

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG



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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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**DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH IDIOMS OF
STUDENTS AT FACULTIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND
SOME SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS**

GRADUATION PAPER

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Class : NA1804

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HAI PHONG - 2019

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NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP

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Tên đề tài: Difficulties in learning English idioms of students at faculties of foreign languages and some suggested solutions.

NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI

1. Nội dung và các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp (về lý luận, thực tiễn, các số liệu cần tính toán và các bản vẽ).

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2. Các số liệu cần thiết để thiết kế, tính toán.

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3. Địa điểm thực tập tốt nghiệp.

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Nội dung hướng dẫn: Difficulties in learning English idioms of students at faculties of foreign languages some suggested solutions.

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Sinh viên

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Người hướng dẫn

Hải Phòng, ngày tháng.....năm 2019

Hiệu trưởng

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PHẦN NHẬN XÉT CỦA CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN

1. Tinh thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp:

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2. Đánh giá chất lượng của khóa luận (so với nội dung yêu cầu đã đề ra trong nhiệm vụ Đ.T. T.N trên các mặt lý luận, thực tiễn, tính toán số liệu...):

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3. Cho điểm của cán bộ hướng dẫn (ghi bằng cả số và chữ):

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Hải Phòng, ngày ... tháng ... năm

Cán bộ hướng dẫn

(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên)

CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc

PHIẾU NHẬN XÉT CỦA GIÁNG VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN TỐT NGHIỆP

Họ và tên giảng viên:

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Đơn vị công tác:

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Họ và tên sinh viên:

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Chuyên

ngành:

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Đề tài tốt nghiệp:

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Nội dung hướng dẫn:

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1. Tinh thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp

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2. Đánh giá chất lượng của đồ án/khóa luận (so với nội dung yêu cầu đã đề ra trong nhiệm vụ Đ.T. T.N trên các mặt lý luận, thực tiễn, tính toán số liệu...)

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3. Ý kiến của giảng viên hướng dẫn tốt nghiệp

Được bảo vệ

Không được bảo vệ

Điểm hướng dẫn

Hải Phòng, ngày ... tháng ... năm

Giảng viên hướng dẫn

(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên)

CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM

Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc

PHIẾU NHẬN XÉT CỦA GIÁO VIÊN CHẤM PHẢN BIỆN

Họ và tên giảng viên:

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Đơn vị công tác:

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Họ và tên sinh viên:

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Chuyên

ngành:

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Đề tài tốt nghiệp:

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1. Phần nhận xét của giáo viên chấm phản biện

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2. Những mặt còn hạn chế

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3. Ý kiến của giảng viên chấm phản biện

Được bảo vệ

Không được bảo vệ

Điểm phản biện

Hải Phòng, ngày ... tháng ... năm

Giảng viên chấm phần biện

(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên)

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

English is considered a global language and used in every field of our life. The aim of learners is to have good skills of communication in English. In order to get that aim, besides good knowledge of grammar, learners need to have a plentiful source of vocabulary. However, to master all the English words somehow is always a question raised. Learners have many difficulties when they learn vocabulary because of its formation and usages in communication.

Practically, study the similarities and differences between the English and Vietnamese languages and the cultures they imply is one of my concerns when studying English at University. It is clear that there are many differences between the two languages as grammar, lexicology, phonetics and a number of other things, which leads to the differences in metaphorical meaning implied in literature, idioms expression.

Apart from improving four skills including Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, it will be a big shortcoming when studying a foreign language without taking notice of the treasure of idioms and proverbs of the country where it was born. Studying and applying creatively English idioms and proverbs help students reach the flexibility in using this language and the creativity of simple but vivid sentences in daily speech. Because idioms are a part of culture, understanding them is the key for learners to know more about the target nation as well as its custom and culture. Therefore, it is necessary and interesting to study English idioms. However, one language is different from another. Therefore, the way individual words are used and the rules of making sentences are dissimilar in different language. As a result, it is not easy for learners to understand and translate the metaphorical meaning of idioms from one language to another. To cope with this difficulty, I want to conduct a study on English idioms. Due to the limitation of my graduation paper's scope and time, I would like to focus on difficulties in learning English idioms at faculties of foreign language and give some suggested solutions.

2. Aims of the study

This study is done with the hope to reach some aims at:

- ✓ Giving knowledge of idioms.
- ✓ Distinguishing the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese idioms.

- ✓ Helping learners use right idioms in right situations.
- ✓ Helping the learners solve problems when studying idioms as well as understand the meaning and usage of English idioms.

3. Scope of the study

Idioms are a treasure of each country and all that I know about them is very little because of its immense number. It can be seen in every situation when we learn English. Thus it is impossible for me to go through all of them. Therefore, I want to focus on students difficulties when learning idioms:

- The importance of learning idioms and its relation to its nation's culture.
- Some popular English idioms and their equivalence in Vietnamese.

4. Methods of the study

In order to learn English idioms and their equivalence in Vietnamese better, with a hope that learners could see the role of idioms in life, the following methods are used in the studying process:

- Firstly, having discussions with my supervisor and friends.
- Secondly, collecting materials from the internet, books, dictionaries and other documents.
- Thirdly, analyzing idioms and comparing them with proverbs to find out some differences and similarities between them and the reasons leading to these similarities and dissimilarities.
- Finally, acknowledging the differences and similarities between English and Vietnamese idioms, especially those relating to difficulties in learning English idioms, it help me to have an insight into the difficulties faced by Vietnamese learners of English when studying English idioms. From there, some useful solutions are suggested to help foreign language students solve their problems in understanding and using those English idioms.

5. Design of the study

For a clear organization, I divide my study into three main parts:

- ✓ Part I is the “ **Introduction**” that mentions the reason, the aim, the scope, the method and the design of the study.
- ✓ Part II is entitled “ **Development**” consisting of three chapters:

- Chapter 1: Theoretical background, dealing with the definitions, common features of idioms, the importance of learning English idioms, and students difficulties in learning English idioms.
- Chapter 2: The differences and similarities between English and Vietnamese idioms.
- Chapter 3: Some difficulties facing learners of English and some suggested solutions.
- ✓ Part III is the “ **Conclusion**”, summarizing what have been discussed in the previous parts.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. An overview of idioms

It is important to recognize that idioms are not only colloquial expressions as many people believe, but also a special form of language that it carries a large amount of cultural information, such as history, geography, religion, custom, thinking pattern and so on. They appear in formal style, in slang, in poetry, ... To research idioms, first of all, we must understand what is an idiom. In the definition of idioms, some scholars emphasize on the word quantity of structure in idioms. That is to say, how many language units constitute the idioms? Is it except phrases, word groups, and words or sentences can also make up to the idioms? Others emphasize the single meanings of idioms and it refers that the idiom's meaning is arbitrary. Meaning of idioms can not be synthesized or cut apart. Therefore different people hold the different opinions on the definitions of idioms. So we must understand idiom exactly through research. We are unlikely to give an ideal definition to the idioms. Therefore, we should give a few definitions to better understand.

1.1.1. Definitions of idioms

Dubrovin (1995) defines "idiom" to be a set of phraseological units whose does not result from the meaning of its components.

The definition by Dean Curry (1994) is "the assigning of a new meaning to a group of words which already have their own meaning".

Moon (1998) says that idioms are typically institutionalized, lexico-grammatically fixed and non-compositional expressions.

Collins (2000) defines idioms as a group of words which have a different meaning when used together from the one it would have if the meaning of each word were taken individually and that are usually employed in everyday language to precisely express ideas and concepts that can not be compressed into a single word.

(<http://www.languageinindia.com/june2009/urduidioms.pdf>)

According to Irujo (1986), "An idiom is a conventionalized expression whose meaning cannot be determined from the meaning of its parts" and "Idioms differ

from other figurative expressions, such as similes and metaphors, in that they have conventionalized meanings”.

(http://pc171115.pc.waseda.ac.jp/ccdl/cl_korea/0515_handout-body.html)

An idiom is an expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning that is comprehended in regard to a common use of that expression that is separate from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which it is made.

(<http://www.alienartifacts.com/Idiom/encyclopedia.htm>)

An idiom is a combination of words that has a meaning that is different from the meanings of the individual words themselves. It can have a literal meaning in one situation and a different idiomatic meaning in another situation.

(<http://www.idiomconnection.com/whatis.html>)

For examples:

a. “let the cat out of the bag” means “to reveal a secret, to let somebody know a secret”.

E.g: We'd planned a surprise party for Donna, but some guy she works with let the cat out of the bag, so now she knows.

Don't forget that this is a secret, so whatever you do, don't let the cat out of the bag!

b. “feel like a million dollars” means “to feel wonderful, to feel well and healthy, both physically and mentally”.

E.g: A quick swim in the morning makes me feel like a million dollars.

c. “beat about the bush” means “to avoid coming to the point, to approach a subject in a round-about manner, instead of coming directly to it”.

E.g: Stop beating about the bush and answer my question!

d. “break the ice” means “to say or do something friendly in order to overcome shyness or to ease tension in a social situation”.

E.g: The hardest part about a first date is breaking the ice. To break the ice, let's invite our new neighbors to lunch.

e. “to give up” means “to stop doing something”.

E.g: If you give up smoking, your health will surely improve a lot. Finally, they gave up the search because they were exhausted.

f. “to hold one's horses” means “to stop and wait patiently for someone or something”. It comes from a time when people rode horses and would have to hold their horses while waiting for someone or something

E.g: "Hold your horses," I said when my friend started to leave the store.

The above explanations and examples are extracted from

<http://www.englishclub.com/ref/Idioms/index.htm>

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

In Vietnamese Dictionary, they say about idiom as follow:

“Thành ngữ là một tập hợp từ đã quen dùng mà nghĩa thường không giải thích được một cách đơn giản bằng nghĩa thường của các từ tạo nên nó.”

(<http://vi.m.wikiquote.org>)

And according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary:

“An idiom can be defined as a number of words which when taken together, it have a different meaning from the individual meaning of each word”.

(<http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>)

In fact, this is what can make idioms all more confusing.

For example, the learner may know the words get and goat, and wonder why she doesn't understand the sentence “You get my goat” . In fact, she has little chance of guessing out of context, that it means “You irritate me”

Or another example:

“break the leg”

- literal meaning : someone's leg is broken and he or she should go to the doctor afterwards to get it fixed.

- Idiomatic meaning : do your best and do well. Often, actors tell each other to “break the leg” before they go out the stage to perform.

The definitions of idioms are many in our society. In my opinion, idioms consist of set phrases and short sentences, which are peculiar to the language in question and steeped in the national and regional culture and ideas, thus being colorful, forcible and thought-provoking. Strictly speaking, idioms are expressions that are not readily understandable from their literal meanings of individual constituents. In a broad sense, idioms may include colloquialisms, catchphrases, slang expressions, proverbs and so on.

1.1.2. Types of idioms

Idioms can be either short or long and they can have different forms or structures. Their structure can be irregular or even gramatically incorrect. Seidl and McMordie (McMordie and Seidl 1978) distinguish three main types of idioms.

- Idioms are not always grammatical

Since idioms are born out of popular usage, they aren't always logical, and they don't always follow traditional grammar patterns.

This is because the phrase itself carries the meaning of the idiom, and not the individual words in the phrase, regardless of each word's grammatical function.

For example:

This is a life-and-death situation.

Something that is life-and-death is extremely important, but that phrase itself is illogical. A situation can't be life and death.

Similarly, a phrase like it's not you, it's me is technically ungrammatical.

➤ Idioms are not complete thoughts

As with any phrase, an idiom itself doesn't create a complete sentence. They require additional context to give them meaning.

For example:

Beat around the bush

This idiom is not a complete sentence. It's the idea itself that is the idiom. One might make it into a complete sentence by saying:

Don't beat around the bush.

Or

He's beating around the bush

➤ Idioms whose forms and meanings are both irregular

An idiom can have a regular structure, an irregular or even a grammatically incorrect structure. The idiom "*I am good friend with him*" is irregular or illogical in its grammatical structure. *I* is singular; why then is the correct form in this case not *I am a good friend with him*?

This form is impossible although it is more logical; one would have to say: *I am a good friend of his*. This is, therefore, an example of the kind of idiom where the form and the meaning are both irregular.

In summary, an idiom is:

- A figure of speech
- A phrase that should not be taken literally
- Used to express a particular sentiment

(https://digilib.k.utb.cz/bitstream/handle/10563/7327/neva%C5%99ilov%C3%A1_1_2008_bp.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

1.1.3. The importance of learning English idioms

Nowadays, English is the most widely used in the world and plays an important role together with the development of society and technologies. English is not only the effective means of communication but also shows its progressive effects in many aspects of life. Practically, study on the similarities and differences between the two languages and cultures of English and Vietnamese has been one of my concerns when studying English at university. It is clear that there are many differences between the two languages as grammar, lexicology, translation, phonetics and so on. However there still exist plenty of similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese that can be demonstrated through metaphorical meaning especially in literature, idioms and proverbs expression. This study of English idioms has been traditionally associated with the study of literature, the use of idioms is not restricted to this kind of language. A good understanding of how idioms are used in everyday language is not only important for students of English to increase vocabulary, but also to understand new and original idioms when we hear or speak them.

However, what I want to express here is that idioms are the genius of national language that is the key to help learners know more about a nation, as well as custom and culture of each country all over the world. So, I have studied idioms for a long time because I find it interesting. It not only reflects concepts but also refers to the characteristics of people and society. Each language has its own system so it is not possible to switch usage from one language to another.

1.2. The characteristics of English idioms

Idioms have the following characteristics:

1.2.1. Non-compositionality

Katamba (1993) says that “The meaning of an idiom is not a straightforward composition of the meaning of its parts”.

And according to Langacker (1986), “Idioms are widely defined as being non-compositional or even compositional after the meaning is known”.

(<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249237935> Criteria for Re-defining Idioms Are we Barking up the Wrong Tree)

Although the words that make up the idiom have their own literal meanings, in the idiom they have lost their individual identity. We can not predict the meaning of an idiom from the sum of its parts:

E.g: Kick up one's heels (means “to celebrate”).

Bite the bullet (means “to endure in a difficult situation”).

Hit the hay (means “to go to bed”).

1.2.2. Non-substitutability

a. Constituents can not be replaced

Constituents of idioms can not be changed or replaced. For example, “kick the bucket” (means “to die”) can not be changed as “kick the pail” or “strike the bucket”.

b. Word order can not be changed

The word order can not be inverted or changed. For instance, “by twos and threes”, “at sixes and sevens” and “tit for tat” can not be turned into “by threes and twos”, “at sevens and sixes” and “tat for tit”.

c. Constituents can not be deleted or added to

The constituents of an idiom cannot be deleted or added to, not even an article. Take the idiom “out of the question” for example, it means “impossible”. If the article “the” is deleted, the idiomatic will be lost and it will signify “no question” instead.

1.2.3. Non-modifiability

We can not modify an idiom or apply syntactic transformations. Some idioms are fixed, and do not present internal variation, while there is also a large proportion of idioms that allow for different degrees of internal variability, and with a variable number of elements.

Syntactically frozen idioms can not be syntactically transformed into the passive and still retain their figurative meaning.

E.g:

John bought the farm # The farm was bought by John.

John bit the dust # The dust was bitten by John.

1.2.4. Institutionalization

According to Grant and Bauer (2004), institutionalization refers to the degree of recognition a particular phrase meets in a speech community.

There are idioms that have cultural roots and are understood only by those communities that share the same cultural values.

For example, people from different cultures can easily understand idioms such as “cold as ice”, “firm as a rock”... due to their similar observation to the world.

On the other hand, owing to different living environments, social customs, religions and other factors, some images can not raise resonance.

For instance, in Western countries, the navigation industry is fast developed and they have many idioms which are related to sea life and people from countries of continental civilization may not easily understand them.

E.g. a big fish: an important and influential person

a fresh fish: a new prisoner

a poor fish: a foolish person

(<http://www.languageinindia.com/june2009/urduidioms.pdf>)

1.3. The distinctions between idioms and proverbs.

1.3.1. English idioms and proverbs

If you say: "The cat is out of the bag" instead of "The secret is given away," you're using an idiom. But "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" is a proverb. Proverbs are old but familiar sayings that usually give advice unlike idioms.

Friedrich Seiler (1939) presented an important definition for proverb. He defined proverb as follows: "The prominent, articulated, advisory, and free speeches that are current in people's language."

A proverb is a complete sentence with a firm structure that is based on an unchangeable foundation, like "where there's a will there's a way", or "one who seeks will find". Proverbs represent a complete piece of information because they can occur as a sentence. They are meaningful by themselves.

In contrast, idioms are not syntactically independent because they can not always occur as full sentences, but as a part of a sentence. As it was said, the difference between proverb and idiom pertains to their form, structure, and function. Contrary to the proverbs, idioms are the general and current phrases that must be substituted in sentences so as to obtain a complete sense. These phrases can change according to time adverb, subject, and object. Explanation of an idiom is possible in the sentence with some additions. In other words, the meaning of a sentence is not perceived from its component words. Idioms carry the substance of speech. They must be used in a complete idiom.

1.3.2. Vietnamese idioms and proverbs

From Pham Van Binh's point of view, proverbs are section of folklore, that is, they are a "complete work of literature". Therefore, proverbs have all the fundamental functions of literature such as the apprehension, aesthetics, and education and so on. On the contrary, idioms are only section of language and an idiom alone cannot express an idea completely, so it equals to word only. Hence, they do not have functions as proverbs do and are often used to replace words so

that the expression effect of the sentient can be strengthened. Nguyen Dinh Hung, another Vietnamese scholar, has approached a more detailed distinction between them through the following table:

Distinctive features	Idiom	Proverbs
Grammatical structure	A fixed phrase equivalent to a word	Complete sentence
Literal function	The aesthetic only	The apprehension The aesthetic The education
Logical though form	Expressing concept and generalizing individual phenomena	Expressing judgment affirming attributive phenomena
Function of language forms	Noun denotation function through words ↓ Language attribute phenomena	Information function under consciousness ↓ Social, cultural and spiritual consciousness phenomena of humans

1.4. Popular idiom examples

There are thousands of examples of idioms in English alone. Each language has at least an equal amount, so this list is by no means exhaustive.

⇒ Here are a few common English idioms.

Idioms	Origin	Meaning
Beauty is in the eye of the beholder	The saying has existed for centuries in various forms; main creditor: Margaret Wolfe Hungerford, 1878	What looks beautiful to one person may not look beautiful to another.
Don't count your chickens before they hatch.	Samuel Butler poem, 1663	Do not count on something before it has come to be
No crying over spilt milk	unknown	Do not be upset about something that cannot be changed or do not be upset about something that is really just a small matter.
Curiosity killed the cat	Proverb, Ben Jonson play, 1598	Being too curious or inquisitive can be dangerous.
It's raining cats and dogs	unknown	There is a heavy downpour
Back to the drawing board	Possibly artist Peter Arno, 1941	Time to start from the beginning.
The hay is in the barn	unknown	The action is complete. It is finished.

A penny for your thoughts	Perhaps English ruler Penda, c.640	What are you thinking?
Beat around the bush	Medieval Period	Someone is avoiding the topic.
You can't judge a book by its cover.	Mid-19 th century	Do not assume you know someone or something by how he or it appears.
That costs an arm and a leg	unknown	That is very expensive
Play it by ear	This sense of the phrase dates back to the 16th century, but the present use only came into being in mid-20th century America, primarily referring to sports	Playing something by ear means that rather than sticking to a defined plan, you will see how things go and decide on a course of action as you go along
Raining cats and dogs	In 1651 in the poet Henry Vaughan's collection Olor Iscanus	We Brits are known for our obsession with the weather, so we couldn't omit a rain-related idiom from this list. It's "raining cats and dogs" when it's raining particularly heavily
Turn a blind eye	During the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801	To "turn a blind eye" to something means to pretend not to have noticed it.

Pot calling the kettle black	First used in the literature of the 1600s – notably Don Quixote by Cervantes	We use this expression to refer to someone who criticises someone else, for something they themselves are guilty of
Once in a blue moon	In 1821	The phrase refers to something that happens very infrequently.
Mad as a hatter	Lewis Carroll’s Mad Hatter character in Alice in Wonderland by 18 th and 19 th century	Mad as a hatter” refers to someone who is completely crazy. A similar expression is “mad as a March hare
Call it a day	In 1919.	This means to stop doing something for the day, for example work, either temporarily or to give it up completely.
Barking up the wrong tree	the early 19th century	If someone is “barking up the wrong tree”, they are pursuing a line of thought or course of action that is misguided.
Blow one’s own trumpet	Anthony Trollope in his 1873 work Australia and New Zealand	to boast about one’s own achievements
In stitches	in 1602 by Shakespeare in Twelfth Night	If you’re “in stitches”, you’re laughing so hard that your sides hurt.

CHAPTER 2: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE IDIOMS

2.1. Similarities between English and Vietnamese idioms.

English- Vietnamese bilingual history is long, including a large number of idioms and proverbs; however, we can see some common features of both two idioms and proverbs.

The first commonality is that both idioms and proverbs are implicit, humorous, serious, refined and particular. They are not only compendious, but also vivid. They can give somebody a kind of beautiful enjoyment. Because of geography, history, religious belief, living custom, etc...the difference of the English - Vietnamese idioms is not bearing the weight of the people's national culture characteristic and culture information. They are linked to cultural tradition closely so they are inalienable.

Secondly, we also find that many English and Vietnamese idioms have the same meaning, awareness as well as presentation method although they still remain national specific characteristics. Because of people being in the emotion, there is similarity in respect of going through in the impression of objective things and the society etc...These literal meanings of idioms and proverbs in the English- Vietnamese ones and the image meaning are the same or approximate. It is the same to imply the meaning, that is to say, the cultural information that the literal meaning of this kind of idiom and image meaning express is the same, it can translate each other.

For example:

- Xa mặt cách lòng.

(Out of sight, out of mind)

Thirdly, an English and Vietnamese proverb can consist of an idiom. For example, the Vietnamese idiom:

Chồng yêu, xỏ chân lỗ mũi

consists of the idiom

Xỏ chân lỗ mũi

or the idiom

Bình chân như vại

in proverb

Cháy nhà hàng xóm, bình chân như vại.

2.2. Differences between English and Vietnamese idioms

The differences in the condition society create particular character and culture of each nation; as a result, English and Vietnamese proverbs are quite different from each other.

Firstly, idiom on life experience, weather, and nature occupying a considerable part in the store of Vietnamese proverbs clearly present particularity of agricultural inhabitants who connect closely to wet rice cultivation.

For example:

Tốt giống, tốt má, tốt mạ, tốt lúa.

Muốn giàu nuôi trâu cái, muốn lợi bại nuôi bò câu.

Đầu năm sương muối, cuối năm gió nồm .

Chuồn chuồn bay thấp thì mưa

Bay cao thì nắng bay vừa thì râm.

It is difficult to find English equivalent idioms because English proverbs mostly reflect rather social relationship than natural one and work experience.

Secondly, anti-feudalism and class struggle spirits is expressed clearly and drastically in Vietnamese idioms through subtle, profound, bitter and daring words and images in order to denounce evils upper class as well as reflect conflict between farmer and despotic landowner and corrupt mandarins.

For example:

Quan thấy kiện như kiến thấy mỡ.

Ngồi mát ăn bát vàng.

Hay làm thì đói, hay nói thì no.

Bà tiên bà thóc, bà cóc gì ai.

Giàu bán chó, khó bán con.

Vô phước bước cửa quan.

Quan hai, lại một.

Tuần hà là cha kẻ cướp.

Muốn nói gian làm quan mà nói.

On the contrary, anti-feudalism and class struggle spirits in English idoms are quite slight and not drastic.

For example:

A cat may look at a King

(Chú mèo nhỏ dám ngó mặt vua)

One law for the rich and another for the poor

(Luật trước cho người giàu, luật sau cho kẻ khó)

Ceasar's wife must be above suspicion

(Vợ Xêda phải ở trên cả sự nghi ngờ)

Thirdly, there are some differences in using metaphor in idioms between two nations. In English and Vietnamese idioms, many different symbols are used to present the same idea, awareness, and criticism.

For example, the Vietnamese idiom:

Ngưu tầm ngưu, mã tầm mã

has a counterpart

Bird of a feather flock together

in which English people use symbol is that birds having the same feather flock together.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Survey questionnaires on difficulties in learning English idiom at HPU

3.1.1. Participants

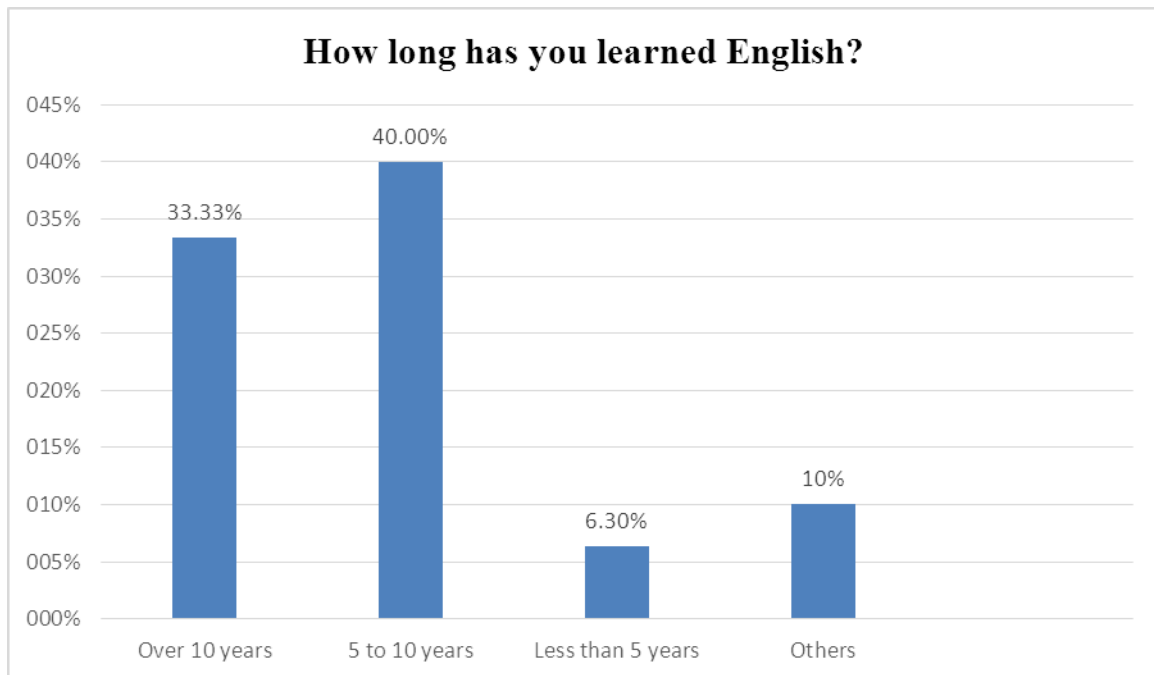
Students studies at Hai Phong Private University, aged between 18 to 23 years. All these participants are students from different regions in Vietnam.

3.1.2. Purpose of survey questionnaires

- ✓ Helping students who improve and prevent from difficulties in learning english idiom.
- ✓ Helping students solve problems when studying idioms as well as understand the meaning and usage of English idioms.

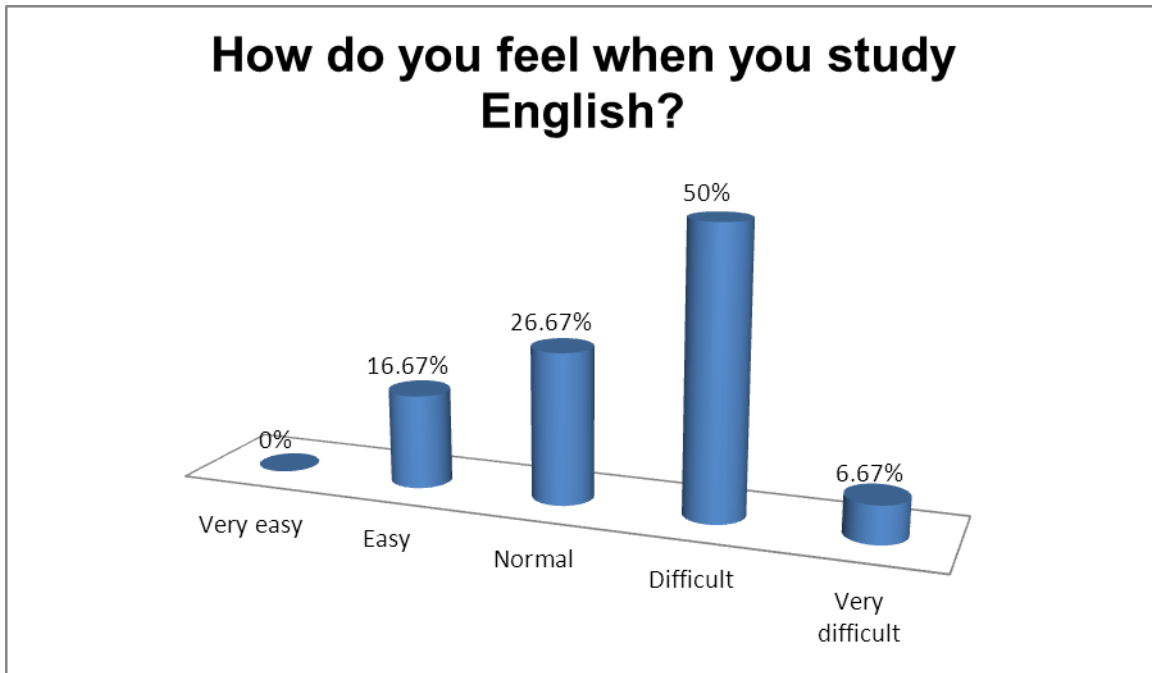
3.1.3. Data analysis

Question 1



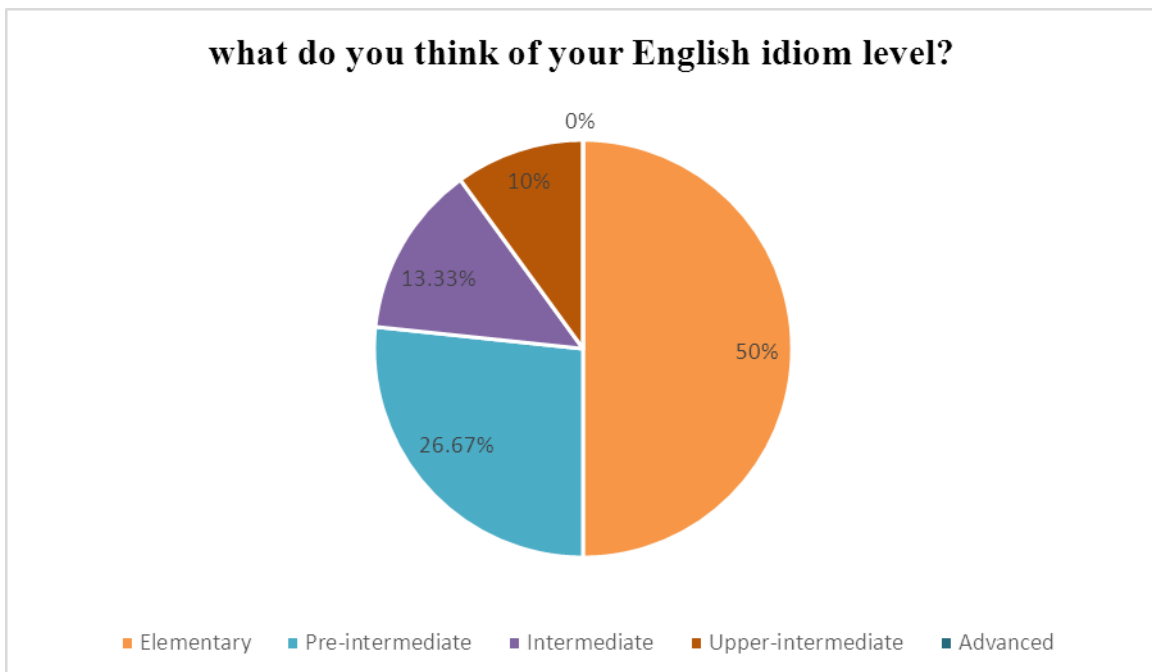
It is shown in the column chart all of the students who took part in the survey got used to English as a second language for a long time.

Question 2



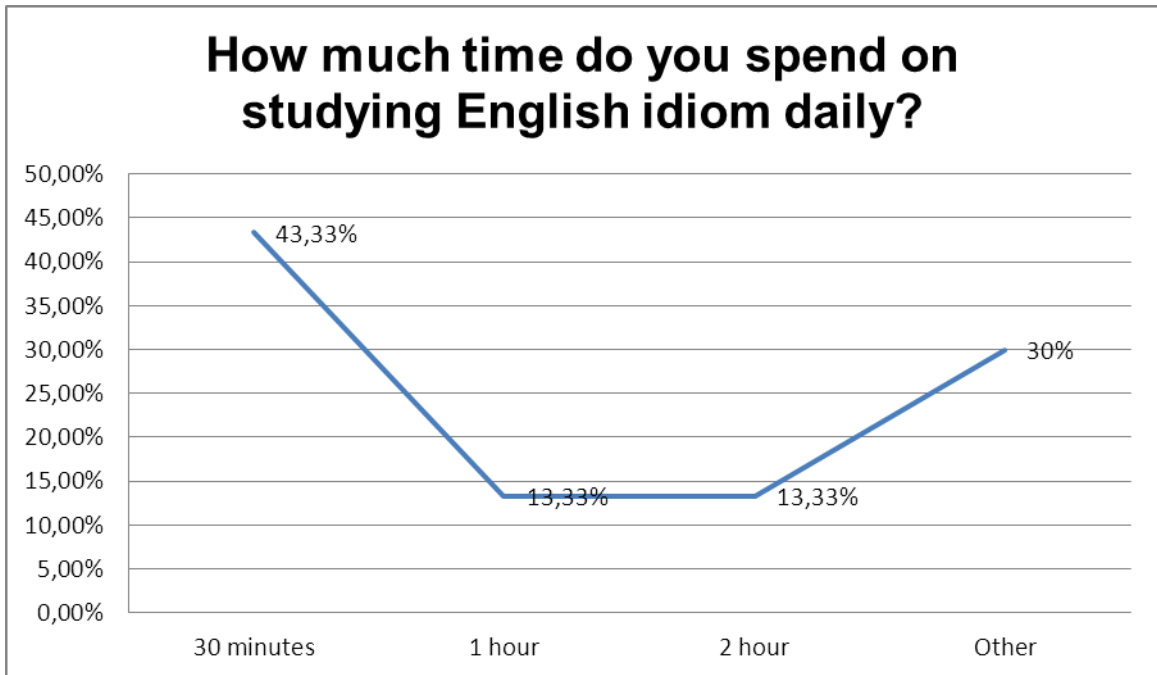
As we see, almost students (50%) thought that English is difficult while only about 0% of them thought that English is very easy.

Question 3



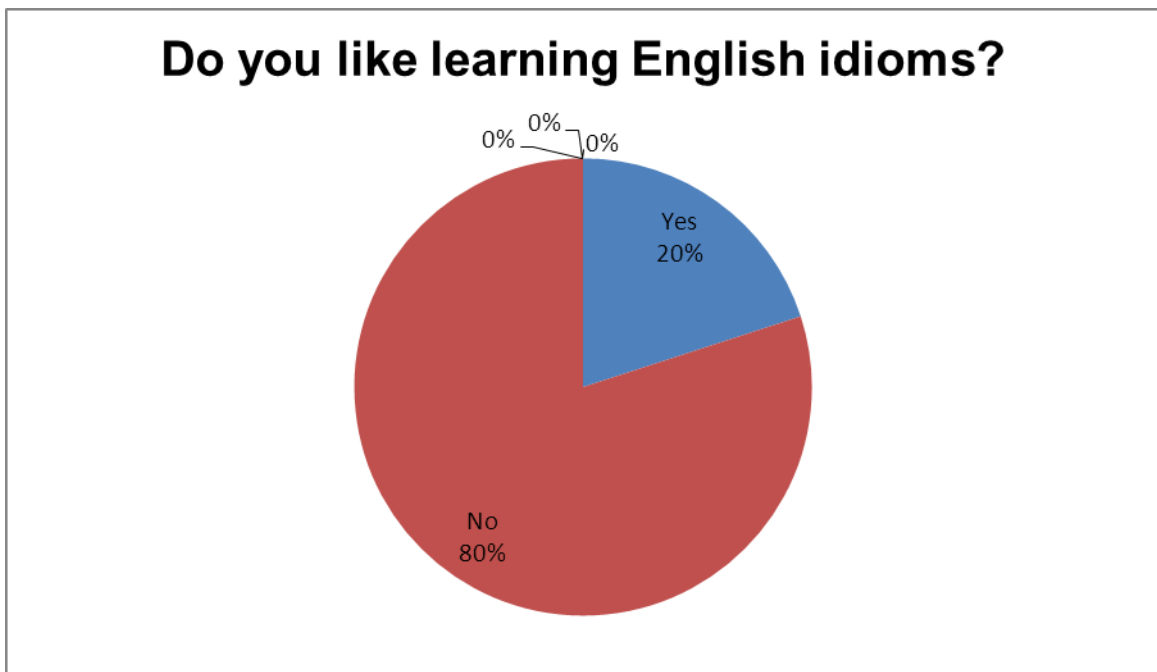
The chart above shows the English idiom level of students are quite different. Some students who rated their English idiom learning at the intermediate level (13.33%), Upper-intermediate level (10%) and advanced level (0%).

Question 4



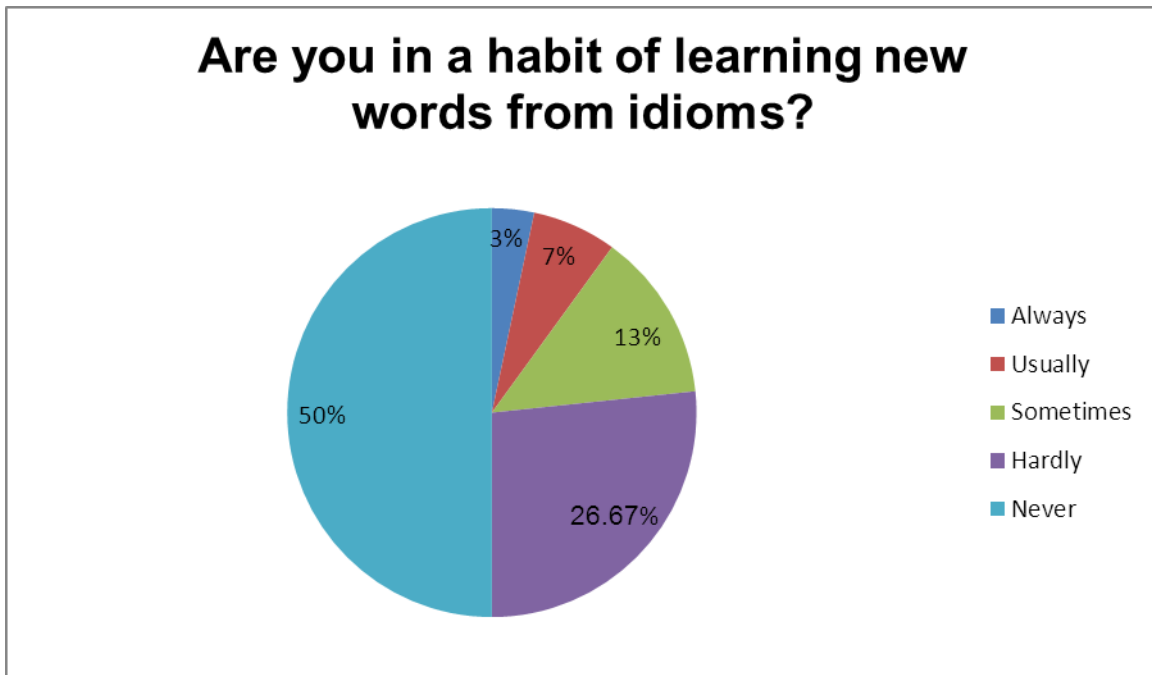
Most of them spend 30 minutes on studying reading daily. The number of students who study from an hour a day and more than an hour is very limited with the same figure of 13,33%.

Question 5



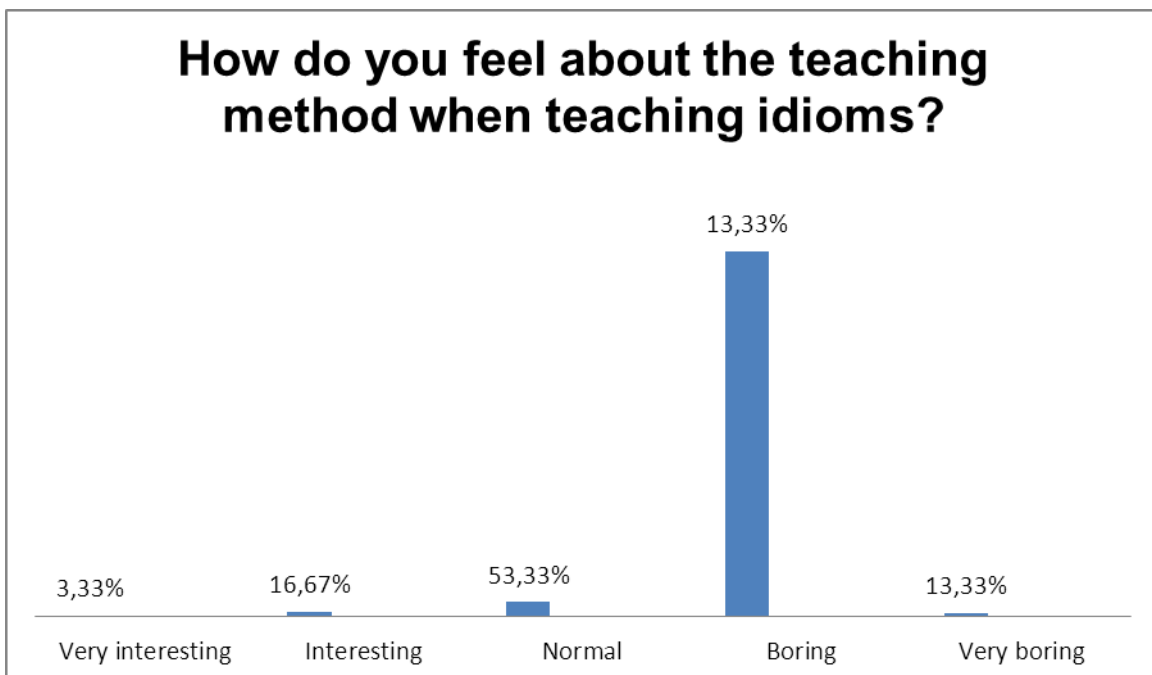
As can be seen, students like learning English idioms only about 20%, but it is about 80% when they don't like learning English idiom.

Question 6

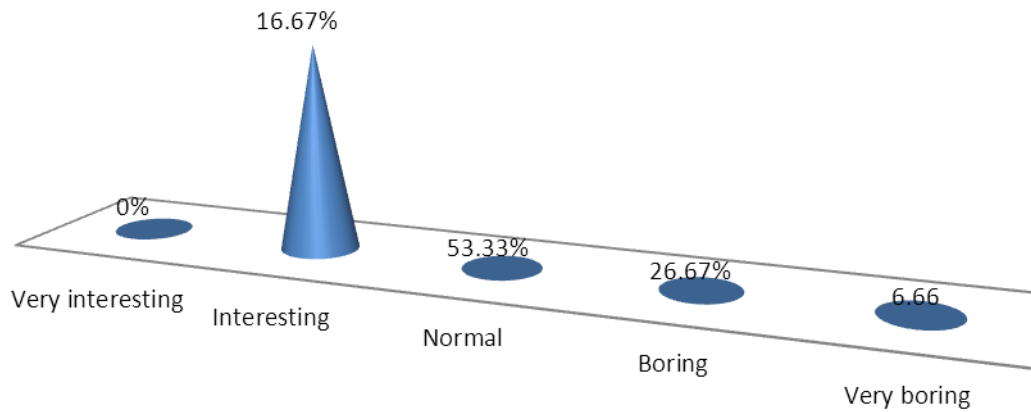


The pie chart illustrates how often learn english idiom the students do. The hard working students who always learned new words assignments seemed to be the least with only 3% student. 13% students sometimes learned new words and 3% of them never did it.

Question 7 and question 8



What do you think about the curriculum being used for teaching English idiom at HPU?



Obviously, only a small proportion of students find those factors interesting (16.67%%) and find it easy to learn. Other 53.33% students think that they are normal. The rest of the students admit that the curriculum and the teaching method are boring and difficult.

3.2. Student's difficulties when learning English idioms

English is a language particularly rich in idiomatic expressions. Without idioms, English would lose much of its variety and humor both in speech and writing. Understanding the meaning and the context of the idiomatic expressions will help students develop their English ability. Using idioms appropriately in oral and written discourse also generates confidence in the student and respect in those with whom he or she communicates for the rich vocabulary, concise expressions and philosophical sayings form idioms.

Idiomatic expressions adds colour to every language in general and in English in particular. Idioms brings us so many benefits but what challenges or problems do non-native English learners have to face as they try to master the English language?

3.2.1. The richness and diversity of the English idioms requires a sufficient cultural background knowledge to fully comprehend and master them.

English native speakers use idiomatic expressions all the time. However, they can often be very difficult to comprehend. Thus, students often feel embarrassed and frustrated if they can not understand them.

English idioms derived from the culture of the nation and from day-to-day life. Learning idioms present a host of difficulties to English learners, primarily because they don't know the culture and history behind English idioms.

Many idioms, for instance, come from favorite traditional British activities such as fighting, sailing, hunting and playing games. As well as being quite specialist in meaning, some of the words in idioms were used two or three hundred years ago, or longer, and can be a little obscure.

Even the majority of native language speakers can not always know the origin of idioms they use, though as long as they utilize them in every day communication, they know its meaning and feel where it is appropriate to use this or that idiom. That is why students often use idioms incongruous with the situation. They find idioms very problematic to both understand and memorize.

3.2.2. English idioms can not easily be understood by defining their components.

Idiom is defined as an expression that does not mean what it literally says. Hence, its meaning is often quite different from the word-for-word translation.

The meaning idioms convey is non-compositional. It implies that we cannot understand the meaning of the whole phrase putting the meanings of each word together. If we look at the individual words, it may not even make sense grammatically. Idioms have the meaning only as a unit.

They can not be understood by defining the separate words. We cannot deduce the meaning of the idiom from the individual words.

We may be able to guess the meaning from context but it is not easy to know the meaning. In real context idioms explain themselves idioms carry their own explanation.

3.2.3. Most of English idioms need to be understood basing on their figurative meanings.

Most of English idioms need to be understood basing on their figurative meanings rather than their literal meanings.

Idioms use language metaphorically. This means that the meaning of an idiom is not the same as the meanings of the individual words in the idiom.

For example:

If you “go down memory lane”, this idiom means “think about the past” (the metaphorical meaning), not “walk down a street called “Memory Lane” (the literal meaning).

Idioms are fixed groups of words. This means that the wording of an idiom can not be changed.

For example:

You can say “*go down memory lane*”, but you can't say “*go down memory street*.”

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/flatmates/episode68/languagepoint.shtml>)

3.2.4. English idioms are fixed in their form, both in grammar and vocabulary.

Idioms have lexical and grammatical stability. It implies that they are fixed in their form, hence any substitutions and rearranging in their structure can lead to complete loss of their idiomatic meaning.

Both the grammar and the vocabulary of an idiom are fixed, and if we change it, we lose the meaning of that idiom. For instance, the idiom “pull your socks up” means “improve the way you are behaving”. If we change it grammatically to “pull up your sock” or we change its vocabulary to “pull your stockings up”, then we must interpret the phrase literally for it has lost its idiomatic meaning.

3.3. Some suggested solutions

With the above difficulties, how to overcome them is still a great question. The following suggestions are to help Vietnamese learners in their English studying.

3.3.1. Studying English idioms basing on classifying them into categories.

Students should divide the idioms they have to learn into categories. Dividing idioms into thematic categories will make them easier to learn. The themes that can be used is various such as idioms of comparison, body, animal, time, clothing, money, weather, proper names and so on. Learning the idioms systematically will help learners avoid mistakes and remember them well.

a. Idioms of Comparison

Idioms of comparison (also called similes) are used in description of people, their appearance, character, mood, actions, things, objects, places, etc. Speakers and writers use similes to emphasize a certain characteristic of a thing. In a simile, the words “like” or “as” are used to signal that a comparison is being made between the two things.

The listener or reader can form a mental image of the comparison. This increases understanding of what the speaker or writer is trying to communicate. *E.g: Working on her project, Mary was as busy as a beaver.*

In the above example, “as busy as a beaver” is the simile, and as is the word used to signal that a comparison is being made. The two things being compared are “busy” and “beaver”. When building a dam a beaver keeps busily working until the dam is completed. A mental image of Mary being as busy as a beaver while working on her project would show her working very hard. This

would bring out that the speaker or writer is saying that Mary was putting a lot of effort into her project and would keep working until it was completed.

Here are some more idioms of comparison with the structure “be + as ... as

As black as the Ace of Spades / soot / coal / midnight

As bold as brass / a coot / a lion

As bright as silver / noonday / day

As changeable as the weather / the moon

As red as fire / blood / a cherry / a rose

As sour as vinegar

As strong as an ox

As timid as a rabbit

As wet as a drowned rat

As white as snow

b. Body-related idioms

There are many English idiomatic expressions relating to various parts of the body.

Idioms	Meaning	Examples
cold feet	nervous just before a big event	My sister didn't get cold feet until she put her wedding gown on
cost an arm and a leg	be very expensive	These cakes are delicious, but they cost an arm and a leg.
face the music	meet, stand up to unpleasant consequences, for example criticism or punishment	I stayed out all night. When I eventually got home I had to face the music from my wife.
have one's head in the clouds	be unaware or unrealistic about something	Amy has her head in the clouds if she thinks she's going to pass her exams without studying.
learn by heart, know by heart	memorize	I learned my multiplication tables by heart in the fourth grade

let one's hair down	relax, have fun	Go to the cottage and let your hair down this weekend.
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pat on the back	recognition or a thank-you	The party organizers deserve a pat on the back for a job well done.
thick in the head	not very intelligent	I'm a bit thick in the head when it comes to reading a map.
wash one's hands of something	stop dealing with an issue or problem	I'm washing my hands of Mary's addiction. She is going to have to get some professional help
keep one's chin up	try to be cheerful	Keep your chin up. I'm sure you'll make some friends soon.

3.3.2. Studying English idioms through their origins.

Idioms are like the human being. They must go through the process of being born, growing up, developing and changing. There are many idiomatic expressions used today originated long ago. We discovered that each of the idioms has its own life and destiny. Behind each idiom, there is a story or an incident preceding it helping students easily remember to use in their daily communication. Besides, every idiom holds a philosophy, an outlook or a life experience stimulated from generation to generation of the native people that students should show their concern for. Using idioms in writings, speeches and in daily conversations has become an artistic style of communicating. Through the following examples, students may clearly understand the background of some idiomatic expressions in order to apply to the suitable situations in life.

For examples:

1. “Break a leg” (A wish of good luck, do well).

E.g: “Break a leg in your game today!”

“Break a leg” is sourced in superstition. It is a wish of good luck, but the words wish just the opposite.

2. “Cat bird seat” (A highly advantaged position, to have it all).

E.g: “Some might describe Bill Gates as sitting in the cat bird seat”.

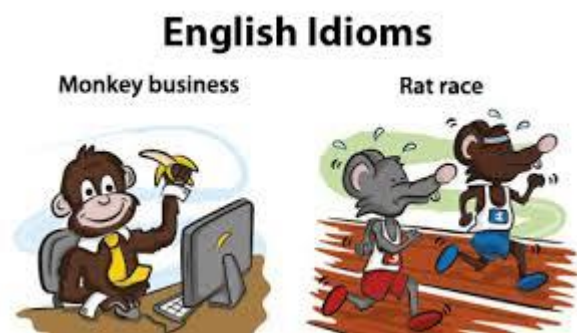
Mocking birds are sometimes referred to as cat birds. Mocking birds typically sit at the top of a tree. Hence the cat bird seat is at the top

3. “Long in the tooth” (To be getting old).

E.g: “Daddy needs a new Porsche. The old one is getting a bit long in the tooth”.

The age of a horse can be roughly determined by examining its teeth, since a horse's gums recede as they age. The longer the teeth of a horse appear to be, the older the horse.

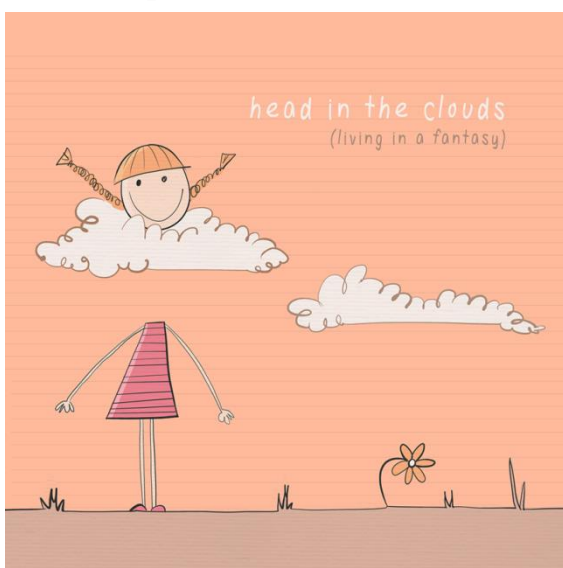
3.3.3. Studying English idioms through pictures, songs, games, etc.

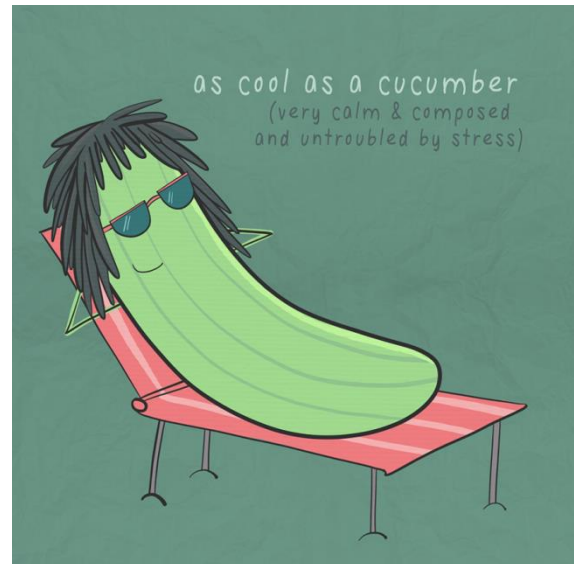
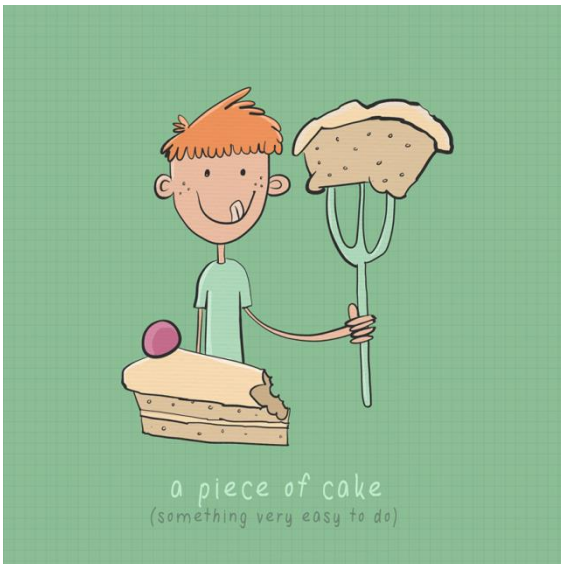


Learning English through images is probably not too strange for children and Vietnamese. By practical memory memorization, learner will remember the reading, vocabulary or grammar more deeply.

One of the most effective ways to learn and remember English idioms is studying them through pictures. They will help illustrate the usage and convey the meaning of each idiom. Then the meaning never escapes from our mind.

For example:





Besides, in the studying process, students should do everything possible to create for themselves a language environment to strengthen the enthusiasm in order to be in a relaxed atmosphere to learn effectively: learning and updating new idioms through listening English songs, playing idiomatic games on the Internet and study from other sources such as books, newspapers, magazines, television shows, advertisements and film dialogues where many idioms are commonly used, stick the notes in locations where they will be seen often, think up conversations which allow to use an idiom and practice it with the classmates, etc. Finally, practicing to use idioms a number of times will help learners master them well.

3.3.4. Comparing English idioms and their Vietnamese equivalents.

Searching and comparing English and Vietnamese idiomatic expressions is really an effective and attractive way to learn, to remember and to strengthen the translating ability as well.

Because English and Vietnamese idioms have some similarities, we can combine these things and idioms can become very easy to remember.

For example, we have the idiom: “in the same boat”. Of course, at the first time we can not figure out what its meaning is. But we know the meaning of the words that make the phrase, so with the figurative meaning, we can conclude that the idiom refers to “in the same situation.”

When facing an idiomatic expression, students should ask themselves if they know any of the idioms translated directly into their own language. If they know a similar expression in their mother tongue, it can help them to remember very well.

3.3.5. Learning five to ten idioms each week.

Students should not be impatient and overload themselves with too many idioms at a time. “Rome wasn’t built in a day”. There are many people who learn this way and remember them for a long time, but for those who have a non-scientific way of learning and try to cram many words each week, this is a way that doesn’t seem to be very suitable. Five to ten is probably a good number for each week.

3.3.6. Making a guess at the meaning of idioms before checking them in dictionaries.

Of course the meaning of idioms should contribute to the meaning of the whole sentence, to emphasize and to clarify the meaning. We should guess idioms in the context of a sentence and the paragraph so as to understand the general idea of that sentence and then check it again in the dictionary. If students learn idioms in this way, they can remember them quickly and easily.

It is sometimes possible to find a Vietnamese idiom or expression with a similar meaning to an English idiom or expression which is expressed in the same way.

For example:

The idiom:

to fight like cats and dog

is expressed using the same words in Vietnamese:

Cãi nhau như chó với mèo

3.3.7. Making sentences when learning a new idiom.

First, students should understand new idioms in contexts. Then they should try to imagine the situations when people actually use the idiomatic expressions you are studying and make sentences or create dialogues to reinforce the meaning of each idiom.

Another important when look at the context. What are people talking about? What’s being discussed? What’s the topic of conversation? Once you know that, you will find it easier to work out the meaning of the idiom. Also, pay careful attention to the co-text. For example, what do you think this idiom means?

3.3.8. Studying idiomatic expressions through English songs, poems, funny stories, media communication, idiom games and quizzes, etc.

Students should do everything possible to create for themselves a linguistic environment to strengthen the enthusiasm in order to be in a relaxing atmosphere to learn them effectively: learning and updating new idioms through listening English songs and poems, playing idiomatic games on the Internet and

studying from other sources such as English books, newspapers, magazines, television shows, advertisements and film dialogues where many idioms and proverbs are commonly used, sticking the idiom and proverb notes in locations where they will be seen often, using computer software to learn and check the knowledge of idioms and proverbs, etc. With these methods, students can feel relaxed and excited during the studying process.

The following poem of simile idioms is a typical example helping students create inspiration to study idiomatic expressions well:

Clever

As poor as a church mouse

As strong as an ox

As cute as a button

As smart as a fox

As thin as a toothpick

As white as a ghost

As fit as a fiddle

As dumb as a post

As bald as an eagle

As neat as a pin

As proud as a peacock

As ugly as sin

Use fresh similes when

you speak and you write,

so your friends will think you are

quite clever and bright.

(<http://www.poetryteachers.com/poetclass/lessons/teachsimiles.html>)

Idioms are a “piece of cake” or a “hard nut to crack”, it is up to our determination. So let’s “roll up our sleeves” (get ready to start work), then “get our noses to the grindstone” (start working hard) and learn idioms and proverbs “until the cows come home” (for a long time)

PART III: CONCLUSION

1. Conclusion

Thanks to idioms people can express their thought and feelings flexibly, exactly and vividly. Therefore, it is necessary to understand them well to guess their meanings and get information correctly. However, due to my limitation of time as well as my knowledge, I have just mentioned some certain aspects of theory of idiom presented in the background part (chapter I), with the hope that readers can have basic knowledge of them and identify them better.

There are many sources of idioms in this paper. I only focus on some issues mentioned in chapter II. I not only find this topic a lot of interesting things but also know more idioms from its usage, culture and life in each. Some English idioms are represented in the paper in comparison with Vietnamese equivalences to find the similarities and difficulties in the way of using metaphor but each of them expresses one meaning, sometimes two idioms have the same meaning and this brings learners interesting things.

Learning idioms is not an easy task, so students often get confused in defining, memorizing and using them. To overcome these, some solutions are introduced in chapter III such as learning them by heart, reading books, magazine, stories pictures and studying culture of each country.

My paper is a very small part of English idioms but I hope that it can contribute partly to learner's process of studying English. All advice, contributions come from teachers will make my paper better and better.

2. Suggestions for further study.

Due to the limitation of my knowledge and time, this paper could not go thought all aspects of English idioms as well as Vietnamese equivalence. So in order to get more comprehensive understanding of this subject, I advise you to study more. I hope that in the future I would like to continue studying this interesting subject. And I would like to take factors relating this theme such as history, society into account to have a different look in the study.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire for students

This questionnaire is meant for a study on the causes of difficulties in learning English idioms of students at Faculties of Foreign Languages. Your answers will be strictly confidential and used only for the purposes of the research. Your co-operation will be highly appreciated.

(Bảng câu hỏi này nhằm phục vụ cho nghiên cứu về nguyên nhân dẫn đến những khó khăn trong việc học thành ngữ tiếng anh của sinh viên khoa ngoại ngữ. Các câu trả lời của bạn sẽ hoàn toàn được giữ bí mật và chỉ được sử dụng vào mục đích nghiên cứu. Tôi sẽ rất đánh giá cao sự hợp tác của bạn)

Section I: Personal information (Thông tin cá nhân)

1. Name (Tên).....
2. Age (Tuổi):.....
3. Hometown (Quê quán):.....
4. Class (Lớp):.....

Section II: Questions (Câu hỏi)

- 1) How long has you learned English? *(Thời gian học tiếng anh của bạn là bao lâu?)*
 - a) Over 10 years (Hơn 10 năm)
 - b) From 5 years to 10 years (Từ 5 đến 10 năm)
 - c) Less than 5 years (Ít hơn 5 năm)
 - d) Other (Khác)
- 2) How do you fell when you study English? *(Bạn cảm thấy thế nào khi học tiếng anh?)*
 - a) Very easy (Rất dễ)
 - b) Easy (Dễ)

- c) Normal (Bình thường)
- d) Difficult (Khó)
- e) Very difficult (Rất khó)

3) What do you think of your English idiom level? (*Bạn nghĩ gì về trình độ đọc thành ngữ tiếng Anh của bạn?*)

- a) Elementary (Cơ bản)
- b) Pre-intermediate (Tiền Trung cấp)
- c) Intermediate (Trung cấp)
- d) Upper-intermediate (Trên trung cấp)
- e) Advanced (Cấp cao)

4) How much time do you spend on studying English idiom daily? (*Hàng ngày bạn dành bao nhiêu thời gian cho việc học thành ngữ tiếng Anh?*)

- a) 30 minutes a day (Mỗi ngày 30 phút)
- b) An hour a day (Mỗi ngày 1 tiếng)
- c) Two hours a day (Mỗi ngày 2 tiếng)
- d) Other:.....

5) Do you like learning English idioms? (*Bạn có thích học thành ngữ tiếng anh?*)

- a) Yes (Có)
- b) No (Không)

6) Are you in a habit of learning new words from idioms? (*Bạn có thói quen học từ mới từ các thành ngữ?*)

- a) Always (luôn luôn)
- b) Usually (thường thường)
- c) Sometimes (Thi thoảng)
- d) Hardly ever (Hiếm khi)
- e) Never (Không bao giờ)

7) How do you feel about the teaching method when teaching idioms? (*Bạn cảm*

thấy thế nào về phương pháp giảng dạy của giáo viên khi dạy thành ngữ?)

- a) Very Interesting (Rất thú vị)
- b) Interesting (Thú vị)
- c) Normal (Bình thường)
- d) Boring (Chán)
- e) Very boring (Rất chán)

8) What do you think about the curriculum being used for teaching English idioms at HPU? *(Bạn nghĩ gì về chương trình giảng dạy đang được sử dụng để dạy thành ngữ tiếng Anh tại HPU?)*

- a) Very Interesting (Rất thú vị)
- b) Interesting (Thú vị)
- c) Normal (Bình thường)
- d) Boring (Chán)
- e) Very boring (Rất chán)

Thank you for your cooperation!
(Cảm ơn về sự hợp tác của bạn!)