

Cat Got Your Tongue?

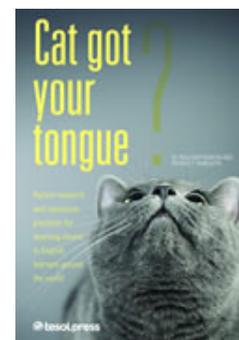
Paul McPherron and Patrick T. Randolph
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The question of how to address idioms effectively in the classroom is one that every language teacher faces. There are some complications with idioms, such as how to define, how to teach, and how students perceive them. Experts Paul McPherron and Patrick T. Randolph offer their book, *Cat Got Your Tongue? Recent research and classroom practices for teaching idioms to English learners around the world*. This book could definitely serve as a handbook for all-things-idioms, as it not only provides a complete understanding of idioms, but also includes actual lessons and materials that the authors recommend.

Idioms are a part of language that frequently occur in formal, informal, written and oral communication. As the authors explain, idioms and figurative language have become a popular topic, and a controversial one as well, since linguists and pedagogists share many differing ideas toward what is included in the definition of idiom, and how to treat them in language teaching. McPherron and Randolph admit that idioms are an “infuriating” topic, difficult to pin down and to study. However, the authors do an extraordinary job of describing the numerous definitions and ideas of what idioms are, why and how they should be taught. Plus, *Cat Got Your Tongue* is written in a way that makes it effortless to read through and simple to follow for non-experts in idiomaticity.

Cat Got Your Tongue has two parts with ten chapters, and each chapter focuses on one particular aspect of idioms and idiom pedagogy. McPherron and Randolph provide a systematic review of studies that pertain to specific problems and uncertainties in teaching idioms, while maintaining a motivating tone for readers who may be intimidated by the complexity of effectively teaching idioms. In the first chapter, “Who is Afraid of Teaching Idioms?” the authors address the notion that teaching idioms can be a daunting task. In explaining why, they introduce just how complex and tricky idioms can be.

In Chapter Two, “What is an Idiom?” the authors show how many diverging and overlapping definitions there are of idioms, such as how some are fixed expressions, while others can be manipulated syntactically or semantically. Idioms’ functions as pragmatic or discourse resources are described, as well as the pedagogical perspectives of the “fuzziness” of idioms.

In Chapter Three, “How are Idioms Acquired?” readers are awarded a unique set of information. McPherron and Randolph delve into the human brain and how its various parts contribute to memory, analysis, motivation, and learning. They explain that teachers should have some knowledge of how the brain works, and briefly describe each section of the brain and how learning happens. The authors then focus specifically on how figurative language is processed, resulting in a very convincing lesson on what is involved in the brain’s encoding process of idioms. They use this chapter as an opportunity to illuminate the effect of sleep, stress, and exercise on the

brain, and they urge teachers to incorporate physical movement in the classroom to increase learning with long-term results.

The fourth chapter, “How are Idioms Taught? Methods and Materials” offers findings from studies on effective ways to teach idioms, for example, using corpus linguistics to find discourse patterns. Included is a highly useful review of studies that answers questions on how idioms can be organized in the curriculum, such as how many idioms to present at once, or presenting idioms with a definition, context, or picture, and translating idioms. This chapter provides an exceptional reference for teachers who have questions about which methods are proven to be effective or not when it comes to the various ways of incorporating idioms into the classroom.

Chapter Five, “How are Idioms Taught? Classroom Strategies and Activities” serves as a useful source for relating individual differences in language learning and various classroom approaches. In this chapter, the authors also provide a helpful list of real activities, each one catering to a particular learning style. Some activities include conversation analysis activities, corpus-based activities, and digital media activities. The authors also provide a list of dictionaries and corpora that could be used.

In Chapter Six, “Teacher Perspectives on Teaching Idioms,” and Chapter Seven, “Student Perspectives on Teaching Idioms,” a survey conducted by the authors reveals participants’ opinions towards teaching or learning idioms, how they are taught, which idioms are most daunting, and other factors. The charts and information delivered in these chapters make it easy to visualize the various perspectives of idioms from teachers and students, as well as which approaches and activities teachers and students found most useful.

In Chapter Eight, “Example Lessons for Teaching Idioms From Around the World” the authors call upon fellow TESOL teachers around the globe to provide a lesson of their own. This chapter gives an assortment of thirteen lessons, complete with directions, time required, resources needed, rationale, caveats, alternatives, and references for further reading. Similarly, Chapter Nine, “Overview and Critiques of Resources for Teaching and Learning Idioms” provides short reviews and critiques for some textbooks, websites, dictionaries, workbooks, and other reference materials.

In the final chapter “Keep the Ball Rolling”, readers are given strategies, resources and tips to be able to make their own resources for teaching idioms. This chapter builds upon the information covered in the previous nine chapters turning the book into a lesson that no longer gives the reader a proverbial fish, but teaches the reader how to fish. Akin to previous chapters, this section also draws upon valuable research that has been conducted on idioms to construct advice for teachers.

All in all, it is clear that McPherron and Randolph truly wish to impart to their readers all of their expertise and passion for idioms in order to improve how English language learners from around the world acquire idioms. *Cat Got Your Tongue?* serves as a complete guide for teaching idioms, and is easy to read and peruse. With excellent definitions, reviews, activities, materials, and references, this book is all a teacher needs to become well-prepared to effectively teach idioms.

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