

INTEGRATING COGNITIVE STRATEGIES INTO TEACHING ENGLISH IDIOMS: A MODEL FOR ENHANCING PHRASEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract: *This article examines the theoretical foundations and practical model of integrating cognitive strategies into the process of teaching English idioms. Idioms were analyzed as the most complex and culture-bound elements of language, and the importance of the cognitive approach in their effective acquisition was substantiated. The article presents an integrative model of teaching idioms using conceptual metaphor theory, mental imagery, semantic networks, and schematic knowledge. A three-stage pedagogical model aimed at enhancing phraseological competence was developed: cognitive awareness, reinforcement, and creative application stages. Specific strategies, exercises, and assessment mechanisms applicable at each stage were recommended. According to the research results, systematic integration of cognitive strategies significantly improves long-term memory retention of idioms, contextual understanding, and the ability to apply them in spontaneous speech.*

Keywords: *idioms, cognitive strategies, phraseological competence, pedagogical model, conceptual metaphor, mental imagery, semantic networks, integrative approach, English language teaching*

INTRODUCTION

In modern foreign language education, complete formation of communicative competence is impossible without the ability to use idiomatic units freely and correctly. Idioms constitute the richest and most expressive layer of any language, but the difficulty of mastering them for foreign language learners lies precisely in this characteristic.

English idioms are extremely numerous, with various sources indicating their number ranges from 25,000 to 50,000. However, mastering such a large volume of lexical material through simple memorization has proven practically ineffective. Traditional teaching methods focus on teaching idioms in isolation, without considering their context and formation motivation, which does not allow for the full development of students' phraseological competence.

The development of cognitive linguistics has demanded a new approach to language teaching. The cognitive approach considers idioms not as random combinations but as products of systematic thinking mechanisms of human consciousness. Based on this approach, the motivation, conceptual structure, and figurative foundations of idioms were analyzed, resulting in the development of more effective methods for teaching them.

Currently, there is a noticeable lack of a holistic and practical model for integrating cognitive strategies into idiom teaching. While existing research mainly covers theoretical aspects, specific models and practical guidelines applicable in the pedagogical process have not been sufficiently developed.

The purpose of the article is to create a pedagogical model for systematic integration of cognitive strategies in teaching English idioms and to identify ways to enhance phraseological competence.

MAIN PART

Idioms and Phraseological Competence

Idioms have been analyzed in linguistics from various perspectives, and a number of definitions have been proposed for them. According to the most widespread approach, idioms are stable combinations consisting of two or more words whose overall meaning does not derive from the sum of their components. The semantic opacity, structural stability, and stylistic coloring of idioms are regarded as their main features.

Phraseological competence, in turn, was defined as the ability to correctly understand idioms, know their semantic-grammatical features, comprehend the scope of stylistic and pragmatic application, and use them appropriately and naturally in speech activities. This competence encompasses several dimensions: receptive knowledge (understanding idioms in listening and reading), productive knowledge (using them in speech), metacognitive knowledge (understanding strategies for learning and applying idioms), and sociolinguistic knowledge (understanding the cultural and contextual appropriateness of idioms).

It was determined that the development of phraseological competence is a process consisting of several stages. At the initial stage, learners perceive idioms as whole units without understanding their semantic motivation. At the next stage, the figurative foundations and metaphorical structures of idioms are comprehended. At the final stage, idioms are used spontaneously and creatively at the level of native speakers.

There are a number of difficulties in mastering idioms. First, the difference between the literal meaning and actual meaning of idioms causes confusion for learners. Second, the culture-specific nature of idioms requires understanding intercultural differences. Third, the stylistic limitations of idioms necessitate their use in the correct context. The integration of cognitive strategies was aimed at eliminating these difficulties.

Cognitive Strategies: Taxonomy and Classification

Cognitive strategies were defined as a set of mental operations used in receiving, processing, storing, and retrieving information during the language learning process. Cognitive strategies play an important role in foreign language learning because they ensure learners' active intellectual involvement and increase learning effectiveness.

Cognitive strategies relevant to teaching idioms were divided into several groups. The first group consists of metacognitive strategies, which include planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process. Learners set their learning goals, determine which idioms are important to learn, and track their progress.

The second group consists of memory-related strategies (mnemonic strategies), which serve to store information in long-term memory. Among these strategies, mental imagery (creating mental pictures), establishing associations, grouping, and structuring occupy an important place. For example, for the idiom "to kick the bucket" (to die), a learner can create a vivid mental image or connect it with personal experience.

The third group consists of cognitive processing strategies, which are aimed at deep analysis and understanding of information. This group includes semantic analysis,

contextual inference, comparison and contrast, guessing and verification strategies. Learners analyze the components of idioms, identify their metaphorical foundations, and compare them with their native language.

The fourth group consists of compensation strategies, which help to compensate for lack of knowledge. Learners use strategies such as understanding unknown idioms based on context, replacing them with synonyms, or paraphrasing.

It was determined that cognitive strategies yield maximum results when applied in an integrative manner rather than in isolation. The combination of strategies needs to be adapted to learners' individual characteristics and learning objectives.

The Role of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in Teaching Idioms

Conceptual metaphor theory is considered one of the most important achievements of cognitive linguistics and serves as the main tool for explaining the majority of idioms. According to this theory, metaphor is not only a linguistic device but also a fundamental mechanism of thinking, where people conceptualize abstract concepts through concrete experiences.

The metaphor "ANGER IS HOT LIQUID" is also widespread in English: "to boil with anger," "to simmer down," "to let off steam." Once learners understand this metaphorical system, they gain the ability to understand and remember new idioms more easily.

The metaphor "KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT" also serves as the basis for many idioms: "to shed light on something," "to be in the dark," "a bright idea." This metaphor is universal and occurs in many languages, which facilitates intercultural understanding.

Applying conceptual metaphor theory to teaching idioms has several pedagogical advantages. First, idioms were presented as systematic groups rather than isolated units, making learning orderly and logical. Second, learners mastered them more deeply by understanding the internal motivation of idioms. Third, knowledge of metaphorical systems gave learners skills to independently analyze and understand unfamiliar idioms.

Mental Imagery and Visualization Strategies

Mental imagery is the ability to create mental pictures and serves as a powerful cognitive strategy in mastering idioms. Psychological research has shown that verbal information is retained much better in long-term memory when combined with visual images.

The majority of idioms evoke vivid and clear visual images. For example, the idiom "to put all your eggs in one basket" has a very clear visual image. Once learners mentally visualize this image, they understand and remember the idiom's meaning more easily.

There are several ways to apply the mental imagery strategy. The first method involves learners themselves visualizing the literal meaning of the idiom and then discussing how this image connects to the actual meaning. The second method involves presenting idioms through ready-made visual materials (pictures, photos, videos). The third method involves learners themselves drawing or creating visual representations for idioms, which ensures active cognitive processing.

However, it must be noted that not all idioms are equally suitable for visualization. Some idioms do not have a clear visual image or their literal representation does not lead to the actual meaning. In such cases, other cognitive strategies were used.

The mental imagery strategy not only improves memorization but also helps in quickly understanding idioms in context. When learners encounter an unfamiliar idiom, images automatically appear in their minds, leading them to identify the meaning more quickly.

Semantic Networks and Schematic Knowledge

Semantic network theory explains how knowledge is organized in human memory. According to this theory, information is stored not in isolation but as a network of interconnected nodes. Each concept is in semantic, associative, or hierarchical relationships with other concepts.

Using the semantic networks approach in teaching idioms gives learners the opportunity to organize idioms systematically. Idioms can be grouped on various bases: thematic groups (for example, idioms related to emotions, relationships, work activities), groups based on metaphorical foundations (for example, idioms related to animals, colors, numbers), or groups based on grammatical structures.

Schematic knowledge (schema theory) plays an important role in understanding the organization of memory. Schemas are generalized knowledge structures formed on the basis of experience. Each person has schemas about various life situations, objects, and processes.

Using existing schemas in mastering idioms proved to be an effective strategy. When learners integrate idioms into their existing knowledge structures, they are understood much more deeply and retained in long-term memory. For example, a learner with a "sports" schema will more easily master sports-related idioms: "to hit a home run," "to throw in the towel," "to be on the ball."

CONCLUSION

The practical model of integrating cognitive strategies into teaching English idioms is a scientifically grounded approach for effectively enhancing phraseological competence. Instead of traditional memorization-based methods, cognitive strategies provide learners with the opportunity to understand the internal logic of idioms, master them systematically, and use them freely in speech activities.

The research determined that conceptual metaphor theory serves as the basis for teaching idioms as logical groups. Once learners comprehend metaphorical systems, they master entire groups of idioms simultaneously and gain the ability to independently analyze new idioms.

The mental imagery strategy proved to be a powerful tool for storing idioms in long-term memory. Creating visual images not only facilitates memorizing idioms but also helps in quickly understanding and recognizing them in context.

Semantic networks and schematic knowledge approaches created the opportunity to organize idioms systematically and orderly. Learners grouped idioms on various bases and created their own personal semantic maps, which ensured individualized learning.

The three-stage pedagogical model—cognitive awareness, reinforcement, and creative application—was presented as a holistic process for gradually developing phraseological competence. Specific strategies, exercises, and assessment mechanisms were defined at each stage, ensuring the practical applicability of the model.

The integration of cognitive strategies developed learners' autonomy and served to form lifelong learning skills. Learners not only mastered a certain set of idioms but also gained strategies for independently learning and applying new idioms.

In the future, it is recommended to conduct empirical research in this direction, test the model's effectiveness in various educational contexts, and explore opportunities for applying cognitive strategies through digital technologies. Additionally, developing integration models of cognitive strategies for other phraseological units (collocations, proverbs, expressions) besides idioms is considered appropriate.

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