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The frequency of using idioms in writing for the students learning Turkish as a foreign language

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In foreign language teaching, the transmission of the culture within which the target language grows is as important as teaching new words and grammar. All elements of the culture have their own special places within the vocabulary of the language. Reflecting not only the linguistic structure but also the culture of the society to which they belong, idioms pose utmost importance for foreign language teaching. The aim of this study is to determine the level that Turkish as a Foreign Language students use the idioms they have learnt in the class while writing. To this end, the idioms covered in B2 and C1 level Turkish as a Foreign Language course books have been specified, and the frequency at which the students use these idioms on their writing-based exam papers has been determined. Therefore, the questions whether the students are able to use these idioms or not, and if they do, what type of idioms they prefer to use in terms of semantics, have been addressed within this study. Following that, samples of linguistic activities that can be employed for teaching idioms have also been proposed hereby.

Key words: Teaching idioms, written production, teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

INTRODUCTION

For the teaching of not only the native tongue but also a foreign language, the ability to use idioms properly is a prerequisite of speaking and writing well in that language (Hinkel, 2017; Liontas, 2015). Bearing this in mind, the notion of idioms stands as a significant subject for teaching foreign language, since idioms are necessary for achieving linguistic competence, not to mention that they serve as the reflectors of culture. With the semantical layers it harbors, an idiom basically represents the lifestyle as well as the cultural heritage of the nation to which it belongs. Therefore, learning idioms inevitably involves a cultural dimension (Liu, 2017;

Huang, 2001).

Every culture has its own language which brings along a distinctive identity. The language hosts all characteristics of the culture, as well as the entire historical and social inheritance. Bearing in mind that language is not just a system of signs but it also means culture, the notion of culture itself should never be neglected when it comes to learning or teaching a language (Tran, 2010). Since language is a phenomenon that grows along with the society to which it belongs, mastering a foreign language requires the ability to think within the mindset of that society and to have knowledge

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about the cultural background of that society.

Every idiom was born by the process of cultural accumulation and cannot be translated by using the words or the grammatical structures that exactly correspond to those in the target language (Nida and Taber, 2003). For instance, the idiom "dereyi görmeden paçayı sıvamak", which can be interpreted as "to start preparing for something too early or without any solid reason", may be considered as the Turkish counterpart of the English idiom "count one's chickens before they are hatched". Although both sayings serve the same purpose, either of them possesses a different linguistic structure stemming from cultural variation. As illustrated in this example, every society has its own distinctive mindset, which should be adopted by those wishing to learn the language that belongs to a given society.

All elements of the culture have their own special places within the vocabulary of the language. Reflecting not only the linguistic structure but also the culture of the society to which they belong, idioms pose utmost importance for foreign language teaching. As also stated by Aksan (1999: 91), idioms reflect the material and non-material culture of a society, including the mindset, lifestyle, surroundings, traditions, jokes, epigrams, relics and beliefs of the people speaking the same language, and they are equally important for linguistics, literature and folklore.

In general, the studies conducted within the field of teaching foreign languages not only emphasize the importance of teaching idioms of the target language, but also point at the difficulty of doing so, and remark that the idioms which cannot be perfectly understood might have a negative effect on comprehending the entire text (Marton, 1977; Andreou and Galantomes, 2008). Moreover, since foreign language learners tend to be skeptical and timid when it comes to transferring idiomatic notions from their native tongue, there are also studies suggesting that it is not easy to learn even the idioms that have exactly the same meaning and structure in the learner's native tongue (Kellerman, 1977; Laufer, 2000; Hulstijn and Marchena, 1989). The difficulty of learning idioms in a foreign language stems from the facts that idioms reflect the linguistic and cultural structure, the customs and traditions, the historical background and the lifestyle of the society to which they belong, that they hold metaphorical meanings in addition to their referential meanings, and that they are conventionally-born phrases achieved in time and by the collaboration of the members of that society.

Working with idioms is generally regarded as a hard work to accomplish (Hinkel, 2017). However, teaching idioms in a foreign language can be achieved by various methods including planning a proper teaching environment, choosing the right idioms to teach, classifying idioms in terms of their semantic features, proposing them within a context and supporting the

teaching process with audio-visual material (Rizq, 2015). By scanning the existing literature for studies concerning this topic (Irujo, 1986; Gibbs, 1987, 1991; Glucksberg, 1993; Kövecsez and Szabo, 1996; Lennon, 1998; Boers, 2000; Bayraktar and Yaşar, 2005; Akkök, 2009; İşeri, 2010), it can be seen that:

(i) The idioms that are frequently used in daily life,
(ii) The idioms that are easy to learn in terms of grammar and vocabulary,
(iii) The idioms that have a clear meaning,
(iv) The idioms comprised of words with meanings that facilitate grasping the overall meaning of the idiom,
(v) The idioms that have a counterpart in the learner's native tongue and share the same notion and the structure in both languages are regarded to be relatively easier to learn. Therefore, it is recommended to start with teaching the idioms that are frequently used, structurally and semantically simple, and comprising of words that bear their core meanings.

Understanding idioms requires the attainment of the "ability to understand and use idioms appropriately and accurately in a variety of sociocultural contexts, in a manner similar to that of native speakers, and with the least amount of mental effort" (Liontas, 2017: 623). There are various approaches to the classification of idioms in terms of semantics. Studies focusing on this issue (Şanskiy, 1969; Subaşı, 1988; Nunberg, 1978; Makkai, 1972; Cacciari and Glucksberg, 1991; Aksoy, 1993) are based on the influence of the meaning of the words composing an idiom on the overall meaning of the composed idiom. In the light of these studies, the idioms in Turkish can be classified in three groups in terms of semantics:

(1). Highly analyzable idioms: Idioms in this group are directly related with the meanings of all of the words composing the idiom. For instance, "kafa dinlendirmek", which can be interpreted as "to stay away from worrying or from problems that tire one's mind", is an idiom made up of two words that directly refer to the idiomatic meaning.
(2). Moderately analyzable idioms: Idioms in this group involve only a single word which keeps its core meaning and contribute to the idiomatic meaning. For example, "gözden düşmek", which can be interpreted as "to fall out of favor", harbors "düşmek", which can be translated as "to fall", connotates the overall idiomatic meaning.
(3). Unanalyzable idioms: Idioms in this group are made up of words that do not directly contribute to the overall meaning of the idiom itself. For instance, "yüz göz olmak", which can be interpreted as "to be too familiar or close with someone for no reason", is comprised of words none of which connotate the overall idiomatic meaning when considered as separate words.

Based on these assumptions, this study aims to determine the level that Turkish as a foreign language students use the idioms they have learnt in the class while writing.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research model

Aiming to determine the level that Turkish as a foreign language students use the idioms they have learnt in the class while writing, this study has adopted the single screening model, which is "a research approach targeting at describing a situation or a condition as it is" (Karasar, 2012: 77).

Population and sample

The population of this study consists of adult students learning Turkish at language training courses located in Turkey, whereas the sample group is comprised of 235 students learning Turkish at Istanbul University Language Center or Istanbul University School of Foreign Languages, at either b2 (N: 140) or C1 (N: 95) level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Data collection

The research data has been obtained in two different ways. Firstly, B2 and C1 level course books and workbooks of *Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Öğretim Seti,* which is the textbook studied at Istanbul University Language Center and Istanbul University School of Foreign Languages, have been analyzed to specify the idioms covered in them. Secondly, the writing sections of B2 and C1 level end-of-course tests have been examined and the idioms used by the students have been categorized and listed.

Data analysis

The idioms specified within the B2 and C1 level course books and workbooks of *Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Öğretim Seti* [Turkish for Foreigners Book Set] and those found in the writing papers of students finishing B2 or C1 level have been categorized in three groups as follows: Highly analyzable idioms, moderately analyzable idioms, unanalyzable idioms. Following that, the data sets collected have been compared to find out which idioms the students tend to use, how many of the idioms learnt during the course have been used and whether the students prefer to use the idioms that have not been previously covered in the class.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Idioms in *Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe* B2 textbook set and the findings related to the idioms used by the students at B2 level

Tables 1 and 2 provides the semantical classification of the idioms covered by Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe B2 textbook set. Table 1 shows the idioms covered by *Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe* B2 textbook set, which is the main textbook used in the class. When examined in terms of their semantical features, 28 idioms out of the total 64 have been found to be highly analyzable, whereas 22 of them have been found to be moderately analyzable, and the remaining 14 have been found to be unanalyzable. Table 2 shows the idioms that the B2 level students used in their writing exam papers as well as the number of students who used them.

When Table 2 is examined, it can be seen that the 140 students involved in the study used 14 different idioms in total. It can also be said that the students preferred to use the highly analyzable idioms while writing (Gibbs, 1991), whereas they preferred the moderately analyzable idioms less often (Andreou and Galantomos, 2008), and only one student used an unanalyzable idiom. It is indeed natural for foreign students to tend to use the idioms which are comprised of words that preserve their core meanings and therefore provide a hint about the overall meaning of the idiom, since learning the metaphors of the target language is an effort that takes a considerable amount of time and training. Another point that deserves attention is that only 7 of the idioms used by the students were those already covered in the class. In other words, the students preferred to use only 7 of the 64 idioms covered in the course book.

Table 3 shows the idioms covered in *Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe* C1 textbook set, which is the main textbook used in the class. When examined in terms of their semantical features, 30 idioms out of the total 81 have been found to be highly analyzable, whereas 33 of them have been found to be moderately analyzable, and the remaining 18 have been found to be unanalyzable.

When Table 4 was examined, it can be seen that the 95 students involved in the study used 20 different idioms in total. It can also be said that the students preferred to use the highly analyzable idioms while writing (Glucksberg, 1993), whereas they preferred the moderately analyzable idioms less often (Cacciari and Glucksberg, 1991), and the least preferred idiom type was found to be unanalyzable idioms (Andreou and Galantomos, 2008). The variety of using idioms in writing for C1 students (Lennon, 1998) was found to be higher than that of B2 students (Irujo, 1986). Although the students used 20 different idioms in total while writing, only 8 of these were the idioms that had been previously covered in the class. Bearing this in mind, it can be inferred that focusing on different types of in-class activities aimed at teaching idioms requires further attention.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study, which aims to determine the level that Turkish as a foreign language students use the idioms they have learnt in the class while writing, and the

Table 1. Idioms in *Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe* B2 textbook set.

Highly analyzable	Moderately analyzable	Unanalyzable
Aklına gelmek	Adım atmak	Akla karayı seçmek
Başarısızlığa uğramak	Ayak uydurmak	Ayaklarına kara sular inmek
Büyümüş de küçülmüş	Bozuntuya vermemek	Başına devlet kuşu konmak
Dikkate almak	Canı çıkmak	Damga vurmak
Farkına varmak	Dile getirmek	Dillere destan olmak
Düş kırıklığına uğramak	Dili tutulmak	Göbeği çatlamak
Fırsatı kaçırmak	… duygusu uyandırmak	Gönlü ferman dinlememek
Gerçek yüzünü göstermek	El koymak	Leyleği havada görmek
Giyinip kuşanmak	Ele avuca sığmamak	Maymun etmek
Harekete geçmek	Ele almak	Nabzını tutmak
Hayal kurmak	Elinden geleni yapmak	Soğukkanlı olmak
Hüküm vermek	Eser kalmamak	Tuzluya mal olmak
İlham almak	Gözler önüne sermek	Ye kürküm ye
İtibar görmek	Gönlünü hoş tutmak	Yer yarılıp içine girmek
Katkıda bulunmak	Göz kamaştırmak	
Keyif sürmek	Hayat vermek	
Mesaj vermek	İçi dışı bir olmak	
Öfkeye kapılmak	Kafa dengi	
Sevinçten bayılmak	Meraktan çatlamak	
Sıkıntı çekmek	Tadını çıkarmak	
Şaşırıp kalmak	Üstesinden gelmek	
Temel atmak	Yok satmak	
Üstün görmek		
Vakit geçirmek		
Vakit kaybetmek		
Yola koyulmak		
Yolu düşmek		
Zevk almak (hayattan)		

Table 2. Idioms used by B2 level students while writing.

Highly analyzable	Moderately analyzable	Unanalyzable
Karar vermek (n: 16)	Deli gibi (çalışmak) (n: 2)	
Farkına varmak (n: 14)	Elinden geleni yapmak (n: 2)	
Aklına gelmek (n: 11)	Eser kalmamak (n: 1)	
Israr etmek (n:8)	Umudunu kesmek (n: 1)	
Morali bozulmak (n: 6)		
Hayal kurmak (n: 5)		Alttan almak (n: 1)
Vakit geçirmek (n: 5)		
İlgi göstermek (n: 4)		
Hayal kırıklığına uğramak (n: 2)		

recommendations based on these results are as follows:

There are 64 idioms in total in *Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Öğretim Seti* B2 coursebook set, which is the textbook used in the class by B2 level students of Turkish as a foreign language. 28 of these idioms are highly analyzable, whereas 22 of them are moderately analyzable and 14 idioms have been found to be unanalyzable. Considering the fact that it is relatively easier to learn and to use the idioms comprising of words

Table 3. Idioms in *Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe* C1 textbook set.

Highly analyzable	Moderately analyzable	Unanalyzable
Akıl vermek	Aklına gelmek	Bıyık altından gülmek
Aklını kullanmak	Aklında kalmak	Bozuk para gibi harcamak
Başını kaşıyacak vakti olmamak	Baş etmek	Boynunu bükmek
Birbiri üstüne gelmek	Başa çıkmak (bir şeyle)	Dert yanmak
Çığır açmak	Başına (bir şeyler) gelmek	Evde kalmak
Delik deşik etmek	Başını dinlemek	Girecek delik aramak
Derdine deva bulmak	Boyundan büyük işlere kalkışmak	Göze batmak
Ders almak	Değme keyfine	Gözleri yuvalarından fırlamak
Ders vermek	Dilinden düşürmemek	Kafayı yemek
Gözler önüne sermek	Dillerde dolaşmak	Kan beynine sıçramak
Gözlerinin içi gülmek	Ele almak	Kan kaybetmek
Gözünü açmak	Feleğe küsmek	Masaya yatırmak
Gözünün önüne gelmek	Gelip çatmak	Olmayacak duaya âmin demek
Hızlı yaşamak	Göz gezdirmek	Pabucunu dama atmak
İki çift laf etmek	Göze almak	Renk katmak
İlham vermek	Gözü yüksekte olmak	Ses getirmek
İmza atmak	Gülmekten kırılmak	Sinek avlamak
İşi rast gitmek	İçi içine sığmamak	Yolunu bulmak
İşleri ters gitmek	İleriyi görmek	
Kalp kırmak	Kafa yormak	
Kendini alamamak	Kendinden geçmek	
Kendini göstermek	Öfkesini (bir şeyden) çıkarmak	
Modası geçmek	Peşine düşmek	
Morali bozulmak	Şaka kaldırmak	
Sinirleri gerilmek	Şakaya vurmak	
Şansı dönmek	Şansı yaver gitmek	
Uğur getirmek	Temize çıkmak	
Varlıkta darlık çekmek	Vicdan azabı çekmek	
Yüzü gülmek	Yenik düşmek (uykuya)	
Zararlı çıkmak	Yüze gülmek	
	Yüzüne gülmek (şans)	
	Zaman kazanmak	
	Zaman öldürmek	

Table 4. Idioms used by C1 level students while writing.

Highly analyzable	Moderately analyzable	Unanalyzable
Akıl vermek	Yas tutmak	İçten pazarlıklı
Kalp kırmak	Canı sıkılmak	Dananın kuyruğu kopmak
Gözlerinin içi gülmek	Sözünü tutmak	Kolları sıvamak
Gözünün önüne gelmek	Aklına gelmek	Dert yanmak
İyi gün dostu	Vicdan azabı çekmek	
Yükte hafif pahada ağır	Hoşuna gitmek	
İlgi çekmek	Gözden düşmek	
Morali bozulmak		
Yola çıkmak		
Sabrı tükenmek		

that have referential meanings which are close to the overall idiomatic meaning, it is normal for the course book to cover analyzable idioms more. The 140 B2 level students involved in this study were found to use 14 different idioms, which shows that they do not make use of idioms sufficiently, and further attention and emphasis on the teaching of idioms, which hold a significant place in the vocabulary of Turkish language, is necessary. Also, idioms should be involved in all of the activities aiming at improving the four basic linguistic skills. Moreover, the course book should not be regarded as the only and ultimate source for teaching idioms; all types of material which can facilitate transferring idiomatic knowledge into daily life should be involved in the teaching process.

İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Öğretim Seti C1 textbook set covers 81 idioms in total. 30 of these idioms are highly analyzable, whereas 33 of them are moderately analyzable, and 18 of them are unanalyzable. The 95 B2 level students involved in this study were found to use 20 different idioms, and they mostly preferred to use the highly analyzable idioms while writing, whereas the moderately analyzable and unanalyzable idioms were preferred less often. Unanalyzable idioms are made up of words that do not directly contribute to the overall meaning of the idiom itself; they have a strong metaphorical aspect, and therefore require interpretation for comprehension. In the interpretation and comprehension of an idiom utilizing all of the linguistic information in the context is the first step. Teachers duty in this issue entails teaching the strategies to analyze the idiomatic meaning, directing the students to positive transference from the native tongue when necessary and creating cultural awareness by telling the original story behind the emergence of an idiom.

The idioms to be taught should be organized in a "from easy to difficult" manner, and the level of appropriateness of an idiom to the student's level as well as the frequency of use in daily life should be taken into account. On the other hand, further attention should be paid on the study of word and idiom frequency in the field of Teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Also, the words and idioms used in verbal communication should be scanned regularly, and the data obtained should be put at the disposal of the practitioners working in this field. Utilizing the principles and methods of linguistics in the field of foreign language teaching for developing language teaching material, inventing methods to facilitate communication, composing activities suitable to students' levels and developing teaching techniques will definitely help students learn the target language as a whole and with all of its living aspects.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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