

Teaching Vietnamese Idioms in Relation to Vietnamese Communication Etiquette

Le Thi Thuy Vinh

¹ Faculty of Philology – Hanoi Pedagogical University 2, Vietnam

*Corresponding Author: Le Thi Thuy Vinh

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17606178>

Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>The article focuses on the teaching of Vietnamese idioms in close relation to Vietnamese communicative rituals. Idioms are not only fixed linguistic units with symbolic and profound meanings but also means of expressing cultural norms and patterns of behavior in everyday communication. By analyzing the role of linguistic rituals in Vietnamese language teaching in general and in teaching idioms to foreigners in particular, the article proposes a teaching procedure that integrates idioms with communicative rituals. This approach helps learners not only grasp the meanings of idioms but also apply them appropriately in accordance with Vietnamese cultural communication norms.</i> Keywords: <i>idioms, communicative rituals, Vietnamese culture, Vietnamese language teaching, pragmatics.</i>
Received: 01-04-2025	
Accepted: 12-05-2025	
Published: 30-08-2025	
Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Le Thi Thuy Vinh, 2025, Teaching Vietnamese Idioms in Relation to Vietnamese Communication Etiquette, UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHSS), 1(6), 392-394.	

1. Introduction

In the system of Vietnamese language and culture, idioms occupy a special position as both vivid linguistic expressions and the crystallization of national experience, thinking, and lifestyle. Idioms not only reflect linguistic knowledge but also embody the norms of behavior, moral values, and communicative styles of the Vietnamese people. Therefore, teaching idioms to foreign learners of Vietnamese cannot be separated from understanding communication etiquette—an aspect that reflects cultural identity and politeness in everyday linguistic interactions.

In the context of Vietnamese being taught increasingly widely as a foreign language, learners are required not only to master the structure and figurative meanings of idioms but also to comprehend the cultural and social contexts in which these idioms are used. Consequently, if idiom instruction stops at explaining meanings and practicing grammar, learners will find it difficult to use idioms flexibly in real-life communication and may even use them inappropriately or impolitely.

From this awareness, the present paper aims to examine the relationship between idioms and Vietnamese communication etiquette as a crucial foundation for innovating the content and methodology of idiom teaching. On that basis, the paper proposes a teaching procedure that integrates idioms with communicative rituals, helping learners not only to understand and use idioms correctly but

also to apply them appropriately in Vietnamese cultural communication, thereby achieving natural and effective interaction

2. Content

2.1. The role of communication etiquette in idiom teaching

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary edited by Hoàng Phê, “etiquette” (nghị thức) refers to “all the conventions, socially regulated or habitual, that must be observed to ensure the seriousness and propriety of communication” [3; p.6653]. Thus, communication etiquette can be understood as a set of linguistic and non-linguistic elements regulated within the communicative behavior of a speech community. These conventions include verbal and non-verbal actions that interlocutors must adhere to throughout the communicative process.

Linguistic communication etiquette is one of the most typical forms of etiquette, marked by verbal expressions—such as greetings, introductions, thanks, apologies, and other speech acts. These actions are realized through conventionalized models (behavioral structures) that speakers must master to ensure mutual understanding in communication.

The use of linguistic communication etiquette depends on various factors such as communicative purposes,

interlocutors, and specific situations. For example, in Vietnamese, greetings may take different linguistic forms:

Chào thầy / Chào cô / Xin chào giáo sư (“Hello, teacher/professor”)

Thầy khỏe chứ ạ? (“How are you, teacher?”)

Thầy đi đâu đấy? (“Where are you going, teacher?”)

Thầy đã ăn cơm chưa? (“Have you eaten yet, teacher?”)

Through these linguistic forms, one can infer the communicative purpose, setting, and relative social positions of the interlocutors. Mastery of communication etiquette and flexible adaptation to linguistic codes are key indicators of cultural language use.

In Vietnamese language teaching—particularly in idiom instruction—emphasizing communication etiquette is essential. Idioms are figurative and emotionally expressive linguistic units that embody Vietnamese cultural values, thought, and sentiment. Therefore, effective idiom teaching requires learners not only to understand meanings but also to know how and when to use them appropriately in real communicative situations that align with Vietnamese etiquette and cultural norms.

Communication etiquette helps learners use idioms appropriately according to context and audience. Each idiom carries specific expressive nuances and is suited to particular communicative situations. Without guidance on etiquette, learners may misuse idioms, causing misunderstanding or impoliteness. For instance, the idiom “nói một đằng làm một nẻo” (“to say one thing and do another”) has a critical connotation and should be used in informal or evaluative contexts, not in formal communication. When idiom instruction is connected with communicative rituals—such as greeting, apologizing, complimenting, or refusing—teachers can help learners recognize linguistic appropriateness in each communicative context.

Communication etiquette also contributes to developing learners’ communicative competence. Teaching idioms is not merely teaching fixed vocabulary but also training flexible, expressive, and natural language use. When learners practice using idioms in real-life contexts—greetings, thanks, encouragement, invitations—they develop the ability to select appropriate language, thus enhancing practical communicative competence. For example, in congratulatory situations, learners may use idioms such as “mã đáo thành công” (“may you return successful”) or “thuận buồm xuôi gió” (“smooth sailing”) to make their utterances vivid and culturally rich.

Moreover, communication etiquette raises learners’ awareness of cultural norms in language use. Many idioms contain humor, satire, or irony, which can be offensive if

misused. By teaching etiquette, teacher’s help learners understand the social and cultural values embedded in idioms and use them both expressively and politely, fostering appropriate, refined, and respectful behavior.

Finally, communication etiquette serves as a bridge between language and culture in idiom teaching. Each idiom encapsulates a worldview, life experience, and ethical norm of the Vietnamese people. When used within communicative rituals, idioms become cultural vehicles. Guiding learners to use idioms appropriately in speech etiquette not only enriches their linguistic repertoire but also cultivates an appreciation for the beauty of traditional Vietnamese communication culture.

2.2. A Teaching Procedure Integrating Idioms with Communicative Etiquette

Step 1: Identify communicative rituals associated with Vietnamese idioms

At this stage, teachers determine common communicative rituals in everyday life and build corresponding idiom sets.

No.	Communicative Etiquette	Example Idioms
1	Congratulating	Mã đáo thành công (success comes with perseverance); thuận buồm xuôi gió (plain sailing), mẹ tròn con vuông (healthy delivery)
2	Complimenting	Đẹp như tiên (as beautiful as an angel), văn hay chữ tốt (good writing and calligraphy), đạo cao đức trọng (high moral principle)
3	Advising	Ở hiền gặp lành (Be kind and you will meet kindness), gieo gió gặt bão (You reap what you sow), kính trên nhường dưới (Respect those above and yield to those below), chín bỏ làm mười (Let bygones be bygones), dĩ hòa vi quý (Harmony is to be valued), biết mình biết ta (Know yourself and know others)
4	Encouraging	Đầu xuôi đuôi lọt (Well begun is half done), có chí thì nên (Where there’s a will, there’s a way)
5	Refusing	Liệu cơm gắp mắm (Cut your coat according to your cloth), của người phúc ta (One’s fortune comes from others’ blessings).

Step 2: Analyze idiomatic meaning and usage within communicative contexts

After identifying relevant idioms, teachers guide learners to analyze meanings and expressive nuances.

Example idiom: Thuận buồm xuôi gió (“smooth sailing”)

Literal meaning: When sailing, favorable winds help the boat move smoothly.

Figurative meaning: Things go smoothly, successfully, without obstacles.

Emotional tone: Positive; expresses joy, blessing, and good wishes.

Communicative etiquette: Suitable for congratulation, encouragement, or farewell.

Appropriate situations:

Congratulating a friend on opening a new café: “Chúc cậu làm ăn thuận buồm xuôi gió!” (“Wish you smooth sailing in your new business!”)

Seeing a colleague off on a work trip: “Chúc anh đi công tác thuận buồm xuôi gió nhé!” (“Have a smooth and successful trip!”)

Inappropriate situation:

Using the idiom in a condolence context would be culturally awkward.

Step 3: Practice communication using idioms

Learners perform short role plays demonstrating correct etiquette and idiom use.

Example 1 – Congratulation:

Lan: “Congratulations! Your café finally opened!”

Hoa: “Thank you! I’m so nervous.”

Lan: “Don’t worry. I’m sure you’ll have smooth sailing and great success!”

Hoa: “I hope so! Thanks a lot!”

Example 2 – Farewell:

Nam: “You’re leaving tomorrow, right?”

Minh: “Yes, I’ll be away for a month.”

Nam: “Wish you smooth sailing and success on your business trip!”

Minh: “Thanks! That really gives me confidence.”

Teachers may also ask learners to write short greetings or wishes using idioms appropriately in real-life contexts.

In short, linguistic communication etiquette plays a central role in idiom instruction. It enables learners to understand idiomatic meaning, nuance, and usage, to choose contextually appropriate expressions, and to develop communicative competence reflecting Vietnamese cultural

identity. Hence, idiom teaching should combine semantic instruction with ritual-based communicative practice, helping learners achieve both linguistic mastery and practical communication skills—the ultimate goal of Vietnamese language teaching today.

3. Conclusion

This study clarifies the dialectical relationship between idioms and communicative etiquette, in which idioms function not only as linguistic units but also as cultural–pragmatic tools. Idioms help shape the indirect, flexible, and expressive speaking style characteristic of Vietnamese communication. Therefore, idiom instruction should move beyond grammatical and semantic approaches toward a pragmatic and cultural orientation, enabling learners to know when, why, and with whom an idiom should be used.

Teaching idioms in association with communicative etiquette proves effective in enhancing natural, appropriate, and efficient communicative competence among foreign learners of Vietnamese. This pedagogical direction opens new possibilities for designing communicative–cultural curricula, textbooks, and teaching materials in Vietnamese as a foreign language. Future research should include experimental studies to evaluate the effectiveness of this integrated model in diverse teaching contexts, thereby contributing to the improvement of Vietnamese language instruction quality in today’s globalized era.

(This research is funded by Hanoi Pedagogical University 2 under grant number HPU2.2022-UT-11).

REFERENCES

1. Đỗ Hữu Châu (1999). *Vietnamese Lexical Semantics*. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
2. Đỗ Hữu Châu (1999). *Dimensions of the Word and Vietnamese Lexicon*. Hanoi: Vietnam National University Press.
3. Nguyễn Thiên Giap (2008). *Vietnamese Lexicology*. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
4. Hoàng Phe (2000). *Vietnamese Dictionary*. Đà Nẵng Publishing House.
5. Ly Toan Thang & Phạm Hữu Đức (2012). “The Concept of ‘Lòng’ in Vietnamese from the Perspective of Language Teaching Theory”. *Some Theoretical Issues of Linguistics and Vietnamese Language*. Social Sciences Publishing House, pp. 122–129.