Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool in Teaching English Idioms for Engineering Students to Enhance Proficiency

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Abstract - Language is a powerful weapon which can make or mar a scenario. To update such a language, we need to enlarge the linguistic skills. Teaching is successful, when the appropriate methodology is chosen according to the concept. This paper caters the best pedagogical tool to learn and teach English idioms for L2 learners of engineering students in an efficient way. Storytelling aids the learners to comprehend and remember the idioms easily. Storytelling method for teaching idioms is suitable from kindergarten children to scholars. Basically, learning idioms is not a piece of cake; this is the tenet of students. This paper will break this myth and make L2 learners of English to love English idiom usage willingly.

Keywords - Communication Skill, Idioms, Pedagogy, Short Stories, Proficiency

1. Introduction
Knowledge is power; language is superpower. Learning idioms make the L2 learner feel superior. So far idioms are taught in a vague way by giving the meaning of it alone. Nonnative speakers feel it as difficult to comprehend the meaning. Because, instead of explaining the concept behind every idiom, L2 learners are asked to memorize the meaning. The words in the idiom do not convey the literal meaning directly. For example, ‘break a leg’ is an idiom. The direct meaning is breaking of one’s leg. Whereas the idiomatic meaning is all the best, perform well or do your best. Since idiom do not convey exact meaning is clear now. Hence student feels difficult in learning it. All English idioms does not give literal meaning, it refers figurative meaning. Let’s locate the simplest way to learn and teach idioms without difficulty. Basically, all language follows certain rules. If not then it would not make any sense. One of the exceptions and peculiar thing is Idiom. Idioms are a group of words which break two normal rules of English. They are: Semantic and Syntactic. Most of the idioms have a short story behind every idiom. Usage of this background may help the learners to learn idioms easily.

Native speakers of English use idioms naturally in their conversation. We have witnessed that in the TV shows, movies and also in books. Whereas, in the state of Tamil Nadu the usage of Idioms among engineering students is very limited. They deem idioms as a stumbling block for their English proficiency. Here in Tamilnadu, idioms are common only in TV shows, movie dialogue and among scholars, and orators. Engineering students learn idioms to pass competitive exams, and to crack bank exams and to get through government recruitment. In all these exams candidates were assessed with synonyms, antonyms, idioms and phrasal verbs to calculate their English Proficiency. This proves that idioms and a language have indispensable harmony.

2. Literature Review
Idiomatic expressions are handled by many researchers and various pedagogical tools were suggested by everyone. For instance, let us review few: [1] in his research paper, ‘The Advantages and Importance of Learning and Using Idioms in English’ (2009) had taken a method of dialogues and reading to improve idioms for a better communication skill. In another research paper ‘Effective Activities for Teaching English Idioms to EFL Learners’ (2008) by [2] in the University of Tainan, author tried with eight activities to make EFL students improve their language skills by learning idiomatic expressions. In ‘Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphors to Idioms’ (2001) by [3] examines how people recognize utterances that are projected figuratively in his book. Here, this paper serves engineering students to improvise English proficiency by learning English idioms which is a part and parcel of fluency, through the pedagogical tool of storytelling as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Objectives of The Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary objective of L2 learners of English</th>
<th>To build fluency with a good range of vocabulary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific objective of this paper</td>
<td>To incorporate idiomatic expressions in a day-to-day conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>To teach idioms through fables and parables to construct engineering students listen and comprehend idioms eagerly to attain fluency</td>
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3. Importance of Idioms Among Engineering Students

Harry Collissays, “When used by native speakers, idioms sound natural and fit the occasion, since Americans instinctively feel the imagery and impact of what they are saying. A non-native speaker of English, on the other hand, may know the basic meaning of such expressions as "I gave it my best shot" or "dressed to kill," but still not be able to use them appropriately”.

Native speakers of English use idioms naturally in their language. Similarly, if L2 engineering students articulate English idioms in their conversation, then that prove their proficiency. Most of the engineering graduates enter either corporate or start up their own firm. In both these cases English language fluency is predominant to prove and exhibit their skills and abilities. Using idioms in a conversation builds confidence and they stand alone wherever they are. Adding to this, idioms are tested in all levels of exams viz, verbal ability (in the interview process), banking exams (IBPS), government competitive exam (TNPSC), and many more. Hence, it is suggested that teaching idiom is mandatory for ESL/EFL students. Idioms are considered as a component of everyday vocabulary.

4. Difficulties in Imbibing Idioms

According to [4], “an idiom is a kind of complex lexical item. It is a phrase whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the morphemes it comprises”. L2 engineering students feel idioms as a complex one because they could not connect the meaning. It is highly impossible to guess the meaning from the sense of the words that constitute them. They believe learning and using idioms in daily conversation is a pipe dream. Hence, engineering students used to memorize idioms instead of comprehending the essence and meaning behind it. So, most of the times they fail to relish the idiomatic expressions.

5. Methodology - Storytelling

Storytelling is a magical pedagogical tool which can even rewire the subconscious mind. Story is a part and parcel of our life. Even moral values are taught in the form of fables. Our Indian Epics are also written in the way of story to teach a set of principles. Moreover, reading habit of children is also persuaded by interpreting parables [5]. These have power to create some ideas into reality. Story includes creativity, imaginative power and in addition adds vocabulary knowledge. The difficulties in learning and teaching idioms can be resolved by means of storytelling methodology. This gives them a better understanding about idioms and its meanings. If students are vivid in the logic of idioms then usage will be habitual. If this miraculous methodology is used to teach idioms, then learning idioms is a piece of cake.

6. Procedure- Decoding Idioms Through Short Stories

Teaching is an art which can be done in myriad ways. The methodology of teaching is selected according to the theory. As per the words of Benjamin Franklin; “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn”. Idioms can be learnt through stories by involving and immersing into it. Either the actual story behind every idiom or let’s cook our own to make the L2 learners learn unambiguously. Some of the paradigms are explained as follows:

*Being in limelight is a flash in the pan*

**Idiom**: limelight  
**Meaning**: center of attention  
**Usage**: in the limelight

*Story*: Pangolin (anteater) and his friend Daisy (rodent) went on an adventure. They were bosom friends from their childhood. As they were animals, we know that Pangolin is stocky and rodent is tiny in terms of physical attribute. In their trip they saw a hillock and planned to have a race. The rule of the race is to climb the hillock to reach its pinnacle and to arrive at the foot of the hill first would be considered as winner. They started immediately, while ascending the hillock they had a cool conversation and climbed together. After reaching the top Daisy rushed rapidly to win the race, he knows well that anyway he is going to bag the contest. Pangolin accepted his failure and started the cerebration process. Throughout the night he pondered the reason for his failure. He talked and blabbered to himself just by asking himself “is my physical trait is the reason for my failure?” Suddenly an idea flashed in his mind which was his father’s adage, “there are many ways to do a thing”. Keeping this in mind he challenged his friend Daisy the same contest very next day. Daisy giggled sarcastically as a sign that he is going to win again. They started the bout and had a casual conversation while ascending after reaching the top Daisy rushed to descent but to his surprise Pangolin curled himself like a ball and rolled down to the foot of the hill and won. This incident became popular and Pangolin stood in the limelight. Reporters from the newspaper came for an interview and enquired Pangolin how this is possible to win Daisy. He replied there are many ways to do a thing. He became a well-known figure and from then everyone called him champion.

* Asking Lion’s share is like entering lion’s den*

**Idiom**: Lion’s share  
**Meaning**: the largest part of something  
**Usage**: the lion’s share

*Story*: Once, there lived a sagacious lion in a forest. He is known for his presence of mind. As he was aging, he could not hunt any animal by himself so, he devices a conspiracy. One day he went for a hunt along with other two animals. They altogether caught a stag and killed it. When they are about to segregate equally, abruptly lion said, “Stop”. He suggested to the other two that, “since I am the king of the forest”, later he added that, “I am being the strongest and the most ferocious”, he needed lion’s share (major share). Other two animals agreed unwillingly without knowing what else to do. He enjoyed eating two third portions and left the leftovers to others.

*Apple pie order keep everything in order*

**Idiom**: apple pie order
Meaning: arranging everything in its proper place

Story: One fine day, Language class was going on in steppe. Though students know it was naff, they keenly enjoyed the session. Language teacher explained the concepts in a practical way; hence she enthralled her students. They were tested on their learning’s through experiments and as a result the field was messy. After the session teacher asked her students to set everything in apple pie order. Later, all the students hurriedly kept all their belongings in the correct places.

Cut to the chase

Idiom: beat around the bush
Meaning: not speaking to the point

Story: Pretty little Preethi who is studying in 1st year engineering students through online mode. Survey was conducted for 15 engineering students (both boys and girls) with a questionnaire as illustrated in Table 2.

Preethi understood and switched her mood. Language teacher explained its benefits and about his ontological memories. But that pretty Preethi is more anxious to taste a bell or be a slave

Idiom: bell the cat
Meaning: take a risky job

Story: There lived an orphan boy named Oliver. No one cares him. So, he grew up by himself with his own living. He tried various jobs and left with few learning’s. After gaining little experience and money he started his own business (grocery shop). He is a jack of all trades but master of none is a known thing in his area, as an added extra credit to it he was not caring his grocery shop. Since he was not paying attention lots of pests and rats enjoy their living by breeding. As a result, it spoiled the goods; it made him lose a lot. To get rid of rats, he asked a suggestion from his friend. His friend presented him a thin bell in the cat’s neck. Everyone appreciated his ideas but no one is ready to execute the scheme. As a result, they started to decline in count.

Do nothing to be a couch potato

Idiom: Couch potato
Meaning: spending maximum time in watching television

Story: COVID-19 is of course a terrifying pandemic. People underwent a sea change in all their activities. Some term it, few memes it, others enjoy the lockdown the rest knock down the lockdown by honing their skills. One adult whose name is Bheem, but everyone calls him with a pet name called bellicose Bheem because his character is warlike. He does not like to share the household duties with his mother. Conversely it is a lockdown too so he spends most of the time watching television. In return he got problem in his eyes then he regretted for his action. He started to ponder how he became couch potato and why his parents not restricted him. After realization now to his surprise he is no more a couch potato and also advised his friends not to be a couch potato.

Tie a bell or be a slave

Idiom: bell the cat
Meaning: take a risky job

Story: In Dholakpur, there was a sweet (laddu) factory. There worked hundreds of people to make both ends meet. They were all very fragile and saved money for the future. One among them is Sita, she worked diligently and got good name among her tribe. Unfortunately, her daughter started to squabble with her mother regarding an inter caste marriage. But her mother could not accept her rationalistic view. As a result, after few days of argument she eloped with her beau. Hence, she does not have any accessories to start her live. She started her new married life from the scratch. They both worked smart and hard and won one day.

These are few illustrations to show how idioms can be taught (by narrating a parable) in language classroom. According to the time and need of students, idiom can be selected. If a L2 engineering students learn one idiom per day, through this method, he could learn more and at the same time, he will use confidently in his conversation too.

7. Result
This procedure was carried out among 1st year engineering college students through online mode. Survey was conducted for 15 engineering students (both boys and girls) with a questionnaire as illustrated in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.N o.</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>N o.</th>
<th>Pre evaluation</th>
<th>Post evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you think Idioms are crucial for engineering graduates?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is learning idioms simple?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you love to listen to stories?</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Is learning idioms through stories are easy?</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post evaluation result proves that the engineering college students feel comfortable to learn idioms when it was taught along with short stories.
8. Conclusion
Story is a memorable way to learn English idioms. As ancient Chinese proverb says, “one picture is worth ten thousand words” story defines every idiom brilliantly without any extra explanation. If an engineering student uses idiom in a regular conversation, he will be considered as a proficient language user. In a nutshell, if idioms are taught and learnt through stories it will provide excellent result. It is in the hands of EFL teachers to train the L2 learners to hone the skill of using idiomatic expression to prove their communication skill is sound enough.

References
[5]. Linda and Roger Flavell, “Dictionary of Idioms and Origins”.