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**EXPLORING ENGLISH LANGUAGE MAJORS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ENGLISH IDIOMS AT UCLV**

**EXPLORANDO LAS PERCEPCIONES DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE LENGUA INGLESA SOBRE LAS FRASES IDIOMÁTICAS EN LA UCLV**

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***Abstract:***

* **Problem to deal with:** Achieving a high command of a foreign language requires more than knowledge of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary; it also necessitates the ability to correctly use idiomatic phrases. English Language majors at UCLV are not an exception to the rule. However, it has been observed that English Language majors at the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas (UCLV) have frequently encountered some challenges when using and translating these phrases into Spanish.
* **Aims:** To explore the perceptions of the students of the aforementioned major in relation to idiomatic phrases in the English Language.
* **Methodology:** For the purpose of the research, a questionnaire was applied to a non-probability sample of twenty-five students from first to fourth year. In order to conduct a proper investigation, the authors adopted a mixed-method approach where qualitative and quantitative data were combined.
* **Results and Discussion:** The results of the questionnaire demonstrated a growing gap in idioms literacy among students of the English Language with A Second Foreign Language Degree Course at UCLV.
* **Conclusions:** The overall findings could be taken as a guideline for the elaboration of some specific strategies for teaching and translating idiomatic phrases that could enhance students’ linguistic competence; thereby, strengthening their preparation for professional tasks related to the English language and its translation into Spanish.

**Resumen:**

* **Problemática:** Lograr un alto dominio de un idioma extranjero requiere más que el conocimiento de la gramática, la pronunciación y el vocabulario; también exige la habilidad de utilizar correctamente las frases idiomáticas. Y los estudiantes de la carrera de Lengua Inglesa en la Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” de Las Villas (UCLV) no son una excepción. No obstante, se ha observado que estos estudiantes encuentran frecuentemente desafíos al usar y traducir estas expresiones al español.
* **Objetivo(s):** Explorar las percepciones de los estudiantes de dicha carrera en relación con las frases idiomáticas en el idioma inglés.
* **Metodología:** Para los fines de esta investigación, se aplicó un cuestionario a una muestra no probabilística de veinticinco estudiantes desde primero hasta cuarto año. Con el objetivo de realizar una investigación rigurosa, los autores adoptaron un enfoque de métodos mixtos, combinando datos cualitativos y cuantitativos.
* **Resultados y Discusión:** Los resultados del cuestionario evidenciaron una brecha creciente en el dominio de las frases idiomáticas entre los estudiantes de la carrera Lengua Inglesa en la UCLV.
* **Conclusiones:** Los resultdos podrían servir como guía para la elaboración de estrategias específicas destinadas a la enseñanza y traducción de frases idiomáticas, las cuales podrían mejorar la competencia lingüística de los estudiantes; fortaleciendo así su preparación para tareas profesionales relacionadas con el idioma inglés y su traducción al español.

**KEY WORDS:** English idioms; idiomatic phrases; translation; translation of idiomatic phrases

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Modismos ingleses; frases idiomáticas; traducción; traducción de frases idiomáticas

**1. Introduction**

Language is the most effective device in humans’ possession aimed to express and communicate properly with others. Although all species have their unique ways of connecting, human beings are the only ones that have mastered cognitive language communication. Subsequently, the higher the knowledge of a second language, the richer is the transmission of the information required in a certain exchange between individuals from diverse cultures. Consequently, learning a second language not only fosters individual performances but minimizes the gap among international citizens as well.

The discipline of Translation plays a significant part in the process of embracing different languages. As a vital discipline, translation bridges linguistic gaps and provides access to essential texts across academic, religious and social spheres (Al-Sulaimaan, 2021). Translations must be accurate and well-conveyed to the target audience, by all means. Nonetheless, some features of the language itself may differ from this compulsory accuracy (Ad Astra Social Team, 2002).

Precisely, the translation of idioms represents a great challenge since they are the colorful side of languages. They are expressions that work as a single unit and cannot be separated to decipher the conveyed message (Lennon, 1998). Idiomatic expressions have a figurative meaning and an arbitrary nature, which brings about a range of complications with respect to the translation of the parts within them (Baker, 1992). De Caro (2009) claimed that idioms are indispensable for linguistic diversity and native-like fluency, as they are learned and stored as cohesive units in memory (Roberto De Caro,Eliana Edith, 2009).

According to Baker (1992), effective translation demands more than linguistic competence, it requires cultural literacy and multidisciplinary knowledge to navigate non-equivalence between languages. In order to evade major mistranslations, translators and interpreters must be fully prepared in both their mother tongue and the foreign language they are working with. Besides, errors in translation are usually interrelated to each other, meaning that one mistake influence other mistakes and the final result (Barrientos, 2014).

It is an indisputable fact that attaining a high level of proficiency in a foreign language entails more than merely possessing a good command of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. It also entails the ability to use idioms correctly. When idioms are mastered, students may gain self-assurance and confidence in their ability to speak the language fluently and accurately.

Students enrolled in the English Language with A Second Foreign Language degree course at the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV) have exhibited some difficulties when using and translating English idioms into Spanish. In this paper, the authors report the results of research aimed at exploring the perceptions of students in the aforementioned degree course regarding English idioms and their translation into Spanish.

**2. Methodology**

The methodology of the present research held to a mixed-method approach. The study focused on collecting, studying and processing quantitative and qualitative data and providing a more accurate understanding of the situation and the research problem (Creswell, 2018).

Some methods were applied in the research herein presented:

Theoretical Methods: historical and logical, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, structural and systemic approach. These methods assisted the systematization and organization of the main concepts associated with the topic of research.

Empirical methods:

Participant observation: to acquire a closer insight into students’ practices with respect to the use and translation of English idioms in the English Language with a Second Foreign Language degree course at UCLV.

Questionnaire: to discover students’ major deficiencies concerning the use and translation of English idioms into Spanish.

Triangulation: to determine the convergent and divergent points of the information from the triangulated methods and sources to come to some conclusions.

Statistical and mathematical methods: percentage analysis for processing the data obtained from the questionnaire.

The sample for this research included twenty-five students (four from First year, three from Second year, thirteen from Third year and five from Fourth year). In order to select the sample, the authors took into consideration the academic level of students and their willingness for collaborating and assisting with this research.

**3. Results and Discussion**

A questionnaire was designed and applied to 25 students from first to fourth year of the academic year 2024-2025. Its main purpose was to determine their opinions on how idioms are addressed in class and their awareness of using idiomatic expressions. The questionnaire was applied by means of Google Forms. This tool provided by Google offers the required tools for obtaining fast and reliable insights from real individuals across the web and allows arriving at more complete conclusions. The results from the questionnaire are summarized below:

Question 1 Do you feel that understanding idioms is important for your English Language proficiency?

* 81.3% of students rated understanding idioms as ‘‘very important’’ and 18.8% deemed it ‘‘important’’.

Question 2 How would you rate your ability to understand idioms in English?

* Only 18.8% rated their comprehension of idiomatic phrases as "excellent," while 56.3% considered it "good," and 25% as "deficient."

Question 3 How would you rate your ability to use idioms correctly in spoken or written English?

* 75% felt confident “good” in using idioms properly, though 18.8% rated their ability as “excellent” and 6.3% as “deficient.”

Question 4 Which of the following resources do you use to learn idiomatic expressions?

* 68.8% relied on films/TV/podcasts, underlining media as the primary tool for learning idioms. Only 6.3% used dictionaries and 6.1% engaged with native speakers.

Question 5 Do you think idioms should be given more attention in your English Language lessons?

* A strong majority of students (62.5%) believe that idiomatic phrases should receive significantly more attention in their English lessons and a substantial portion of the students (31.3%) support the idea of giving them at least a little more focus. However, a small minority (6.3%) considers the current level of attention to be sufficient.

Question 6 How do you usually fee when you encounter an unfamiliar idiomatic expression in English?

* 87.5% feel curious and motivated to look up the unknown meaning while a minority of students (12.5%) feel confident that they can deduce the unknown meaning from the context.

Question 7 How challenging do you find it to translate English idioms (e.g., “Break the ice”) into Spanish while retaining their original meaning?

* 75% rated translating English idioms into Spanish while preserving their original meaning as "difficult" or "very difficult."

Based on the results of the questionnaire applied, the following conclusive outcomes were identified:

* Among students, there is a widespread consensus (93.8%) that idioms should receive significantly or somewhat more attention in English lessons.
* Curiosity and motivation predominate when encountering an unfamiliar idiom. This indicates a positive attitude toward learning new expressions.
* Translating English idioms into Spanish poses a challenge for most students. Bearing in mind this result, it is advisable to enhance didactic strategies to make learning idioms and their translation into Spanish an enriching and rewarding experience for students. Examples include:
* Using authentic material, such as presenting idioms through clips from movies, T shows, songs, podcasts, books, or news articles.
* Identifying a Spanish idiom with a meaning and connotation very similar to its English counterpart (e.g., English: “*To kill two birds with one stone*” / Spanish: “*Matar dos pájaros de un tiro*”).
* Explaining the meaning of the English idiom using clear and simple language, avoiding literal translations into Spanish (e.g., English: “*To be in the same boat*” / Spanish: “*Estar en la misma situación díficil*”).

**4. Conclusions**

In this paper, the authors have reported the results of a research conducted at the Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” de Las Villas (UCLV) with students of the degree course English Language with A Second Foreign Language. Its main purpose was to explore students’ perceptions regarding English idioms, particularly their use in different communicative contexts and their translation into Spanish. The methodology applied held to a mixed-method approach that embraced the collection, analysis and integration of qualitative and quantitative data to improve the comprehension of research issues. A questionnaire was applied to a sample of twenty-five students from first to fourth year. Although the sample was relatively small, the results provided valuable insights into the need to raise awareness among professors and students. The study offered significant findings regarding the comprehension of idioms in real-life contexts, their effective application in oral and written communication and their translation into Spanish. This can empower instructors to develop pedagogical strategies aimed at improving students’ skills in this area, such as incorporating audiovisual resources, contextualized activities and cultural explanations to enable the understanding of idioms.

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