

The Use of **ENGLISH** and **COMMUNICATION** **SKILLS**

For Tertiary Education



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Chapter Eight

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Dan Chima Amadi and Anthony E. Ogu

8.1 Introduction

The art of learning a second language, indeed any language, is the acquisition of as many words as possible to enable the user to apply those words to a variety of use. At the heart of the language learning are the rules governing the use of such words. To master the rules of grammar, the learning process cannot be complete if the user is not in a position, or has not been able, to have at his disposal words and their relations and other ways of forming new words. Vocabulary then is the list of words (compiled in alphabetical order, in the case of a dictionary) available to a user. They are the words known to a user. In other words, a person's vocabulary is the list of words known or available and used by that individual.

The ability of an individual to improve on his linguistic competence is dependent on his reading skills, mastery of the rules of grammar and the development of the vocabulary. The English language teacher ought to impart to his students not only the knowledge to acquire more words but to explain how these words function

(grammar) and how they are pronounced (phonetics).

Over time, scholars tend to divide the vocabulary into two: passive and active vocabulary. The passive vocabularies are those words which we store unconsciously and are hardly applied into use. They lie latent in us and are rarely manifested in our day to day communication or writing. The active vocabularies on the other hand are those words we employ regularly to communicate our thoughts and sensibilities.

8.2 Word Formation Processes/Ways of Improving Your Vocabulary Base

Developing the vocabulary base is crucial if the student has to improve on his communicative competence. In his speech and in writing, he has to be armed with many words and their alternatives if his work will not appear insipid and tasteless. As in eating, well-spiced passages are the readers' delight. The following are some of the ways of vocabulary development by understanding how words in the language are formed and the nature of words.

8.2.1 Affixation

New words can be formed from existing words by adding affixes (also called *bound morphemes*) to such words. This could be through adding prefixes or suffixes.

8.2.1.1 Prefixes

A prefix is an affix added before the root of a word. The root is the core of a word which is what is left when all the bound morphemes are removed. An example of a prefix is the morpheme *un-* which is added to the word *stable* to form a new word *unstable*. The root of the word is *stable*. It is a free morpheme because it can stand alone as a word. It is independent unlike *un-* which is dependent and therefore called a *bound morpheme*. Here are more examples of prefixes and their meanings:

PREFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLES
il-	negative (not)	illegal (not legal), illogical (not logical), illegible (not legible), etc.
in-	negative (not)	inaudible (not audible), inappropriate, inaccessible, etc.
im-	negative (not)	improper (not proper), impossible, imperfect, etc.
de-	opposite/reverse	dethrone (remove from the throne), deregister, deactivate, defrost, etc.
ex-	Former	ex-convict (former convict), ex-president, ex-

		wife, etc.
poly-	Many	polygamous, polysyllabic, polytechnic etc.
mono-	One	monologue, monotone, monotony, monosyllabic, monoteknic etc.

8.2.1.2 Suffixes

This is an affix added after the root of a word to form another word. For example, the suffix *-less* can be added to the word *noise* to get *noiseless*. Some suffixes can change the word category or meaning of words they are attached to. For example, the word *noise* is a noun. When *-less* is added, the new word derived *noiseless* changes to an adjective. We can then say that *-less* is an adjective-forming suffix or affix. Here are more examples of suffixes.

(a) Noun-Forming Suffixes

We can form nouns from words which belong to other parts of speech by adding the following suffixes.

(i) Suffixes added to verbs to form nouns, e.g. buy (verb) buyer (noun)

- er (buyer, player, etc.)
- ee (employee, referee, etc.)
- age (wreckage, breakage, etc.)
- ant (disinfectant, accountant, etc.)

- ation (derivation, exploitation, etc.)
- al (denial, betrayal, etc.)
- ment (imprisonment, involvement, etc.)
- ance (conveyance, deliverance, etc.).

(ii) Suffixes added to adjectives to form nouns, e.g. wicked (adjective) wickedness (noun)

- ness (wickedness, sadness, kindness, etc.)
- ity (sincerity, formality, humility, etc.)

(iii) Suffixes added to nouns and the new word is still a noun, e.g. child (noun) childhood (noun)

- hood (childhood, priesthood, parenthood, etc.)
- ship (citizenship, relationship, etc.)

-let (piglet, etc.)

-ling (duckling, etc.)

(b) Verb-Forming Suffixes

We can form verbs from words that belong to other parts of speech by adding the following suffixes:

(i) Suffixes added to nouns to form verbs, e.g. class (noun) classify (verb)

- ify (classify, glorify, dignify, etc.)
- ize (crystallize, idolize, etc.)
- en (strengthen, hasten, etc.)

(ii) Suffixes added to adjectives to form verbs, e.g. immortal (adjective) immortalize (verb)

- ize (immortalize, immunize, stabilize, formalize, normalize, etc.)

-en (brighten, darken, lighten, weaken, straighten, etc.)

(c) Adjective-Forming Suffixes

We can form adjectives from words that belong to other parts of speech by adding the following suffixes:

(i) Suffixes added to nouns to form adjectives, e.g. beauty (noun) beautiful (adjective)

-ful (e.g. beautiful, wonderful, careful, stressful, etc.)

-al (natural, conditional, environmental, etc.)

-less (childless, careless, mindless, wingless, etc.)

-ic (climatic, magnetic, aquatic, nomadic, etc.)

-ous (courageous, famous, etc.)

-ish (sheepish, outlandish, impish, dwarfish)

(ii) Suffixes added to verbs to form adjectives, e.g. solicit (verb) solicitous (adjective)

-ous (solicitous, desirous, continuous, etc.)

-able (adaptable, removable, disposable, etc.)

-ible (convertible, reversible, etc.)

(d) Adverb-Forming Suffixes

We can form adverbs from words that belong to other parts of speech by adding the following suffixes:

(i) Suffixes added to adjectives to form adverbs, e.g. quick (adjective) quickly (adverb)

-ly (quickly, elegantly, narrowly, kindly, etc.)

(ii) Suffixes added to nouns to form adverbs, e.g. clock (noun) clockwise (adverb)

-wise (clockwise, lengthwise, etc.)

We have seen that a word can be made up of one or more morphemes. Morphemes are the least linguistic units that make sense, e.g. in "reapply", there are two morphemes here: "re-" and "apply". This is made up of the root *apply* (free morpheme) and the affix *re-* (bound morpheme). An affix may be added to a word which already has an affix. For example, *un-* can be added to *removable* to get *unremovable*. In this case, *removable* is not a root. It is called a stem. The root is *remove*. This is what is left after removing *-able* and *un-* which are bound morphemes. Below are more illustrations of *root*, *prefix*, *suffix* and *stem*.

Root	prefix	suffix	stem
God	<u>un</u> godly	god <u>less</u>	--
counter	<u>en</u> counter	count <u>eract</u>	--
late	<u>trans</u> late	late <u>ly</u>	--
self	<u>un</u> selfish	selfish <u>ness</u>	selfish

8.2.2 Borrowing

A lot of English words were borrowed from other languages such as Latin, French, Greek, German, etc.

Most of the scientific and technical terms come from

-ly (quickly, elegantly, narrowly, kindly, etc.)

(ii) Suffixes added to nouns to form adverbs, e.g. clock (noun) clockwise (adverb)

-wise (clockwise, lengthwise, etc.)

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late	<u>trans</u> late	late <u>ly</u>	--
self	<u>un</u> selfish	selfish <u>ness</u>	selfish

8.2.2 Borrowing

A lot of English words were borrowed from other languages such as Latin, French, Greek, German, etc. Most of the scientific and technical terms come from

Greek and Latin, e.g. *physics, medicine, hypothesis*, etc. More examples of borrowed words include *debauch, en masse, garrage* (French), *piano*, (Italian), *video, expel* (Latin), *alcohol* (Arabic), *harmattan* (Twi Akan, West Africa), etc. The ability to accommodate these foreign words has been responsible for the growing influence and dynamism of the English language because more and more words are assimilated into English. These borrowed words are called loan-words. However, most of these borrowed words have been Anglicized (that is, made to seem English) that they are no longer regarded as loan-words.

8.2.3. Blending

This is a process of combining the elements of two different words to form a new word. Here are examples of words formed through blending:

- (i) *brunch* is from *breakfast* and *lunch*
- (ii) *motel* from *motor* and *hotel*
- (iii) *smog* from *smoke* and *fog*
- (iv) *urinalysis* from *urine* and *analysis*
- (v) *telecast* from *television* and *broadcast*

8.2.4 Clipping

This is the reduction of a multi-syllabic word. The initial or final part of the word is deleted. Here are

examples:

- (i) *madam* reduced to *ma*
- (ii) *advertisement* to *ad*
- (iii) *television* to *TV*
- (iv) *refrigerator* to *fridge*

8.2.5 Acronym

An acronym is a word formed from the initial letters of a set of words. Examples are:

UNO - United Nations Organization

WHO - World health Organization

JAMB - Joint Admission and Matriculation Board

NEPA - National Electrical Power Authority

PAYE - pay as you earn

RADAR - radio detecting and ranging

LASER - light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation

Note: When an acronym becomes much commonly used, it can be written like a common noun without capital letters, e.g. *laser* and *radar*.

8.2.6 Conversion

This involves assigning the base of a word to a different word class without changing its form (zero affixation). For example, the word *drive* used as a noun to mean *pushful/focused* is derived from the verb *drive* as in *drive a car*. Also the word *strike* used as a noun to mean

work to rule/withdraw services is derived from the verb *strike* meaning *to deliver a blow/hit/attack*.

8.2.7 Compounding

This is when a word is formed by adding two or more free morphemes (words). An example is the formation of the word *blackboard* by combining the words *black* and *board*. More examples of compounding are *airstrip*, *airbus*, *civil servant*, *wristwatch*, *overflow*, *watchman*, *cybercafé*, *cybercrime*, etc

8.2.8 Reduplication

This is the use of two or more elements with identical or slightly identical forms to express an idea. Examples are *higgledy-piggledy* (without order/in disarray/mixed together) and *helter-skelter* (in great hurry/confusion).

8.2.9 Neologism

This is the process of coining new words. Development and inventions help in the formation of new words. A lot of words have come into English vocabulary from such technological and scientific innovations as the computer and Internet. These new words include *email*, *cybercafé*, *cybercrime*, *text* (as a verb meaning "sending a text by mobile phone, etc."), *log in/on*, *log out/off*, etc. There are other such innovations as *GM* (genetically modified) as in *GM food*. We have *transgender* which is

a situation where someone changes his sex from a man to a woman or from a woman to a man. Even the words *laser* and *radar* which are commonly used in technology and navigation are newly coined words from acronyms.

8.3 Word Relations

In the day-to-day speech and in formal writing, words have been known to have relations with each other, either in the process of forming new words or to make full meaning in a sentence. The following are instances of word relations.

8.3.1 Homonyms

Homonyms are words with the same spelling and the same sound but have different meaning and origin. Varying usage gives them different meanings. For instance, the word "plant" can be used to mean a living organism as distinguished from a tree and a shrub; it can also mean a factory or a machine for generating electricity. Other words which have multiple unrelated meanings are given below and students should find the various meanings of each word and how each is used in different contexts.

arch	die	march
arm	fair	match
ball	fell	mean
bear	grave	pitch
blow	gum	plot
		race

box	hawk	rent
case	jet	scale
cow	leave	tense
cricket	light	

8.3.2 Homophones

Homophones are words that have different spellings and meanings but the same sound. Applying them in sentences bring out their meanings. Also their difference is seen when written.

Examples: *court* and *caught*

hale and *hail*

night and *knight*

sow, *sew*, and *so*

right, *rite* and *-wright* as in *playwright*

course, and *coarse*

lore and *law*

raw and *roar*

you and *ewe*

Note that the following words are not homophones because they do not have the same pronunciation: *heat* and *hit*, *leave* and *live*, *tank* and *thank*, and many other such sets of words. A good knowledge of English sounds will prevent people mispronouncing these words.

8.3.3 Polysemey

Polysemey is a situation where a word has more than one related meanings. Here the words have a common major source. The other meanings are by metaphorical extension. For example, we talk of *the mouth of a cave*, *the mouth of a river*, etc. These meanings of *mouth* are derived from the human anatomy *mouth* which is an opening/entrance into the body. By extension these meanings of *mouth* are like openings/entrances into the cave and river respectively. In the case of homonymy there is no such relationship. A generator is not related in meaning to a crop but they are both referred to as *plant* in homonymy. Other examples of polysemey:

Leg of a table versus human leg

Eye of a needle versus human eye

Foot of a mountain versus human foot

We can say that two words are polysemes when they are in such relationship we have in polysemey.

8.3.4 Hyponyms

In language, a word is hyponymous when it can share characteristics with other words and so project a certain image. Their relationship could be founded on the fact that they share certain generic properties, e.g. *lizards*; *crocodiles*. The property they share is that they are *reptiles* and are animals of the class *reptilla*. They are also vertebrates with scales. Therefore, *lizards* and

crocodiles are co-hyponyms and come under the superordinate term *reptiles*. In the same way *hibiscus* and *daffodils* are flowers. Hyponyms tend to remind us that words have origins and associations and the order in which they appear should interest us.

8.3.4 Homographs

These are words which are spelt alike but they have different origin, meaning, grammar and pronunciation. For instance, the word *wind* can be pronounced /waɪnd/ (verb) or /wɪnd/ (noun). Thus, they are two different words that share the same spelling but different pronunciations. They are therefore homographs. Other examples are *lead* (n) and *lead* (v); *record* (n) and *record* (v).

8.3.5 Synonyms

These are words with similar meaning. Ability of a writer or speaker to know other words that can serve his purpose is the hallmark of a good writer or speaker. Constant usage of a particular word or words in the same page or passage gives the impression of limitation. It is for this reason that wide reading is recommended. However, the writer should know the exact context in which a particular word is used. Here are more examples of synonyms:

expensive , dear, exorbitant, costly

profitable, lucrative, gainful

buy, purchase

enduring, durable, lasting

big, huge, immense, bulky

fat, big, obese, plump, chubby, portly, flabby

However, it can be argued that no two words are exactly the same. What can be admitted here is that some words have words with close meanings. For a word to be synonymous with another word, it must agree in all respects, including grammatical properties. Similarly, if such a word is in plural, to be synonymous with another word, that other word must also be in plural. If it is a verb, it must also be a verb and must agree in number and tense to be completely synonymous.

8.3.6 Antonyms

In a sense, antonyms are the opposite of synonyms. The way words are used, it is almost unavoidable to know they have opposite meanings. Examples of antonyms are:

good - bad

give - take

donor - recipient

sympathy - apathy

ascent - descent

proceed - recede
achievement - failure
dated - new

Scholars like Ndimele (1997:62) have identified a broader meaning for antonyms. They call it semantic opposition. Antonyms is an umbrella word to cover all levels of semantic opposition. We might not take this argument beyond this level because of the scope of this paper. It suffices here that words with opposite meanings are called antonyms.

8.4 Connotation and Denotation

In an attempt to establish the meaning of a word, we can approach it from two levels - denotation and connotation. We use denotation to refer to the dictionary, the hard-core level of it or the literal meaning of a word. At the level of science, when words are used, they usually refer to the denotative meaning of it. When we use the word 'have', it is usually made to signify possession. Using it to mean other things is possible but it is no longer denotative.

However, when we use the implied meaning of the word "have", it is now connotative, which is to use the word at other levels or degrees. For example, the same word can mean affluence or riches if we say:

He is one of the haves.

When a word is used in a different context, its meaning can acquire a new status or meaning. Connotative usage of words is usually affected by writers who want to convey special meanings or play on their readers' emotion to achieve certain effects. Thus, a writer can state:

Obi's last appearance at the panel nailed him.

Here, "nail" does not mean the iron, which a carpenter uses to hold pieces of wood together. It is used to mean 'convict'. In other words, the word is used connotatively.

8.5 The Dictionary and Vocabulary Development

The dictionary from all angles is arguably the best companion of the student, which must be treasured and preserved. The dictionary is so invaluable that a serious student should not go to a private study without it. This stated, it need be observed that most Nigerian students do not know the immense use the dictionary can be put. True, many know it is a book to discover the meaning and usage of words. But the dictionary means much more than that. (Note: In Chapter Three of this book, the types of dictionaries and the nature of information a dictionary provides have been treated in details.)

8.6 Figures of Speech

Every discipline has its own language and this much

can be said of literature. To understand literature, one needs to have a good grasp of this language and the devices which writers and critics alike have been using to communicate their message to the reader. The writer uses language to communicate his thought.

To communicate his thought (the message to the reader) the literary artist makes use of certain devices (modes) which include alliteration, metaphor, simile, metonymy, hyperbole, euphemism, bathos, climax, synecdoche, irony, sarcasm, anti-climax, personification, oxymoron, imagery, satire, symbolism, paradox, epigram, diction, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia and rhythm. This is the language of the art, the language of literature. The artist is accountable to society in his language as the society sees its ills from his art. As he beams light on the ills of his society and age, so will society examine his language. For he must first show marks of competence before the society can enter his clinic for examination. The society cannot be treated by a virulent, malignant cerebral moll. As the blood is screened before transfusion to ensure it is free from HIV/ AIDS virus, so will the language of literature be preened before endorsement

A writer uses language at two levels: first at the literal or denotative level (also called literal meaning) and secondly at the figurative or connotative level where words are put into use as distinct from their standard

meaning. When a writer uses language at figurative level, his objective is to achieve some special meaning or effect. M.H. Abrams believes that such figures are the "ornaments" of language, and integral to the functioning of language (1981:63). Since art vibrates at these two levels, it is important to evaluate the writer's use of language, to establish his true intent.

But taken from another level, art is susceptible to varying interpretations. The critic in evaluating a work of art could take it to other levels, thereby giving fuller interpretations to a writer's work. In serving this purpose, therefore, the critic has entered as a referee, the pivot where important art may revolve. Thus, the artist while writing about his society could achieve universality. As Oladele Taiwo rightly observes, "to be truly universal, you have to be truly local".

Figures of speech are those sayings that are not applied in the usual dictionary meaning way but are used to achieve a particular effect.

Alliteration

This is the repetition of some consonants or letters in lines of a poem to make it achieve musical effect. The consonants that are repeated are so close that their application could easily be noticeable. For example Shakespeare describes life as

It is a tale told by an idiot,

Full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.

The "t" in the first line
"fs" in line two constitute the alliteration.

Metaphor

It is sometimes called condensed simile. This is where one thing is likened to another. For example, where one thing is applied to another; here, they are not compared.

- a. Emeka is a lion in the field
- b. John is a horse.

Simile

This is where two distinctly different things are compared, where one thing is compared with another using such words like "like" and "as". Examples are
"Each flower is scented like an incense bowl"
"Twists like a crooked pin"

Metonymy

This is a situation where an entire group of people or things are represented in an image by something associated with the group. For example:

- a. The pen is the sword
- b. The crown is happy

In the first example above, *pen* represents writers who use the pen to write about society and criticize the wrong things people do, especially the leaders. They are thus seen to be stronger than soldiers who use the sword. Also, the king is associated with the crown because he wears a crown.

Synecdoche

This is a device by the writer where he uses a part for the whole or the whole for a part. Examples are:

- a. Tell him all hands must be on deck.
- b. He has about ten mouths to feed in his house

In the first example *hand* is used to represent the persons whose hands are referred to. This simply means that everybody must participate. In the second example, instead of saying ten persons to feed, the word *mouth* is used. The expression *mouths* is used to represent the persons who own them.

Irony

It is a literary device made popular by the Greeks where a character could say something that is not actually the case. There is dissimilarity between what is said and the actual position of things.

There are different types of Irony. They include:

(a) **Verbal Irony** - what the speaker says will be different from what he means like when Mark Anthony asserts, "Brutus is an honourable man." After his complicity in the assassination of Caesar, Brutus, even if he was considered honourable in the past, could no longer claim that title. Mark Anthony is saying the opposite of what he means; he is mocking Brutus by using such an expression to describe him when he has just taken part in killing Caesar.

(b) **Dramatic Irony** - Here in a story, the audience and the author could be better informed than the characters. So when the characters say something that the audience knows is not true, the audience could only laugh. This is called dramatic irony. An example is the story of king David in the Bible when he was confronted by Nathan after killing Uriah and taking his widow. The story told by Samuel about a rich man and a poor man is a dramatic irony.

- a. **Socratic Irony**-This is lifted from the dialogues of Socrates where he feigns ignorance while showing zeal to be educated. The style is unique to Socrates.
- b. **Sarcasm**- This is another form of irony that is characterized by superfluous praises. For example "You are the most beautiful woman in the world. Believe me, you are"

Bathos or Anti-Climax

This is the exploitation of a literary device to elicit pity by cataloguing a character's woes in the order of descent. For example:

- a. John was killed, his wife was arrested, and they stopped her salary.
- b. Saddam Hussein was deposed, his children killed, now he faces trial.

Hyperbole

This is a device where a statement is given excessive praise to draw humour. For example:

- a. The robbers attacked with a million tanks.
- b. The policemen got gifts from all the people who attended the rally.

Euphemism

Here an attempt is made to reduce the impact or severity of an action in a speech. Examples are:

- a. The old man kicked the bucket- ~~this~~ means that he died.
- b. The Judge said that Okeke was given a brown envelope-~~this~~ means that he was bribed.

Climax

This is a literary device where the writer or speaker makes a statement in the order of ascent. The famous

statement of Caesar is a climax

- a. Veni, vidi, vici - I came, I saw, I conquered.
- b. The battle was short, sure, sharp and decisive.

Paradox

Underneath a statement, which appears contradictory, there is some meaning. This kind of literary device makes the speaker sound very intelligent. Examples are:

- a. More haste less speed if we have to succeed
- b. God did not create the city, men did.

Personification

In this case, an inanimate object is addressed as if it were a human being. For example:

- a. O Justice, thou art fled to British beasts And
men have lost their reason.
- b. Your hand is heavy, Night upon my brow.

Oxymoron

Sometimes, critics call it condensed paradox. This is a device where contradictory expressions or terms are placed side by side. It is somewhat antithetical and made to heighten effect. For example:

- a. His faithfulness kept up faithless
- b. The wise fool was here and there

Epigram

This is a clever irony of saying something in a witty, thrifty manner. The statement might sound contradictory but the condensed meaning soon comes to the fore. For example:

- a. Mirror what you can see
- b. Fall on the enemy but spare his life.

Satire

It is a kind of writing where the writer exposes the inherent vices prevalent in a society in a light-hearted way. Writers to escape possible prosecution often use this kind of ridicule or mockery. For example:

- a. The Jero plays by Wole Soyinka
- b. Animal farm by George Orwell.

Symbolism

It is the use of images to stand for certain meanings. These images could be objects but made to represent something.

Sometimes there are symbols that have gained universal acceptance. For instance the cross is seen as a sign of Christian values or Christ's crucifixion. White is generally regarded as representing purity while green represents agriculture. However, a writer can use a word to represent a meaning in the manner he wants.

Onomatopoeia

Where the sound of a word indicates its meaning is called onomatopoeia. Examples include: screech, bang, harsh, hiss, etc.

Pun

This is the device of playing upon words that may be similar in sound but different in meaning. Shakespeare used it a lot in his writings. The title of the play *Love's Labour Lost* is itself a pun.

Enjambment

It is mostly used in poetry where the continuation of the sense without pause is done beyond the line. In other words, the meaning of the line is fully developed in the next line. This literary encroachment of one line into another gives a poem unity if it is well arranged, and the reader must see it as a literary device. For example: the poem, "The Poor" by Ossie Enekwe is a good example:

The antennae of the 'poor'
like reeds
quake before
a palace of gold.

Diction

Through diction, we enter the writer's own choice of words. In trying to express his thought, the writer

implants his personality; that is the level of his thought, the depth of his education, his vision, his manners, objectivity and prejudices, his wisdom and his style. Whatever he writes, he has chosen and, it reflects any or all of the above. Obi Maduakor (1991:27) divides the writer's diction into four external features; Formal (used by learned men in serious writing), Colloquial (words of every day speech), Technical (words from the professions) and Scientific (words drawn from the sciences). In the writings of Wole Soyinka, his choice of words is usually drawn from the learned vocabulary. Robust language is synonymous with him.

8.7 Idioms

The origin of idioms can be traced to the Greek word, which means 'make one's own'. It is therefore an expression or a saying that can be appropriated to one's own advantage. The dynamism of English as a Language, which admits the incorporation of these idioms, some of which have foreign origins into the everyday speech and writing is in itself a good thing. It must be admitted that idioms thrive in any Language and they are used to refresh or invigorate writings or speeches. Like in some words in any Language, idioms that have been over used can become unpopular and so can be discarded.

IDIOM	MEANING	APPLICATION
To spark off the cuff	Without adequate preparation	The building could not be completed because Mr. Ifeka sparked off the cuff
To have the ball in one's court	To be in a position holding the opportunity	When his father paid his fees, he made it clear that the ball was now in his court
To find one's feet	To feel at home	If you are humble and work hard, you will soon find your feet.
To shed crocodile tears	To be insincere	The suspect was merely shedding crocodile tears when he saw the police.
The cast pearls before the swine	To waste favour on the undeserving	When you give a car to such an old woman, it is like casting the pearl before the swine.

To jump the
gun

To act before
something is
due

The Chairman
felt that the
comment was
like jumping the
gun

Across the
board

Without
exception

The senate
decided that the
punishment of
the erring
students must be
across the board.

Blaze a trail

To make a
pioneering
effort

The party men
are in support of
Mrs. Okeke
because they
believe she
is a trailblazer.

To play to the
gallery

To act in a way
to gain
popularity

The people were
not convinced
because they
believed that the
speaker was
playing to the
gallery.

All and Sundry

Everyone,
collectively

The priest's appeal
to the
congregation was
that the
contribution
should be by all
and Sundry.

Under lock and
key

Safe, well
protected.

The Police made it
clear that the
valuables were
under lock and key.

To bite more
than one can
chew

Take a task
one cannot
carry through

At the end of the
day, the man
discovered that by
marrying two
wives he had bitten
more than he could
chew.

OTHER IDIOMS

To twist the lion's tail - To insult someone of affluence or influence.

To come to grief - To end up in ruin

To be in the red - To be broke or in financial distress with a bank.

To go to town - To act extravagantly/popularize.

To pass the buck - To avoid responsibility or pass it to another person.

A storm in a teacup - Make unnecessary fuss

A red-letter day - A significant day.

The sword of Damocles - Imminent or constant danger.

To burn the midnight oil - To study late into the night

To cut one's coat according to one's cloth - To live within one's means

A wolf in a sheep's clothing - One that hides wicked intentions under the guise of gentleness.

To develop cold feet - To withdraw interest in what one is doing.

To let sleeping dog lie - To let to rest a matter that may cause trouble

To read the riot act - To threaten punishment.

A wild goose chase - A fruitless venture.

To fight tooth and nail - To endeavour spiritedly.

To bear the palm - To be outstanding, to be

distinguished in something.

To kill in cold blood - To kill deliberately without provocation.

To sit on the fence - To be uncommitted in an issue.

To give a piece of one's mind - To voice one's opinion/ scold someone.

To set the Thames on fire - To do something outstanding.

To stand on ceremony - To insist on strict compliance.

To see eye to eye - To agree / to submit on an opinion.

To turn a deaf ear to - To ignore.

To be a black sheep - To be a traitor.

To put one on his mettle - To rouse one to do his best.

A bone of contention - A subject of dispute.

To set one's teeth on edge - To irritate.

To be at cross-purposes - To operate against each other.

On the spur of the moment - Without hesitation, to do something impromptu.

To rule with a heavy hand - To be tyrannical.

To have it at one's finger's end - To know something thoroughly.

In the nick of time - At the right time.

To live from hand to mouth - To barely have enough for subsistence

To stir up the hornet's nest - To invite someone's anger through an act.

To bury the hatchet - To put an end to a dispute.

To nip in the bud - To stop an event before it happens.

In the teeth of - In defiance of.

To be hand and glove - To be intimate with someone.

At dagger's drawn - To be in deep hostility with someone.

To keep the wolf from the door - To ward off danger/to ward off hunger.

To hunt with the hound and run with the hare - Double-dealing.

A pyrrhic victory - A victory at a great cost.

Heads I win, tails you lose - To always insist on getting an advantage.

Achilles heel - One's weak point. A Herculean task - A task difficult to accomplish.

To have too many irons on fire - To be engaged in too many tasks.

A Gordian knot - An intricate problem.

To take French leave - To be absent or leave without permission.

To let the grass grow on one's feet - To procrastinate.

At one's wit's end - To be at complete loss.

Splitting hair - To dispute over petty issue.

A flash in the pan - A sudden single effort.

To kill the goose that lays the golden egg - To lose valuable source of income.

To cross the Rubicon - To take a decisive step from which there is no retreat.

To pull the wool over one's eyes - To hoodwink or mislead.

To nail the lie on the counter - To expose publicly.

A Machiavellian policy - A policy achieved by fair or foul means.

A white elephant - An expensive or useless possession.

To sail with every wind - To make every change of circumstance to one's advantages.

A Dutch courage - Courage induced by alcohol.

Draconian laws - Oppressive laws.

To sow the wind and reap the whirlwind - To indulge in wickedness only to suffer the consequences.

To fish in troubled waters - To court trouble or be meddlesome.

A fly on the wheel - A person who over-estimates his self-importance.

To be a fair weather friend - To be a friend when the going is good.

To have the gift of the gab - To be eloquent.

To strain at the leash - To show deep desire to do something.

Hook, line and sinker - Completely.

Lock, stock and barrel - Everything.

To take up the gauntlet - To accept a challenge.

To cut corners - Not to do something well in order to save time.

To be on tenterhooks - To be anxious.

To apply Fabian tactics - delay tactics.

To be like the Joneses - To desire to live like an affluent person.

To be born with a silver spoon - To be born into wealth.

To take the bull by the horns - To exhibit courage or tackle a challenge.

Work to rule - To slow down work in protest.

To strike while the iron is hot - To act decisively.

To clean the Augean stable - To bring an improvement in an establishment by correcting abuses.

To take it at one's stride - To do something at one's pace/Act without any great effort.

The die is cast - To take an irrevocable step.

To ride on tiger's back - To trust a dangerous person.

To look at something with jaundiced eyes - To be biased.

To be at logger heads - To quarrel with someone / To be in dispute.

To spill the beans - To reveal a secret.

To be swept off one's feet - To overwhelm with emotion.

To bell the cat - To undertake a dangerous assignment.

Class Activity: Do the exercises in Chapter Eight of the workbook.

