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Անգլերենի ուսումնասիրության հայկական ասոցիացիա (Անգլերենի ուսումնասիրության եվրոպական ֆեդերացիայի անդամ)

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To the Centenary
of Yerevan State University

On the Role of Phraseological Units in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adult Learners

Minoo Khamesian
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Abstract

One of the challenges of learning English for Iranian learners is "native-like" production of speech rarely achieved by even the most advanced learners. Unfortunately, it is common belief among Iranian English learners that knowledge of individual lexical items is the key to communicative competence. But alas! The outcome has shown this is counterproductive. As an anglicist teaching ESP in general and EAP in particular in my country, I feel responsible for shedding light on this issue inasmuch as I experience the lapse in my every-day professional work. It should be noted that in this Global Village, in which English is considered the Lingua Franca of science and technology, focusing on phraseological units as a sub-branch of lexical proficiency seems to be of paramount importance to avoid misunderstanding and miscommunication. The present article makes an effort to highlight the role of contextual usages of these units in TEFL to help the learners reach the desired native-like production of English speech.

Key words: *phraseology, idiomaticity, collocational proficiency, native-likeness.*

Introduction

Language and culture are, needless to say, intimately linked. Different schools of thought, for instance, Prague school of linguistics, or Firthian-Hallidayan functional-systemic British Contextualism, view language as a social phenomenon primarily, as it is intertwined with culture both naturally and inextricably. Such approaches, in addition to those socio-culturally and contextually oriented, tend to view language as embedded in culture to the

extent that linguistic proficiency can only be reached providing that the cultural context embracing it is properly referred to. The functions of phraseological units from many researchers' works can be summarized as first and foremost indicating how these units contribute to the production of creative language and fluency, as well as help avoid misunderstanding, improving the users' native-likeness in communication.

When it comes to producing a text or a piece of speech, according to Sinclair (2004), seldom do we have the chance of selecting a single word freely, but there is a phraseological tendency by means of which meaning is built. This phraseological nature of language is further explained by Bolinger (1976:1) as, "language does not expect us to build everything starting with lumber, nails, and blueprint, and rather it provides us with an incredibly large number of prefabs." Sinclair (2004b:19-20) also argues that words do not "constitute independent selections". Rather, co-selection is the norm, "the choice of one word conditions the choice of the next, and of the next again". Otherwise stated, this sharing entails that "[…] the meaning of words chosen together be different from their independent meanings", leading to a certain "delexicalization" of words, as a result. According to Gibbs (1993), it is essential to study idioms not only because they help us comprehend how people learn and communicate figurative language, but also because idiomaticity opens the door to some dramatic insights into how language and thought are interconnected.

Phraseologies and Teaching Language to Non-Natives

We should bear in mind that language tends not only to be controlled by grammatical rules and regulations, but by lexical and discursive co-selections as well. In this regard, the phraseologies of a given language (in our case the English language) can thus be taken as a means to differentiate native language from learner language. The latter has been termed differently, e.g. "informal, speech-like" (Granger & Rayson, 1998:130), "bookish and pedantic" (Channell, 1994:21), "vague and stereotyped" and having "limited vocabulary" (Ringbom, 1998:49), or lacking idiomaticity (Lorenz, 1998:53), all of which imply that

learner language contains its own style, which is generally referred to as "unnatural" or "non-native".

On the other hand, as Cowie (2005:12) puts, "Prefabricated expressions pervade all levels of linguistic organization – lexical, grammatical, pragmatic – and affect all kinds of structures, from entire utterances to simple phrases [...], there are relatively few examples that are completely invariable or opaque." Thus, to select the most natural alternative from among a broad range of grammatically possible sentences in any given situation calls for something beyond knowledge of syntax. Being ubiquitous in the English language, and arguably, allocating a large part of the native's vocabulary to themselves, these prefabricated expressions require to be paid due attention while teaching the language to the non-native. The foreign language learner, not being familiar with them, would devise structures in the hope that native speakers would be unable to communicate without misunderstanding, but the result is likely to be highly contrived and unacceptable to native ears.

When it comes to cultural differences between languages, the interference of the native language of the learner makes the learning process even worse. Furthermore, according to Wray (2002:206), another problem the learner should challenge is having so many choices – paradigm – so a wrong selection would undoubtedly result in unnaturalness, and, as a result, correct use of words seems to be an essential counterpart of expressive and effective speech.

Wolter (2006) shows that the learner's mother tongue would provide a pre-set structure of concepts, and as a consequence of the dissimilarities between lexical sources, miscollocations might be inevitable. Learners make collocational errors mainly due to the fact that they rely on their L1 lexical knowledge. However, the acquisition of new combinations of words in L2 will lead to "conceptual modifications", as a result of which problems manifest. This is further elaborated by Danesi's conceptual fluency, which argues that "students 'speak' with the formal structures of the target language, but they 'think' in terms of their native conceptual system" (Danesi 1995).

Analysis

What is adduced below is drawn from my English learners' speeches, who devised these usages naturally and spontaneously. It should be added that my learners of English generally have rather a good command of English and target IELTS or TOEFL to seek a post-degree or a job opportunity overseas.

In actual fact, my collection is noticeably overwhelming, but as it is impossible to include all, I decided to select some of those with the highest frequency of occurrence in every day communication. The native-like English equivalents are presented after each misused phrase. The collection, although small, hopefully will be enough to meet my claim in this study.

Empty your place.

It was a shame you weren't with us.

He is not in the garden.

His mind is somewhere else.

Your father will be killed.

Your goose is cooked.

Don't be tired.

(The word by word translation of how Iranians farewell at the end of a working day; *see you.*)

Any order?

(Again, the direct translation of *How can I help you.*)

He looked at me left left.

He looked at me angrily.

His hen has one leg.

He is headstrong.

His donkey has crossed the bridge.

He is out of the woods.

Her writing is lobster and frog.

His writing isn't legible.

Wants both God and date.

(Which surprisingly means *Have your cake and eat it.*)

I should hasten to add that such violations tend to be a natural manifestation of the playful, creative energy. The oddness of expressions built by the learners, as obvious, is not associated with grammatical deficiency. They seem to occur due to the mental models of Farsi, the mother tongue. The interference of semantics and syntax of Farsi is obviously visible. Considering the nature of phraseology, i.e. the arbitrary co-selection of words to be combined, we can put it at an area between grammar and meaning.

Surprisingly enough, the learners are interested in using idiomatic structures, but rarely do they bother themselves to find out what the genuine equivalents are. Such pragmatic clusters, as I would like to call, are made up of a string of words, the meaning of which can rarely, if ever, be taken in literally. As Wray (2002:465) puts, "A sequence, continuous or discontinuous of words or other meaning elements, is, or appears to be prefabricated; that is stored and retrieved whole from the memory at the rime of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar." Sinclair (2004), on the other hand, explains that when producing a text or speech, we are not entirely free to choose a single word inasmuch as there is a phraseological tendency according to which meanings can be created in terms of word combinations.

The cultural distance or so-called alienness of the utterances clearly shows that the learners do not share in the socio-cultural knowledge of native English speakers or common ways of how they speak. Following what Bakhtin (1981:346) puts concerning every discourse presupposing a special conception of the listener, of his perceptive background and the degree of his responsiveness, I would assert that the differences found from the two cultural contexts and in the two languages contribute to establishing distance towards the readership, ailing true understanding. It is also worth adding here that Bolinger (1976:1) elaborates on the phraseological nature of language stressing out that "language does not expect us to build everything starting with lumber, nails, and blueprint. Rather it provides us with an incredibly large number of prefabs."

Sadly enough, the majority of the poor phraseological performances were produced by advanced learners, which can strengthen the fact that they are deficient in collocational relationship between words in idiomatic expressions.

For them, this tends to be initially regarded as compositional combinations of words not a phenomenon of co-selection.

What is worthy of note here is that contrary to some study results indicating that learners tend to use a limited number of collocations (those they are sure about) – Iranian learners create collocations in English unnervingly extravagantly, happily expecting their interlocutors to understand them.

As written time and again, phraseological cohesion tends to be more challenging than lexical cohesion due to its semantic structure, hence it will not be irrational to claim that the inherent feature of any unit of phraseology is the cohesion of the base form, including not only grammatical, lexical, and phonological but also stylistic aspects. Wolter (2006:746) puts that "the process of building syntagmatic connections between words in L2 appears to be considerably harder than the process for building paradigmatic connections." Therefore, it does not seem unreasonable to say that idiomatic competence is highly likely to develop after extensive exposure to the pragmatics of idiomaticity in the sociocultural contexts of a specific discourse community.

Conclusion

Undeniably, cross-cultural communication is essential in the world today, but sadly, it seems not to enjoy the attention it deserves among the teachers. English teachers in general and in Iran in particular, should be aware of the fact that our task is not merely teaching the language rules and the vocabulary, but also raise our learners' awareness of the important role the English culture plays in our ability of native-like production of speech.

It is also worth bearing in mind that we cannot expect our learners to communicate in English naturally if the vocabulary of English is taught as single items without collocational relationships in terms of idiomaticity. It is necessary for learners' attention to be diverted from single lexical items to habitual word combinations, whose meanings could be perceived through intralinguistic relations that exist between them. This does not necessarily overlook the fact that lexical items relate to concrete features of the real world but stresses out that the meaning would not solely be comprehensible in terms

of the referential approach.

It is of paramount importance for us as English teachers to find out lexical restrictions in teaching idioms which due to their purely intralinguistic nature, cannot be accounted for by logical considerations. Also important for an efficient teacher is to be aware of the fact that for a native-like command of English in general, and idiomatic English in particular, words, word-groups and sentences must be shed light on within the lexical, grammatical and situational restrictions of the language.

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Դարձվածաբանական միավորների դերը օտար լեզուների դասավանդման մեջ

Իրանցիների համար անգլերենի ուսուցման գլխավոր դժվարություններից մեկը լեզվակրին բնորոշ սահուն խոսքի արտաբերելն է, ինչը հազվադեպ է հանդիպում անգամ ամենալավ ուսանողների խոսքում: Ցավոք, անգլերեն ուսումնասիրող իրանցիներից շատերը այն կարծիքն ունեն, թե առանձին բառային միավորի իմացությունը հմուտ հաղորդակության բանալին է: Ավաղ, արդյունքները հակառակն են վկայում: Անգլերեն դասավանդելով ինչպես հատուկ, այնպես էլ ակադեմիական նպատակներով լեզուն ուսումնասիրող խմբերի՝ պարտավորված եմ զգում լույս սփռել այս խնդրի վրա, քանզի ինքս ականատես եմ լինում բացերի ամեն օր: Սույն հոդվածով անդրադարձ է կատարվում դարձվածաբանական միավորներին որպես բառային մակարդակում վարպետության հասնելու միջոցի: Այս գլոբալ աշխարհում, որտեղ անգլերենը համարվում է գիտության և տեխնոլոգիայի լինգվա ֆրանկան, լեզվի իմացությունը հույժ կարևոր է թյուրըմբռնումներից խուսափելու համար: Հոդվածում փորձ է արվում վեր հանել այս միավորների համատեքստային կիրառության դերը TEFL-ում՝ հնարավորություն ընձեռելով լեզուն ուսումնասիրողներին հասնել լեզվակիրների այդքան բաղձալի վարպետությանը:

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Armenian Folia Anglistika is concerned with such fields as Linguistics, Literary Criticism, Translation Studies, Methodology, Ethnic Studies, Cultural History, Gender Studies, Armenian Studies and a wide range of adjacent disciplines. The articles address a wide range of interesting questions and are of consistently high quality. The reviewing is timely, knowledgeable and objective. The book reviews are very balanced and informative. The language of submission and publication is English.

Editorial Process

This journal follows strict double blind fold review policy to ensure neutral evaluation. All manuscripts are subject to peer review and are expected to meet standards of academic excellence. High quality manuscripts are peer-reviewed by minimum two peers of the same field. The reviewers submit their reports on the manuscripts along with their recommendation of one of the following actions to the Editor-in-Chief:

Recommendation regarding the paper:

1. I recommend the paper for publication
2. I recommend the paper for publication after major/minor corrections
3. I do not recommend the paper for publication

The Editor-in-Chief makes a **decision** accordingly:

1. to publish the paper
2. to consider the paper for publication after major/minor corrections

In these cases the authors are notified to prepare and submit a final copy of their manuscript with the required major/minor changes in a timely manner. The Editor-in-

Chief reviews the revised manuscript after the changes have been made by the authors. Once the Editor-in-Chief is satisfied with the final manuscript, the manuscript can be accepted. The Editor-in-Chief can also reject the manuscript if the paper still doesn't meet the requirements.

3. to reject the paper

The editorial workflow gives the Editor-in-Chief the authority to reject any manuscript because of inappropriateness of its subject, lack of quality, incorrectness, or irrelevance. The Editor-in-Chief cannot assign himself/herself as an external reviewer of the manuscript. This is to ensure a high-quality, fair, and unbiased peer-review process of every manuscript submitted to the journal, since any manuscript must be recommended by one or more (usually two) external reviewers along with the Editor in charge of the manuscript in order to accept it for publication in the journal.

Ethical Issues:

Authors cannot submit the manuscript for publication to other journals simultaneously. The authors should submit original, new and unpublished research work to the journal. The ethical issues such as plagiarism, fraudulent and duplicate publication, violation of copyrights, authorship and conflict of interests are serious issues concerning ethical integrity when submitting a manuscript to a journal for publication.

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The author can request withdrawal of manuscript after submission within the time span when the manuscript is still in the peer-reviewing process. After the manuscript is accepted for publication, the withdrawal is not permitted.

Armenian Folia Anglistika (AFA) Stylesheet

1. Style and Format

Use Win(Word), Sylfaen, set all margins to 25mm.

Main text	11pt, 1,15 spacing throughout, justified
Notes and references	11pt.
Title	12pt bold, centered.
Name Surname	11pt, bold, right, separated from the text by one space line.
Abstract and key words:	11pt, left, separated from the text by one space line, (up to 100 words).
Subtitles	11pt bold, separated from the text above by one space line.
Info about the author	11pt (affiliation, current position, title, email).

Titles and subtitles

E.g.: **Title of the Article**

Name Surname

Affiliation

Abstract

Key words: (5-7 word)

Introduction

The body of a manuscript opens with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy. The structure of the introduction should necessarily comprise the author's aims / tasks / objectives, the subject-matter and the material of the study. The necessary requirements run as follows:

- Exploration of the importance of the problem. The article should state how it is related to previous work in the area.
- The description of the relevant related literature. This section should review studies to establish the general area, and then move towards studies that more specifically define or are more specifically related to the research you are conducting.
- The statement of hypotheses and objectives, their correspondence to research. The present tense is used to state your hypotheses and objectives.

Conclusions

This section simply states what the researcher thinks the data mean, and, as such, should relate directly back to the problem/question stated in the introduction. By looking at only the Introduction and Conclusions sections, a reader should have a good idea of what the researcher has investigated and discovered even though the specific details of how the work was done would not be known. After moving from general to specific information in the introduction and body paragraphs, your conclusion should restate the main points of your argument.

- Pages are to be numbered consecutively throughout the manuscript (including notes).
- The numbering of **notes and references** should **not** be done automatically.
- **Quotations s**hould correspond exactly with the originals in wording, spelling and interior punctuation, should be italicized, and have one space line above and below. Omissions or additions within quotations are indicated by **three stops: …**
- **Quotations from scientific literature** should be enclosed in inverted commas. Square brackets are used to enclose phonetic transcriptions; phonemic transcriptions are placed between slanting virgules (/).Quotations run on as part of the text are enclosed in double quotation marks, quotations within quotations in single quotation marks. **Please use the single and double quotation marks in the Anglo-Saxon way, i.e. in superscript position**. The superscript number which indicates the place in the main text to which there is a note, should follow adjacent punctuation: (" ."[1]).
- **Paragraphs** should be indented.
- **Titles** of articles and essays, etc. used in the text should be italicized. Capitalize the first word and all the principal words in English titles of publications, in divisions of works, etc.
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References:

- Short references within the text should be referred to by the name/date system, E.g.: (Bronfen 1992:330).

- The corresponding full references should be given in the list of References at the end of your article, after the Notes, separated from the list of Notes by one space line.
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References should be listed as indicated below:

1. Author's Surname, Initials. (year) *Article title.* // Journal or book title. / Ed. by ….. . Vol. (number). Publishing place: Publishing house.
2. Author's Surname, Initials. (year) Book title. / Tr. by….. . Publishing place: Publishing house.
3. (year) *Dictionary title.* Publishing place.
4. (year) *Article title.* / Available at: <Internet address> [Accessed month year]

Examples:

1. Svartvik, J. (2005) *A Life in Linguistics.* // The Euoropean English Messenger. / Ed. by John A. Stotesbury. Vol.14 (1). Portugal: Grafica de Coimbra.
2. Eisenstein, E.L. (1979) *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. Cambridge: CUP.
3. Kofman, S. (1991) *Freud and Fiction*. / Tr. by Sarah Wykes. Cambridge: Polity Press.
4. (1998) *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English.* Oxford.
5. (2012) *Conceptual Blending*. Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conceptual_blending> [Accessed June 2012].

Transliteration

References both in and out of text other than in English should be given in a transliterated form.

Dual Submissions

Submission of a paper to *AFA* implies that it has not been published before and that it is not being considered for publication elsewhere.

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