

TEACHING ‘JACK’ PROVERBS TO UZBEK LEARNERS: MULTIFACETED CHALLENGES AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES

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Abstract This study examines teaching ‘Jack’ proverbs to Uzbek learners: multifaceted challenges and effective teaching strategies. Content analysis of *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* and selected course books revealed difficulties in polysemy, figurative meaning, pragmatic interpretation, stylistic features, and cross-linguistic interference. To address these, the study proposes various learner-centered strategies. A task-based learning sample illustrates practical classroom application, promoting contextualized, learner-centered instruction. The study focuses on Jack proverbs due to their frequency and relevance in course books, the tasks can be adapted to learners’ proficiency and interests. Further research may apply these instructional strategies to proverbs containing different anthroponyms to foster deeper figurative and cultural understanding.

Key words: anthroponyms; English Jack proverbs; figurative; **quizlet**; teaching strategies;

Аннотация: В данном исследовании рассматривается преподавание пословиц с компонентом Джека узбекским учащимся: многогранные проблемы и эффективные стратегии преподавания. Контент-анализ Оксфордского словаря пословиц и выбранных учебников выявил трудности, связанные с полисемией, образным значением, прагматической интерпретацией, стилистическими особенностями и межъязыковой интерференцией. Для решения этих трудностей в исследовании предлагаются различные стратегии, ориентированные на учащихся. Примеры заданий, основанных на практических задачах, иллюстрируют практическое применение в классе, способствуя контекстуальному обучению, ориентированному на учащихся. Исследование фокусируется на пословицах о Джеке из-за их частоты и актуальности в учебниках, задания могут быть адаптированы к уровню владения языком и интересам учащихся. В дальнейших исследованиях эти методические стратегии могут быть применены к пословицам, содержащим различные антропонимы, с целью углубления понимания переносного и культурного смысла.

Ключевые слова: Антропонимы; английские пословицы с компонентом *Jack*; образный; Quizlet; стратегии обучения.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada o‘zbek til o‘rganuvchilariga “Jack” tarkibli ingliz maqollarini o‘qitish ko‘p qirrali muammolar va samarali o‘qitish strategiyalari mavzusi tahlil qilinadi. Oksford maqollar lug‘ati hamda tanlangan darsliklar asosida o‘tkazilgan kontent tahlil natijalari polisemiya, ko‘chma ma’noga, pragmatik talqinga, uslubiy xususiyatlarga va tillararo interferensiyaga oid qiyinchiliklar ko‘rsatib o‘tildi. Ushbu muammolarni bartaraf etish maqsadida shaxsga yo‘naltirilgan turli metodlar taklif etiladi. Topshiriqga asoslangan ta’lim (Task-Based Learning) namunasi orqali mazkur yondashuvlarning amaliy mashg‘ulotlarda qo‘llanishi ko‘rsatilib, kontekstga asoslangan va shaxsga yo‘naltirilgan ta’limni rivojlantirishga xizmat qilishi yoritiladi. Maqola Jack tarkibli maqollarga ularning yuqori chastotasi va darsliklardagi dolzarbligi sababli qaratilgan bo‘lib, taklif etilgan topshiriqlar o‘quvchilarning til darajasi va qiziqishlariga moslashtirilishi hamda kelgusidagi tadqiqotlar ushbu strategiyalarni boshqa antroponimlar ishtirok etgan maqollarga tatbiq etish orqali obrazli va madaniy jihatdan boy til birliklarini o‘qitish imkoniyatlarini kengaytirishi mumkin.

Tayanch so‘zlar: Antroponimlar; ingliz tilidagi *Jack* tarkibli maqollar; ko‘chma ma’no; Quizlet; o‘qitish strategiyalari

Introduction

Proverbs are brief, figurative expressions that encapsulate cultural knowledge, moral guidance, or practical advice. Comprehending them goes beyond memorizing words; it requires learners to apply abstract thinking, draw on their language skills, utilize memory, and integrate cultural knowledge, all of which are essential for effective learning in the EFL context (Nippold et al., 1998; Brown & Wright-Harp, 2011; Boykhanov, 2023). In particular, Uzbek EFL learners often encounter multiple challenges when learning English proverbs. Lexical and semantic difficulties arise from polysemous words and less familiar vocabulary (Boykhanov, 2023). Stylistic features such as metaphor, personification, and antithesis may further obscure meaning (Boykhanov, 2026; Mäntylä, 2005). Culturally-specific references or gaps between English and Uzbek equivalents create pragmatic and comprehension difficulties (Boykhanov, 2023). Some proverbs with cautionary or negative connotations can also elicit psychological resistance, making them harder to learn (Boykhanov, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for carefully designed instructional activities that support comprehension, contextualization, and practical application in the EFL classroom. Building on these insights, the present study focuses specifically on English proverbs containing the anthroponym *Jack*, examining how they are represented in widely used EFL materials and exploring strategies to address the cognitive, cultural, and stylistic challenges learners encounter when comprehending such proverbs.

The term *anthroponym* is defined as a person’s name (Webster, n.d.). The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) notes that it is an English compound, possibly modeled on a French lexical item, first attested in a 1937 translation by John Orr and later in the academic journal *Studies in Philology* (1952). More extended definitions of anthroponym types related to phrases and pemiias are provided by Kovshova (2019). Kovshova (2019) outlines key onomastic terms containing the component –onym, including: (1) Anthroponyms — a subclass of proper names used to refer to specific individuals. In proverbs and idioms, anthroponyms denote characteristic qualities and traits of people and “group” a particular social type under a specific name; they include first names, surnames, patronymics, pseudonyms, and nicknames; (2) Mythonyms — proper names referring to anthropomorphic pagan gods, demons, mythological heroes, or objects endowed with sacred meaning; used in proverbs and idioms to signify characters or symbolic images; (3) Hagionyms — proper names referring to biblical or legendary characters from the Old and New Testaments; (4) Literary onyms — proper names of anthropomorphic characters from literature, cinema, television, or animation; (5) Historical onyms — proper names referring to real historical figures, with analogies often based on events associated with the figure in collective consciousness (Kovshova, 2019, pp. 7–9).

Drawing on Kunin’s (1996) phraseological framework, proverbs containing the anthroponym *Jack* exhibit a number of linguistic and cognitive features that directly affect learner comprehension. These proverbs are characterized by phraseological stability, as their structure remains largely invariant and is reproduced as a fixed unit across contexts. Many function as substantival phraseological units with coordinative structures, often referring to paired or multiple figures (e.g., *Jack and Jill/Gill*), which may be opaque to learners unfamiliar with such conventions. A number of *Jack* proverbs also carry evaluative or cautionary meanings, as illustrated by *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*, where moral judgment is conveyed implicitly. Moreover, the semantic range of these units is broad, encompassing human qualities, behaviors, and social roles, as in *a Jack of all trades*. Euphonic devices such as rhyme and alliteration enhance memorability and cultural salience, yet they may also increase processing demands for EFL learners who lack phonological or cultural familiarity with these patterns.

Having outlined the nature of proverbs, the role of anthroponyms, and the specific characteristics of *Jack* proverbs, it is necessary to examine how such units are understood and taught in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Previous research has addressed cognitive, stylistic, and cultural difficulties in proverb comprehension and has proposed various pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning. The following literature review synthesizes these findings, with particular attention to instructional strategies and classroom exercises, and identifies gaps that the present study seeks to address. This article aims to analyze English proverbs containing the anthroponym *Jack* in terms of their cultural load and pedagogical complexity, and to propose practical instructional strategies for teaching such proverbs effectively to Uzbek EFL learners.

Literature Review

Proverbs containing anthroponyms have been explored by Uzbek scholars, including Abdusamadov (2022), Nasrullayeva (2019), and Yuldashev (2017). Overall, these studies approach anthroponymic proverbs from linguocultural, cognitive, anthropocentric, and comparative linguistic perspectives.

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Madiyeva and Karaman (2020) report that anthroponyms are incorporated into Olympiad task questions and may also be employed in scientific projects and academic research. The authors further outline several pedagogical applications of anthroponyms at different stages of classroom instruction, including their use as brief speech warm-up activities to develop pronunciation and speaking skills (Gorbanevsky, 1987, p. 156; Sattarov, 1992, p. 240), in translation exercises, and for the enhancement of grammatical competence. Overall, anthroponyms are presented as effective linguistic and didactic tools. However, despite acknowledging that phraseological units containing anthroponyms can contribute to vocabulary development, the study does not specify the target learner population (e.g., school pupils or university students), proficiency level, or instructional context. More importantly, no distinction is made between different types of phraseological units, and anthroponym-based proverbs are not addressed explicitly.

Ruzieva and Sharipova (2022) note that the formulation and naming of **precedent anthroponyms**, the type of anthroponyms who are personal names with cultural, historical, or literary significance, serving as recognized symbols in texts, constitute an integral part of the Russian cognitive base and support the everyday activities of Tajik-speaking students, who are active participants in intercultural communication. The authors cite a system of exercises designed to help non-language-major students acquire precedent anthroponyms through tasks addressing multiple linguistic levels (phonetic, derivational, and grammatical), oriented toward Russian speech stimuli. Exercises are divided into written and oral formats, with some reinforcing previously learned material and others introducing new content to deepen understanding of **onomastic vocabulary**. Among the 20 proposed onomastic exercises, only one directly relates to **proverbs containing anthroponyms** (Exercise 16), asking students to explain their understanding of the following proverbs: *Любопытной Варваре на базаре нос оторвали; Один говорит про Фому, другой про Ерёму; Один у Мирона сын, да и тот Мироньч; Мели, Емеля, твоя неделя; На бедного Макара все шишки валяются; Затвердила ворона Якова одно про всякого; Скучно Афонюшке на чужой сторонушке; У Сидора обычай, у Карпа свой; Ваша-то Катерина да нашей Орине двоюродная Прасковья; and Говорила Афанасью, быть-де ненастью: знай, поскакал да колёса растерял*. These exercises illustrate the limited attention given to anthroponymic proverbs within the broader set of onomastic tasks, indicating a potential area for further pedagogical development.

Vasyukovich (2019) stated that the high frequency of proper names in school textbooks necessitates the development of an adequate system of **linguocultural representation of culturally marked Belarusian onyms**. This is clearly illustrated by the proverb «*Пятрок – апаў лісток, прыйшла Ілля – апала два*», in which anthroponyms function as **calendar and cultural markers** rather than as references to real individuals.

Urmancheeva (2022) cited that Aleksandrova et al their study manual “Rodnoy russkii yaziik” included a task in the Unit “Yaziik i Kul’tura”. They provided three tasks, namely “What people’s names and city names can tell us,” “Linguistic Notes” and “Dialogue Cultures,” related to anthroponyms. Importantly, there is a task that is explained the terms anthroponymy and onomastics, the etymology of some foreign calendar names, especially those frequently found in proverbs and sayings such as *При деньгах Панфил всему миру мил, а без денег* and *Панфил – никому не мил; Куда Макар телят не гонял*(p.24). Furthermore, Urmancheeva identifies seven further anthroponymic tasks, **among which the seventh directly relates to the focus of this study:**

В «Словаре собственных имен в русских загадках, пословицах, поговорках» М. Л. Ковшовой (2019 г.) приводятся устойчивые выражения разных жанров, в составе которых есть собственные имена: антропонимы, мифонимы, агионимы, литературные и исторические онимы. Проанализируйте представленные идиомы, найдите в них перечисленные типы имен собственных. По лингвокультурологическим, историко-этимологическим, фразеологическим словарям установите происхождение, значение и культурный смысл данных устойчивых оборотов [M. L. Kovshova's Dictionary of Proper Names in Russian Riddles, Proverbs, and Sayings (2019) contains fixed expressions of various genres that include proper names: anthroponyms, mythonyms, hymnonyms, literary and historical onyms. Analyze the idioms presented and find the listed types of proper names in them. Using linguistic, cultural, historical, etymological, and phraseological dictionaries, determine the origin, meaning, and cultural significance of these fixed expressions]

An examination of widely used EFL materials indicates that proverbs containing anthroponyms receive very limited attention. Specifically, only one such proverb, *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*, was identified across four student course books from the Enterprise series and one general reference manual, *English Idioms in Use*.

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The literature review further indicates that most research on proverbs containing anthroponyms has been conducted by Russian scholars. Although these studies are partially relevant to the present research due to their focus on teaching anthroponymic proverbs, they are not fully applicable to the current context. First, previous studies primarily analyze Russian proverbs, whereas the present study focuses on English proverbs. Second, the proposed instructional activities are mainly designed for high school learners and students studying Russian as a foreign language. Third, proverbs containing anthroponyms are only marginally incorporated in selected student coursebooks from the *Enterprise* series and in general reference manuals.

To address this research gap, the present study aims to explore how proverbs containing anthroponyms can be taught to Uzbek EFL learners and to identify the challenges they may encounter in the learning process. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What challenges do Uzbek EFL learners encounter when learning English proverbs containing anthroponyms?
2. How can these proverbs be taught more effectively in the Uzbek EFL classroom?

Methodology

This study uses a **qualitative content analysis and design-oriented approach**. It is limited to English proverbs containing the anthroponym *Jack*, selected for their high frequency and cultural significance. The proverbs were drawn from *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (Speake, 2008, 5th ed.). To analyze their representation in teaching materials, four student coursebook series from the *Enterprise* series and one general reference manual, *English Idioms in Use*, were examined. Based on a review of relevant literature on anthroponyms and pedagogical practices, a set of instructional activities was developed to address common learner difficulties, including literal interpretation, cultural opacity, and contextual understanding. These activities are analyzed in terms of their theoretical and pedagogical relevance for the Uzbek EFL classroom.

Results

Analysis of the selected materials—four course books, two reference books, one additional study manual, and a dictionary—revealed patterns in the frequency and usage of proverbs containing anthroponyms. Proverbs appeared across different activities in the *Enterprise* course book series and *English Idioms in Use*. The most frequently cited proverbs were identified in the *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*. Detailed findings are presented below.

The analysis of instructional materials indicates a very limited representation of proverbs containing anthroponyms. Specifically, only one such proverb, *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*, was identified across four student course books from the *Enterprise* series and one general reference manual, *English Idioms in Use*. Precisely, the proverb appears twice: In the *Enterprise* coursebooks, in Unit 3 (*Words of Wisdom*), where students are asked to read the sentence and interpret its meaning, and in Unit 29 (*Life and Experience: Proverbs / Half Proverbs*), where students complete the proverb by writing the familiar ending. In *English Idioms in Use*, the proverb is presented in an explanatory format with its meaning—“someone who spends all their time working becomes a boring person”—but without accompanying practice tasks. According to the theoretical framework outlined in the Introduction, proverbs containing anthroponyms can be classified as *mythonyms*, *hagionyms*, *literary onyms*, or *historical onyms*. The identified proverb falls under the category of **literary onyms**, as it refers to a culturally recognized literary character (Jack) repeatedly cited in English literature and idiomatic expressions. Overall, proverbs containing anthroponyms are **sparsely represented** in the analyzed materials.

By content analysis of *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (Speake, 2008), we identified proverbs containing the following anthroponymic components: Agamemnon, Barnaby, Caesar, Eve, Gill, Jack, Jill, Macgregor, Mahomet, Paul, Robin Hood, Swithun, and Thomas. The results indicated that proverbs featuring **Jack** were dominant, specifically six items: *Every Jack has his Jill*, *For every Jack, there is a Jill*, *Black Jack was as good as White Jack*, *Jack of all trades and master of none*, *A good Jack makes a good Jill*, and *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*. It should be noted that the actual number of distinct proverbs containing **Jack** is five, since *For every Jack, there is a Jill* is a variant of *Every Jack has his Jill*. Speake (2008) provides valuable lexicographic information, including etymology, meanings, variants, and contextual usage, which can aid learners in understanding the core meaning of these proverbs. This constitutes a brief analysis of the research materials, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Discussion

RQ1 What challenges do Uzbek EFL learners encounter when learning English proverbs containing anthroponyms?

The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs (Speake, 2008) provides detailed etymology and meanings of proverbs containing the anthroponym “Jack.” However, even when semantic meanings are explicitly listed, Uzbek EFL learners still face multiple challenges in understanding and applying these proverbs. **Polysemy and figurative use** pose a major difficulty: “Jack” appears in different proverbs with varying nuances, including an ordinary person, a sailor, an unskilled worker, or a moral example, requiring learners to select the correct meaning from context. Stylistic and formulaic features—such as rhyme, alliteration, and fixed phrase structures—can both support memorization and, if not attended to carefully, require extra attention to ensure the intended meaning is understood. Understanding proverbs containing ‘Jack’ requires attention to polysemy and figurative use, as ‘Jack’ may represent different roles (ordinary person, sailor, worker, or moral example). While contextual meaning must be inferred, dictionaries often provide sufficient cultural and historical background, including social hierarchies (‘Jack is as good as his master’), gender roles (‘A good Jack makes a good Jill’), and historical trades (‘Jack of all trades, master of none’), enabling learners to grasp the intended meaning without needing additional external knowledge. In addition, **pragmatic interpretation** demands that learners infer relational, evaluative, or cautionary intentions—moral lessons or warnings—which are not explicitly stated. Finally, challenges related to equivalents in other other languages, particularly in Uzbek language — *Black Jack was as good as White Jack*, this proverb may cause **psychological or abstract challenges** which learners may resist or misinterpret. These factors together highlight that even well-defined dictionary entries are insufficient on their own, emphasizing the need for careful instructional scaffolding and contextualized teaching in the EFL classroom.

In RQ2, *How can these proverbs be taught more effectively in the Uzbek EFL classroom*, the study seeks to identify and propose instructional activities designed to address learners’ difficulties in understanding and using proverbs containing anthroponym *Jack*.

Although dictionaries provide detailed semantic, cultural, and historical explanations of proverbs containing the anthroponym *Jack*, Uzbek EFL learners continue to experience difficulties related to polysemy, pragmatic interpretation, stylistic form, and cross-linguistic interference. To address these challenges, a range of pedagogical tasks—such as persona mapping, storytelling, contrastive analysis, and guided project work—can be employed. Digital tools, including Quizlet and language learning platforms, are effective when integrated with teacher-controlled scaffolding and oral presentation requirements. The alignment of specific learner difficulties with targeted instructional tasks demonstrates that effective proverb instruction requires contextualized, analytical, and learner-engaged approaches rather than dictionary-based explanation alone.

Table 1
Learner Difficulties and Pedagogical Tasks for Teaching Proverbs Containing the Anthroponym *Jack* in the Uzbek EFL Classroom

Learner difficulty	Description of the difficulty	Pedagogical task	Instructional focus / problem-solving value
Polysemy and figurative meaning	<i>Jack</i> represents multiple roles (e.g., ordinary person, sailor, worker, moral exemplar), requiring contextual interpretation	Persona mapping	Helps learners visualize and differentiate semantic roles of <i>Jack</i> across proverbs
Pragmatic and evaluative meaning	Proverbs convey implicit moral, cautionary, or evaluative messages not explicitly stated	Storytelling	Embeds proverbs in meaningful contexts, facilitating inference of pragmatic intent
Stylistic and formulaic features	Rhyme, alliteration, and fixed structures may obscure meaning despite aiding memorization	Group work: one group analyzes linguistic features, the other etymology	Raises awareness of form–meaning interaction in proverbial language
Cultural and historical references	Proverbs reflect social hierarchy, gender roles, and	Mini-projects / coursework based on	Develops cultural literacy and reduces reliance on

Learner difficulty	Description of the difficulty	Pedagogical task	Instructional focus / problem-solving value
	historical occupations unfamiliar to learners	printed scientific materials	decontextualized dictionary definitions
Cross-linguistic and psychological interference	Lack of Uzbek equivalents or sensitive contrasts may cause misinterpretation or resistance	Contrastive analysis task (English–Uzbek comparison)	Encourages critical comparison and mitigates negative transfer
Passive dictionary-based learning	Learners rely on definitions without developing productive use	Quizlet-assisted proverb learning	Promotes active recall, spaced repetition, and controlled practice
Superficial use of digital and AI tools	Unguided use of AI risks copy-paste learning and limited skill development	Guided article analysis + oral presentation	Ensures linguistic engagement, critical thinking, and accountable use of digital tools
Fragmented proverb knowledge	Mechanical identification of proverbs without deeper analysis	Classification task: find <i>Jack</i> proverbs and categorize by meaning, style, and function	Transforms a search task into analytical problem-solving
Limited research skills	Learners lack experience in linguistic data analysis	Dictionary-based statistical analysis	Introduces basic research methodology and quantitative awareness

To illustrate how these pedagogical tasks can be implemented in practice, the following sample activity demonstrates the application of persona mapping and contextual analysis for teaching proverbs containing the anthroponym *Jack*.

Sample Activity Redesigned as a Task-Based Learning (TBL) Activity

Task-Based Activity: Understanding Jack Proverbs in Context

Task objective: To enable intermediate to upper-intermediate Uzbek EFL learners to understand and appropriately use proverbs containing the anthroponym Jack by resolving semantic and pragmatic ambiguity through contextual analysis.

Learner profile / course context: Suitable for B1–B2 learners in an English language course on idiomatic expressions and cultural literacy, with prior experience in group work and basic reading comprehension.

Pre-task phase:

The teacher introduces several Jack-containing proverbs and briefly reviews the idea that Jack may represent different social or moral roles. One example proverb is discussed collectively to model understanding and application.

Task cycle:

Students work in small groups and receive:

- a set of proverbs containing Jack, and
- short situational prompts representing real-life communicative contexts.

Groups match each proverb to the most appropriate situation, identify the role of Jack in each case, and justify their choices. Learners negotiate meaning and reject incorrect interpretations.

Post-task phase:

Groups report their decisions orally. The teacher provides focused feedback on semantic choice, pragmatic meaning, and stylistic features, highlighting how context determines interpretation.

Outcome:

Learners demonstrate improved ability to infer figurative meaning, select context-appropriate proverbs, and explain pragmatic intent.

Limitations

This study is **theoretically focused** on English proverbs containing the anthroponym *Jack*, selected due to its high frequency, cultural salience, and prominence in widely used EFL materials. Limiting the scope to a single personal name allowed for detailed analysis of cognitive, linguistic, and cultural challenges within the constraints of a conference-length article. Consequently, findings may not fully generalize to proverbs containing other anthroponyms or to broader idiomatic language.

Additionally, the proposed pedagogical tasks have not yet been empirically tested in classroom settings; their effectiveness is inferred from theoretical frameworks, prior research, and observed learner difficulties.

Recommendations

Pedagogical activities, including **persona mapping, storytelling, contrastive analysis, guided project work, and digital tools such as Quizlet**, can be **differentiated according to learners’ language proficiency, interests, and learning context**, facilitating engagement and comprehension. Future studies should explore proverbs containing other anthroponyms and examine empirical implementation of proposed instructional strategies. Expanding research to include a broader corpus of proverbs and longitudinal classroom testing could further validate effective methods for integrating culturally and linguistically rich proverbs into EFL instruction.

Conclusion

The findings highlight that **even well-defined dictionary entries are insufficient** for teaching proverbs containing *Jack* in the Uzbek EFL classroom. Learners require scaffolding to navigate semantic ambiguity, stylistic forms, cultural references, and pragmatic meaning. Pedagogical tasks such as **persona mapping, storytelling, contrastive analysis, project work, and digital learning platforms** provide structured ways to support comprehension and productive use of proverbs. By contextualizing instruction and engaging learners in analytical and collaborative activities, teachers can enhance understanding, retention, and application. While this study focuses on a single anthroponym due to article constraints, the proposed tasks are adaptable for learners of different **proficiency levels and interests**. Further research should explore proverbs containing other anthroponyms, including *Agamemnon, Barnaby, Caesar, Eve, Gill, Jill, Macgregor, Mahomet, Paul, Robin Hood, Swithun, and Thomas*, and test the effectiveness of these instructional strategies in practice.

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