

IDIOMS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS: THE CASE OF MARKET LEADER AND BUSINESS RESULT

Lindita SKENDERI¹, Suzana EJUPI²

¹ *Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philology, University of Tetova*

² *Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philology, University of Tetova*

^{*} *Corresponding author e-mail: lindita.skenderi@unite.edu.mk*

Abstract

Idioms represent an important part of effective communication between native speakers, but they are quite necessary among non-native speakers too. Their crucial role in making communication flow easily makes them attractive and important to be studied. Their use is not very common among non-native speakers, because they are usually taught at higher levels, such as C1 and above. This paper is a systematic analysis of idioms representation in Business English textbooks used in higher education, both Market Leader and Business Result. The focus is in identifying their presence in these textbooks, followed by an analysis and categorization of idiomatic expressions across various units and topics.

A thorough approach of their complex nature and connection to real-world business scenarios is taken in order to see the efficacy of their inclusion in the textbooks. The paper contains extractions, which show how these expressions are introduced to students in these two textbooks, and if they are equivalent to the requirements in the Common European Framework of Languages. This research's objective is to help teachers, educators and curriculum see how idiomatic language is treated in Business English textbooks. Also, the study adds a contribution of raising awareness of the role idioms play in language acquisition and the implications for effective business communication.

Keywords: idioms, business English, business idioms, market leader, business result

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) represents an invaluable bridge between different professional sectors and the amazing world of languages. It includes a range of disciplines and fields, adapting the English language to the unique needs and demands of professionals across diverse industries. The foundation of ESP lies in its ability to tailor language instruction to the specific requirements of learners, ensuring that they acquire the linguistic and communicative skills necessary for success in their respective domains.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) offers a structured approach to assessing language proficiency. It breaks down language competency into six levels, from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient), providing a clear roadmap for learners to track their progress. ESP aligns itself with the CEFR framework, allowing learners to pinpoint their current language level and set realistic goals for improvement, all within the context of their specific professional needs.

Furthermore, sociolinguistic competences play a vital role within the landscape of ESP. These competences go beyond mere language proficiency and extend to the understanding of the social and cultural nuances that underpin effective communication in a professional context. Idiomatic expressions, in particular, emerge as powerful tools in navigating these sociolinguistic intricacies. They not only enhance communication but also help learners connect with their colleagues and clients on a deeper, cultural level. According to Zarei (2012), idioms were not neglected before the 20th century but they gained special attention in the pedagogical aspect in recent years.

Furthermore, Ejupi (2016) claims that idioms are an attractive subject of research among researchers because awareness is growing and it is clearly being noticed that idioms are an integral part of language during everyday speech. Therefore, learning idioms should be considered as an integral part of learning the vocabulary of a language.

Literature review

The English language is undoubtedly one of the main languages in the world, connecting countries, people, businesses and all that requires a tool that makes communication possible. English became a very important language somewhere after World War II. As technology, economy and science began to rise, it was inevitable to have a language that would make things easier. Since the United States were the most notable power regarding the economical aspect, the role of the “main language” fell upon English. Prior to that period, the importance of speaking any foreign language, including English was a sign of well- rounded education but, at that time English began to be considered as “the key to the international currencies of technology and commerce.”(Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p.6)

Business English is integral to the broader framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), sharing key characteristics such as needs analysis, syllabus design, course development, and material selection common to all ESP fields. Business English, around 2007, was named as Business English as a Lingua Franca, appearing as a relatively new feature, not often used and met in literature. English as lingua franca, just as Seidlhofer (2011) describes it, is the medium that is used when it’s the only option to communicate; while Cogo & House (2018) sees ELF as an open-source phenomenon.

According to the Common European framework, idioms are part of sociolinguistic appropriateness which falls under the sociolinguistic competences. It stands there as “socialising, following basic routines at lower levels, without requiring the interlocutor(s) to behave differently (from B2 up) and employing idiomatic expressions, allusive usage and humour (at C levels). (CEFR, p.129). In c1, a speaker should be able to “recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms”, whereas in c2, the speaker should Have “a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative levels of meaning.”(CEFR, 129).

Idioms

The use of idioms in communication and interaction between native and non-native English speakers is not uncommon, but still doesn’t happen often. Native English speakers easily incorporate idioms into their language, often unaware that these expressions may be quite often be misunderstood by non-native speakers. The primary challenge associated with idioms lies in their proper use within figurative language, particularly when individuals attempt to translate them from their native language (Monica-Ariana & Anamaria-Mirabela, 2015). Monica-Ariana and Anamaria-Mirabela (2015) underscore the importance of integrating idioms into the teaching of Business English.

Their research aimed to determine the familiarity of Business students in Romania with idioms and assess their perceptions of the relevance of idioms in business communication. According to the authors, the findings were rather disheartening: a significant majority, 93.7%, were unfamiliar with idioms; 83.3% did not view idioms as pertinent in their business communication; and all respondents reported that even translation did not aid in comprehending the meaning of idioms. This study highlights a deficiency in exposing college-level students to idioms and underscores the need for improvement in this aspect of language education. (as cited in Skenderi, 2022). Market Leader, a product of Pearson, follows strictly this CEFR suggestion and chooses to introduce idioms exactly at Upper intermediate, in quite a few exercises, both in the student's book and practice files.

Textbook analysis

Textbooks play a key role in language teaching and learning (Ayu & Indrawati, 2018), offer a consistent support to teachers and students (Zohrabi, Sabouri and Kheradmand, 2014) and this makes them the heart of educational programs, and as such they offer students "a rich array of new and potentially interesting facts, and open the door to a world of fantastic experience" (Chambliss & Calfee, 1998, p.7). *Market Leader*, had an explicit way of introducing idioms to the learners. The term *idiom* is used very often, which introduces students with this term directly. Studies show that *Market Leader* and *Business Result* have more linguistic tasks, however, idioms were mostly introduced through cognitive type of tasks. The following examples are extracted from *Market Leader* textbook:

Complete the idioms below with the words from the box.

bush grapevine loop point purposes stick mouth nutshell picture tail wall wavelength

- a) to put it in a
- b) to get straight to the
- c) to hear it on the
- g) can't make head nor of it
- h) to talk at cross-.....
- i) to beat about the
- d) to put someone in the
- e) to get the wrong end of the
- f) to be on the same
- k) to be like talking to a brick
- l) to keep someone in the
- j) to get it straight from the horse's

(p. 9)

Another example of practicing idioms is this one:

- a) They sent us a very long reply with all the details. **But to put it in a nutshell**, that's it, we've won the contract!
- b) I wish my boss would stop beating about the and tell me clearly whether or not I stand a chance of being promoted soon.
- c) She expected profit figures and I was going on about sales figures. Once again, we were just talking at cross.
- d) Not official yet, but it seems we're going to relocate. Just heard it on the.
- e) If you think you can give a good presentation just because you know your subject inside out, well, I'm afraid you've got the wrong of the.
- f) This is a very badly written report. I just can't make or of it.
- g) I've tried to tell my boss, but it's like talking to a. No reaction!

(Market leader, first unit, language work)

Or as in the two following tasks which require matching.

Match the idiomatic expressions (1-7) to their meanings (a-g).

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 pass the buck | a) forget to do something |
| 2 get to the bottom of the problem | b) paid far too much for something |
| 3 the last straw | c) avoid responsibility |
| 4 slip my mind | d) find the real cause of something |
| 5 ripped off | e) the last in a series of irritating events |
| 6 talk at cross purposes | f) try harder in order to achieve something |
| 7 go the extra mile | g) misunderstand what someone else is referring |

to

Match the use of kill in 1-6 to definitions a-f.

1. *I'm going to have to sit down, my feet are killing me.*
 2. *I heard he made a killing from selling doughnuts at the World Cup!*
 3. *...but don't tell Sandra-she'd kill me if she knew what I'd done!*
 4. *When I heard Jose wanted to become a singer, I killed myself laughing-I mean, he's tone deaf!*
 5. *It won't kill you to admit we targeted the wrong market with that advert.*
 6. *John asked Abi about her new job, but she hadn't been asked to second interview-it was a real conversation killer!*
- a) *To make a lot of money from something*
 - b) *To laugh a lot about something*
 - c) *To be a lot of effort to do something*
 - d) *To be very angry about something*
 - e) *To hurt*
 - f) *To stop something abruptly*

Most of the exercises regarding idioms are the ones with matching two different parts. Matching exercises are often used because of their versatile and very effective nature of tools used for interactive learning. They are seen as suitable for a wide range of subjects by teachers, and achieve to stimulate memory retention by requiring individuals to associate and recall information, aiding better comprehension. These exercises are adaptable to different learning levels, encouraging active engagement and hands-on task sometimes too. Their adaptability allows for both formative and summative assessments, providing instructors with valuable insights. Furthermore, multiple choice questions are known to offer help in critical thinking development and promotion by requiring learners to analyze relationships between items.

However, the same does not happen with Business Result. This textbook, does not contain idioms as much as Market Leader. The first thing that must be noted is that the term idiom is not used at all. Students don't have the opportunity to dwell into the world of idioms if the teacher doesn't choose to deal with them specifically. One of ESP's specific aims is to develop learner's pragmatic competence (Alemi et al., 2021). Unfortunately, studies show that Business result pays more attention to linguistic tasks, rather than cognitive ones, which would serve more in enhancing students' development of communicative competences in general. Business Result has chosen an implicit way of introducing idioms, which requires a lot of work and effort by the teacher. The following are examples extracted from Business Result, where some of the expressions are idioms.

Glossary

come into your own to be useful and successful in a certain situation

figurehead of political brokering someone who represents the company when negotiating

grasp the nettle force yourself to do something difficult

the cream always rises to the top the best people will naturally succeed

thrown into the deep end given a challenge with little or no preparation or assistance

thrust into the role forced to take on a job you didn't ask for or want

(p. 101)

For example, from this glossary students must be explicitly informed that these are idioms, because the textbook does not offer something like that. It is expected for them to learn them by heart, instead of introducing them through different types of tasks. Another example of idioms in Business result is through **Key word** section:

Match the phrases in italics with *kill* to definitions a-f.

- 1 *I'm going to have to sit down, my feet are killing me.*
 - 2 *I heard he made a killing from selling doughnuts at the World Cup!*
 - 3 *... but don't tell Sandra - she'd kill me if she knew what I'd done!*
 - 4 *When I heard Jose wanted to become a singer I killed myself laughing- I mean, he's tone deaf!*
 - 5 *It won't kill you to admit we targeted the wrong market with that advert.*
 - 6 *John asked Abi about her new job, but she didn't get asked to second interview - it was a real conversation killer!*
 - a *to make a lot of money from something*
 - b *to laugh a lot about something*
 - c *to be a lot of effort to do something*
 - d *to be very angry about something*
 - e *to hurt*
 - f *to stop something abruptly*
- (p. 99)

As it can be seen above, this example does not mention the word “idiom” but it is a cognitive task about teaching them. So, Business Result, has chosen to introduce idioms way less than Market Leader, in indirect ways, which leave the floor to the teacher, who can choose to introduce them just as simple expressions and develop them further and add more material about idioms. Studies show that students of business and economic programs are not familiar enough with idioms (Skenderi, 2022), which represents an opportunity to introduce new ways of incorporating idioms in the classroom, including here new vocabulary, which will surely serve learners in future interactions with international companies (Leonte, A., & Istratie-Macarov, 2016).

Conclusion

This analysis of two textbooks of Business English, *Business Result* and *Market Leader*, shows that idioms are not introduced as they should be, according to CEFR. To be more precise, *Market Leader* appears to have way more content of idioms, through a more explicit incorporation, and in different forms of tasks, but does not include them in every level above intermediate. Whereas, *Business Result*'s choice of more implicit methods of introducing idioms, through sections of glossaries and key word, raises concerns about the effectiveness of developing communicative competences, specifically pragmatic and sociolinguistic skills.

The outcomes of this research show a need for a shift in textbooks' designs, where the authors should focus more on the objectives of CEFR. The model which should be followed is the direct one, as used by *Market Leader*, which would help in creating more effective learning materials. The aim is to integrate tasks that specifically target the development of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences, what is also the element that differs English for Specific Purposes (ESP) from other branches of English. In other words, to sum up, the qualitative findings of this study adhere for a content revision that leaves more space for idioms.

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