



**UNIVERSITAT
JAUME·I**

**A STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
METAPHOR AND CULTURAL
AWARENESS-RAISING TO THE
LEARNING OF IDIOMS IN THE EFL
CLASSROOM**

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ABSTRACT

Idioms are one of the most fascinating and complex aspects of the language, since they contain a great deal of the TL culture and native speakers' way of perceiving reality. However their figurative nature makes that most EFL students have problems when learning and acquiring them. This situation together with the traditional method employed to teach idioms, which is based on the structural view of language, and that employs drills and repetitive activities in order to memorise idioms, makes that IEs represent a nightmare for students.

Taking into account these problems, the objective of this study is to adopt the cognitive view of language to design a methodology to teach idioms in the EFL classroom. The aim of this methodology is to raise students awareness of the metaphors and cultural implications that are behind most idioms in English, in order to facilitate their learning. Moreover, this study also considers students' learning differences, such as level of motivation and learning styles. For that reason, the methodology presented is carried out in two different classrooms in which different levels of motivation and different learning styles are observed.

The results of the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology (experimental groups) are compared to those obtained following a traditional methodology (control groups) in order to test the effectivity of the lesson plan presented. Results suggest that the learning differences observed between the two groups are relevant, since they affect the degree of efficiency of the methodology, concluding that the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology is more effective in a group of students with low level of motivation and with preference for a visual learning style.

Keywords: idioms, idiomatic expressions, structuralism, cognitivism, metaphor and cultural awareness-raising.

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List of abbreviations:

EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

ESL (English as a Second Language)

FL (Foreign Language)

IE (Idiomatic Expression)

TL (Target Language)

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of English as a lingua franca in the current world has contributed to increase the importance of studying English as a foreign language (EFL). As it is not the same learning EFL than learning English as a second language (ESL), it is necessary to begin by distinguishing between these two concepts. According to Stern (1983), the term EFL is used to refer to the study of English by non-native speakers outside the territory or national boundaries where it is commonly spoken, i.e. English is not the language of communication of society. For instance, studying English in Spain. Whereas ESL makes reference to the study of English by non-native speakers within the territory or national boundaries where it is commonly spoken, and it is the language of communication of society. For example, Spanish people who live in the United Kingdom and study English.

From an EFL perspective, there are pragmatic and cultural aspects of the language that are usually left aside in the foreign language (FL) curriculum and that are difficult to be acquired by students without explicit instruction, as they do not have natural contact with the language. In the case of vocabulary, we find idioms as frequently used expressions that contain cultural aspects and ways of perceiving reality of the target language (TL) community and that are very rich in terms of meaning. Nevertheless, due to the figurative nature of idioms, students usually have problems to understand and acquire them. This is one of the reasons that make that idioms are normally introduced at intermediate or advanced levels.

Another aspect to be considered is the approach and method employed to teach idioms in the EFL classroom. Our study makes a review of the two linguistic approaches that influence the way of teaching idioms, which are the structural and the cognitive approach, and adopts this last approach to design a methodology based on metaphor and cultural awareness-raising that facilitates

students' acquisition of idioms. In order to be sure that the results are due to the efficiency of the methodology presented, the traditional structural methodology is applied to a group of students (control group) and the results are compared.

However, it is widely known that all students do not learn in the same way, i.e. there are students who learn better from oral explanations, and others from visual and graphic materials. In the same way as other students need to see the information in written form, while others are more active and need to interact physically with it. These differences in learning styles have to be considered when designing the methodology to teach idioms, as they may affect its effectivity. Taking into account this fact, this study is developed in two groups that differ in the students' preferential learning style.

Another aspect considered in this study is students' differences in terms of motivation and attitude towards the FL. Throughout four weeks of observation, some relevant differences regarding these aspects were found between the two groups, and they were also taken into consideration when analysing the results.

This study starts by making a theoretical review of the nature of idioms, the two linguistic approaches that have influenced the way of teaching and learning idiomatic expressions (IE), and the students' individual learning differences that may affect the effectivity of any methodology to teach idioms. Then, a section stating the importance of idioms instruction in the EFL classroom and the difficulties that exist is introduced. Next, there is a brief review of some relevant studies on idioms teaching and learning. After that, the study is presented, explaining the characteristics of the participants, the materials employed, and the methodology followed. The next section focuses on the analysis and discussion of the results obtained. Finally, the study finishes with a conclusion in which all the process is summarised and some final reflections are considered.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The nature of idioms

When we talk about idioms we refer to an heterogeneous group of multi-word expressions whose structure is fixed or semi-fixed (Grant & Bauer, 2004). Inside this group we can find metaphors, metonymies, sayings, phrasal verbs, grammatical idioms, among others (Kovecses & Szabó, 1996). That heterogeneous nature makes it very difficult to define the boundaries of the group and to establish clear criteria that define the concept of idiom, as all the attempts to determine clear defining characteristics are to some extent misleading. Taking into account these limitations, Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994) suggest that prototypical idioms like *kick the bucket*, or *eat your heart out* have a series of properties, which are conventionality, inflexibility, figuration, proverbiality, informality, and affect.

- I) **Conventionality:** idioms are conventionalised in the sense that we cannot predict their meaning from the meaning of its constituents, i.e. the meaning of an idiom cannot be guessed by analysing the individual meaning of each of the words that form that expression.
- II) **Inflexibility:** the syntactic constructions in which idioms appear are limited. In contrast to free expressions, idioms cannot adopt an unlimited number of syntactic frames. For instance, the idiom *kick the bucket*, cannot appear in passive form (**the bucket is kicked*).
- III) **Figuration:** most idioms involve some kind of figuration, such as metaphors (*spill the beans*) or metonymies (*give me a hand*).
- IV) **Proverbiality:** idioms are usually employed to refer to recurrent situations that have some kind of social interest (becoming restless or telling a secret) in relation to concrete things or situations that have certain resemblance (climbing walls, spilling beans).

V) Informality: idioms are typically used in informal registers, as they are associated with popular speech and oral culture.

VI) Affect: the use of idioms implies some kind of affective stance or evaluation of the situations they make reference to. Idioms are not usually employed to refer to neutral situations, such as reading a book or buying something (although there might be a culture where these situations are subject of an IE).

As it is previously stated, these features characterise a prototypical idiom, but they do not apply to all idioms. For example, we can find idioms that do not have register restrictions and can be found either in formal and in informal registers like *render unto Caesar*. Others, such as *by the dint* do not have figurative meaning, as this item does not occur in other contexts. The only property that is assumed to be common to all idioms is conventionality. Thus, this lack of homogeneity makes that idioms are considered a fascinating and very complex group of semi-fixed expressions that represent one of the most difficult aspects to learn of a FL.

2.2 A structural approach to teaching idioms

In the field of language teaching, the different conceptions of language that have been adopted according to the linguistic paradigm that prevailed have affected the way of teaching and learning vocabulary. In the case of idioms, their learning has been specially conditioned by a traditional linguistic approach, which is structuralism. This section focuses on the main tenets of this approach and explains how that conception of language has influenced the teaching and learning of idioms.

2.2.1 Structural Linguistics

Structuralism is a linguistic paradigm that emerged in the early twentieth century. This approach adopts a formal linguistic perspective that considers language as a set of elements (phonemes,

morphemes, phrases, and sentences) which are combined following a series of rules. In this conception of language, semantics is seen as a secondary aspect, since meaning cannot be analysed empirically through collection, observation and analysis of data, as formal aspects of the language can be. Therefore, the analysis of meaning is out of the structuralism's scope, which is mainly focused on the analysis of form (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 1998).

Within the structural perspective, the aim of language learning is “the mastery of elements of this system, which are generally defined in terms of phonological units (e.g., phonemes), grammatical units (e.g., clauses, phrases, sentences), grammatical operations (e.g., adding, shifting, joining, or transforming elements) and lexical items (e.g., function words and structure words)”. (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 20-21). That is, language learning is focused on form, emphasising the study of grammatical norms and vocabulary items.

On the basis of structuralism, several language teaching methods appeared, such as the Audiolingual Method, Total Physical Response, and the Silent Way. The Audiolingual Method was one of the most popular in the United States during World War II. The type of activities developed within this method were mainly drills, i.e. repetitions of linguistic structures either written or oral in order to acquire them.

Some of the principles of structuralism and the Audiolingual Method are applied nowadays in many EFL classrooms, since some EFL teachers still focus on the acquisition of grammatical rules and vocabulary, and the methodology employed is based on drills, and repetitive activities that do not foster students understanding and real use of the language.

2.2.2 Traditional view of idioms

This structural perspective to language has influenced not only the perception of idioms, but also the way in which they are taught. According to Kovecses and Szabó (1996: 328) in this traditional

linguistic approach idioms are conceived as “a matter of language alone [...] which are independent of any conceptual system”. Idioms are seen as other words, i.e. elements that have a meaning and some syntactic characteristics, with the exception that idioms' meaning is different from the meanings of the words that constitute them. This conception of idioms can be represented in the following way:

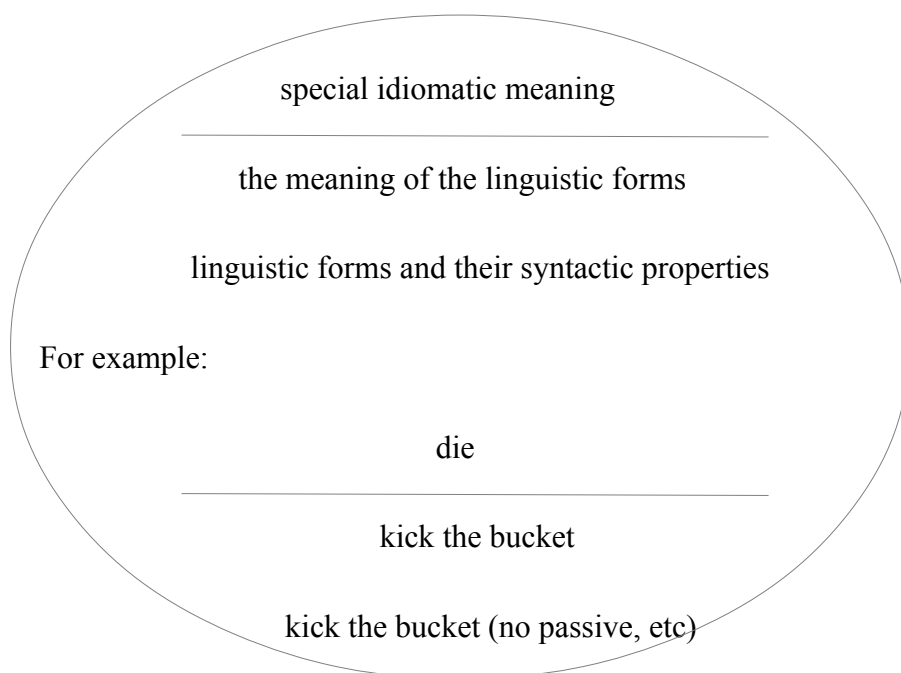


Figure 1: Core conception of idioms in the traditional view (Kovecses & Szabó 1996: 328).

Another characteristic of idioms following the structural approach is that they are independent of each other. As other lexical units, idioms are thought to have only linguistic meaning relations, as synonymy, antonymy, homonymy and polysemy, but not relations within our conceptual system. This means that the traditional approach considers that the meaning of each idiom is independent and arbitrarily, and therefore it does not arise from our conceptual system.

Following this view, idioms are as other lexical units of the language and their meaning seems

to be arbitrary and unmotivated. According to Boers, Eyckmans and Stengers (2007), these assumptions have influenced the way in which idioms were taught in second and foreign language contexts, since the lack of clues in the expressions led learners to use the context to interpret the meaning of idioms, and the only possible way of acquiring their meaning was thought to be rote-learning.

Therefore, the traditional perspective to teaching and learning idioms considers idioms as ordinary vocabulary items that have to be memorised by means of drills, since its meaning is unmotivated and independent from other IEs.

2.3 A cognitive approach to teaching idioms

After analysing idioms from a structural point of view, this section provides an explanation of cognitivism and reports its claims regarding not only the nature of language, but also about idioms and idioms teaching and learning.

2.3.1 Cognitive Linguistics

The Cognitive Linguistics paradigm emerged during the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the early eighties, some scholars like Lakoff and Johnson (1980) developed the tenets of a new theory about the relationship between language and thought. This theory claims that language is dependent on extralinguistic factors that arise from our social, perceptual, and bodily experience. That is, language is a human ability that is connected to other cognitive abilities, and reflects speakers' conceptualisations of reality.

An important aspect of Cognitive Linguistics is the conception of language as metaphorical in nature. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out, metaphors are no longer considered exclusive of poetic and rhetorical language, but devices of ordinary language. Moreover, they go further and

claim that metaphors are not only present in language, but in our conceptualisation of the world:

“metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 4)

Therefore, cognitivism claims that metaphors are a mechanism employed not only in literature, as it was traditionally believed, but in everyday language and in our way of perceiving and conceptualising reality.

In order to understand the nature of metaphors, it is necessary to start by presenting the term “conceptual domain”. Cognitive linguists employ this term to refer to “a body of knowledge within our conceptual system that contains and organises related ideas and experiences” (Evans & Green, 2006:14). In this context, metaphors are understood as the projection of certain elements from a source domain onto a target domain. For example, if we consider the metaphor proposed by Lakoff (1992) “love is a journey”, we can understand expressions such as “we have been a long way together”. This example is visually explained in the following figure:

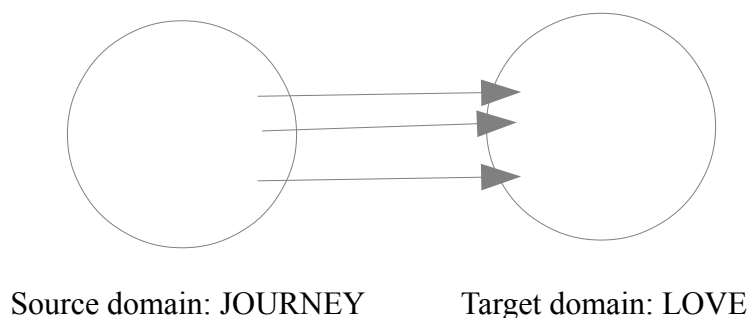


Figure 2: Example of metaphorical mapping.

This metaphor is based on the mapping of some elements from one domain onto the other. Some examples of mappings are the following: Lovers are the travellers, love is the path, and difficulties in the relationship are the difficulties in the journey.

This example shows how Cognitive Linguistics conceives language, as a human ability that is

connected to other cognitive abilities and that represents how we conceptualise the world and the reality that surrounds us by means of metaphors and other idealised cognitive models.

2.3.2 Cognitive approach to idioms

Considering the basic tenets of Cognitive Linguistics, such as that language is not isolated from other cognitive abilities, it represents our conceptualisation of the world, and it is metaphorical in nature, we can explain how idioms are understood under this linguistic approach.

As Lakoff (1992) points out, most of the metaphors that we use in our everyday language are idioms. That means that most idioms are based on metaphors and they are, therefore, much more than mere linguistic expressions. Following Kovecses and Szabó (1996), idioms are a representation of our conceptual system:

“An idiom is not just an expression that has meaning that is somehow special in relation to the meanings of its constituent parts, but it arises from our more general knowledge of the world (embodied in our conceptual system) In other words, idioms (or, at least, the majority of them) are conceptual, and not linguistic, in nature.” (Kovecses & Szabó, 1996: 330)

This relationship between idioms and our conceptual system, presents the possibility that there is a certain kind of motivation in the meaning of idioms i.e. we can use our knowledge of the world and the knowledge we have about how metaphors work in order to make sense of their meaning (Lakoff, 1992). This claim goes against the traditional approach that considered the meaning of idioms arbitrary, and widens the scope of this field.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to this view, since there are some IEs whose meaning is not at all motivated, such as the expression *kick the bucket*. In the same way, there are some idioms that are not metaphorical in nature, but whose meaning resides on cultural and conventionalised knowledge like *get the sack*, whose origin dates from the nineteenth century when tradesmen owned

their own tools and received a sack to take them with them when they were dismissed (Phrases.org webpage, 2014).

In any case, from an EFL teaching and learning perspective, this cognitive view of idioms broadens the range of methodological proposals for teaching them, since teachers can develop methodologies that raise students' awareness of the motivation of idiomatic meaning and, in that way, facilitate their acquisition. In this line, Irujo (1993: 217) suggests:

“Teaching students strategies for dealing with figurative language will help them to take advantage of the semantic transparency of some idioms. If they can figure out the meaning of an idiom by themselves, they will have a link from the idiomatic meaning to the literal words, which will help them learn the idiom.”

Considering these aspects, in this study I adopt this cognitive view to create a methodology that raises students' awareness of the metaphorical and cultural implications that are behind some commonly used idioms, and that therefore helps them to acquire their meaning.

2.4 Individual learning differences

Apart from the methodology and approach adopted, there are other factors that may affect the effectivity of idioms and FL instruction in general. In this sense, it is common to observe that in the same EFL class, there are students who have more difficulties, while other students progress faster. These differences in language learning are related to individual learning characteristics of students. Second language acquisition researchers have tried to identify which personal or individual aspects contribute to achieve greater success in language learning. Some of the most relevant aspects are age, motivation, learning styles, and anxiety level.

For the development of this study, I have focused on students' learning styles and motivation, since these are the most relevant differences observed between the two groups of students that

participated in the study. Besides, another reason to focus on these two aspects is the importance that they have when learning EFL, since the level of students' motivation and their learning styles may affect students' successful learning of the FL.

2.4.1 Learning styles

Learning styles can be defined as students' disposition to adopt specific strategies when they face some activities or problems (Hervás, 2003 in Martín-Bravo & Navarro-Guzmán, 2011). The study of learning styles and their relation to learning success has gained importance in the last decades. This is not surprising, since the analysis of students learning styles can help teachers to adequate their methodology and teaching practice in order to enhance students' learning.

The increased interest of psychologists, teachers and educators in the field has generated multiple models and classifications of learning styles. One of the most relevant is the proposal of Biggs (1976, 1979, 1987), who distinguishes four models of learning styles according to the emphasis given to the different aspects of the learning process and its evaluation, such as the student, the context, the learning process, and the results (Marín, 2002). Other influential model is the one elaborated by Kolb (1981) based on experiential learning that considers four learning styles: converger, diverger, assimilator and accommodator (López-Aguado & Silva-Falchetti, 2009). In the field of language teaching and learning, Oxford (2003) discusses four dimensions of learning styles relevant to language learning, which are sensory preferences (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile), personality types (extroverted vs. introverted; intuitive-random vs. sensing-sequential; thinking vs. feeling; and closure-oriented/judging vs. open/perceiving), degree of generality (global/analytic), and biological differences.

Nevertheless, for the development of the present study, I have adopted the learning style model proposed by Felder and Silverman in 1988 and later reviewed in 2003, since it is a very complete

and clear model that adapts and simplifies some of the styles proposed by the authors mentioned above. This model classifies students according to their preference for one of the two categories of each of the four following dimensions: sensing or intuitive, active or reflective, sequential or global, and visual or verbal (Felder & Spurlin, 2005).

According to these authors, sensing students are those who prefer learning facts, and are good at memorising details. These students are practical and careful, and do not like courses that are not apparently related to the real world. On the other hand, intuitive students prefer abstractions and feel comfortable discovering possibilities and relationships between concepts. Intuitors are usually more innovative and work faster than sensors.

Regarding the second dimension, active learners process information best by doing something active with it like applying it or explaining it to others, while reflective learners get benefit from reflection and prefer thinking about it quietly.

The third dimension considers sequential learners as those who understand and retain information best if it is presented in linear steps, following one after the other in a logical way. However, global learners benefit from absorbing information that is not apparently related while understanding the connections from a more global perspective.

In the last dimension, visual learners are defined as those students who learn best if the information is presented through pictures, diagrams, flow charts, or demonstrations, whereas verbal learners benefit from words, either written or spoken. Traditionally, in all educational levels, information is mainly presented verbally, through written material or oral explanations, and this goes in detriment of visual learners, who would do their best if information was presented more visually.

However, with this classification of learning styles, we do not mean that learners have to have

either one or the other learning style, since they can have no preference for any of them. For instance, a student can show no preference for neither verbal nor visual learning style, and that means that he/she learns as well from verbal as from visual information. Thus, this classification does not pretend to classify students into a specific learning style, but to establish their preferences.

2.4.2 Motivation

Together with students' learning styles, motivation plays also an important role in the process of learning a FL. This is commonly observed in the English classroom, where some students do better than others because, among other reasons, they have a higher degree of motivation.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced two types of favourable motivation: integrative, and instrumental. The first type refers to the degree in which the learner identifies himself or herself with the culture and society in which the TL is typically spoken, i.e. to which extent, learners admire the target culture, have interest in reading its literature, and want to travel to countries where the TL is spoken. Instrumental motivation, however, reflects whether the learner has other goals that are not related to the use of language by native speakers. Some of these goals can be: to pass an exam, to have more opportunities to find a good job, or to obtain a certification or degree, among others.

Usually, English learners with integrative motivation tend to perform better in the English classroom, but this is not a determinant factor, and both types of motivation are important. However, what is commonly assumed is that with neither integrative nor instrumental motivation learners will find many difficulties to learn English in FL contexts (Cook, 1991).

In secondary school language teaching, English teachers usually find that most students have neither integrative, nor instrumental motivation, as they have no particular contact with English native speakers and their culture, and have not started thinking about their professional future yet.

This lack of motivation is a difficult situation with which English teachers have to deal, and which they have to overcome to achieve learners' successful acquisition of the language.

In order to enhance learners' motivation, Vaello (2007) proposes a series of techniques that teachers can apply in secondary school classrooms, such as influencing students' expectations, i.e. inducing success expectations to students who think that they cannot do it; presenting contents in an active and attractive way, for instance by introducing a question or a problem to make students react and feel curiosity; appreciating and encouraging students' effort; promoting participation in class, and proposing varied activities, in order to avoid monotony and boredom.

We all agree that motivation is a very important aspect to learn a FL successfully, but it can go the other way round, i.e. facilitating students' learning and enhancing their successful results is a way of increasing their motivation. As Cook (1991: 75) claims, “motivation also goes in both directions. High motivation is one factor that causes successful learning; successful learning, however, may cause high motivation”.

3. IDIOMS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

As the aim of this study is to design and implement a metaphor awareness-raising methodology to the teaching of idioms in the EFL classroom in order to facilitate their acquisition by students, it would be convenient first to establish the importance of learning idioms, to discuss the appropriate level to introduce them, if there is any, and to point out some difficulties for students.

3.1 The importance of idioms instruction

Sometimes, we find that in the EFL classroom teachers tend to emphasise the study of grammar rules and single vocabulary units, and IEs are left aside. Considering the degree of frequency and

use of idioms, and the way they reflect everyday language, they should be given a more important role in the English classroom. In this sense, Detry (2009) highlights the benefits of teaching and learning idioms, pointing out four aspects that are fostered by the introduction of idioms instruction in the FL curriculum, which are the communicative, cultural, metaphorical-cognitive and psycho-affective aspects.

Regarding the communicative aspect, it is well-known that the knowledge of lexicon plays a key role for the students' communicative competence development. In other words, increasing students' knowledge of the target language vocabulary means enhancing their understanding and use of the language. Besides, if we consider that language is not only made up of isolated words, but also of multi-word expressions, such as idioms, and as Pinilla-Gomez (1998) claims those are one of the richest and most creative aspects of a language, we can conclude that leading students to the study and acquisition of idioms means fostering their communicative competence in the TL.

The second aspect is the cultural one. This aspect is of great relevance, since learning a FL implies getting familiar with the customs and the ways of perceiving the reality of the society that speaks that language. As Detry (2009) indicates, IEs are one of the most culture stuck linguistic elements, as many expressions have their origin in a popular ground that has been formed throughout the history of a speaking community. By means of figuration, these IEs may reflect idiosyncratic aspects of a community related to their world view or their beliefs. Therefore, due to their cultural load, idioms are a necessary aspect to be introduced in the FL learning programmes, and they contribute to develop students' intercultural competence.

The next aspect that is promoted with idioms instruction is the metaphorical-cognitive aspect. Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980) our conceptual system is organised up to a great extent by metaphorical mechanisms. That functioning is reflected on the vocabulary and expressions we use, since our everyday language is full of metaphors and metonymies. For that reason, presenting

students with the most commonly used metaphors in the TL brings about positive consequences for students' acquisition of the language, such as the activation of their metaphorical knowledge and their abilities to make parallelisms between their mother tongue and the TL, and the development of cognitive strategies that allow them to overcome the comprehension and memorisation difficulties typical of the figurative language.

Concerning the last aspect (psycho-affective), it is assumed that the affective aspect plays an important role in the process of learning a FL. In this sense, idioms instruction implies the improvement of the learner's understanding and use of common and conventionally accepted expressions in the TL, and therefore, the increase of their confidence and integration in the TL culture. Moreover, due to its communicative usefulness, IEs awaken students' curiosity and increase their motivation, as the study carried out by Liontas (2002) with 60 FL learners in the United States suggests, in which most of the interviewed students were conscious of the importance of idioms and were willing to learn them.

3.2 Age restrictions

In the previous section we have seen the benefits that idioms instruction brings about in the EFL classroom. Up to this point, it is necessary to make a reflection upon the appropriate learning stages to introduce this instruction.

Analysing the textbooks used in the different stages of Secondary Education in Spain, we can observe that idioms are usually first introduced at intermediate or even advanced levels, which extrapolated to the Spanish educational system, means 1st or 2nd of Batchillerato. This situation indicates that, in EFL contexts, learning idioms is considered inappropriate at early stages. Forment-Fernández (1997) defends the idea that we should avoid presenting beginner learners with IEs, as they represent complex combinations of words that can be avoided by free discourse. Besides, this

author considers that idioms present morpho-syntactic features that can complicate the students' gradual comprehension of the TL grammar.

Nevertheless, other authors (Irujo, 1986 and Vazquez-Fernández & Bueso-Fernández, 1998) support the opposite position, claiming that the relevance of IEs regarding its frequency in daily speech, together with its communicative function makes it a strong enough argument to introduce them in all levels of learning:

“Learning idioms is, or should be, an integral part of vocabulary learning in a second language. Therefore it should not be put off until students reach advanced levels. Even at the beginning levels, idioms can be added to the vocabulary being learned (...)” (Irujo, 1986: 240).

Even though learning idioms may present some difficulties for students, postponing their learning until advance levels does not help. It is necessary to introduce them in all levels of EFL learning, adapting the difficulty to the students' level, and taking into account the approach and methodology employed to teach them.

3.3. Difficulties

As we have seen, learning idioms has multiple benefits for EFL students. However, its instruction is normally introduced at intermediate or advanced levels, largely due to the assumed complexity of idioms in terms of meaning and form, and the difficulties that their acquisition represents for most EFL students.

According to Kovecses and Szabó (1996: 326) “idioms constitute one of the most difficult areas of foreign language learning for both teachers and learners”. These difficulties reside on the special nature of idioms, which are defined as fixed or semi-fixed expressions that have a figurative meaning which cannot be understood by the meaning of its constituents. Its figurative nature entails

some problems for most students to understand them properly and to acquire their meaning and use, as they cannot resort to their background knowledge of the language to guess their meaning.

Besides, traditional methodologies do not help to overcome these difficulties, since they present idioms as other vocabulary items that have a specific meaning which is arbitrary and that has to be memorised by means of drills. This traditional methodology is used in some textbooks, as I have concluded after doing some research and analysing two textbooks of intermediate English level.

In this analysis of how idioms are presented in textbooks, I selected two of the usually employed textbooks either in secondary education or in the Spanish Official Language School, which are *New English File Intermediate* (Oxenden & Latham-Koenig, 2008), and *Advanced Contrast for Bachillerato 2* (Williams & Baines, 2013). In the two textbooks idioms are presented in a structural way by means of drills, such as fill-in-the-gaps and multiple choice activities.

More concretely, in the textbook *New English File*, eight idioms, in this case phrasal verbs, are introduced by means of a list. The first activity consists in using those idioms to fill in the gaps of three short texts, i.e. students need to guess the meaning of the idioms in order to use them correctly. In the next activity students are required to look up the idioms in a dictionary to check their meaning. Then, at the end of the book there are two extra fill-in-the-gaps activities in which students are asked to use the same idioms to complete the sentences.

In the textbook *Advanced Contrast for Bachillerato 2*, we find similar activities. In this case, eight idioms about jobs are presented. First, there is a short explanation about the nature of idioms and an example with its meaning. Then, in the first activity there are eight sentences containing an idiom each one, and two possible options of the meaning of each idiom are provided. The next activity is a fill-in-the-gaps exercise in which the same eight idioms have to be used to complete the sentences presented.

This informal analysis of how idioms are presented in textbooks shows that the methodology followed to teach them is still the traditional one, since in none of these textbooks the metaphorical and cultural origin of idioms is considered. Moreover, the activities used are very structural, since they consider idioms as chunks of language, and forget about the semantic and conceptual aspect of the IEs. This way of presenting idioms to students does not facilitate their learning, as the only way of learning them is by means of memorisation and drills.

Therefore, we find several problems regarding idioms instruction. Firstly, the complex nature of idioms represent a difficulty for students, because they have figurative meaning that cannot be understood through the meaning of the words that form them. Besides, the traditional way of teaching them that is reflected in the type of activities presented in textbooks certainly does not help students. On the contrary, it represents an obstacle to EFL students' successful acquisition of idioms. Since the nature of idioms is something that we cannot change, we should focus on developing methodologies that facilitate idioms learning to students.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW OF STUDIES ON IDIOMS TEACHING AND LEARNING

The difficulties mentioned in the previous section made that several authors developed some studies testing different methodologies to facilitate idioms learning. More particularly, the present section makes a review of the most relevant studies that adopt the cognitive view of idioms to their teaching and learning.

Kovecses and Szabó (1996) carried out an informal study focusing on a special group of IEs, which are phrasal verbs. They did an experiment with thirteen Hungarian English learners with an intermediate proficiency level, and divided those students into two groups, group A, and group B. Group A were provided with ten phrasal verbs containing the particle *up* or *down*, and then the

meaning of each phrasal verb was explained. In group B, the same phrasal verbs were presented, but with the exception that these were grouped by the metaphor of the particle, for example, *up* is *more*, and the different metaphors of the ten phrasal verbs were explained to students. After that, all students completed an exercise with those ten idioms, and results showed that group B obtained better results than group A. As the authors indicate, this study suggests that using the cognitive view of idioms can facilitate their learning to EFL students.

Another author who has developed several experiments using the idea that the meaning of idioms is somehow motivated is Boers. Similar to the results by Kovecses and Szabó, the study of Boers in 2000 concluded that grouping idioms by metaphor facilitates their retention by students.

Moreover, in 2007 Boers, Eyckmans and Stengers undertook an experiment with Dutch speaking students using an online tool in order to foster their acquisition of English idioms. This tool consisted of a series of online activities in which students had to choose the meaning of each idiom and then a multiple-choice activity in which they had to select the most suitable target domain of the idioms. In the experimental group of students the activities were done in different order, i.e. they had to guess the target domain first and then to choose the meaning of the idiom. This difference in the order of activities made that students in the experimental group performed better than those in the control group in the activity in which they had to identify the meaning of the idiom. Following the authors' conclusions, this study proves that providing students with knowledge of the origin of idioms is an effective technique to help them understand their figurative meaning.

These studies represent attempts to implement cognitive methodologies to the teaching of idioms, and their results suggest that raising students' awareness of the origin of idioms or the metaphor that is behind each idiom is a way of providing students with more tools to deal with these special and complex expressions.

5. METHODOLOGY

Taking into consideration the importance of idioms instruction in the EFL classroom and the difficulties that most students have when facing these figurative expressions, this study has as main objective to design a methodology to teach idioms based on the cognitive approach, that raises students' awareness of the metaphors and cultural implications that are behind idioms, and that, therefore, facilitates their acquisition.

As a secondary objective, this study aims to consider students' individual learning differences and how they may affect the effectivity of the methodology. For that reason, the methodology proposed to teach idioms was implemented in two different groups that differed in terms of students' preferential learning style and motivation. This aspect differentiates this study from other studies concerning idioms stated in the previous section.

In order to test the effectivity of the methodology proposed, the two groups were divided into two subgroups, and a half of the students (control group) was taught following a traditional methodology, whereas the other half (experimental group) was taught following the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology. Finally, a test was done in order to check the students' acquisition of idioms, and the results of the two control groups and the two experimental groups were compared and discussed.

5.1 Participants

The present study was carried out in two groups of second of Bachillerato in the secondary school Broch I Llop, in Vila-real. The reason for choosing last year students is because idioms were part of their curricular contents. Although their textbook only contained idioms related to jobs, for this study I decided to select some other commonly used idioms that were useful for them.

Regarding the groups, one of them, class A, was formed by twenty students, who studied the Social Sciences and Humanities branch. In the other group, class B, there were nineteen learners who studied the Plastic Arts, Image and Design branch. The students were non-native English speakers with an average English proficiency level of A2/B1, which is the level achieved at the Spanish Bachillerato stage. Their previous knowledge about idioms was very reduced. Most of them had not received any idioms instruction before, and were not able to identify any idiom in English.

Although studying the same level, there were some differences between the two groups of students. After four weeks of observation of the two classrooms, I found some relevant differences between these two groups regarding their learning styles, motivation, and attitude towards the English subject.

Considering the differences between the branches of Bachillerato that these two groups were studying, Arts, and Social Science, and the different ways of presenting information, since in Arts the contents are mainly visually presented, while in Social Sciences the contents are found in written or oral form, i.e. verbally, we may assume that the learning style that predominates in each group might be different. However, in order to be sure about, the students completed a learning style test (appendix 1). This test is an adaptation of the Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire developed by Felder and Soloman (2001), in which I decided to focus only on the visual/verbal dimension, which are the learning styles that could represent the most relevant difference between these two groups of students. After passing the questionnaire, I obtained the following results:

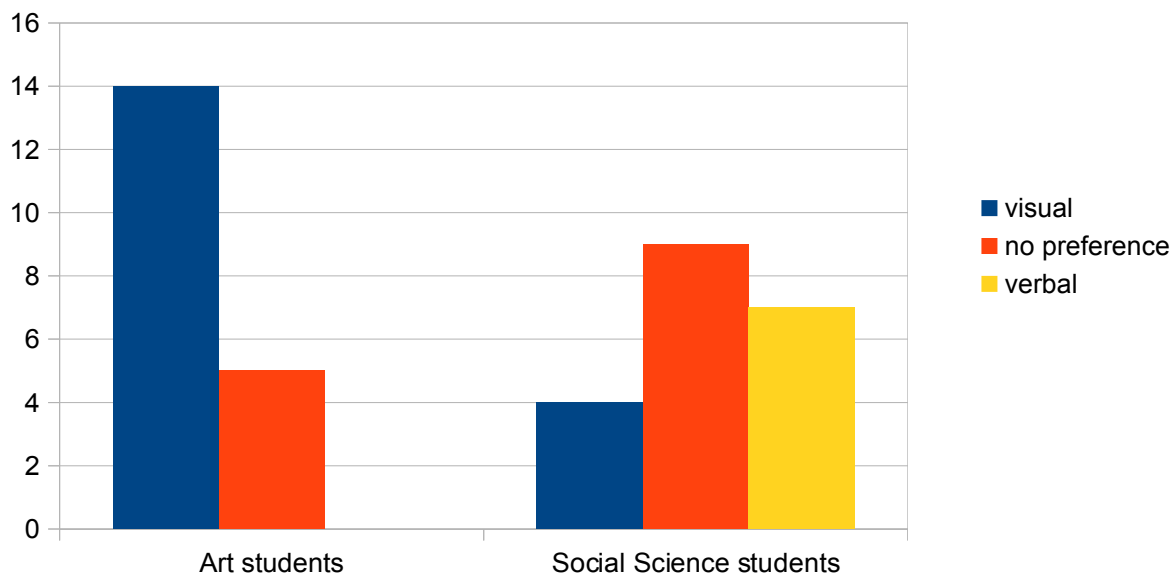


Figure 3: Students' learning style preference.

Figure 3 indicates that in the group specialised in Arts the visual learning style was predominant, being fourteen the students that learn better through visual information, and only five those that showed no preference for any of these learning styles, i.e. they feel as comfortable with visual as with verbal information. A surprising fact is that none of these students presented preference for verbal information.

In the case of the Social Science group, the results were more varied. We can see that almost half of the students, nine out of the twenty students, had no preference regarding visual/verbal information when learning. The figure indicates that seven students preferred verbal information in this group, either written or orally, while only four students showed a clear preference for visual information.

With the analysis of the results of the learning style test, we can conclude that, in the group taking the Art speciality, the students were mainly visual, whereas in the group taking the Social Science speciality, most students had no preference for visual nor verbal learning style, although there were more students that learn better through verbal than through visual information.

Moreover, these two groups of students also showed differences in their motivation. After four weeks of direct observation, analysing their attitudes towards the English subject, their behaviour in class, how and how much they worked, and their results, I concluded that their level of motivation to learn the English language was quite different.

An important aspect to consider is that some of the students studying the Bachillerato specialised in Arts had no intention to take the University entrance exam, because they wanted to enroll in the Art School. This situation contributed to their lack of interest in the English subject, since they only wanted to pass the subject to obtain the degree, and they did not want to achieve a great mark in order to compete for a place at University. However, in the other group, all the students wanted to take the University entrance exam, and they were highly motivated to obtain good marks in all subjects. According to the classification by Gardner and Lambert (1972), these students had instrumental motivation to learn the language.

Another relevant indicator of their motivation level was their behaviour in class and their disposition to work. In the Art group most of the students showed a disruptive behaviour in class. They were most of the time talking and interrupting the teacher's explanations. Besides, only a small number of students brought their homework done, and the great majority invented excuses to justify why they did not do them. However, in the other group the situation was very different. It is true that some students were disruptive, but the great majority had good behaviour in class. All the students worked hard in class and at home and it was very easy to teach to that group.

Finally, all these differences regarding motivation, behaviour and work were reflected in the students' results. In the Art group most of the students failed the exams with the exception of a group of four or five students who passed, and in the Social Science group the situation was the other way round. The major part of them passed all the exams, except a minority of students who failed some of them. In general, while in the Art group the medium grade in the English subject was

5, in the Social Science group it was 6.5.¹

5.2 Materials

(1) Worksheets A and B

In order to develop the study, two different worksheets were employed: worksheet A for the control groups, and worksheet B for the experimental groups (see appendix 2 and 3).

Worksheet A contains three activities that were designed following a traditional approach to teaching vocabulary. It consists of a multiple choice activity, a fill-in-the-gaps exercise, and a free activity in which the students are asked to write a sentence for each one of the idioms presented.

The activities in worksheet B follow a more cognitivist approach to vocabulary teaching. The first activity is a multiple choice exercise, the second one is a metaphor reflection of the meaning of the idioms, and the last one is a role-play.

(2) Flash cards

For the second activity in worksheet B, three sets of flash cards containing the eight idioms and images of the source and target domain of the metaphor or culture implication behind each idiom were employed (appendix 4).

(3) Test

With the objective to check the students' degree of acquisition of idioms, a test was done to the students in which they had to explain the meaning of the eight idioms that were taught (appendix 5).

5.3 Procedure

After having analysed the differences between the two groups through direct observation and the

¹ The Spanish Educational System uses a 10-point scale in primary and secondary education.

learning style questionnaire, in each classroom the students were divided arbitrarily into two subgroups. One half of the class (control group) was taught following a traditional approach to teaching idioms, whereas the other half (experimental group) was taught following the cognitive methodology.

Both the two control groups and the experimental ones received a lesson on idioms, which lasted 50 minutes. The four groups were taught the same idioms; some of them were extracted from the book *Idioms Organiser: Organised by Metaphor, Topic, and Keyword* (Wright, 1999), and others from the students' textbook *Advanced Contrast for Bachillerato 2* (Williams & Baines, 2013). The criteria for the selection of idioms were the level of difficulty and the usefulness, i.e. I selected eight common idioms that were not extremely complex for the students to understand according to their level. The idioms selected were: *to get the sack*, *to let the cat out of the bag*, *to speak of the Devil*, *to pull someone's leg*, *to be a pain in the neck*, *to be paid peanuts*, *hot potato*, and *the penny dropped*. The reason for choosing only eight idioms is because the objective of this study is to test whether the metaphor awareness-raising methodology contributes to facilitate the students' acquisition of idioms, and I consider that presenting students with more than eight idioms in only one lesson would be too much information for them to process and it would be an impediment for their successful acquisition.

5.3.1 Experimental groups

The methodology employed to teach the eight idioms in the experimental groups is based on the cognitive approach. The main objectives of this lesson are: (i) to introduce eight common English idioms to students, (ii) to identify their meaning, (iii) to reflect upon the metaphor or cultural implication behind each of them and to discuss the connection, and (iv) their acquisition and incorporation to their linguistic repertoire.

Regarding competences, following the communicative-discursive model proposed by Ruiz-Madrid (unpublished manuscript) after this lesson students are thought to develop (i) their linguistic competence, as they are going to incorporate new vocabulary and IEs; (ii) their strategic competence, because they use different strategies to make sense of the idioms presented, such as using the context or applying what they know about language and figurative mechanisms; (iii) the intercultural competence, since idioms represent part of the TL culture and the way in which native speakers perceive reality, and (iv) the communicative competence, because the lesson fosters the four skills. Students are required to read in English, to write a short dialogue, and to perform it, i.e. to speak and to listen to their partners.

The lesson started by explaining the students that they were going to learn some idioms in English. As a pre-activity, they did a brainstorming. They were asked to define idiom, to provide some examples of idioms in their mother tongue and, then, in English. After that, they received an explanation to idioms, in which the definition of idiom and some examples were provided. Besides, the notions of metaphor and mapping from the source domain onto the target domain were also explained, and some examples of metaphors were presented. Then, the idea that some idioms are based on metaphors while the origin of some others have a cultural implication was introduced. To carry out this explanation I used a PowerPoint presentation, since the secondary school had computers, screens and overhead projectors in most classrooms. This fact together with the importance of ICTs in the current world made me doubt about using some kind of ICT to develop the metaphor awareness-raising lesson apart from the PowerPoint presentation. However, I decided to use traditional materials, such as worksheets and flash cards, to make sure that the use of ICTs did not condition the results, since it is not the objective of this study.

After that introduction, they did the activities on Worksheet B. The first activity was thought to be a first contact to the idioms selected. The students were provided with eight sentences, one for

each idiom, and three options of the meaning of the idiom. First, they were required to identify the idiom in each sentence, and then, choose the option they considered the correct meaning of the idiom. For this activity, the students had to work individually. When they finished, the activity was corrected aloud, i.e. the students said the options they had chosen and their partners provided feedback, until they reached an agreement about the correct meaning of each idiom. The correction of this activity was essential for the students' understanding of the eight idioms and for the development of the next activity.

In the second activity, the students in groups of three or four worked on the metaphor or culture implication of each idiom. Each group of students were given a set of cards containing the eight idioms and a graphic representation of the source domain (literal meaning) and the target domain (figurative meaning) of the metaphor or the cultural aspect behind each idiom. They were asked to match the idiom with its corresponding images, and think about the meaning relationship between them, i.e. why they thought we associate that source domain with that target domain. For example, considering the idiom *let the cat out of the bag*, an image of the source domain (releasing) and one of the target domain (revealing) were provided, and the students had to think about the relationship between the metaphor (releasing is revealing) and the idiom (let the cat out of the bag).

When they finished this second activity, it was corrected and every idiom was explained through a PowerPoint presentation in which all the idioms and their metaphorical or cultural implications were deeply analysed. With this activity the students were encouraged to reflect and discuss in groups about the metaphorical nature of idioms, and to understand their meaning by means of analysing the metaphors. Besides, an important fact is that visual elements were employed to facilitate the students' understanding of the target and source domain of the idioms.

Finally, the last activity was a role-play. The reason for using this type of exercise is because it is a way to encourage students to use the idioms they are learning, and to make them realise that

idioms are not only expressions they learn in order to complete a series of written activities, but they are part of daily life speech and are very useful, particularly in informal conversations. In this activity, a situation was presented, and the students in groups were required to create a dialogue using at least three of the idioms studied in the previous activities. Then, they performed the dialogue in front of their partners.

5.3.2 Control groups

The methodology used in the two control groups follows the structural linguistic approach. The objectives of this lesson plan are: (i) to introduce eight common English idioms to students, (ii) to identify their meaning, and (iii) to achieve their acquisition and incorporation to the students' linguistic repertoire. As we can see, the only difference with the metaphor awareness-raising methodology is that raising students' awareness of the metaphors and cultural implications of idioms is not an objective of this lesson plan, since the metaphorical nature of idioms is not considered in the traditional approach.

The competences achieved with this methodology are: (i) the linguistic competence, as students incorporate new vocabulary and IEs; (ii) the strategic competence, because they use different strategies to make sense of the idioms presented, such as using the context or applying what they know about language, and (iii) the intercultural competence, since idioms represent part of the TL culture and the way in which native speakers perceive reality. In contrast to the metaphor awareness-raising methodology, in this lesson plan the communicative competence is not developed, since the activities follow the structural view of language.

Regarding the development of the lesson, it started with a brainstorming, in which the students were asked to provide a definition of idiom, and to say aloud any idiom they knew both in their mother tongue and in English. Then, they were introduced to idioms by means of a PowerPoint

presentation and an explanation. They were provided with a definition of idioms, and some examples of idioms in English were presented.

After the introductory explanation, the students did the activities on Worksheet A individually. These activities were designed following a structuralist approach to teaching idioms, i.e. they consider idioms as semantic units whose meaning is arbitrary and is not connected to our conceptual system. The type of activities selected was based on the analysis of the most common exercises to learn idioms used in intermediate level textbooks, which are fill-in-the-gaps and multiple choice activities, and the use of idioms in written form.

The first activity was a multiple choice exercise in which there were eight sentences, each one containing an idiom, and three options for each one of the idiom's meaning. This activity is the same that the first one in the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology, because it is a similar activity to the one used in the test to check the students' acquisition of idioms. Therefore, I considered that all the students had to be familiar with the activity in order to have the same opportunities.

The other two activities differed to those designed in the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising lesson plan. The second activity was a fill-in-the-gaps activity in which the students were expected to use the eight idioms presented in the previous activity to complete some sentences. This type of activity represents the drills characteristics of the structural method. Finally, in the last activity the students were asked to write a sentence for each idiom. This is an open exercise that promotes the free use of the idioms they have just learnt. When the students finished the worksheet, all the activities were corrected aloud, and any students' doubts about the meaning of the idioms were solved.

An important aspect to mention is that this lesson plan was taught with the same interest and enthusiasm than the previous one, i.e. I tried to do my best when explaining idioms to the students

and when solving their doubts. My attitude and teaching efforts were equal in the two methodologies, in order to avoid that this could be a factor that interfered in the results of the study.

5.3.3 Idioms acquisition test

Two days after the implementation of the two different methodologies in the two classrooms, the students took a test to check their acquisition of idioms. In order to avoid that the different degree of study habits interfered in the results, they were not told that a test was going to be done. In this way the results of the test show the students' real acquisition and retention of the meaning of the eight idioms taught.

This test consisted of eight sentences, each containing an idiom, and the students were asked to explain the meaning of the idiom either providing a synonym or using their own words. The sentences appearing on the test were different from those presented in the two lesson plans.

When correcting the test, some criteria were used in order to consider the answers as correct or incorrect. As the objective of the test was to check their acquisition of the idioms meaning, I had into account that the students' explanations showed that they really understood the meaning of the idiom. Therefore, any possible answer that reflected the meaning of the idiom was accepted. Moreover, grammar and spelling errors were not penalised, since checking the students' accuracy was not the objective of the study.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are analysed in a global way, i.e. the total number of correct answers obtained by the two control and experimental groups of students in the idioms acquisition test are considered and stated in percentages, in order to have a global view of the effectivity of the

metaphor awareness-raising methodology in comparison to the traditional lesson plan.

The following figure represents the percentage of correct answers achieved by the experimental and control groups of the Bachillerato students specialised in Arts and those specialised in Social Sciences and Humanities. Through this figure, we can have a global perspective of the results of the study.

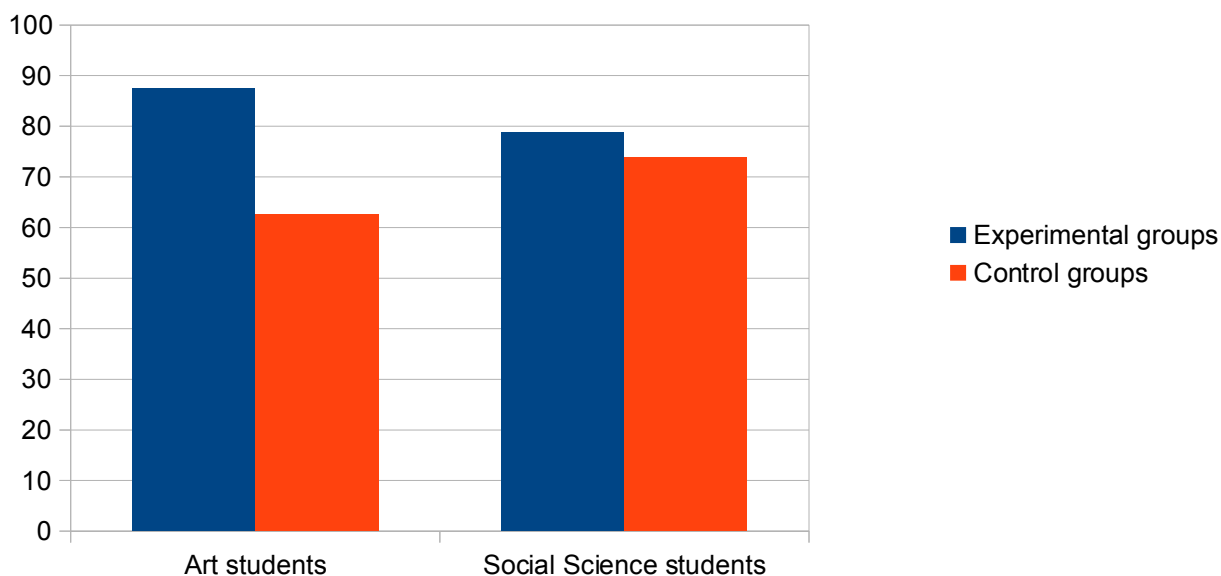


Figure 4: Percentage of students' correct answers.

As we can observe, the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology obtained better results in the two classrooms. However, there are some differences between the Art students and the Social Science students regarding the range of effectivity of this methodology with respect to the traditional methodology.

Considering the Art students, the experimental group achieved considerably better results than the control group. The percentage of correct answers of the experimental group is 88%, whereas the control group only answered correctly the 62% of them. These results are very positive, because they show a high degree of effectivity of the metaphor awareness-raising methodology of almost

90% of correct answers. Besides, the great difference of more than 25% in favour of this methodology could seem strong enough to defend its effectivity over the traditional method.

Nevertheless, analysing the results of the Social Science and Humanities students we cannot be so optimistic. In this classroom, the difference between the two methodologies is minimal, since the experimental group obtained 79% of correct answers, and the control group 74%. This difference of only 5% is not sufficient to claim the superior effectivity of the metaphor awareness-raising methodology over the traditional one.

Up to this point, it is necessary to discuss the factors that differ in the two classrooms, which are the learning styles and the level of motivation of the students, and how they influenced the results.

Firstly, as it is stated in section 5.1, in the Art group there were a great majority of the students who were visual, i.e. that learn better if the information is presented through pictures or graphics, rather than through text, whereas in the Social Science group most of the students showed no preference for either visual nor verbal learning style. This aspect seems to be of great relevance, since one of the characteristics of the metaphor awareness-raising methodology is the use of images of the source and target domain of idioms. For that reason, the great effectivity of this methodology over the traditional method in the Art group might be, up to a great extent, due to the visual aids employed to facilitate the students' understanding of the metaphorical and culture implications of idioms.

Another factor to consider is the level of motivation of the students. It was observed that most of the students in the Art group had a lack of motivation to learn English, while in the Social Science group most of the students were highly motivated to achieve good marks in this subject, since they want to go to University. This high level of instrumental motivation makes that the students in the Social Science classroom showed equal interest in a traditional methodology based on repetitive activities, than in an innovative methodology in which visual images are used and metaphorical and

cultural awareness is raised. In contrast, the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology seems to increase the interest and motivation of the Art students, and it was reflected in their good results.

Therefore, the results obtained suggest that the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology presented to teach idioms is more effective than the traditional methodology, since the two experimental groups obtained better results in the idioms acquisition test than the control groups. However, the traditional method was almost as effective as the cognitive one in the classroom in which the students had no preference for a visual or a verbal learning style and whose motivation was very high. For that reason, designing and introducing new methodologies that increase students' motivation and participation in the classroom is essential, above all in those classrooms in which students have a low level of motivation and interest towards the TL.

7. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to develop a methodology to teach idioms in the EFL classroom that facilitates their acquisition to students, since it is claimed that idioms are one of the most difficult aspects to learn for EFL students. After analysing the way in which idioms are presented in some textbooks, and concluding that the activities presented follow the structuralist approach, I decided to adopt a cognitivist approach to design the methodology.

This methodology focuses on the cognitive conception of idioms, which are considered to be related to our conceptual system. This perspective suggests that the meaning of idioms is motivated, since they are based on metaphors or cultural and conventionalised knowledge. Following this approach, I designed a lesson plan that raises students' awareness of this fact, and that fosters their reflection upon the relationship of the target and source domain of each idiom by means of images.

The objective of this methodology is to facilitate the students acquisition of eight common English idioms.

In order to test the effectivity of this methodology, I carried out a study in the secondary school IES Professor Broch I Llop in Vila-real, in two Bachillerato classrooms that presented several differences regarding the students' preferential learning style and their level of motivation. In each classroom the students were divided arbitrarily in two groups, one of them (experimental group) received a lesson in which eight idioms were taught following the metaphorical and cultural awareness-raising methodology, and the other group (control group) was taught following a traditional methodology.

After the implementation of the two methodologies, an idioms acquisition test was done. The results of this test were significantly different in the two groups. In the group of students who were coursing a Bachillerato specialised in Arts, the results of the experimental group were much better than those obtained by the control group. However, in the group specialised in Social Science the results of the experimental and the control group were very similar, although the former were slightly better.

These differences in the results of the two classrooms are interpreted in terms of the differences between the learners. In the group in which the students had preference for a visual learning style and whose motivation and interest in the English subject were very low, the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology had significantly better results than the traditional lesson plan mainly because of the use of visuals and the introduction of a new methodology that increased their motivation and active participation in class. While in the Social Science group the two methodologies obtained good results, because the students had no preference for visual nor verbal learning style, and because they were highly motivated and showed the same interest and participation in the cognitive and in the traditional lesson plan.

Considering the results of this study, some final conclusions can be drawn. First of all, the high number of correct answers achieved by the two experimental groups suggests that the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology presented in our study helps students to learn the meaning of idioms. However, we can also claim that the design and implementation of an innovative methodology that responds to a specific problem found in the EFL classroom is more likely to improve the results in those classrooms in which students have a lack of motivation and interest in the subject, since using new ways of teaching can foster students' participation and involvement in the class.

This general teaching implication is suggested by the results of our study, in which the metaphor and cultural awareness-raising methodology designed to facilitate students' learning of idioms has been more effective in a classroom in which the students had a low level of motivation and interest. However, I propose to do further research on this field to test the effectivity of an innovative methodology regarding any aspect of the language in two groups of students with different levels of motivation and learning styles.

Finally, taking into consideration the positive results of the innovative methodology to teaching idioms presented in this study in a classroom in which the students had a lack of interest in the English subject, I claim that it is essential that EFL teachers have into consideration students' individual characteristics and needs, in order to adjust their teaching practise and use new methods or approaches when traditional ones do not work.

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9. APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: LEARNING STYLE TEST

1. When I think about what I did yesterday, I am most likely to get
 - (a) a picture.
 - (b) words.

2. I prefer to get new information in
 - (a) pictures, diagrams, graphs, or maps.
 - (b) written directions or verbal information.

3. In a book with lots of pictures and charts, I am likely to
 - (a) look over the pictures and charts carefully.
 - (b) focus on the written text.

4. I like teachers
 - (a) who put a lot of diagrams on the board.
 - (b) who spend a lot of time explaining.

5. I remember best
 - (a) what I see.
 - (b) what I hear.

6. When I get directions to a new place, I prefer
 - (a) a map.

- (b) written instructions.
7. When I see a diagram or sketch in class, I am most likely to remember
- (a) the picture.
- (b) what the instructor said about it.
8. When someone is showing me data, I prefer
- (a) charts or graphs.
- (b) text summarizing the results.
9. When I meet people at a party, I am more likely to remember
- (a) what they looked like.
- (b) what they said about themselves.
10. For entertainment, I would rather
- (a) watch television.
- (b) read a book.
11. I tend to picture places I have been
- (a) easily and fairly accurately.
- (b) with difficulty and without much detail.

Adapted from Soloman and Felder Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire, at <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>

APPENDIX 2: WORKSHEET A

Name: _____

Course: _____

IDIOMS WORKSHEET A

Exercise 1. Read the following sentences and highlight the idiom in each one. Then, choose the correct meaning of the idiom.

- We tried to give Tommy a surprise party for his birthday, but you let the cat out of the bag.

Not to go

To reveal a secret

To buy a present

- James never arrived at work on time, so he got the sack.

To be dismissed

To get a job

To be promoted

- When my brother called me to tell me he had won the lottery, I thought he was pulling my leg.

To tell a joke

To ask for money

To ask for a favour

- These employment agencies treat workers like slaves, they pay them peanuts and get rid of them whenever they want.

To pay a good salary

To pay a very low salary

To pay for food

- After telling her a joke, she looked confused for a moment. Then, suddenly, the penny dropped and she started laughing.

To understand something

To be angry

To be very happy

- Mary: I haven't seen James for weeks.

Alan: Look, here comes James.

Mary: Speak of the devil. Hi! We were just talking about you.

To talk about a cruel person

To talk about a person and that person appears

To criticise a person

- The abortion issue is a political hot potato in Spain nowadays.

An easy thing

A forbidden topic

Something that is difficult or dangerous to deal with

- My little brother doesn't leave me alone. He's a real pain in the neck.

To be very annoying

To be very kind

To be very boring

Exercise 2. Fill in the gaps with the appropriate idioms from exercise 1.

1. Do you get phone calls from companies trying to sell you things?

All the time. They are _____ .

2. Tony thinks I've got no taste in clothes. He says I'm twenty years out of date.

Don't take him too seriously. He's only

_____ .

3. Does anybody know when our contracts are going to be renewed?

Nothing's been said. Nobody wants to ask. It's a bit of a _____

_____ .

4. I've heard that John left his job yesterday. Why did he do that? I thought he really enjoyed selling.

He did, but he was _____ .

5. I've arranged a surprise party for my husband's birthday. I just hope nobody _____ by accident.

6. It was only when I saw Ron's car outside Penny's house that _____ and I realised they were having an affair.

7. Apparently, Lisa went there and wasn't very impressed - oh, _____ , here she is.

8. He _____ when his boss found out that the'd lied about his qualifications.

Exercise 3. Write a sentence for each idiom

1. Let the cat out of the bag

-

2. Get the sack

-

3. Pull someone's leg

-

4. Pay peanuts

-

5. The penny drops

-

6. Speak of the devil

-

7. Hot potato

-

8. A pain in the neck

-

APPENDIX 3: WORKSHEET B

Name: _____

Course: _____

IDIOMS WORKSHEET B

Exercise 1. Read the following sentences and highlight the idiom in each one. Then, try to guess the meaning of each idiom.

- We tried to give Tommy a surprise party for his birthday, but you let the cat out of the bag.

Not to go

To reveal a secret

To buy a present

- James never arrived at work on time, so he got the sack.

To be dismissed

To get a job

To be promoted

- When my brother called me to tell me he had won the lottery, I thought he was pulling my leg.

To tell a joke

To ask for money

To ask for a favour

- These employment agencies treat workers like slaves, they pay them peanuts and get rid of them whenever they want.

To pay a good salary

To pay a very low salary

To pay for food

- After telling her a joke, she looked confused for a moment. Then, suddenly, the penny dropped and she started laughing.

To understand something

To be angry

To be very happy

- Mary: I haven't seen James for weeks.

Alan: Look, here comes James.

Mary: Speak of the devil. Hi! We were just talking about you.

To talk about a cruel person

To talk about a person and that person appears

To criticise a person

- The abortion issue is a political hot potato in Spain nowadays.

An easy thing

A forbidden topic

Something that is difficult or dangerous to deal with

- My little brother doesn't leave me alone. He's a real pain in the neck.

To be very annoying

To be very kind

To be very boring

Exercise 2: CARDS. Group each idiom with its source domain (literal meaning) and its target domain (figurative meaning).

Then, try to find the meaning relationship between the source and the target domain. Sometimes this relationship is not very clear because the idiom is based on something cultural and not on a metaphor.

	SOURCE DOMAIN (literal meaning)		TARGET DOMAIN (figurative meaning)
1. Let the cat out of the bag	<i>releasing</i>	is	<i>revelation</i>
Meaning relationship: <i>Releasing a cat from a bag is like releasing a secret from your mouth.</i>			
2. Get the sack			

Meaning relationship:	is
3. Pull someone's leg Meaning relationship:	is
4. Pay peanuts Meaning relationship:	is
5. The penny drops Meaning relationship:	is
6. Speak of the devil Meaning relationship:	is
7. Hot potato Meaning relationship:	is
8. A pain in the neck Meaning relationship:	is

Exercise 3: Write a short dialogue using at least three idioms.

Situation: You are four friends that are in a pub talking about another friend who lost his/her job last week.

APPENDIX 4: IDIOMS TARGET AND SOURCE DOMAIN FLASH CARDS

1. Let the cat out of the bag	2. Get the sack
3. Pull someone's leg	4. Pay peanuts
5. The penny drops	6. Speak of the devil
7. Hot potato	8. A pain in the neck



PHYSICAL TEASING



JOKING



FOOD



MONEY



FUNCTIONING OF A MACHINE



UNDERSTANDING



SPEAK OF THE DEVIL



APPEARING



HEAT



CONTROVERSY



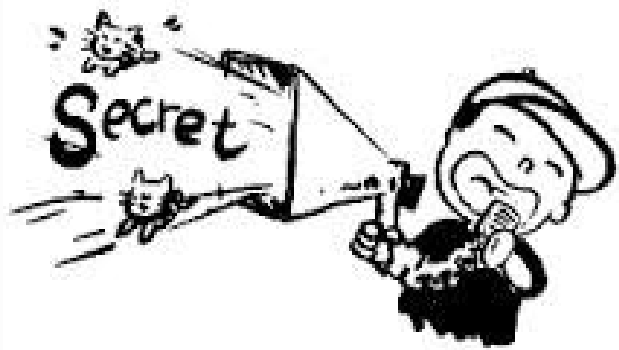
PHYSICAL PAIN



ANNOYANCE



RELEASING



REVELATION



RECEIVING A SACK



GETTING FIRED

APPENDIX 5: IDIOMS ACQUISITION TEST

Name: _____

Course: _____

Lesson: A / B

IDIOMS TEST

1. Explain the meaning of the following idioms:

- Poor Tom, he **got the sack** yesterday. He is always late.

- Amazingly, anyone who knew about the surprise **let the cat out of the bag**.

- Did you hear what happened to Anna yesterday? - oh, **speak of the devil**, here she is.

- Is it really your car or are you **pulling my leg**?

- That child is a real **pain in the neck**.

- I really like this job, but I **get paid peanuts**.

- Gun control is a **hot potato** in USA.

- When I saw Mary crying, **the penny dropped** and I realised she was having a hard time.