

Research, Innovation and Sustainable Development: Emerging Trends and Perspectives

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PREFACE

The contemporary world is witnessing profound transformations in the fields of research, technology, society, economy, and the environment. Rapid technological advancement, emerging scientific discoveries, changing social structures, climate-related challenges, and the growing demand for responsible development have created new opportunities as well as complex challenges for researchers, academics, policymakers, and practitioners. In this context, research and innovation have become essential instruments for understanding emerging realities and developing sustainable solutions for the future.

Research, Innovation and Sustainable Development: Emerging Trends and Perspectives is an attempt to bring together diverse scholarly perspectives on some of the significant issues shaping the present and the future. The volume brings together research contributions that explore contemporary developments across different disciplines and examine how knowledge, innovation, and sustainable practices can contribute to social, economic, environmental, and intellectual progress.

Sustainable development is no longer limited to environmental conservation. It encompasses a much broader vision that includes social well-being, economic development, technological innovation, responsible use of natural resources, inclusive growth, quality education, institutional development, and intergenerational responsibility. The challenges of the twenty-first century require interdisciplinary approaches because many contemporary problems cannot be adequately understood within the boundaries of a single academic discipline. Research therefore needs to encourage dialogue among the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, technology, management, geography, and other fields of knowledge.

Innovation, similarly, extends beyond technological inventions. It involves new ideas, approaches, methods, practices, and forms of collaboration that can improve existing systems and respond effectively to emerging needs. Universities, research institutions, governments, industries, and communities all have important roles to play in creating an environment where innovative thinking can contribute to sustainable and inclusive development.

The chapters included in this volume reflect this broad understanding of research and innovation. They engage with emerging trends, contemporary challenges, theoretical perspectives, and practical possibilities from different disciplinary viewpoints. While the contributions differ in their subjects and methodologies, they share a common concern with generating meaningful knowledge and exploring ways in which research can contribute to a more sustainable and responsible future.

The book is intended for teachers, researchers, doctoral scholars, postgraduate students, policymakers, and readers interested in contemporary research and sustainable development. It may also serve as a useful academic resource for those seeking to understand the changing landscape of interdisciplinary research and the relationship between knowledge creation, innovation, and sustainable development.

As editors, we believe that an academic book becomes meaningful when it encourages further thought, discussion, and research. This volume is therefore not intended to provide final answers to the complex questions addressed in its chapters. Rather, it seeks to open avenues for further inquiry and scholarly dialogue. The rapidly changing nature of the contemporary world makes continuous research and critical engagement indispensable.

We sincerely acknowledge the efforts of all the contributors whose scholarly work has made this volume possible. We are grateful to the researchers and academicians who shared their ideas and perspectives and contributed to the intellectual richness of this collection. We also appreciate the support of colleagues, institutions, reviewers, and everyone involved in bringing this work to completion.

We hope that *Research, Innovation and Sustainable Development: Emerging Trends and Perspectives* will be useful to the academic community and will encourage readers to think critically about the relationship between research, innovation, human development, and sustainability. We further hope that the ideas presented in this volume will inspire new research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and constructive engagement with the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Dr. Mohammad Afasr Alam

Dr. Wakil Kumar Yadav

Editors

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11. Inclusion of Idioms in ELT Materials and Role in L2 Proficiency

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Abstract

Idioms are some of the most frequently occurring fixed phrases in many of the world's languages and any language learner that is immersing themselves deeper into the target language of their choice should be at the very least conscious of their role in larger discourse. Thus, they ought to be formally included in the language materials the learner primarily is instructed linguistic knowledge from.

The aim of this study is to determine whether there is a positive relationship between the formal inclusion of idiomatic expressions into language learning materials and vocabulary proficiency of English as a second/foreign language. The objective of this study will be an examination of the vocabulary focused content of two language textbooks at a lower intermediate level (B1) used in classroom language instruction for learners of English so as to perceive a difference in the vocabulary proficiency outcomes of each.

Key words: idioms, vocabulary proficiency, language learning materials, language textbook

Introduction

Idioms, as they are an unavoidable and ingrained part of human language, are found to be an essential and distinguishing feature of possessing a great deal of linguistic knowledge, in addition to richness and diversity in expression and a sign of fluent communicative competence. They reflect the language users' shared lived experiences and connect them to their community; and considering the vital role of language in maintaining culture, it is only reasonable that the contents of such phrases would reflect that and carry with them a unique blend of sociocultural, historical and etymological information (along with their connotations), even if that may not be obvious at first glance.

Their sheer frequency and pervasiveness in almost every conceivable domain, medium, and register of communication (and therefore, every form of discourse) does make them hard to enumerate, but at the same time, it speaks volumes about their significance, despite their existence being (for the most part) overlooked and understated by both native and non native speakers alike due to the casual spontaneity with which they are uttered in discourse.

The figurative and to many, perplexing, meaning idioms (and related non-literal expressions such as metaphors, proverbs, similes, sayings, collocations, compounds, phrasal verbs etc.) are inherently imbued with requires of the language user to learn how to be creative and "play" with parts of language itself in order to correctly interpret the sense(s) of that type of utterance, and in turn, develop one's own skill enough to memorize and produce them swiftly and accurately.

This, however, is quite the demanding skill to master, even more so for those who are unacquainted with the language at hand, or at least not to a proficient enough level to do so subconsciously, the way native speakers are able to. It necessitates developing a deeper level of

understanding (and thus, awareness) not just of the building blocks of language and the main linguistic skills, but also of the variety of functions and contexts involved in both idiomatic reception and production and thus channeling that comprehension into appropriate, balanced, and relevant usage of idioms, and their cohesion with the overall discourse.

This creates a lexical knowledge gap for many non-native speakers (especially learners of a second/foreign language), since they are the ones that are primarily faced with hindrances when trying to ascertain that kind of semantic and pragmatic skill, which can seriously affect their L2 proficiency and communicative competence. Unfortunately, despite their perceived importance, idioms are neglected and rarely included in language teaching or learning (especially at the lower levels of proficiency) and their benefits to L2 acquisition are seldom investigated and vague at best.

This can be potentially due to idiom unfamiliarity through lack of direct target language exposure, idioms not being (either explicitly or implicitly) integrated within the course, through its teaching modes, tasks and materials, or the learners' lack of awareness in relevant background knowledge, and most commonly their literal perception of idioms, as in, not viewing or learning them as a whole singular semantic (lexical) unit which is, more than often, non-compositional in meaning and thus, impossible to translate with equivalent (cultural) nuance. On top of this, insufficient amount of practice, low motivation or scarce opportunities to apply that idiomatic knowledge may lead to weakening of those acquired associations in the learner's memory.

Difficulties arise on the foreign/second language instructors' side as well, since they find it difficult to seamlessly integrate idioms into classroom instruction without taking time away from other type of tasks that take precedence that involve more basic language skills (such as speaking, listening, writing and reading), they may also face indecision in the choice of idioms they may want to include in supplementary materials, or they themselves may not fully fundamentally understand the concept of idioms and their cultural background enough to be able to instruct them accordingly.

This is why textbooks are of great importance, since they are most often the primary resource for both the language teaching and learning process, offering neatly organized salient linguistic information; in doing so, are substantial in providing language learners with the best language learning opportunities, giving them second-hand experience with the target language as well as its associated sociocultural values, all done with aim to improve their communicative competence and attain a solid level of proficiency in said second/foreign language.

Literature review

Definition of the term

Cooper (1999) defines the notion of idiom as "... an expression whose meaning cannot always be readily derived from the usual meaning of its constituent elements" (p. 233).

There is lack of consensus on what would be the criteria for defining an expression with such figurative nature as the idiom, since many of its defining characteristics overlap to a great extent with other types of related figurative expressions (such as similes, metaphors and proverbs). Some of its most defining features are their degree of metaphoricity, non-compositionality (analyzability), their 'invariance' in form and level of formality they carry across discourses.

Metaphoricity, as Mäntylä (2004) puts it, pertains to how decipherable the figurative meaning of an idiom is, with 3 categories broadly demarcated by the strength of the literal – figurative connection and degree of figurativeness:

- Transparent (where the literal meaning is clearly linked to the figurative one)
- Semi-transparent (not as clear of a connection, but the literal hints about the figurative meaning)

- Opaque (it is hard to determine the figurative meaning without knowing the etymology behind it)

In saying this though, one does have to consider that the criteria for opacity is heavily dependent on perception and what may seem transparent in meaning to some may be the opposite case (opaque) or may not even be recognized as an idiom due to their falsely perceived familiarity; otherwise known as ‘deceptive transparency’.

Similarly, Mitsis (2004, in Alhaysony, 2017) considers the idiom to lie on “a continuum of non-literal expressions that starts with usual collocations, continues with stable or fixed collocations and metaphorical collocations, and ends with idioms of absolute abstract meaning” (p. 71).

Academics also entertain the idea that the idiom (as a figurative expression) is a type of ‘dead’ (frozen) metaphor, since their root metaphorical origin is obscured and no longer strongly linked with their particular meaning or usage, and as such, their meaning – form connection seems superficially arbitrary, particularly to non-native language speakers.

This view also pertains to their assumed syntactic ‘frozenness’ (restrictedness) in form, one that does not permit many (if any) variations or transformations to its base; an assumption which has later been refuted as a false, as numerous allegedly difficult obscure idioms’ are shown to have traceable origins to either extinct or niche practices and do tolerate a level of transformation, variation and substitution (or have it syntactically built-in). I think this quote on idioms by Crystal (1991) sums all this up well:

...a term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which are semantically or syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic viewpoint, the meaning of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words do not often permit the usual variability they display in other contexts (Crystal, 1991, in Khawaldeh et al., 2016, p. 120).

Prior studies

Studies on idioms and idiomaticity, especially those that pertain to implementation of idioms in classroom instruction and second/foreign language learning have only in recent times been picking up in pace; research examining the nature of idioms and their comprehension had to be firmly established first so as to provide theoretical basis for such endeavors.

Thomas Cooper’s (1999) study on L2 idiom processing by English language learners is one of the many notable works in this area, since it sheds light on some of the mental strategies learners take up in order to interpret the meaning of L2 idioms. This process of trial and error includes strategies like: guessing from context, discussion and analysis, using literal meaning, requesting information, paraphrasing, using one’s background knowledge, referring to L1 equivalents, etc. He is of the opinion that idioms should not be relegated to secondary importance in L2 instruction; since they are frequently encountered in discourse and can greatly improve learner proficiency level.

Prior works that have also concerned themselves with idioms in L2 language learning have been those of Eric Kellerman (1983) and Suzanne Irujo (1986). The former, involving Dutch participants whose task was to recognize English idiom equivalents, touches upon the effect of transfer between the first language and the target (L2) language and how their semantic perception of familiarity would shape idiom interpretation as non/literal. The latter, similarly, was concerned with whether learners were reliant upon mother tongue usage in the comprehension and production of L2 idioms (tested on three categories of idioms based on level of unfamiliarity or dissimilarity to L1 equivalents) and whether that production was in accordance to native usage. Other studies that cover reception and production of L2 idioms and their effect on proficiency:

Arnaud and Savignon's (1997, in Mäntylä, 2004) work focusing specifically on recognition of rare (opaque) idioms and the strategies used to arrive at their meaning;

Mäntylä's (2004) study on the level of comprehension of English idioms by Finnish learners and their differences from native use or in perception of formality and context, along with whether the L1 or the idioms' characteristics had any effect on interpretation;

De Caro's (2009) work talking about the advantages and importance of learning and using idioms in English;

Abolfazli and Sadeghi's (2017) examination of whether the mode of teaching idioms played a role in improving learners' idiomatic competence;

Zyzik's (2011) study on the effects of prior lexical knowledge and idiom organization on L2 idiom learning;

Cieślicka's (2006) work touching on literal salience in immediate processing of idiomatic expressions by second language learners;

...amongst many others not mentioned here for the sake of brevity and avoiding repetition.

Research question:

Following this brief review of literature, this study seeks to answer this research question:

1. Does the inclusion of idiomatic expressions in language teaching material (language textbook) play a role in English language learners' vocabulary proficiency?
2. Are there integrated tasks with focus on idiomatic expressions and as such, do they pertain to both idiom recognition and production skills?

Method

Materials

The two textbooks whose content is surveyed for the purposes of this study are the student's book "Close-Up" by Angela Healan and Katrina Gormley (originally published in 2012), and the student's book 2 "THINK" by Herbert Puchta, Jeff Stranks and Peter Lewis-Jones (published in 2016), matched on lower intermediate level of language learning proficiency (or B1), according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR for short).

"Close-Up" in particular is currently being utilized in language teaching for second-year students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in secondary school education at the secondary community school "Jane Sandanski" in the city of Strumica, Macedonia. The latter textbook, as it is not currently in use, has been chosen to serve as a control for the former, since it has no presence of idiomatic expressions. Both of these textbooks have gotten approval to be used for the purposes of this study and were obtained from the school's library with permission.

They each consist of 12 units with sections which focus on each language skill (speaking, writing, listening and reading) as well as grammar and vocabulary sections relating to a relevant topic, which ranges from familial ties and relationships, to sports, lifestyle, the environment, entertainment and leisure time activities, food, architecture, technology and communications, school life (education) and science and scientific discoveries.

Procedure

This non-experimental quantitative study involves textual analysis of the vocabulary content of each textbook, noting down instances where there is clear presence of idiomatic expressions and what kind of activities are given that include said expressions, and lastly, subsequent collection and organization of raw data, along with measurement and analysis of said data.

Results

Characteristics of Content

Each of the units in “Close-Up” contain two instances of a vocabulary section, each a page-long, which come up to 24 vocabulary focused pages across the 12 units; that cover 5 important vocabulary areas: phrasal verbs, word formation, prepositions (in context), lexis (singular words and phrases), and lastly, collocations and expressions (meaning, idiomatic expressions make up a mere fifth of the content included in the vocabulary section). The vocabulary section makes up for a total of 13% of the overall page count, which amounts to 183 pages.

Only one of the two pages per unit dedicated to vocabulary includes tasks that assess idiomatic knowledge, meaning they account for only (less than) half of all the vocabulary focused content throughout the textbook. A problem that has arisen from the data collection part of the process is that not every unit has explicit vocabulary focus on, or contains idiomatic expressions, with some units having majority or all of their idiomatic expressions found within a text excerpt. The vocabulary section in units 8, 10 and 12 does not include idioms, so by excluding them, general idiomatic expression presence comes up to 9 formally recognized instances.

The population of idiomatic expressions in this textbook comes up to 50 in number, each organized by the topic (theme) of the unit. However, they are unequally distributed across units, with a few units having only one to two instances, whereas one of them has as much as 11 instances throughout the whole unit. The unit in question is unit 4, it alone making up for 22% of the whole amount of idioms in the textbook, closely followed by unit 5 and 6, both with 8 idioms, which, when combined, make up practically half of all idioms found throughout the textbook. The most common frequency of idioms is four, and as such the average of all the values is 4.16. Only unit 12 does not include a single idiom throughout the entirety of it. The table containing them in full along with their location will be presented in the appendix at the end of this paper.

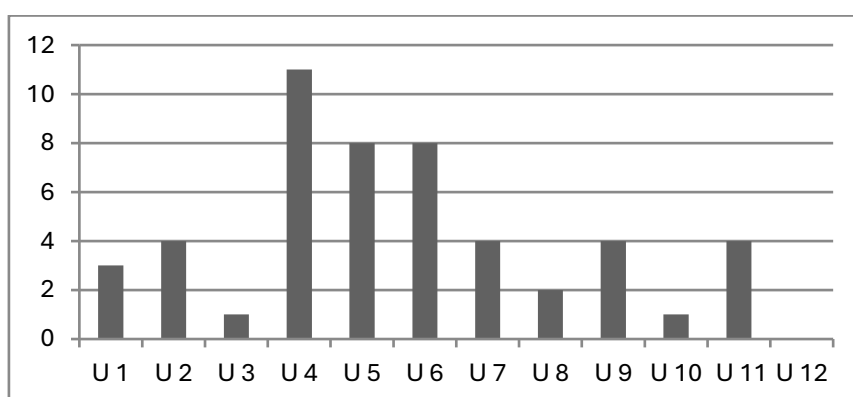


Figure 3: Frequency of idioms per unit in ‘Close-Up’

Characteristics of Idiom Assessment Tasks

Idiomatic expressions and collocations here are paired and assessed together, with the only exercises that involve them presented in a pairwise manner (per whole unit with one of each type); one of which

focuses on their receptive skill (recognition of idioms and such), and the other(s) on their productive skill (brief in-context written or spoken discourse). The receptive exercises throughout the textbook are designed either as a multiple choice activity or, in some units, as matching activities, whereas the productive exercises are designed as fill in the blank exercises or are tasking learners to form a discussion involving the idioms given in the prior exercise.

The number of idiom related Multiple choice activities in total is eight, them being present in units 1 – 5, absent in 6 – 8, then present in both unit 9 and unit 11, and absent in unit 10 and 12. The matching to meaning activities are three, present in units 5 – 7. Seven fill in the blanks activities are present (in units 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11). Discussion activities are present in a majority of the units (eight), but absent in 6, 8, 10, and 12. The sum of all idiomatic activities is 26. The breakdown per unit is presented in the table below:

Table 1: Characteristics and number of each type of idiom-related task in ‘Close-Up’

Unit	Receptive skills tasks		Productive skills tasks	
	Multiple choice	Match to meaning	Fill in the blanks	Discussion
1	✓	✗	✓	✓
2	✓	✗	✗	✓
3	✓	✗	✓	✓
4	✓✓	✗	✗	✓
5	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	✗	✓	✓	✗
7	✗	✓	✓	✓
8	✗	✗	✗	✗
9	✓	✗	✓	✓
10	✗	✗	✗	✗
11	✓	✗	✓	✓
12	✗	✗	✗	✗

*number of tasks per unit is indicated by amount of checkmarks

As for the ratio of the idiom related tasks to total vocabulary content; each unit contains on average, 8 vocabulary exercises (except for units 2, 5 and 6 which have 9 exercises). The total amount of idiom related exercises is 26, whereas the sum of all of the vocabulary exercises is 99.

Idiom knowledge is once again revised (assessed) along with the other vocabulary in a dual unit review following the completion of a pair of units, of which in the book there is six, with one exercise committed to idioms and collocations. However, only four of the six reviews contain that singular exercise related to idioms and collocations. With this additional review, the sum of idiom related tasks comes up to 30 and the overall vocabulary task total is 119, meaning tasks that contain idiomatic expressions make up 25% of the entirety of the vocabulary section.

‘THINK’ includes 3 brief instances of vocabulary focus per unit with an average of two to three short exercises per instance and average of seven per unit (36 instances throughout with a sum of 83 tasks), and an additional exercise in the dual unit review (of which there is six, moving the total amount of tasks to 89). Most of that vocabulary practice is limited to single lexemes, phrasal verbs, collocations or short phrases. The types of tasks commonly found throughout are fill-in-the-blanks, open clozes, multiple choice exercises, question and answer tasks, pair and group discussions, and matching vocabulary to definition or the appropriate graphics.

Discussion

From a pedagogical standpoint, the mere presence, inclusion and accessibility of idiomatic expressions in the teaching materials of a language program is already viewed as a desirable goal and considered an overall net positive for vocabulary skill improvement, but the addition of them being formally and semi-frequently integrated in a decent amount of vocabulary practice tasks (that put them into brief context) does solidify their merit in language teaching.

By that account, learners would give them the appropriate amount of attention and consider them an important part of the lexis of the target language, as well as actively participate in the process of deciphering their meaning and develop better semantic (comprehension) skills. This is particularly notable, as the textbook covers topics and subjects that are considered suitable for a level of proficiency as (lower) intermediate as B1. It is ill-advised to delay integration of idioms until learners reach an advanced level of proficiency, since they are quite frequent in L2 communication.

The idioms themselves vary in degree of metaphoricity, with some being transparent, but others semi-transparent or opaque. The tasks which contain them, first – give them an opportunity to figure out the idiom's meaning through choices of options that contain hints (one of which is contrary to its actual sense), then provide brief (sentence or text) context for learners to practice their newfound knowledge on, in addition to utilizing them in a pair/group discussion task that prompts practice of communicative skills.

With this combination of tasks through many units in the textbook, newly acquired idiomatic expressions have better chance of remaining situated in learners' minds (particularly if the learner has not had much or any prior exposure to them through other mediums). This all being said, I am in no position to make claims of the degree of effectiveness of the idiom-related tasks have on learners' communicative competence and proficiency due to the limitations and approach of this study.

Moreover, their status as idiomatic expressions has been confirmed by cross-examination of a couple of English (learners') dictionaries and one bilingual (EN – MK) idiom dictionary. Most of the idiomatic expressions present throughout the textbook have shown to be commonly used colloquialisms of the native English speaking population.

Conclusion

While this does seem to be a sufficient level of involvement of idiomatic expressions in this particular language teaching textbook (Close-Up), this does not mean that one (as a language teacher) should remain stagnant and leave it to just the teaching materials alone as the only manner of instruction on idiomatic expressions. One should always strive to go beyond the limitations of classroom instruction and timeframe, to involve them on occasion in homework assignments and discussions, oral and written storytelling activities; additionally, the learners should also be prompted to be open to being more actively involved in their own terms by noting down any instances of perceived idioms in any type of media they are exposed to, or looking up the origins and cultural background of the idioms they learn, as that will help greatly with both their semantic and pragmatic competence and as such, idioms will not be viewed as a stumbling block on the way to acquiring a second/foreign language.

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Appendix

Table 2: Full list of idioms from each unit in “Close-Up”, along with their location within the unit

Unit	Idioms	Location of idiom in textbook
1 Family ties	pay a visit	Vocabulary section
	pay a compliment	Vocabulary section
	fall to pieces	Vocabulary section
2 Food, Food, Food!	piece of cake	Vocabulary section
	big cheese	Vocabulary section
	like chalk and cheese	Vocabulary section
3 The Wonders of Nature	spill the beans	Vocabulary section
	on the verge of	Vocabulary section
4 Special Relationships	man’s best friend	Reading section
	be at a loss for words	Vocabulary section
	give someone a hard time	Vocabulary section
	don’t see eye to eye	Vocabulary section
	be fed up with	Vocabulary section
	break the ice	Vocabulary section
	plain sailing	Vocabulary section
	on top of the world	Vocabulary section
	down in the dumps	Vocabulary section
	not have a lot in common	Writing section
	give someone a hand	Writing section
	get away from it all	Vocabulary section
	a man’s home is his castle	Vocabulary section
	move with the times	Vocabulary section
	charity begins at home	Vocabulary section
5 A Place to Call Home	eat someone out of house and home	Vocabulary section
	get on like a house on fire	Vocabulary section
	bring home the bacon	Vocabulary section
	until the cows come home	Vocabulary section
	take the wind out of someone’s sails	Vocabulary section
	a race against time	Vocabulary section
	neck and neck	Vocabulary section
6 Ready, Steady, Go!	get the ball rolling	Vocabulary section
	(open up) a can of worms	Vocabulary section
	par for the course	Vocabulary section
	the ball is in someone’s court	Vocabulary section
	get out of (my) sight	Listening section
	make a journey	Vocabulary section
	scared to death	Writing section
7 Extreme Situations	as quick as lightning	Writing section
	breathe a sigh of relief	Writing section
	cost a (small) fortune	Writing section
8 Time to Spare	make the most of it	Writing section
	state of the art	Vocabulary section
9 High-Tech World	lead the field	Vocabulary section
	sell like hotcakes	Vocabulary section
	top of the range	Vocabulary section
	go gold	Reading section
10 That’s Entertainment	time of your life	Reading section
11 Lessons to Learn	be in someone’s good books	Vocabulary section
	get the hang of it	Vocabulary section
	get a taste for (sth)	Vocabulary section
12 The Body Beautiful		

