

**Enhancing the Italian Learners' Comprehension Competence in Turkish
Proverbs and Idioms**

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Abstract

Problem Statement: Foreign language learners who do not naturally come from the tradition of the language they are learning have naturally difficulties in comprehending Turkish proverbs and idioms. Comprehension problems of the Italian learners of Turkish can be various.

Purpose of Study: This study aims at presenting some suggested teaching methods for Turkish proverbs and idioms through some semantically identical Italian proverbs and idioms in order to solve the comprehension problems of Italian learners of Turkish arised from lack of grammatical, strategic, communicative and pragmatic competence.

Method: This study uses content analysis to explore whether proverbs have a significant effect on language learning. In order to do so, the author uses Turkish proverbs to find their equivalentents in Italian.

Findings: In light of the comparison between Turkish and Italian proverbs, one can easily see that the proverbs have a bearing effect on language learning and teaching.

Conclusion and Recommendations: This study will contribute to the understanding of the importance of the use of proverbs in foreign language teaching/learning. We should give importance to idioms and proverbs in foreign language teaching, since they are important part of the culture without which learning a foreign language is not

possible. However, the foreign language learners have difficulties in understanding idioms and proverbs.

Keywords: Turkish as a foreign language, Turkish proverbs, Turkish idioms, comprehension competence.

Introduction

Language is an identity of a nation. Knowing a language does not only mean knowing the rules of the language. As Wittgenstein points out “the limits of one’s language mean the limits of his language.” That is to say, through the philosophical study of language, we can identify the boundaries of philosophical thought”. The boundaries of language can be also enlarged by proverbs and idioms.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995:1136) defines the term ‘proverb’ as “a short well known statement that contains advice about life in general.” This dictionary also defines the term ‘idiom’ as “ a group a words with a meaning of its own that is different from the meanings of each separate word put together.” (1995:706).

Proverbs are created after years of experience and close observation of life and natural phenomena. Through metaphorical language, they warn, advice, or reprimand by drawing attention to the moral or ethical consequences of human behavior. Proverbs and idioms reflect emotions, thoughts, way of life, beliefs, customs and traditions of the nation to which they belong and generally appear in some routine formulas and prefabricated patterns.

There is a Turkish proverb which says “He who does not listen to proverbs remains screaming for help.” As is seen they are an important part of life and they must be taught in Turkish Language Teaching Programmes.

Foreign language learners who do not naturally come from the tradition of the language they are learning have naturally difficulties in comprehending Turkish proverbs and idioms. Comprehension problems of the Italian learners of Turkish can be listed as follows:

- Comprehension problems arise from the lack of semantic properties of figures of speech;

- The students' lack of competence in the relationship between sense and reference of an expression causes problems in comprehension of Turkish proverbs and idioms;
- Cases of homonymy and polysemy also create comprehension problems in Italian learners;
- Due to the lack of comprehension competence of Turkish proverbs and idioms, the language learners do not actually reflect them in their performative competence.

Therefore, teaching proverbs and idioms to foreign language learners needs a special importance with some functional teaching techniques.

In order to enhance the learners' linguistic competence, proverbs and idioms should be taught along with the grammar letting the foreign language learners use in meaningful contexts. They are said to be an important part of linguistic competence of speakers.

This study aims at presenting some suggested teaching techniques for Turkish proverbs and idioms through some semantically identical Italian proverbs and idioms in order to solve the comprehension problems of Italian learners of Turkish arising from a lack of grammatical competence (words and rules), sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness) and strategic competence (appropriate use of communication strategies).

By underlying the cultural similarities and differences between Turkish and Italian languages, Italian language learners of Turkish will communicate with native speakers of Turkish better. Besides, it aims at helping language teachers of Turkish with some task-based language teaching techniques.

Besides, this study takes the attention of readers to İSTANBUL, 2010 as a European Capital of Culture.

Methodology

This study aims at finding the answers of the following questions:

1. Why should we give importance to proverbs and idioms in foreign language teaching?

2. What are the plausible techniques to teach Turkish idioms and proverbs to the Italian University students?

In order to answer the above-mentioned questions, the third year Italian language learners in the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the University of Salento have been given some Turkish proverbs and idioms based on four elements in order to detect their comprehension problems. Among the problematic ones, 40 have been selected totally. For each element 10 proverbs and idioms have been used. Then the Italian students have been given tasks to find the semantically identical Italian proverbs and idioms for the given Turkish proverbs and idioms. In order to accomplish the tasks, the students have scrutinized the proverbs and idioms with the guidance of the instructor in order to overcome inhibitions in both comprehension competence and performance competence.

This study is limited with 40 Turkish and Italian proverbs and idioms which are based on four elements of Aristoteles: fire, air, earth, and water, which forms the slogan of İstanbul 2010 as a European Capital of Culture.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The Turkish idioms and proverbs have been classified according to the four elements: air, earth, fire and water.

About Air

Idioms.

- 1) **Hava almak:** To go out to get fresh air; 2) To take in air; 3) To get nothing out of something
- 2) **Hava atmak (basmak):** Lord it over somebody; to put on airs. (To behave in a way that shows you think you are better or more important than other people.)
- 3) **Havada kalmak:** It's up in the air. (To engage in unproductive activity, see the efforts be futile and vain.)

The comprehension problem. The comprehension problem in the first three idioms arises from the figurative meaning of the word “hava” (air). This word is polysemous and pun creates the problem. The case of homonymy seems problematic, since it is not given in an appropriate context.

4) Havadan sudan konuşmak: Chinwag. (To make an informal conversation.)

The comprehension problem. The comprehension problem arises from two words, “hava” (air) and “su” (water). They are used as binary antonyms.

5) Havası olmak: To resemble someone (to look like, or be similar to, someone or something)

The comprehension problem. This idiom becomes also a problem in comprehension due to the collocation.

Proverbs.

6) Köpek havlamakla hava bulanmaz: A dog’s bark dirties not the the air. (A man who is annoyed cannot solve the problem by shouting.) It is used for defamation.

The comprehension problem. The comprehension problem arises from zoomorphsim. Because in its Italian version, an animal is not used. It is directly related with human being.

7) Rüzgara karşı tüküren kendi yüzüne tükürür: He who spits against the wind spits on his own face. (If you oppose someone or something that’s far more powerful than you are, you are bound to wind up the loser.) It is used for conformity.

The comprehension problem. The word “rüzgar” (wind) is used as a metaphor. Therefore it creates a problem in comprehension. It represents a more powerful person. “Tükürmek” is repeated twice. Through hermeneia, vain effort is indicated. This indirect suggestion also creates a problem in understanding the danger of the struggle with more powerful person.

8) Havaya göre yelken kullan: Use your sails according to the weather. (One should behave according to the situation in which he is.) It is used for conformity.

The comprehension problem. The words “hava” (air) and “yelken” (sail) are metaphors. “Hava” indicates the sitaution in which there is a person; “yelken” represents the way how he should behave.

9) Kışın geleceğini yazdan düşünmek gerek: It is important to think of winter in summer (A person who works in summer will have something to eat in winter.)

The comprehension problem. The word “gelecek” has two meanings, such as “future” and “coming”. Besides, the verb “düşünmek” (to think) here means “to do something for winter or make preparations for winter”.

10) Yazın başı pişenin, kışın aşı pişer: He whose head boils in the summer heat will have his pot boiling in the winter cold. (A person who works when he’s young will enjoy a comfortable old age.) It is used for diligence.

The comprehension problem. The semantic properties of the words “kış” (winter) and “yaz” (summer) related with the cultural values are different for the Italian students. Because in Turkish culture, field work is tiring because of the working conditions, whereas in Italy working conditions are better. Besides, the word “pişmek” (boil) is repeated twice, due to epanalepsis. Foregrounding of the word “pişmek” also causes problems, since it violates the sense of the word related with only “liquid” not with the solid. The word “Baş” is used just for the internal rhyme with the word “aş”. Consonance is also seen with the repetition of the consonant [ş].

11) Güneş girmeyen eve doktor girer: Where the sun doesn’t go, the doctor will. (The house without sun always sees illness. Sunlight is essential for good health.) It is about health.

The comprehension problem. In this proverb the comprehension problem arises from the semantic component of the word “güneş” (sun). It is because in Turkish, it subsumes “health”. The words “doktor” (doktor) and “güneş” (sun) are used as synonyms. The advice is given with two parallel clauses, one is positive, the other is negative.

About Earth

Idioms.

- 1) **Toprak olmak:** To die, to pass away
- 2) **Yerin dibine girmek:** To be embarrassed (ashamed, nervous, or uncomfortable in a social situation after an unexpected event.)
- 3) **Dünyada kalmak/olmak:** To survive

4) Dünyadan haberi olmamak/Dünyanın kaç bucak olduğunu bilmemek: To be unaware of the happenings around oneself.

5) Dünyaya getirmek: To give birth to

The comprehension problem. The comprehension problem of the above-given idioms arises from the figurative meaning of the collocated words.

Proverbs.

6) Aç kal, topal kal, kör kal, fakat topraksız kalma: Be hungry, be lame, be blind, but never be without land. It is about agriculture.

The comprehension problem. Through enumeratio where the subject “you” indirectly is divided into detailing parts, and later a consequence to make a point more forcibly, the learners are unable to understand the given opposition by “fakat” (but). The priorities of human life are listed with their antonyms in imperative structures: “aç” (hungry), “topal” (lame) and “kör” (blind). The polysemous word “toprak”(earth) creates ambiguity for the foreign learners when they miss the suggestion created by the opposition.

7) Toprak avuçlayan altın bulur: He who grasps soil, finds gold. It is about agriculture.

The comprehension problem. The ambiguity in the meaning of “toprak avuçlamak” (to grasp soil) creates the problem in the comprehension skills of the foreign language learning. Grasping soil is used in its figurative meaning. It signifies “growing crops on the land”. Besides, “altın” (gold) is the polysemous word. Gold “a valuable soft yellow metal and “money” “what we earn by working and what we spend in order to spend. The concept of the both senses indicates “cash”. Due to the lack of the concept of the sense “gold”, the learners’ comprehension skills fail.

8) Toprağı işleyen, ekmeği dişler: He who tills his field will bite bread. (He who works is the one who reaps the benefits of his labor.) It is about agriculture.

The comprehension problem. In order to create internal rhyme with “işlemek” (to till the field), dişlemek” (to bite) is used. The comprehension problem arises from the words “işlemek” and “dişlemek” which are polysemous.

9) Bir avuç altının olacağına bir avuç toprağın olsun: Instead of having a handful of gold, it is beter to have a handful of earth. (i.e. a piece of land.) It is about agriculture.

The comprehension problem. The sense of “toprak” (earth) here is used with its extra concept which signifies “real estate bringing money forever.” The lack of understanding the distinctive feature “+/- real estate” causes comprehension problems in students.

10) Düşenin dostu olmaz: Those who fall will have no friends; you just fall and see what happens. (People in trouble are deserted by their friends.) It is about adversity.

The comprehension problem. “Düşmek” (to fall down) is used in figurative meaning with the sense “to be in trouble.”

About Fire

Idioms.

1) Ateşe körükle gitmek: To add fuel to the fire/flames. (To make a situation a lot worse than it was already)

2) Ateşe atmak (kendini, birini): (To put somebody in a difficult situation)

3) Ateş basmak: (Increasing the temperature of the body with blood pressure because of boredom or difficulty.)

4) Çapraz ateş altında olmak: To be caught in the crossfire. (To be involved in a situation in which other people are arguing, when one does not want to be.)

5) Ateş hattı: Firing line/ To be in the firing line. (To be in a situation or position in which one can be attacked or blamed for something, often unfairly.)

The comprehension problem. The comprehension problems arise from the different uses of the sense of ateş” (fire) belonging to different part of speech created by collocations. “ateş” (fire): a simple noun; 2. “ateş” (fire): a simple noun; 3. “ateş basmak” (to increase the temperature of the body): a verb; 4. “çaprazateş” (crossfire). A compound noun; 5. “ateş hattı” (firing line): a compound noun. In all idioms, the sense of “fire” is used with the concept of “difficulty”. However, different uses of parts of speech may inhibit the foreign language learners’ communicative competence.

Proverbs.

6) Ateş kış gününün meyvesidir: Fire is the fruit of a winter day. It is about similarity.

The comprehension problem. The problem first arises from the figurative use of “meyve” (fruit) as a thing possessed by “kış günü” (winter). Besides, “kış günü” (winter day) is also problematic with the concept of “being too cold”.

7) Kadını hamarat eden ateştir: What makes a woman industrious is the fireplace. It is about woman.

The comprehension problem. This proverb is related with Turkish cultural sensitivity. Culinary skills generally are related with female people. The lack of the students’ schemata about “fire” with the concept of “cooking” causes a comprehension problem.

8) Ateş ateşle söndürülmez: Fire cannot be extinguished with fire. (Anger does not solve the problem.) It is about revenge.

The comprehension problem. Apophasis creates a problem here. It is because invoking the extinguishing fire is denied by its invocation with the same concept “anger”. When the students miss the concept of the sense “fire”, they are unable to comprehend the proverb.

9) Altın ateşte, insan mihnette belli olur: As gold is tested by fire, so man is tested by suffering. It is about trying.

The comprehension problem. Ellipsis of “belli olur” with the concept of “being tried” creates a problem in comprehension.

10) Ateşten korkan tütünden sakınır/kaçar: He who fears fire flinches from tobacco. It is about fear.

The comprehension problem. The sense of “tütün” (tobacco) contains the concept of flammable. The lack of this concept in the schemata of the learners creates a problem in their comprehension competence.

About Water

Idioms.

1) **Su koyvermek:** Not to keep promises, to leave something unfinished.

The comprehension problem. The figurative meaning of “su” (water) is nothing to do with the literal meaning “water”. Besides, the verb “koymak” appears in “koyvermek with the omission of vowel in blending. (koymak+vermek).

2) **Su yüzü görmemiş:** One who is very dirty, one who has not taken a shower for a long time.

The comprehension problem. The concept of “water” subsumes “cleanliness”. The figurative meaning is directly related with the lack of this concept in somebody. The compound of “su yüzü” standing for “su” (water) seems misleading for the learners, since they are apt to understand the compound noun word by word.

3) **Su yüzüne çıkmak:** To become apparent.

The comprehension problem. The concept of “being apparent” with the figurative use of “su yüzü” (the surface of the water) cannot be understood by the learners.

4) **Sucuk gibi ıslanmak:** To be soaked to the skin, heavily.

The comprehension problem. The students are unable to relate the concept “being soaked” to “sucuk” due to the lack of its production process. Therefore, the use of simile with the construction “like sucuk (sweetmeat made of grape juice and nuts)” has a problem for the learners.

5) **Sulu göz:** One who is always ready to cry.

The comprehension problem. The attribute “sulu” (watery) used for the head “göz” (eye) misleads the learner in understanding the figurative meaning with the concept “being always ready to cry”.

Proverbs.

6) Su akarken testiği doldurmalıdır: The pitcher should be filled while the water is flowing. (We should use the opportunities appropriately.) It is about opportunity

The comprehension problem. The concept of “testi” (the pitcher) is used with its figurative meaning of “making use of”. The flowing water also signifies “opportunity. Since this suggestion cannot be clear in the learners’ comprehension competence, they are unable to use in their performative competence appropriately.

7) Suyun yavaş akanından, insanın yere bakanından kork: Beware water that flows slowly and a man who looks down when speaking. (A person who is silent and is not reflective enough resembles water running slowly, which is deep and dangerous.) It is about appearance and trust.

The comprehension problem. The suggestion is given two parallel structures with the omission of the imperative form of the verb “kork” (beware). A comparison between a silent person and a slowly running water with an indirect simile causes a comprehension problem in the imperative sentence.

8) Akan su yosun tutmaz. Akan su pislik tutmaz: Running water gathers no moss. (An active person gets even more effective.) It is about diligence.

The comprehension problem. The concept “diligence” is given by “running water”; and the concept “effectiveness” is reflected by “not gathering moss”. The comprehension of these concepts are problematic for the learners, since they are unable to relate the concepts to a diligent, studious person.

9) Rüzgarın ardı yağış, sevincin ardı dögüş: The end of wind is rain and the end of joy is fight. It is about weather.

The comprehension problem. The parallelism is created by the word “ardı” (after). The learners are unable to understand the sense of “ardı”, which is the synonym of “sonra” (after).

10) Eşegi düğüne çağırmişlar, “Ya su lazımdır ya odun” demiş: When the ass was invited to a wedding, he said “They must need someone to carry either water or wood.

(A reference to the least important man, the low man on the totem pole, who is unexpectedly treated kindly because his service is necessary.) It is about guests.

The comprehension problem. Personification creates a comprehension problem, since the speech ability of the human being is applied to an “ass” and also is presented in a narration. Besides, as a concept of “su” (water) and “odun” (wood), “the load” of the ass is indicated for its service. This concept is not clearly understood by the learners.

Some Suggested Task-Based Teaching Techniques

The comprehension competence of the Italian learners can be enhanced through common Italian idioms and proverbs. In order to teach idioms and proverbs better, communicative tasks play an important role. As Nunan (1989) points out “ A communicative task is ‘a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.’”The learners may be asked to make a list of them as a task. Below some tasks related with the problematic idioms and proverbs are presented. The first task is an example for listing, sorting, and classifying to improve both grammatical and sociolinguistic competence, whereas the second one is an information gap activity for developing strategic competence of the learners.

A List of the Common Italian Idioms and Proverbs about Four Elements of Aristoteles

The university students have been asked to scrutinize semantically identical Italian idioms and proverbs based on four elements with the problematic Turkish idioms and proverbs. Then in groups of five, they have listed, sorted, and classified as follows:

About Air

Idioms.

- 1) Prendere una boccata d'aria
- 2) Darsi delle arie
- 3) Seminare al vento

- 4) Parlare di aria fritta
- 5) Novità nell'aria

Proverbs.

- 6) Chi troppo abbaia si riempie il corpo di vento.
- 7) Chi sputa in cielo se l'aspetti in faccia.
- 8) Marinaio guarda in aria.
- 9) Chi canta d'estate, piange d'inverno.
- 10) Un'arietta di fuoco fa bene anche d'estate. Val più una boccata d'aria la mattina che una medicina.

About Earth

Idioms.

- 1) Andare a far terra per ceci
- 2) Fare terra bruciata
- 3) Essere al mondo
- 4) Essere fuori dal mondo
- 5) Mettere al mondo

Proverbs.

- 6) La terra, o bene o male, è un capitale.
- 7) La zappa ha la bocca d'oro.
- 8) Dalla terra viene il pane. Terra, zappa e contadino danno pane e danno vino.
- 9) I soldi son di carta ma la terra è d'oro.
- 10) Quando sei per terra non ti resta che tirarti su.

About Fire

Idioms.

- 1) Mettere fuoco
Mettere benzina sul fuoco

2) Buttarsi nel fuoco

Gettarsi nel fuoco

3) Diventare di fuoco

Farsi di fuoco

4) Essere sotto un fuoco incrociato

Essere sotto tiro incrociato

5) Fuoco di fila

Proverbs.

6) L'inverno al fuoco, l'estate al sole.

7) Chi non è buono a fare il fuoco, non è buono a far l'amore.

8) Non bisogna aggiungere fuoco a fuoco.

9) Con il fuoco si prova l'oro, con l'oro la donna e con la donna l'uomo.

10) Chi attizza il fuoco fa uscire le scintille.

About Water

Idioms.

1) Fare promesse da marinaio

2) Non aver mai visto l'acqua

3) Venire a galla

4) Essere bagnato come un pulcino

5) Avere le lacrime in tasca

Proverbs.

6) Raccogli l'acqua quando piove.

Riempi l'anfora quando hai l'acqua.

7) L'acqua cheta fa crollare i ponti.

L'acqua cheta rovina i ponti.

8) Acqua che cammina non imputridisce.

Acqua che cammina non si riscalda.

Acqua che non si muove puzza.

9) Dopo il vento viene l'acqua.

10) L'asino porta il vino ma beve acqua.

The above given list prepared by the university learners is supposed to enhance their comprehension competence, since they have scrutinized and listed the common Italian idioms and proverbs by comparing and sorting.

Another Suggested Task-Based Activity

Below a dialogue has been given with some missing parts. In order to fill in the information gap, the University students of Turkish have been asked to write in missing idioms or proverbs which are related with four elements.

Dialogue

Can : Merhaba.

Canan: Merhaba.

Can : Bugün uygunsan bana tarla almaya gidebilir miyiz?

Canan : Çok başım ağrıyor.

Can : Geçmiş olsun! Neden?

Canan : Dün çok yağmur yağıyordu. Şemsiyemi yanıma almayı unutmuştum.

.....

Aklıma gelmişken sormadan edemeyeceğim. Neden tarla almak istiyorsun?

Can : Atalarımızı dinliyorum. Ne diyor atasözü

“.....”

Canan : Evet doğru.

Can : Ancak biraz paraya da gereksinimim olacak. Babamdan istedim. Ama borç vermeye yanaşmadı ve kızdı. Ben de kızdım.

Canan:

Can : Haklısın.

Canan: Peki sonunda ne dedi? Parayı verecek mi?

Can : Bilmiyorum.

In the above dialogue, in order not to violate the coherence and cohesion, the learners have to find out appropriate idioms and proverbs. This task helps them to use them appropriately in real communicative event with native speakers of Turkish, as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we should give importance to idioms and proverbs in foreign language teaching, since they are important part of the culture without which learning a foreign language is not possible. However, the foreign language learners have difficulties in understanding idioms and proverbs.

In order to enhance the comprehension competence of the Italian language learners of Turkish, the learners have been asked to scrutinize and classify semantically identical Turkish and Italian idioms and proverbs based on four elements. Therefore, their enhanced comprehension competence seems to have triggered their performance competence, as well. In teaching idioms and proverbs, it has been seen that the concept of the “sense” plays an important role instead of the individual “word study”. It is because ambiguity is always created by homonymy and polysemy. Thus, the learners should be taught figures of speech in meaningful contexts, which will help them to overcome comprehension problems and improve their performance competence.

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İtalyan Öğrencilerin Türkçe Atasözleri ve Deyimler Üzerine Anlama Yeterliklerinin Geliştirilmesi

Özet

Araştırma Konusu: Bu çalışma, Türkçeyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen İtalyan Üniversite öğrencilerinin Türkçe'deki deyim ve atasözlerini öğrenirken, dilbilgisel, iletişimsel ve kullanım yetilerininin yetersizliğinden kaynaklanan sorunlarının İtalyanca'da anlamsal benzerlik taşıyan atasözleri ve deyimler yoluyla öğretilerek çözümlenebileceği önerisi getirilmektedir.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Çalışmanın amacı, yabancı dil öğretiminde ve öğreniminde, atasözleri ve deyimleri kullanmanın önemini kavramaya katkıda bulunmaktır.

Araştırma Yöntemi: Bu çalışmada Türkçe ve İtalyanca'da etkin olarak kullanılan atasözleri incelenerek "içerik analizi" yöntemi uygulanmıştır.

Bulgular: Elde edilen bulgular, her iki dildeki atasözlerin birbirleriyle benzerik gösterdiğini ve dil öğrencilerinin bu atasözlerini kullanmada son derece yatkın oldukları sonucunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Sonuç ve Öneriler: Dilin yaşayan bir unsur olduğundan hareketle, yabancı dil öğreniminde atasözlerini vurgulamak ve atasözlerin öğrenciler tarafından kullanılmasına yardımcı olmak dil öğrencilerinin hedef dili etkin bir şekilde kullanması noktasında son derece yararlı olacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretimi, Türk atasözleri
Türkçe deyimler, kavrama yetisi.