

## ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE THE USE OF PROVERBS TO DEVELOP FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS

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### ABSTRACT

Through proverbs, students develop their thinking and imagination, enrich their vocabulary and they are introduced to folk wisdom. The study aimed at demonstrating to teachers the activities and exercises designed to use in the classroom to increase their awareness of teaching proverbs. The study of the potential of a proverb in English language teaching has revealed that it can be used in many ways to improve the students' skills and develop their understanding of the language. These activities not only helped the students improve their methodology, experimentation and attentiveness, but the teachers benefited as well. These activities enable young people to learn and use proverbs in the right context in their daily lives.

**KEY WORDS:** Proverb, culture, Turkish, English, methodology

### 1. Introduction

Culture is one of the essential elements that distinguishes a society from most of other communities, and it is a complex combination of elements, such as language, history, literature, art, folklore, etc. In general, culture includes all the social practices that bind people together but also those which distinguish them from others. The culture expresses the ideas, material and spiritual values of the community that are acquired over and are reflected in the culture. Proverbs are combination of "universal" and "national-cultural" factors, which are interwoven. The proverbs are common to all communities and though each culture has its own set of proverbs, the same wisdom can usually be recognised in a different culture. (Gozpinar, 2014)

Proverbs are a matter of educating feelings and emotions of the society. It is the 'training of the heart and mind' and consists in developing socially accepted feelings and emotions. Like poetry, sometimes it is 'caught' rather than taught. There are several factors (social background, age, sex, status, etc.) in the formation of a culture, and those are important factors for the interpretation of proverbs in order to achieve better results in our lessons related to proverbs. It is essentially a matter of creating the right atmosphere, imitation and learning by example. Proverbs help moral development which includes both thinking and behaving morally.

Proverbs make our speech fluent, natural and colourful, can allow us to perform certain communicative functions, and can increase our understanding and awareness of the target language and culture. Ignorance of those expressions can create communication problems. Most researchers nowadays believe that the study of modern phraseology is impossible without taking into account cultural aspects of language (Pirainen, 2007: 208).

In the research done by Can (2011), when the subjects were asked in what situations and for what purposes they were using or would use English proverbs, they could mention a wide range of situations and purposes as given below:

- For communicating with native speakers better
- For creating humour
- For expressing oneself better and for being understood better
- For supporting the arguments
- For showing that you have a good command of the language and that you have learnt it well
- For beautifying and embellishing the language
- For exemplifying

- For describing an event better
- In oral presentations
- For comprehending native speakers
- For writing effective compositions
- For expressing many things with few words
- For warning someone politely
- For summarizing
- In daily and informal communication with close friends
- For giving advice

The comments above illustrate how proverbs can be incorporated in language classrooms in secondary schools to help the development of students' language knowledge. Most importantly, their knowledge of proverbs can enable them to have access to native speakers' culture so that the learners can enjoy language learning and teaching in a more meaningful way.

Native speakers mostly tend to use simple, concrete, everyday vocabulary when they address the second language learner. That seemingly positive attitude of the native speaker unfortunately cannot help the second language learner understand and learn more about the culture and the proverbs of that nation. However, if a language teacher doesn't design a systematic plan, or give special attention to teaching proverbs to foreign language learners, and if foreign language teachers also avoid using or handling these cultural expressions, students cannot learn and use them appropriately. English teachers may have problems with the textbooks they are using in classes due to the lack of exercises dealing with proverbs, so there is a need for teachers to create activities to teach various language skills. If proverbs chosen by teachers to be used in classes are frequently used ones with less difficult vocabulary, then proverbs gets more attention than the other units in them (Gozpinar, 2014).

Teachers should be careful not to overload students with too many proverbs. Seven is probably a good number for one class. If teachers teach proverbs in context by using texts rather than teaching them in isolation, it may be more effective and enjoyable. Teachers can prepare a list of proverbs in advance to encourage students to use the proverbs in meaningful contexts or motivate learners to use proverbs as topics for writing exercises. The teacher should have the idea of teaching the identical and similar proverbs before proverbs which are difficult to comprehend. When students learn one proverb from the other culture, they will be willing to find out the counterparts of the proverbs in their own languages.

One of the issues related to teaching proverbs is age factor. If the teacher follows just the traditional teaching methodologies, then any age seems suitable for teaching proverbs which can be an enjoyable process for learners.

As a Turkish language lecturer in Georgia for 5 years, I have different activity series while teaching Turkish to Turkish minor program students whose major is English in Samtskhe-Javakheti State University. I adopted one activity and designed a similar lesson plan for intermediate level students in order to promote proverb knowledge in English language teaching classes.

If the proverbs are used in the right place, they will be more helpful. Proverbs teach lessons or provide certain instructions on what should be done and what should not be done and they also gain the status of arguments. A good language teacher should teach proverbs in a communicative and meaningful way together with the culture of that target language in order to foster the pragmatic competence in it. By doing so, the teacher not only helps the student understand the culture, but also helps the existence of the proverb in the following years because the more frequently a proverb is heard, the more easily it will be retained and recalled in the future (Gozpinar, 2014).

We have some ideas for using proverbs in the classroom. I believe that there are many ways to inspire children to learn about the foreign language. I wanted to guarantee fun when I was able to incorporate English proverbs into my lesson plan. Proverbs whose content relates to cultural, educational development and awareness have potential to become a useful and a motivational device in foreign language classes. Below, I have teacher-written class activities that create a climate for proverb learning and could be useful for the teachers who are looking for further ways to inspire students to learn proverbs.

In the exercises, we aimed at bringing and strengthening motivation through a context. I believe that if the teachers are interested in using authentic materials in foreign language classes, carefully chosen proverbs can be used with learners from elementary level up. If the learner wants to be an efficient user of a foreign language, he/she should be culturally aware of the foreign language as well.

## 2. Sample Exercise

### Step 1: Grouping the Equivalent Proverbs

Students were given the following equivalent proverbs in order to group them. The Turkish ones were not given with their translated versions in English.

1. Long absent soon forgotten.
2. Dereyi görmeden paçayı sıvama. **English Translation** :Don't roll up trousers before reaching the stream.
3. Hamlet without the prince of Denmark.
4. Ateş düştüğü yeri yakar. **English Translation**: The fire burns the place where it falls.
5. You can not get blood out of a stone.
6. Öfke ile kalkan zararlar oturur. **English Translation**: He who rises up with wrath will sit down with loss.
7. Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches.
8. Kambersiz düğün olmaz. **English Translation**: No feast is complete without a jester.
9. Experience is the best teacher.
10. Yoktan yonga çıkmaz. **English Translation**: You can not get wood chips from a non-existent log.
11. Anger punishes itself.
12. Bin nasihatten bir musibet yeğdir. **English Translation**: One misfortune is better than a thousand pieces of advice.
13. Don't count your chickens before they are hatched.
14. Gözden irak olan gönülden irak olur. **English Translation**: Away from the eyes away from the heart.

**Answers: ( 1;14 - 2;13 - 3;8 - 4;7- 5;10- 6;11- 9;12 )**

Because the teacher chose less metaphorically expressed proverbs or literally easy ones, that made the lesson more enjoyable and fun. As we have observed, activities were enjoyable for them and for their self confidence after having the results of 100 %.

### Step 2: Talking about Turkey and Guessing the English Proverb

This exercise will help the students learn more about the other country and culture. I aimed to improve the students' knowledge of Turkey, Turkish language, culture and finally learn a proverb. The students were asked to answer the following questions to find the missing proverb. The first letter of each answer helped them find the English proverb.

1. What is the most famous dessert in Turkey? ( Baklava)
2. What is "bread" in Turkish? (Ekmek)
3. What is the most popular drink in Turkey? (Tea)
4. What team did Georgian footballers Shota and Archil Arveladze play for Turkey? ( Trabzonspor)
5. In which city is the biggest mosque of Turkey? ( Edirne)
6. In which city is "tea" grown in Turkey? (Rize)
7. What is the currency in Turkey? (Lira)
8. What is the capital of Turkey? (Ankara)
9. What is "OK" in Turkish? (Tamam)
10. What does "İngiltere" mean in Turkish? ( England)
11. What does the word "lale" mean in English? ( Tulip)
12. What is the most famous sea food in the Black Sea region. ( Hamsi)
13. What is "Hamsi" in English? (Anchovy)
14. Where is Cappadocia in Turkey? (Nevşehir)
15. According to biblical tradition what came to rest on the Mountains of Ararat, now in eastern Turkey? (Noah's Ark)
16. Which part of Turkey does "Eastern Thrace" refer to? (European)
17. What is the name of the largest lake of Turkey? ( Van)
18. It is an ancient city located near the Aegean Sea in Turkey and one of the Seven Wonders of the World. (Ephesus)
19. One colour of the Turkish flag. ( Red)

**(Answer: Better late than never.)**

### Step 3: Proverbs about Asking for Advice

In this activity, the students were asked to speak about “how important it is to ask for advice from other people”. One of the objectives was to give the students opportunity to speak about the topic “asking for advice” individually and work in pairs about the topic. The students are expected not to ignore other people for their advice when they have problems. This step was completed in two teaching hours time. We aimed to make **speaking, reading class and vocabulary teaching** at the same time.

#### a) Reading the Dialogue

Tom: I appreciate your concern as usual.

Celin: No problem! Does my support help you cope better during troubling times?

Tom: You are always here when I need you and you help me with your good advice. Should I take this new job? Or should I stick with my current one?

Celin: As I have told you many times, it's time for a change.

Tom: Why do you think so?

Celin: You always get your salary late and that makes you unhappy.

Tom: Do you really think so?

Celin: I've been listening to you complain for over a year now. Trust me. Take the job. What do you have to lose?

#### b) Answering Some General Questions

We told them to speak about those questions after they were given the questions on a piece of paper:

1. What would you do if you had to decide about a major problem in your life?
2. Would you ask others for advice?
3. Do you sometimes hesitate to ask for advice or help?
4. Do you trust your friends easily?
5. How often do you follow others' advice?
6. How often does a piece of advice from others help you?
7. Do you ignore advice from others?
8. When you need to resolve problems, who do you trust and why?
9. Are you interested in what proverbs say about your problem?
10. Do you take proverbs into consideration while making important decisions?
11. Do you think proverbs can help us with our problems?

#### c) Complete the Following Proverbs by Using One Word from the List Below consult - tongue - counsel - advise - asked - astray

- He who has a .....in his mouth can go anywhere. (**tongue**)
- Better to ask the way than go ..... (**astray**)
- Good ..... has no price. (**counsel**)
- If you wish good advice, ..... an old man. (**consult**)
- Though old and wise, yet still ..... (**advise**)
- Give neither counsel nor salt unless ..... (**asked**)

### 3. Conclusions

**To sum up**, in our activities, we hoped to help other foreign language teachers include proverbs in their classes to enrich the educational experience as much as possible. The study of the potential of a proverb in foreign language teaching has revealed that it can be used in many ways to improve the students' skills and develop their understanding of the language. I think that teachers should collaborate to investigate how teenagers can be taught proverbial wisdom as expressions of laws of life and proverbs can be used as a way of teaching moral values. In the exercises above, you see some values to be taught in classes by means of different activity types about proverbs. It is a cross cultural study of proverbs in English and Turkish languages.

I also think that proverbs should be presented in the way that students can learn proverbs about different topics rather than listing proverbs about one topic. Proverbs which contradict with each other shouldn't be given one after the other. The proverbs can be given to students at different times.

Because we have proverbs from two nations, it will help for the development of multicultural perspective of the students. The order of the following proverbs should be according to the priorities of the class students and their ages. The point is that teachers should be alert to use proverbs in classes anytime.

The proverbs for those activities were specifically chosen from daily life to help the students create their stories easily, and one "value" for character development was meant to be taught. Our goal of letting the students show their understanding of proverbs with effective moral messages was a success from the point of learning. Learning is defined as a process in which students find opportunity to communicate, ask questions, reflect on their thinking. Thus, the study automatically gave them this chance.

Children may use the didactic and moral value of proverbs later in their future lives. I hope the students will connect a proverb to a situation after this valuable and motivational series of activities. Rather than studying the proverbs as time fillers, we wanted to teach the students how to use them in the correct context. This is because I believe that by learning words when we need them and then immediately place them in context with known words, the person learns faster and commits this learning to long term memory, which can contribute to the improvement of pragmatic competence.

I was motivated to teach proverbs by preparing contextual activities, because proverbs are true and meaningful depending on the context they are used in. I think that if the student learns how to apply the proverb to various contexts, the benefit of this is achieved for the long term. Students were motivated to understand the literal meaning first and then context by interpreting the figurative language.

When studying proverbs in a foreign language class, it facilitates the learning process, and at the same time, proverbs create an interactive atmosphere within the classroom. Students learned numerous proverbs, and learned how to use them in meaningful contexts by illustrating them. At the end of the activity, the students were encouraged to participate in the learning process by expressing their own ideas, and that their comprehension was also improved with the help of those wisdom tips.

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