

## Lingua-cultural approach to teaching english idioms to georgian students

Irine Goshkheteliani y Dea Megrelidze

Faculty of Education and Sciences Batumi ShotaRustaveli State University, Georgia . Faculty of Education and Sciences  
Batumi ShotaRustaveli State University, Georgia

igoshkheteliani@yahoo.com, deakuna\_deako@mail.ru

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### ABSTRACT

*A language has a communicative function. The success of this process much depends how the speaker uses his background knowledge. We should underline the importance of the speakers' cultural awareness, the factors that support the communication, how language and culture correspond among themselves, how language reflects the world through consciousness of the person, how the individual and collective mentality, ideology and culture are reflected in the language, how language and culture create a world picture - primary, from the native language, and secondary, acquired when studying foreign languages. The maintenance of a cultural and national connotation of idioms is interpretation of the figurative basis of idiomatic picture of the world in the sign of cultural and national "space" of this language community. From this point of view it is possible to deduce methodologically important consequences: the cultural knowledge can be "caught" from an internal form of the idiom: there are some "traces" of the cultures, customs and traditions, historical events and life elements and the culture can be understood as a way of orientation of the subject in empirical, cultural, spiritual life on the basis of norms, standards, stereotypes, symbols, myths, etc. signs of the national culture which has been traditionally established in certain national language society.*

*Keywords: language and culture, idiom, lingua-cultural approach to teaching idioms, the language picture of the world.*

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

English has become a very essential language in Georgia. It is currently the most frequently taught second language and when we speak about its importance, we should think how to help learners achieve communicative competence.

Linguistic creativity much depends on how language is used by the speakers in relation to local contextual purposes and especially for interpersonal interaction. One of the main difficulties is the correct usage of an idiom. A further difficulty is whether an idiom is appropriate in the given context or if a non-native speaker tries to translate an idiom from his native language into English. It confuses a listener due to the lack of the common ground between their cultures. There is nothing that is obviously wrong, but somehow native speakers know that they wouldn't express themselves in quite that way. Louisa Buckingham (2006) remarks that "Idioms are widely recognized to be a stumbling block in the acquisition of a foreign language; it is often maintained that their 'arbitrary', language-specific nature makes them difficult for learners to understand and acquire, and resistant to translation." Learning idioms develops students' cultural awareness that benefits their proper usage in communication.

### 1.1 CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Culture and language are means of collective co-existence and social practice kept in the memory of the society that is created by the people during the centuries. Cultural awareness helps people to become more understanding and tolerant of behaviors which are different from their own.

Difference between cultures causes some misunderstandings in the interactive communications between a foreigner and a native-speaker. Millions of people travel around the world and they all need to communicate in some way. They need to acquire not only linguistic competence but cultural awareness as well. Cross-cultural investigations can provide materials that assist language learners to deal with the problems of unknown environments. The native speaker puts in language his world vision, mentality, and the relation to other people in cross-cultural dialogue, and the non-native speaker receives that vision. "It is clear that there is a difference between the native and the non-native speakers' focus when they evaluate an oral discourse. The former focuses on the vocabulary related to the cultural and social factors. On the other hand, the latter lacks the ability to consider such factors. This is one of the major problems of the non-native speakers both at production and comprehension level (Kenan Dikilita?, 2012).

Language and culture exist in each individual person. That individual is a thinker, a creator, a transmitter of the culture, he is the part of the society, and he uses the language for communication with other members of this society where he is supposed to be understood as they belong to the same community. But the indispensable condition of realization of any communication is that a speaker and a listener should have a mutual knowledge of realities or the background knowledge as a basis of a language interaction to understand each other. A "Language world picture" gives a non-native speaker the opportunity to realize the implicit meaning of the vocabulary through explicit meaning, to understand cumulated unconscious cultural information via background knowledge, to investigate cultural values via communicative process, to synthesize interrelation and interaction of the culture and the language.

Special interest should be drawn to idioms which are the most difficult items of language. If one can use them correctly in the communication, like native speakers, we say definitely that one's English is fluent. The lingua-cultural approach in teaching phraseology aspires to be approached to reality; it is focused on the maximum explication of processes which occur in the reproduction and perception of the English idioms.

## 1.2 IDIOM AS A CULTURE- BASED LANGUAGE UNIT

An idiom most often reflects the national specificity of the people. It is a figurative interpretation of reality and an emotional model of communication. Idioms are highly interactive items. They are strong and colorful examples of cross-cultural relations. The source of their origin is sometimes difficult to ascertain. They are firmly assimilated in various languages and have become part and the whole of these cultures. The main difficulty is whether an idiom is appropriate in the given context when a non-native speaker tries to translate an idiom from his native language into English. It may confuse a listener. The problem is often one of collocation, which is a central characteristic of the language in use. The way native speakers use English in the real world is largely idiomatic and it assumes that a fluent non-native speaker should be similarly idiomatic. When even very good learners of the language speak or write English, the effect is slightly odd. Since idioms evaluate the whole narrative summarizing the main events or opinion, a native speakers' unconscious knowledge of collocation is an essential component of their idiomatic and fluent language use and is, therefore, an important part of their communicative competence.

A large number of idioms are of folk origin; however, there are huge numbers of the biblical, mythological and author-specific idioms. Knowing culture, literature and traditions of different nationalities will help the language learner to communicate with a native speaker adequately. In this way, an idiom is the key, which enables people to open the gate of the national culture, history, traditions and beliefs of different people.

Luke Prodromou remarks that the love of puns and wordplay, often based on idiomatic sayings, is a common feature of a native speaker: "What is striking about informal uses of English is not only how common the idiom principle is, but just how common creativity with idioms is among native-speakers" (L. Prodromou, 2003, 42). Indeed, the need for greater idiomatic competence is precisely what linguists propose for the non-native speaker.

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## 2. TEACHING IDIOMS TO GEORGIAN STUDENTS

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Georgia aims at creating favorable conditions for learning foreign languages. Georgia, as a member of the European Union, has entered in the linguistically and culturally diverse area. Without profound knowledge of foreign languages, students would find it difficult to integrate in this area and fully realize their own personal abilities. The Georgian national curriculum aims to develop skills of communication based on "dialogue of cultures" that means to respect every lingua-cultural identity, creation of a positive attitude and interest towards cultural diversity and the whole world.

Priority objectives of foreign language teaching are to:

- develop adult speech skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking) in at least two foreign languages;
- ensure developing of good communication skills;
- give a positive mood linguistic - cultural diversity and realize it as a manifestation of the private world of diversity;
- develop the ability to understand different cultural concepts
- prepare for cooperation in different linguistic - cultural identity;
- develop effective teaching of language skills.

The most important aim of learning foreign languages is communication with people of different nationalities. Cultural awareness means to understand human behaviors, traditions and values of different people. Development of multilingualism helps a person to perceive cultural and language diversity. The lingua-cultural approach towards teaching English focuses on perception of the world through culture "prisms": its installations, concepts, stereotypes, symbols, standards, having emphasized thus a special role in the process of interpretation.

Learning English is quite complicated for the Georgian learner, as it is significantly structurally different language from Georgian. The reasons for mistakes made under the influence of the Georgian language are: 1. Incorrect analogy of native language (misuse of prepositions, tenses, phrasal verbs, articles, subject-verb agreement, etc.); 2. A psychological process of acquisition of English as the primary foreign language; 3. Mistakes caused by other foreign language analogies.

By comparing the texts imposed on the cultural diversity of other people, we can help students to understand that there are important principles of truth, beauty and traditions of the culture; in other words, learning a foreign language means to open the door to valuable cultures in the world. This process itself represents a necessary condition for comprehension of uniqueness, originality of different cultures, and the formation of personal qualities and individual ideas about world cultures. Essential social, psychological and pedagogical aspects of teaching languages exercise the usage of the foreign language in certain socio-cultural situations with the proper contents, paying attention to the standards of behavior stereotypical to different cultures, possessing the particular features reflecting the specifics of native speakers' mentality, their similarity and distinctions. The lingua-cultural approach to teaching languages develops students' lingua-cultural competence, expands their positive attitude to cross-cultural relationship that creates conditions for cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation, mutual understanding and empathy preserving and promoting originality of their own culture. Effective and productive methodology of teaching foreign languages combines the lingua-cultural and communicative competence with lingua-didactics. It defines the existence or absence of socially useful values, distinguishes and understands the depth of information implied in the different discourse, it provides tolerance to various cultures in the course of verbal communication, and it compensates skills which are under formation in the process of language acquisition.

Verbal registration of thought, language images play an extremely important role in speech communication, providing an exchange not only ideas, but also emotions. Emotion can be vividly expressed in the phraseology. Mastering foreign phraseology on the basis of the lingua-cultural approach allows students to get acquainted with fragments of a language's image of the world which is new for them though so necessary for learning English language. Cicoure, Aaron V. (2006) remarks:

"Children grow up in the midst of the socially and historically constituted artifacts and traditions, which enables them 1) to benefit from the accumulated knowledge and skills of their social groups; 2) to acquire and use cognitive representations in the form of linguistic symbols, analogies and metaphors constructed from these symbols; 3) to internalize certain types of discourse interactions into the skills of Dialogic thinking; 4) to develop cultural awareness. The speaker accumulates all these skills and knowledge to perform creative discourse. The fundamental aim of conversation is for each participant to achieve the understanding of what the other intends to convey".

Essential and informative activity of students should include development of the following abilities: to use dictionaries and directories; to analyze in parallel located columns of initial, professionally translated and own interlinear translation of the text; to understand the depth of putting information by distinction of language and speech norms, divergences; to build the right strategy for clear text situations by attracting additional information, explanations, etc.; To show socio-cultural competence, by acquainting national values and culture; to express their own opinion. It is necessary to note that when students accurately

realize the purposes and results, they learn to estimate the facts from outside, to estimate both successes and failures in the course of training. Ideally, without fear of misunderstanding people around, they become participants in the educational process. Our aim was:

1) To reveal cultural awareness of English phraseology, to elicit similarities and distinctions in a figurative and motivational basis of Georgian idioms with the same components; 2) to define metaphorical and figurative character of English and Georgian idioms in the language image of the world for the educational purposes. 3) To develop lingua-cultural basis for active usage of English idioms in communication.

Ethno-national and universal features of the English and Georgian idioms are vividly depicted in the phraseology with the same Immediate Constituents, in particular, with the semantic center of the somatisms, animalisms, color, anthroponyms and toponyms. Their adequate perception reflects the mentality and provides comprehension not only of an English idiom, but also modern English culture.

Research suggests the best way to teach idioms is task-based, cooperative learning in small groups and pairs. Students elicit information from the texts, trying to guess the meaning of the idioms; then they share their suggestions with other groups and discuss and try to interpret the understanding of the culture or tradition of the people through the idiom meaning by comparing English and Georgian idioms.

Creative use of English idioms by the Georgian students depends on the tasks and the exercises, and can be characterized by the following didactic principles:

1. Presentation. Comparing and defining differences or similarities of Immediate Constituents and the meaning of the Georgian and English idioms.

To outline similarities or differences between the English and Georgian idioms the best way is to present them in the context where students meet idioms which are familiar to them as they exist in their native language and idioms which have no analogy in Georgian. Several idioms are presented and students are asked to guess the meaning; they recognize idioms that are common in the Georgian Language, then jumbled meanings are given and they match them to the idioms. Idioms with soma-center, animalisms, biblical phrases, color idioms are easily guessed, these concepts have similar understanding in both languages. E.g. Biblical idioms exist in both languages nearly with the same IC and the meanings. For example:

**A drop in the bucket-????????????(wveTi zRvaSi) a drop in the sea-A very small proportion of the whole.**

Origin-From the Bible, Isaiah 40:15 (King James Version):

"Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing."

'A drop in the bucket' is the predecessor of 'a drop in the ocean', which means the same thing, and is first found in a piece from The Edinburgh Weekly Journal, July 1802:

"The votes for the appointment of Bonaparte to be Chief Consul for life are like a drop in the ocean compared with the aggregate of the population of France."

( <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/124000.html> )

**Forbidden fruit-????????????(akrZalulixili)-A prohibited article.**

Origin

Forbidden fruit originates from the Garden of Eden bible story. The biblical 'forbidden fruit' was of course the apple. In the story the type of fruit isn't actually mentioned - God forbade Adam and Eve to touch the fruit of the tree of knowledge. It is widely interpreted as being an apple though and the 'Adam's apple' is named after the fruit which is supposed to have stuck in Adam's throat.

The term began to be used figuratively in the 17th century. In 1663, Heath used it in his Flagellum; or, the Life and Death of Oliver Cromwell: "The stealing and tasting of the forbidden fruit of Sovereignty." (<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/141700.html> )

Here are some idioms that were easily identified by the students as they were similar in meaning and IC (Immediate Constituent).

Welcome someone/something with open arms -????????? ?????????? ?????????? (?????????)?????????(?????????); - gaSlili xeleb iT Sexvda (Seegeba) vinmes (raimes);

To do something behind someone's back -????????? ?????????? - viRacis zurgs ukan

To turn one's back upon somebody -????????? ??????????- zurgi Seaqcia;

To be up to the ears in something -????????????? ??????????????- yurebamdea - (magaliTad, Seyvarebuli);

*To stand on one's own two feet -?????? (?????)???????? ????- mtkice (magar) fexebze dgas;*  
*Blow out one's brains-?????? ?????? –tviniswaReba*  
*Be up to the elbow's in work –???????? ??? ????????? ?????????– yelamde var saqmeSi Cafluli*  
*Keep an eye on smth. or smb.–?????? ????????? ?????????–?? ?????????–Tvali geWiros vinmeze an rameze*  
*Pull the wool over someone's eyes –???????? ????????? ?????????– Tvalidan bewvis gamocla*  
*Have got one's eye on smb.or smth. –?????? ????????? ????????? (?????) Tvali daadga vinmes (rames).*  
*With one's eyes closed –???????? ????????????????? ?????????–saqmis TvaldaxuWuli keTeba*  
*Throw dust in a person's eyes –???????????? ????????? ?????????– TvalebSi nacris Seyra*  
*One's eyes deceive –???????? ?????????????– Tvali matyuebs*  
*Can't believe one's eyes –???????????? ??? ?????????–Tvalebs ver vujereb*

At this stage students are asked to express their impression of the introduced idiom; interpret the given phrase in a free form, having specified its senses and associations, etc. It helps them in the identification of estimated essence and perception of idioms by the Georgian students. Most significant in the lingua-cultural approach are the answers identifying the "traces" of cultural interpretation of phraseology. Basic words or semantic centers (animalisms, somatisms, etc.) indicate this or that type of information taken from the idiom – denotative, figurative, metaphorical, emotive, estimative, etc. Mainly, it is the denotative processing of idioms operating with knowledge of properties of designated, and motivational processing, i.e. Operations with gestalt structures (image of the phraseological unit) which, in turn, are connected with estimation and emotive processing of information. Such a complete perception of the phraseological unit in all versatility of its senses is caused by the essence of this language sign and speaks about a syncretism of its semantics. (Kovshova, 2009)

2. Practice. Sequence; from simple to difficult, from the studies to the unknown; repeatability of a learnt material should be taken into consideration.

2.1. Analysis and synthesis of idioms which are used in literature and everyday speech, in concrete speech situations; explaining and comparing the meanings of English and Georgian idioms.

2.2. Formation of lingua-cultural competence that promotes understanding of idioms as forms of expression of national culture, national and cultural specifics of the language.

3. Production. Usage of the idioms in speech: dialogues, different situations, presentations, essays, everyday speech, etc.

E.g. -Give the students a list of conversational topics, some of them ones that are easy to talk about with strangers in their own or other countries (e.g. weather), and some of which are difficult to talk about, ask them to use learnt idioms.

- Ask students to remember English and Georgian idioms connected with different public or religious holidays, tell what situations they are used.
- Draw two intersecting circles on the board and label them with the names of two countries, e.g. "England" and "Georgia," write common idioms into the space where the two circles intersect, and idioms that are different to the spaces of their respective circles outside the intersecting part.

There are more possibilities to train idioms in speech. This is the most important stage, as it shows achieved results; this is accurate and creative usage of idioms in proper situations. The creativeness is a creation of a new, original image, idea. The image is something similar to real-life. Development of creative usage of idioms promotes understanding of English culture; it accumulates students' bright images about the language picture of the world. Linguistic creativity much depends on how language is used by speakers in relation to local contextual purposes and especially interpersonal interactions with language.

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### 3. CONCLUSION

The Lingua-cultural approach of teaching idioms broadens cultural awareness of students; they learn not only language but the traditions and customs of the English people, they become more tolerant of other cultures, they start to respect other

