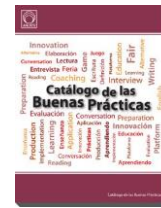




Catálogo de las Buenas Prácticas



Using different techniques to teach idiomatic expressions (Idioms)

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Resumen

El objetivo de esta práctica es utilizar dos técnicas diferentes -visual y L1- para enseñar modismos y comparar cuál de estas dos técnicas es más efectiva para ayudar a los alumnos a recordar su significado. El inglés al igual que el español utiliza una gran variedad de modismos (*Idioms*), Vasiljevic, A. (2015), menciona que los modismos son ampliamente utilizados tanto en forma oral como escrita por los nativos del idioma; por lo que es indispensable que nuestros alumnos los entiendan y usen de una manera natural. Esta actividad generó conciencia sobre los modismos y su uso.

Palabras clave: Modismos, visual, L1 -idioma natal-, similar, equivalente.

Abstract

The aim of the study is to use two different techniques -visual and L1- to teach idioms and compare their effectiveness to help students recall the meaning of idioms. English like Spanish is a language with vast idiomatic basis, Vasiljevic, A. (2015), states that idioms are an inner characteristic of all languages and, they are widely used in both spoken and written discourse by native speakers; therefore, it is necessary that our students understand and use idioms in a natural way. This activity created an awareness about idioms and their use.

Key words: Idioms, visual, L1 -speakers first language-, similar, equivalent.

Características generales de la Buena Práctica (BP)

Está diseñada para un tipo de curso curricular de modalidad presencial, el objetivo que persigue el curso es el desarrollo de 4 habilidades y el nivel de dominio de la lengua al inicio del curso es B1 de acuerdo con el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCER).

Contexto

1. **Nombre del curso:** Inglés 5
2. **Tipo de curso:** Curricular
3. **Modalidad del curso:** presencial
4. **Objetivo persigue el curso:** 4 habilidades
5. **Duración en horas:** 81-120
6. **Distribución del tiempo:** Por semana se tienen 4 horas de práctica en el aula frente a grupo, 1 hora de práctica en taller en el aula o en el SAC (Centro de Autoacceso), además de una práctica autónoma fuera del aula de aprox. 48 minutos.
Por lo que el total de horas durante cada nivel contando exámenes es de 75, las cuales incluye la práctica en taller en aula o SAC, adicionalmente los estudiantes realizan 12 horas al semestre de práctica autónoma complementarias al aula, dando total de horas por nivel de 87.
7. **Nivel de dominio de la lengua al inicio del curso:** B1

Contexto de la práctica

Número promedio de alumnos: Más de 41

Habilidad(es) comunicativa(s), académicas o digitales a las que responde su BP: Escritura, Lectura expresión oral y Trabajo en equipo, comunicación.

Necesidades, dificultades y/o particularidades académicas que lo llevaron a decidir que era conveniente implementar la intervención didáctica: Even though my students are on the last level of the program, identifying and using idioms in a natural way is difficult for them as they usually try to get their meaning from the literal-sense of each word and not as multi-word phrases. Students should be able to use idioms in a way which is natural to native speakers.

Factores afectivos que incidieron en el diseño/implementación de la BP: Motivación, actitudes, creencias y estilos de aprendizaje.

Objetivo: The students will be able to learn idioms using the techniques that we saw in class by choosing the one that works best for them. These techniques can be used whenever they need to learn an idiom.

Descripción de la BP

Procedimiento

I have identified that it is difficult for students to learn idioms.

Research has been conducted to analyze different ways to teach idiomatic expressions in a meaningful way and different ways in which idioms can be incorporated into our English lessons. Among the different research studies, I want to try two different methods one suggested by Vasiljevic, A. (2015) where she proposes the use of illustrations to teach idioms, and the other method suggested by Pei-Yu (sf) where she proposes to teach idioms by using the L1 equivalent.

One method is to use L1 to find similar or equivalent idioms to the ones taught in L2 based on a research conducted by Pei-Yu (sf) at the National Taiwan Normal University. She agreed with Irujo, S. (1986), that “L1 knowledge may assist L2 learners in comprehending idioms which are identical and similar to L1 equivalent” (p. 45) “She mentions that students comprehended idioms by referring to idioms which have correspondence to identical phrase expressions in Chinese”. (p. 45). She presents the idioms in different ways, one is giving the idiom and the translation or the equivalent idiom in L1, other technique is to provide a vivid explanation of the idiom.

The second method is based on a research carried out by Vasiljevic, A. (2015), where it is mentioned that even though there is no decisive evidence whether pictures promote more retention of meaning of idioms, there is evidence that visual input can facilitate the process, therefore I will use images to present some of the idioms to the students.

The practice was implemented with level 5 groups at the DUI, then it was used at the Centro de Idiomas with B1 students too, however it can be adapted to other levels.

The procedure is the following:

1.- The teacher prepares a power point presentation where s/he explains to the students what idioms are and provides some examples. (The presentation can also be done using the board and flashcards).

The presentation includes images, L1 similar or equivalent and the origin of the idioms, giving them a definition and then presenting different idioms trying to elicit from them the meaning of each. I am including the presentation that I used in class as a reference (Appendix A).

For example: The idiom “Take the bull by the horns” has an equivalent in Spanish which is “tomar al toro por los cuernos”, so students will be asked to explain a situation where this idiom may be used.

2.- Give each student a worksheet, (Appendix B). Divide the group into pairs and then ask them to answer exercise A. They have to read 10 sentences which contain an idiom and, match the idioms with its corresponding meaning.

The teacher does not give the idioms answer, the idea is that the students deduct the meaning from the context. When the students have finished, they work with another pair of students and check their answers.

3.- Students work individually and complete exercises B and C from Appendix B. Exercise B has images of the idioms and they will have to write the idiom that corresponds, on exercise C students have the L1 equivalent of the idiom and they must write the corresponding idiom in L2. Then students get in pairs and check their answers.

Teacher clarifies any question that may arise.

4.- Teacher divides the students in pairs (trying to mix the group, so students can work with a different partner) and gives them some cards (Appendix C), which includes either a picture or the idiom in their L1.

Students take turns taking a card from the pile, first they have to say the idiom in English, and then use the idiom in a sentence. If both the sentences and the idioms are correct, the student keeps the card and the one who gets most cards is the winner.

The practice was held in a 50 minute-class, and the survey was answered at home (approx. 7 min).

Efectos en los estudiantes

The students mentioned that they enjoyed playing with the cards, as it was fun but also a good way to practice and memorize the idioms.

The students had to answer a survey- designed on “Google Forms”- where they had to complete a test (without looking at the material) and answer a question where they were asked about the method that helped them recall the idioms better.

The survey can be found in the following link: <https://forms.gle/p6sMQ1zdfGExQQHF7>

Based on their answers, the graph shows that using pictures is the least effective method, followed by the use of L1 (which is what the quiz showed), but that they prefer using both techniques, which is similar to what Pei-Yu (sf), concluded that “Generally speaking, L2 learners sometimes use two strategies altogether to form the figurative meanings of the idiom, and it was proven that L1 transfer effect indeed existed in idiom comprehension once the one-to-one correspondence was found between L1 and L2”. (P. 48)

Fundamentos teóricos y metodológicos

After reading Hurtford, Heasley & Smith (2007), I could identify that idiomatic expressions are difficult to learn, as they cannot be translated word by word, and that if our students want to sound native-like speakers it is necessary to learn and use them adequately.

I considered necessary to provide some extra tools to our students to learn them, as O’Keeffe, A., McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (2007) mention, idioms are loved by teachers and learners, however there is not enough information of how idioms are used in everyday communication, hence I considered necessary to look for alternatives to teach them.

English like Spanish is a language with vast idiomatic basis, Vasiljevic, A. (2015), states that idioms are an inner characteristic of all languages. They are widely used in both spoken and written discourse. Idioms have a pragmatic function as they make the language more colorful and precise; and are frequently used by native speakers, therefore it is very important to teach idioms to our students.

Hurtford, Heasley & Smith (2007) define Idiomatic expressions (idioms) as multi-word phrases whose literal meaning cannot be predicted from the literal senses of individual words in each phrase. Idioms are idiosyncratic as they reflect speaker meanings. Gibbs (1987, based on Pei-Yu, sf), states that “The idiomatic meaning is usually understood based on the conventional use of speakers in the speech community. Idioms are found in all languages and some types of idioms are culture-specific”. (p. 31). For example, the idiom “kick the bucket” cannot be derived from its literal meaning and the figurative meaning “to die” is not related with its literal sense. Estill, R. B., & Kemper, S. (1982) mention that common idioms can be interpreted either as figurative or as literal expressions as context demands, (someone may kick the bucket = die, or someone may kick the bucket the length of a barn), however context can be ambiguous whether a phrase should be interpreted as figurative or as literal, like in the following example: “His wife was shocked when farmer Jones kicked the bucket”(the context does not provide enough information to interpret the phrase”.

Mcglone, M. S., Glucksberg, S., & Cacciari, C. (1994), state that idioms have qualities like those of words. The meaning of many idioms cannot be discovered, they must be learned or inferred from context. Since idioms are phrases, they can be subject to syntactic operations such as negation or changing tenses. Linguistics (Chomsky, 1980; Fraser 1970; Katz, 1973) assume that idioms are noncompositional, in other words, that the individual words of an idiom do not contribute to the meaning of the idiom itself.

One drawback is that idioms do not behave like single words as we cannot change part of a word without changing its meaning, on the other side idioms can survive lexical substitutions, like break the ice or crack the ice. Also, idioms retain their meaning in different syntactic forms, for example, breaks the ice, broke the ice, breaking the ice.

O’Keeffe, A., McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (2007), also mention that idioms are loved by teachers and learners. Publishers are aware of this and offer materials specially designed to idiom learning, and there are dictionaries of idioms available in English, however it was noted by McCarthy that there is not enough information of how idioms are used in everyday communication, and more information on actual use may be pedagogically beneficial.

Materiales y recursos

1. Power point presentation (this is optional, as the idioms can be explained using the board if there is no computer or projector in the classroom).

2. Appendix B which is a worksheet that was adapted from: Woodward, J. (2002). Timesaver vocabulary activities: Pre-intermediate-intermediate. London: Mary Glasgow Magazines, and some of the definitions from <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com>

3. Make some cards with the idioms that we saw in class. Some of the cards have the picture of an idiom or the L1 translation or equivalent. (Appendix C)

Características de su BP

The activity was presented only once in each of my Level 5 groups, and also with one group at the Language Center of the UASLP. I am planning to replicate the practice with students of other levels, adapting the phrasal verbs and continue using it with level 5 students as well, as it worked really well and helped students identify idioms and find new methods of learning them.

We should incorporate different techniques in our lesson when teaching idiomatic expressions, students learn by using their L1, using images, and if available we can also include the origin of the idiom, but mainly encourage them to use them in class and whenever they have the opportunity outside the classroom.

I used to think that using L1 in class was not appropriate, therefore I would try to avoid it as much as possible, however after doing this practice I could realize that it is not always bad, and that it helps students understand and learn new expressions and vocabulary.

I would include an activity asking students to watch an episode of a series they usually watch, or a song and write down the idioms they identify and then discuss them in class.

The results of the practice are like the two main research studies I used as a guide, Pei-Yu, M. H., concludes that “Generally speaking, L2 learners sometimes use two strategies altogether to form the figurative meanings of the idiom” (p. 48), and “it was proven that L1 transfer effect indeed existed in idiom comprehension once the one-to-one correspondence was found between L1 and L2”(p. 48), which is pretty similar to what my students answered in the last question, and opposite to what many teachers may think, using L1 proved to be helpful in my class, however we need to increase the number of students to see if the results remain similar.

As to what Vasiljevic, A. (2015), concludes, she mentions that “Idiomatic Language can be taught and should be taught, and it is our duty as teachers to look for the means by which the learning burden of our students can be minimized and their learning experience optimized” (p. 21)

I find this practice really useful as it created an awareness on both the students and the teacher of the importance that idioms have on everyday communication, and how the textbooks used in class do not always include different ways of practicing and learning idioms.

I thought that as my students were finishing their last level of English they would find the idioms really easy to understand, even though they struggle a bit, it worked really well for the purpose of the activity which was mainly to create an awareness and show them different methods that can be used to learn idioms. I consider it would be useful to use a CORPUS to choose more common idioms to be taught in class, or provide some examples from episodes of series or from songs.

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Anexos: Evidencias o materiales de apoyo

1. Appendix A. Power Point Presentation. <http://catalogo-buenas-practicas.portal.anuies.mx/wp-content/blogs.dir/71/files/sites/71/2019/08/1.Idioms-Appendix-A.pdf>
2. Appendix B. Worksheet. <http://catalogo-buenas-practicas.portal.anuies.mx/wp-content/blogs.dir/71/files/sites/71/2019/08/2.-Appendix-B-worksheet.pdf>
3. Appendix C. Cards. <http://catalogo-buenas-practicas.portal.anuies.mx/wp-content/blogs.dir/71/files/sites/71/2019/08/3.-Appendix-C.-Cards.pdf>
4. Appendix D. Survey. <http://catalogo-buenas-practicas.portal.anuies.mx/wp-content/blogs.dir/71/files/sites/71/2019/08/4.-Appendix-D-Survey.pdf>