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**The Cultural Lexicon and Linguistic Identity: Analyzing the Acquisition of
British and American Idiomatic Expressions by L2 Learners in
Contemporary Media and Fiction**



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Abstract

Idiomatic expressions continue to pose a challenge to students aiming for advanced English proficiency because they represent a complex intersection of linguistic structure, cultural knowledge, and social identity. Despite having a similar linguistic heritage, British and American idioms have developed along different cultural, historical, and socio-pragmatic paths that affect how second language learners interact with them. Idiom acquisition is influenced by learners' exposure to modern media, their engagement with fiction, and their developing sense of linguistic identity in addition to figurative processing abilities and lexical familiarity, according to research in applied linguistics, cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, and media studies. American idioms are widely used due to American media's global dominance, while British idioms continue to be used in literature, historical media genres, and educational settings. Though its educational potential is still unexplored, fiction from classic British literature to modern American novels, graphic narratives, and digital storytelling continues to offer idiomatic forms embedded in narrative meaning and cultural symbolism. While sociocultural perspectives stress the significance of shared experiences, cultural schemas, and symbolic alignment, cognitive studies draw attention to issues with semantic opacity, metaphorical incongruence, and linguistic distance. Learners' idiomatic repertoire frequently reflects larger identity negotiations between localized and globalized English as they negotiate these influences. In order to better understand how L2 learners internalize, interpret, and use idiomatic expressions in an increasingly complex linguistic and cultural landscape, interdisciplinary synthesis is necessary. This is highlighted by the convergence of media exposure, literary engagement, and identity positioning.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Idioms, Linguistic Identity, Media Studies, Global English

Introduction

Idiomatic expressions have a special place in the study of learning a second language. At the nexus of lexis, metaphor, culture, pragmatics, and social identity, they create a domain of language use that is both expressive and formulaic.[1] Idioms pose problems for English language learners that go beyond vocabulary to include cultural interpretation. Their origins are deeply ingrained in cultural histories that may be foreign to people outside the linguistic community, their meanings are often nonliteral, and their structures are frequently opaque.[2] Idiomatic competence is becoming recognized as a key indicator of advanced proficiency in the larger field of applied linguistics because idioms serve as markers of linguistic authenticity, pragmatic sophistication, and cultural membership.[3]

The difference between American and British idioms complicates matters even more.[4] Despite having similar historical origins, both varieties' idiomatic repertoires have drastically changed over time as a result of sociopolitical changes, cultural shifts, and local experiences. British idioms frequently reflect the nation's monarchical past, class-based social structure, regional dialects, and cultural preference for understatement and irony.[5] In contrast, American idioms often reference consumer

culture, sports metaphors, individualism, frontier mythology, and the ubiquitous impact of mass media.[6] Depending on their educational background, media exposure, and communicative needs, learners must navigate two rich but different idiomatic systems that have resulted from these cultural trajectories.[7]

The circumstances in which idioms are encountered and learned have drastically changed due to the English language media's explosive global expansion. Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ are examples of streaming services that distribute movies and TV shows full of colloquialisms from both American and British cultures.[8] Real-time idiomatic usage among content creators and communities of practice is amplified by YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and gaming platforms. Instead of just coming across idioms in static textual formats, learners encounter them through multimodal, narratively rich, and socially significant contexts that engage the visual, auditory, and emotional dimensions of comprehension. This type of exposure provides learning opportunities that are very different from idiom instruction based on textbooks.[9]

Fiction still serves as a unique medium for cultural and emotional immersion in addition to being a storehouse of idioms. Idioms linked to centuries-old cultural schemas can be found in British literature, from Shakespeare and Dickens to Zadie Smith.[10] Learners are exposed to idioms that reflect the sociocultural concerns of a very different cultural environment through American fiction, from Twain and Fitzgerald to contemporary writers.[11] Idioms found in youth culture, popular discourse, and hybrid linguistic forms are introduced through digital fiction, graphic novels, and young adult literature. Idioms play a role in character development, social relationships, stylistic choices, humor, and cultural symbolism in fictional narratives.[12] However, idiom acquisition research, which has traditionally favored lists, glosses, and decontextualized teaching methods, has understudied fiction despite its pedagogical richness.

The learning process is made more difficult by the cognitive requirements of idiom comprehension. Learners usually activate literal interpretations before accessing figurative meanings, according to research on figurative processing; this pattern is more noticeable in L2 contexts.[13] Processing ease is influenced by semantic transparency, frequency, familiarity, and conceptual metaphor alignment. Culturally opaque idioms require significant contextual support, whereas idioms whose cultural metaphors match those of the learner's native tongue are easier to pick up. By offering contextualized cues that support inferencing and reinforce memory traces, media and fiction exposure can lessen these difficulties.

Another important aspect is highlighted by cultural linguistics: idioms are cultural conceptualizations rather than just linguistic expressions. They encode common beliefs, collective recollections, comedic preferences, past events, and social norms.[14] British idioms can allude to historical institutions, pub culture, class differences, and regional identities. American idioms may reflect commercial symbolism, individualist ideology, multicultural influences, and entrepreneurial values. Engaging with the cultural schema that underlies an idiom is necessary to fully comprehend it. Idioms are essential for understanding how meaning is created within a community because of this intersection of language and culture. Learners' changing linguistic identities also influence the acquisition of idioms.[15]

Learners' aspirations, sense of cultural alignment, and sense of belonging are frequently reflected in idiomatic choices. Learners who are exposed to a lot of

American media often pick up American pronunciation, idioms, and informal registers sometimes intentionally, but more often unintentionally.[16] British idiomatic norms may appeal to people who are drawn to British literature or British cultural aesthetics. These idiomatic alignment patterns can affect learners' attitudes, motivation, and sociolinguistic self-perception in addition to contributing to a wider identity positioning within global English. Idiom pedagogy has historically had a narrow focus despite this complexity.[17]

Conventional methods frequently lack cultural explanation or real-world contextual examples and instead concentrate on list-based instruction or definitional memorization. Multimodal exposure, narrative immersion, explicit cultural discussion, and identity-sensitive pedagogy are all recommended by recent research.[18] However, empirical research lags behind theoretical interest, especially when it comes to identity formation, fictional narratives, and digital media.

Understanding how students pick up and understand idioms necessitates ongoing interdisciplinary research as idiomatic expressions continue to proliferate through increasingly globalized media and literary contexts.[19] Different aspects of idiom learning are illuminated by insights from media studies, literary analysis, sociocultural theory, cognitive linguistics, and cultural linguistics. Examining how idioms are internalized, how cultural schemas are interpreted, and how linguistic identity is negotiated within dynamic learning ecologies is made possible by the convergence of these viewpoints.[20]

Theoretical Perspectives

Numerous theoretical traditions have contributed to the study of idiomatic expressions, each providing a unique perspective on the difficulties and procedures associated with idiom acquisition.[21] Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which holds that idioms originate from systematic metaphorical mappings between source and target domains, is one of the most significant frameworks.[22] Speakers are able to comprehend abstract ideas in terms of tangible experiences thanks to these culturally grounded mappings. For example, British idioms like "throw a spanner in the works" reflect industrial history and mechanical imagery, whereas American idioms like "hit it out of the park" rely on a shared cultural familiarity with baseball.[23] In addition to having difficulty with semantic interpretation, learners who lack the cultural experiences that underlie these metaphors frequently have trouble understanding the significance of particular metaphors in a particular cultural context. According to CMT, idioms serve as linguistic crystallizations of cultural thought patterns, so understanding these underlying conceptualizations is more important for successful acquisition than memorization of predetermined meanings.[24]

Usage Based Linguistics is a second significant framework in this field that highlights how repeated exposure to significant discourse patterns leads to the development of idiomatic knowledge. Idioms become ingrained in memory through contextual reinforcement and frequency because they behave as formulaic sequences.[24] Idiom learning follows an experiential trajectory shaped by exposure patterns in contemporary learning environments where students heavily absorb English from digital media, social networks, and audiovisual content. For instance, high frequency idiomatic expressions associated with modern youth culture are frequently presented in American entertainment media; the widespread use of these expressions speeds up

learners' entrenchment.[25] Additionally, usage-based perspectives emphasize the significance of pragmatic function, syntactic fixity, and collocational strength. They propose that learners acquire idiomatic competence by observing how idioms function in real-world communicative acts.[26]

Another interpretive perspective is provided by sociocultural theory, which views idioms as cultural instruments ingrained in customs and social interactions. According to this viewpoint, learning idioms is a socially mediated process based on engagement in cultural activities, whether in real-world or virtual settings, rather than just an internal cognitive process.[14] Idioms are indicators of inclusion, solidarity, and group identity; using them shows familiarity with the norms and values of a speech community. Students are becoming more involved in online communities, such as gaming forums, vlogs, fandom spaces, and social media platforms, where idioms are constantly circulating. Learners are exposed to idioms in interpersonal, emotionally significant contexts through these communities, which improves retention and deepens comprehension of pragmatic nuances.[27]

The relationship between idiom acquisition and learners' linguistic self-concept is further highlighted by research based on identity-based and affective frameworks. Idioms are not neutral linguistic artifacts, especially when they are associated with national or cultural markers. When students pick up American or British idioms, they frequently also pick up the cultural positions, comedic styles, or social attitudes that go along with those idioms.[28] Learners' perceptions of what idioms are prestigious, authentic, or desirable are influenced by identity alignment. For instance, students who respect British literary or historical traditions may favor British idioms, while those who see American culture as contemporary and worldwide dominant may favor internalizing American idioms. These decisions are indicative of more general patterns of linguistic identity construction in the English-speaking world.[29]

This is further developed by Intercultural Communication Theory, which presents idioms as locations of culturally specific meaning. Idioms are cultural scripts that represent common beliefs about humor, interpersonal dynamics, social behavior, and emotional expression. Therefore, in order to understand idioms, students must not only comprehend metaphors but also interpret the socio-pragmatic conventions that support them. When idioms have humorous or evaluative connotations, misinterpreting them can result in sociocultural misalignment or pragmatic failure. Intercultural theorists contend that by giving students access to symbolic systems that influence communication within a linguistic community, learning idioms promotes cultural literacy.[30]

When taken as a whole, these theoretical traditions show that idiom acquisition is a complex process that involves intercultural understanding, metaphorical reasoning, pattern frequency, sociocultural participation, and identity negotiation. Idioms must be examined at the nexus of cognitive, cultural, media-based, and identity-related processes since no single theory can adequately explain the complexity of idiom learning.[31]

Nature and Cultural Anchoring of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions occupy a particularly rich and multifaceted position within the English lexicon. They are not merely lexical combinations but culturally resonant artifacts that encode shared histories, communal experiences, and socially meaningful metaphors. Unlike compositional language, idioms resist direct translation and often

require familiarity with the cultural narratives that produced them. This characteristic makes idioms especially challenging for second language learners, who must navigate a dual layer of meaning: the semantic content and the cultural schema embedded within the expression.[32]

Idiomatic systems are shaped by cultural trajectories, as demonstrated by British and American idioms. Centuries of social stratification, political history, religious influence, and literary output are frequently reflected in British idioms.[33] Words like "lose the plot," "a damp squib," or "as keen as mustard" have undertones of regional heritage, British humor, and understatement. Historical institutions like the monarchy, colonial government, and industrial labor are the source of many idioms. Knowledge of the cultural allusions that were prevalent in earlier eras of British history is necessary to comprehend them.[34]

In contrast, American idioms frequently result from a cultural environment characterized by popular entertainment, modernity, mobility, and an entrepreneurial spirit.[35] Terms like "break even," "think outside the box," and "hit the jackpot" are indicative of both technological advancement and commercial culture. Others, such as "step up to the plate" or "a whole new ball game," are derived from sports metaphors that have gained cultural recognition. The media industries of Hollywood, advertising, and television, as well as the multicultural character of American society, which incorporates influences from immigrant communities and regional dialects, all have an impact on the American idiomatic repertoire.[36]

Idioms' pragmatic purposes further strengthen their cultural anchoring. Idioms are often used to convey attitudes in socially acceptable ways, express humor, establish rapport, or lessen face-threatening behaviors. Idioms are used by speakers to indicate cultural competency, align with others, and position themselves socially. When a British speaker uses phrases like "pulling your leg" or "throwing a wobbly," they are appealing to British audiences. When an American speaker says "give me a break" or "no brainer," they are adhering to American speech conventions.[37]

Therefore, learning idiomatic expressions requires learners to enter a cultural world in addition to comprehending figurative meaning. Contextual knowledge is crucial. Idioms reflecting historical and cultural nuances are accessible to learners who are deeply involved in British literature, British comedy, or regional dialects. Idioms influenced by modern speech communities are encountered by people who are engrossed in American pop culture, movies, and digital entertainment. Over time, learners' linguistic identities are shaped by the idioms they choose to use, which frequently reflect their cultural affiliations.[38]

The learning environment is made more difficult by the simultaneous use of American and British idioms in international English contexts. In many areas, students consume primarily American media while English teachers are trained in British English, resulting in hybrid idiomatic repertoires. In the same conversation, learners may employ idioms from both varieties, sometimes without realizing the cultural differences they convey. Important issues regarding identity formation, linguistic authenticity, and intelligibility in international English communication are brought up by such hybrid usage.[39]

Therefore, idioms are a microcosm of linguistic cultural identity. They encode shared experiences, index humor patterns, reflect social hierarchies, and capture cultural worldviews. As students pick up idioms, they not only broaden their vocabulary but also become more engaged with English-speaking cultures and learn how to fit in.[39]

Cognitive Processes in Idiom Acquisition

Idiomatic expressions present unique cognitive challenges because they operate at the intersection of literal and figurative language processing. Whereas compositional phrases allow learners to derive meaning from individual lexical items, idioms require the integration of lexical recognition, metaphor comprehension, and contextual inference. Cognitive research indicates that idiom comprehension involves a combination of bottom up and top down processing mechanisms, and the extent to which learners rely on each depends on familiarity, transparency, and exposure.[40]

The argument over the dual route model of idiom processing is a major problem in idiom acquisition. Research indicates that before accessing an idiom's figurative meaning, learners usually activate its literal meaning. For instance, when learners come across an expression such as "spill the beans," they might first picture the literal act before realizing its idiomatic meaning of disclosing a secret. This literal first processing pathway illustrates how the cognitive system anchors unfamiliar or semantically ambiguous expressions in concrete imagery in an effort to reconcile them. Like lexical chunks or formulaic sequences, idioms are accessed holistically as learners become more comfortable with them, suppressing their literal representation.[41]

A key factor in determining processing difficulty is the idea of semantic transparency. Idioms like "see the light" and "break the ice" are easier for students to understand because they have comparatively obvious metaphorical connections to their figurative meanings. On the other hand, idioms that are opaque, such as "kick the bucket" or "a red herring," rely more on contextual cues and memory-based retrieval because they offer little semantic guidance. Learners' capacity to deduce meaning is greatly impacted by their understanding of cultural metaphors, such as the British hunting customs incorporated into "a red herring." [42]

Figurative competence, or learners' capacity to interpret figurative language more broadly, is another crucial component. Idioms are easier for learners with strong metaphorical awareness to understand, particularly when they correspond with conceptual metaphors in their L1.[43] According to cross-linguistic research, learners from cultures with similar metaphorical structures such as German or Dutch learners often process English idioms more quickly than learners from cultures with different conceptual mappings. For instance, metaphorical structures in many Asian languages differ significantly from those in English, making it more challenging to understand English idioms that rely on imagery that is unfamiliar to the target culture.[44]

Idiom comprehension also heavily relies on working memory. Idioms require more mental effort to maintain both literal and figurative interpretations at the same time, particularly those with low transparency. Higher working memory capacity learners typically do better on idiom recognition tasks, especially when idioms are used in fast-paced conversational sequences or complex discourse structures.

Lastly, background knowledge greatly improves understanding of idioms. Learners can deduce figurative meaning from surrounding cues, speaker intentions, and pragmatic signals when they are exposed to narrative contexts like movie scenes, fictional dialogues, or social media exchanges. By establishing links between idiomatic meaning, emotional tone, and communicative function, narrative-based exposure ultimately promotes deeper semantic integration and quicker retrieval.[45]

The Cultural Lexicon of British and American Idioms

Idioms are short cultural narratives that are incorporated into common speech. They capture the shared experiences, humor conventions, historical occurrences, and social values that characterize a speech community's cultural lexicon. Different socio-historical trajectories are reflected in the cultural lexicons of American and British English, which produce idioms that are representative of cultural concerns, symbolic domains, and national experiences.[46]

British idioms often reference the nation's lengthy history, social hierarchy, and literary legacy. Words like "carry the can" or "a stiff upper lip" evoke cultural values associated with moral obligation, emotional restraint, and responsibility that have historically been linked to British national identity. Additionally, a lot of idioms come from particular historical eras or establishments. Despite having a classical origin, the expression "crossing the Rubicon" spread throughout English literary and educational traditions. Others, like "spanner in the works," highlight Britain's mechanical engineering heritage and industrial history. Regional variation is also significant; common expressions found in dialects of Scottish, Welsh, or Northern English add to a rich mosaic of idiomatic diversity. For learners, navigating this diversity requires familiarity not only with the English language but also with regional cultural norms and historical references.[47]

A distinct set of cultural experiences is reflected in American idioms. Frontier narratives, immigration history, entrepreneurial values, multicultural influences, and mass media dominance all have an impact on the American lexicon. Idioms like "pull yourself up by your bootstraps," "on the same page," and "think big" demonstrate a societal emphasis on personal initiative and hope. Sports metaphors are widely used, particularly in American football and baseball. Terms like "touch base," "drop the ball," "three strikes," and "Hail Mary" have meanings that are immediately familiar to Americans but frequently foreign to students. Idioms like "give me a ballpark figure" and "pay through the nose" are also heavily influenced by commercial culture.[36]

The American idiomatic repertoire has been further impacted by the rise of mass media. Expressions that spread quickly throughout the world are introduced by Hollywood movies, sitcoms on television, commercial slogans, and popular music. Even though their roots are still clearly American, many of these idioms become part of global English. Long before they are encountered in formal learning environments, learners in a variety of linguistic contexts frequently pick up these idioms through digital exposure.[48]

By comparison, American idioms frequently convey directness, energy, and informality, whereas British idioms frequently convey subtlety, understatement, and irony. Literature, the media, and public conversation all support these distinctions, which are a reflection of larger sociocultural values. Students who absorb idioms from one variety may also unconsciously absorb its cultural viewpoint. For example, a preference for British literary idioms may indicate identification with British cultural heritage, whereas frequent use of American commercial idioms may indicate alignment with American economic and cultural ideology.[49]

Learners' idiomatic repertoires frequently combine British and American expressions in hybrid ways as a result of their increased exposure to English through globalized media. Cultural authenticity, communicative appropriateness, and identity positioning within global English are all called into question by this hybridization. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend both the cultural lexicon of idioms and how learners create

their own linguistic identities through idiomatic choices.[50]

Media Exposure and Idiom Learning

Modern media environments have revolutionized the acquisition of idioms by giving students previously unheard-of access to real, multimodal input. In previous decades, textbooks, formal instruction, and sporadic interactions with native speakers were the main ways that students encountered idioms. These days, learners come across figurative expressions in movies, TV shows, social media, music, video games, and online communities on digital platforms, which act as constant idiom-rich environments.[51]

American idioms are widely known throughout the world due to the global reach of American media, especially Hollywood movies and American television. Idioms are often incorporated into narrative contexts that improve comprehension, such as character speech, humor, or dramatic tension, in movies and television shows. Through repeated exposure to these narrative moments, learners pick up idiomatic expressions. Idioms like "give me a break," "break it down," and "hit the road," for instance, are frequently used in popular media.[52]

Despite being less prominent worldwide, British media has a significant impact on a number of genres, such as comedies, crime dramas, historical dramas, and literary adaptations. Viewers are exposed to idioms ingrained in British historical and sociocultural contexts through television programs like *Sherlock*, *Downton Abbey*, and *The Crown*. British comedy, which is renowned for its irony, fast-paced verbal humor, and regional accents, gives students real-world idiomatic expressions that mirror modern British speech patterns. In addition to improving comprehension, these exposures influence how students view British cultural norms and communication styles.[34]

Social media platforms disseminate conversational, informal English to audiences' worldwide, increasing idiomatic exposure. Idioms are regularly and creatively used by YouTubers, Instagram influencers, TikTok creators, and online communities. They are frequently combined with slang, memes, and internet vernacular. Through direct interaction with this material, learners internalize idioms; occasionally, they even take on non-standard or youth-specific expressions. Because these platforms are multimodal, inferential learning is supported and idiomatic comprehension is strengthened by visual cues, gestures, and tone.[53]

Additionally, gaming environments are conducive to learning idioms. Idioms are used spontaneously by speakers in real-time interaction through multiplayer games, live streaming, and gaming forums. Idioms like "level up," "on fire," and "game changer" combine literal gaming contexts with metaphorical everyday meanings, spreading outside of gaming communities and into wider popular culture.[54]

Learners' idiomatic preferences and linguistic identities are significantly influenced by their media consumption habits. While learners who are exposed to British media may become familiar with British idiomatic structures, learners who primarily interact with American content frequently unintentionally adopt American idioms. Learners frequently blend idioms from both varieties to create hybridized speech patterns that are representative of English usage around the world.[55]

Crucially, media exposure influences students' affective relationship with idioms in addition to improving comprehension. Idioms are more likely to be retained and actively used when they are encountered through cherished characters, captivating

stories, or significant social interactions. Learners' sense of connection to the linguistic diversity portrayed in the media is strengthened by this emotional engagement, which also reinforces idiomatic uptake.[56]

Fiction and Literature as Sources of Idiomatic Input

Fiction has long been a storehouse of idiomatic richness, providing language learners with access to the cultural, emotional, and narrative contexts that give idioms their complete meaning in addition to the idioms themselves. Idioms are incorporated into character-driven dialogues, descriptive passages, stylistic choices, and cultural allusions in literary texts, ranging from classic novels to modern fiction and digital storytelling. This embedding gives students the contextual cues they need to recognize pragmatic function, deduce meaning, and recognize stylistic nuance.[57]

Particularly in British literature, colloquial expressions that date back centuries abound. Idioms reflecting historical social norms, regional expressions, and ideological attitudes can be found in works by authors ranging from Shakespeare to Dickens, Austen, and Woolf. Many of the idioms that students come across in these texts such as "much ado about nothing," "break the mold," and "the game is up" have made their way into the contemporary lexicon through literary transmission. These idioms are potent but occasionally difficult tools for L2 learners because they frequently have symbolic resonance connected to British cultural memory.[58]

Themes of mobility, modernity, and multiculturalism have shaped the idiomatic landscape of American literature. American fiction frequently uses idioms that are influenced by urban culture, informal registers, and modern speech patterns. Figurative expressions reflecting American humor, social tensions, and regional identities can be found in works by authors like Mark Twain, Toni Morrison, and contemporary young adult authors. The idiomatic repertoire is further expanded by graphic novels and digital fiction, which incorporate expressions into multimodal settings that combine linguistic inventiveness and visual symbolism.[59]

The capacity of fictional texts to offer rich narrative scaffolding for idiom learning is one of their main advantages. Idioms improve memorability and make inferencing easier because they frequently occur in literary works during emotional tension, character conflict, or narrative climax. Readers can gain a deeper understanding of pragmatic functions by observing how characters employ idioms to convey frustration, humor, solidarity, irony, or resistance.

Fiction is still an underutilized tool in idiom pedagogy, despite this potential. Because of worries about linguistic complexity, many language classrooms use simplified texts or steer clear of real fiction entirely. However, research indicates that students who actively engage with literary narratives acquire improved cultural literacy, interpretive skills, and emotional engagement in addition to broader idiomatic competence. Thus, fiction provides a complex and culturally rich route for learning idioms that balances the informality and immediacy of media-based input.[60]

Linguistic Identity and Idiom Ownership

Idiomatic expressions convey a sense of identity, cultural congruence, and belonging that goes beyond mere semantics. Adopting idioms from American or British English allows students to position themselves within sociolinguistic and cultural contexts rather than just learning vocabulary. Idiom acquisition becomes closely linked to linguistic identity, which is defined as how people view themselves and are perceived

by others through language use.[61]

Some students align their speech patterns with American idiomatic norms as a result of global exposure to American media and its cultural prestige in many parts of the world. Idioms like "hang in there," "cut to the chase," and "give it a try" can indicate an aspirational identification with the directness, optimism, and informality of American culture. On the other hand, some students are drawn to British idioms as indicators of literary heritage, sophistication, or conformity to British cultural aesthetics. Words like "a tall order," "not my cup of tea," or "in the same boat" can be associated with British understatement, irony, or politeness.[62]

Exposure patterns frequently have an impact on identity development. Students who spend a lot of time in American pop culture, movies, and online communities tend to pick up idioms from those settings. A distinctively British idiomatic repertoire may be developed by those with academic backgrounds based in British English or who frequently engage with British literature and media.[63] A common occurrence among learners is the blending of American and British idioms, which is indicative of the development of hybrid linguistic identities influenced by the use of English worldwide.

Idioms are indicators of belonging to an in-group as well. By demonstrating familiarity with a community's speech patterns through the use of culturally appropriate idioms, students can engage in conversation more fully. On the other hand, misusing idioms or using marked expressions can identify the speaker as an outsider and cause self-consciousness or sociolinguistic insecurity. Idiom learning is frequently driven by learners' desire to "sound native like," but this goal is inextricably linked to more general issues of cultural belonging and identity negotiation.[64]

Additionally, learners' personal identities and social goals may be reflected in their choice of idiom. Some students use idioms that correspond with specific personality traits, such as humor or assertiveness. Some deliberately steer clear of idioms that they believe are too casual, culturally sensitive, or inconsistent with how they present themselves. As a result, learning idioms becomes a place of identity work where students negotiate communicative objectives, cultural norms, and personal values.[65]

The notion of idiom ownership the degree to which students believe they have the right to use idioms varies greatly. Idiomatic expressions may be completely avoided by learners who rely only on textbooks, while those who are heavily exposed to immersive media and communicative interaction frequently feel comfortable using them. When idiom learning is bolstered by repeated authentic exposure, cultural familiarity, and emotional engagement, ownership rises.[66]

Pedagogical Approaches and Instructional Research

Classroom instruction has frequently lagged behind theoretical insights, despite the difficulty of learning idioms. Dictionary definitions, isolated example sentences, and list-based memorization are common components of traditional teaching methods. These techniques might help with short-term memory, but they seldom offer the cultural and contextual support required for profound idiomatic competence. The significance of contextualization, multimodal exposure, and cultural explanation in idiom instruction is highlighted by recent applied linguistics research.[67]

Integrating idioms especially those derived from media and fiction into real communicative contexts is one promising strategy. Learners can observe pragmatic

function, tone, prosody, and nonverbal cues by using idioms in naturally occurring conversations found in movies, TV shows, and social media posts. Idioms encountered in emotionally meaningful scenes are often retained more effectively than those introduced through decontextualized lists.[68]

Similarly, students can interact with idioms that are incorporated into narrative structure and stylistic nuance through literature-based instruction. By using passages from novels, short stories, or graphic narratives, teachers give students the chance to deduce idiomatic meaning from character interactions, plot context, and narrative tension. These methods help students understand the cultural significance of idiomatic language and promote deeper interpretive engagement.[69]

Explicit cultural instruction is a crucial aspect of idiom pedagogy. Teachers who talk about the historical or cultural roots of idioms can improve students' comprehension and retention because idioms encode culturally specific knowledge. By describing the baseball origins of "step up to the plate" or the British industrial roots of "spanner in the works," students are able to place idioms within relevant cultural contexts.[70]

The necessity of identity-sensitive education is also becoming more widely acknowledged. Instead of enforcing a single standard, educators who recognize that students may prefer American or British idiomatic norms can support identity negotiation by promoting informed choices. In global English contexts, where learners may interact with speakers from a variety of linguistic backgrounds and need flexible idiomatic repertoires, this approach is especially pertinent.[71]

Following that, idiom pedagogy has new prospects due to the emergence of digital learning environments. Online resources can provide exposure to real-world digital discourse, immersive simulations, and multimodal idiom lessons. Learners can engage with native speakers, take part in online communities of practice, or examine idiomatic usage in user-generated content. These settings naturally fit learners' media habits and show how idioms are actually used in modern communication.[72]

Conclusion

Idiomatic expressions encode cultural knowledge, symbolic meanings, and community identities that cannot be learned through vocabulary alone, they represent a particularly challenging area of learning English. This complexity is increased by the contrast between American and British idioms, each of which reflects unique sociocultural norms, humor traditions, and historical experiences. Idiom comprehension highlights the interdependence of cognitive and cultural factors by relying on the interaction of figurative processing, metaphorical awareness, memory, and culturally shaped schemas. While American idioms primarily originate from sports, commerce, multicultural influences, and mass media, British idioms draw from monarchy, class history, and literary tradition. As a result, learners unavoidably absorb cultural perspectives through idiomatic forms. While maintaining familiarity with British expressions, contemporary media platforms and digital environments offer dense idiomatic exposure backed by visual and contextual cues, strengthening the global spread of American idioms. Fiction also enhances pragmatic interpretation by incorporating idioms into narrative and emotional contexts. As students move through these inputs, their idiom preferences show how exposure, cultural affiliation, and aspirational ties to specific English varieties have shaped identity alignment. Therefore, multimodal, context-rich, culturally grounded, and identity-sensitive approaches are necessary for effective pedagogy. All things considered, idiom acquisition is a multifaceted process that is influenced by cognitive, cultural, media-

driven, and identity-related factors. These factors work together to shape learners' developing idiomatic repertoires.

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