING THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

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Abstract

Idioms are an integral part of our language and culture, enriching the way we communicate and allowing us to express ideas figuratively. Despite using these expressions frequently without much thought, they have fascinating stories behind them, often shrouded in myth and reality, making them all the more intriguing. Therefore, learning idioms provides learners with a significant chance to acquire information about the underlying parameters of a language.

This article aims to analyze the significant impact of using idioms in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language. It is considered to be one of the most effective ways to provide students with better conditions to improve their communicative skills in daily contexts. A team of researchers and students from the Departments of Macedonian, Italian, and German Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology, University Goce Delcev in Stip, the Republic of North Macedonia, conducted a study on the use and meaning of idioms of mythological origin in foreign language classes. The goal was to compare their meanings and analyze their usage.

The research involved 40 students who worked in groups. The first phase was to identify idioms with mythological origins in given texts, followed by researching the origins of the idioms and their meanings while using available online resources. In the second phase, all students participated in an online workshop using the Microsoft Teams platform where they presented the information they had gathered and compared it with each other in Macedonian. This encouraged students to interact and discuss the differences and similarities regarding the use of idioms across different languages. In the final phase of the research, the students were required to use the idioms correctly in exercises previously prepared by the teachers.

These interactive activities helped the students to become cognizant of the meaning of the idioms that were analyzed explicitly and connected to mythological characters and events while becoming appreciative of their cultural heritage. The study concluded that the use of idioms with mythological origins in foreign language classrooms not only improves students' proficiency but also raises their cultural awareness.

Keywords: idioms, mythology, figurative language, foreign language.

1 INTRODUCTION

The impact of mythology on various languages is undeniable. From idioms to motivations, mythology has left its mark. In this paper, the aim is to connect today's students with mythology by exploring commonly used idioms. The study focuses on idioms in German, Italian, and Macedonian that incorporate mythological elements.

A myth is a tale that portrays the world in a manner that deviates from our conventional understanding of it. Such stories usually incorporate a transformation that aligns the world more closely with our current perception of it. Although this definition may seem narrow, it offers valuable insight into the essence of myths (Gnerre, 1985: 29).

Myths are ancient tales that trace their roots back to mythology, featuring mythological gods, creatures, and places. These stories have been immortalized in the cultural fabric of nearly all nations, serving as a means to express novel thoughts and ideas and make claims about the origin and essence of our world. Although the authors of these tales are unknown, myths from Greek and Roman cultures, as well as those from other nations and regions, are ingrained in our culture and handed down through generations. Despite their age, these stories of gods and other mythical beings have a significant role in helping us understand ourselves as human beings. Myths offer a profound insight into universal human experiences and aspirations, and their underlying logic unites the wisdom of cultures from every corner of the globe.

Myths are tales that are intricately intertwined with the creative and imaginative capacities of humanity. Their purpose is not to mirror reality but to delve into the realm of possibility. According to Aristotle, myths weave together events in a coherent narrative, allowing for an appreciation of their credibility. In epic poetry and tragedies, myths serve as a mirror of life, offering a glimpse into what could occur in a specific situation (Bertazzoli, n.d: 6).

Have you ever wondered why ancient civilizations are filled with captivating myths and enchanting tales? Despite some of these stories being misinterpreted, they still resonate with us on a personal level. Each anecdote holds a significant meaning and it is worth exploring why we should take heed of them. These stories possess an immense power that allows us to construct our interpretation of the world and that is why they are so alluring.

We explore the depths of our ancestral memories to unearth the power of hidden knowledge. It is crucial to acknowledge that our very essence holds secrets about our identity and how to reveal the truths that have been veiled for centuries, impeding the comprehension of humanity's history.

Myths are narratives that frequently utilize allegory and symbolism to depict the origins of gods, the underworld, paradise, hell, and other supernatural themes. Typically, the central figures in myths reside in a realm brimming with deities, magic, and goddesses that have crafted our world. These stories are not confined to any particular era or civilization; rather, they are a fundamental aspect of every culture and are often adopted and reimagined to safeguard our shared history and sense of community. The majority of myths were fashioned during pre-literate periods and were composed by anonymous authors. The expressions and traditions of ancient mythology have been shared and spread across the Western world through literature, education, visual arts, scientific terminology, and modern mass media. Yet, the cultural influence of these methods of transmission has not been consistent (Mazzini, 2014: 9).

For centuries, mythological motifs have inspired countless artists. These motifs have not only shaped the literary world but also impacted language, resulting in idioms that are used across many languages. Many of these idioms can be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman mythology, with their origins stemming from specific persons, events, or motifs. These idioms have been translated from the original Latin language or intermediary languages such as French, German, Greek, Church Slavonic, and others.

2 METHODOLOGY

The field of phraseology provides a precise portrayal of the intricate connection between language and culture. Many idiomatic expressions are rooted in metaphors, and close examination of their underlying concepts can illuminate their intended message. Rather than fixating on the individual components of a phraseological unit, its significance is informed by an individual's personal experiences and comprehension of a given metaphorical expression.

Mythological idioms, being phrases of ancient origin, are often absent from contemporary dictionaries. These idioms, considered to be sayings and proverbs derived from the literature of antiquity, represent a rich cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations. Such idioms can add depth and nuance to language and should be studied and analyzed, as they can provide insight into ancient cultures and ways of thinking.

By analyzing the linguistic and symbolic elements of myths, one can gain a deeper understanding of the historical context in which they originated. Therefore, myths can be seen as signposts that point to the reality of past events, but to interpret them correctly, one must have a thorough understanding of the language, symbolism, and cultural context in which they were created.

This article aims to analyze the significant impact of using mythological idiomatic expressions in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language. It is considered to be one of the most effective ways to provide students with better conditions to improve their communicative skills in daily contexts. A team of researchers and students from the Departments of Macedonian, Italian, and German Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology, University Goce Delcev in Stip, the Republic of North Macedonia, conducted a study on the use and meaning of idioms of mythological origin in foreign language classes. The goal was to compare their meanings and analyze their usage. The research involved 40 students.

The first phase was to identify idioms with mythological origins in given texts, followed by researching the origins of the idioms and their meanings while using available online resources.

The first phase was structured into five distinct parts. Initially, the students were asked to peruse a selection of online texts, ranging from journalistic to literary pieces, that featured mythological expressions. Subsequently, in the second part, the students were tasked with identifying and differentiating the mythological phrases from the texts.

In the third part of the task, the objective was to discover the precise or partial equivalents of the idioms in Macedonian. Subsequently, the fourth part comprised a multiple-choice exercise to gauge the significance of the idioms in the given context. In the fifth part, it was imperative to employ online resources, predominantly dictionaries, to ascertain the connotation of the mythological expression. It is recommended to investigate the phrase in detail and make use of credible sources to ensure accuracy. By doing so, one can attain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying meaning and significance of the mythological idiomatic expressions.

In the second phase, an online workshop was held on the Microsoft Teams platform, where all students participated in sharing the idioms they had collected. The workshop was conducted in Macedonian to facilitate comparison and discussion of similarities and differences in idiomatic usage across languages, encouraging interaction and constructive dialogue among the students.

Moving forward to the final phase of the research, the students were tasked with completing exercises that were prepared by their teachers to ensure they had a proper grasp of the idioms studied and could use them effectively. The objective was to help them gain a better understanding of the idioms and utilize them appropriately.

Through interactive activities, students could gain a deeper understanding of idioms and their meanings. These idioms were thoughtfully analyzed and connected to mythological characters and events, allowing students to gain a greater appreciation for their cultural heritage. The study concluded that introducing idioms with mythological origins in foreign language classrooms not only enhances students' proficiency but also fosters a greater sense of cultural awareness.

3 RESULTS

The research findings from the first phase of the study proved to be unsatisfactory, in contrast to the final phase, which revealed a significant improvement in students' knowledge of mythological idiomatic expressions.

3.1 The first phase of the research

3.1.1 Results from the first and the second part of the first phase

The primary objective was to meticulously search through the given texts to locate and pinpoint idiomatic expressions that have their roots in ancient mythological tales and legends. By efficiently completing the first and second parts of the first phase, the research participants have impressively identified a total of 30 idiomatic expressions: 1. мк. *Данајски подарок*, de. *Danaergeschenk*, it. *botte delle Danaidi* (in English: Greek gift); 2. мк. *Тројански коњ*, de. *das trojanische Pferd*, it. *il cavallo di Troia* (in English: the Trojan Horse); 3. мк. *Пирова победа*, de. *Pyrrhussieg*, it. *la vittoria di Pirro* (in English: a Pyrric victory); 4. мк. *Ахилова петица*, de. *Achillesferse*, it. *tallone d'Achille*, (in English: Achilles heel); 5. мк. *Аријаднин конец /Аријаднина нишка*, de. *der Faden der Ariadne*, it. *il filo d'Arianna* (in English: Ariadne's thread); 6. мк. *Танталови маки*, de. *Tantalusqualen*, it. *il supplizio di Tantalò* (in English: Tantalus's torture); 7. мк. *Прометеев оган*, de. *prometheisches Feuer*, it. *il fuoco di Prometeo* (in English: Promethean Fire); 8. мк. *Хомерска смеа*, de. *homerisches Gelächter*, it. *la risata omerica* (in English: Homeric laughter); 9. мк. *Јанус со две лица /дволикиот Јанус*, de. *die zwei Gesichter des Janus*, it. *Giano bifronte* (in English: two-faced Janus); 10. мк. *Авгиеви коњушници /Авгиеви штали*, de. *Augiasstall*, it. *le stalle di Augia* (in English: Augean stables); 11. мк. *Сизифов труд/Сизифова работа/Сизифовски маки*, de. *Sisyphusarbeit*, it. *la fatica di Sisifo* (in English: labor of Sisyphus, the work of Sisyphus); 12. мк. *Дамоклов меч*, de. *Damoklesschwert*, it. *la spada di Damocle* (in English: the sword of Damocles); 13. мк. *Прокрустова постела*, de. *Procrustesbett*, it. *il letto di Procrate* (in English: Procrustes bed); 14. мк. *Касандрин крик*, de. *Kassandrarufo bezeichnet*, it. *il grido di Cassandra* (in English: Cassandra syndrome or curse); 15. мк. *Гордиев јазол*, de. *gordische Knoten*, it. *nodo gordiano* (in English: gordian knot); 16. мк. *Пандорина кутија*, de. *die Büchse der Pandora*, it. *il vaso di Pandora* (in English: Pandora's box); 17. мк. *Купидова стрела*, de. *Amors Pfeil*, it. *la freccia di Cupido* (in English: Cupid's arrow); 18. мк. *Херкулов труд/сила/подвиг*, de. *herkulische Anstrengung*, it. *la fatica di Ercole* (in English: herculean effort/ task); 19. мк. *Медузин поглед*, de. *Medusas blick*, it.

lo sguardo di Medusa (in English: Medusa's gaze); 20. мк. Еридино јаболко /јаболко на раздорот, de. Apfel der Zwietracht /Erisapfel, it. il pomo della discordia/la mela della discordia /la mela lanciata da Eris (in English: the golden apple /apple of discord); 21. мк. го јавна Пегас, de. den Pegasus besteigen, it. cavalca Pegaso (in English: mount Pegasus); 22. мк. минува низ Сцила и Харибда/меѓу Сцила и Харибда, de. zwischen Szylla und Charybdis, it. tra Scilla e Cariddi (in English: between Scylla and Charybdis); 23. мк. Прометеев орган, de. das Feuer des Prometheus, it. il fuoco di Prometeo (in English: The fire of Prometheus); 24. мк. убав како Аполон, de. schön wie Apollo, it. essere un Apollo (in English: an Apollo); 25. мк. воскресне/се прероди како Феникс од пепелта, de. wie Phönix aus der Asche, it. essere come l'Araba Fenice (in English: being like the Phoenix); 26. мк. Едипов комплекс, de. oedipus Komplex, it. complesso di Edipo (in English: Oedipus complex); 27. мк. како Нарцис е, de. Narziss sein, it. essere Narciso (in English: to be a Narcissus); 28. мк. во прегратките на Морфеј, de. in Morpheus' Armen, it. tra le braccia di Morfeo (in English: in the arms of Morpheus); 29. мк. падот на Икар, de. Sturz des Ikarus, it. la caduta di Icaro (in English: the fall of Icarus); 30. мк. Сфингина загатка, de. eine Sphinx sein, it. essere una Sfinx (in English: like a sphinx).

3.1.2 Results from the third part of the first phase

In the third part of the task, the objective was to discover precise or partial equivalents of the idioms in Macedonian. In this particular part, the participation was restricted to the students of Italian studies and German studies, totaling 27. It is to be noted that the students of Macedonian studies were not included in this task. Based on the chart, it is evident that all 27 students were able to determine the Macedonian language equivalent of expressions numbered 2, 15, 17, and 27. A total of 26 participants were able to find the equivalent of idioms numbered 3, 16, and 24, while 25 students identified the equivalent of idioms numbered 4, 11, and 26. Most of the participants, a total of 24, were able to find the equivalent of idioms numbered 19, 23, and 25. Similarly, 23 students were able to find the equivalent of the idiom number 8, while 17 students figured out the equivalent of the idiom number 14, and 15 students were able to find the equivalent of the idiom number 21. Finally, 13 and 12 students respectively found the equivalent of idioms number 28, 30, and 9. It's worth noting that only a small number of students, fewer than six, were successful in finding an equivalent for idioms numbered 1, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, and 22 in the Macedonian language.

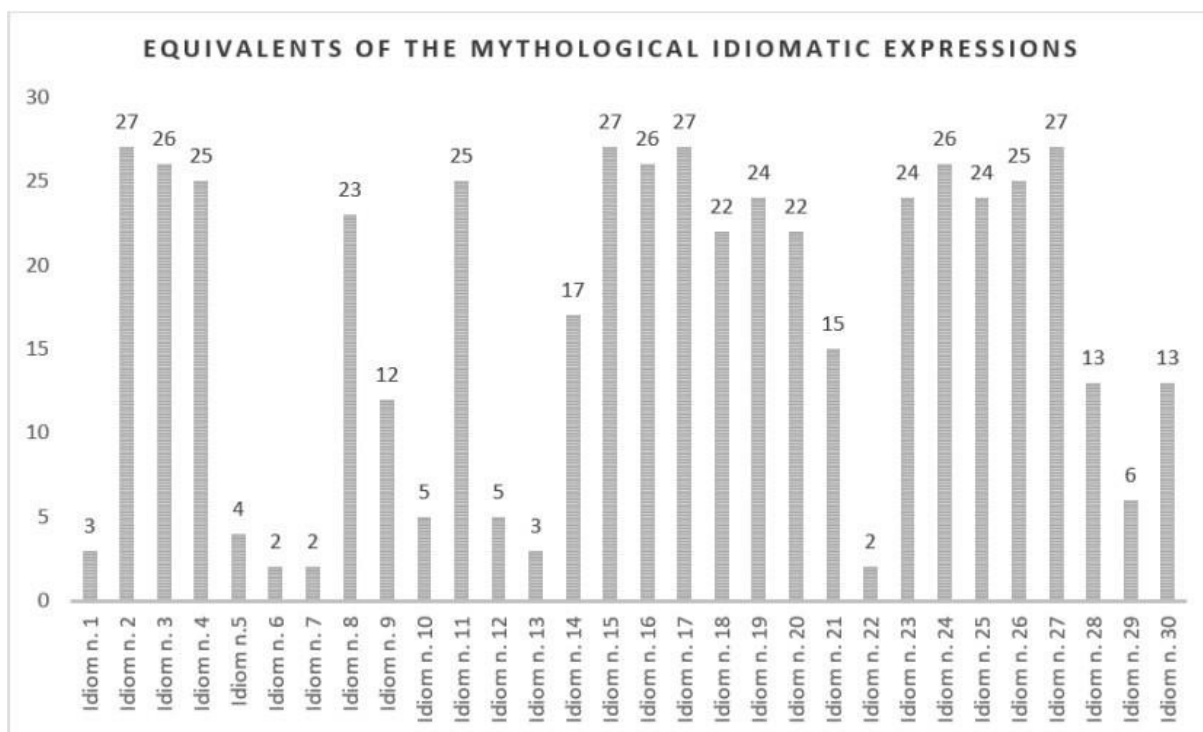


Figure 1. Equivalents of the mythological idiomatic expressions in Macedonian.

3.1.3 Results from the fourth part of the first phase

In the fourth part, students had to complete a multiple-choice exercise to determine the significance of idioms in a given context. The students' task involved identifying the appropriate answer from the three

options provided. The chart indicates that the meanings of idioms no. 16, 17, 25, 26, and 27 have the most accurate responses, whereas the meanings of idioms no. 1, 12, 13, 22, 29, and 30 are unclear. All 40 students participated in the activity and the following are the outcomes:

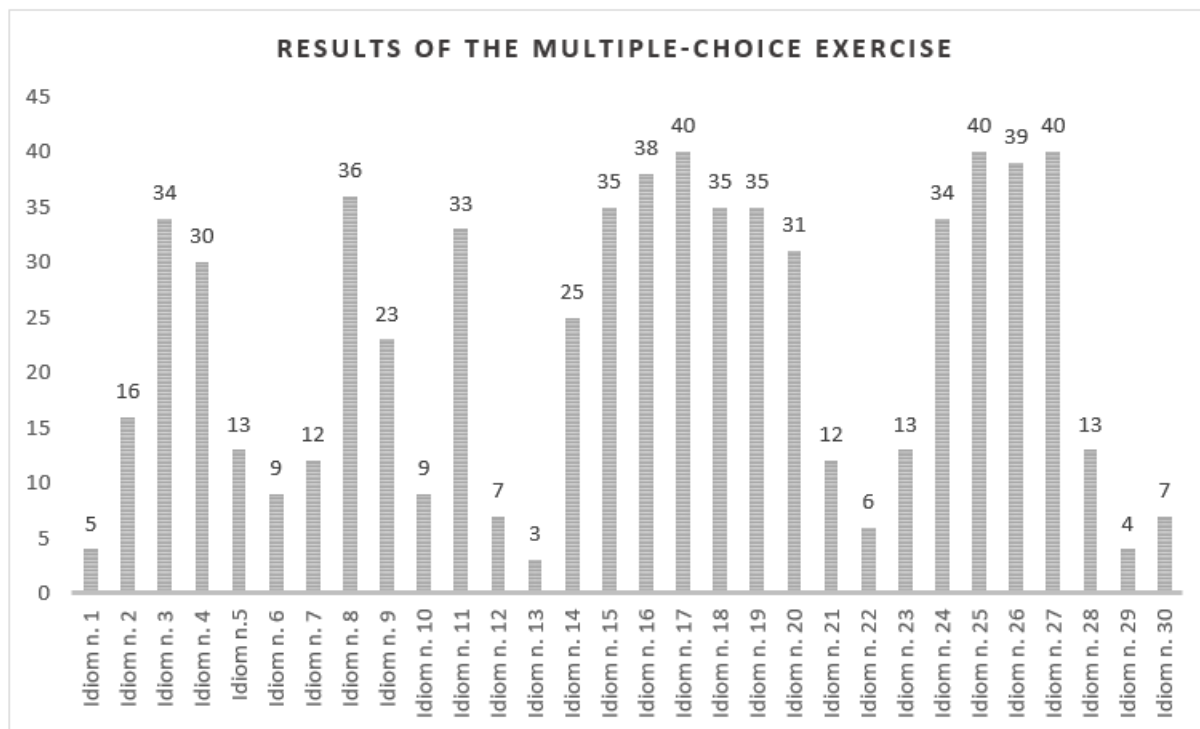


Figure 2. Results of the multiple-choice exercise.

3.1.4 The fifth part of the first phase

During the fifth step, to truly understand the deep meaning and significance behind mythological idiomatic expressions, it was essential for the students to take advantage of the vast resources available online. By conducting thorough research and utilizing reliable sources, students could attain a comprehensive understanding of the authentic meaning and importance behind mythological idiomatic expressions. The students' dedication and drive are demonstrated in their independent work during this part of the research. It's important to note that this part does not involve any evaluation, but the students should be proud of their efforts nonetheless.

3.2 The second phase of the research

In the second phase of the research, the students participated in an online workshop that was held on the Microsoft Teams platform. The primary objective of the workshop was to share and discuss the idioms that the students had collected. The workshop was conducted in Macedonian, which allowed the students to compare and explore the similarities and differences in idiomatic usage across various languages. The interactive session encouraged constructive dialogue among the students, enabling them to learn from one another.

It is crucial to emphasize that the second phase of the research does not entail any form of assessment or evaluation. Rather, it is an opportunity for the students to demonstrate their skills and expertise in the subject matter. This provides a valuable opportunity to take a comprehensive look at the extent of progress made thus far, recognizing and analyzing the significant strides made toward achieving the intended goals.

3.3 The final phase of the research

In the concluding phase of the research, the teachers designated a set of exercises for the students to evaluate their comprehension levels of the idiomatic expressions that were taught, as well as their ability to apply them precisely. The ultimate goal was to augment their understanding of idioms and foster their skillful application. The empirical evidence is incontrovertible - the students' comprehension of

mythological idiomatic expressions has demonstrably improved. They have acquired not only a lucid understanding of the phrases' meanings but also the competence to apply them in appropriate contexts.

Figure 3 showcases remarkable results of all 40 students, indicating their impressive grasp of idioms numbered 3, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 24, 25, 26, and 27. Their accurate application of these idioms in accordance with their intended meanings is a clear indication of their diligent efforts and unwavering commitment. In the assessment, it was observed that the majority of the students were able to effectively identify the correct use of idioms, as intended. However, there were a few instances where one or two students did not demonstrate proficiency in identifying the appropriate usage of idioms, specifically the idioms numbered 4, 18, 19, and 20. It is worth mentioning that the utilization of idioms 6, 10, 12, and 13 resulted in a lower number of correct answers. Despite this, there was a noticeable improvement in comparison to the initial phase results.

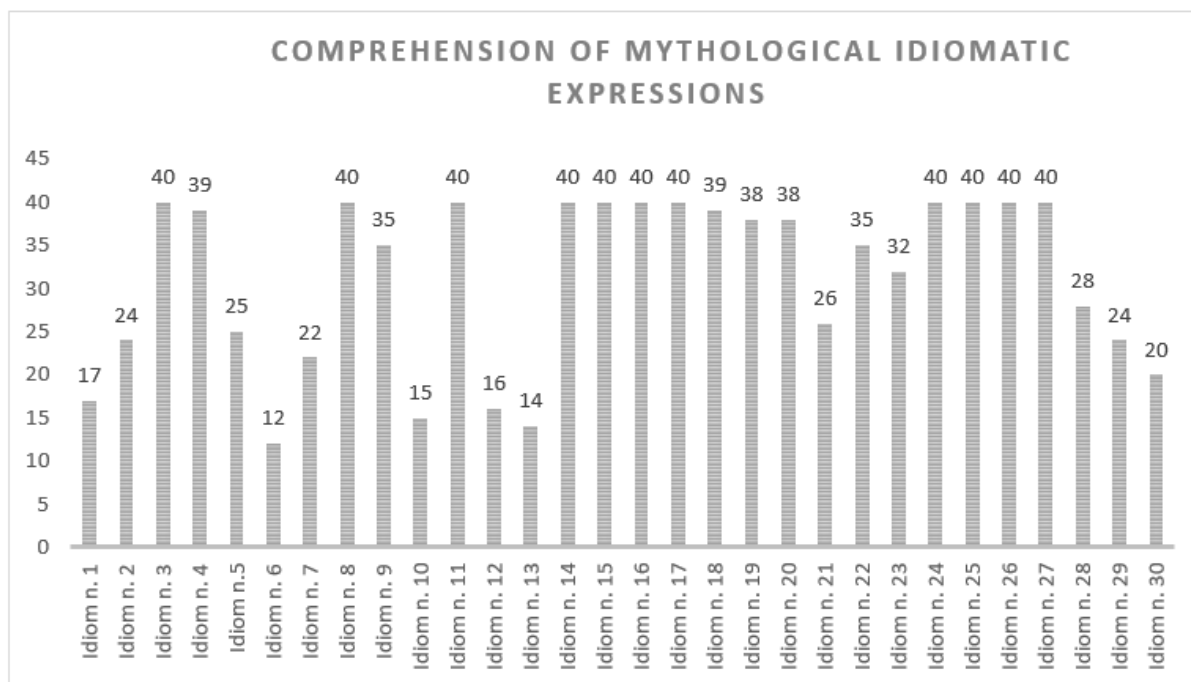


Figure 3. Comprehension of mythological idiomatic expressions.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The analyzed corpus primarily comprises idioms that pertain to human appearance, character, abilities, and state. These idioms serve to describe various human traits, inner states, emotions, and psychological processes, encompassing both positive and negative aspects of human behavior. Additionally, these idioms express interpersonal relationships, including love, seduction, attention, anger, and threats, and are associated with human activities such as work, successes, and failures in life, as well as other various activities of human existence. Consequently, these idioms are widely recognized across cultures and exist in most languages.

Research has indicated that there are frequent resemblances in mythological idioms among diverse languages. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the adoption of similar mythological expressions across various European languages where one can discover idioms that not only possess comparable structures and meanings but also originate from the same source and motivation.

The concept of a myth holds a certain allure, as it serves as a vanishing point that connects our past with the present. It is a reminder of the stories and legends that have been passed down through generations, carrying with them the wisdom and experiences of those who came before us. These idiomatic expressions are not only significant because of their historical origins, but also because of the cultural and literary value they hold. By identifying and exploring these expressions, we can gain a deeper understanding of the myths and legends that have shaped the beliefs and practices of different societies over time.

Incorporating interactive activities in the classroom proved to be an effective method in helping students grasp the meaning of idioms, particularly when connected to mythological characters and events. This approach also enabled students to develop a greater appreciation for the cultural heritage. The research findings suggest that integrating idioms with mythological roots in foreign language lessons not only enhances language skills but also promotes cultural awareness because the myth is a powerful symbol of our cultural identity and a testament to the resilience and creativity of humanity.

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