The Use of Phraseological Units with Didactic Purposes

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Título: "La utilización de unidades fraseológicas con fines didácticos".
Resumen: La lengua es un ente dinámico. Toda materia viva tiene un núcleo que es vital para su naturaleza, esencia y desarrollo. En el caso de la lengua, las unidades fraseológicas parecen ser las bases de este núcleo. En canciones, eslóganes publicitarios, divisas y en casi toda actividad humana existen frases específicamente diseñadas para alcanzar el éxito. En el contexto del aula todavía se puede hacer mucho para mantener vivo este singular tesoro de la lengua; hay ejercicios que pueden ayudar a mejorar las destrezas necesarias.
Palabras clave: Fraseología. Didáctica. Lengua.

Titre: "**L'utilisation d'unités phraséologiques dans le cadre de la didactique".**
Resumé: La langue est un être dynamique. Toute matière vivante possède un noyau vital . En ce qui concerne la langue, les unités phraséologiques semblent être les bases de ce noyau. Que ce soit dans les chansons, les slogans publicitaires, les devises, et dans pratiquement toute activité humaine, il existe des phrases qui mènent à la réussite. Dans le contexte de la classe, beaucoup d'activités pédagogiques peuvent être entreprises pour maintenir vivant ce singulier trésor de la langue et ainsi améliorer les compétences langagières de l'apprenant.
Mots-clé: Phraséologie. Didactique. Langue.

Abstract: Language is a dynamic being. All living matter has a core that is vital for its nature, essence, and development. In the case of language phraseological units appear to be the basic grounds for this. In songs, slogans used for propaganda, mottos, and in almost any human activity some phrases are specially designed likely for the sake of success. In the classroom environment much can be done yet for keeping alive this particular treasure of language. Some exercises could help improve the necessary skills.
Key words: Phraseology. Didactics. Language.

INTRODUCTION

Since times immemorial there has been a natural interest for those phrases that make up the rich universe of any language. Their study has been primarily devoted to ethnic and social expressions, or perhaps, it is better to stress that the use of phrases with didactic purposes was once developed, and then set aside by any unknown reason.

In our University, by the 50s and 60s of the twentieth century, Samuel Feijóo consecrated a lot of time to the study of phrases, their etymology. He also published articles about the presence of these language units in the speech of our farmers and countrymen, their wisdom, their colorful and proverbial use.

The study of phrases involves a lot of patience and straightforwardness, due to the fact that there are many sides to their analysis: their characteristics, their origin, the semantic field to which they apply, the social group preferring their use, their presence in literary works, songs, etc.

An important moment in any human study is the definition of the subject under study. The definition of proverb or saying does not come into view as an easy matter.

The several tryouts of the phrases were presented to students of English (ESL) and to students of English for Science and Technology (EST) in many hours of classes in several faculties of the Central University of Las Villas, mainly in the faculties of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Construction, and the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. In all cases the students' interest was a constant. It has been observed that many students did not know the meaning of the phrases in Spanish; not only they did not recognize the expression, but they failed also to have heard it before. Notice that we are speaking of the native, vernacular language.

The result of the tryouts in class has been very inspiring, thanks to the satisfactory fulfillment of the goals and assumptions previously established, that are the following:

- The phrases are present in the whole written cultural treasure of the peoples, in historic and literary (ancillary) works, in popular sayings and speech, plays, movies and whichever means denoting the cultural background of any people. They are found in poems, songs, news, etc.
- Technical literature is not alien to the presence of phrases that belong to the kind studied herein, and in no few cases these units represent a challenge for those people who handle it. In some moments, when dealing with technical literature, the phrases may appear to be loose, without a natural connection with the general information given in the treated material.
- At present, there is not a systematic treatment of phrases from the didactic or methodological point of view.
- There exist multiple ways for activating the study of phrases in class.
- The study of phrases adapt to any level of the study of language.
- There exist a lot of tasks to be subsequently developed on this matter.

Our proposal was very practical, by way of suggesting a set of exercises based on the results of the investigation and the practical work carried out in classes.

OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate motivation in class by working with proverbs in a variety of exercises.
- Fully interpret the meaning of the message of a given text provided phrases are present in it.
- Provide a series of exercises and lists of proverbs and idioms that may be used in class.

WORKING WITH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

The following examples of how to work with phrases given below have been developed and worked within the environment of the class, especially with ESP (English for Special Purposes) and ESL (English as a Second Language) students:

SAMPLE 1

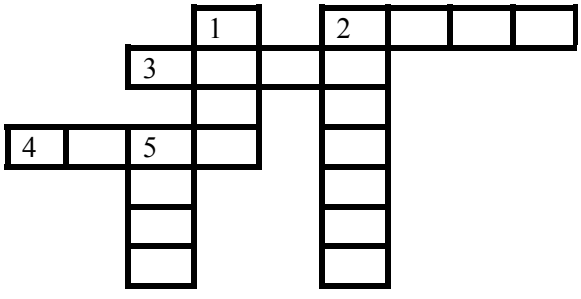
1. Fill in the blank space of the puzzle with the corresponding words from the sayings:

Down

1. When poverty comes indoors, _____ flies out the window.
2. Birds of a _____ flock together.
5. When the cat's away, _____ will play.

Across

2. Where there's smoke, there's been _____.
3. There's no _____ without a thorn.
4. While in _____, do as Romans do.



- Phonetic correction can be made by adopting some approach as the suggested by their possible associations. In the above case the following can be treated:
  /s/, /z/- there's, Romans, rose, as, comes, indoors, flies, birds, cats mice
  /v/, /b/- poverty, love birds, been
  /ai /, /i/- indoors, flies, window, birds, Hill, fire, while, without

Additional questions liable to be worked with in class:

1 Think of a situation in which you may use the saying or the saying might be applicable.

2 Do you think that the saying is liable to be applied to any circumstance? Is it universal in this sense or is it arguable? If not, say under which circumstance it fails, or if it has any counterpart.

3. Have you ever used it? With what purpose? (As a warning, moral, for fun…)

4. How would you react if anyone would say it to you?

- Working with words from the sayings

Expand the meaning of the words by giving additional information. Answer to the questions given:

Love.- What is love? Have you ever been in love? Does the saying reflect your personal opinion? Do you know of any other saying about love? Any other idea related.

Fire.- Is fire useful? Under what circumstances? How many ways of controlling fire do you know? What is necessary to do in order to prevent fire? Do you know the legend of Prometheus? Do you happen to know that there are fire-worshipping sects?

Feather.- Are feathers useful? In what way? What can be done with feathers? Are they still used for pillows and mattresses? Do they have advantages over other materials? (The feathers from geese used for foie gras are sold for making pillows and mattresses). Many people collect feathers, or simply show them in vases and hats. Do you know of any other uses of feathers? Do you know of other birds whose feathers are also highly priced?

Rose.- There's much to say about roses as symbols of love and good taste. Would you like somebody to give you roses as a present? Do you plant roses yourself? Do you happen to know about different classes of roses? What is the most wonderful rose? What country makes wines and sweet out of roses? How about their place in the production of perfumes, sweet, wine? Mention other flower or flowers that might compete with roses as to delicacy, fragrance, or any other quality.

Rome.- Rome is one of the most marvelous capitals all over the world. Why so? What makes Rome a famous place? Would you include Rome among those cities you would like to visit as a tourist? What other cities would you visit, and why? Any other idea related.

Mice.- The word mice is the plural of mouse. They have been taken to tales, cartoons, stories, legends. Can you mention some of them? What is the natural enemy to the mice? How do you find mice to be: funny, dangerous, useful…? Any other idea related.

Discuss the answers with your partner. A debate involving all the class is held.

I. Write down a piece of conversation that might begin or end with a saying. Say in what sense it was used (as moral, warning, for fun, etc.). This can be done in pairs in the classroom, or as assignment for out-of-the-classroom work.

II. Given a set of situations, choose the saying that best fits to each of them. If some does not apply, say why. Say if you know of any other that fits in.

III. Match the components of the sayings from columns A and B so that the convey meaning

SAMPLE 2 (FOR TRANSLATION)

Rome was not built	keeps doctors away
Time is	P's and Q's
The pot can't tell the kettle	in a day
An apple a day	black
Mind your	gold

1. Match the resulting sayings with their equivalents in Spanish:
    1. El tiempo es oro.
    2. El aura no puede decirle cabecipelado al pitirre.
    3. No se ganó Zamora en una hora.
    4. Una manzana al día conserva la salud.
    5. Haz bien (pero mira a quien).

The teacher may have the students translate a text about one or more topics: Rome, medicine, apples and their products, importance, etc.

The exercises proposed for other samples can be done as well. This is so for the rest of the samples.

SAMPLE 3

Island 1	Island 2	Island 3
home	dog	rose
broom	horse	bush
window	worm	hay
	fowl	straws
	fish	oak
		sun
		clouds
		stone
		seas
		nature
		moss

1. Fill in the blank space in the proverb or idiom using the words from the cognitive islands.

1. East or west, _____ is best.
2. A new _____ sweeps clean.
3. To kill two birds with one _____.
4. Make _____ while the sun shines.
5. _____ show which way the wind blows.
6. When poverty comes in doors, love flies out the _____.
7. Never look a gift _____ in the mouth.
8. A barking _____ seldom bites.
9. A bird in the hand is worth two in the _____ .
10. Old _____ gives good shade.

11. The early bird catches the _____.
12. There's no _____ without a thorn.
13. Smooth_____ make poor sailors.
14. A friend may be well reckoned a masterpiece of _____. (Emerson).
15. Be neither _____ nor _____.
16. A rolling stone gathers no _____.
17. The _____ shines for the just and the unjust.
18. After _____ the sun shines.

Accordingly, the teacher may use any of the cognitive islands to speak or treat a theme in any part of the class, i.e., it can be used as motivation, warm-up, and follow-up or as the main topic to be developed in the class. Any of the idioms or proverbs can be used with the above stated objectives. Let's take islands 2 and 3, which are interrelated with nature, whose same meaning appears among the words used in the exercise.
A special use of islands can be made for a particular part of speech such as nouns. These nouns can be linked by a common characteristic, say they all are abstract nouns related with human behavior, etc.

Match the word from the islands with the blank space of the proverb:

Island 1
1. charity
2. will
3. truth
4. love
5. courtesy
6. politeness
7. wisdom
8. cheerfulness
9. experience
10. understanding

Island 2
1. appearances
2. taste
3. company
4. honor
5. perseverance
6. falsehood
7. consent
8. discourage
9. goodwill

Proverbs

1. _____ begins a t home.
2. Where there's a ____ there's a way.
3. There's no accounting for _____.
4. Love is a little fiction, a little _____, and a little reality.
5. Children and fools speak the _____.
6. _____ costs nothing and wins everything.
7. _____ keeps a dear school, but a fool will learn in no other.
8. _____ are often deceitful.
9. Better suffer for truth than prosper in _____.
10. _____ thy father and thy mother. (From the Bible).
11. The very best medicine that a family can keep in the house is _____.
12. Show me your _____ and I will tell you who you are.
13. Let no defeat _____ you,
    let no discouragement defeat you.
14. Silence gives _____.
15. Love me, _____ my dog.
16. _____ conquers all things.

17. Life is short, but there's always time for _____.
18. If _____ ways you wisely seek,
    five things observe with care:
    to whom you speak, of whom you speak,
    and how, and when, and where.
19. Civilization rests on justice, _____, and cooperation

SAMPLE 4

A section called "The phrase of the day", or "Today's phrase" can be established. This has been done with good results by other teachers in other places, and we have also tried it in our classes. The teacher can ask the students to bring any proverb or saying to be analyzed or work with in class. This can be a challenge for everybody including the teacher, who might not know the proverb. Therefore, it is necessary that the students be asked to bring to class not only the bare proverb, but also the whole information, including origin, way in which it is used, i.e., the possible situations to which the proverb applies, etc. Finally, if possible, depending on the level and real progress of the group and the individual student, he can propose a set of exercises to be developed in class. This is a good opportunity for the student to develop research and independent work. So the students become active participants of the teaching-learning process, increase their self-confidence and esteem through personal satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Much can be done by using in class the arsenal of phrases a language has. This gives the teacher the possibility to cover many classroom situations, impulse creativity and independent work on the part of the students. The exercises suggested in the present work can be used as warm-up; independent study, as part of the main body of the class, for motivation, or to deliver a whole class by taking one of the words, say Rome as the core of the topic to be developed. Another example could be using the cognitive islands, such as that about animals, or nature, or human behavior. On the other hand, the phrases allow increasing motivation in class, focusing on real-like situations, and multiple-sided analysis. The fact that phrases are ambiguous in many cases makes them an excellent material for discussion in class.

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