

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AS PREDICTORS OF L₂ IDIOMS COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to investigate types of language learning strategies as predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. The participants were 112 male and female Iranian undergraduate B.A. and M.A. students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, English Translation, and English Literature at the University of Qom; Islamic Azad University, Takestan Branch; and Mofid non-profit University. Data were gathered through the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP), an idiom comprehension test, and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and analyzed using multiple regression procedure. The results showed that cognitive and affective learning strategies were the best predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. In other words, cognitive and affective learning strategies together could account for approximately 43% of the total variance in L₂ idioms comprehension. These findings may have implications for language learners, teachers, researchers, syllabus designers, and materials developers. Since cognitive learning strategies were found to be the most commonly used strategies by successful idiom learners in this study, they should be taken into account more in L₂ idiom comprehension. At the same time, teachers should make learners aware of affective and social strategies because they have not received much attention in classrooms.

KEYWORDS: Idioms, idioms comprehension, language learning strategies

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, vocabulary has received a great deal of attention in language learning and teaching. During the nineties, the focus shifted from single words to word strings, phrases, and idioms (Mäntylä, 2004). It is believed that lexicon is not only single words but a dynamic system which includes larger lexical items, language chunks, or word strings (Read, 2000). Consequently, idioms have become important not only to language researchers but also to language teachers. Pollio, Barlow, Fine, and Pollio (1977), and Cooper (1999) emphasize the importance of idioms in foreign language learning and hold that most English speakers produce 10 million novel metaphors and 20 million idioms in their lifetime of 60 years. Surprisingly, Anglin, Miller, and Wakefield (1993) postulate that more than half of the compound entries are

idioms. In addition, Levorato (1993) and Levorato and Cacciari (1992) coined the term “figurative competence” to focus on the production and comprehension of idioms. This type of competence refers to the ability to decode and encode figurative expressions.

However, idioms are not defined clearly and comprehensively. This lack of clear and exact definition of idioms causes teachers and learners some difficulty dealing with idioms (Grant & Bauer, 2004). Idioms should be defined more clearly to remove this difficulty. Irujo (1986) defines an idiom as a conventionalized expression whose meaning cannot be determined from the meaning of its parts. One clear, specific, and systematic definition is Fernando’s (1996, p. 38) definition that “conventionalized multi-word expressions are often, but not always non-literal”. Lennon (1998) asserts that idioms are the colorful side of language used while we are communicating our thoughts and feelings. They are used to make language much livelier and richer. However, according to Akbarian (2012), studies in psycholinguistics (Gibbs, 1993) and in applied linguistics (Boers & Demecheleer, 2001; Kovecses & Szabo, 1996) have revealed that many idioms are not as arbitrary as they are traditionally thought to be. It means that those learners who are aware of the lexical components of unfamiliar idioms are sometimes able to guess the meaning correctly.

Another concern of the present study is language learning strategies. Over the past decades, a gradual shift from the teacher-centered classes to more learner-centered classes has resulted in more focus on learners and learning. One consequence of this shift is focus on the use of language learning strategies (LLS) by learners and teachers in L₂ learning and teaching (Lessard-Clouston, 1997). Cohen and Weaver (1998) suggest that interest in language learning strategies started with the publication of papers mainly concerned with the “good language learner”. Consequently, language learning strategies have become an integral part of various theoretical models of language proficiency (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). As Holec (1981) and Wenden (1998) claim, language learning strategies not only enable learners to learn an L₂ effectively and efficiently, but also help develop their abilities of independent and autonomous learning, which are believed to be another important factor leading to successful learning. Oxford (2002) also argues that using language learning strategies makes learning quicker, easier, more effective, and more fun.

Language learning strategies have been variously defined by various researchers such as O’Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), and Ellis (1995). One of the most comprehensive definitions, among many others, is proposed by Oxford (1990), based on which learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. Ellis (1995) argues that strategies refer to some kind of mental activity or behavior that can occur in a particular phase of the learning or communication process.

Griffiths (2004) offers language learning strategy theory, which asserts that other things being equal, the strategies which different learners use may account for at least part of their differential success rate. Chamot and O’Malley (1987) argue that research in language learning strategies in the second language acquisition literature has put much emphasis on the patterns of learning

strategies used by successful language learners. Then, less successful language learners may benefit from applying the same strategies in their own learning, and successful language learners become better by taking advantage of strategies which are available to them (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975).

Although idioms are considered as an integral part of each language and many researchers have worked on idioms, there is a paucity of research on the effectiveness of language learning strategies in the comprehension of L₂ idioms. The purpose of the present study is to fill part of the existing gap in this area. It aims to investigate the contribution of language learning strategies to L₂ idioms comprehension.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Idioms

In the past, when language was studied through its structure rather than meaning, idioms were studied on the basis of their form, and form was on the basis of idioms' definition. Idioms were considered as frozen and multi-word expressions that have little or no structural variation. Idioms were also seen as dead expressions because there was no relationship between their meaning and origin. But after the emergence of the functionalist approach to the study of language, the focus shifted from idiom structures to idiom meanings (Mäntylä, 2004).

Cooper (1999) asserts that although L₂ idioms comprehension is very difficult, learning idioms is essential for second or foreign language learners because idioms are used in all forms of discourse. According to Ellis (1997), the knowledge of idioms and the ability to know how to use idioms in a second language are important indicators of language learners' communicative competence.

Moon (1996) and Mäntylä (2004) classify idioms into four major groups according to their level of lexical transparency or idiomaticity: transparent idioms, semi-transparent idioms, semi-opaque idioms, and opaque idioms. Idioms are considered as one of the most difficult areas of L₂ learning for both teachers and learners (see, for example, Cieslicka, 2006; Kövecses & Szabo, 1996; Zarei & Rahimi, 2012). There are different factors involved in idioms comprehension that should be taken into account. However, three major factors influencing idioms comprehension are proposed by Rohani, Ketabi, and Tavakoli (2012). They are semantic transparency, familiarity, and context. Another factor affecting L₂ idioms comprehension is learners' knowledge of their first language. This factor is also called *transfer*. Irujo (1986) examined whether second language learners use knowledge of their first language to comprehend idioms in the second language. Findings revealed that identical idioms were the easiest to comprehend. Similar idioms were comprehended almost as well, but showed interference from language learners' L₁. Different idioms were the most difficult to comprehend, but showed less interference than similar idioms.

Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

Researchers have started to study language learning strategies since 1960s. The cognitive approach to language learning has affected language learning strategies research (Williams & Burden, 1997). Zarei and Elekaei (2012) argue that the effect of language learning strategies on language learning is undeniable. Many researchers have conducted research on the relationship between language learning strategies and language proficiency. Major findings have revealed that the use of appropriate language learning strategies helps language learners to improve their language proficiency or achieve general or particular language skills (e.g., Akbari & Talebinenezhad, 2003; Bremner, 1999; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Cohen, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; and Wharton, 2000). As an example, Akbari and Talebinenezhad (2003) conducted a study on the relationship between language learning strategies by Iranian learners of English and their foreign language proficiency. They found a positive relationship between the use of language learning strategies by the subjects and their proficiency.

Brown (2007) points out that some learners are successful and others are not regardless of teaching methods. At the same time, it is undeniable that learners' learning is influenced by their abilities, techniques, or strategies used during learning. There is a high correlation between language learning strategies and successful language learning. However, not all language learning strategies are effective for all second language learners. As Cotterall (2000) argues, learners are different, so they choose different strategies based on their understanding of which strategies can possibly contribute to their learning.

Like the various definitions of learning strategies, there are also different classifications of learning strategies (Bremner, 1999). One of the most comprehensive classifications of language learning strategies was proposed by Oxford (1990) suggesting that language learning strategies contain six categories of L₂ learning behaviors. Based on Oxford's (1990) classification, language learning strategies can be generally divided into two main categories: direct and indirect strategies. Memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies are considered as direct strategies. Metacognitive, affective, and social strategies are indirect strategies. Unlike direct strategies, indirect strategies do not have a direct effect on the target language, but have a significant effect on language learning. Brown (2007, p. 141-142) offers a similar classification.

The present study uses Oxford's (1990) and Brown's (2007) classification because, as Ellis (1994, p. 539), and Rausch (2000, p. 2) claim, this classification is the most comprehensive, multi-leveled, and theoretically well-conceived classification with a hierarchical ordering of language learning strategies.

There is a wide variety of factors influencing the selection of language learning strategies. Among these, biological, cognitive, affective, socio-cultural factors, and also level of proficiency are strongly correlated with the selection of language learning strategies (Ames & Archer, 1988; Lucas, Pulido, Miraflores, Ignacio, Tacay & Lao, 2010; Oxford & Burry-stock, 1995; Vandergrift, 2005).

Language learning strategies used by learners can be assessed through various procedures like interviews, students' diaries, think-aloud procedures, and questionnaires. Among the above procedures, questionnaires have been used mostly for assessing learners' strategies (Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Nykios, 1989). One of the most common and standardized questionnaires was developed by Oxford (1990). This questionnaire is called the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

Many studies have also been conducted on both language learning strategies (LLS) and idioms. Cooper (1999) studied the on-line processing strategies used by nonnative speakers of English who were asked to give the meaning of idioms presented in a written context. The findings showed that most of the participants engaged in a heuristic approach to idioms comprehension. Bulut and Celik-Yazici (2004) investigated the strategies used by learners in processing L₂ idioms. They reported that L₂ learners recalled the strategies acquired during first language acquisition to construct L₂ idiom meanings. Other findings showed that learners made a guess to interpret L₂ idiom meanings and moved from context. Cooper (1999, p. 246) identified a number of other strategies, used by learners to understand the meaning of L₂ idioms, including the following: (the frequency of use is mentioned in parentheses)

- Guessing from context (28% of the time)
- Discussing and analyzing the idioms (24%)
- Using the literal meanings of idioms (19%)
- Using background knowledge (7%)
- Repeating or paraphrasing the idioms (7%)
- Connecting L₂ idioms to L₁ idioms (5%)
- Other strategies like personal discussion and meta-analysis of the idiom (2%)

Cooper's results showed that guessing from context (28%) was mostly used by learners which led to a correct answer 57% of the time. The least used strategy was referring to an L₁ idiom (5%) which led to a correct answer 8% of the time. According to the study, successful strategies respectively were:

- Guessing from context (57% of the time),
- Using the literal meaning (22%),
- Using background knowledge (12%), and
- Referring to an L₁ idiom (8%).

Based on Cooper's findings, it can be concluded that L₂ learners used compensation and cognitive learning strategies the most.

Meanwhile, Mäntylä (2004, p. 87-89) also suggests that there are many techniques that can be used for comprehending and learning idioms:

- Using images and imagination
- Making a relation between meaning and form
- Using actions, objects, and pictures
- Using guessing or inferencing strategies
- Using contextual clues

- Using keyword method

On the whole, despite the relative plethora of research on various aspects of both idioms and language learning strategies, there seems to be a paucity of research on the direct relationship between language learning strategies and idioms. This study aims to bridge part of the existing gap. It attempts to investigate the relationship between language learning strategies and idioms and examine which learning strategies contribute best to L₂ idioms comprehension.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study addresses the following research question to fill the above mentioned gaps:

Which language learning strategies are better predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of the present study were initially 118 male and female Iranian B.A. and M.A. students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, English Translation, and English Literature at the University of Qom; Islamic Azad University, Takestan Branch; and Mofid non-profit University. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 30 years old. A general proficiency test (MTELP) was administered to homogenize the participants' level of English language proficiency. After the administration of the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency and taking the results into account, the number of participants was reduced to 112. Six participants were excluded from the study because they had a different level of proficiency.

Instruments

To collect data for the present study and answer the research questions, the following instruments were utilized:

a) *Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP)*: In order to homogenize the participants, the vocabulary subtest of the Michigan test of English language proficiency was administered. MTELP is one of the popular tests for measuring ESL or EFL learners' level of language proficiency. The test is a three-part, 100-item multiple-choice test containing 40 grammar items in conversational format, 40 vocabulary items requiring the selection of a synonym or completion of a sentence, and reading passages followed by 20 comprehension questions.

b) *L₂ idiom comprehension test*: In order to assess the participants' comprehension of idioms and their receptive knowledge of idioms, a multiple choice test containing 30 items of L₂ idioms was used. All of the idioms used in this test were selected from the *American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*.

c) *Already established L₂ idiom comprehension test*: Since the idiom comprehension test was developed by the researcher, its validity had to be established. To this end, an already established L₂ idiom comprehension test was also used.

d) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0*: In order to assess the general language learning strategies used by second language learners, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0 was used. SILL refers to a self-scoring questionnaire developed by Oxford (1990) based on her strategy taxonomy with 50 strategy items on a five-point Likert scale from 'Never' to 'Always'. This version of SILL is designed to collect information about language learning strategies used by non-native speakers of English who are learning English as a second or foreign language. By the use of this instrument, the following six types of strategies proposed by Oxford (1990) could be examined: memory (items 1-9), cognitive (items 10-23), compensation (items 24-29), metacognitive (items 30-38), affective (items 39-44), and social learning strategies (items 45-50). It is worth noting that a number of studies using SILL for collecting their data have found reliability indexes ranging from 0.91 to 0.95 (Oxford, 1996).

Procedures

The procedures followed in this study were divided into five main stages. First, 118 participants majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, English Translation, and English Literature at the University of Qom; Islamic Azad University, Takestan Branch; and Mofid non-profit University were selected. In the second stage, the 40-item multiple-choice vocabulary subtest of the Michigan test of English language proficiency was used to make sure that there were no significant differences among the participants in terms of their vocabulary knowledge. The time allocated to this test was 45 minutes. Data from those who scored more than one standard deviation above or below the mean were excluded from all subsequent analyses. As a result, the number of participants was reduced to 112.

Next, the L₂ idiom comprehension test was administered; the participants were asked to answer a 30-item multiple choice test of L₂ idioms in 30 minutes. In the fourth stage, an already established L₂ idiom comprehension test was administered to check the validity of newly developed tests. The time allocated to this test was also 30 minutes.

At the end, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was administered to collect data about types of second language learning strategies used by the participants. They were asked to choose from the five-point Likert scale for every statement from 'Never' to 'Always'. The collected data were organized and prepared for further statistical analyses.

Since the idiom comprehension test was developed by the researcher, its validity and reliability had to be established. To this end, KR-21 formula was used to estimate the reliability of the test. The reliability index of the idiom comprehension test turned out to be 0.84 (see Appendix). A correlation procedure was used to check the validity which the scores of the participants on the idiom comprehension test were correlated with their performance on the idiom comprehension test of which the validity was already established. The validity index of comprehension test

turned out to be 0.82 (see Appendix). To analyze the collected data, the multiple regression analysis procedure was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study sought to investigate which types of language learning strategies are predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. A multiple regression procedure was used to answer this question. To do so, initially a correlation procedure was run to see the degree of the relationship between L₂ idiom comprehension scores and types of language learning strategies, the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlations among L₂ idiom comprehension scores and language learning strategies

		Idiom comp.	memory	cognitive	compensation	metacognitive	affective	social
Pearson Correlation	Idiom comp.	1.000	.288	.608	.419	.495	-.197	-.004
	memory		1.000	.626	.338	.519	.321	.249
	cognitive			1.000	.674	.659	.127	.137
	compensation				1.000	.398	.061	.189
	metacognitive					1.000	.082	.210
	affective						1.000	.470
	social							1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Idiom comp.		.001	.000	.000	.000	.018	.483
	memory			.000	.000	.000	.000	.004
	cognitive				.000	.000	.090	.075
	compensation					.000	.262	.023
	metacognitive						.194	.013
	affective							.000
	social							

As Table 1 shows, L₂ idiom comprehension has the highest correlation with cognitive strategies (i.e., .608) and the lowest correlation with social strategies (i.e., -.004). A stepwise multiple regression was run (Table 4.2) which showed that cognitive and affective strategies entered into the regression equation (stepwise criteria: probability of $F \leq 0.050$).

Table 2: Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Cognitive	.	Stepwise (Criteria: Probability-of-F-to-enter <= .050, Probability-of-F-to-remove >= .100).
2	Affective	.	Stepwise (Criteria: Probability-of-F-to-enter <= .050, Probability-of-F-to-remove >= .100).

a. Dependent Variable: idiom comprehension

Based on model summary (Table 3), it can be seen that cognitive strategies and L₂ idioms comprehension share 36% of the variance. Cognitive and affective strategies together share 43% of the variance with L₂ idioms comprehension. In other words, cognitive and affective strategies explain 43% of the total variance in L₂ idioms comprehension.

Table 3: Model Summary^c

Mode	R	Adjusted R Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			Sig. Change	F	
				Square	F Change	df1			df2
1	.608 ^a	.370	.364	5.11253	.370	64.654	1	110	.000
2	.669 ^b	.447	.437	4.81238	.077	15.149	1	109	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), cognitive

b. Predictors: (Constant), cognitive, affective

c. Dependent Variable: idiom comprehension

The ANOVA procedure was used to test the null hypothesis that the predictive power of the models is not significant. The results of the ANOVA performed on the model are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: ANOVA^c on L₂ idiom comprehension test

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1689.934	1	1689.934	64.654	.000 ^a
	Residual	2875.173	110	26.138		
	Total	4565.107	111			
2	Regression	2040.773	2	1020.386	44.060	.000 ^b
	Residual	2524.334	109	23.159		
	Total	4565.107	111			

a. Predictors: (Constant), cognitive

b. Predictors: (Constant), cognitive, affective

c. Dependent Variable: idiom comprehension

Based on Table 4, significant results were shown.

To find out how strong the relationship between L₂ idioms comprehension and each of the six predictors is, the standardized coefficients and the significance of the observed t-value for each predictor were checked. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5: Coefficients^a of language learning strategies

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-4.199	2.639		-1.591	.114
	cognitive	.429	.053	.608	8.041	.000
2	(Constant)	4.636	3.365		1.378	.171
	cognitive	.454	.051	.644	8.969	.000
	affective	-.572	.147	-.280	-3.892	.000

a. Dependent Variable: idiom comprehension

Based on Table 5, cognitive and affective strategies, among six types of language learning strategies, account for a statistically significant portion of the variance in L₂ idioms comprehension. Cognitive strategies are the best predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension; for every one standard deviation change in the cognitive strategies score, there will be .60 of a standard deviation change in idiom comprehension score. Affective strategies are another predictor of L₂ idioms comprehension; every one standard deviation increase in one's affective strategies score will cause .28 of a standard deviation decrease in one's idiom comprehension score. It can be concluded that cognitive strategies are positive predictors and affective strategies are negative predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there are no significant differences in the predictive power of the language learning strategies in idiom comprehension is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The present study attempted to investigate types of language learning strategies as predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. One of the findings of the present study was that cognitive learning strategies were the best predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. The participants employed more cognitive learning strategies for L₂ idioms comprehension compared to other categories of language learning strategies. This result is in line with that of Chamot and O'Malley (1987), Oxford (1990), Lachini (1997), Bremner (1999), and Khabiri and Azaminejad (2009), who argue that the most popular strategies with language learners are cognitive learning strategies. This finding also supports Ehrman and Oxford's (1995) finding that cognitive learning strategies had a significant correlation with the participants' speaking and reading proficiency. In addition, the finding of the study also lends support to Tajeddin's (2004) findings; he studied the relationship between language learning strategies and performance on the cloze test (passage). He found that the cloze had a significant correlation with only cognitive language learning strategies.

Meanwhile, it corroborates the findings of Cooper (1999), showing that L₂ learners employed cognitive learning strategies to comprehend L₂ idioms the most. It is also in line with one finding of Mäntylä (2004), which showed that non-native speakers used 3 main strategies to comprehend L₂ idioms. The most frequent strategy was a direct translation equivalent in L₁. The second one was looking for links between literal and figurative interpretations. The third most popular strategy was guessing. The first and second most popular strategies are related to cognitive strategies.

However, this finding of the present study contradicts Klassen's (1994) finding that compensation learning strategies were the most frequently used category by learners. It is also in conflict with Park's (1994) result, which revealed that cognitive learning strategies were minimally used by learners. The finding also differs from that of Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003), who found that the most commonly used learning strategies by both monolingual and bilingual groups were metacognitive and social learning strategies. The finding of the present study is in conflict with Rezaei and Almasian's (2007) finding, which indicated that metacognitive learning strategies were the most preferred category of strategies for both high and low creativity groups. Finally, the finding is different from that of Takeuchi (2003), who reported that successful language learners tended to employ more metacognitive learning strategies than other categories.

Another result of the present study was that affective learning strategies were also a significant predictor of L₂ idioms comprehension. However, they had a significantly negative correlation with L₂ idioms comprehension. Moreover, the participants made use of affective learning strategies for L₂ idioms comprehension the least. This finding corroborates the findings of Park (1994), Oxford and Ehrman (1995), Mochoizuki (1999), Wharton (2000), Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003), and Khabiri and Azaminejad (2009), that affective learning strategies were used the least. It also provides support for Rezaei and Almasian's (2007) finding that both high and low creativity groups and both high and low proficiency groups used affective learning strategies the least.

There could be two reasons why learners used affective and social learning strategies minimally: first, L₂ researchers may have used some methods to identify language learning strategies that failed to measure learners' affective and social learning strategies properly. Second, successful learners might hesitate to consider these as real strategies (Oxford, 2002). Another possible reason for these results is that many English language teachers were trained in the use of direct strategies such as cognitive strategies when they were younger learners; now they feel that these strategies require more emphasis than affective learning strategies. Consequently, students are taught how to use cognitive strategies and are not well aware of affective learning strategies. Since the participants of the study were Iranian, one possible reason for these findings may be related to the Iranian educational system where classes are more teacher-centered. In these classes, students' affective factors are not taken into account and direct strategies such as translating, analyzing, or reasoning, which are categorized as cognitive learning strategies, are focused on more by teachers and students.

Unlike the above results, this result of the study contradicts that of Sedaghat (2001), who showed no significant correlation between affective learning strategies and attitude. This study is also not in line with some non-L₂ research which indicated that a number of the best learners used affective and social learning strategies (McCombs, 1988). Meanwhile, it is different from Nikoopour and Amini Farasani (2010), who found that from among six categories of language learning strategies, metacognitive learning strategies were used frequently and EFL learners minimally used memory learning strategies.

The observed discrepancy between the findings of the present study and those of the above-mentioned studies could be partially attributed to the following factors. It is worth noting that the cultural differences might be one reason for differences between the results of the present study and the above studies. The participants of the present study were Iranian learners. Iranian learners are rarely given opportunities to raise their awareness of affective learning strategies. They do not feel comfortable discussing their feelings and attitudes with others. Moreover, Iranian learners are given little (if any) opportunity to take risks. As a result, they tend to learn language through practicing formulas and patterns. This reason lends a support to the present study in which cognitive learning strategies were used the most in L₂ idioms learning.

The differences in the learners' level of proficiency might affect language learning strategy use. In this study, the participants were intermediate level. As a result, they may not have been able to apply indirect strategies such as metacognitive, social, and affective strategies. They may not have been proficient enough to self-monitor and self-evaluate. Sex differences may be considered as another factor contributing to such differences in the findings. Sex differences were not taken into consideration in the present study although they might have affected the learning strategy use and choice.

One of the possible reasons that may justify why learners used cognitive strategies the most and affective learning strategies the least is that learners preferred to use more familiar strategies and had an inclination to avoid trying less familiar ones. On the other hand, in the Iranian learning context, cognitive learning strategies are more focused on at the expense of affective and social learning strategies. In addition, teachers usually provide learners with Persian equivalents of L₂ idioms. It motivates them to use analyzing, reasoning, transferring, and translating strategies. Iranian learners are also trained to summarize, take note, and highlight important information. These strategies are mainly categorized as cognitive learning strategies.

CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to investigate types of language learning strategies as predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. The research question sought to investigate types of language learning strategies as predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. The multiple regression analyses indicated that cognitive and affective learning strategies were significant predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. Participants who made more use of cognitive learning strategies had better performance on the L₂ idioms comprehension test. In other words, cognitive and affective learning strategies together could account for approximately 43% of the total variance in L₂

idioms comprehension. This significant relationship can be accounted for on the basis of two considerations. First, cognitive learning strategies are direct strategies and involve the mental processing of language directly. Language learners need to have the direct mental processing of language to comprehend L₂ idioms. Second, cognitive learning strategies include information processing strategies like analytic, bottom-up skills, and synthesizing skills. They might be more closely related to L₂ idiom learning (Tajeddin, 2004). In addition, based on the results of previous studies and those of the present study, strategies like reasoning, analyzing, translating, and transferring, which are referred to cognitive learning strategies, help learners to comprehend L₂ idioms better.

On the other hand, it can be concluded that affective learning strategies including strategies to control learners' feelings (e.g., I feel relaxed when I cannot understand L₂ idioms) have a significantly negative correlation with L₂ idioms learning. This is probably due to lack of awareness of these strategies on the part of the learners, which is in turn because the educational system focuses on the cognitive and metacognitive learning processes, and ignores the affective and interpersonal factors involved in the learning process. As a consequence, learners do not consider this category of language learning strategies as real strategies leading to successful learning (Rezaei & Almasian, 2007). Another possible reason is teacher-centered classes in which learners are not allowed to employ more affective learning strategies.

In short, it is believed that language learning strategies are a new area of research in English language learning and teaching (for example, Green & Oxford, 1995; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; Oxford & Cohen, 1992). More research studies are required to explore the effectiveness of six categories of language learning strategies in different English language tasks.

To sum up, the findings showed that language learning strategies can be significant predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension. At the same time, the findings suggested that there are differences among the various language learning strategies as predictors of L₂ idioms comprehension.

Pedagogical implications

The present study can have implications for learners, teachers, syllabus designers, material developers, and researchers. Teachers can share their experiences and language learning strategies with learners while doing language tasks. They should provide students with a rationale for why they need to learn how to use language learning strategies. They can also integrate different language learning strategies with each other. However, they should begin training students to adopt the most successful learning strategies rather than all possible ones. Learners should be given opportunities to discuss language learning strategies which they use to do different language tasks. They should be provided with language learning strategies and an awareness of how and when to use them to make their language learning better and faster. Particularly, they should be given an awareness of the effective language learning strategies to better comprehend L₂ idioms.

Since the focus has shifted from teacher-centered classes to learner-centered classes, material developers should develop materials which:

1. teach different categories of language learning strategies to learners,
2. specify which language learning strategies may be more effective in doing a particular task,
3. explain how and when language learning strategies can be used,
4. provide tasks and exercises which allow learners to make use of different language learning strategies, and
5. give a degree of freedom to learners and teachers to use their own preferred language learning strategies.

In addition, since many English language materials ignore idioms and/or introduce them in vocabulary lists (Irujo, 1986), materials developers should provide sections and exercises focused on idioms independently. These exercises should motivate learners to apply various effective language learning strategies.

Researchers should also conduct more studies on the effect of language learning strategies on different aspects of language and provide learners, teachers, syllabus designers, and materials developers with information about effective and less effective language learning strategies.

On the whole, since cognitive learning strategies were found to be the most commonly used strategies by successful idiom learners in this study, learners, teachers, researchers, syllabus designers, and materials developers should put more emphasis on this category of learning strategies. For example, they may develop and use activities which promote memory-enhancing strategies (e.g., mnemonic technique). At the same time, teachers, syllabus designers, and materials developer should make learners aware of affective and social strategies because they have not received much attention in classrooms. Activities for teaching L₂ idioms should provide students with different categories of language learning strategies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are some limitations which are involved in the present study:

1. The participants were both females and males at different ages; therefore, the age and sex of the participants were not taken into account.
2. There were only 120 participants. So, the generalizability of findings must be treated cautiously.
3. The level of proficiency of the participants was limited to intermediate and upper-intermediate levels.
4. The participants' background knowledge may have affected their use of language learning strategies and idiom comprehension; however, it was not the concern of this study.

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Appendix: Tables

Table 3.1. Descriptive statistics for idiom comprehension test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	KR-21 r
Idiom comprehension	112	2.00	28.00	16.6607	6.41304	41.127	0.84
Valid N (listwise)	112						

Table 3.2. Correlations between newly developed idiom comprehension test and an already established test

		Idiom comprehension	Criterion
Idiom comprehension	Pearson Correlation	1	.824**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	112	112

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).