

Classroom Activities for Teaching Figurative Expressions Using Conceptual Metaphors

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Introduction

Figurative expressions are pervasive in English (Littlemore & Low, 2006). Many of these expressions are motivated by conceptual metaphor, whereby an abstract or a complex concept is accessed in terms of a more concrete or simpler concept often grounded in physical experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For example, Time, an abstract concept, is often understood in terms of Money, which is a concrete object. This can be seen in linguistic expressions such as *spending* time with your loved ones, *wasting* time in unfruitful activities, living on *borrowed* time, *having* enough time, etc. Here, the italicised expressions used to talk about the abstract concept of Time have been taken from the concrete domain of Money. Similarly, the abstract concepts of Happiness and Sadness are expressed in Upward and Downward orientations, respectively. This can be found in expressions such as being in *high/low* spirits, lifting/raising (someone's) spirits, feeling low, having a (or that) *sinking* feeling, etc. Such grouping of figurative expressions under a conceptual metaphor has pedagogical implications for teachers and materials developers. Results of experimental studies have shown that using conceptual metaphors to teach figurative expressions enhances comprehension and retention compared to the traditional method of rote learning and memorisation generally practiced in language classrooms (Kovecses & Szabo, 1996; Boers, 2000; Berendi et al., 2008; Yasuda, 2010).

However, when it comes to teaching figurative expressions in an actual classroom, it is important to design and develop language activities that focus not just on figurative expressions but also on language use in general. This is because any language form, whether grammar or

vocabulary, cannot be learned in isolation without context. Keeping this in mind, this article develops activities that can be used by teachers in their classes to teach figurative expressions.

The activities integrate all four language skills with an additional activity on raising learners' awareness of conceptual metaphors. The list of activities includes: (i) a warm-up activity (ii) a listening activity (iii) a reading activity (iv) a speaking activity, (v) a writing activity, and (vi) a conceptual metaphor awareness activity. By integrating the four skills, a rich environment can be fostered in both the input (listening and reading) and the output (speaking and writing) needed for comprehending and producing figurative expressions. It must be noted that the target expressions are not explicitly taught to the learners but are presented in such a way that learners cannot avoid noticing and processing them while doing the activities. In other words, learners learn these expressions not in isolation but through language use.

Language Activities to Teach Figurative Expressions

Objective: To help learners understand and use figurative expressions motivated by conceptual metaphors Happy is Up and Sad is Down.

Level: Pre-intermediate (can read and communicate in everyday situations using familiar expressions)

Target Conceptual Metaphors: Happy is Up		Sad is Down
Target idiomatic	In high/low spirits	to lift/raise
expressions:	feeling low	(someone's) spirits sinking feeling

1. Warm-Up

Look at the pictures below and identify the happy and the sad people. State any one reason for each.

2. Listening

Listen to the conversation between Rahul and his teacher and say whether the teacher let Rahul go home or not. Give reasons for your answer.

Rahul: Hello teacher! Can I go home early, today?

Teacher: Why? What happened?

Rahul: My sister got her board results. She did extremely well. I'm in high spirits today.

Teacher: That's good. But why do you have to go home early?

Rahul: It's because my parents are going to my grandparents' home to celebrate it. There's a train at 2 pm. They want to take me along.

Teacher: Don't worry. I won't let your spirits sink. But don't forget to bring sweets for the class.

3. Reading

Read the Following News Articles and Select the Correct Option.

a) Young, wild and free: Rescued Thailand boys are in high spirits, says official
The eight boys rescued from a flooded cave in northern Thailand are in "high spirits" and have strong immune systems because they are soccer players, a senior health official said Tuesday, as rescuers prepared for a third push to bring out five still deep in the cave.

Jedsada Chokdumrongsuk, permanent secretary at the Public Health Ministry, said the first four boys rescued, aged 12 to 16, are now able to eat normal food. Two of them possibly have a lung infection but all eight are generally "healthy and smiling," he said.

"The kids are footballers so they have high immune systems," Jesada said. "Everyone is in high spirits and is happy to get out. But we will have a psychiatrist to evaluate them."

Adapted from: <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/thailand-cave-rescue-boys-soccer-team-healthy-1281266-2018-07-10>

The young boys were in high spirits because

- i. they had strong immune systems
- ii. they were soccer players
- iii. they were rescued safely

b) Family of badly burned girl asking for cards to lift her spirits

PORTLAND, Oregon (KTRK) -- The family of a girl who was badly burned is asking for your help.

Moir, 6, received burns to 30 percent of her body last month when the dress she was wearing caught on fire on a wood stove.

Her injuries will keep her from school for the rest of the year.

However, her parents want to keep her spirits up and her education going.

They're asking you to send Moira greeting cards with a fact about your state while she's in Randall Children's Hospital in Portland.

Moira and her family actually live in Baker City more than four hours away, but she's recovering in Portland.

If you would like to mail her a letter, you can send it to:...

Adapted from: <http://abc13.com/family-of-burned-girl-asking-for-cards-to-lift-her-spirits-/3063799/>

The family of the burned girl wanted to lift her spirits by asking people to send her greeting cards because

- i. they cannot do so
- ii. the girl is fond of collecting greeting cards
- iii. they think that this may help the girl to overcome her sufferings

c) When you feel low and moody for no reason...

June 22, 2018, 4:28 PM IST Vinita Dawra Nangia in O-zone, Lifestyle, TOI

Sometimes we feel low for no reason. Why does that happen and how can we fight back such moods?

Some days are low for no reason at all. You feel a soul-searing loneliness and nothing seems to help. You cast your mind around, wondering what makes you feel so down and out – and there is nothing really, no perceivable cause.

Adapted from: <https://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/O-zone/when-you-feel-low-and-moody-for-no-reason/>

People sometimes feel low

- i. because they want to feel so.
- ii. for reasons which they do not know.
- iii. because they have nothing to do.

d) That sinking feeling: Mumbai trains late, BMC on alert

PTI / Updated: September 19, 2017, 22:45 IST

On August 29, Mumbai received more than 300 mm rainfall that crippled transport services threw normal life out of gear.

Several parts of the city and its suburbs, including South Mumbai, Borivali, Kandivili, Andheri and Bhandup, received heavy rainfall, the official said.

The downpour, which started in the afternoon, was accompanied by thunder and lightning.

PRO of Central Railway A.K. Jain said, "(Suburban) trains are running a bit late, but there has been no cancellation till now."

A tree branch fell between Andheri and Vile Parle stations on the Harbour corridor in the afternoon, briefly halting the traffic, he added.

Mumbaikars, meanwhile, took to social media to express that all too familiar similar sinking feeling.

Adapted from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/that-sinking-feeling-mumbai-trains-late-bmc-on-alert/articleshow/60753927.cms>

People had that sinking feeling because

- i. normal life had been terribly affected by heavy rain
- ii. Mumbai was having rain after a long time
- iii. they had not been able to use social media because of the rain

4. Speaking

One of your friends is in low spirits over his recent grades in the examination. How would you talk to him in order to raise his spirits so that he does not get that sinking feeling any longer? Work in pairs to act out a role play in front of the whole class.

5. Writing

Work in Pairs. Given below is a list of expressions in a sequence from a newspaper article regarding admission to Delhi University colleges. Go through these expressions and write a report by guessing the story. After you finish writing, one of you from each pair will read out your version of the report. Later, the original story will be read out and you will vote for the best version which fits the original.

- i. students seeking admission in DU colleges ii. in low spirits iii. high cutoffs iv. candidates who applied for admission in foreign universities v. in high spirits vi. sinking feeling when the cutoffs were out vii. limited number of seats viii. candidates' parents sought help of counselling services ix. good news from foreign universities x. students ready to fly to a different destination

Original Version of the newspaper article

DU out of bounds, students eye int'l varsities as backup

TNN I Jul 3, 2018, 07:58 IST

By Mohammad Haaris Beg

While students seeking admission in Delhi Universities colleges are in low spirits due to high cutoffs, city candidates who applied for admission in foreign universities got the course and college of their choice and were in high spirits (the original word for *high spirits* in the article is *overjoyed* and the rest of the story is contrived to suit the learning purpose).

Initially, city candidates too had that sinking feeling when the cutoffs were out. Due to limited number of seats as compared to the large number of applicants, many students had to give up their hopes of getting into a college of their choice. Worried, some of these candidates' parents even sought help of counselling services to raise their children's spirits.

Finally, good news started pouring in from foreign universities for students who appeared for SAT examination as these students are now ready to fly to a different destination to achieve their dreams of getting higher education from a good college.

6. Conceptual Metaphor Awareness

Work in pairs. Go back to Activity 2 and list all the language expressions used to indicate happiness and sadness. What conclusions can you draw about the emotions of happiness and sadness from the pictures in Activity 1 and the language expressions you have classified in terms of happiness and sadness in this activity?

Conclusion

Acquisition of any language form, including figurative expressions, requires sufficient exposure and opportunities to use that particular form. The activities developed in this article provide both to the learners. Here, learners are provided opportunities to learn the figurative expressions not just from one type of activity but from various types, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Apart from this, the conceptual metaphor awareness activity can significantly boost their understanding of figurative expressions through the revelation that many of these expressions are based on our physical experiences. This may motivate them to further explore the conceptual metaphors underlying other figurative expressions the conceptualisation underlying them.

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