



PERSONALIZED ENGLISH IDIOM LEARNING THROUGH AI-SUPPORTED ADAPTIVE TASKS

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ABSTRACT

English idiomatic expressions are an important component of communicative competence, yet they remain challenging for foreign-language learners because their meanings are not always predictable from the meanings of their constituent words. Learners also differ considerably in their previous exposure to idioms, ability to interpret figurative meanings and capacity to use idiomatic expressions appropriately in context. This paper proposes a personalized approach to English idiom learning through AI-supported adaptive tasks. The framework draws on Russian phraseological theory and phraseodidactics, Uzbek research into linguocultural and technology-supported idiom instruction, and international research on second-language idiom processing and acquisition. The proposed model consists of five progressive stages: meaning recognition, contextual interpretation, controlled production, independent use and transfer. AI is conceptualized not as a replacement for the teacher but as a tool for generating differentiated tasks, adjusting scaffolding and providing context-sensitive practice according to learners' demonstrated performance. The paper argues that combining established principles of phraseological pedagogy with adaptive technology can provide a promising framework for personalized idiom instruction among first-year Philology students. The model requires subsequent empirical validation through controlled classroom research.

1.Introduction

Idiomatic expressions occupy an important place in natural language because they allow speakers to communicate meanings economically and figuratively. At the same time, their semantic and structural characteristics make them particularly demanding for foreign-language learners. Phraseological scholarship has long emphasized that phraseological units should be distinguished from freely constructed word combinations because their meaning

and use are determined by relatively stable structural and semantic relationships (Chernysheva, 1970; Kunin, 1996).

The pedagogical implications of this linguistic complexity have been examined in Russian phraseodidactic research. Prokurorova (2006), for example, investigated the teaching of English phraseological units to university language students through home reading, thereby connecting phraseological learning with meaningful language input. Sonina (2012) subsequently developed a cognitive-communicative methodology for teaching English phraseology, emphasizing the relationship between phraseological knowledge, cognition and communication.

This research tradition is complemented by Uzbek scholarship. Azizova (2018) examined the linguocultural characteristics of teaching English phraseological units to university students through English-Uzbek material. More recently, Kalabaeva (2025) investigated innovative educational technologies for teaching English idiomatic expressions to Philology students. These studies demonstrate the continuing relevance of phraseological competence within foreign-language education and the growing interest in innovative methods of instruction. However, an important pedagogical problem remains. Learners within the same university group rarely possess identical levels of idiomatic knowledge. A student may recognize an idiom but fail to interpret it in context, while another may understand its meaning but be unable to produce it appropriately. Consequently, providing all learners with identical exercises may result in either insufficient support or unnecessary repetition.

This paper therefore proposes an AI-supported adaptive approach in which the difficulty, contextual complexity and degree of scaffolding of idiom-learning tasks are adjusted according to learner performance. The focus is particularly relevant to first-year Philology students, for whom systematic development of idiomatic competence can contribute to both linguistic proficiency and future professional communication.

2. Theoretical and Empirical Foundation

The proposed approach rests on three interconnected foundations: phraseological theory, research on L2 idiom processing, and evidence-based idiom pedagogy.

2.1. Phraseological and cognitive foundations

Russian phraseological scholarship provides the linguistic basis for understanding idiomatic expressions as relatively stable units whose meaning cannot always be derived compositionally from their constituent words. Chernysheva (1970) and Kunin (1996) are particularly important within this tradition.

From a pedagogical perspective, this means that learners need to develop knowledge of an idiom as a whole linguistic and communicative unit, rather than simply learning the meanings of its individual components. Prokurorova (2006) and Sonina (2012) demonstrate how phraseological knowledge can be integrated into meaningful language learning through reading, cognitive processing and communication. This principle is also supported by research into second-language idiom processing. Cooper (1999) showed that L2 learners employ different strategies when attempting to interpret idiomatic expressions, while Cieřlicka (2006) found evidence that literal meanings of idiom constituents can remain cognitively salient during L2 processing. These findings suggest that learners may require

explicit assistance in establishing connections between an idiom's form, figurative meaning and contextual function.

Thus, effective idiom instruction should move beyond a simple: idiom → translation relationship towards: form → figurative meaning → context → communicative function → appropriate use.

2.2. Evidence for meaningful idiom instruction

The need for contextualized and cognitively meaningful instruction is supported by empirical research. Boers, Eyckmans and Stengers (2007) investigated the pedagogical value of providing etymological information when teaching figurative idioms. Their findings support approaches that encourage meaningful understanding rather than relying exclusively on memorization.

A particularly relevant experimental study was conducted by Hung (2019), who compared cognitive-linguistic instruction with rote learning in an EFL context. The instructional treatment included explanation, practice and productive tasks, and the cognitive-linguistic group demonstrated stronger learning outcomes. This provides empirical support for the principle that idiom instruction should progress from understanding towards active use. The implication for adaptive learning is significant. If learners differ in their level of mastery, the sequence and intensity of these activities should not necessarily be identical for everyone.

2.3. From innovative instruction to adaptive instruction

Recent Uzbek research provides an important bridge between traditional phraseodidactics and technology-supported instruction. Kalabaeva (2025) specifically examined innovative educational technologies in teaching English idiomatic expressions to Philology students. Her work demonstrates the relevance of ICT, interactive activities and innovative pedagogical techniques to idiom instruction. The present proposal extends this direction by introducing adaptivity as a central methodological principle. The issue is therefore not simply whether technology is used, but how technology can respond to differences in learner performance. This distinction is central to the proposed framework.

3. AI-Supported Adaptive Framework

The proposed model consists of five stages.

Stage 1. Meaning Recognition

Learners first establish the basic figurative meaning of the target idiom.

For example:

break the ice — to make people feel more comfortable in a social situation.

At this stage, AI-supported tasks may include matching, multiple-choice questions, definitions, translation or visual prompts. If the learner demonstrates difficulty, additional scaffolding can be provided. If the learner demonstrates mastery, the system can progress to a more demanding task.

Stage 2. Contextual Interpretation

The learner encounters the idiom in meaningful contexts:

Everyone was nervous at the beginning of the meeting, so the teacher told a joke to break the ice. The task can require the learner to identify the figurative meaning and explain why the expression is appropriate in the particular situation.

Stage 3. Controlled Production

Learners begin producing the idiom with support:

Everyone was nervous, so I tried to ____.

The learner completes the sentence using *break the ice*.

As performance improves, the amount of linguistic support is progressively reduced.

Stage 4. Independent Use

Learners use idioms in dialogues, role-plays, discussions, presentations or short narratives. At this stage, the target expression does not necessarily need to be supplied. Learners must retrieve an appropriate idiom themselves.

Stage 5. Transfer

The final stage requires learners to apply idiomatic knowledge in an unfamiliar communicative situation.

For example: *You are attending an international academic conference and meet another student for the first time. Start a conversation and use an appropriate idiomatic expression.* The learner must determine which expression is suitable for the situation and use it appropriately.

4. The Adaptive Mechanism

The central feature of the model is the relationship between learner performance and subsequent instruction. The basic cycle is: learner response → performance diagnosis → adapted task → teacher validation → new response → progression or additional support

Performance	Instructional response
Cannot identify meaning	Translation, definition and additional examples
Partial comprehension	More contextualized practice
Successful comprehension	Controlled production
Successful production	Reduced scaffolding
Independent use	More complex communicative tasks
Successful transfer	Novel and spontaneous situations
Persistent difficulty	Return to an earlier stage
Performance	Instructional response

The model therefore avoids treating adaptive learning simply as a matter of giving students "easier" or "harder" questions. Adaptation can occur along several dimensions:

- linguistic complexity;
- contextual complexity;
- amount of scaffolding;
- type of task;
- degree of communicative independence.

AI can assist the teacher by generating alternative examples and exercises at different levels of complexity. Nevertheless, teacher supervision remains essential. Generated examples should be checked for grammatical accuracy, naturalness, cultural appropriateness and contextual suitability.

5. Application to First-Year Philology Students

The proposed model is particularly appropriate for first-year Philology students because learners entering the same programme may have substantially different levels of English proficiency and previous exposure to idiomatic expressions.

For learners requiring greater support, the system can provide bilingual explanations, visual clues, simpler contexts and controlled practice. More proficient learners can receive less predictable contexts, communicative challenges and tasks requiring independent selection of idioms.

The approach therefore changes the role of the teacher from simply delivering the same sequence of exercises to all learners toward monitoring, diagnosing and regulating individual learning trajectories. AI does not replace this role. Instead, it can reduce the amount of time required to prepare differentiated materials and provide teachers with a greater range of task options. This is particularly valuable in large university classes where preparing separate exercises for different proficiency levels can be difficult.

6. Conclusion

Theoretical and empirical research indicates that English idiom learning involves linguistic, cognitive and communicative challenges. Russian phraseological scholarship provides a theoretical basis for understanding the distinctive nature of phraseological units, while Prokurova's and Sonina's research demonstrates the relevance of meaningful, cognitive and communicative approaches to phraseological instruction. Uzbek research, particularly Azizova's and Kalabaeva's studies, further demonstrates the importance of linguocultural and innovative approaches in the context of university-level English education. International empirical research by Cooper, Cieřlicka, Boers, Eyckmans and Stengers, and Hung provides additional evidence that idiom learning involves complex processing and benefits from meaningful contextualized instruction.

Building on these foundations, this paper proposes a five-stage adaptive framework:

meaning recognition → contextual interpretation → controlled production → independent use → transfer.

Its principal innovation is the integration of AI-supported task generation with performance-responsive adaptation. Rather than exposing all learners to identical activities, the model allows scaffolding, contextual complexity and task demands to change according to demonstrated learning. The framework should, however, be regarded as a theoretically grounded proposal rather than an empirically validated model. Its effectiveness should be tested through a quasi-experimental study involving first-year Philology students, using pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test measures of idiom comprehension, productive knowledge, retention and contextual appropriateness.

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