Impact of Strategies in Handling the Difficulties of Idioms

Samer Manzoor[a]*, Shumaila Kiran[b]

[a] *Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Pakistan*
[b] *University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan*
[a]*Rosam.star@gmail.com*
[b]*ahmad.shumaila19@gmail.com*

Abstract

Present study tries to explore difficulties while learning English language and specifically idiomatic language. It aims to find the different categories of the idioms which create difficulty and also suggests some strategies which are helpful in comprehension of idioms. This study also finds out the different variables that causes difficulty in learning idioms. As [1] described idioms as metaphorical aspects and delineate different processes while learning idioms. Furthermore, this paper is also determined to describe different strategies for successful learning of idiomatic phrases of second language. All the necessary information for this study and opinions of students about using different strategies for learning idioms in narrative at graduation level was obtained through a questionnaire. The questionnaire based on rating scale model. Data analyzed in the form of frequency distribution, percentage mean score and standard deviation by using SPSS software. The study is designed to know the impact of different strategies of learning idioms for second language learners.

Keywords: idiomatic language; metaphorical aspect; idioms learning strategies; categorization of idioms.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Rosam.star@gmail.com.

1. Introduction

Idioms are such expressions which can't be understand through its parts. It is the group of words which meaning is different from the meaning of words in it. For example "at a snail`s pace" means idiomatically "very slow". Idioms are one of the most difficult aspects of language learning for anyone who has taken on a new language. The second language students face difficulties in learning English idioms.

Non-native speakers often feel difficulty to understand full meaning of language conversation because in many cases the native speaker`s discussions contain large number of idioms. An idiom is quite different from other literal expressions because they don't give its meaning just by understanding its constituents. All languages comprise with a lot of idioms and native speakers use them spontaneously without even thinking about their figurative nature. The main purpose of the idiom is to comprehend and paraphrase that what is going on and what is being said. Non-native speakers have distinct disadvantage in understanding L2 figurative expressions because idioms find in all forms of discourse whether it`s in formal speech like lectures or informal conversation or other media sources like movies, radio, broadcast and television for non-native learners. Idioms are also different from other figurative expressions like simile or metaphors. Native speakers of English could instantly get the idea of "face the music" that means "face the result of one's actions" while non-native speaker could take it in different dimension. It is difficult task for most second language teachers and learners to deal with such expressions in a defined context without using flexible strategies and systematic approach. Idioms are the complex and long words which meanings are arbitrary and have complex nature. The second language students and even teachers prefer memorization and rote learning of these expressions. Many researchers believe that the proper knowledge and exact use of idioms in L2 is the symbol of L2 communicative competence. In this way another term of figurative competence is introduced by researchers. This type of competence is the skill to decode various meanings of a word and to produce novel figurative expressions and build a complete semantic representation of the produced figurative expression. Idiomatic expressions are helpful to enrich the English language. They also help the language learner to understand the target culture and know about the customs and the style of English people and provide an understanding and perception of the nature of English history.

1.1. Theoretical framework

According to [2] "an idiom can have a literal meaning. But its alternate figurative meaning must be understood metaphorically. Similarly [1] defines, "an idiom is a conventionalized expression and its meaning cannot be determined from the meaning of its parts. Idioms differ from other figurative expressions, such as similes and metaphors, in that they have conventionalized meanings. Idiomatic expressions cannot be occurred separately. These are the unbreakable blocks of language. Idiom parts must be certified by each other. Idioms are sensitive to their contents in which regularity and irregularity of idioms occur. There are some properties of idioms which violate the general characteristic of language. Every lexical item has regularity in its morphological shape and every word belongs to a specific and regular inflectional paradigm. There are lexical items which have frozen properties, these idioms need not consist of the normal lexical inventory of language, and they have idiosyncratic properties on morphological level. Idiomatic expressions are both sources of regularity and irregularity in language while some have the unchanging properties due to its tense or mode. There are some

morphological, lexical, syntactical and semantic characteristics of idioms [3]. Idioms are also consisted by bound words. This type of idioms occurs only in specific situation, bound words are those lexical units which have been frozen during language development over time [4].

Four theories have been explained by [2] which are based on that how native speakers comprehend idioms. It is proposed in [5] and idiom-list hypothesis which says that native speakers first go for literal interpretation. In case when literal meaning doesn't fit the situation than he searchers for figurative meaning in mental lexicon. The authors in [23] proposed a model named as lexical representation hypothesis. According to their hypothesis along with other words idioms which are considered to be long extended words stored in mental lexicon. These idioms exist in mid with both of their literal and figurative expressions and as well as with context interpretation. There is another model which is modified version of lexical representation hypothesis termed as direct access hypothesis [6, 7], it says that native speaker directly go for figurative meaning from their mental lexicon. It came with salience hypothesis on idioms which talks about the salient meanings of words or expressions in which discussion, demonstration and conception involved. As literal interpretation is different to metaphorical interpretation.

The lack of awareness about metaphorical concepts and lexical strategies often lead L2 learners to render a metaphorical expression in the L2 by using analogs counterpart of their L1. The sheer number of idioms and their high frequency in discourse make them an important aspect of vocabulary acquisition and language teaching in general [9]. According to [2], since idiomatic expressions are so frequently encountered in both spoken and written discourse, they require special attention in language programs and should not be relegated to a position of secondary importance in the curriculum. Gibbs (1987) said that people acquire more easily the idioms that are syntactically frozen and those whose literal meaning is close to their figurative one. Syntactically frozen idioms cannot be syntactically transformed into the passive and still retain their figurative meanings. These idioms are learned more quickly because heard more frequently in only on syntactic form. Syntactically flexible idioms retain their figurate meaning even if transformed into passive.

2. 1. Strategies of teaching idioms

Proficient writers can write more colorfully after using these strategies. Infrequent highly colloquial idiom with difficult vocabulary should be avoided.

2.1.1. Choosing idioms: Choose idioms that are frequently encountered in target language, choose expressions with transparent figurative meanings teach first identical idioms (in L1 and L2), second: similar idioms and last teach dissimilar idioms [9].

2.1.2. Discussing idioms: Lead a discussion about figurative language including metaphors, similes and idioms in metaphors, similes and idioms in order to show the students why they are used in speech and writing [10].

***2.1.3. Defining idioms*:** Choose a few idioms carefully and define them then present them within the large context of a short paragraph or dialogue. Contrast the literal and figurative meaning and show how they are related [11].

2.1.4. Situational portraits: Sketch a setting that will elicit responses in the slang, colloquial and formal or standard speech registers. Themes that could be used getting some one's attention reassuring a friend asking for money, expressing anger for example chill out (slang) and take it easy (colloquial) [11].

2.1.5. Drawing idioms: Drawing idioms is effective for showing the contrast between the literal and figurative meaning [11].

2.1.6. Dramatizing idioms: Act them out to compare literal and figurative meaning of idioms in a humorous way. Another activity: Charades, act out the literal meaning of an expression and the class must guess the figurative meaning [11]. Dialogues can be considered as short plays and used for students to act out rather than simply read aloud. Moreover, the dialogues the students write function as basic communication at all levels. Teachers can put pupils into pairs for the role-play in the daily dialogue is an effective way of oral practice for various levels [12]. The authors in [13] stressed that role-play are also excellent activities for learners' speaking in the relatively safe environment of the classroom before they must do so in real environment. Therefore, dialogues could prove to be an effective strategy for learning English idioms for second language learner.

2.1.7. Idioms with Readers Theater: Readers Theater is an interesting and motivating strategy it help students to reread text and improve their word recognition, reading fluency and reading comprehension. Researches claim that Readers Theater offers a way to improve fluency and enhance comprehension as well as to create interest in and enthusiasm for learning [14]. Through this strategy, below average learners can benefit from Readers Theater because there is no memorization required and it also provides a possible opportunity for practice repeated reading in language learning. This strategy also enhances peer interaction and learning more appealing than learning alone [15].

2.1.8. Retelling exercise: The teacher tells the story containing several idioms and the students have to retell it or write it down by trying it down by trying to use as many of the expressions as they can. Retelling considers to be very good strategy to know how much students have been learned and to increase their comprehension. Retelling activities can facilitate students reading because these activities motivate students to recall the lesson older students can benefit from retelling stories because it allows students to learn to organize and describe events, which enhances reading comprehension [16].

2.1.9. Add on story: Write a list of idioms on the board and start the story by using one of the idioms. Students have to add this idiom to the story by each contributing one sentence containing a new expression [9]. For effective language learning stories have been popularly used. Interesting and enjoyable stories draws student's attention easily get involved in the. Through this strategy student could understand idioms in better way because of the complete contextual information of stories. Thus, introducing English idioms within interesting stories can possible help second language learners to understand and memorize them in better way [17].

2.1.10. Idioms used in media: Select different cartoon CDs and select idioms from them [18]. Compile idioms from TV shows (sit-comes are a good source) view all in class and discuss. Student should select a comic strip that has idiomatic language from Sunday newspaper. List all the selected idioms on the board and discuss them [11].

2.1.11. Idiom board game: Student creates a board game that that tests their knowledge of idiomatic expressions. Practice idioms through music students can create chants [11].

2.1.12. Idioms with group discussion: Students are likely to be passive learners if they receive lectures in classrooms. In contrast small group discussion in class could motivate students to involve in active process of constructing knowledge. In group discussion students learn from each other consciously or unconsciously. Group talks can provide learners with rich opportunities to acquire social and linguistic knowledge necessary for understanding new texts the encounter [19]. The authors in [20] stressed that ESC students engaging in collaborative talk during content reading, they assisted one another in understanding the meaning of challenging words, getting the main ideas, and ensuring questions about what they read [20].

2.1.13. Paragraph competition: Omit the idioms in context from a paragraph then students have to complete the idioms with proper expression that fits in the context. After this give them the omitted idioms. Students will see how they have inferred the idioms meaning from the context [1].

2.1.14. Dividing idioms into categories: Dividing idioms into thematic categories will make them easier to learn [1]. Idioms can be grouped according to the main words they contain: verbs, nouns. Idioms can be grouped according to their underlying metaphorical themes e.g., time is money; argument is war [11]. It is proposed in [8] a typology of idioms with three sub-classes i.e., pure idioms, semi idioms and literal idioms.

2.1.15. Idioms and role of context: For learners of all ages the comprehension of the idiomatic expressions is facilitated by contextual support [21,22]. English idiom do not mean what they literally mean, their meaning is change from the meaning of its elements. Therefore it's difficult to learn idioms by non-native learners in an easy way. The authors in [22] stressed, failure to grasp the meanings of idioms can impinge upon an individual's understanding of language in social, academic, and vocational settings. In addition, it is found in [23] that students are often able to discuss content, take notes, or create semantic maps for writing; however they often do not use the new words or concepts taught in class.

2.1.16. Role of illustrations in idiom learning: Researchers claim that if reading materials facilitated by visuals it will be more comprehensible and effective. It is stressed [24]in that teachers need to illustrate key vocabulary effectively by showing pictures and diagrams so as to improve the ESC student's reading comprehension. The author in [25] found that words and pictures presented together helped students to recall better than alone. It is effective in language learning if students were provided interesting pictures to reinforce vocabulary development. So, the visuals which were used for language learning must be stimulating, interesting and motivating to students' comprehension and retention of reading.

2.2. Variables affecting idiom learning and comprehension

There are certain factors which affect the idiom comprehension level of the students. Some of these factors are listed below:

2.2.1. Age of learners: Children interpret idioms literally until the age of nine. Piaget's theory of cognitive development [26] says that use of figurative language by teachers can improve children's figurative language.

2.2.2. Second language learners: Idioms are problematic for EFL and ESL learners, [9] conducted a study to determine whether advanced learners of English use knowledge of than first language to comprehend and produced second language idioms [9].

2.2.3. Idiom comprehension difficulties: It takes long time for children to comprehend and produce idiomatic expressions. The literature on normally developing children and on children with language disorders and deficits coverage to show that at the core of the acquisition of efficient idiomatic competence is the ability to construct word and sentence meaning from context, whether by selecting salient meanings and suppressing irrelevant ones, by drawing the necessary inferences, or by comprehending the speaker's intend meaning. Measures of idiom understanding might be associated with measures of intelligence, academic achievement in reading and listening comprehension in adolescents, and with general non-verbal measures of mental capacity [22]. Many studies reported that children having specific language disorders also have deficits in understanding some forms of figurative expressions including idioms.

3. Methodology and procedure

The study under reference is survey type research which deals to find out the opinions of students about different strategies for learning idioms in narrative at graduation level. This survey was conducted through questionnaire consisted of 16 statements (Appendix A).The sample of the study included 40 students of graduation. These students were first taught idioms by following different strategies which were mentioned in literature review part and then on the basis of these strategies the researcher developed a questionnaire because results obtained in this way are more accurate. The researcher developed this questionnaire after exclusive study of related literature and by following need analysis technique. The questionnaire is based on pattern of Likert-type scale. SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) software was used to analyze data in the form of frequencies, percentage, mean to see the opinion of students about different strategies for learning idioms.

4. Results

The result of the item 'it is easy to learn those idioms which one usually spoken by our friends and family members' shows that 12.5% students response (SA), 77.5% students response (A), 2.5% students response (D) and 7.5% students response (SDA), mean score of this statement is 2.75 and standard deviation is 0.63. On the basis of results, it is concluded that students accepted that it is easy to learn idioms which are spoken by our friends and family members.

Table 1: Students' opinion about different strategies for learning idioms

Statement (It is easy to learn…)	SA f %	A f %	DA f %	SDA f %	Mean	Std. deviation
Familiar idioms	5 12.5	31 77.5	3 7.5	1 2.5	2.75	0.630
Equivalent meaning in native language.	4 10	27 67.5	9 22.5	0 0	2.58	0.675
Idioms with group discussion	19 47.5	15 37.5	5 12.5	1 2.5	2.6	0.744
Idioms with retelling and rewriting	5 12.5	31 77.5	3 7.5	1 2.5	2.75	0.63
Idioms with defined context	13 32.5	22 55	5 12.5	0 0	2.23	0.92
Idioms by knowing their metaphorical aspect	4 10	9 67.5	27 22.5	0 0	2.58	0.675
Idioms with clear literal meaning	17 42.5	21 52.5	2 5	0 0	2.1	0.982
Idioms with familiar vocabulary	8 20	26 65	5 12.5	1 2.5	2.425	0.874
Idioms with repeating and paraphrasing	3 7.5	23 57.5	8 20	6 15	2.58	0.844
Idioms with rich illustration	12 30	24 60	4 10	0 0	2.3	0.911
Idioms with reading comprehension	9 22.5	21 52.5	8 20	2 5	2.4	0.9
Idioms with categorization	11	24	3	2	2.575	0.747

	27.5	60	7.5	5		
Idiom learning through activating mental lexicon	10	25	5	0	2.38	0.868
	25	62.5	12.5	0		
Idioms which have close literal and figurative meaning	13	25	2	0	2.3	0.939
	32.5	62.5	5	0		
Idioms which have conceptualization in both first and second language	17	21	2	0	2.1	0.982
	42.5	52.5	5	0		
Idioms which have multi-word combination	3	23	8	6	2.58	0.844
	7.5	57.5	20	15		
Idioms used in different media	5	31	2	1	2.55	0.639
	12.5	47.5	5	2.5		
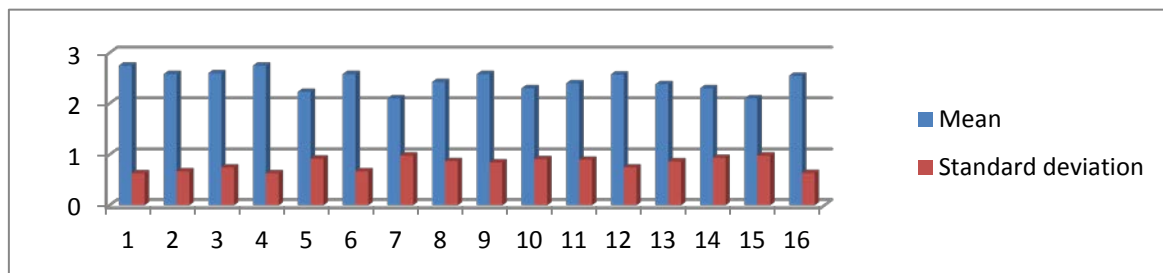
The second item of the questionnaire is 'it is easy to learn those idioms which have equivalent meaning in native language' show the response of 10% at (SA), 67.5% at (A), 22.5% at (D) and 0% at (SDA).The mean score of this statement is 2.58 and standard deviation is 0.675. So it is concluded here that majority of the learners find easy to learn those idioms which have equivalent meaning in their native language. The result of third statement 'it is easy to learn those idioms with group discussion' shows that 47.5% respondents agreed on (SA), 37.5% agreed on (A), 12.5% agreed on (D) and 1% agreed on (SDA). The mean score and standard deviation are 2.6 and 0.744 respectively. On the basis of results, it is concluded that students accepted that it is easy to learn idioms with group discussion. The results of the statement 'it is easy to learn idioms by using retelling and rewriting strategies are 12.5% (SA), 77.5% (A), 7.5% (D), and 2.5% (SDA). The mean score is 2.75 and standard deviation is 0.63. On the basis of these results it is concluded that students accepted that retelling and rewriting strategy is quite effective for idiom learning. The next statement 'it is easy to learn those idioms which one can relate to defined context and situation' shows the result of 32.5% at (SA), 55% at (A), 12.5% at (D) and 0% at (SDA). The mean score here is 2.23 and standard deviation is 0.92. On the basis of the result of this item it is concluded that students find it easy to learn idioms with defined context. The statement 'it is easy to learn idioms by knowing their metaphorical aspect produce results 10% (SA), 67.5% (A), 22.5% (D), 0% (SDA),

mean score is 2.58 and standard deviation is 0.675. This statement shows that for students it's easy to learn idiom by knowing its metaphorical aspect. The item 'it is easy to learn idioms when their literal meaning can clear its figurative use' shows the numeric result of 42.5% (SA), 52.5% (A), 5% (D) and 0% (SDA). The mean score is 2.1 and standard deviation is 0.982. On the basis of these results it is concluded that students accepted that it is easy to learn those idioms which have clear literal meaning. The statement 'it is easy to learn idioms when their used vocabulary is familiar show the result 20% (SA), 65% (A), 12.5% (D) and 2.5% (SDA). The mean score of these values is 2.425 and standard deviation is 0.874. On the basis of produced results it is concluded that students accepted that it is easy to learn idioms when the vocabulary used in it is familiar. The item 'it is easy to learn idioms by repeating and paraphrasing' results are 7.5% (SA), 57.5% (A), 20% (D), and 15% (SDA), the mean score of these values is 2.58 and standard deviation is 0.844. On the basis of these results it is concluded that it is easy to learn idioms by repeating and paraphrasing them. The results of the statement 'it is easy to learn idioms with rich illustration' is 30% (SA), 60% (A), 10% (D) and 0% (SDA), the mean score and standard deviation are 2.3 and 0.911 respectively. The item 'it is easy to learn idioms with reading comprehension' produce result of 22.5% (SA), 52.5% (A), 20% (D), 5% (SDA), mean score is 2.4 and standard deviation is 0.9. The results conclude that student accepted that it is easy to learn idioms by reading comprehension. The item results 'it is easy to understand those idioms which have an existence in our mental lexicon' 'it is easy to understand those idioms which have an existence in our mental lexicon' 27.5% (SA), 60% (A), 7.5% (D), 5% (SDA) the mean score is 2.575 and standard deviation is 0.747 On the basis of results it is concluded that students accepted that idioms which have already existed in our mental lexicon are easy to learn. Idioms which have close literal and figurative meaning produce the result 25% (SA), 62.5% (A), 5% (D), 0% (SDA), the mean score are 2.38 and standard deviation is 0.868. On the basis of these results students find it easy to learn those idioms which have close literal and figurative meaning. Idioms which have conceptualization in both first and second language shows the results of 32.5 (SA), 62.5% (A), 5% (D), 0% (SDA), the mean score of these values is 2.3 and standard deviation is 0.939. The results conclude that student agreed that idioms which have conceptualization in their first and second language are perhaps more easy to learn. Idioms which consist of multi word combination show the result 42.5% (SA), 52.5% (A), 5% (D) and 0% (SDA). The mean score of these values is 2.1 and standard deviation is 0.982. On the basis of these results student agreed that multi-word combination of idiom is easy to learn. The item 'it is easy to learn those idioms which are used in different media sources shows the result 12.5% (SA), 47.5% (A), 5% (D), 2.5% (SDA), the mean score of these values is 2.55 and standard deviation is 0.639. The results conclude that students agreed that idioms used in media are quite easy to learn.

5. Conclusion

The current study provides English language learners with a better understanding by using different strategies to further enhance their learning. On the basis of the findings, it was concluded that idioms spoken by family, friends and peer groups are easy to learn and it should be practiced in daily routine. Idioms that have close literal and figurative meaning are easy to remind. Those idioms which have contextual basis and present in our mental lexicon are also easy to learn. Throughout the paper it was shown that there are difficulties for learning idioms for non-natives. As idioms are those figure of speech that are closely linked to the native culture of the language and has different metaphorical aspects which could be discriminated from its literal meaning, so second

language learners find difficulty in learning this part of the language so these suggested strategies will somehow help them to overcome their difficulty. As the concluded results show that students who learned idioms by these strategies find it quite easy and interesting.

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