 хозης μοι
eipein, ω
Σωκρατες, άρα
didaktōn ή
ἀρετή; ή ού
didaktōn αλλ’
ασκητόν; ή οὔτε
ασκητόν οὔτε
μαθητόν, αλλά
φύσει
παραγίγνεται
τοῖς
ἀνθρώποις ή
ἄλλω τινὶ τρόπω
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Lorena Robo
“Fan S.Noli” University of Korça, Albania
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to give a clear view of the usage and acquisition of idiomatic expressions of the 2nd year students of finance in the University of Korça. We have focused on a section of phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions in “English for Business life” used during the English course with these students in “Fan. S.Noli” University. This paper discusses methods and strategies used by students to master English idiomatic expressions. The sample of the study consisted of 85 students who were given a research project with the topic “Understanding and using phrasal verbs and expressions in the business context”. The first part of the study defines and synthesizes the definition and linguistic contribution to idioms. Then it focuses on the corpus driven approach illustrated with figures and data enrolling the frequency given in percentage. Quantitative and qualitative research is used to outline the most important methods of acquiring idiomatic language in EFL classes followed by an analysis of the driven data. The study highlights the importance of idioms in language use, English language teaching and strategies to promote idiomatic English at academic level. As concluding remarks of this paper, further implications are given for the teachers.

Keywords: acquisition, idiomatic expression, corpus approach, usage, methods, strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Since idioms as part of a multidisciplinary approach take a crucial and considerable part of the language system, phraseology reflects continuously the cultural elements of a nation and seems to be the discipline which best interprets and reflects the cultural framework of a whole society in the language, therefore it is also the field of study which can attempt to provide an explanation about stable expressions containing words loaded with a cultural meaning (Luque & Manjón 1998). The aim of this study is to investigate the acquisition of idiomatic expressions through a corpus based approach carried out with Finance students of the 2nd year of “Fan.S.Noli” University of Korça, Albania.
It is a well-established belief among scholars that lexicon is not just a repository of single words but a dynamic system, which includes larger lexical items as well (Read, 2000). It is a common knowledge that idioms are used in a broad range of everyday situations. This pervasiveness of idioms relates them to second language (hereafter L2) proficiency or at least to higher levels of L2 fluency. Many researchers (e.g. Ellis, 1997a; Yorio, 1989) suggest that adequate knowledge and appropriate use of idioms in an L2 is an important indicator of L2 communicative competence. In the same vein, the notion of figurative competence is introduced (Levorato, 1993; Levorato and Cacciari, 1992) to account for the production and comprehension of idioms. Teaching phrases and idiomatic expressions is not considered as the easiest part of vocabulary instruction but rather a stumbling block (Laufer, 1997).

Idioms are not taught to be learnt by heart but they should be studied in the context. Methods and strategies used by students and learners are numerous. This paper aims at identifying these methods and giving their personal experience of learning idiomatic language. As idioms are used in a broad range of everyday situations, their mastery relates to an increase of the figurative competence.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Idioms have been the interest of linguistic research in Europe (especially of Russian linguistics) and America since the beginning of 20th century. Phraseology is a scholarly approach to language which took its start when Charles Bally's notion of locutions phraseologiques entered Russian lexicology and lexicography in the 1930s and 1940s and was subsequently developed in the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries. From the late 1960s onwards, it established itself in (East) German linguistics but was also sporadically approached in English linguistics. The earliest English adaptations of phraseology are by Weinreich (1969) within the approach of transformational grammar, as well as by Arnold (1973) and Lipka (1992 [1974]). In Albania, the rise and development of Lexicology as an independent branch of linguistics was seen of a later development dating in the beginning of the 20th century, first with some didactic phraseological studies mainly on the practical plan of A. Xhuvani (1921); Nonda Bulka; I.D.Sheperi (1927); J.Rrota (1942); M.Domi (1957); S.Prifti (1962); and lately by J.Thomaj (1981), who, for the first time, had given a full treatment of the phraseological units mostly in the theoretical and lexico-grammatical conceptual plan in his monography “Issues of Albanian language phraseology”.

It is important to outline a brief history of the language acquisition, since L2 vocabulary acquisition is one important component of L2 language acquisition. There were four vocabulary articles published in the 1980s (McCarthy 1984; Carter 1987; Li 1988; Kerim-Zade, et al. 1989). During the period 1990-1999, the number of articles was tripled. « A newlook at vocabulary in EFL » (McCarthy, 1984), was the first article published on vocabulary research in Applied Linguistics. The attempt was followed by the publication of several books (e.g. Arnaud & Bejoint...

Vocabulary started to be investigated in the following years from a variety of perspectives. Ellis (1994:18), proposed a useful framework for exploring the vast field of second language acquisition.

### Table 1. A framework for investigating L2 acquisition (Ellis 1994:18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area 1</th>
<th>Area 2</th>
<th>Area 3</th>
<th>Area 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on learning</td>
<td>Focus on the learner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of learner language</td>
<td>Learner-external factors</td>
<td>Learner-internal mechanism</td>
<td>The language learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errors</td>
<td>Social context</td>
<td>L1 transfer</td>
<td>General factors e.g. Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition orders and developmental sequences</td>
<td>Input and interaction</td>
<td>Learning processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variability</td>
<td>Communication strategies</td>
<td>Learner strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic features</td>
<td>Knowledge of linguistic universals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This framework has found acceptance and has been found effective for describing second language acquisition. Since L2 vocabulary acquisition is an important component of L2 language acquisition, this framework should be applicable in describing L2 vocabulary acquisition.

### 3. THE DEFINITION OF IDIOM

The problem of idiom definition is encountered mainly by all linguists and new researches in this field and defining them has been one of the most debatable issues in phraseology nowadays. We encounter terms such as: prefabricated units, idioms (Cowie et al, 1983), phraseological units, collocations, locutions, word-group (Gläser, 1998), phraseme (Mel'cuk et al. 1995), set phrases, word combinations, clichés, etc. Some linguists stand on the view of using phraseological units and idioms with almost no difference in meaning. Some others use set phrases, clichés as units with great stability and lack of motivation (idioms too). But each of these terms embodies an act of unitary thinking, equivalent to a single word, the existence of certain lexical, semantic or syntactic archaisms.
The following table represents the different terms used by some linguists.

**Table 2. Terms used to define the subcategories of word-like units (semantic units).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>General Category</th>
<th>Opaque Invariable unit</th>
<th>Partially motivated unit</th>
<th>Phraseologically bound unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vinogradov (1947)</td>
<td>Phraseological Unit</td>
<td>Phraseological fusion</td>
<td>Phraseological Unity</td>
<td>Phraseological combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amosova (1963)</td>
<td>Phraseological Unit</td>
<td>Idiom</td>
<td>Idiom (no difference)</td>
<td>a. Phraseme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. Phraseoloid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowie (1981)</td>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>Pure Idiom</td>
<td>Figurative Idiom</td>
<td>Restricted Collocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mel’cuk (1988)</td>
<td>Semantic Phraseme</td>
<td>Idiom</td>
<td>Idiom (no difference)</td>
<td>Collocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gläser (1988)</td>
<td>Nomination</td>
<td>Idiom</td>
<td>Idiom (no difference)</td>
<td>Restricted Collocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howarth (1996)</td>
<td>Composite Unit</td>
<td>Pure Idiom</td>
<td>Figurative Idiom</td>
<td>Restricted Collocation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 also shows categories with a nominative function range along a scale or a continuum from unmotivated and formally invariable to partially motivated and partially variable collocations. Beyond the latter are “free” or “open” combinations whose make-up can be explained in terms of general restriction of co-occurrence.

The core meaning of the definition of phraseological units tends to be the designation as units characterized by semantic and structural stability and the criteria of idiomaticity are the main essential features for their existence.

### 4. SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The scientific study of language acquisition began around the same time as the birth of cognitive science, in the late 1950's. We can see now why that is not a coincidence. The historical catalyst was Noam Chomsky's review of Skinner's Verbal Behavior (Chomsky, 1959), as one of the central topics in cognitive science.

It is a well-established belief among scholars that lexicon is not just a repository of single words but a dynamic system, which includes larger lexical items as well (Read, 2000).

The use of idioms and idiomatic English are both characteristic of advanced EFL learners. It seems that due attention is not given to the learning of idioms, and students' competence in these forms needs to the further development not only on the recognition level but also on the production level. Learning a first language is something every child does successfully, in a matter of a few years and without the
need for formal lessons. With language being so close to the core of what it means to be human, it is not surprising that children’s acquisition of language has received so much attention.

A famous hypothesis, outlined by Benjamin Whorf (1956), asserts that the categories and relations that we use to understand the world come from our particular language, so that speakers of different languages conceptualize the world in different ways. Language acquisition, then, would be learning to think, not just learning to talk.

While the role of formulae and other sentence-level expressions in second language development is well documented (Weinert, 1995), few researchers have studied the acquisition of collocations from the point of view of L2 learners' production. One common pattern in language acquisition is that learners pass through a stage in which they use a large number of unanalyzed chunks of language in certain predictable social situations (Nattinger and DeCamco, 1992).

Although there is a growing recognition of collocation (and phraseology in general) in language teaching, there seems to be a lack of awareness of its true significance. But since language is a driving machine in which people tend to master its steering wheel toward the usage of the idiomatic language, ranging from formal collocations toward slang and everyday idioms, it is a common knowledge that idioms are used in a broad range of everyday situations, and phraseology acquisition has taken a considerable importance in the works of many linguists and course books.

Views on teaching idioms vary from one extreme to another. Sornig (1988, 285) sees idioms as something that perhaps cannot be taught at all since they lack general rules. On the other hand, Gläser (1988, 272) states that “idioms and phraseological units in the broadest sense against their social background will provide a rich source of general education and increase the pleasure in foreign language teaching and learning”.

To my experience, working for several years as an English teacher in some public schools of Korça region and now teaching in the university, idioms are difficult to learn and teach for many reasons. The main reason, according to McPartland (1981, 5-10), is that idioms are not literal: they do not mean what they say. The easiest ones are those which have exact counterparts in the learner’s mother tongue, and the most difficult ones are those which have no counterparts and whose meaning cannot be derived from the conjoined meaning of their constituents. Thus, the acquisition of idiomatic language from EFL students is an important indicator of English language competence of all the students in the academic context. Figurative and idiomatic language acquisition from EFL students in the Albanian classes, and perhaps all the students encountering phraseological patterns, however reveal the state of possessing a high competence of English usage.
5. THE STUDY

5.1. The aim of the Study

The purpose of carrying out this study was to investigate the methods and strategies students of finance in “Fan S.Noli” University use in order to see how they acquire phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions related to business. Dealing with business language, no one can exclude the existence of collocations, phrasal verbs and idioms because of the fact that English language is to a greater extent surrounded and encircled by figurative language, and no area of study can remain out of inclusion. Thus, studying the acquisition of figurative expressions from the three groups of finance constitutes the object of this study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The underlying research questions for this study were as follows:

- Do idioms promote language skills to the Albanian students as language learners?
- What are the strategies to promote idiomatic English at a higher level?
- How do they acquire collocations and phrasal verbs?

Hypotheses

1. Teaching idioms with specific strategies will help ESL learners to understand and produce idioms.
2. Knowledge of idioms improves the learners’ language.

Table 2 Demographic and socio-economic presentation of the research sample.¹

5.1.1. The Participants

The sample of this research consists of 85 participants who are Finance students from 2nd year in “Fan.S.Noli” University of Korça region. Of these students, 31 students are of the first group, 27 of the second group and 27 of the third one. Of these 85 participants, 26 (31%) participants were males and 59 (69%) were females, respectively. 39 students from Korça and 36 from villages near Korça, 6 from Bilisht, 3 from Pogradec and 1 from Mollas village, Erseke. In total, the attendants of the three courses of Finance 48 (56%) were living in the city and 37 (44%) were living in the village.

5.1.2. The Research instrument and Data collection

As research instrument a project work was used with the topic “Understanding and using phrasal verbs and expressions in the business context”, in which students have to give an overall view of their ways, methods and strategies used each individually to gain competence of their usage, based on the English course book “English for Business life, by Ian Badger, Pete Menzies, Upper-Intermediate. The project work was given to be worked within 3 weeks and papers were collected between 16

¹ The names of respondents were changed to guaranty anonymity and confidentiality.
Descriptive statistics was performed at the beginning for analyzing data. Next the presentation of methods and strategies used by the students were outlined. The frequency of their usage was recorded and data is collected and presented in charts and tables to show the student’s idiomatic language acquisition. Then, final findings and conclusions of this research are drawn.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Recognizing idioms in a text needs tools in order to analyze the meanings of unfamiliar idioms. Hence, receptive knowledge of idioms should indeed be encouraged and supported. The meaning of idioms cannot always be inferred from the context, and there is often risk of misinterpretation. There are several methods of working out the meaning of unknown words, some of which are also applicable to idioms (Vaurio 1998). Using images and imagination and linking meaning and form is a strategy worth mentioning (Ellis N. 1997, Nation 2001, 62). Likewise, using actions, objects and pictures are applicable forms (Nation 2002, 85). Also, expanding knowledge on existing vocabulary, through semantic mapping, has been suggested (Nation and Newton 1997, 248-251).

There are many ways in which we can depict the meaning of a certain word or phrase. However, these means are not always sufficient, and the meaning of a word or expression may remain unclear or misunderstood despite various guessing or inference strategies.

The study carried out with finance students of the second year in “Fan S.Noli” University, outlines some of the methods and strategies used by them to study idiomatic language. Below are given data and figures concerning the outcome of the study undertaken.

**Table 3.** Methods and strategies used by students in idiomatic language acquisition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Repetitive exposure to new words</td>
<td>19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Writing down the word several times</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Making sentences with new words</td>
<td>8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Word association with things around them</td>
<td>12 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Making flashcards (write the phrase on one side and draw/cut the picture on the back)</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Practicing in exercises</td>
<td>27 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Using new vocabulary in dialogues and everyday conversations</td>
<td>19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Study idioms and verb patterns by topic and grouping</td>
<td>19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Personalizing vocabulary</td>
<td>18 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Listen out and learn in context</td>
<td>34 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Taking tests</td>
<td>11 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this section, the frequency of the strategies and methods is illustrated in the table above. Taking into consideration the methods used by the students, we could reveal that most of the strategies represented were present in almost 80% of the students’ project works. However, the table gives an exact calculation of each method given several times in their works. This is due to the fact that the acquisition of idiomatic language, hence, phrasal verbs, idioms and figurative expressions is one of the most challenging tasks for English learners.

In table 2 methods and strategies are given in the first column and the percentage of their occurrence in the second column. It was observed that a few students (2%) could use learning by heart or using cognates. Another 2% of the students could share the status on Facebook, 1% could record them and then listen. 4% could learn by using the synonym or the antonym form of the phrase, 4% through the brainstorming method, another 4% by practicing in writings and reviewing them. 5% of the students could use root analysis, 6% taking quizzes and
latching onto a key sound. 7% of them used flashcards and YouTube and also 7% guessed the meaning through the context. 8% used to give definitions and make sentences with new words. 9% of them made clusters with the common noun, verb or particle. They said this is a good and effective method of memorizing them.

10% could study them and also 10% could find out how common the idiom is. 11% took tests to practice them either from internet or telling the meaning of the idioms. Also 11% learnt through songs and from a native speaker. 12% could acquire through objects and things that surround them. This facilitated the memorizing of the word or phrase. Another 12% could learn from stories and also 12% using internet for writing and listening online lessons. 14% acquired idiomatic language by identifying idioms in speech. They could listen and fix them better associated with the context.

15% of the students could learn by lists writing in one column the word and in the second its usage. 15% could also study through visualizing and memorizing. 18% by personalizing vocabulary, 19% studied idioms grouping by topic another 19% by repetition of the words or phrases, and 19% also using vocabulary in dialogues and everyday conversations, 20% used writing down the word several times. 21% of them could look it up in the dictionary and finding out the meanings while 27% of the students could practice in exercises. The greatest percentage recorded in this research paper is listening out and learning in context in 34% of the cases.

On the basis of these results, the most frequent methods and strategies are:
1. listening out and learning in context (34%)
2. practicing in exercises (27%)
3. looking up the expression in the dictionary (21%)
4. practice writing down the expression several times (20%)
5. using idiomatic new phrases in dialogues and everyday conversations and by repetition (19%)
6. personalizing vocabulary (18%), etc.

As it can be seen, the methods of comprehending and learning idioms are many. Thus, recognizing and understanding them is crucial to second and foreign language learners. There are many strategies but some can rely in some of them and some others on the the rest, since each student is shaped by different character and selects the method that best fits him in order to acquire a foreign language. Mastering the use of idiomatic phrases can be very overwhelming. A lot of times, dedication and motivation is required. What is absolutely not recommended by linguists is studying them by heart. The best way is to learn them in context, everyday situations, to guess their meanings, to develop passive knowledge of them, extensive listening and reading of the everyday English language that you are exposed to.

7. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study is to investigate the methods and strategies finance and
accountability, students of the second year of “Fan S.Noli” university in Korça of Economic Faculty use while acquiring idiomatic language. The results of this study indicate the usage of a great variety of methods, carried out from 85 students being exactly 38 methods and more.

Our goal was to carry out a study that could outline methods in the second language acquisition and specifically in the business context. Students were seen to possess a good means of methods in acquiring a foreign language. The use of internet, books, research papers and other sources of information have supplied students with various materials to fulfill this project work.

Our interest has been in presenting some methods which would be crucial in idiom and figurative language explanation. In general, the results support the claim that Albanian students are more prior to studying through strategies as looking the phrase up in the dictionary, personalizing the vocabulary, listening out and learning in context, practicing in exercises, looking up the expression in the dictionary, practice writing down the expression several times, using idiomatic new phrases in dialogues and everyday conversations, repetition, memorizing of the words, writing them down, etc.

Based on the quantitative research, the results of table 2 show that there is a great percentage (34%) of the Albanian students who seemed to acquire idiomatic language mostly by listening out and learning in the context and 27% of them in practicing exercises. But there is a considerable number acquiring figurative language through sharing a status in Facebook (2%). Thus, from the results of the study it is seen that the great percentages of students nowadays use internet more common than other means of language acquisition methods and strategies presented in the table above. 11% of the students learn through taking tests and learning through songs. 7% of students learn through YouTube videos, 6% by taking quizzes, using internet programs which offer writing and listening lessons (12%), etc.

From the students’ project works, we conclude that many students (95%) did not use a limited number of methods in studying the expressions and phrasal verbs, but more a great variety from eight up to ten or more, enriching thus the list of the strategies presented in this study. The results showed that internet has played an important role being a basic and important device used by students to practice in online exercises of listening and writing (12%), gap filling, DVD watching, listening to songs (11%), etc. A great number of students (21%) learn by looking up the word in the dictionary, 20% by writing the word several times. 19% learn by using or learning their synonym or antonym counterpart (4%). Practicing in dialogues and everyday conversations (19%) is another common used method by the finance students in this study. 20% learn by writing down the expression several times in order to fix and memorize it better. Many of them (18%) personalize the vocabulary and 19% make a repetitive exposure to the new vocabulary. As stated from the result in the previous section, the great percentage of students learn them by listening out and learning in context (34%), practicing in exercises (27%), looking up...
the expression in the dictionary (21%), practicing by writing down (20%), using idiomatic phrases in dialogues and everyday conversations (19%). A few of them used self recording and listening several times (1%), learning by heart (3%), using brainstorming method (4%), using crosswords to memorize words (2%), using cognates (1%), etc.

As idioms comprise a crucial part of each language, great interest has been raised in many linguists’ works over the years. Language is a living thing and phraseology is part of it, reflecting the liberal historical experience of a nation. For that reason, teaching and learning phraseological units of a native culture are of great importance nowadays.

The above mentioned aspects are of crucial importance because a lack of idiom knowledge will have an impact on the learners’ overall performance. Hence, it is essential for both teachers and students to deal with idioms in a well defined environment, where topics such as idiom definition or teaching methodology are solved. This is the only way the educational process as a whole will be beneficial to its participants.

To sum up, this study could be a useful paper to be used by teachers and students in all levels in the class. Teaching idioms is not an easy task to perform; it requires knowledge, devotion, and motivation to make students having complete control and rigid competence upon the figurative expressions of a language, making them feel the master of that language for possessing it in a proficient level.

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