

# Research on Idiom Teaching in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Tao Shuang

*Department of University International College, Macau University of Science and Technology, Macao, China*

**Abstract:** The paper deals with teaching idioms within teaching Chinese as a foreign language and tries to analyze the current situation, problems, strategies, and methods of effective teaching of idioms. It first clarifies the definition, classification, and cultural role of idioms in Chinese and then reflects on the current problems in teaching idioms within TCSL, pointing out shortcomings with regard to a lack of systematicity in teaching materials, inadequate explanation of cultural background, and difficulties in its practical application by students. It puts forward that a teaching strategy should be based on contextualization and task-driven in response to these problems and explores the ways to use such technological innovation as multimedia teaching tools and online learning platforms to improve idiomatic phrases teaching. At last, it emphasized that it is rather important to combine the teaching of idioms with the teaching of culture and then put forward the ways to help students gain a better idiomatic expression understanding and usage with fresh teaching methods and technical support in order to improve their cross-cultural communication competence.

**Keywords:** Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language; Idiom Teaching; Cultural Teaching; Teaching Strategies; Multimedia Assistance

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background and Importance

As an important part of Chinese, idioms carry rich cultural connotations and historical backgrounds, and have become an indispensable part of teaching Chinese as a foreign language [1]. However, teaching idioms is not an easy task. Their unique fixed

form, semantic concentration, and cultural background make many learners face great challenges in the learning process. Although many Chinese learners have mastered the grammar and vocabulary of modern Chinese to a certain extent, the use of idioms is still a major difficulty that intermediate and advanced learners need to overcome [2]. Related research shows that the teaching of Chinese idioms requires not only the imparting of language knowledge, but also the interpretation of cultural background and analysis of context, which is crucial to improving students' cross-cultural communication ability [3].

In current Chinese teaching as a foreign language, the teaching of idioms is often limited to vocabulary memorization and semantic interpretation, lacking effective teaching models and systematic teaching material design. As Tsai and Liu pointed out, the existing idiom teaching methods mostly focus on explaining the meaning of idioms through interesting and contextualized methods, but rarely involve the syntactic structure of idioms and the design of experimental teaching [4]. Therefore, systematic research on idiom teaching will not only help improve the overall effect of Chinese teaching as a foreign language, but also provide theoretical support for promoting the dissemination and promotion of Chinese culture [5].

### 1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to comprehensively review the current status of idiom teaching in the current teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, and explore how to effectively improve learners' mastery of idioms in the teaching process. By combing and analyzing relevant literature, this study will summarize the advantages and disadvantages of existing idiom teaching methods, and propose improvement strategies

for idiom teaching in combination with the actual needs of cross-cultural teaching. Specifically, this study will analyze the application effects of different teaching methods in idiom teaching, and explore how to better integrate cultural background into idiom teaching to help learners understand and use idioms more accurately. In addition, this study will also explore the application prospects of technical means in idiom teaching, aiming to provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for the optimization of idiom teaching in Chinese as a foreign language in the future.

## 2. Definition and Characteristics of Idioms

### 2.1 Basic Definition of Idioms

In linguistics, idioms are usually defined as fixed phrases or expressions with indivisible holistic semantics [6]. The composition of idioms is not just a simple combination of individual words, but is gradually solidified through long-term language use, forming an expression form with specific cultural connotations and language style. Unlike ordinary words, the meaning of idioms is often not completely consistent with their literal meanings and needs to be understood in combination with cultural background and context [7]. Idioms not only have the function of efficiently conveying complex information in language communication, but also can reflect cultural values, historical events and social norms through concise expressions [8]. For example, many Chinese idioms are derived from ancient literature, historical stories and folk legends. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, it is crucial to understand the historical and cultural background behind these idioms [9]. This high degree of integration of culture and language makes idioms occupy an important position in language teaching and cross-cultural communication.

### 2.2 Classification and Characteristics of Idioms

According to semantic and structural characteristics, idioms can be roughly divided into several categories, such as idioms, proverbs, aphorisms and colloquialisms [10] (Figure 1). Idioms usually consist of four characters, have a fixed syntactic structure and

highly condensed semantics, and are used more frequently, such as "画蛇添足" [11]. Proverbs reflect more folk wisdom and life experience, and their expressions are concise and philosophical, such as "the early bird catches the worm" [12]. Aphorisms are similar to proverbs, but are more instructive and universally applicable, such as "knowledge is power"[13]. In addition, proverbs are more colloquial and vivid, and often contain regional or temporal expression characteristics. The structure of idioms is usually very compact, and their grammar and syntax are highly stable, so they cannot be changed or deformed at will[14]. For example, the four characters in "画蛇添足" not only have a fixed word order, but their overall meaning cannot be expressed by changing any one character. Therefore, mastering the structural characteristics of these idioms is crucial for learners to accurately understand and use idioms[15].

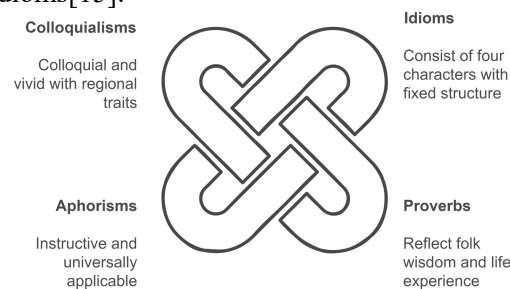


Figure 1. Components of Idioms

### 2.3 The role of idioms in Chinese

The role of idioms in Chinese is not only the simplicity and image of language expression, but also its important function in cultural inheritance and social communication[16]. Idioms, through their unique expression, condense rich historical experience and cultural knowledge, and become one of the important carriers of Chinese culture. Especially in literary works, the use of idioms can enhance the expressiveness and beauty of articles[17]. At the same time, in daily communication, idioms, as an efficient way of expression, can help speakers convey complex thoughts and emotions in a short time[18]. In addition, idioms also play an important role in education and moral enlightenment. Many idioms contain moral lessons and behavioral norms, which have a positive impact on shaping social values[19]. Therefore, in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, idioms

are not only the focus of language learning, but also an important part of cultural understanding and cross-cultural communication ability training.

### 3. The Current Situation of Idiom Teaching in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

#### 3.1 Overview of Idiom Teaching in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Idiom teaching has always been an essential part of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. However, the efficiency of the current idiomatic teaching is not satisfactory, and students generally feel that mastering idioms is difficult. Many scholars point out that the difficulty in teaching idioms lies in the main condensed semantics, the complicated syntactic structure, and the profound cultural background behind them [20]. For example, studies on teaching idioms to advanced learners of Chinese show that learners usually have such problems as incomplete comprehension and inflexible usage when using idioms [21]. Besides, present idiom teaching lacks a systematic syllabus and a unified teaching model, so the content and methods of teaching idioms vary greatly among institutions. It makes students unable to use idiomatic expressions flexibly to express complicated thoughts and emotions during cross-cultural communication [22].

#### 3.2 Analysis of Textbooks for Idiom Teaching

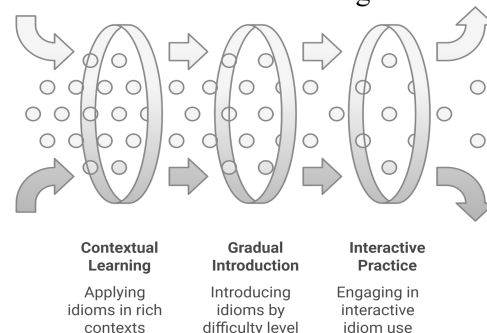
There are many problems in the compilation of idioms in current textbooks for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Some textbooks give a relatively simple explanation of idioms and lack an in-depth analysis of their cultural background and pragmatic characteristics [23]. In addition, the selection of idioms in textbooks often lacks systematicity and does not fully meet the needs of learners of different Chinese proficiency levels. For example, a study pointed out that a large number of idioms are specified in China's "Chinese Proficiency Test Outline", but in actual teaching, the frequency of use of these idioms is inconsistent with the actual teaching content, resulting in students being unable to fully understand and master the true meaning of these idioms [24]. In response to these problems, scholars suggest

that future idiom teaching materials should pay more attention to the interpretation of cultural background and provide graded teaching according to the learners' level [25].

### 4. Teaching Strategies and Methods for Idiom Teaching

#### 4.1 Principles and Objectives of Idiom Teaching

The core principle of idiom teaching should revolve around the balance between understanding and application. In the teaching process, teachers not only need to ensure that students can accurately understand the literal meaning and deep meaning of idioms, but also guide students to flexibly use these idioms in actual communication. Therefore, the first principle of teaching is "contextualized learning", that is, to help students better master the use of idioms through rich contexts and practical application scenarios. Secondly, idiom teaching should follow the principle of "progressiveness" (Figure 2), introducing idioms of different difficulty levels in stages according to students' language level, and avoid teaching too much complex content at one time. In addition, "interactivity" is also an important principle in idiom teaching. Interactive teaching can improve students' sense of participation and memory effect. The overall goal is to help students use idioms in real contexts, improve their language expression ability and cross-cultural communication ability, and ultimately achieve the transition from understanding to free use.



**Figure 2. The "Gradual" Principle of Idiom Teaching**

#### 4.2 Teaching Methods and Models of Idiom Teaching

In terms of teaching methods, idiom teaching can adopt a variety of flexible teaching models (Figure 3) to meet the needs of different

learners. Situational teaching method is an important means. Teachers can guide students to understand and use idioms in real contexts by designing situations related to students' daily life or learning scenarios. In addition, task-based teaching method is also widely used, that is, through task-oriented teaching activities such as dialogue exercises and role-playing, students can use the learned idioms in the process of solving practical problems. For elementary learners, comparative teaching method can be used to compare idioms with their literal meanings or similar expressions in their native language to help students understand the usage scenarios and cultural connotations of idioms more intuitively. Intermediate and advanced learners can understand the usage changes and grammatical structures of idioms in different contexts through discourse analysis. These methods not only improve students' understanding of idioms, but also enhance their practical application ability.

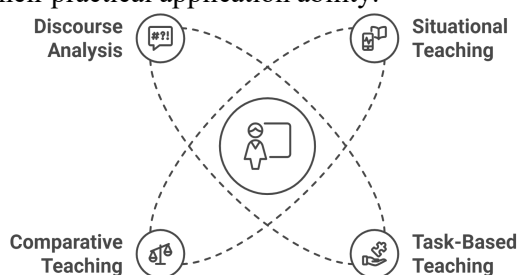


Figure 3. Four Important Teaching Methods for Idiom Teaching

### 4.3 Combination of Cultural Teaching in Idiom Teaching

Idioms are not only a form of language expression, but also carry rich cultural connotations. Therefore, in idiom teaching, the combination of cultural teaching is crucial. When teaching idioms, teachers should help students understand the cultural background of these expressions by explaining the historical allusions, folk traditions and social habits behind the idioms. For example, many Chinese idioms come from historical stories or ancient classics. Teachers can help students understand the meaning and usage scenarios of idioms more deeply by telling the relevant historical background. At the same time, cultural teaching can be carried out through cross-cultural comparison to help students better understand the similarities and differences of idioms in different cultures in

comparison and avoid misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. By combining culture and language in teaching, students can not only master the use of idioms, but also understand the cultural essence behind them, thereby improving their cross-cultural communication skills. This combination of cultural teaching helps to cultivate students' cultural sensitivity and enable them to use language freely in a multicultural context.

## 5. Future Development Direction of Idiom Teaching in Chinese as a Foreign Language

### 5.1 Problems and Reflections in Idiom Teaching

Although idiom teaching occupies an important position in Chinese as a foreign language teaching, there are still many problems in the current teaching process. First, many teachers tend to pay too much attention to the literal interpretation of idioms in teaching, ignoring their deep cultural connotations and practical applications in context, which makes it difficult for students to use idioms flexibly. Secondly, the lack of systematicness in teaching content and methods is also a major problem. Especially in the compilation of textbooks, the selection and explanation of idioms are often too one-sided and cannot fully reflect the diversity of idioms in different contexts. Finally, the standards for teaching evaluation are relatively simple, mainly focusing on memory and recognition, while ignoring the examination of students' practical application ability. These problems show that idiom teaching needs to find a better balance between theory and practice, so that the teaching method is more in line with students' actual needs.

### 5.2 Future Trends in Idiom Teaching Research

In the future, research on idiom teaching will pay more attention to the integration of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural. With the deepening of globalization, idiom teaching needs to pay more attention to the language differences and commonalities under different cultural backgrounds, and explore the expression forms of idioms in different languages through cross-cultural comparative studies. In addition, the research trend will also shift to a more student-centered

teaching design, emphasizing personalized and adaptive learning models to meet the needs of learners at different levels.

## 6. Conclusion

Through the discussion of the current status, principles, methods and innovative support of idiom teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, this study reveals the importance and challenges of idiom teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Idioms are not just a language form in Chinese, they deeply reflect the rich connotation of Chinese culture. Therefore, how to effectively teach idioms and help learners understand and flexibly use idioms in a cross-cultural context is the core issue in current teaching. Traditional idiomatic teaching methods generally pay too much attention to the memorization of vocabulary and explanation of grammatical structure in a sentence, while ignoring cultural background that it is based on and how to use it practically. Therefore, students cannot use these expressions freely in actual communication. Therefore, idiomatic teaching in the future has to be more systematic and hierarchical in content. It also has to combine creative modes such as situationalization and task-driven teaching methods, focusing on cultural penetration and understanding.

Furthermore, with the advancement of technology, medias and intelligent teaching tools open up new possibilities in terms of teaching idioms. It helps teachers to be flexible and engage in teaching content design more efficiently. Technical support can also increase the participation and interest in learning among learners. The use of personalized learning platforms and data-driven feedback mechanisms is important in improving teaching effectiveness and catering to the diverse needs of learners in each particular case. Future idiomatic teaching research ought to continue on cross-cultural comparisons, integration with technology, and development of new models to better contextualize idioms within global culture and enable the students to enrich their language communication ability and cultural sensitivity.

## References

[1] Jung-Jen, T., Ching-tien, T.: Research on the Teaching Mode of Idioms in

## International Conference on Social Development and Intelligent Technology (SDIT2024)

- International Chinese Language. Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2021) (2021).
- [2] Liu, Y.: Investigation and Reflection on Advanced Chinese Idioms Teaching for Foreign Students. Chinese Language Learning (2013).
- [3] Luo, D.: Teaching Chinese as a Second Language and Chinese Culture. Journal of Frontiers in Educational Research, 1, pp. 125-128(2021).
- [4] Zhengl, X.: An Investigation on Foreigners' Acquisition of Chinese Idioms at Intermediate and Advanced Levels. Overseas Chinese Education (2012).
- [5] An, Y., Wang, S.: Narrative Idioms for Elementary-Level Chinese as a Second Language Learners. In: 4th International Conference on Education and Development (ICED), pp. 457-464(2015).
- [6] Xue, L.: On the Features of the Classic Chinese in Chinese Idioms. Journal of Huzhou Teachers College (2000).
- [7] Liu, P.: Analysis of Characteristics Reflected in English and Chinese Idioms. Journal of Jining Teachers' College (2003).
- [8] Yin-fang, Z.: Comparison on the Metaphor Features between English and Chinese Idioms. Journal of Hunan University of Science and Engineering (2009).
- [9] Da, L.: Literature and History Information in Chinese Idiom. Journal of University of Science and Technology Liaoning (2015).
- [10] Wang, Y.: A Contrastive Research on the Definitions and Categories of Chinese and English Idioms. Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (2021).
- [11] Lin-li, C.: On the Characteristic Features of English Idioms and Translation Methods. Science and Technology Information (2008).
- [12] Ming-zhu, M.: Semantic Relations of English Chinese Idioms and the Cultural Influences. Journal of Huaihua University (2010).
- [13] Zong-jiu, Z.: Exploration on National Cultural Features between English and Chinese Idioms. Journal of North China Institute of Water Conservancy and Hydroelectric Power (2007).

- [14]Zheng, W.: On the Structural Features of Chinese Idioms and the Equivalent Translation in French. *Journal of Zhejiang University of Technology* (2011).
- [15]Yan-qin, L.: In Chinese and English Idioms. *Journal of Pingyuan University* (2006).
- [16]Fan, X.: A Comparative Study of Connotations in Chinese & English Idioms. *Journal of Hunan University of Science and Engineering* (2007).
- [17]Qing, H.: Trying to Analyse the Correspondence between Japanese Idioms and Chinese Ones. *Journal of Huaqiao University* (2000).
- [18]Xiao-jing, H.: On Translation of and Cultural Differences between English and Chinese Idioms. *Journal of Nanning Polytechnic* (2006).
- [19]Zhen-hua, T.: Comparison and Translation of Chinese and English Idioms. *Journal of Shanghai Institute & Electric Power* (2004).
- [20]Liu, Y.: Investigation and Reflection on Advanced Chinese Idioms Teaching for Foreign Students. *Chinese Language Learning* (2013).
- [21]Zhengl, X.: An Investigation on Foreigners' Acquisition of Chinese Idioms at Intermediate and Advanced Levels. *Overseas Chinese Education* (2012).
- [22]Zhou, Y., Wang, J.: The Teaching of Chinese Idioms in Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language(TCFL). 2019 International Conference on Politics, Economics and Management (ICPEM 2019).
- [23]Wang Wei.: A brief analysis of idiom teaching methods in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. *ML*, 4, 10(2016).
- [24]Zhou, Q., Yang, Y., & Qian, X.: Research on the Compilation of Idiom Entries in Specialized Chinese Textbooks. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 9, 1(2023).
- [25]Tsai, J.-J., & Tsai, C.-T.: Research on the Teaching Mode of Idioms in International Chinese Language. *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2021)*.