



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1984 Volume III: Hispanic Minorities in the United States

---

## **The Bilingual Students: Understanding Language Imagery**

Curriculum Unit 84.03.10  
by Ruth M. Wilson

Students who have been mainstreamed from bilingual classes are often expected to do the same work as other students. Unfortunately these students have many problems trying to understand the ordinary vernacular used in everyday situations. Teachers must recognize that a child's personal world largely affects his performance in the daily school situation.

As teachers, we take for granted such things as comprehension, following directions, and appropriate use of idioms. While we are comfortable in using these idioms, we sometimes forget that these idioms are foreign and consequently formidable to the bilingual student. Hence barriers are erected that can be one of the causes why bilingual students test low on citywide testing programs. Problems are compounded because anxiety, frustration, and low self-esteem become additional barriers to achievement. Bilingual students fall further and further behind in their class work until finally, in some cases, behavior problems arise.

Because many students have trouble understanding idioms, this unit is designed to make bilingual students feel more comfortable and knowledgeable in reading and language usage. Hopefully this unit will enable students to cope better with reading difficulties, but, also with behavioral problems as well. Positive changes in behavior and attitude can be a by product of this endeavor and an asset to learning. As the student becomes more proficient and more confident, positive feelings will, hopefully, supplant the negative feelings prompted by failure in reading.

This unit is constructed for sixth and seventh grade students as part of a remedial reading course. The unit can be varied somewhat according to grade and reading level, and thereby provide awareness to the student of understanding an alternative way of speaking. The four main objectives are: 1) define 50 idioms, 2) help students understand these idioms in reading and conversation, 3) demonstrate when the use of a particular idiom is appropriate, and 4) provide activities for students to use the idioms.

The use of the computer will also be incorporated in this unit. The computer programs in general imagery will enable the students to reinforce and recall previous lessons taught. Students must read, understand, and choose the proper sequence they are to follow. After students interact with the program and its specific directions, the computer will give them immediate feedback. This activity will be the beginning and culminating event of this unit. All students will be able to see the exact amount of growth by comparing their Pre and Post test scores with a computerized printout.

By teaching the reading and language skills along with the computer, the students can actively participate in

using idioms in various situations. The computer's function will be: 1) to expose and reinforce the idiom, 2) to diagnose the comprehension of the idiom, 3) to Pretest and Posttest for final comprehension.

The lessons on the computer's program will help the students compile a list of idioms for their own use. The idioms can be used by students to stimulate and create situations like TV and radio commercials, ads, or everyday speech.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

---

Reading is closely related to language experience. Recent research points to the fact that the language experience of many bilingual children, some from lower socio-economic groups, and/or isolated geographical areas, have much less success in language skills. If the language of teachers differs to any degree from the native speech of the learners, difficulty will result. (Urban Language Series, 1969).

A student who does not use English as the dominant language in social settings usually has difficulty understanding the reading material in school. When reading the rhythm is different which is one indication that the student is thinking in his native language. Students with language problems have more steps to go through when reading than unilingual students. Bilingual students when reading, see the word, internalize and think the word (usually in the native tongue), then speak its English counterpart. In comparison to the unilingual student, the bilingual student takes one or more steps before words are internalized and then spoken.

Twentyfive percent of the population, in the greater American society, belong to the lower socio-economic class. This brings about serious handicaps for one in four in the public school system. These handicaps involve: 1) lack of motivation to succeed in school, 2) failure to set goals at a high level of aspiration, 3) lack of desire to stay in school longer with children from higher social classes, and 4) failure to select college preparatory courses. The subtle discrimination in schools has a punishing effect and decreases the students selfrespect, which causes them to do poorly and drop out.

Miles Zintz confirms this by stating: "Many tests indicate that I.Q. scores diminished as these children from meager language backgrounds progress through the school system. While innate capacity for learning did not decrease, their verbal abilities to respond in comparison with other children in their group, did decrease." (Corrective Reading, 1972).

In 1920, with the advent of intelligence tests, there were many studies claiming that bilingual children lacked intelligence when compared with unilingual middleclass children. Tests have shown that as these students progressed through the grades, they fell further behind their counterparts. Tests comparing performances of urban and rural children gave the advantage to the knowledge, experience, and sophistication of the typical urban English-speaking child. Unfortunately, those from urban areas who lacked adequate skills were most likely to fall into the lower socioeconomic classes, lacking the experiences that would make school learning meaningful. Lastly, cultural difference must be recognized as having a major effect on the life values of children and what is expected of them in school. The expectations the school makes on the students can be unrealistic. One of the mayor issues facing an educator today is the consistently low scores of innercity Black, Hispanic, and poor rural While children. These children are often called "linguistically different" or "linguistically diverse" . . . which means in some cases low achievers.

Research has shown that negative attitudes toward these linguistically different children can be detrimental. No doubt these negative attitudes affect classroom teaching. Bilingual students show one of the highest dropout rates of any other minority group or fall progressively behind other students as they move through the educational system. This represents a failure within the educational structure which many educators are trying to overcome.

Teachers should be cognizant of the fact that when a young child starts the educational process, the bicultural existence may be especially difficult. Some critics of the educational system of bilingual students maintain that educators have created a barrier between the child's culture and the child's school. It is no wonder that many children who must learn English as a second language develop negative attitudes and fail to achieve academically.

Arthur W. Combs author of *Myths in Education* points out that students need to be prepared for the world they must enter, they must learn how to adapt to changing conditions, and how to maintain openmindedness. A curriculum designed to help young people change must concentrate on the student and what is happening to him or her.

"The ultimate purpose of education," says Alvin Toffler, "is not to create elegantly complex, well ordered accurate images of the future, but help learners cope with reallife situations, opportunities, and perils. It is to strengthen the individual's practical ability to anticipate and adapt to change, whether through invention, informed acquiesce, or through intelligent resistance".

Schools emphasizing adaptable, intelligent behavior require personcentered curricula designed to help students behave in ever more intelligent ways. (Combs, 1979).

My personal experience in reading bears out what research has uncovered. When teaching vocabulary skills, I realized that words frequently meant nothing to the youngsters. True, they needed to have an enriched vocabulary but the material used was not very good. It bothered me that students were meeting very little success. I am aware that meeting success in reading and language can make for a pleasant school experience for any child . . . hence my decision to introduce idioms, their meanings and usefulness through this unit.

## **METHOD**

---

I have decided to attack this problem by exposing my students to Idiomatic Expressions. These idioms can be found in imagery in general. Through the use of the computer and the oral discussion approach to reading, there will be a lot of conversation and interaction in the classroom between student and student, and teacher and student. The computer will be used to reinforce lessons taught. Students will first take the Pretest on the computer and then work with lessons on the chalkboard and dittos.

The "wheel diagram" provided below will make unit objectives constantly visible and thereby less formidable.

*(figure available in print form)*

### **OBJECTIVE I.**

Students will understand recognize "language imagery" such as Similes, Metaphors, and Colloquialisms (slang) as part of familiar conversation.

## *1. STRATEGY FOR OBJECTIVE I.*

- a. Teacher presents posters on the chalkboard ledge to initiate a discussion with class.
- b. Teacher is to define and make class aware of terms for recognizing such idioms as Similes, Metaphors and Colloquialisms. Students will pair off in twos to take a Pretest on the computer.
- d. Students will copy definitions with examples from the board.

## *LESSON FOR OBJECTIVE I.*

*PREPARATION:* Have posters depicting Simile, Metaphor, and Colloquialism in view on chalkboard. Have computer and cassette lesson ready for Pretesting class.

*STUDENT MATERIALS:* notebook, pencil

*PROCEDURE:* Teacher will begin lesson with large group instruction. Pointing to posters on ledge of board, teacher discusses each poster making note of their similarities and their differences. Teacher will elicit from class what they think the messages imply. After discussion of why a specific phrase was used, class will copy language definitions from board to notebook.

*TEACHER DISCUSSION:* "How many of you students have ever heard a teacher use a term that you didn't understand? Well, today I am going to introduce you to some terms which have a special meaning and name. These sayings or phrases are called idioms." Teacher defines term and introduces posters emphasizing the "word imagery" that describes each picture. Next students working in pairs, will take a Pretest of "language imagery" on the computer. Those students waiting for turn on the computer will copy definitions from board into notebooks.

## *LESSON FOR OBJECTIVE I*

*Sample lesson from computer*

This program will test your knowledge of some useful vocabulary (Metaphor) word.

1. What does "arthritic car" mean?
  1. stays close to home
  2. very light
  3. uncaring person
  4. broken car
  5. too much work

Right!

2. What phrase means “shouts but doesn’t mean it?”

1. fountain of youth
2. clinging vine
3. raining cats and dogs
4. his bark is worse than his bite
5. sly as a fox

Right!

You have 2 right out of two questions.

3. What does “he’s an iceberg” mean?

1. rough hands
2. uncaring person
3. sneaky can’t be trusted
4. doesn’t think for oneself
5. very light

Right!

*Sample lesson from computer*

You have 3 right out of three questions.

4. What phrase means “a smart person?”

1. raining cats and dogs
2. walking encyclopedia
3. she’s a puppet
4. sly as a fox
5. clinging vine

Right!

You have 4 right out of four questions.

5. What does “mountain of work” mean?

1. very light
2. too much work
3. doesn't think for himself
4. become a big success
5. honest and above board

Right!

You have 5 right out of five questions.

That's 100%.

Very good!

*TEACHER FOLLOWUP* : As students are working in pairs, teacher should be available to give help when needed. Teacher may also be a participant or observer in small group work at the computer.

**OBJECTIVE II:** Teacher will write a list of Similes on the board using the key words . . . “like” or “as”.

#### *STRATEGY OF OBJECTIVE II*

- a. Students will write seven sentences using Similes.
- b. Students will work in pairs so that they can discuss work being done.
- c. Teacher will be available to observe and give assistance.

#### *LESSON FOR OBJECTIVE II*

Similes are words that describe by comparison using “like” or “as.” You are to read each Simile and decide its meaning then match the meanings below with the above phrases.

1. quick as a flash
2. stubborn as a mule
3. sly as a fox
4. hard as a rock
5. meek as a lamb
6. busy as a bee
7. eyes like stars
8. worked like a horse

9. cheeks like roses
10. fat as a hog

Now's the time to use your head and match the meanings. Good luck!

1. a very large person
2. pretty eyes
3. very fast
4. not to be trusted
5. very gentle
6. red cheeks
7. did a lot of heavy work
8. won't change your mind
9. fat and sloppy
10. always doing something

note: Don't forget to write your name and date on paper.

Thank you!

*PREPARATION* : Teacher will write a list of Similes with matching answers on the board. Students are to copy the assignment from board making sure that each phrase is spelled correctly.

*ASSIGNMENT*: After copying work from the board, students, in small groups, will work on assignment. Then students are to choose seven Similes from paper and write seven sentences using these Similes. Student is to decide in which manner to approach this assignment: seven per student or fourteen as group work.

*OBJECTIVE III AND IV*: Teacher will follow the same steps as outline in the previous lesson for discussion and procedures for Metaphor and Colloquialism. Teacher will incorporate diagram to show students how Idioms are alike yet different.

*STRATEGY FOR OBJECTIVE III AND IV*:

- a. using the same format as the previous lesson, the teacher will continue to reinforce the concept that idioms are part of the "language imagery" which is used in everyday speech.
- b. using diagram to reinforce concept of the interrelationship between the concepts and to show, also, their difference.

*LESSON FOR OBJECTIVE III.*

Here is an example of how Simile, Metaphor, and Colloquial are similar yet different.

(figure available in print form)

Metaphors are words that paint a picture. Just as a beautiful picture has lovely colors for you to enjoy, a Metaphor has the same effect only with words. A Metaphor compares one thing to another.

1. walking encyclopedia
2. head is a computer
3. arthritic car
4. mountain of work
5. bark is worse than his bite
6. clinging vine
7. sandpaper hands
8. fountain of youth
9. puppet
10. iceberg

Match meanings below to the Metaphors above. Good luck!

1. smart person
2. good in math
3. a lot of paper work
4. car needs to be fixed
5. stays close to home
6. shouts a lot but doesn't mean it
7. does not think for self
8. uncaring person
9. young looking and young acting
10. very rough hands

#### *LESSON FOR OBJECTIVE IV.*

Remember a Colloquialism is a group of words that we use in everyday conversation. People use these phrases in a special way. They are not to be taken literally.

1. show true colors
2. hit the jackpot
3. throw in the towel
4. drink like a fish
5. let your hair down
6. by hook or by crook



7. honest and above board
8. hard as a rock
9. chicken feed
10. sings like a bird

Match meanings to the Colloquialisms above.

1. nice singing voice
2. doesn't listen to anyone
3. very small amount
4. not caring how something is done
5. can be trusted
6. to give in
7. very satisfying
8. drinks lots of liquids
9. enjoying yourself
10. stubborn or something very hard . . . like a muscle

How many Colloquialisms did you find?

Did you find any Similes?

Did you find any Metaphors?

*PREPARATION:* Teacher will hand out worksheet to students and follow same procedure as in previous lessons II and III.

*STUDENT MATERIALS:* pencil, notebook, and hand-out.

*ASSIGNMENT:* Read and discuss handout with class. Then class is to work in small groups following procedures as stated previously in lesson II and III.

*OBJECTIVE V.*

Students will become more knowledgeable in idiom usage when speaking or writing.

### *STRATEGY FOR OBJECTIVE V.*

- a. Student will interpret short paragraphs using language imagery.
- b. Teacher will help students understand that reading, writing, and language are interdependent.
- c. Students will become more selective in choosing idioms when speaking.

### *LESSON FOR OBJECTIVE V:*

You are to paraphrase each short paragraph. You may work with your partner to do the paraphrasing. Remember: idioms paint a colorful picture in speech and are not to be taken literally.

1. Hey now, pal! What's happening? You look beat and seem to be on edge. I can't make heads nor tails of your story, so simmer down and cool off!
2. Yesterday I ran into my ace. He said that he had moved lock, stock, and barrel to the city. We jawed awhile, then I had to make it to my pad. As I left, I said, "Give me a ring sometime".
3. Jokes that are old hat are often boring. I can't make heads or tails of them, when I get over the edge I just take off!
4. When you have a run in with your ace, you feel bad. Sometimes you jump out of the frying pan into the fire by jawing too much!
5. My father works hard to bring home the bacon. Because of his job, his muscles are hard as rocks. He can get down with the best of them. Can you guess what my father's job is?

*PREPARATION:* Teacher will have work sheet containing five short paragraphs for students to paraphrase.

*STUDENT MATERIALS:* pencil, handout, notebook

*PROCEDURE:* "Today we are going to read five short paragraphs using "language imagery." You are to read each paragraph and decide with your partner the meaning of each paragraph. Remember you are to use Standard English".

*ASSIGNMENT:* Read and discuss handout with partner. One student is to act as recorder and write down paraphrasing of each paragraph to be turned in. Each group is to put both names on paper to identify your work.

### *OBJECTIVE VI.*

Students are to be aware that idioms are used daily in our speech, on radio, on TV, in magazines, and ads to get messages to the public.

### *STRATEGY FOR OBJECTIVE VI.*

- a. Teacher will show a prepared poster for class to interpret . . . what is this ad trying to sell?

- b. Students using material available from magazines, newspapers, ads will select and cut out appropriate pictures to mount, then print their particular Idiomatic Phrase.
- c. Students using their posters will prepare a short presentation to class explaining rationale for particular choice of words.

*PREPARATION:* Teacher will have various magazines, newspapers in classroom for students to use.

*STUDENT MATERIALS:* scissors, glue and construction paper

*PROCEDURE:* "Today we'll be working with magazines. Browse through a magazine of your choice and choose any colorful picture to cut out and post. Then think about an appropriate idiom to describe that picture".

*ASSIGNMENT:* Choose an attractive, colorful picture and write an idiom of your choice for that picture. Collect and display work on the board. Ask each student to read his idiom: then have the class try to identify the picture from the idiom read.

#### *OBJECTIVE VII.*

Students will have learned fifty idioms of teacher's choice for use and understanding. Students will interact with the computer for reinforcement of skills.

#### *STRATEGY FOR OBJECTIVE VII.*

- a. Students will interact with the computer to reinforce skills being taught.
- b. Students by interacting with learning tape on computer, will be able to get immediate feedback from program so student's progress can be noted.

*PREPARATION:* Teacher will have computer, tape, and printer ready for lesson.

*STUDENT MATERIALS:* notebook, pencil

*PROCEDURE:* "Now I'm going to see how well you have remembered the idioms that we have been working with." Teacher "boots in" program for student's use. Following the procedure of working in small groups, student will interact with the computer. Each student in group records the results of the lesson into notebook . . . comparing results of Pretest with results from Posttest. Teacher will check to see if students are following directions.

*ASSIGNMENT:* Each student is to record their results in a notebook under Posttest with date. While other students are waiting for their turn on the computer, they will be using books or magazines to locate idioms and write their interpretation of the idioms. Also teacher may pass out other work sheets which are located in the unit.

*POINT OF INFORMATION:* The computer tape of idioms taught in this unit can be located at The Yale New Haven Teachers Institute, 53 Wall Street. Teachers using unit tape may substitute idioms of their choice by changing the data statements to suit the occasion. This lesson is compatible with the Radio Shack TRS80 model three computer.

## LESSON FOR OBJECTIVE VI

Here are examples of lessons that class can prepare.

Student creates ad to sell an item: using “language imagery”

*(figure available in print form)*

What is this ad trying to sell?

What is it “literally saying”?

## WORKSHEETS FOR STUDENTS

### *Idioms*

Idioms are common words that give a completely new meaning to a word or phrase. Idiomatic Expressions are not to be taken literally.

1. run across
2. run down
3. run into
4. run rings around
5. run into
6. throw a party
7. throw light on it
8. see about
9. see eye to eye
10. see through
11. see to it
12. throw a fit
13. throw in the sponge
14. throw in the towel

Match the meanings below with the *idioms* above.

1. falling apart

2. have a fight

3. can do it better
4. to meet
5. very tired
6. to stop
7. suddenly understand
8. understand
9. investigate
10. do something about it
11. understand
12. give a party
13. to stop
14. to give up

note: some of the sayings and meanings are similar.

Expressions that are well known

1. That's the way the cookie crumbles.
2. It's in the bag.
3. It's a rat race.
4. He's over the hill.
5. Stop bugging me.
6. It's just chicken feed.
7. She's good for putting her foot in her mouth.
8. It's a dog's life.
9. He's got rocks in his head.
10. I'll put it in the circular file.
11. Get off my back.
12. We're all in the same boat.
13. He got the ax.
14. It's raining cats and dogs.
15. Don't play dirty pool.
16. You're up the creek without a paddle.
17. Cat got your tongue.
18. Can you dig it.
19. Straight from the horse's mouth.
20. Go fly a kite.

## *Idioms to learn Colloquialism*

1. What's eating you
2. To be on edge
3. To see the handwriting on the wall
4. To run across something
5. To jaw awhile
6. To give a ring sometime
7. To be old hat
8. Lock, stock, and barrel
9. To be over the hill
10. To take off
11. To have cold feet
12. To drop in one's tracks
13. To bring home the bacon
14. To pull your leg
15. To talk turkey

## *IDIOMS*

Slang expressions change quite frequently. For example: "here today and gone tomorrow." Here are more dated expressions to compare with the new ones of today.

1. Pad: Let's go over to my pad.
2. Hip: He's hip to our plan.
3. Get hitched: When are you getting hitched?
4. Tired dogs: Gee, my dogs are tired.
5. Gizmo: Can you fix this gizmo.
6. Razz: It's not polite to razz people.
7. Bread: When you work, you get bread.
8. Hot dog: She's a real hot dog when skating.
9. Turkey: Let's talk turkey.
10. Cool: Let's cool it right now!
11. Creamed: Our team creamed your team.
12. Far out: Man, that's far out!

Remember Slang Words don't last long so don't let it limit you in your reading and speech.

#### *COLLOQUIALISMS OF 1984*

These sayings were compiled by Veronica Douglas a student at Cross High School.

What's up: a for of greeting . . . "hello"

Homegirl: very close female friend

Homeboy: very close male friend

Dude: a nice looking young man

Freak: well dressed: nice looking girl

Kicks: sneakers, shoes

Crib: house

Ace: best friend

Flick: movie, photo

Bank roll: large amount of money

Starvin like Marvin: very hungry

No way Jose: won't do something

Hey now: happy greeting

Maxing out: casually not bothering anyone

Ice that: stop something

Right thing: Getting an education or a job

Crew: a group of friends together

Maxing and relaxing: casually not bothering anyone

Jam: dancing

Chilling: standing still and posing

Wimp: afraid to take a change

*These sayings were compiled by author of unit.*

*Colloquialisms* (slang expressions) change with time. Here is a comparison of then and now.

Chilling: scary, horrible

Dude: a stupid person

Ice: jewelry

Pad: someone's house

Right on: agreeing with someone

Threads: clothes

Bad: positive meaning . . . very good

Coins: money

Cooling it: relaxing

Bug off: telling someone to stop

Homegirl: person from the rural south

Homeboy: person from the rural south

Dough: large sum of money

Skinny Minnie: a very thin girl

Cool it: stop it immediately

Get down: to fight

Ears lowered: just got a hair cut

Yellow: scared, not confident

Walkers: shoes

Bad: really something special

Chicken: to be afraid

*(figure available in print form)*

*(figure available in print form)*

*(figure available in print form)*

*(figure available in print form)*

*(figure available in print form)*

## IDIOMATIC ALPHABET

A is for "ACT RIGHT"



B is for "BYENOW"

C is for "COOL IT"

D is for "DIG IT"

E is for "EAGLEEYES"

F is for "FAR OUT"

G is for "GO FOR IT"

H is for "HEY NOW"

I is for "ITSYBITSY"

J is for "JUNK FOOD"

K is for "KICK THE HABIT"

L is for "LEMON"

M is for "MUSCLE MOUTH"

N is for "NUTS AND BOLTS"

O is for "OUT OF THIS WORLD"

P is for "PATSY"

Q is for "QUICK AS A WINK"

R is for "RIGHT ON"

S is for "SWINGER"

T is for "TIPSY"

U is for "UP THE CREEK"

V is for "VINES THAT CLING"

W is for "WASHED OUT"

X is for "X RATED"

Y is for "YELLOW"

Z is for "ZAPPED"

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

1. Anderson, Paul S. *Language Skills in Elementary Education*, New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1972.
2. Berenbon, Howard. *Mostly Basic: Applications for Your TRS80* . Indianapolis, Indiana: Howard W. Sams & Co., Inc., 1988.
3. Comb, Arthur W. *Myths in Education* . Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1979.
4. Dixon, Robert J., *Essential Idioms in English* . Regents Publishing Co., Inc., 1971.
5. Fry, Edward B., et al., eds. *The Reading Teacher's Book Lists* . New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1984.
6. Mintz, Sidney W. *Caribbean Transformations* . Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
7. Norton, Donna F. *The Effective Teaching of Language Arts* , Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill Co., 19—.
8. Rugg, Tom, and Phil Feldman. *32 Basic Programs for TRS-80 (level II) Computer* . Oregon: Dilithium Press, 1980.
9. Savaiano, Eugene and Lynn Winget. *2001 Spanish and English Idioms* . New York: Barren's Educational Series Inc., 1976.
10. Shuy, Roger W. and Joan C. Baratz. *Teaching Black Children to Read: Urban Language Series* . N.W. Washing Center For Applied Linguistics, 1969.
11. Zintz, Miles V. *Corrective Reading* . Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Co., 1972.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>