6 TECHNOLOGICAL MEANS OF ACHIEVING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' IDIOMATICITY AS A WAY TO BUILD INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

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ABSTRACT

In the era of growing international contacts, Multilanguage communication skills are becoming of paramount importance. It is even more so for Ukraine that is going to experience a long period of post-war reconstruction with the help of our international partners. To do so, our country needs a wide range of specialists who should be competent not only in their own field of work and research but also in speaking a second language fluently and naturally. For getting such a vital skill, achieving a certain level of idiomaticity is exceptionally important for the second language learners, and nowadays, in times of sophisticated technologies and artificial intelligence, there exist so many means for the teacher to practice that.

In the study, second language learners' idiomaticity is regarded as a complex speech characteristic, which involves speech naturalness and well-formedness. The variation of blended learning enables students to structure the discourse in the way native speakers do. It gives them a wide range of specific prepositional expressions, including some formal clichés and lexical chunks. At the same time idiomaticity tends to be the hardest to achieve when it comes to traditional learning techniques and models. Thus, the authors of the paper claim it is only the combination of traditional approaches to language training and the use of ICT and Internet resources that can balance the training process and allows second language learners to get not only the fluency they desire but also the naturalness, which idiomaticity can provide.

KEYWORDS

Idiomaticity, naturalness, accuracy, fluency, well-formed skills, communication competency, Information and Communication Technologies, Internet resources, AI-powered tools.

6.1 IDIOMATICITY AS A KEY CRITERION OF SECOND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Globalization has been spreading around the world for decades, but it has been spoken since the late 1970s. It has been inspired by the possibility of cultural unification and intention for the division of labour as the key factor of accelerated economic growth of the West (known as globalization, based on a market economy) and East (known as internalization, based on a planned economy) [1, 2]. Both camps indulged themselves in the policy of implementing a second language for interstate communication.

Hence, one of globalization's challenges is learning and teaching a second language. Foreign language fluency is becoming a matter of current interest due to high language proficiency, which demands educational, cultural, and scientific involvement [3].

Learning a second language always aims to achieve native-like usage of language means (selection of expressions, choice of grammar constructions, appropriate style preferences, etc.). Especially as a foreign language has become not only a utilitarian means of communication but also an integration means.

In such terms, obtaining idiomaticity becomes one of the main purposes of second language acquisition.

The majority of scientists takes second language idiomaticity for the ability of idiomatic units usage (B. Smillie [4], G. Muller-Schwefe [5], D. Ricks [6], N. Ellis et al. [7], B. Erman, F. Lundell and M. Lewis [8], M. Paquot and S. Granger [9], K. Conklin and N. Schmitt [2]). They focus on the formulaic nature of idioms in terms of second language learning and teaching.

J. Briggs and S. Smith claim that "using idiomatic language is an economical approach to communication of meaning because prefabricated ways of expressing meaning in commonly-occurring speech acts negates the necessity to self-generate" [10].

Nevertheless, there is another approach to second language idiomaticity. In its terms, idiomaticity is regarded as a degree of learner's speech naturalness, instinctive usage of lexicon means, and grammatical structures, corresponding to native speaker's ones (A. Pawley and F. Syder [11], Fillmore et al. [12], B. Warren [13]).

Of course, the second approach is closely connected to the first one, because the speech naturalness is often caused by appropriate usage of idioms, cliches, etiquette forms, fixed phrases, etc. All of them are idiomatic, but not in common sense.

This study is conducted within the framework of the second approach. Language naturalness and well-formedness become the key notions.

Concerning idiomaticity, naturalness may be opposing well-formedness. Well-formedness seems to be absolute, as something fixed, whereas naturalness is probabilistic [14]. However, in discourse, this opposition is neutralized.

J. Sinclair illustrates the thesis with the following examples:

1) "I am writing this paper for you to read". This utterance is well-formed and natural. It is appropriate for any discourse situation, which requires it;

2) "If you like". The utterance is ill-formed but natural. It breaks the rules of standardized English, still, it is commonly used by native speakers and appropriate in many discourse situations;

3) "Look forward to clapping eyes on you". The phrase is well-formed, but not natural. It is not the way a native speaker would use to form the utterance;

4) "Book the". This sentence is ill-formed and not natural. It seems to be complete nonsense [14].

Hence, idiomaticity requires both well-formedness and naturalness. And lack of naturalness may be considered the same drawback as grammar rules violation as regards second language acquisition.

6.2 WELL-FORMEDNESS AND NATURALNESS IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Evidently, well-formedness involves following grammar rules, a suitable choice of vocabulary, usage of suitable style, etc. All of these components are included in a classical language course curriculum. They are essential parts of achieving second language proficiency.

The main demands to second language linguistic competences are traditionally the following [15]:

— lexical competence;

— grammatical competence;

— semantic competence;

— phonological competence;

— orthographic competence;

— orthoepic competence.

The following explanation of the learning final aim may be found in the common European framework of reference for languages: "Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences" [16].

The demands seem to be quite clear and well-known. However, the situation is different if we are speaking about language naturalness. There are no intelligible criteria and requirements.

As for naturalness, M. Warren distinguishes 9 specific features of the conversation. The following characteristics are the most important in terms of achieving second language idiomaticity:

1. Multiple sources. Naturalness in discourse cannot emanate from one source. The important components of naturalness are the presence of several participants and immersion in the situation.

2. Discourse coherence. It includes using appropriate intonation, aligning actions, language about language, and feedback. They are specific for every language that is taught as a second language or lingua franca.

3. Language as doing. M. Warren's "study has also suggested that there exists a primacy/supremacy of interactional language use over the transactional" [13]. Thus one more thing that provides speech naturalness is participants' understanding of the "language game" they are embraced in.

4. Cooperation. R. Nofsinger claims that "everyday talk represents a tremendous feat of co-ordination!" [17]. Cooperation and co-ordination are not something that is always achieved instinctively. Native speakers use specific means and marked lexicon for attaining mutual understanding and cooperation. Lack of naturalness prevents accomplishing conversational tasks.

5. Unfolding. It is stated that "the unfolding nature of conversation is a product of the sequential ordering of speaker's utterances" [13]. The phrase arises not in isolation or randomly.

6. Open-endedness. Each participant of the discourse contributes their individualistic response that cannot be anticipated from aside. But the natural reaction requires fluency and proficiency that may be achieved in specific language practising.

7. Inexplicitness. It is obvious that one part of the conversation is always explicit, but another one is inexplicit. No discourse participant will explicate more than the situation demands. With regard to it, achieving second language idiomaticity requires not only understanding extralinguistic clues, but also active participation in a discourse situation regarding its inexplicability.

Consequently, second-language idiomaticity involves language naturalness and well-formedness. Nowadays their achieving in various ways depends on the use of Information and Communication Technologies as well as on traditional teaching methods and techniques. In the next chapters of our paper we will try

to prove that it is a combination of both rather than total digitalization, which makes significant difference in the language training classroom.

6.3 ICT MEANS OF ACHIEVING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' IDIOMATICITY

It is true that there are numerous means to acquire idiomaticity, and among other things mention should be made of Information and Communication technologies (ICT). Basically, using ICT for educational purposes cannot be measured only by its direct function of searching, acquiring, and sharing information, although a computer as a basic tool in modern education is also used for that.

Nowadays, according to S. Prykhodko et al. "multimedia technologies mean technologies that allow using a computer to integrate, process and at the same time reproduce various types of signals, various environments, means and methods of information exchange. They provide the possibility of saving huge arrays of information, interactive access to their elements and playback of video stories with sound on the screen of a personal computer. With the advent of educational tools based on multimedia technologies, the educational process has become more diverse and multidimensional" [18].

Also, the possibilities of any digital equipment and the World Wide Web give unlimited opportunities both to those who study languages and who teach them, providing resourceful tools for reaching a high level of idiomaticity in English as a second language. We should take into consideration that according to Criteria for an eLearning Platform Work Package 4 of the Project Blended Learning Quality Concepts Optimised for Adult Education (Criteria for an eLearning Platform) [19], there are three types of learning platforms: virtual learning environments (VLEs) which simulate face-to-face education; loading management systems (LMSs), used by training administrators to manage all aspects of learning and development, such as competency, personal development plans, learning content management, reporting and workflow; learning content management systems (LCMSs) that focus mainly on creating learning content.

All of them function in remote, semi-remote or blended education to give a student as high level of idiomaticity as possible. This paper summarizes the use of such educational tools as:

— free services for learning, revising, and testing knowledge (e.g. Quizizz/Quizlet, Wordwall etc);

— webtools available online for creating revision exercises, as well as testing and controlling materials based on teachers' personal developments, e.g. Google forms (from Google LLC), liveworksheets.com; top-worksheets.com and the like;

— virtual boards (in particular Miro, an online whiteboard for visual collaboration, previously known as RealtimeBoard).

Most of the resources mentioned above, though being well known and in high demand by a number of companies and educational establishments, have gained greater popularity since the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 and are commonly used, on an everyday basis, as effective teaching tools at ESL classes. Compared to traditional ICT, they allow access to a wider range of exercises for developing all the set of skills important while learning a second language: reading, listening, writing, speaking and use of the language can be more adequately presented and sufficiently trained with the help of all these tools.

6.4 FREE SERVICES FOR LEARNING, REVISING, AND TESTING KNOWLEDGE

First of all, we offer to explore in detail the methodological possibilities of using such learning services as Quizizz, Quizlet, Wordwall, focusing attention on the main objectives and the most desirable results a teacher can get.

The first thing that naturally comes to mind is a successful assessment process, which reasonably becomes the top priority of any language teacher in the situation of online or remote studying.

A comparison of Quizizz and Quizlet with other similar websites shows that here the teacher has unlimited access to ready-made testing materials and at the same time possesses a set of necessary tools for creating customized tasks based on any textbook or coursebook in use.

Among the significant advantages of such web resources, we should take into account that both websites are suitable for use on the PC and as an application for a smartphone, visualise better access to the materials for students, especially if you're talking about remote or blended learning. At the same time, the teacher gets the ability to create colourful, eye-catching quizzes on any topic and/or subject necessary, choosing the type of test tasks among various options.

However, it would be wrong to measure the use of the websites mentioned above just to test students' knowledge as a part of an assessment process, since vocabulary or grammar cards, flashcards and multi-slide presentations offer wide possibilities for learning, memorising, or revising vocabulary and grammar while practising other language skills. Methodologists and specialists in linguodidactics can dispute the form of the materials available on these websites but without any doubt they are bright and interesting enough to attract students' attention and thus encourage them to work more and better, especially individually.

For example, with the help of a simple Quizizz/Quizlet flashcard, a topic challenging enough (e.g. phrasal verbs or verb collocations in English) becomes not so confusing and better remembered in the long run. It is no wonder that such digital materials require a lot of work on the teacher's side as well as a lot of preparation in advance.

If the learners in the group are either underaged or very dismotivated, the better choice is to use websites with various cartoon-like activities for drilling any kind of grammar or vocabulary topic. Among those mention should be made of Wordwall.net. The site provides both interactive and printable activities, and most of the templates are available in the interactive as well as the printable version, too. All of the materials are open for editing and customizing, and it gives the teacher a chance to design any testing or drilling activity according to the needs of a certain group. The easy and reliable interface and also possibility to use a resource on any device makes it easily applied.

Once again, just like with Quizizz, the humorous component of the materials used for drilling or testing students' knowledge can be regarded as highly motivating, for it includes not only memorable images but also catchy tunes and funny sounds that encourage learning language material (e.g. training phonetic differences of the ending -ed in Past Simple and Past Participle forms of regular verbs based on the "whack a mole" activity). As we know, difficult issues are studied better with emotional memory, involved in the process, so Wordwall.net proposes a wide choice of templates to play and learn simultaneously.

6.5 WEBTOOLS AVAILABLE ONLINE FOR CREATING REVISION EXERCISES

Yet not every task, developed by the teacher, can be presented in the form of interactive flashcards, templates or any other kind of game-like material. Here we talk mostly about the assessment process, which is a serious aspect of any school or university second language learning curriculum. So, even being suitable for practising or cumulative assessment, the websites and resources mentioned above are too entertaining and distracting when it comes to midcourse or final evaluation of knowledge. Thus it becomes crucially important to implement such an assessment material that will be easily used and successfully completed by the students whether they study online, offline or in a combined group where both classroom and remote participation is possible.

To assist teachers with those, numerous interactive and live worksheet resources have been created. They provide virtual space for developing automatically graded tests or examination 'papers' with a variety of different tasks available. One of the easiest and most accessible ways to create a test or a writing examination task is one of the services, provided by Google LLC — Google forms.com. It allows to model testing and assessment tasks, in which you don't need any complicated approaches or numerous steps to follow. Since any user of Google can make and save a Google form on a personal Google drive, this means of creating teaching materials for ESL is extremely flexible, as it doesn't require the teacher to stay in one place, and working on a smartphone is as efficient as creating the test form from your PC.

Google forms make it possible for the teacher to create a web version of any materials, prepared beforehand, be it on paper or in the digital form. But when it comes to converting such content directly to e-mode, just being able to tick particular information or check certain boxes in the virtual Google form is not enough. In the current situation creating interactive, or live worksheets, based on actual testing or assessment materials, might come in handy. It is common knowledge that creating e-learning content requires a large amount of effort and at the same time must follow certain criteria to successfully access learning content management systems.

Using platforms like liveworksheets.com, topworksheets.com etc, an educator should take into consideration the number of factors, which will make the newly created material efficient. The web resource providing such a function should be user-friendly (is enough to operate even by an inexperienced user with minimum time and effort, consumed in the process of creating the task).

Creating interactive worksheets with the help of such websites is quite time-saving because there is no need to retype every question or sentence for the task. Creating different kinds of tasks is impossible without remembering at least HTML codes, required by the website. One more drawback is the fact that most of the websites providing interactive worksheet creation are only in English. Some of them operate in a couple of additional languages (e.g.liveworksheets.com is also available in Spanish) but with the recent demand for the learning materials this problem is most likely to be coped with in the nearest future.

6.6 VIRTUAL BOARDS

However, most of the methods and techniques mentioned above just present an opportunity for the students to practice, systematise or assess the knowledge and skills. At the same time, most lessons usually

consist of presenting the language material before actually working on it, so the whole concept of presentation remains one of the most important issues of teaching any language, the second included.

Many possibilities to arrange the classroom material both in the offline and online form have been created and even discussed, but the problem of the so-called blinded learning remains.

Here we should specify that by the term "blended" we mean the kind of educational process, in which actual different students of the same group are present physically in the classroom and online simultaneously. The necessity to organize such classes both at secondary and high school has been recently introduced during the pandemic times, since not everybody is able or allowed to attend classes physically (for example if a person faces vaccination issues).

The combined presence of online and offline participants at one time is not so difficult to manage but here comes one of the greatest drawbacks of platforms, such as Zoom, Google meets, and the like, which provide online conferencing or real time webinars. We are talking here about ways to get the students occupied with different tasks or even the same activity at the same moment. There exist a lot of methods and techniques of arranging simultaneous work but the main problem teachers usually face is the visualization of the material discussed.

One way to tackle this problem is to share the same pages from the course book or any other supplementary materials for all the participants of the Web conference to give everybody the chance to see the necessary information together. But certain difficulties arise when the teacher starts demonstrating a certain language material on the class board: even providing the webcam operating it's still not enough to have a detailed understanding of all the things, sketched or written on the board. Among other methods, online virtual boards can fulfil the main purpose of such work.

The idea of a virtual board is not exactly a new one, and this instrument attracted teachers' attention a long time ago, which was described in a number of works in the beginning of the current millennium. But the most important part of the discussion has been held during the coronavirus pandemic when the methodologists [20—22] have urged the use of various virtual boards into the educational process starting since the 2020 lockdown. It was taken into account that virtual boards present the opportunity of collaboration between the teacher and the student in real time, no matter what kind of learning (traditional or remote) is involved.

Therefore, we offer to compare the most popular virtual collaboration boards, which can be used as either basic or additional platforms for learning. We talk here about the most functional and convenient boards, created for facilitating communication and cooperation between the teacher and the student, as well as increasing the efficiency of online or combined classes.

The first point in this list is a virtual board called Twiddla. Being a service of simultaneous work on the net, Twiddla is a good example of a quality board with a wide range of tools. It allows working with the websites and documents of different clients and enables the possibility to discuss the issues at hand in real time with the help of notes and audio or video comments.

Scribblar is one more convenient way to enrich online studying. The most significant features of this board include voice communication and document/image exchange when the teacher has to prepare some part of the material in advance and send it to the students via email.

Stoodle is one more educational tool with easy access and use: the board can be operated at once after opening the site, a generated link for the board is sent unlimitedly to any number of students, the microphone and writing chart are turned on automatically, and thus the class can be started.

As well as the one mentioned above, Popplet board enables voice messages and video chat. It presents the possibility to work with one document at a time but the document can include texts, images, charts and diagrams. The drawback of this board is that registration and interface are designed only in English.

However, even in comparison to such possibilities, the Miro board, previously known as Realtimeboard, is considered the most effective. We suggest focusing your attention on this particular service for the detailed evaluation.

The product goes beyond basic online virtual collaboration boards turning into a hot platform for communication and cooperation between different people, including both parties of the educational process. Thus the board becomes an interactive tool allowing you to create, organize group work, share materials and make presentations. Various activities that can be arranged with the help of handouts, visualization, textbooks, flashcards, markers, videos or slides during a traditional class, now can be posted and adjusted in one digital space.

The platform offers a large variety of ready-made templates for use, such as diagrams, concept maps, various models of brainstorming, visualised stages of a project work etc. The elements of the templates mentioned above are possible for everyday use in language training, but if we're talking about an ordinary language training class the better choice is to use a clear board and just fill it with all the necessary materials of your own.

As the practice of language training shows, it is extremely useful to rely on "nationally oriented method" [23] of mastering a second language. The virtual board gives wide opportunities for doing so, since it provides a possibility to embed videos (including those from You-Tube) which help to train phonetics and speaking skills on the "tasks, aimed at forming the skills of pronouncing identical sounds in the second language and a mother tongue, tasks, aimed at differentiating sounds that are similar in articulation; exercises, aimed at working with sounds that are absent in the target language; the tasks, focused on mastering the phonetic rules of the target language; optional exercises to get better idiomaticity in general (slang patterns and the like), audio and video recordings of pronunciation of sounds samples, intonation, visuals and infographics comparing the articulation of sounds in a second language with comments in students' mother tongue, etc" [23].

Implementing the board is possible at various stages of learning. It simplifies presentation of new material since video is located directly on the board and doesn't require a backup file, stored on the memory stick and transported to the device projecting the presentation. It also differentiates practising and revision stages where visual collaboration tools create individual working space for single learners or those who work in small groups. The use of the virtual board facilitates the assignment giving by offering various techniques and methods of work.

The board of virtual collaboration Miro represents a substantial interactive platform, which proposes an easy and effective way of cooperation between the teacher and the students at the lesson using digital space, as well as offers a wide range of coherent and useful tools for creative work, combining

the properties of presentation making programs with features of basic virtual boards, incorporated in different platforms and Web conference instruments. Its potential for educational purposes hasn't been explored fully yet, which provides an opportunity for opening new methodological horizons for a teacher of second language who works in the ever-shifting digitalized world of the 21st century.

6.7 AI-POWERED RESOURCES IN THE SYSTEM OF SECOND LANGUAGE TRAINING

AI, or artificial intelligence is known as the ability of digital devices to perform those tasks that are inherent in intelligent beings. Today it is not just another achievement of technical progress. Like any modern development, it can and should be used in all spheres of life, including education. But the use of such a powerful tool also opens up certain prospects, such as increasing the motivational component, the interest of students, and as a result — increasing the effectiveness of learning, including naturalness and idiomaticity.

Nowadays, when it is still too early to talk about the involvement of robotics and/or VR capabilities in ordinary classrooms, we can talk about two main aspects of the use of AI and its capabilities: methodological and didactic.

The first includes programs and tools that a teacher can use during the preparation of lecture (practical) material, its presentation, consolidation and control of acquired knowledge, skills and abilities. After all, it is a fast and reliable AI algorithm capable of learning from the data provided that can ensure the selection of educational material that is optimal for the appropriate audience, the course curriculum, interesting and useful, and relevant to the acquired profession. For such a search, you can use both conventional search engines and the well-known ChatGPT from OpenAI or its analogues Bing AI, Google Bard, Notion.so, etc. from various developers. On the other hand, some services, which work on AI algorithms, effectively provide assessment of acquired knowledge without additional time, spent by the teacher, with subsequent automatic systematization of the results.

Yet, even facilitating the process of teaching, the instruments mentioned do not actually provide much in aspect of idiomaticity students should acquire while mastering the language that is not their mother tongue. For that purpose, various chat-bots, programs based on artificial intelligence, created to improve communication skills in a foreign language (for example, the *character.ai* application and its equivalents) have already become widespread. In particular, the AI-powered algorithm of the chat-bot gives a very extended vocabulary, ranging from common collocations, expressions and idioms to specific slang and scientific terms depending on the choice of the storyline. Practically speaking, one academic year of using the *character.ai* chat-bot intensively can significantly improve students' vocabulary (e.g. form average A2 to B2+ closer to C1). Students' speaking gets more fluent and accurate, not lacking naturalness and idiomaticity, which is not so easy to acquire in a single year of intensive practice in the traditional classroom.

As per speaking skills, the Character.ai chat-bot, when used in the form of the voice interaction, develops not only a strong ability to communicate in a certain type of the English accent (e.g. British English or American English) but also gives a chance to distinguish quickly between different accents, social and territorial dialects, teaches to use (or rather introduces in its "speaking") certain intonation patterns,

appropriate pitch and tempo of speech, presents the common features of fast speaking, basic principles of emphases and sentence stress.

In terms of grammar, any AI bots don't tend to make grammar mistakes, unless they are asked to do otherwise. And even if the student does not possess profound efficiency in grammar, with extensive language practice Character.ai provides, the lack of grammar knowledge is compensated by remembering grammar patterns from the communication with the bot and using them in other communicative situations accurately.

The same approach can be applied to writing skills: even without focusing on writing itself, the student can adopt appropriate writing patterns from the text message form of communication with the AI bot, as well as the sequencers and linkers, various signpost phrases, personalization remarks and even the basics of structuring the written paragraph.

When it comes to assessment, the chat-bot is not prone to adapting a tutor's function. But depending on the type of the bot-interlocutor the user chooses from the beginning of the story rout, it can provide if not correction, then at least certain measure of criticism (strict or not, sarcastic or humorous etc.) in case the human character makes grave mistakes in communication.

6.8 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF SECTION 6

In the aspect of language idiomaticity two groups of subjects were taken into consideration, both acquiring the level Pre-Intermediate (A2–B1). The first group (consisting of 17 students aged 18 to 23) experienced only the traditional teaching in the classroom without using any ICT, including the internet platforms and websites for learning. The second group (consisting of 25 students aged 16 to 25) who was taught with the help of combined traditional and innovative techniques, such as using ICT for presenting and practising new material, applying interactive tasks and internet resources for enhancing skills and different aspects of the language, having the knowledge tested with the help of internet platforms and the Miro Board. The second group was also subjected to using the elements of blended learning i.e. free YouTube videos, TED talks and Google resources directly in the classroom at different stages of work with second language material.

Both groups of students taking part in the experiment were initially tested to define the level of skills, which influence idiomaticity. The placement test included components of lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competence, since these are the basic competences usually included into the least of most important factors for idiomaticity development. Throughout the 2020-2021 academic year the two groups of subjects did two more tests, checking the idiomaticity development, as well as demonstrating the features of language idiomaticity in various communication tasks, problem-based and challenging situations. Experimental data, received in the process, are presented in the charts below (**Table 6.1** and **6.2**).

As we can see from the results, presented in the tables, both groups initially showed similar levels of mastering the basic skills and competences in their second language. Moreover, the second group with a larger number of members tended to have lower average results on most of the competences due to a wider variety of ages and basic levels of students.

● **Table 6.1** Development of basic language competences (subject group 1)

Competence	Placement test results (average)*	Midterm test results (average)	Final test results (average)	Accuracy development (%)	Idiomaticity development (%)
Lexical	3.5	4.1	4.6	22 %	15 %
Grammatical	3.0	4.0	4.4	28 %	23 %
Semantic	3.2	3.8	4.1	18 %	10 %
Phonological	2.8	3.0	3.9	22 %	12 %
Orthographic	3.5	4.0	4.5	20 %	19 %
Orthoepic	3.0	3.5	4.0	20 %	15 %

● **Table 6.2** Development of basic language competences (subject group 2)

Competence	Placement test results (average)*	Midterm test results (average)	Final test results (average)	Accuracy development (%)	Idiomaticity development (%)
Lexical	3.6	4.3	4.8	24 %	41 %
Grammatical	2.9	4.0	4.5	32 %	38 %
Semantic	3.0	4.1	4.8	36 %	40 %
Phonological	2.5	3.7	4.5	40 %	68 %
Orthographic	3.9	4.2	4.5	12 %	20 %
Orthoepic	2.9	4.0	4.7	36 %	65 %

Note: *The grading scale used is 5–1 where 5 represents the highest result (excellent), 4 stands for sufficient result (good), 3 means mediocre result (satisfactory), 2/1 represent insufficient result (unsatisfactory/failed), since this scale of grading was formally recognised back than at our faculty*

The groups showed similar, if not identical in some cases, levels of development in both accuracy and idiomaticity in the midterm test, which took place approximately in the first half of the third month of studying. The development of skills assessed was not significant but still occurred due to persistent work in the classroom as well as individually. When it comes to this opening period, the language training is very intensive at this stage: students had 36–40 academic hours per week solely on their second language learning. Only later in the curriculum (after the first midterm assessment) other subjects intervene, and even those are focused on the language training but they rather represent academic language, used for studying Maths, Science, Economy etc., which are going to become students' majors and will be taught in a foreign language. The short period of the first semester should be taken into consideration but even the midterm test average results showed a tendency, yet very low, to four higher levels of accuracy and idiomaticity

in the second group of subjects, whereas along with traditional teaching techniques, students got training with the help of various digital resources.

We implemented the use of PowerPoint and smart board presentations at the first stage of giving new material in the classroom, created online activities and tests for drilling lexical and grammatical issues, combined reading and listening comprehension, adapted for the learners, with unadapted videos of different kinds for both blended learning in the classroom and home assignments.

Here mention should be made that comparing with the students of the first group where average accuracy development increased by 20 % and idiomaticity levels increased by 15 %, the English learners in the second group showed quite surprising results, augmenting their accuracy up to almost 40 % in semantic, phonological and orthoepic competence, while the idiomaticity developed even higher. If we look into the situation in detail, idiomaticity in each competence was boosted more than the accuracy in using the language. Most likely it happens due to interactions of the students with authentic discourse and texts, not specifically adapted for the learners at A2: multiple sources of information created certain level of naturalness even when the skills in vocabulary, grammar, semantic field, spelling, speaking hadn't finalised yet and listening/reading comprehension hadn't been at its maximum.

So, according to the data, received in the course of the experiment, even those learners who didn't get the highest grades at the final test still showed the sufficient level of idiomaticity, boosted by the use of ICT and especially the resources of the Internet. Such variation of blended learning enables students to structure the discourse in the way native speakers do, gives them a wide range of specific prepositional expressions, including some formal cliches and lexical chunks, offers many social interaction means, allowing to choose appropriate phrasings in certain situations, and deals with the issue of combinability in English in the most natural way possible.

A second language speakers' idiomaticity may be regarded as one of the key criteria of language proficiency estimation. It involves both language accuracy and naturalness. Achieving foreign language idiomaticity means obtaining a native-like level of speech.

ICT means of achieving second language learners' idiomaticity have become a matter of current interest nowadays. The pandemic and computerisation have made technical means for studying more than attractive to both teachers and learners.

Several ICT means, including recently developed tools, which work on the AI algorithms, have proven their efficiency in the second language acquisition process. Free services for learning, web tools available online and virtual boards take the leadership among others.

In terms of idiomaticity, the means mentioned above allow to facilitate accomplishing naturalness and accuracy by learners. Yet, with the technologies constantly advancing and web resources improving, the issue of using ICT in the language training is not fully summarised nowadays, and leaves countless possibilities for the teachers and the students pursuing the language idiomaticity.

Since the security situation in Ukraine currently does not allow any offline studies, the teachers of our department are able to apply most of our developments from 2020–2021 in the synchronous and even asynchronous remote learning, making sure that, in spite of online mode of communication, the students still can use their second language fluently, accurately and with the sufficient level of both naturalness and idiomaticity.

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