

ENGLISH IDIOMS WITH ANIMALS: THE WAYS OF THE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE FORMATION AT ENGLISH LESSONS

Svitlana Nasakina, Anna Golubova, Iryna Shums`ka

Ukrainian and Foreign Languages Chair, Odesa State Agrarian University,
Odesa, Ukraine

Abstract

In recent decades, there has been increased interest in the study of phraseological units in different languages in various aspects. The object of this study is English idioms. The subject of this study is English idioms with animals. The article aims to specify a competence-oriented approach to professional training intended for the future specialists according to modern requirements and demands. The authors focus on idioms with animals as a means of linguistic and cultural competence formation. Special attention is given to the social and cultural competence. It is indicated that when learning English with a purpose of a professional communication of agrarian universities should be paid particular attention both to the terminology and phraseology. Competency is understood as some prescribed professional basis, which is considered to be obligatory for future specialists. The analysis considers the explicit and the implicit representations of the idioms, their symbolic meanings. The article focuses on the efficient means of idiom formation in the English language as well. The authors discuss the possibility of using idioms with the following phraseological models: adjective + noun, noun+noun, noun+verb, and forecasts further idiom-formations according to the phraseological model. The article is aimed at showing the interaction of linguistic and extra linguistic aspects within an idiom with animals, as a linguistic unit. Aspects of English phraseology are analyzed by emphasizing the important role of idioms in the cognitive processes. Working with idioms at English lessons proved to be effective for forming and developing linguistic competences as reading, writing, listening, speaking.

Keywords: culture, language, phraseology, teaching, veterinarians.

INTRODUCTION

The discipline “English for specific purposes” aims to ensure the students of agrarian universities to master the professional English language competence. Training is aimed at developing speaking, reading, writing, and translation skills. The need for the teaching of English idioms in the agrarian universities and the development of translations gave rise to the English idioms description and analysis in our research. The phraseology of language attracts the attention of linguists and language teachers from different countries. An idiom is a word or phrase that is not taken literally. As Groszler (2012, p.347) underlined, “idioms are words or phrases whose meaning cannot be inferred simply from the meaning of each of its words, but they comprise a figurative

significance which is known through common use”. Animals have a special place in the life of future veterinarians, that’s why animal idioms teaching English lessons would be rather interesting and useful. Some researchers think that there are both positive and negative animal idioms. According to Smith-Harris (2008), “negative animal idioms, metaphors, and euphemisms are pervasive and indicate that there is a societal permissiveness to implied cruelty toward nonhuman animals”. The present paper focuses on the teaching the idioms with animals at English lessons at agrarian universities. The theoretical significance of the work is conditioned by the comprehensive approach to idioms, which enabled to consolidate the knowledge concerning the relevant aspects of the phraseology of English and Ukrainian languages. The practical value of this research is determined by the possibility of using the obtained conclusions in special courses in English for Bachelors and Masters of the Veterinarian Faculties. The practical findings of the study can serve as the basis for teaching aids.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method, which includes two stages, has been presented. The first stage consisted of material collection, the frequency of certain idioms use in printed or electronic media published in English being the main criterion for this selection. The second stage consisted of the description and systematization of the data obtained using particular methods. The *descriptive method* was used in this work for inventory and taxonomy of the studied idioms. The *structural method* was used in the development of the structural classification of idioms.

ANIMAL IDIOMS

The idioms fund of each nation reflects in its many aspects of the customs and culture. There are lots of English and Ukrainian expressions based on animals and birds, and almost every animal and bird has inspired a whole range of idioms in every language, and a surprisingly varied range too. According to Oxford Dictionary of English, “idiom is a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words” (p.869). Idioms aren’t always easy to learn and understand. As Kunin (2005) marks:

The characteristic feature for idioms is the presence of a meaning that clarifies the meaning of the components of the variable word combination, which is the prototype of an idiom, and the literal values of the components are an integral part of the value of a turnover and as a whole are its

internal form. The added value is narrower in comparison with the value of the prototype of the idiom. (p.327).

To help students go deeper into the English idioms, we must integrate our students not only with the academic knowledge but also with knowledge of idioms, proverbs, so on. Makkai (1972, p. 25) states, that “there is a view according to which everything in natural language is idiomatic; both encoding and decoding, from phonology through word formation up to syntax and semantics, including sayings, proverbs, literature, and each individual culture”. There are different kinds of activities in learning idioms in English lessons. As a result of these activities, the idiomatical expressions must take their places under the name of an individual course in syllabi in agrarian universities, and especially at the veterinary faculties.

200 English and Ukrainian animal and bird idioms were selected from the English printed and electronic media. It has been established that among the animal idioms there are adjective+noun, noun+noun, verb+noun, for example, *Irish bull (English)*, *хитрий, як лис (Ukrainian)*; *bulls and bears (English)*, *ні пари з уст (Ukrainian)*; *to have a bee in one's bonnet (English)*, *бути байдужу (Ukrainian)*.

To memorize animal idioms better, it is necessary to compare English and Ukrainian idioms. It must be noted, that both Ukrainian and English phraseology has a long history. We can find similar animal idioms in English and Ukrainian languages, for example, *sly as a fox* in English, and *хитрий як лис* in Ukrainian. There are differences between English and Ukrainian culture, that's why sometimes there are not equivalents between some English and Ukrainian animal idioms, for example, the English idioms *a cat can look at the king* and *cook your own goose* does not have the Ukrainian equivalent. At the same time, the Ukrainian idioms *як віл до браги*, *як мокра курка* does not have the English equivalent. We agree with Dragoescu (2011), that “bird idioms are sometimes metaphorically constructed as if birds were endowed with human feelings and even abilities” but think that animals in idioms are usually endowed with human abilities as well.

So, animal idioms reflect the national peculiarities and conceptions of the native speakers. In English and Ukrainian languages animal idioms belong to the lexis, which denotes the well-known animals. The most frequent animals in Ukrainian and English animal idioms are the cat, the dog, the horse.

ANIMAL IDIOMS AT ENGLISH LESSONS AT THE VETERINARY FACULTIES

Teaching English in agrarian universities has certain specifics. Teachers of English can choose the activities that will be useful for future veterinarians, agronomists, so on. There is a so-called Rule of “Four Cs” – Communication, Collaboration, Critical thinking and Creativity. In our opinion, one of the main aims of English language training in the Agrarian University is to teach communication, and critical thinking in the professional sphere. Besides, one of the important goals of mastering English by future veterinarians is forming linguistic and cultural competence, which is based on students’ knowledge of the national and cultural characteristics of the country the language of which they are learning. Students need to be trained on the identification of different idioms.

Considering the content of communicative competence, it is worth noting the study of A. Kapskaya (1997), in which the author identifies the two blocks of speech skills, which essentially reflect their orientation towards the particular type of professional activity. The first block of speech skills covers mainly those that ensure the qualitative nature of speech, in particular: mastery of speech logic, intonation variability, ability to predict communicative behavior, interaction and emotional-experimental influence, mastery of speech etiquette. The second block includes the speech skills that enhance the effectiveness of the communicative process in general and social impact, in particular: the formation of the speech goal (i.e. the whole communicative process), initiating the speech process, selection and implementation of speech, adaptation of communicative skills to social and educational conditions and a specific client, the use of the results of the analysis of the communicative process, the implementation of speech management and its correction.

The theoretical and methodological analysis of the above-mentioned competencies made it possible to establish that their formation in future agricultural specialists will be effective under the following conditions. Firstly, the number of hours for a foreign language teaching has to be extended and its continuous study should be implemented. Secondly, it is necessary to create a positive microclimate, psychological comfort in an academic group at the foreign language lessons. Thirdly, the definition of the principles of learning as for the formation of foreign language speech competence should be taken into account, such as: that of communication, as well as the principle of taking into account the native language and principle of approximations (Kostyk, 2012).

The modern English textbooks for future veterinarians could, on the one hand, familiarize them with vocabulary and grammar; on the other hand, it could also present the idiomatic matrix of the language. Students need to be trained in the identification of different idioms. There are many ways in which English teachers can make their lessons memorable. At the beginning of a new topic, a set of exercises including gap-filling, multiple choices, matching, etc. is usually developed to provide a practical aid to learn animal idioms and veterinary terminology.

Let's look at the exercises which we use in English lessons. The examples below enhance the receptive knowledge of animal idioms:

Example 1. Fill in the gaps with animals from the box

| |
|---------------------|
| Cat, bee, bull, dog |
|---------------------|

My mother was busy as a _____ making cherry jam, cooking the Ukrainian borshch, and so on. We haven't seen our French teacher in a _____ age! Mark was like a _____ in a China shop. I was like a _____ on a hot tin roof.

It is very important to involve students in listening activities. It is known that listening is an understanding of speech, comprehension of it by a person. It also contributes to the formation of different types of speech activity. This type of speech activity makes it possible to master the rhythm and correctness of pronunciation, etc. Therefore, the training of listening is necessary when learning a foreign language.

Another useful activity is shown below:

Example 2. Listen to the English idioms. Circle T(true) or F(false)

1. Curiosity killed the dog. T/F
2. The dog days of summer are really humid and uncomfortable. T/F
3. Which came first, the chicken or the cat? T/F

We often use exercises with matching idioms in our English lessons. For example:

Example 3. Match the part of idioms in column A with the second part of the idiom in column B

| Column A | Column B |
|---|-----------|
| What's the matter? Has the cat got your | mouse. |
| Don't count your | tongue? |
| Fight like | egg. |
| Kill the goose that lays the golden | a tiger. |
| As poor as a church | chickens. |

Reviewing the training of future veterinary specialists for professional activity, it is necessary to pay attention to the speech component of this process. From the experience of teaching future veterinarians, it has been established that the most significant type of activity is speaking. Speaking allows you the opportunity to express your thoughts, convey some information to others, prove your own point of view, influence people, etc. It was found out that speech competence is the basis for the formation of communicative competence. Communicative competence is the assimilation of ethno- and socio-psychological norms, standards, stereotypes of behavior. Here is the activity we used at English lessons:

Example 4. In pairs, use idioms in the box to discuss sport on television

| |
|--|
| Proud as a peacock, a cat can look at the king, get on your high horse, fish out of water, smell a rat, have a whale of a time, a dark horse, etc. |
|--|

We use authentic material to show students for what purposes the certain idiomatic structure is used in communication. For example, the English-language movie is such an authentic material. For example, it could be the movie *Black Beauty* or *The Wind in the Willows*. Makkai (1972, p. 27) states, that “language teachers are usually involved in multilingual situation in the classroom, their method of separating idioms from nonidioms has been a pedagogical one”. The method of formation of speaking and writing competence of students should be chosen taking into consideration. It is advisable to teach professional speech through the lexical and grammatical language levels in the system of various communication exercises, built on the principle of speech situations. The purpose of idiomatic training in agrarian higher education institutions is to embed in the long-term memory of students the idiomatic patterns.

Much attention is paid to the writing, insofar as future agricultural specialists during their professional activities will need to fill out many reports, forms, conduct business correspondence, etc. Writing also allows to better master the rules of sentence construction, certain temporal forms, phraseology, and so on.

The students should understand that they need all the standards of literacy, their basic skills of spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar to create the message. It must be noted, that “care needs to be taken when writing idioms as many of them are only used in informal language”(Berman et al., 2011). The students will need to write concisely, accurately, and fluently. An informal letter can be selected for the writing activity. The students could be given a time limit to write the email using animal or bird idioms.

Teachers could organize some extra classes, for example, speaking clubs for students who want to improve their English. The topics for the discussion could be the following: Colour Idioms, Animal Idioms, Bird Idioms, etc.

So, the success of the professional activity of future veterinarians is connected with the use of a foreign language. In our opinion, the professional-oriented study of English for Specific Purposes plays a leading role in improving the level of English language of future veterinarians. Improvement of the basics of communication activities in veterinarians of higher agrarian educational institutions requires serious attention to aspects of mastering both idiomatic and terminology aspects, developing the ability to perceive authentic English.

CONCLUSION

Mastering the English language in the veterinary faculty is not only learning grammar and vocabulary for specific purposes but learning idioms as well. The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Odesa State Agrarian University carries out training of highly skilled, competitive veterinarians. The University needs to integrate European educational system, that’s why Bachelors and Masters need good knowledge in English.

An idiom is an expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its individual words but has a separate meaning of its own. The main attention of teachers is usually paid to the formation of lexical, grammatical, and speech knowledge, while the issue of idioms competence remains insufficiently developed in the methodology of teaching foreign languages for professional

purposes. Although grammar and terminology is part of the curriculum in many education programs, idiomatic exercises are often left without attention. To our mind, teaching animal idioms must be a regular feature of English language lessons at the Veterinary faculties. Though it would be overwhelming for future Masters in Veterinary to give too much theoretical information on idiomatic patterns.

Therefore, the discussion over animal idioms led us to the following conclusions: animal idioms help to understand the culture and the history of the nation, that the most frequent animals in Ukrainian and English animal idioms are cat, dog, horse. Teachers need to explain the etymology and symbolic meaning of these idioms. On the one hand, teachers have a fixed curriculum and syllabus to follow, but on the other hand, we are free to add some topics with animal idioms. Idioms can attract students' attention and make them participate more willingly and be involved in learning more actively. Students' attention to the animal idioms is drawn with the help of different exercises.

REFERENCES

- Berman, M. P., M. Belak, and W. Rimmer. (2011). *English Language Teaching Matters: A Collection of Articles and Teachers Materials*. Winchester. Washington: John Hunt Publishing.
- Croszler, A-S. (2012). English Animal Idioms and their Romanian Equivalents. *Agricultural English* (I). Cambridge Scholars Publishing. pp. 347-355.
- Dragoescu, A-A. (2011). "An Eagle's Eye's View on Metaphors in Animal Idioms". *Academic Days of Timișoara*: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. pp.34-46.
- Fuller, R. (2000). *Animal Idioms*. Presses de Universitaires de Mirail.
- Kaps'ka, L. Y.(1997) *Pedahohika zhyvoho slova* [Pedagogy of the living word]: Navch.-metod. posibnyk. K. : IZMN.
- Kostyk, Ye. V.(2012) Formuvannya inshomovnoyi movlennyevoyi kompetentsiyi studentiv nefilolohichnykh fakul'tetiv u VNZ [Formation of foreign language speech competence of the students of non-philological faculties of higher educational institutions]. *Inozemni movy u vyshchii osviti : linhvistychni, psyholoho-pedahohichni ta metodychni perspektyvy: materialy Vseukrayins'koyi naukovo-praktychnoyi konferentsiyi*. Kharkiv : NU «YUAU im. Yaroslava Mudroho», 2012. pp. 141-142.
- Kunin, A.V. (2005). *Course on modern English phraseology*, Dubna: Fenix
- Makkai, A. (1972). *Idiom Structure in English*. Hague-Paris: Mouton.
- Oxford Dictionary of English. (2010). Oxford: Oxford University Press.(ed. A.Stevenson).
- Smith-Harris, T. (2008). There's Not Enough Room to Swing a Dead Cat And There's No Use Flogging a Dead Horse. *Social Creatures: A Human and Animal Studies Reader*. Lantern Books. pp. 130-136.