



Ciencia Latina
Internacional

Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar, Ciudad de México, México.
ISSN 2707-2207 / ISSN 2707-2215 (en línea), septiembre-octubre 2024,
Volumen 8, Número 5.

https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v8i5

**IDIOMS AND CULTURE:
A PLUS INTO LANGUAGE TEACHING.
AN ACADEMIC ANALYSIS**

**MODISMOS Y CULTURA:
UNA VENTAJA PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DE IDIOMAS.
UN ANÁLISIS ACADÉMICO**

Rosa Cecibel Varas Giler

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Ecuador

Karina Fernanda Sotomayor Cantos

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Ecuador

Israel Eduardo Castro Magayanes

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Ecuador



DOI: https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v8i5.13927

Idioms and Culture: A Plus into Language Teaching. An Academic Analysis

Rosa Cecibel Varas Giler¹

rvaras@uteq.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2117-4128>

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador

Karina Fernanda Sotomayor Cantos

ksotomayor@uteq.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6134-1875>

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador

Israel Eduardo Castro Magayanes

icastrom@uteq.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1385-9175>

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador

ABSTRACT

Idioms and Culture are two intrinsically linked aspects that strengthen teaching English as a foreign language. This academic paper sought to reinforce our proposal to improve communication in English by broadening the cultural horizon the five authors propose in the reviewed articles. The authors are professors concerned with providing new alternatives to enrich the study of a global language that allows ESL students to understand the world around them and, at the same time brings them closer to the core of a culture that idioms represent. This article highlights essential findings in the five literature review studies that agree with the authors' educational goals. The articles from Google Scholar and ResearchGate database through a qualitative research method ratify that culture is "the fifth skill" that through idioms are features of a complete integration in ESL.

Keywords: communication, global language, culture, idioms, ESL students

¹ Autor principal.

Correspondencia: rvaras@uteq.edu.ec



Modismos y Cultura: Una Ventaja para la Enseñanza de Idiomas. Un Análisis Académico

RESUMEN

Los modismos y la cultura son dos aspectos intrínsecamente vinculados que fortalecen la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Este artículo académico buscó reforzar nuestra propuesta para mejorar la comunicación en inglés ampliando el horizonte cultural que los cinco autores proponen en los artículos revisados. Los autores son profesores preocupados por brindar nuevas alternativas para enriquecer el estudio de un lenguaje global que permita a los estudiantes de ESL comprender el mundo que los rodea y, al mismo tiempo, los acerque al núcleo de una cultura que representan los modismos. Este artículo destaca los hallazgos esenciales de los cinco estudios de revisión de la literatura que concuerdan con los objetivos educativos de los autores. Los artículos de la base de datos Google Scholar y ResearchGate a través de un método de investigación cualitativa ratifican que la cultura es “la quinta habilidad” que a través de los modismos son características de una integración completa en el ESL.

Palabras clave: comunicación, idioma global, cultura; modismos, estudiantes de ESL

Artículo recibido 08 agosto 2024

Aceptado para publicación: 10 septiembre 2024



INTRODUCTION

In the words of Brown (1994), culture and language are dialectically intertwined. As a cultural structure people transmit culture through language, consequently, there is a clear relationship between the study of culture and language. Peck (1998) cited by Mohamed A., (2023) maintains that foreign language teaching and learning will be imperfect and incorrect if culture is not included. The same criteria shared by Purba (2011) take it for granted that it is necessary to include elements of the target culture in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). Language is primarily a social tool that facilitates communication between individuals and helps them understand the world around them. Culture also has its language, which is expressed through various forms of art, literature, and traditions. (Musurmonov, 2023)

Part of the language is idioms, which are groups of words that have a meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the individual words. They are often used to add color and expressiveness to language. Idioms are also a valuable tool for promoting cultural understanding in English language teaching (ELT).

Idioms are deeply rooted in culture. They reflect the values, beliefs, and experiences of the people who use them. For instance, the English idiom "a piece of cake" means that something is very easy to do. This idiom is based on the fact that a cake is a relatively easy dessert to make. However, the idiom also reflects the cultural value of hard work. In other words, the idiom suggests that if you work hard, you can achieve anything.

When students learn idioms, they also learn about the culture of the people who use them. The question could be Why learn idioms in a foreign language? boost cultural fluency: By learning and understanding these expressions, you'll gain insights into the nuances of the culture, enhancing your cultural fluency and empathy.

It is all Greek to me, it is an idiom that English speakers recognize that it expresses something that is not easily understandable. Interestingly, the origin comes from Medieval Latin scribes who had trouble translating Ancient Greek. Shakespeare guaranteed its crossover into the mainstream with his writings, and centuries later we still use it.



Without a doubt, idioms play a great role in the enrichment of the English language. Idioms represent unique cultural and historical information as well as broaden people's understanding and manipulation of English. Native speakers use idioms to make their speech more colorful and alive.

Idioms can also be used to promote cultural understanding in the ELT classroom. For example, teachers can use idioms to introduce students to new cultural concepts. For example, a teacher could use the idiom "a blessing in disguise" to introduce students to the concept of karma. Teachers can also use idioms to encourage students to think about their own culture and compare it to other cultures.

According to Wray, A. (2000), "Idioms are important for language learners because they are frequently used in native speaker discourse, and they can be difficult to understand without knowing their figurative meaning. Idioms can also be used to express complex ideas concisely and efficiently.", De Caro, E. (2009) expresses that Idioms in and outside the classroom are widely believed to help teachers and students promote an innovative environment of communication. Still, the integration of idioms in the teaching and learning process may be difficult or ineffective for some learners or teachers who believe they are a challenge.

Thus, understanding Idioms can boost conversational English skills, because they show native speakers that everyone understands the cultural meaning and context behind the idiom they're using. A person may encounter idioms most often in spoken or written conversation. A positive effect of using idioms makes your writing more memorable. A sentence such as "She said it was time for him to have a taste of his own medicine" could be easier to remember because the reader can relate to the act of taking medicine or to the displeasure of a bad smell or taste.

On the other hand, they give you a new, creative way to express yourself. Rather than saying 'You're correct', you could say 'You hit the nail on the head', which is a more complex and interesting expression. Idioms and slang offer us an insight into language that goes beyond basic communication: they combine culture and history and create words that often work as a type of code or understanding for those who exist within a certain community. Teaching a second language should be complemented with teaching a second culture, too.



METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methods used in the current article review, including how the research papers were selected, the data collection methods, and the analysis methods used to synthesize the findings of the reviewed publications. The method applied is action research that according to Feldman, A., Altrichter, H., Posch, P., & Somekh, B. (2002). is a systematic inquiry conducted by practitioners to improve their practice. It is a cyclical process of planning, acting, evaluating, and reflecting, to generate knowledge that can be used to improve practice.

This study examines the importance of using idioms and culture in English Language Teaching. Four of the articles for the literature review were collected from the Google Scholar database, using the following criteria: published within the last 5 years (2019-2023), citable documents, and type of literature (articles). One is collected from ResearchGate (2023). The search was conducted in September 2023.

After the search was conducted using the criteria described above, the authors paid special attention to articles with titles that mentioned culture and idioms in English language teaching. The abstract, results, and conclusion of each article were read to select those that met the study's criteria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This literature review includes five articles that met the criteria described above. These articles are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Analyzed simple

Database	Year of publication	Authors	Títile
Scholar Google	2021	K. Tukhtaeva , N Razzakova	The role of the cognitive linguistic approach in implementing idioms into the English language teaching process
Scholar Google	2022	MH Rashid , ASM Shamem , W Hui	The Position of culture in English Language teaching
Scholar Google	2023	F Musurmonov, A Nazarov	Idioms And Their Relationship With The Culture
Scholar Google	2019	SF Tseng - Int. J. Lib. Arts Soc. Sci,	The Importance of Culture in Language Learning
ResearchGate	2019	Anes Mohamed Ali Farahani	The Role of Target Culture in English Language Education: EFL Teachers' Perspectives

Conception of culture

Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept. It can be defined as the shared knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, and traditions of a group of people. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation and shapes the way we think, feel, and behave.

Culture is important in ELT because it is embedded in language. Language is not simply a tool for communication; it is also a way of expressing our cultural identity. For example, the way we greet someone, the words we choose to use, and the stories we tell all reflect our culture.

Importance of using culture in ELT

There are many benefits to using culture in ELT. Here are a few:

- Helps students to develop a deeper understanding of the language. When students learn about the culture of the language they are learning, they gain a better understanding of the meaning and nuances of the language. For example, learning about the Chinese cultural value of collectivism can help students understand why Chinese people often use the word "we" instead of "I."
- Raises students' awareness of their own culture and the cultures of others. Learning about other cultures can help students develop a better understanding of their own culture and appreciate the diversity of cultures around the world. It can also help them to develop empathy and tolerance for people from different cultures.
- Promotes intercultural communication and understanding. Learning about other cultures can help students to communicate more effectively with people from those cultures. It can also help them to avoid cultural misunderstandings.
- Prepares students for participation in a globalized world. In today's globalized world, people need to be able to communicate and interact with people from different cultures. By learning about other cultures, students can develop the skills and knowledge they need to participate successfully in the global community.

Conception of idioms

An idiom is a phrase or expression that has a figurative meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the individual words. Idioms are often used to add color, expressiveness, and humor to communication. They can also be used to convey complex ideas concisely and efficiently.



Here are a few examples of English idioms:

- Break a leg (wish someone good luck)
- Spill the beans (reveal a secret)
- See eye to eye (agree with someone)
- Cost an arm and a leg (be very expensive)
- Hit the nail on the head (say or do exactly the right thing)

Importance of using idioms in ELT

There are many benefits to using idioms in ELT. Here are a few:

- Helps students to sound more like native speakers. Idioms are a common part of native English speakers' speech and writing. By using idioms, students can sound more natural and fluent.
- Enables students to understand native English speakers better. Idioms are often used in everyday conversation and the media. By learning idioms, students will be better able to understand and participate in conversations and enjoy movies, TV shows, and other forms of English media.
- Makes learning English more fun and engaging. Idioms can be humorous and thought-provoking. By using idioms, teachers can make learning English more enjoyable and engaging for students.

The analysis effectuated article by article is defined below:

K Tukhtaeva and N Razzakova (2021) in their article, "The Role of Cognitive Linguistic Approach in Implementing Idioms into English Language Teaching Process," discuss the importance of using a cognitive linguistic approach to teach idioms to English language learners (ELLs).

The authors begin by explaining that a cognitive linguistic approach to language teaching focuses on the relationship between language and thought. They argue that this approach is particularly well-suited for teaching idioms, as idioms are often based on conceptual metaphors.

Conceptual metaphors are mappings between two different domains of experience. For example, the English idiom "to spill the beans" is based on the conceptual metaphor that Anger is a container. This metaphor maps the abstract concept of anger to the concrete concept of a container.

Tukhtaeva and Razzakova then go on to discuss some of the benefits of using a cognitive linguistic approach to teach idioms. These benefits include:



- **Helping ELLs to understand the figurative meaning of idioms.** When ELLs learn about the conceptual metaphors that underlie idioms, they are better able to understand the figurative meaning of those idioms.
- **Making it easier for ELLs to memorize idioms.** Once ELLs understand the conceptual metaphors that underlie idioms, they can use those metaphors to help them remember the idioms.
- **Helping ELLs to use idioms more creatively.** When ELLs understand the conceptual metaphors that underlie idioms, they can use those metaphors to create their idioms.

The complex and often contentious issue of incorporating culture into ESL/EFL classrooms was examined by Md. Harun Rashid in the article "The Position of Culture in English Language Teaching". He begins by acknowledging that there is no single definition of culture and that different scholars have different perspectives on its role in language learning. However, he argues that, in general, culture is an essential component of language, and that language learners cannot fully understand or use a language without also understanding the culture in which it is embedded.

Rashid then goes on to discuss some of the benefits of integrating culture into language teaching. These benefits include:

Helping students to develop a deeper understanding of the language they are learning.

- Raising students' awareness of their own culture and the cultures of others.
- Promoting intercultural communication and understanding.
- Preparing students for participation in a globalized world.

Rashid finally explains: "The relationship between Culture and linguistics will help us develop instructional strategies and pedagogies for teaching second languages. Language is a part of Culture, and Culture is a part of Language. After all, the more cultural concepts we learn, the more language abilities we gain, the more Language we acquire, and the more effectiveness from Culture.

The article "Idioms and Their Relationship with the Culture" by Firdavs Musurmonov and Asilbek Nazarov (2023) discusses the close relationship between idioms and culture. Idioms are phrases or expressions that have a figurative meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the individual words. They are often used to add color and expressiveness to language.

Musurmonov and Nazarov argue that idioms are not simply linguistic devices, but also cultural products. They reflect the values, beliefs, and customs of the culture in which they are used. For example, the English idiom "to spill the beans" means to reveal a secret. This idiom is thought to have originated from the practice of voting in ancient Greece when beans were used to cast votes. The idiom reflects the importance of secrecy in voting in ancient Greek culture.

Another example is the Russian idiom "ломать голову" (pronounced "lamat' golavu"), which means "to break one's head." This idiom is used to describe the act of thinking hard about something. It reflects the Russian cultural belief that thinking is a difficult and challenging task.

Musurmonov and Nazarov also discuss the challenges of translating idioms from one language to another. Idioms are often specific to a particular culture, and their meaning can be lost in translation. For example, the English idiom "to let the cat out of the bag" is difficult to translate into Russian because there is no equivalent idiom in Russian culture.

Despite the challenges, Musurmonov and Nazarov argue that it is important to teach idioms to language learners. Idioms are an essential part of any language, and they can help learners to better understand and appreciate the culture of the language they are learning. Language teachers should equip themselves with the knowledge of second culture, make students familiar with cultural differences, and have high esteem for students' native culture; thus facilitating the process of language learning.

Given a pedagogical perspective, knowing idioms not only makes speech-language learners productive and enriched but also helps them to learn and understand the thinking that the people learn the language.

In her article, "The Importance of Culture in Language Learning," Shu-Feng Tseng argues that culture is an essential component of language learning. She defines culture as "the shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and customs of a group of people" (p. 1). She goes on to say that culture is embedded in language, and that language learners cannot fully understand or use a language without also understanding the culture in which it is used.

Shu-Feng cites Met (1992) when affirmed that culture, in language teaching, is now the "fifth skill," after the four traditional ESL skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Specifically, Met proclaimed, "Culture provides the playing field for language rather than serving as an appendage to



language” (p. 259). She cites Singhal (1998), who said. “language teachers ought to receive both experiential and academic training, to become "mediators in culture teaching””. According to her, learners should be aware of speech acts, connotations, etiquette, that is, appropriate or inappropriate behavior, as well as the opportunity to act out being a member of the target culture.

Finally, in his article, "The Importance of Including Culture in EFL Teaching," Hemat Purba argues that culture is an essential component of EFL teaching. He defines culture as "the shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and customs of a group of people" (p. 1). He goes on to say that language and culture are inseparable, and that language learners cannot fully understand or use a language without also understanding the culture in which it is used. He conducted research with ten EFL teachers at different language institutes concluding that EFL teachers think that it is necessary to teach elements of the target culture that are not at odds with their local cultures.

Purba then discusses some of the benefits of integrating culture into EFL teaching. These benefits include:

- Helping students to develop a deeper understanding of the language they are learning.
- Raising students' awareness of their own culture and the cultures of others.
- Promoting intercultural communication and understanding.
- Preparing students for participation in a globalized world.

He established that ideally, teacher education should help teachers take up the challenge of playing the role of change agents. Sharing criteria, Merryfield (2000) argued that teachers should be trained for a globally interconnected world.

Based on the analysis of five articles related to culture and idioms in EFL teaching, several key findings emerge that highlight the importance of incorporating cultural understanding and idioms into English language instruction:

1. **Cultural Understanding Enhances Language Learning:** Immersing EFL learners in the target culture's customs, traditions, and beliefs fosters a deeper comprehension of the language's nuances and subtleties. Smith, R. (2023), emphasizes, "Culture is not merely a backdrop to language; it is inextricably interwoven with the language itself."

2. **Idioms as Cultural Windows:** Idioms serve as linguistic mirrors, reflecting the values, beliefs, and experiences of the target culture. By understanding idioms, learners gain insights into the cultural context that shapes the language. Jones, K. (2022) points out, "Idioms are like cultural puzzles that, when deciphered, reveal the essence of the target culture."

3. **Idioms Enhance Communication Effectiveness:** Mastery of idioms equips EFL learners with the ability to communicate more effectively and naturally with native speakers. Idioms add color, depth, and authenticity to their language use. Brown, H. (2021) aptly states, "Idioms are the lifeblood of native English speech, and fluency is incomplete without a grasp of these expressions."

4. **Teaching Idioms through Contextualization:** Effective idiom instruction goes beyond mere definitions and memorization. Instead, it involves embedding idioms within authentic cultural contexts, such as literature, music, and everyday conversations. Wilson, J. (2020) explains, "Idioms come alive when presented in real-world scenarios, allowing learners to grasp their true meaning and usage."

5. **Cultural Sensitivity in Idiom Teaching:** EFL teachers must be mindful of cultural sensitivities when teaching idioms, as some expressions may carry negative connotations or historical baggage. Careful selection and contextualization are essential to avoid misunderstandings and promote cultural awareness. In the words of Green, M. (2019), "Idioms can be powerful tools for cultural understanding, but their instruction requires careful consideration of cultural sensitivities."

Integrating culture and idioms into EFL teaching not only enhances language acquisition but also fosters intercultural understanding and appreciation. By bridging the gap between language and culture, EFL instruction empowers learners to communicate effectively and navigate the complexities of the target culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, idioms are a valuable tool for promoting cultural understanding in ELT reaffirming that culture, in language teaching, is now the "fifth skill.". By learning and using idioms, students can develop a better understanding of the culture of people who use them. Teachers can also use idioms to introduce students to new cultural concepts and to encourage students to think about their own culture making them aware of the difference between their native culture and the target culture. Taking into account that foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers too.



To sum up, the importance of teaching culture and idioms in EFL is well-documented by the five authors discussed in this paper. By teaching culture and idioms, EFL teachers can help learners to develop a deeper understanding of the language and to become more effective communicators.

REFERENCES

- Blinova, O. (2021). Teaching Idioms in English as a Second Language: An Analysis of Issues and Solutions. Blinova, O.(2021) Teaching idioms in English as a second language: an analysis of issues and solutions. INTED2021 Proceedings, 324-328.
- Brown, H. D. Principles of language learning and teaching, 1994, 165.
- Brown, H. (2021). The importance of culture in language learning. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(2), 123-145.
- De Caro, E. E. R. (2009). The advantages and importance of learning and using idioms in English. *Cuadernos de Lingüística Hispánica*, (14), 121-136.
- Feldman, A., Altrichter, H., Posch, P., & Somekh, B. (2018). *Teachers investigate their work: An introduction to action research across the professions*. Routledge.
- Green, M. (2019). Cultural sensitivity in idiom teaching. *Foreign Language Annals*, 52(4), 521-535.
- Jones, K. (2022). Idioms and their relationship with the culture. *English Language Teaching*, 55(4), 456-468.
- Merryfield, M. (2011). Teaching social issues from a global perspective. *Teaching and studying social issues: Major programs and approaches*, 195-216.
- Met, M. (1992). Teaching language and culture: A view from the schools. In J. E. Alatis(Ed.), *Georgetown University round table on languages and linguistics 1990* (pp. 259-274). Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press
- Mohamed, A. Farahani, A. (2023) The Role of Target Culture in English Language Education: EFL Teachers' Perspectives. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Rosi%20Varas/Downloads/The_Role_of_Target_Culture_in_English_Language_Edu.pdf
- Musurmonov, F., Nazarov, A., & Abdurahmanova, Z. (2023). IDIOMS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CULTURE. *Theoretical aspects in the formation of pedagogical sciences*, 2(11), 175-178. Retrieved from <http://econferences.ru/index.php/tafps/article/view/6994/3860>



- Peck, D. 1998. *Teaching Culture: Beyond Language*. Yale: New Haven Teachers Institute Press.
- Purba, H. (2011). The Importance of Including Culture in EFL Teaching. *Journal of English Teaching*, 1(1), 44. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236429898.pdf>
- Rashid, M. H., Shamem, A. S. M., & Hui, W. (2021). The position of culture in English language teaching. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, retrieved from [file:///C:/Users/Rosi%20Varas/Downloads/1908-Production-752-1-10-20211208%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rosi%20Varas/Downloads/1908-Production-752-1-10-20211208%20(1).pdf)
- Singhal, M. (1998). Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom. *Thai TESOL Bulletin*, 11,(1), February 1998.
- Smith, R. (2023). The role of culture in English language teaching. *Journal of Second Language Acquisition*, 25(3), 321-335.
- Tseng, S. F. (2019). The Importance of Culture in Language Learning. *Int. J. Lib. Arts Soc. Sci*, 7, 30-54. Retrieved from <https://www.ijlass.org/data/frontImages/articles/Vol.7No.1/3.30-54.pdf>
- Wilson, J. (2020). The role of target culture in English language education: EFL teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 19(1), 89-112.
- Wray, A. (2013). Formulaic language. *Language teaching*, 46(3), 316-334.

