

TEACHING IDIOMS THROUGH 20TH CENTURY LITERATURE AND ITS ROLE IN ENHANCING LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR B2-LEVEL LEARNERS

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Abstract: This research article explores the use of idioms in 20th-century literature and their role in enhancing language skills for B2-level learners. By analyzing idiomatic expressions in notable literary works from the 20th century, this study provides insights into how literature can facilitate the acquisition of idioms, improve cultural awareness, and foster critical thinking.

Keywords: Idiomatic expressions, 20th-century literature, B2-level learners, language learning, vocabulary acquisition, figurative language, cultural context, critical thinking, pedagogy, second language acquisition.

Introduction

Idioms are a critical component of language learning, representing cultural and linguistic nuances essential for achieving fluency. For intermediate English learners, idioms can often be challenging due to their non-literal meanings and cultural contexts. As highlighted by Wray (2002), idiomatic expressions require a deep understanding of cultural and linguistic contexts, making their teaching both a challenge and an opportunity for educators.

This article examines idiomatic expressions within 20th-century literature and their application in teaching English to B2-level learners. Literature provides a rich, contextual backdrop for idioms, making it an ideal medium for teaching both linguistic and cultural aspects of language. Furthermore, the analysis of idioms can enhance critical thinking by encouraging learners to explore figurative language and thematic depth. Incorporating such literature into language learning for B2-level learners—those with intermediate proficiency—can make idioms more accessible and meaningful.

Findings and Discussion

Idiomatic Expressions in 20th-Century Literature

1. Early 20th Century

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* is one of the most notable works of the early 20th century. Idioms such as "Put your foot in it" (to say or do something that causes embarrassment or a social blunder), "Not one's cup of tea" (something that one does not particularly enjoy), "Turn over a new leaf" (to start behaving in a better way), "Hit the nail on the head" (to describe a situation accurately), and "The writing on the wall" (a clear sign that something negative is about to happen) are used to convey character traits, societal norms, and human relationships. These idioms provide learners with historical and cultural insights, enhancing their interpretive skills. The idioms in *Pygmalion* are still commonly used in modern English. By learning them, students enrich their vocabulary and improve their ability to communicate effectively in real-world situations.

2. Mid-20th Century

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is a rich source of idiomatic expressions that offer valuable insights into the language and the mindset of its characters. For B2-level learners, understanding and using idiomatic expressions from such texts can significantly enhance their language skills, making them sound more natural in conversation.

Examples of idioms in the novel include:

- a) 'Get a kick out of' – to enjoy something very much.
- b) 'In a nutshell' – to summarize something concisely.
- c) 'Give someone the creeps' – to make someone feel uneasy or uncomfortable.
- b) d) 'Throw in the towel' – to give up or admit defeat.
- e) 'In the dark' – to be unaware or uninformed about something.

3. Late 20th Century

Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie* offers profound life lessons while presenting various idiomatic expressions commonly used in everyday language. Expressions such as 'Live in the moment' (to focus on the present), 'Go out with a bang' (to end something in a dramatic way), and 'A heart full of love' (to be deeply affectionate and caring) provide learners with practical language skills for both personal and academic settings.

Role in Language Learning

Idiomatic expressions from literature serve as effective tools for vocabulary acquisition. By encountering idioms in context, learners develop a deeper understanding of their meanings and usages. This aligns with Boers et al. (2006), who argue that contextual learning enhances retention and comprehension.

Moreover, idioms provide cultural insights, helping learners navigate the socio-cultural dimensions of language. For instance, organizing role-play activities based on *Pygmalion* allows learners to explore the cultural, historical, philosophical, and mythological contexts of Shaw's work.

Analyzing idioms within literary contexts fosters critical thinking by encouraging learners to interpret figurative language and identify underlying themes. This process aligns with the findings of Lazar (1993), who emphasizes the role of literature in developing interpretive skills.

Conclusion

Teaching idiomatic expressions through 20th-century literature offers a dynamic and effective approach to language learning. By contextualizing idioms within literary narratives, educators can enhance learners' linguistic competence, cultural understanding, and critical thinking skills. The findings underscore the value of literature as a pedagogical tool for intermediate learners, demonstrating that idioms, when taught creatively, can transform language learning into a deeply enriching experience.

Future research could expand on these findings by exploring the use of literature from diverse cultures and its impact on idiom acquisition. Additionally, incorporating multimedia adaptations of literary works could provide learners with a multisensory approach to understanding idiomatic expressions.

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