

PHILOLOGIST-METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LEXICAL COMPETENCE BY ACTIVATING PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN STUDENT SPEECH

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Lexical competence is a fundamental component of linguistic proficiency, particularly in the context of second or foreign language acquisition. Among the many ways to enhance this competence, the integration of phraseological units—such as idioms, collocations, and set expressions—proves both linguistically enriching and culturally informative. Philologists and educators are increasingly focusing on how these units can be methodologically employed to develop students' expressive abilities and comprehension in academic and everyday speech.

This article aims to outline a methodological framework for developing lexical competence through the targeted use of phraseological units, with particular emphasis on their activation in spoken language tasks among students.

The philologist-methodological development of lexical competence through the activation of phraseological units in student speech is a multifaceted process that integrates linguistic theory, pedagogical strategies, and practical applications. This approach aims to enhance students' ability to understand, produce, and appropriately use fixed expressions, idioms, collocations, and other phraseological units, which are essential for achieving fluency, cultural literacy, and communicative competence in a target language. Below, I provide a detailed exploration of this process, covering theoretical foundations, methodological frameworks, practical activities, assessment techniques, and potential challenges with solutions.

Theoretical Foundations

Phraseological units are multi-word expressions with fixed or semi-fixed structures that carry specific meanings, often non-compositional (i.e., the meaning cannot be deduced from individual words, e.g., "kick the bucket" means "to die"). These units are central to lexical competence because they:

- Enhance Expressiveness: Phraseological units add stylistic richness and vividness to speech, enabling students to sound more natural and idiomatic.
- Reflect Cultural Nuances: Many idioms and expressions are culture-specific, embedding historical, social, or cultural references (e.g., "raining cats and dogs" in English reflects a unique imagery).
- Support Pragmatic Competence: They help students navigate context-appropriate language use, such as formal vs. informal registers or emotional tone.
- Facilitate Fluency: Mastery of ready-made phrases reduces cognitive load during speech production, allowing for smoother communication.

From a philological perspective, phraseology is a subfield that studies these units' structure, semantics, and usage. Methodologically, the goal is to move students from passive recognition (understanding phrases in context) to active production (using them accurately in speech and writing). This requires a systematic approach grounded in cognitive, sociocultural, and constructivist learning theories.

Methodological Framework

The development of lexical competence through phraseological units involves a structured pedagogical process with the following stages:

Selection of Phraseological Units

- Criteria for Selection:
 - Frequency: Choose high-frequency units relevant to everyday communication, using corpus linguistics tools (e.g., COCA for English, Sketch Engine for other languages) to identify common expressions.
 - Cultural Relevance: Select phrases that reflect cultural values or are frequently encountered in literature, media, or social interactions.

- Thematic Grouping: Organize units by themes (e.g., emotions, actions, social interactions) to facilitate learning and application.

- Level Appropriateness: Match phrases to students' proficiency levels (e.g., simpler collocations like "make a decision" for beginners, complex idioms like "burn the midnight oil" for advanced learners).

- Example: For English learners, a beginner-level thematic group on "emotions" might include "over the moon" (very happy), "down in the dumps" (sad), and "on cloud nine" (ecstatic).

Contextual Introduction

- Authentic Materials: Introduce phraseological units through real-world texts such as short stories, news articles, movie dialogues, or social media posts. This exposes students to natural usage and contextual cues.

- Example Activity: Provide a short story containing idioms like "spill the beans" and "let the cat out of the bag." Ask students to underline unfamiliar expressions and infer meanings from context before discussing as a group.

- Teacher Modeling: Teachers should demonstrate correct usage in sentences, emphasizing intonation, register, and situational appropriateness (e.g., "spill the beans" is informal and conversational).

Pedagogical Tools and Resources

To support the activation of phraseological units, teachers can leverage various tools:

- Visual Aids:

- Create mind maps linking idioms to thematic categories or visual imagery (e.g., a cloud image for "on cloud nine").

- Use infographics to show frequency, formality, or cultural notes.

- Digital Platforms:

- Use language apps like Quizlet for flashcard-based idiom practice or Kahoot for interactive quizzes.

- Encourage exploration of online dictionaries (e.g., Cambridge, Oxford) for phraseological entries.

- Corpora and Databases:

- Introduce students to tools like the British National Corpus or GloWbE to explore real-world usage of phrases.

- Multimedia:

- Use video clips or podcasts where idioms appear naturally, pausing to discuss meaning and context.

- Example: Show a sitcom scene with phrases like "hit the nail on the head" and analyze their role in humor or dialogue.

Assessment of Lexical Competence

To evaluate students' ability to use phraseological units, assessment should focus on accuracy, appropriateness, and fluency. Methods include:

- Oral Assessments:

- Conduct presentations or interviews where students incorporate target phrases.

- Example: Ask students to describe a memorable event using at least three idioms from a given list.

- Written Tasks:

- Evaluate essays, letters, or creative writing for correct and context-appropriate use of phraseological units.

- Example: Write a persuasive essay on teamwork, using "pull together," "on the same page," and "drop the ball."

- Peer and Self-Assessment:

- Have students review each other's dialogues or stories, using a rubric to check for idiom accuracy and variety.

- Rubrics:

- Criteria might include:
 - Accuracy: Correct meaning and structure.
 - Contextual Fit: Appropriate use for the situation or register.
 - Variety: Range of phrases used.
 - Fluency: Seamless integration into speech or writing.

This study confirms that phraseological units, when taught methodically, can significantly contribute to the development of lexical competence in students. Their activation in speech practices enhances communicative depth and cultural sensitivity.

Curriculum Integration: Include phraseology modules in language education syllabi.

Teacher Training: Equip educators with philological strategies for teaching phraseological units.

Resource Development: Create phraseology-based textbooks and multimedia resources.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Encourage contrastive analysis of phraseological units across languages.

Assessment Tools: Design evaluation instruments that measure idiomatic usage and phraseological awareness.

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