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MODERN METHODS AND APPROACHES OF TEACHING PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH LESSONS

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Abstract

Phraseological units play a crucial role in achieving fluency and communicative competence in foreign language learning. Despite their importance, traditional language teaching methods often neglect systematic instruction of phraseological units, focusing primarily on grammar and single-word vocabulary. This article examines modern methods and approaches to teaching phraseological units in English lessons. The study analyzes cognitive, communicative, corpus-based, and task-based approaches, highlighting their effectiveness in developing learners' linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural competence. Drawing on contemporary linguistic research and classroom practices, the paper argues that integrating phraseological units into English language teaching enhances learners' fluency, accuracy, and naturalness of speech.

Keywords

phraseological units, English language teaching, modern methods, communicative approach, task-based learning, corpus-based approach, fluency, lexical competence.

In recent decades, the goals of foreign language education have shifted from the mastery of grammatical structures to the development of communicative competence. Communicative competence involves not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to use language appropriately and naturally in real-life situations [L. Bachman, 1990]. One of the key components of communicative competence is the knowledge and use of phraseological units (PUs), which include idioms, collocations, fixed expressions, and proverbs.

Phraseological units constitute a significant part of native speakers' everyday communication. Research shows that fluent speakers rely heavily on formulaic language, as it allows for faster processing and more natural production of speech [A. Wray, 2002]. However, learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) often struggle with phraseological units due to their semantic opacity, structural rigidity, and cultural specificity [R. Moon, 1998].

Phraseological units are stable combinations of words whose meaning is partially or fully non-compositional [A. P. Cowie, 1998]. According to Cowie, phraseological units include idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, and fixed expressions that function as single lexical items [A. P. Cowie, 1998].

Moon classifies phraseological units into the following categories:

Idioms (e.g. spill the beans)

Collocations (e.g. make a decision)

Fixed and semi-fixed expressions (e.g. by the way)

Proverbs and sayings (e.g. No pain, no gain) [R. Moon, 1998]

These units are essential for achieving native-like fluency and pragmatic competence.

Cognitive Aspect of Phraseological Units

From a cognitive perspective, phraseological units are processed and stored as single chunks in the mental lexicon. Wray argues that formulaic language reduces cognitive load and facilitates faster language production [A. Wray, 2002]. This explains why native speakers rely heavily on phraseological units in spontaneous speech.

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For language learners, however, this chunking process is not automatic and requires systematic exposure and instruction.

Importance of Teaching Phraseological Units in English Lessons

Phraseological Units and Communicative Competence

Communicative competence includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence [L. Bachman, 1990]. Phraseological units contribute to all these components by enabling learners to:

express ideas more naturally,

understand authentic materials,

interact effectively in social contexts.

Learners who lack phraseological competence often produce grammatically correct but unnatural speech.

Cultural Dimension of Phraseological Units

Many phraseological units are deeply rooted in culture and reflect historical, social, and cultural values. Proverbs and idioms, in particular, convey shared cultural knowledge [A. P. Cowie, 1998]. Teaching phraseological units therefore promotes intercultural competence and cultural awareness.

Despite their importance, phraseological units present several challenges for EFL learners:

Semantic opacity: The meaning cannot be inferred from individual words.

Contextual limitations: Many PUs are restricted to specific registers or situations.

L1 interference: Learners tend to transfer phraseological units from their native language.

Lack of exposure: Traditional textbooks often provide limited input [M. Lewis, 1993], [R. Moon, 1998].

These challenges highlight the need for modern, effective teaching approaches.

Modern Methods and Approaches to Teaching Phraseological Units

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The communicative approach emphasizes meaningful interaction and authentic language use. Within this framework, phraseological units are taught through dialogues, role-plays, and real-life communication tasks [L. Bachman, 1990].

CLT encourages learners to use PUs in context rather than memorizing isolated expressions.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-based learning focuses on completing meaningful tasks using the target language. Phraseological units are introduced as tools for task completion, such as problem-solving or discussions [M. Lewis, 1993].

Research shows that learners retain PUs better when they are used to achieve communicative goals.

Lexical Approach

Proposed by Lewis, the lexical approach places phraseological units at the center of language teaching. According to this approach, language consists of lexical chunks rather than individual words and grammar rules [M. Lewis, 1993].

Teaching activities include:

noticing collocations,

chunk repetition,

reformulation tasks.

Corpus-Based Approach

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The corpus-based approach uses authentic language data from large electronic corpora. Learners analyze real examples of phraseological units in context [J. Sinclair, 1991].

This approach helps learners:
identify frequent PUs,
understand usage patterns,
avoid unnatural combinations.

Cognitive and Noticing-Based Approaches

The noticing hypothesis suggests that learners must consciously notice phraseological units in input for acquisition to occur. Teachers can enhance noticing through highlighting, comparison, and repetition [A.Wray, 2002].

Teaching Strategies and Classroom Techniques

Effective strategies for teaching phraseological units include:
using authentic materials (films, songs, news articles),
contextualized practice,
contrastive analysis with learners' L1,
recycling and spaced repetition,
project-based learning.

Technology-enhanced tools such as online corpora and digital flashcards also support PU acquisition.

Teachers play a key role in selecting relevant phraseological units and creating meaningful learning opportunities. Modern textbooks increasingly integrate phraseological units, but teacher mediation remains essential [J. Sinclair, 1991].

Teacher training programs should emphasize phraseological competence and modern teaching methodologies.

Phraseological units are a fundamental component of English language proficiency. Modern methods and approaches, including communicative, task-based, lexical, and corpus-based approaches, offer effective solutions to the challenges of teaching phraseological units. Integrating these approaches into English lessons enhances learners' fluency, accuracy, and cultural competence.

The study concludes that systematic and contextualized instruction of phraseological units should be a priority in EFL teaching. Future research should focus on empirical classroom studies and the impact of digital tools on phraseological competence development.

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