

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INSTRUCTING IDIOM ORIGIN ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF IDIOMATIC TRANSLATION COMPETENCE FOR DONG NAI UNIVERSITY'S SENIOR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of idiom instructions in second language acquisition has been acknowledged in the literature so far; however, their studies has chiefly focused on strategies of idiom teaching and learning as well as learners' and teachers' attitudes towards idiom instruction. This study, therefore, aims to fill into the gap of literature by probing deeply into the investigation of whether or not knowing the origins of any idioms taught could enable students to learn idioms more effectively and/or their attitudes henceforth could be improved thanks to the stories embedding the idioms in it. This is a new study trend of teaching idioms as far as the researchers were concerned as up to now there have not been any systematic studies in it. This study was conducted with a voluntary participation of 45 senior students of English majors at Dong Nai University through the three stages, namely, pre-training, while-training, and post-training. The study result indicated that most students expressed their positive attitudes towards idioms, idiom instructions through detailed explanation of their origins. Likewise, students' idiomatic translation competence was also better enhanced after their training. On the basis of findings, some recommendations for future studies on idiom instructions through their origins in language curriculum were also included.

Keywords: *Idiom, idiom and culture, idiom translation strategies, idiomatic translation competence, students' perceptions towards idiom and idiom origin*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the problem

The importance of idioms and idiom instruction has been acknowledged in the body of literature so far; therefore, their importance is indisputable. Indeed, idioms have been widely used in ESOL instructional programs, daily written and spoken discourses, classic literature/religious texts, sports, films, advertising, politics, military, to name but a few. Several researchers concurred to the fact that language users' communicative competence should also include idiomatic competence, especially when they have to communicate with the native speakers of English [1], [2]. Most recently, when the

international exams such as CEFR and/or International English Language Testing Systems (i.e., TOEFL, IELTS, & TOEIC) have been introduced into Asian language schools and institutions, criteria to evaluate the language competence of the candidates has become more urgent than ever before. In this framework, candidates wanting to achieve Band 7 onward in IELTS or C1 equivalents in the CEFR should be able to use some less common and idiomatic vocabulary. In one word, lack of knowledge of idiomatic expressions will certainly put English users at disadvantage, making them unable to achieve desirable results in exams as well as disrupt their communicative

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performance with cross-culture speakers of English.

In recent years, idiom instruction has received a plethora of attention in language program. In this sense, idioms are very important in “both written and spoken discourse”, so they “should not be relegated to a position of secondary importance in the curriculum” [3]. Also, as idioms are now also used a lot in English fictions, newspapers, or magazines, and on TV shows, learners of English should arm themselves with a large number of idioms in order to help them become competent communicators in the English-speaking communities. Finally, a good mastery of idiom enables learners to “heighten their motivation and love-of-learning for the target language” [4].

Important as it is, idioms have long been considered a thorny problem to both learners and even native people of a given language. Studies so far have mentioned several problems faced by EFL/ESL learners and they are briefly summarized as follows.

First of all, the difficulties posed by idiom are very enormous. The first one may lie in the fact that idioms often exist on figurative meaning instead of literal meaning, as coined by [5] and, in linguistics and literature, there are thousands of idioms falling neatly in this category ranging from slang, sayings, proverbs, figurative phrases, motto, quotation, jargon maxim, cliché and so on [6]. Regarding division of idiomatic meaning, Fernando categorized idioms into three corresponding types depending on their function and usage, namely, *pure/non-literal idioms*, *semi-literal idioms*, and *literal meaning* [7]. *Pure idioms* are the ones that are not

existed on the literal meaning at all. Idiomatic expressions like “kick the bucket”, “pull someone’s leg”, “make off with”, “hot under the collar”, “a carrot and stick”, and so on belong neatly to this category. The second type, semi-literal idioms, exist both on literal level and figurative level. “Build castle in the air”, “cut the ground out from someone”, “sit on the fence”, “fat chance”, “go through”, “a piece of cake”, and so on are typical examples of this kind. Finally, literal idioms are those that have lost their idiomatic expressions, used freely, and can be easily understood by the majority of EFL/ESL learners. Examples such as these are “according to”, “in terms of”, “throw something away”, “in sum”, “looking forward to”, “take someone/something for granted”, “out of sight out of mind”, and etc. Due to a varied nature and opaqueness of idiomatic expressions, non-native speakers of English in general are often at loss to learn the rope of it.

Second, the contextual factor or culturally-specific factor also largely contributes to the confusion of idiom. The speakers of ESL and EFL are often not able to understand phrases such as “hit below the belt/stab in the back”, “in the eleventh hours”, “till/to the kingdom come”, “in the twinkle of an eye, to play the fool”, and so on as these idioms all have references at least from three main sources, namely, “in Bible, in Roman fables, and in the work of Shakespeare” [7]. In order for the meaning of these idioms to be realized, it is necessary to understand the origin and context where they are being used, and spoken. Without an understanding of their origin and context, the learners of language will be

forever confused over their meaning, and, therefore, they cannot assimilate into the community of the target language as well as advance further into the academic setting and professional world.

Last but most importantly, the difficulty that the EFL/ESL learners encounter is that there has not yet had a systematic and detailed teaching and reference materials about idiom instruction so far. This is especially true when traditional instruction for language currently still focusses exclusively on “the acquisition of grammatical system and neglect of the lexis” [8]. Even if idiomatic expression is paid due attention to in the language curriculum, it is normally “intuition-based”, focusing on “seldom-used idioms” instead of most commonly spoken and written idioms. This in turn minimizes their usefulness to the ESOL learners [9]. In the same vein, instructions on idiom at school level and university level are still marginal. Tran’s study found only 24 idioms used in the Vietnamese high school English textbooks [10]. Finally, Dat’s & Luan’s studies also uncovered that though EFL & ESL learners were very keenly interested in idiom learning and expressed their positive attitudes towards idioms and idiom instruction [10], [11], they “may not try to understand what an idiom might convey if they are not afforded opportunities to see idioms enacted in lives” [12].

1.2. Research questions

This present study sets out to find the answer to the following research questions.

- Can knowing the origin of idiom help students learn idioms effectively?

- What are differences in students’ idiomatic competence before and after this training?

- What are students’ attitudes towards idioms and the learning of idiom before and after the training?

2. Literature review

2.1. Idiom and culture

Contrary to the normal rules of a given language where its fixed and regular patterns with some minor exceptions must be stringently obeyed, idioms do not and very often violate semantic and grammatical rules to create “anomalies of language, mavericks of the linguistic world” [13]. In this sense, idioms are often defined on two criteria, i.e., meaning (semantic) and grammar (syntax). First, in terms of meaning, idioms are often understood figuratively. Sayings such as “He *kicked the bucket* yesterday”; “He *spilled the beans* all over the town”; “It *rained cats and dogs*”; “beat about the bush”, etc. must be understood in the senses of “died”, “divulged secret”, “rained heavily”, “discuss the matter without going to the point” respectively. Secondly, in terms of grammar, idioms also do not obey any normal rules of grammar. Phrases above like “kicked the bucket”; “spilled the bean” cannot be written and spoken into “kicked a bucket”, “picked up the beans”. In other words, any additions, omissions, or substitute of one element for another one in a given idiom are not allowed if viewed in light of idioms.

Their ambiguity of meaning is often ascribed to the cultural elements. As language and culture are the two inseparable components, so are idioms, which “predetermine customs, beliefs, and social attitudes” [14]. Idioms are not

merely products of grammarians, dictionary composers and/or language curriculum designers, etc. but rather are processes and results of historical/cultural processes of a community of a mankind and the breath of lives, where people in a given culture, under influences of their daily customs and practices, political, social, economic, and warfare forces, have given birth to them. Therefore, to understand about the idioms, the learners and the users of a given language must view them in light of culture and history where the idioms have originated.

In general, idiom is often classified according to at least three elements, religious reference, historical allusion and customs and practices of a language community.

Religiously, the oriental culture is often influenced by Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Therefore, many stories behind idioms relating to these doctrines have entered the treasure of lexis. “Thiện cao một thước, ma cao một trượng”, “mượn hoa kính Phật”, gần chùa gọi Bụt bằng anh” in Vietnamese, for example, can be translated into corresponding English versions like “as virtue rises one foot, vice rises ten”, “to present Buddha with borrowed flowers”, “familiarity breeds evils.” On the contrary, Englishness, under the influences of occidental cultures, especially of Christianity cultures, transported many Christian colourings to English language. Idioms such as “Chúa giúp người biết tự giúp mình”, “rất hạnh phúc”, “giờ chót”, cho đến chết”, etc. with English equivalent translations “God helps those who help themselves”, “on the nine cloud/over the moon”, “at

the eleventh hours”, “till the kingdom come”, etc. have found their standing in English language.

Historically, English idiom is very rich in their references to the historical events. So far, British English language has undergone and been largely influenced by such many cultures as Celtic cultures, the Roman cultures, Germanic cultures as well as the borrowing cultures from Greek, Arabic, and Indian cultures through Britain’s colonization to these countries from the mid-eighteenth centuries onwards. Due to these enormous influences, English idioms have their origin coming from at least these following sources: Historical events in Europe, Greek & Roman mythology, fables, Biblical texts, etc. [15]. Idioms such as “hit below the belt/stab in the back”, “the Trojan Horse”, “meet one’s Waterloo”, “Battle-ax”, “according to Hoyle”, “Hobson’s choice”, “bite the bullet”, “Swan song”, “the wolf may lose his teeth but never his nature”, “Herculean task, Achilles’ heel”, “slow and steady win the race”, etc. are some typical examples from these references.

Finally, idioms are the product of a given culture, where customs and practices of daily habits and everyday activities shape them. Regarding this third characteristics, there are many themes regarding idioms, which is culturally-specific. Idiom-based topics like films; plays and books; relationship-friends and family; people-character and behaviour; crime and punishment; work; business news; business meetings; money; society; daily life; learning, and so on can be found present in many books of idioms.

2.2. *Idiom translation strategies*

Idiomatic competence of a person should, first of all, include his/her thorough understanding of idiomatic expressions/vocabulary words in source language (SL) and re-express their meaning effectively in his/her target language (TL). For example, an English idiom when translated into Vietnamese language should not only keep its original meaning but more importantly, preserve the property of Pure Vietnamese or at least Sino-Vietnamese as well. In reality, there are abundance of ways that teachers can help non-native learners overcome obstacles in learning idiom, which is commonly called “idiom translation strategies”.

Below are some idiom translation strategies that can be applied to teach idioms for non-native speakers of English.

The first one to be mentioned is literal translation. This strategy is especially useful for “literal idioms” where word-for-word or literal translation is parallel in the TL. These idioms can only be translated effectively if and only if both SL and TL possess their respective equivalent structures and lexis. Such English idioms as “add fuel to the fire”, “rub salt into the wound”, “walls have ears”, “knowledge is power”, “out of sight, out of mind”, “as fast as lightning”, “union is strength”, and so on can be all translated directly into the corresponding Vietnamese language: “thêm dầu vào lửa”, “xát muối vào vết thương”, “xa mặt cách lòng”, “tai vách mạch rừng”, “kiến thức là sức mạnh”, “xa mặt cách lòng”, “nhanh như chớp”, đoàn kết là sức mạnh”.

The second type of translation strategy that is often utilized by many translators when treating idiom-related phrases and/or utterances is the

communicative or idiomatic translation. This strategy is extremely useful in cases where the source text (ST) and target text (TT) are not in coincidence in form and style or equivalencies in meaning and structure. It is often used for figurative idiomatic expressions where literal translation is hardly achievable due to their cultural, historical, social, and regional differences.

To translate these idioms effectively, the first thing to do is to check whether these idioms are truly figurative idiomatic expressions or not. If such is the case, the following methods can be used to transport the SL idioms into the TL idioms.

The first strategy that a translator can use to interpret the idiomatic expression is to utilize contextual clues to predict the meaning of a source idiom before transporting it to the TL. This strategy is only really useful when the source idiom is placed in the whole context of a sentence or an utterance. The sentence/utterance preceding or following it can help translators in interpreting its meaning. Below is an example to illustrate.

SL (1): “The politician is *sitting on the fence* and he will not give his own opinion”. The following utterance “He will not give his own opinion” hints that “sitting on the fence” does not actually imply a specific location, because if understood in this way, this phrase will make no sense. Hence, this verbal phrase “sitting on the fence” must be an idiom and based on the context of the second utterance, the translator can guess its meaning “this is an undecided action, the one that causes the politician not to know what to do before a difficult situation.” In other words, the politician is being put in a dilemma where he finds it hard to be

going to give his own opinion, or in Vietnamese, it should be read “Nhà chính trị gia vẫn còn đang lưỡng lự, vì thế anh ấy sẽ không đưa ra ý kiến của mình.”

The second strategy that can be adopted by the translators is equivalence in translation as proposed by Eugene Nida in the book *The Theory and Practice of Translation* published in 1969. In this book, he mentioned two dissimilar translation approaches which can be mutually supplementary and easily accepted in the TL. They are formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, in which the former aims to preserve form of the SL in the TL whilst the latter aims to render the meaning of SL readable and comprehensible by the target readers. Here are some idioms extracted from [16] that can be translated in two ways as follows.

The English idiom “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” is easily accepted by Vietnamese people because the meaning of the utterance is as clear as daylight. In other words, there is nothing hidden in this utterance. As a result, it can be translated both semantically (formal equivalence) and communicatively (dynamic translation). In Vietnamese, this utterance is “Khi ở La Mã, hãy làm/cư xử như người La Mã” (formal equivalence) or “nhập gia tùy tục (dynamic translation).

The third translation strategy as suggested by [17] comprises four translation strategies, namely, using idioms of similar meaning and form, using idioms of similar meaning but dissimilar form, using idioms by paraphrasing, and using idioms by omission. These are briefly summarized below.

First of all, by using idiom of similar meaning and form, the translators

attempt to find another TL idiom that is roughly equal to SL idiom in both meaning and lexical items.

Using idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form “involves translating a source text (ST) idiomatic expression into its equivalent target text (TT) idiom which conveys the same meaning, but has a different form.

For example, the English idiom “as strong as a horse” will be translated into Vietnamese, “khỏe như trâu”. This is because of the fact that Vietnamese people are used to the image of the “buffaloes” ploughing on the farm rather than the image of the “driven-horse cart” used in the Western Societies to express how strong a person is. Though the two cultures use different lexical items, the meaning expressed is exactly the same.

The paraphrase strategy is employed in cases where no equivalent SL idioms can be found in the TL idioms. To this end, a brief explanation or a footnote of meaning behind SL idioms are given out. This strategy is perhaps the most commonly used one in idiom translation strategies because many idiomatic expressions in the SL do not always have their corresponding ones in the TL. For example, the utterance “He was born in a *silver spoon* family” is paraphrased into “He was born in a rich family” or in Vietnamese: “Anh ta sinh ra trong một gia đình rất giàu có”. The idiom “silver spoon” have no corresponding idiom in Vietnamese language. Therefore, this idiom is conveniently transported to “rich” or “giàu” in Vietnamese language.

Last, the omission translation involves completely giving up the idiomatic element of the SL in the TL. This often occurs when the cultural entity of the SL is not present in the TL.

For example, “according to Holye” must be understood as “nói có sách, mách có chứng” in Vietnamese. In the Vietnamese version, the whole idiom “according to Holye” is omitted to replace a Vietnamese phrase “nói có sách, mách có chứng” to be easily accepted by Vietnamese people instead of translating it into “căn cứ vào lời nói của ông Hoyle” which can be vague to the majority of Vietnamese people who do not understand who Hoyle was and what the origin of this idiom was. Another example to illustrate is “Hobson’s choice” that is translated into Vietnamese “sự lựa chọn bắt buộc dĩ”. Again, the original idiom is completely lost in Vietnamese version to make room for a new message approachable to the Vietnamese people.

2.3. Finding out about the origin of idioms: an alternative approach to teach idiom

2.3.1. Reasons for introducing the origin of idioms

There are at least four main benefits that may be drawn out from knowing about the origin of idioms. The first and most important one is that it helps language learners/users avoid arbitrariness, misuse, and wild guess of idioms learnt. This very often occurs among EFL/ESL learners who do not possess much knowledge about the culture embedded in figurative idiomatic expressions they are learning. Secondly, mastering the origin of idioms also enables them to retain them longer in their long-term memory. Thirdly, realizing the origin of idiom stimulates the learners to appreciate the target culture in relation to their native culture in terms of similarities and differences between the two cultures. Finally,

learning about the origin of idiom can improve learners’ language competence through the enhancement of the vocabulary and grammar thanks to the interesting stories embedded in the idioms as well as arouse learners’ passion of learning language in general and idioms in particular exerted by humorous elements present in the stories of idioms.

2.3.2. Some illustrative examples of idioms and their origins applied in the present study

Below is an extract of three out of 100 some illustrative examples of idioms and their accompanying origins which were taught in this present study. Where the references were borrowed, they would be duly acknowledged.

This idiom “battle-ax” [1] is normally used to refer to “an old woman who is very difficult and unpleasant because of her fierce and determined attitude” (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/battle-axe>), which is roughly translated into Vietnamese: “lão bà bà”. However, this idiom may also imply an amicable/adorned wife of someone or “nội tướng”, “vợ”, “bà xã” in Vietnamese language.

Its origin is as follows. In the primitive warfare, the battle-ax used to be an extremely important weapon of a soldier, an inseparable object carried along by him to the battlefield. It was considered an extremely dangerous weapon because it could kill any enemy with a sharp single blow. The history recorded a story of a fierce fighting taking place on June 23rd, 1314, when General Robert de Bruce killed General Henry Bohrn with a single blow of his

battle-ax. Although with time firearms came into being to replace the battle-ax, this weapon was still in popularity and admired by people in general and now it has been on display on the London Tower and other museums in England. From this origin, this idiom carries the figurative meaning of “a domineering old woman” or “an adorned wife” as mentioned above.

Example: “I am sorry I cannot go out drinking with you as planned, for if I do, my *battle-ax* will certainly kill me.”

The idiom [2] is “to beat about the bush” which means “to avoid talking about what is important” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/beat-around-the-bush>) or “nói vòng vo tam quốc” in Vietnamese.

This story is about the time when the European noblemen liked to go on hunting the wild animals, however, they did not dare to risk their lives to face up to these savage animals, especially, the boars, which prove themselves to be very fierce. To save themselves from danger, they normally hired local hunters to thrash the bushes and undergrowth to frighten the game from its cover. However, because of the savageness of the wild animals, these hunt beaters only used a stick to beat around them to make a noise to frighten the beast to go out from their shelter. With time, the phrase “beat about the bush” has become an idiom to refer to tricks of someone who want to avoid an issue both verbally and in written word.

Example: I could not understand a thing he said. All he did was beating about the bush.

Another one [3] is “to bite the bullet” referring to the showing of “courage in facing a difficult or unpleasant situation” [16], which is equivalent to “cẩn rắng chịu đựng” in Vietnamese language.

This idiom came into being in the wartime in and around 19th century when wounded men on the battlefields were often operated on without the benefits of painkillers and anaesthetics. In order to help the wounded soldiers to forget their intense pains, the physician practitioners encouraged them to bite the bullets as a mean of relieving their terrible pains and maybe to avoid the cases where they could bite their tongue to end their lives to terminate their painfulness forever. Gradual by gradual, this phrase has been used idiomatically to refer to the undesirable situations where you have to accept them without any other alternatives.

Example: “The wounded soldier had to bite the bullet during the medical operation without anaesthetic.”

3. Methodology

3.1. Research site & research participants

This experiential research design was conducted at the English Department of Dong Nai University from October 11th, 2021 to December 30th, 2021, with the participation of 45 senior students of English majors of two branches, English Pedagogy and English Linguistics, Batch 8, conveniently available at the time of the research. These participants were called upon to partake in the research on their voluntary basis.

The study was done in three phases, namely, pre-training phase, while-

training phase, and post-training phase. The study result was then triangulated to find out whether there were any significant differences in attitudes and the learning of idioms of students before and after the figurative idiomatic expressions' instructional modules of the researchers had been applied

3.2. Research method

This present study deployed quantitative method for data analysis coming from students' pre-tests and 'post-tests concerning translating 10 out of 100 idiom exercises taught in this study from English into Vietnamese, pre-questionnaires & post-questionnaires to find out differences in their translation competence and attitudes before and after the training of origins of idioms.

3.3. Training

3.3.1. Pre-training period

In this phase, the researchers asked student participants to do a quick and short pre-test with 10 statements containing the frequently used idioms picked out from idioms that would be taught in the whilst-training of this study. Our purpose was to check how much they had understood about the idioms regarding their meanings as well as their usage in the sentence before the training.

To the questionnaires, student participants were asked to select options on each questionnaire item that they thought best reflected their points of view on idioms and idiom teaching and learning in their previous classes as well as their importance in the international exams. All the question items were designed on Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), uncertain

(U), strongly disagree (D), and disagree (SD) respectively.

3.3.2. Whilst-training

The whilst-training period involved 4 weeks of training about the idioms concerning their origin, meaning, and uses in spoken utterances, and in formal contexts so that after this study they could confidently use these idioms in their academic setting, conversational setting, as well as in their related international exams.

3.3.3. Post-training

Upon completing a two-month training phase of idiomatic instruction, students met the researchers again to do a final test and respond to the questionnaires. The same procedure was repeated like that of the pre-training.

To the final test, a different 10-statement-item was delivered to student participants to complete the translated version from English into Vietnamese.

To the questionnaire, eight different post-training questions were designed to elicit students' opinions about idioms after being instructed with the origins of idioms, and how knowing origin of idiom could facilitate students' learning idiom.

3.4. Instructional materials

The materials selected for teaching about the origin of English idioms included *Dictionary of Idioms and their Origins* by Linda & Roger Flavell, 1992, *Telling Stories of English Idiom* by Lê Tuấn Đạt, 2006, *Dictionary of American Idioms* by Sunflower, 2003, and *What you need to know about Idioms: Master 1000 commonest Idioms carefully selected for you* by Klein, 2004. From these well-selected material sources, we

picked out 100 commonly-used idioms to teach students of this present study.

3.5. Translation assessment

Students' translated scripts were assessed on two criteria, faithfulness and comprehensibility. The sentences qualifying both two criteria would be labelled as "Good"; others were categorized as "Average" if they strictly conformed to the source language but sound unnatural in terms of Vietnamese

language. Finally, the others were regarded as a "Failure" if students were unable to follow the structure and meaning of source language as well as incomprehensible to the target readers. To this end, three criteria to evaluate the success of students in idiom translation competence were "Excellence", "Good", and "Unaccepted" respectively.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Pre-training questionnaires

Table 1: *Students' previous perspectives on the role of idiom in learning English*

Student choice	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
I used to think	5	4	3	2	1	3.0
1. Idioms are never important for English study.	21 46.7	12 26.7	10 22.2	2 4.4	0 0.0	4.2
2. I thought Idioms are only important in everyday informal communication.	22 48.9	12 26.7	3 6.7	6 13.3	2 4.4	4.0
3. Idioms are only important for the native speakers of English.	15 33.3	20 44.4	2 4.4	3 6.8	5 11.1	3.8
4. Non-native speakers of English do not need to learn and use idioms, but they do need to know idioms to understand any of those like native speakers of English who use them in their oral and written communication.	15 33.3	20 44.4	5 11.1	3 6.8	2 4.4	4.0
5. Idioms are generally important for learning four English skills (e.g., Listening, speaking, reading, and writing.)	8 17.8	7 15.6	10 22.2	9 20	11 24.4	2.8
6. Idioms help students better study the theory of linguistics such as semantics, pragmatics, phonology, syntax, and so on.	13 28.9	20 44.4	5 11.1	2 4.4	5 11.2	3.8
7. Idioms help students improve their translation skills	5 11.1	5 11.2	5 11.1	10 22.2	20 44.4	2.2
8. Idioms help students better comprehend English academic texts.	10 22.2	5 11.2	15 33.3	5 11.1	10 22.2	3.0
9. Idioms help students a lot in the understanding of the target culture embedded in it.	12 26.7	15 33.3	8 17.8	8 17.8	2 4.4	3.6
10. Idioms help me enrich my personal life, academic life, and professional life. They also help me express my ideas briefly, concisely, and more easily understood.	7 15.6	8 17.8	15 33.3	5 11.1	10 22.2	2.9
11. Idioms help students more successful in their face-to-face communication with the native speakers of English.	4 8.9	6 13.3	7 15.6	12 26.7	16 35.5	2.3
12. Idioms help students increase their Band Scores in the International exams such as CEFR, TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC.	5 11.1	5 11.1	10 22.2	12 26.7	13 28.9	2.5

As indicated in the table 1, a considerable percentage of learner respondents (73.4%, item 1) had not realized the importance of idiom learning in the second language acquisition (SLA) before the onset of the research. This in turn entailed their ascertainment to the items (5, 7, 8, 10, 11, & 12) respectively. Concerning item 5, the very high number of student respondents (30 out of 45) expressed their hesitation, disagreement, and strong disagreement towards their importance in improving the four English skills. In doing so, they also concurred to the fact that idioms helped them very little in the learning of translation skills, comprehending the English academic text, serving best for their personal, academic, and professional life, assisting them in the face-to-face communication with native speakers of English, and/or increasing their band score in the international language exams. The figures for items 7, 8, 10, 11, & 12 could be seen in 66.6%, 66.6%, 66.6%, 77.8%, and 22.2 (hesitation), and 55.6% respectively.

In spite of that, there were still positive signs to indicate that learner participants still considered idioms to be extremely essential in the first-language

speaking countries at least. This was clearly expressed in their responses to the item questions (3, 4, & 6) respectively. Concretely, 35 out of 45 respondents firmly agreed that they were important for the native speakers of English (item 3). As a result, they claimed that the non-native learners of English, though not necessarily arming themselves with the knowledge of idioms, they certainly needed to know and understand idioms to be not at loss at the spoken and written communication used by the native speakers of English (77.7%, item 4), which in turn enabled them to better understand the theory of linguistics such as semantics, pragmatics, syntax, phonetics and phonology and so forth (73.3%, item 6).

The pre-survey questionnaires revealed that students in this present study still highly evaluated the merits of idioms in English language in general and in the language curriculum in particular despite the fact that they have not fully recognized their standings in language instruction as well as in their personal and professional lives as well.

4.2. Post-training questionnaires

Table 2: Students' opinions towards learning English idioms with explanations of their origins

Student choice	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
Knowing the origins of idiom increase my/helps me	5	4	3	2	1	3.0
1. Ability of retention/memorization of fixed idiomatic expressions learnt longer.	25	15	5	0	0	
	55.6	33.3	11.1	0.0	0.0	4.4
2. Passions in learning English in general and idioms in particular.	18	12	4	6	5	
	40	26.7	8.9	13.3	11.1	3.7
3. Knowledge of the culture, people, and history of the target culture more deeply.	15	15	5	8	2	
	33.3	33.3	11.1	17.9	4.4	3.7

Student choice	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
Knowing the origins of idiom increase my/helps me	5	4	3	2	1	3.0
4. Knowledge of vocabulary, and sentence structure embedded in the stories told about the origins of those idioms.	23 51.1	17 37.8	0 0.0	2 4.4	3 6.7	4.2
5. Avoid wild-guessing the meanings of idioms	18 40	12 26.7	5 11.1	6 13.3	4 8.9	3.8
6. Comparing and/contrasting native idioms and target idioms between the two cultures.	15 33.3	15 33.3	5 11.1	3 6.7	7 15.6	3.6
7. Listening to the stories about the idioms in VOA, discussing the meaning of English idioms with peers makes the learning of English idiom more interesting.	13 28.9	16 35.6	10 22.2	0 0.0	6 13.3	3.7
8. Feel more interested in learning English after being instructed learning about the origins of English idioms.	20 44.5	15 33.3	3 6.7	2 4.4	5 11.1	3.5

Concerning the issues of learning idioms through an explanation of their origins embedded in the stories, the researcher divided the question items into two subsections, with the statements beginning (1) knowing the origins of idioms increases my..., and (2) knowing the origins of idioms helps me.... As indicated in table 2, most student participants acknowledged that understanding about the origins where the idioms derived from could help them retain the idiomatic expressions longer in their minds (40 students expressing their agreement to item 1). Though a fewer number of respondents expressed their agreement to item 2, 30 out of 45 students also claimed that their passions in learning English in general and in learning English idioms in particular were also reinforced thanks to knowing the origins of idioms learnt. Finally, a very high number of students voiced their opinions that their knowledge of culture, people, history of the target culture, and that of vocabulary, grammar

and sentence structure picked up from the stories told about the idioms were much more significantly improved. This could be seen in their very positive responses to items 3 and 4 with 30 and 40 learner informants expressing their agreement and strong agreement to these item questions.

Regarding the sub-section item question 2, a large majority of learner participants strongly agreed that knowing the origins of idioms learnt helps them (1) avoid wild-guessing the meanings of the idioms (66.7%), (2) comparing and contrasting between native idioms and target idioms (66.6%), (3) enhancing their interests in learning English through stories told by idioms in VOA (64.5%), and (4) feeling more interested in learning English in general and in English idioms in particular in the future (77.8 %).

In one word, almost all students in the post-survey question sessions expressed their positive attitudes towards learning English idioms through

an explanation of their origins embedded in the stories told.

4.3. Pre-test & post-test

4.3.1. Pre-test scripts' analyses

Table 3: List of the percentage of acceptable idioms and unacceptable idioms in students' pre-test scripts

ENGLISH IDIOMS	Percentage of acceptable idioms		Percentage of unacceptable idioms
	Good	Average	
1. It started raining cats and dogs and we had to shelter under a tree.	44.4%	33.3%	22.3%
2. Once in blue moon a customer will actually say thank you- and that is a great thing.	44.4%	22.2%	33.4%
3. Gilbert has finally buried the hatchet with his former business partner after many years of bitterness.	0.0%	11.1%	88.9%
4. The medical director gave two nurses the sack last week, for unprofessional conduct.	44.4%	44.4%	11.2%
5. He's planning to write three more books before he kicks the bucket.	0.0%	22.2%	77.8%
6. The job had to be finished by today, so we've been burning the midnight oil all week to get it done.	55.6%	44.4%	0%
7. "Do you play golf with your husband sometimes?" "Oh no- it's not my cup of tea."	44.4%	22.2%	33.4%
8. You really hit me below the belt when you told the boss about my tax problems.	33.3%	33.3%	33.4%
9. He was a good student, but English literature had always been his Achilles' heels.	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%
10. How did you know he was leaving? Oh. Let's just say a little bird told me.	33.3%	44.4%	22.3%

It could be inferred from table 3 that most students before the training had very little knowledge of idiom, particularly idiomatic translation competence. This was clearly visible in ten utterances with a very high percentage of unaccepted idioms in the Vietnamese language. Concretely, it could be seen in items 3, 5, & 9 that 88.9%, 77.8%, 66.7% of students gave wrong and/or unaccepted idiomatic translation. In item 3, for example, most student participants translated “buried their hatchet” into “chôn cái rìu” literally and item 5 into “đá cái thùng”; và “gót chân Achilles”, which was certainly incorrect in the light of figurative meaning. This could be explained in the fact that student participants may not

have possessed the knowledge of idioms in their previous class or are hardly exposed to these idioms outside the class, which hampered them from understanding the meanings of these idioms. Similarly, other idioms in items (1, 4, 7, 8, & 10), though many learners had their English version translated correctly in the corresponding Vietnamese language, the percentage of unaccepted idioms was very high, which required a careful investigation in the while and post-training of idiom instruction to see whether knowing the origin of English idiom could make it easy for student participants in the translation competence or not.

4.3.2. Post-test scripts' analyses

Table 4: List of the percentage of acceptable idioms and unacceptable idioms in students' post-test scripts

ENGLISH IDIOMS	Percentage of acceptable idioms		Percentage of unacceptable idioms
	Good	Average	
1. You can ask anyone about how reliable I am! I don't mind. I don't have any skeletons in the cupboard.	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%
2. We are planning a surprise party for Jane. Don't let the cats out of the bag.	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%
3. Her oldest friend stabbed her in the back by publishing cruel stories about her.	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%
4. Let's call a spade a spade. The man is a liar.	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%
5. The boss was mad because Tom called it a day at noon and went home.	77.7%	22.3%	0.0%
6. We'll have to pay a lot of money, but we must bite the bullet; I think, as	66.7%	17.8%	15.5%

ENGLISH IDIOMS	Percentage of acceptable idioms		Percentage of unacceptable idioms
	Good	Average	
this school trip is very important.			
7. I am your mother! How can you bite the hand that feeds you?	55.6%	44.4%	0%
8. John is carrying a torch for James.	77.8%	0%	22.2%
9. If I see someone being unfairly treated, I can't just turn a blind eye to it.	88.9%	11.1%	0%
10. Angela has replaced her car again, in an effort to keep up with the Joneses, I suppose.	77.8	11.1%	11.1%

Table 4 revealed that most student participants, after being taught about the origins of English idioms, could translate sentences containing idioms successfully and effectively. Most of their translated scripts achieved a very high percentage of assessment on the scale “good” and “average” except for the cases where a low percentage of “unaccepted idiom translation” could be found in items 3, 6, 7, & 10, especially item 4.

First, the largest percentage of students (66.7% & 33.3%) had an accurate translation of the idiom in item 1. All of them had their idiom translated into Vietnamese either “không có điều gì giấu giếm hay che đậy cả” or “ngay thẳng”. Similarly, the idiom in item 2 received the precise translation from 45 students, ranging from 66.7% and 33.3% respectively. All of them had this idiom translated into “đừng tiết lộ tin tức [đó] cho bất kỳ ai”. Idioms in item 3, 6, & 10 also received an accurate Vietnamese corresponding translation, which was

“chơi khăm (chơi xấu)”, “cắn răng chịu đựng”, “đua đòi” respectively. Once again, a very high percentage of accepted idioms was obtained, ranging from 88.9%, 84.5%, and 88.9% respectively.

Surprisingly, item 5, item 7, & item 9 received the highest percentage of accepted idioms (100%), classifying (77.7% & 22.3%, item 5), and (55.6% & 44.4%, item 7) & (88.9% & 11.1%, item 9). The reason may be that these idioms are as clear as a crystal from the context of the utterance. That is why “call it a day”, “bite the hands that feed you” and “turned a blind eye to it” could be easily corresponded to the Vietnamese language “kết thúc một ngày làm việc”, “phản phúc, vô ơn” và “nhắm mắt làm ngo”. No students made mistakes in translation for these ideas. On the contrary, “call a spade a spade, item 4”, & “carrying a torch for James, item 8” were met with confusion from student participants. The percentage of

unaccepted idioms were rather high, from 66.7% & 22.2% respectively.

To conclude, it is obviously clear from the figures in table 4 that the instruction from the origins of idioms by the researchers far better facilitated learners in the process of translating the 10 sentences into the corresponding Vietnamese language. As compared to the result of the pre-test, this post-test result was much better, which actually validates the study outcome.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This present study attempted to seek answers to the three research questions set out at the beginning of the study. Based on the aforementioned study results, some conclusions were withdrawn.

The first conclusion related to students' opinions on idioms, idiom learning, & learning about the origins of English idioms.

Firstly, before the outset of the study, almost all students expressed their doubtfulness about the usefulness of idiom implementation in SLA. This was evidently shown in the negative responses of several informants in the survey. However, after a two-month detailed instruction of origins of idioms by the researchers, they had their perceptions drastically overturned. Most of them realized that idiom learning was extremely useful not only in language curriculum, but also in their daily communication and professional lives and international language exams. By mastering the English idioms thoroughly, they firmly believed that their communicative skills and professional skills in the face-to-face

cross culture communication would be strongly reinforced. Therefore, they no longer thought about idiom significance in terms of theory of linguistics or in the minds of the native speakers of English only. This was the most positive sign of the study result, helping students realize the significance of idiom and idiom learning in the academic, personal, and professional context in order that they will not be passive in learning idioms any more.

Secondly, almost all students expressed their delightedness in exploring a new approach of learning idioms, the so-called "learning idioms through their origins." Most students opined that they rarely heard about this method before. In this study, they not only remember the learnt idioms longer but also understood the context and time these idioms came into being; through which they better loved these idioms, helping them strengthen story's reading comprehension skills, enhancing their vocabulary, grammar, listening skills through BBC and VOA stories. Thanks to this, they realized that learning idioms was not boring, but instead very lively and put it all together, the English hours became more interesting and more attractive than ever before.

As regards for idiomatic competence of student participants, it was found that students' translation abilities were better; they had their idiom-included sentences better translated whilst very few of their translated sentences were labelled as "unaccepted translated idioms".

On the basis of conclusions, we-the researchers- suggest incorporating teaching idioms through explanations of

their origins in the stories which were written in a simple and easy-to-remember language into the language curriculum at universities, initially at Dong Nai University. If such suggestion was cordially welcomed, both students

and teachers will benefit remarkably from this approach, in turn contributing to enhancing students' knowledge and 'passions towards idioms, whose benefits are undeniable.

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ĐIỀU TRA TÍNH HIỆU QUẢ HƯỚNG DẪN DẠY THÀNH NGỮ NGUỒN GỐC CỦA CÁC THÀNH NGỮ NHẪM CẢI THIỆN NĂNG LỰC DỊCH THÀNH NGỮ CHO SINH VIÊN NĂM CUỐI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC ĐỒNG NAI

TÓM TẮT

Cho đến nay, tính hiệu quả về hướng dẫn dạy thành ngữ trong quá trình thụ đắc ngôn ngữ thứ hai đã được xác định trong tổng quan lý thuyết. Tuy nhiên, các nghiên cứu chỉ chủ yếu tập trung vào các chiến lược dạy và học thành ngữ; thái độ của giáo viên và sinh viên đối với hướng dẫn thành ngữ. Nghiên cứu này nhằm điền vào chỗ còn khuyết trong lĩnh vực nghiên cứu thành ngữ bằng cách đi sâu vào điều tra việc biết nguồn gốc của các thành ngữ có làm cho sinh viên học thành ngữ hiệu quả hơn không, thái độ của sinh viên về việc học thành ngữ bằng phương pháp này có cải thiện hay không nhờ các câu chuyện được lồng ghép trong nó. Đây là một hướng nghiên cứu mới, dựa theo những gì nhóm nghiên cứu được biết thì cho đến nay vẫn chưa có một nghiên cứu nào về điều tra nguồn gốc thành ngữ có thể cải thiện năng lực dịch thành ngữ cho người học. Nhóm tác giả mời 45 sinh viên năm cuối của Trường Đại học Đồng Nai tham gia trên cơ sở tự nguyện qua ba giai đoạn, trước, trong và sau huấn luyện. Nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng hầu hết sinh viên bày tỏ thái độ tích cực đối với việc học thành ngữ thông qua giải thích chi tiết về nguồn gốc của nó. Tương tự như vậy, năng lực dịch thành ngữ của sinh viên cũng cải thiện qua khóa học. Trên cơ sở kết quả nghiên cứu, nhóm tác giả đưa ra thêm một số gợi ý cho các nghiên cứu tương lai về việc dạy thành ngữ qua việc giải thích nguồn gốc của nó.

Từ khóa: Thành ngữ, thành ngữ và văn hóa, chiến lược dịch thành ngữ, năng lực dịch thành ngữ, nhận thức của sinh viên về thành ngữ và nguồn gốc của thành ngữ

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