

## CRAFTING STUDENT DISCOURSE: EXPLORING THE “BREAKING STRATEGY” IN MATERIAL ORGANIZATION AND TEACHING IDIOMS

**Bodyk Ostap,**

Ph.D. in Philology, Associate Prodiomssor,  
Associate Prodiomssor of English Philology Department  
Mariupol State University  
Kyiv, Ukraine

**Antypiuk Olga,**

Master’s Student of English Philology Department  
Mariupol State University  
Kyiv, Ukraine

**Abstract.** This paper addresses phraseological poverty in students’ speech at the middle and senior stages of school education. Due to time constraints, the proposed solution involves using intensive methods centered on home reading. The study suggests initiating this approach at the middle stage, emphasizing a crucial “turn” in students’ phraseology through a specific fiction work serving as a phraseology textbook. The chosen novel, *Theatre* by W.S. Maugham, is recognized for fulfilling home reading tasks and enriching students’ phraseological repertoire. The study proposes a structured and time-efficient approach, integrating phraseological unit acquisition into literature discussions without disrupting traditional home reading tasks. Efforts are also directed toward dedicated work on phraseological units outside the context of literary discussion, ensuring a well-defined trajectory for students’ phraseological development.

**Key words:** phraseological poverty, breaking strategy, material organization, teaching idioms, home reading, literature discussions.

**Introduction.** The teaching of English in secondary school reveals that pupils generally do not frequently employ phraseological units (idioms) in their speech and often struggle to interpret such units without the aid of a dictionary. Limited familiarity with phraseology is unquestionably a notable disadvantage in the education of prospective graduates. Firstly, the English language contains commonly used phraseological units that lack synonyms (such as “*to fall in love with sb*” and “*Indian summer*”). Not being aware of these units compels students to rely on lengthy explanations to convey their intended meaning. Furthermore, the mere existence of a non-phraseological synonym in an individual’s vocabulary usually cannot make up for the lack of a phraseological means of conveying a particular concept.

Phraseological units possess a connotative layer of meaning that allows them to convey additional emotional and evaluative nuances in a statement, which cannot be expressed by their non-phraseological equivalents. Furthermore, phraseological units serve crucial roles in communication, such as enhancing speech variety (e.g., “*to risk:*

*to skate on thin ice = to play with fire = to throw caution to the winds = to tempt fate*”) and promoting linguistic efficiency (e.g., *“to split hairs = to discuss insignificant matters as if they were significant”*).

Insufficient understanding of phraseology greatly hinders students’ ability to effectively complete crucial communication activities and prevents them from reaching a genuine degree of competency in the English language. Insufficient focus on phraseological units denies students the aesthetic enjoyment and the chance to grasp the cultural nuances of the language being studied. These units contain explicit information about historical facts, economics, and lifestyle (e.g., *“to carry coals to Newcastle”*), as well as implicit cultural expressions (e.g., *“An Englishman’s home is his castle”*).

Hence, the extensive use of idiomatic expressions in a foreign language holds great importance in terms of communication, sociocultural understanding, and aesthetic appreciation. Therefore, it is essential to include the teaching of idiomatic phrases as an integral part of language education for students. Attaining true proficiency in a language necessitates cultivating an enthusiasm for English phraseological units and a motivation to enhance one’s personal repertoire of phrases. The process of phraseologization in speech serves as a significant measure of one’s linguistic ability level.

**The status of problem development.** Teaching phraseological units continues to be an unresolved issue in the methodology of English language instruction at secondary schools. Several studies are dedicated to addressing this issue (T. Vdovina, 2001; T. Vdovina, 2002; A. Kravchenko, 2019; M. Natsiuk, 2015; H. Cherednichenko, L. Shapran, & L. Kunytsia, 2010; V. Chernysh, 2001; L. Shaposhnikova, 2013; O. Sherstiuk, 2003; M. Adams, 1999; T. Johns, & F. Davies, 1983; M. Redondo, 1997). The objective is to determine the criteria for choosing phraseological units and to develop exercises and a minimal set of phraseological expressions for different levels of education (intermediate and senior), as well as for the whole duration of English language study; to provide a justification for the principles of selecting artistic text material and the necessary conditions for its implementation; to describe a methodology for teaching reading using the integrated approach of artistic texts; to offer a detailed explanation of the interconnected system of exercises and stages involved in working with artistic texts. Nevertheless, the unresolved matters pertain to the organisation of training, specifically the extent and frequency of incorporating phraseological units into students’ speech, as well as how to effectively integrate this training with the existing curriculum.

Phraseological units are currently present in textbooks focused on oral speech practice, periodicals, as well as in home and analytical reading materials. Nevertheless, the deliberate and methodical instruction of English phraseological units to pupils is not included in the goals of these disciplines. Mastering phraseological units involves similar efforts as mastering individual words and free phrases. This includes understanding their form (having multiple components arranged in a specific order), their meaning (the overall meaning of a phraseological unit is not equal to the sum of the literal meanings of its components), and their usage (being contextually dependent). However, the subjective motivation for learning phraseological units, such as personal attitudes towards their use in speech, is often overlooked. Consequently, there is a

prevailing perception that the study of phraseology is considered subordinate and discretionary.

The significance of this paper lies in the limitations of the current method for acquiring phraseological units, as well as the scarcity of methodological studies focused on enhancing students' vocabulary with phraseological units in middle (basic) and high school.

This **article aims** to provide methodological support for a “break” in the expansion of students' phraseological repertoire in middle and high school. This involves fostering in students a desire for the “auto-phraseologization of speech,” which is demonstrated by both an increase in the number of phraseological units used and a positive attitude towards independently enriching their vocabulary with such units.

**Introduction of the primary research material.** The efforts to enhance students' phraseological repertoire should be structured in a manner that does not hinder, but rather facilitates the accomplishment of the primary objectives of independent reading, which include the development of reading abilities, oral communication, and vocabulary enrichment.

The research on the process of phraseologization in kids' speech should be limited to a short duration. Furthermore, it is imperative to seamlessly integrate it with educational endeavours to facilitate discussions on the material that has been read. There are numerous ways to organise duties in a way that allows for the simultaneous and mutually beneficial resolution of traditional tasks such as home reading and speech phraseology. For instance, if a list of phraseological units is provided to analyse a specific topic, discussing the content read helps students understand the typical context in which these phraseological units are used. In turn, these phraseological units enable students to express more emotional, original, and other related characteristics of the topic.

Occasionally, it is essential to focus on the process of incorporating phraseological units, even if it means diverting attention from the information being read. Such work is necessary to ensure that the growth of phraseological vocabulary is not overshadowed by other issues related to reading at home, but is acknowledged as a significant and independent undertaking.

There are two main lines of research on phraseological units, with the first one being the most prominent:

- analysis of phraseological units within the context of the text being discussed;
- independent analysis of phraseological units outside the context of the text. These exercises mostly focus on isolated practice, along with few problems that involve applying the learned phraseological units in different circumstances beyond the assigned assignment.

*The Concept of a “Breaking Strategy”  
in Relation to the Phraseologization of Students' speech*

The current inadequate state of phraseology study at the middle and senior stages in secondary school cannot be effectively addressed through comprehensive and continuous work for several reasons:

- Firstly, not all literary works possess the requisite abundance and diversity of phraseological units.

- Secondly, the most effective transformation of students' perception and utilisation of phraseological units is best achieved at the onset of the intermediate stage of their education.
- Thirdly, it is imperative to undertake this endeavour without unnecessary time consumption, so as to not impede the resolution of the primary objectives of the "home reading" subject.

Considering these circumstances, in order to address the limited range of phrases used by students, a rigorous organisational adjustment is suggested to enhance their repertoire of idiomatic expressions. This type of revolution in the pedagogy of teaching phraseological units to students should be implemented as a distinct phase of instruction, ideally from the onset of secondary education. Intensive training in phraseological units is necessary. A focused examination of the limited vocabulary of students can be conducted by analysing the abundance of phraseological units and their relevance to real-life situations and their use in speech.

*Employing a Piece of Fiction as a Form of Instructional Material  
for Studying English Phraseology*

Not all occupations are appropriate for this position. It is imperative to find a book that not only fulfils the typical criteria for picking books for "home reading" (V. Chernysh, 2001; L. Shaposhnikova, 2013; O. Sherstiuk, 2003), but also satisfies some specific requirements:

- The work should include a substantial amount of phraseological units, and they should be evenly dispersed throughout the text. This means that, despite the natural variations in the number of phraseological units, every section of the book should still be abundantly filled with them. The difference is readily apparent to the naked eye. For instance, E. Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms* lacks in phraseological units compared to Oscar Wilde's work *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.
- The phraseological units present in the novel should primarily be related to the "everyday speech of educated people" (*gebildete Umgangssprache*), which means they should belong to the stylistic layer that is typical of the spoken language used by students (Riesel, 1975). The book's depiction of realism and the variety of life situations should resonate strongly with kids. Subsequently, the phraseological units that have been learned will be applied in the students' speech practice.
- It is essential that the author of the material is personally passionate about idioms. It would be ideal if the author consciously and subconsciously shared the same desire as the students to use phraseological units (*animus utendi*); ensuring that, the phraseological content of the work aligns with the main motives for mastering these units.
- The characters in the work, especially the main ones, should naturally use phraseological units in their speech, and the author's portrayal of their internal monologues or thoughts about them should not disrupt the overall style (*Stilbruch*).
- The work should be popular and easily accessible, included in the traditional list of literature recommended for secondary education as material for independent reading. This way, teachers will not need to spend time and effort searching for

and introducing new books.

The decision was taken in favour of W.S. Maugham's novel *Theatre*. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the remarkable appeal of this work as a choice for personal reading at home. This work effectively combines the qualities that make it an excellent resource for addressing traditional issues in the subject of "home reading": it captivates students' interest, stimulates literary discussions, and also serves as a valuable resource for learning English phraseology.

A statistical analysis was conducted to support our selection of the novel *Theatre* by W.S. Maugham as the "action movie" that can effectively improve the students' phraseologically deficient speech. Initially, the overall count of phraseological units in the complete novel *Theatre* was determined to be approximately 550. This count was based on the novel's 270 pages and 29 chapters. Therefore, it was evident that this effort exceeded the criterion in terms of phraseologization in a quantitative manner. However, in order to maintain neutrality, it was essential to compare data regarding the quantity and "quality" of phraseological units in other literary works commonly analysed in secondary level home reading. The term "quality" in this context refers to the extent to which phraseological units align with the motivation of the student audience in learning them, as determined from the survey data.

Our analysis revealed that the mean number of phraseological units per 26-page passage in W.S. Maugham's *Theatre* is 50 idioms. After computing the mean number of phraseological units in similar passages from other writers' works, we obtained the following result:

- Edna O'Brien's novel *The Country Girls* has four idioms.
- Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* has 13 idioms.
- A.J. Cronin's novel *The Citadel* has 23 idioms.
- Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sandcastle* has 15 idioms.
- W. Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* has no idioms.
- Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* has no idioms.
- F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* has three idioms.

The lack of rich and varied phrases in most texts is clearly apparent. In addition to the aforementioned works, there is a notable inclusion in the realm of home reading, namely John Galsworthy's novel *The Man of Property*, which has 63 phraseological units. These units are utilised with a frequency comparable to that of W.S. Maugham.

Only Theodore Dreiser's work *Sister Carrie* occupies the middle spot, with approximately 33 phraseological units in a similar passage.

The frequency estimation of phraseological units in works regularly examined in home reading classes is not arbitrary. With the exception of W.S. Maugham, J. Galsworthy, and to a certain extent T. Dreiser, most authors mirror reality through the actions of their characters, in accordance with their chosen style and method of writing. They minimise the use of reasoning and generalisations, aiming to elicit comparable generalising views about the reality that is immediately portrayed to the reader. Theodore Dreiser, although his works contain certain phraseological units, mostly relies on those that help structure speech and narration (such as "to tell the truth..." and "on the one hand..., on the other hand"). Phraseological units are typically

employed when there is a lack of non-phraseological synonyms, or when the author seeks to enhance speech by incorporating phraseological units. Many writers, when employing phraseological units, are motivated by the same factors as T. Dreiser.

Only W.S. Maugham and J. Galsworthy exhibit a proximity to the “*animus utendi*” concept, which refers to the inclination to utilise phraseological units, a tendency commonly observed among student audiences. It is important to remember that students value the subtle nuances of phraseological meaning that rely on connotation. These nuances express the speaker’s emotional and evaluative attitude towards the subject of speech and enhance communication in a more significant way than its organisational and diversification functions. The phraseological units mentioned are extensively utilised by authors such as Maugham in *Theatre* and J. Galsworthy in *The Man of Property*.

Out of the 550+ phraseological units identified in the *Theatre*, over 80% have synonyms that are not phraseological in nature. To clarify, the utilisation of phraseological units by W.S. Maugham was not due to a lack of alternative means of expression, but rather stemmed from a deliberate intention to employ idioms as an artistic tool. This usage served multiple purposes: self-expression, pragmatic influence on the reader, evoking strong reactions, amusement, intellectual engagement, and stimulation of the reader’s imagination. The primary trend observed in W.S. Maugham’s utilisation of phraseological units is to imbue the speech with vivid imagery and uniqueness, while avoiding clichés and promoting speech diversity. We aim to cultivate in students a specific inclination towards utilising phraseological units.

The book contains phraseological units that are commonly used by educated individuals. It is worth noting that 95% of these units belong to the “*gebildete Umgangssprache*” layer. It is worth mentioning that within educated circles, “*soliloquy*” is considered slightly more informal than “*dialogue*.” Consequently, there are only a few instances (about 10) of recurring crude language, such as “*blast his eyes*,” or phrases containing “*darned*”:

“*What blasted fools they are,*” he said. “*What the devil do they think they’re going to get out of it?*”... “*I should be a darned fool if I got myself mixed up with some woman in Middlepool*” (Maugham, 1957, p. 37).

The employment of phraseological units by W.S. Maugham is enhanced by the naturalness of his writing talent, which is further supported by the inclusion of a significant number of theatre players, many of whom hold prestigious positions. Throughout their lives, they have engaged with the texts of theatrical works and contemplated the intonation of phraseological units countless times. Consequently, they incorporated a substantial amount of stylistically coherent idiomatic expressions into their language.

The phraseological repertoire of the novel *Theatre* by W.S. Maugham is remarkably diverse and captivating. Maugham’s novel is a vivid portrayal of various subjects and real-world events, capturing the essence of life itself. The novel *Theatre* provides an opportunity to strengthen and broaden your vocabulary, including idiomatic expressions, related to the *overarching theme* of “*Man and the Spectacular Event*” in a comprehensive manner. This study focuses on the key elements of verbal

communication in the analysis of plays, actors, and directing. These elements are represented by recurring nodes, which serve as a fundamental component of oral speech. These nodes are equally applicable to film, theatre, and any stage-based performances that adhere to dramatic principles:

e.g. “*She was **a born actress** and it was an understood thing for as long as she could remember that she was **to go on the stage.**” (ibid, p. 29);*

e.g. “*Julia had one good acting scene in which she **had brought down the house,** and Michael’s astonishing beauty had made a sensation.” (ibid, p. 76).*

The fundamental motif of the theatrical universe is infused with diverse “horizontal” motifs, namely the manifestation of evaluations, emotions, and attributes pertaining to the interpersonal dynamics among the characters (such as the relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, etc.). Here are some examples of how the author uses phraseological units to depict Julia’s “unrequited love” for her husband, starting from when she first develops this sensation until it eventually fades away. The phraseology employed captures the range of emotions and states of mind that the protagonist undergoes while grappling with unreciprocated affection, including the initial infatuation, unease, intense desire, idolization, and subsequent disillusionment.

*This did not prevent Julia from falling madly in love with him.* (ibid, p. 29).

*She pull in love with Michael at first sight.* (ibid, p. 35).

*“Doesn’t he know I’m crazy to marry him?”* (ibid, p. 47).

*“I wonder if I dare tell him I ‘m absolutely sick with love for him”* (ibid, p. 47).

*“...he seemed to take her a little for granted: by his manner, friendly but casual, you might have thought they had been married for years”* (ibid, p. 49).

*“Darling, you know I’d go anywhere in the world with you”* (ibid, p. 59).

*She was well aware that he was not in love with her* (ibid, p. 49).

*“He doesn’t love me. He doesn’t care a damn about me”* (ibid, p. 51).

*“It’s quite obvious that you don’t care two straws for me”* (ibid, p. 61).

*... she pull out of love with him* (ibid, p. 64).

*“By God, it’s grand to be one’s own mistress”* (ibid, p. 66).

The only analysed work that is comparable to W.S. Maugham’s *Theatre* in terms of both quantity and quality of phraseological units is J. Galsworthy’s *The Man of Property*. However, based on the consensus of the polled teachers who are already practicing, this book is deemed excessively intricate for intermediate students and so should only be assigned as independent reading material starting in the higher level. Thus, in order to enhance the phraseological repertoire of intermediate students, the decision was taken to select the novel *Theatre*. This work possesses remarkable positive attributes, serving as an excellent resource for both conventional home reading assignments and as a comprehensive guide to English phraseology.

It is worth mentioning the distinct benefit of W.S. Maugham’s work *Theatre* compared to his other works, such as the novels *The Painted Veil*, *Cakes and Ale* or *a Skeleton in the Cupboard*, *The Moon and the Sixpence*, and his short stories. The crucial aspect here is not the quantity of phraseological units, which remains relatively consistent across the entire author’s works, but rather the disparity between the life

events shown in his earlier works and those portrayed in *Theatre*, which are considerably more distant from our own reality. Either the action in a novel can occur in an exotic location, such as in the novel *The Painted Veil*, or the professional setting of the characters can be much different from the everyday lives of regular people, as seen in the novel *Cakes and Ale or the Skeleton in the Cupboard*.

Based on the preceding information, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of employing a certain instructional approach for teaching phraseological units in the second year is mostly dependent on the utilisation of the novel *Theatre* by W.S. Maugham.

Our experience has demonstrated the subjective nature of the drive to grasp phraseological components. Therefore, we decided to eliminate the stringent criteria for students to fully comprehend all phraseological units. Instead, it is recommended to provide a versatile, adaptable, personalised approach to the choice and integration of idiomatic expressions.

The treatment of phraseological units varies across different sections of the text. During the lesson planning phase, the teacher, having thoroughly read the entire work multiple times and familiarised themselves with the phraseological units in each chapter, decides which classes will focus on intensive instruction of phraseologization in students' speech by introducing new phraseological material. They also determine which classes should only involve short-term repetitive exercises. The duration of rigorous phraseology work sessions might vary from two to many lessons, depending on the material complexity, student preparedness, and academic year.

Commencing a groundbreaking endeavour, particularly in the realm of home reading and phraseological units, from the initial chapters of a book would be scarcely appropriate. Prior to engaging with phraseological units, the student reader should immerse themselves in the essence of the work and the context in which it operates. This involves understanding the problematic and subject-semantic content, and the associated tasks.

If less than 100%, but rather 80 or 70% of the functional units of the task are learned in this manner, it is not a cause for concern. This aligns well with the suggested methodology for choosing phraseological units. There is no predetermined, obligatory minimum requirement. It is sufficient that the phraseological units of selected chapters for intensive study will be thoroughly and carefully analysed. The regularity of intense work enables the educational activity of phraseologization of speech during home reading to be contained within a relatively limited scope, without compromising the primary objectives of this aspect of language learning. It also facilitates a thorough examination of the studied phraseological material, based on the principles of imitating (*die Nachnahme*) and continuously repeating the material.

In classes that do not focus heavily on students' use of phrases, very little new phraseological content is introduced. Instead, the focus is on reviewing and reinforcing previously studied material. This approach ensures a consistent and ongoing exploration of phraseological units across different portions of the text. The concept of "secondary passage of material" (*die Nachnahme*) is utilised to refer to the later assimilation of previously covered content. Periodically, efforts are made to revisit the



phraseological units from the previous section of the book, both upon the student's request and as a mandatory practice. Furthermore, when initially studying a heavily emphasised chapter, it may be advisable to temporarily exclude the discussion of phraseological units. Instead, the students' focus might be directed towards these units in a subsequent lesson, once the substance of the chapter is no longer challenging.

In order to use the "*principle of permanent repetition*," it is necessary to have activities that encourage the memorization of studied phraseological units. These exercises require students to review all the material they have studied, mentally organise it, and select phraseological units that have a common characteristic. As an illustration:

A game designed to assess the knowledge of phraseological units, titled "*Who Can Name More?*" Please provide a list of phraseological units that meet the following criteria: a) they are related to a certain character or theme, b) they have a common grammatical or lexical component, and c) they are connected by a synonymous relationship. In this scenario, the teacher has the authority to assign a specific number, such as five.

It is imperative, if feasible, to incorporate previously examined material into the analysis of the present text:

- Previously, we acquired specific knowledge regarding character X. Integrate the knowledge gained from the current text passage by expressing it using both previously learned phraseological units and the phraseological units introduced in the current lesson.

Occasionally, it is essential to employ tasks to delineate the progression of the plot and succinctly recapitulate pertinent information from prior readings. For instance:

- envision a scenario where one of the students lacks the initial eight chapters in the book; the content of the assignment commences solely from the ninth chapter. Recount the narrative of Julia's affection for Michael in its entirety, employing the phraseological units you have acquired.

When engaging with the works mentioned, it is possible to include previously studied phraseological content into their analysis. It is feasible to utilise activities that blend fresh phraseological material from the upcoming home reading assignment with previously covered content from the prior book. For instance, tasks may involve organising theme clusters of phraseological units, retrieving synonyms/antonyms for phraseological units from the material of the current study, based on a previously read book. It is challenging to determine whether it will be feasible to guarantee the perpetuation and motivation to utilise acquired knowledge and the proficiency in its application. However, each word carries the same risk.

However, the primary issue is different: the proposed phraseological breakthrough, which is further elaborated without compromising the objectives of the main components of home reading, should not be confined to a single text. Suppose that in the tenth year of study, a comparable task can be undertaken, such as analysing *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser. In the next year, another work, such *The Man of Property* by J. Galsworthy, can be studied. There is strong evidence to suggest that the motivation for this task will not be any less prosperous. This provides justification for

regarding the work conducted in these “sessions” on specific coursework as rigorous instruction of pupils in idiomatic expressions of the English language.

**Conclusions.** To address the issue of students’ limited use of idiomatic expressions in their speech due to time constraints during middle and senior school years, it is suggested that the problem be tackled through intensive methods of learning idiomatic phrases using home reading materials. It is recommended to start this task at the intermediate level of instruction. This is the ideal moment to introduce a shift in the way students express themselves, using a specific work of fiction as a guide to English phraseology. By employing rigorous techniques to teach and include idiomatic expressions in this study, we effectively address the issue of students’ limited vocabulary in this area. During the subsequent phases of English instruction, a comparable rigorous course is once again implemented, utilising the content of specific literary works to review and enhance students’ understanding of English phraseology.

The novel *Theatre* by W.S. Maugham was chosen because of its outstanding merits, which include fulfilling the traditional objectives of home reading and providing opportunities for phraseologization of student speech. This work comprises a highly abundant collection of phraseological units, characterised by a wide range of themes and styles. The novel *Theatre* by W.S. Maugham explores a diverse range of life occurrences, personalities, and problems, mirroring the reality of theatre, which serves as its central focus.

The process of enriching students’ phraseological repertoire is conducted within a relatively short period. It is done intensively, not in every lesson, but periodically. The organisation of this process is designed to not disrupt, but rather facilitate the completion of the traditional tasks related to “*home reading*”. The incorporation of phraseological units, predominantly, seamlessly integrates into the discourse’s context regarding the material that has been read. In addition, laborious efforts are being made to analyse phraseological units independently from the context of the text being discussed. This ensures that the use of phrases in speech remains distinct and does not get overshadowed by other reading activities, as it follows a clearly discernible trajectory.

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