

L2 IDIOM LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF DISTANCE LEARNING: A FOCUS ON TEXTUAL AND PICTORIAL GLOSSING AND HYPERLINK

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of textual and pictorial glossing and hyperlink on L2 idiom comprehension in distance learning context. The participants, 60 Intermediate female English as a foreign language (EFL) students, were randomly assigned to 4 groups of 15. All groups received two stories a week through Email. Each group received the stories with a different mode of presentation. Two groups were provided with hyperlinked idioms: pictorial and textual hyperlink. The other two groups received instruction through glosses, pictorial and textual glosses. At the end of the treatment period, a multiple choice test was administered to measure receptive knowledge of idioms. The findings showed that the pictorial groups outperformed the textual groups in both hyperlink and glossing conditions on the comprehension test. The present study may have implications for teachers, learners, material writers, textbook authors, CALL package designers and distance learning planners in that it may encourage them to add pictorials to the verbal input.

KEY WORDS: idiom learning, distance learning, gloss

INTRODUCTION

In today's society, the web-based environment of education has provided learners with the opportunity to improve their knowledge of second language (L2) and enhance their communicative competence by the use of various web-based services such as: Email, chat, online dictionaries, online magazines, electronic banking, electronic books, electronic shopping, private online language tutoring courses, etc. Furthermore, the internet has made it possible for learners to choose and manage the process of their learning regardless of the physical location of them.

Another side of this study is idioms. Idioms are one of the crucial culturally integrated constituents of any language. Idioms have received considerable attention from pedagogical point of view in recent years (e.g., Abel, 2003; Boers, 2001; Cooper, 1999; Gibbs, 1980). Researchers and instructors have offered many presentation modes to instruct idioms including L2 definition, L1 explanation, etymology elaboration, pictorial elucidation, glosses, etc.

Nevertheless, the issue of applying the most effective presentation mode of teaching idioms has generated a substantial amount of controversy among researchers. Boers (2001) states that associating an idiom with its etymology has been shown to enhance retention. He believes that the simple question ‘Where might this expression come from?’ has a facilitative role in helping learners to call up in their minds a concrete scene. On the other hand, Fotovatnia and Khaki (2012) point out the pedagogical value of pictures for the teaching of both meaning and form of decomposable idioms. Boers, Piriz, Stengers, and Eyckmans (2009), in a small-scale experiment, addressed the question of whether pictorial elucidation helps retention of the form of idioms, i.e. their precise lexical composition. Results revealed that the addition of pictorial elucidation contributes little to learners’ retention of linguistic forms.

The objective of the present study is to investigate the effect of four presentation modes (pictorial hyperlink, pictorial gloss, textual hyperlink, and textual gloss) on SL idioms learning. Previous studies on idioms have demonstrated the positive effect of these modes on L2 idiom learning in classroom context. This study is an attempt to compare them with each other in order to see which one is the most effective in the context of distance learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

By the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web, learners have the opportunity to manage the process of their learning based on their need and purpose. In addition, one culturally integrated aspect of any languages is idioms. Also, there are many modes of idiom presentation. The debate is about which mode is the most effective and compatible mode in distance learning context.

Idioms

An appropriate use of idiomatic expressions is a sign of language fluency. Many advanced language learners are unable to utilize these expressions appropriately, or they avoid using them. In the literature, idioms have been defined by many linguists and lexicographers in different ways. According to Cooper (1999), an idiom is an expression whose meaning cannot always be readily derived from the usual meaning of its constituent elements. Likewise, Abel (2003) holds that a decomposable idiom is an idiom whose individual components contribute to its figurative meaning, whereas the constituents of a nondecomposable idiom do not make such a contribution. In an attempt to offer a tentative idiom classification, Andreou and Galantomos (2008) believe that Greek idioms can be categorized as figurative idioms, idiomatic expressions based on historical and cultural knowledge in general, and pure idioms (i.e. non compositional idioms).

Different presentation modes of idiom

Mayer (1997) mentions differences among delivery media, presentation modes, and sensory modalities. He refers to delivery media as the system used to present instruction, such as a book-based medium versus a computer-based medium. Presentation modes refer to the format used to represent the presented instruction, such as words versus pictures, and modality refers to the information processing channel that a learner uses to process the information such as acoustic versus visual information processing. According to Mayer (2008), a central challenge of

psychology and education is the development of the science of instruction aimed at understanding how to present material in ways that help people learn.

Multimedia

Providing appropriate and relevant pictures depicting concrete and relevant scenes makes materials more appealing and may foster comprehension and retrieval of L2 idioms and words. In addition to pictures, using videos, sounds, animated pictures, drawings, and video clips becomes common ways of presenting idioms or words.

The term multimedia means different things on different levels. On the level of technology, it means the use of multiple delivery media such as computers, screens, and loudspeakers. On the level of presentation formats, it means the use of different forms of representation such as texts and pictures. On the level of sensory modalities, it means the use of multiple senses such as the eye and the ear (Mayer, 2005, pp. 49-70).

To demonstrate the importance of pictures in education, Yeh and Wang (2003) conducted a study to compare the effectiveness of three types of vocabulary annotations on vocabulary learning of EFL college students in Taiwan: text annotation only, text plus picture, and text plus picture and sound. The results of the study showed that the version with text plus picture was the most effective type of vocabulary annotation. Similarly, Yushi (2006) investigated the effects of additional pictorial cues in L1 and L2 glosses, and how these additions affect vocabulary learning in a multimedia environment. 195 students from two universities in Japan participated in his study. The students were randomly divided into four groups using four different gloss types: the first group read a story with L1 text-only glosses; the second group read it with L2 text-only; the third group used L1 text-plus-pictorial cues in the glosses; and the fourth group had as their glosses L2 text-plus-pictorial cues. The results showed a significant difference between picture and no-picture groups, suggesting the beneficial effects of pictures with regard to learners' retention of the meaning of words.

Finally, Zarei and Salimi (20012) found evidence supporting the effective role of pictures in L2 vocabulary recognition and production. They compared the effectiveness of three methods of vocabulary presentation: picture, song, and the keyword method on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary recognition and production. Results showed that the group instructed through picture had the best performance.

Gloss

Glossing is another useful mode of idiom and word presentation. Generally, glosses are categorized into two types: Computer-based or multimedia-based glosses versus paper-based glosses. Many researchers have examined the effectiveness of glosses in enhancing vocabulary and idioms knowledge of L2 learners, and have compared various kinds of glosses.

Shahrokni (2009) compared the effect of online textual, pictorial, and textual pictorial glosses on the incidental vocabulary learning of 90 adult elementary Iranian EFL learners. 3 groups of participants were exposed to the research treatment. During 3 sessions of instruction, 5

computerized reading texts including 25 target words were studied. The participants read the texts for comprehension and, at the same time, were able to consult the glosses attached to the target words. Results showed that a combination of text and still images resulted in significantly better incidental vocabulary learning.

In a similar attempt, Yousefzadeh (2011) compared computer-based glosses with traditional glosses. Two groups of participants received instruction in the following conditions: The Computer based group were instructed through computer. i.e. new words were presented with their pictures and L1 translations and the traditional group received material on the paper only with L1 translation. The results indicated the superiority of computer-based glosses.

The impact of CALL in foreign language learning

New technologies offer students a venue for additional interesting and engaging activities in second or foreign language learning. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) provides a motivating and safe environment of learning which may improve students' achievement. Within this context of electronic learning (e-learning), students have the opportunity to choose and manage their learning and to keep interaction and connectivity. To show the powerful role of e-learning, Bielawski and Metcalf (2003) state that e-learning is powerful because it is able to provide the right information to the right people at the right times and places. Furthermore, integrating technologies with language pedagogy may develop learner autonomy and help learners to become independent. Raya and Fernández (2002) emphasizes the effective role of new technologies which can help learners to take a more active part in determining their own objectives and syllabi, as well as the path and timing they choose. They state that by teaching students the necessary skills, they can find information when they need it as well as use it appropriately based on their requirements and purposes.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study addresses the following research question:

Are there any significant differences among the effects of various presentation modes (pictorial hyperlink, pictorial gloss, textual hyperlink, and textual gloss) on L2 idiom comprehension in distance learning context?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of this study were 60 female EFL students at intermediate level of proficiency. All the participants were native speakers of Persian studying in Iran Language Institute in Kermanshah, Iran. Randomly, they were divided into four groups. Each group contained 15 participants who received one of the treatment conditions via the internet.

Instruments

In this study, the following instruments were utilized:

In order to homogenize the participants in terms of their level of proficiency, a Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency was used. It contains 100 multiple-choice items including 40 grammar items in a conversational format, 40 vocabulary items requiring the selection of a synonym or completion of a sentence, and reading passages followed by 20 comprehension questions.

To make sure that the participants had no prior knowledge of the target idioms, an idiom pretest was administered. The test included 121 items containing idioms which were to be presented during the treatment. The participants had to write the English or Persian translation of the idioms. Results revealed that, 20 idioms were familiar for the participants. Therefore, these 20 idioms were excluded for the post tests. All the items of the tests were selected from “*Can You Believe It? Stories and Idioms from Real Life, Book3*” (Huizenga, J., 2000).

The course book used to present idioms was titled “*Can You Believe It? Stories and Idioms from Real Life, Book3*” (Huizenga, J., 2000). The book was published by Oxford University Press. It contained 14 amazing real stories from around the world. Each story included 7 to 10 idioms and 2 to 5 phrasal verbs. For the purpose of this study, phrasal verbs were included in the instruction phase but excluded from the posttests.

A 30-item multiple choice idiom test was administered to compare the effects of textual gloss, textual hyperlink, pictorial gloss, and pictorial hyperlink on the comprehension of idioms and to measure the participants' receptive knowledge of idioms. The time allocated to this posttest was 30 minutes.

Procedure

In order to achieve the aim of the study, the following procedures were followed. First of all, to homogenize the participants, a multiple-choice MTELP was administered to 80 participants. The analysis of the scores indicated that 20 of the participants had to be excluded from the study because of a different proficiency level. So, 60 female intermediate learners took part in the study. Second, to minimize the effect of the participants' background knowledge of the target idioms, a pre-test was administered in the second week of the spring semester 2013. The pre-test contained 112 idioms and the participants were asked to write the meaning of the idioms in English or Persian. Furthermore, they were asked to write their Email address to take part in the virtual course of idioms. Then, the participants were divided into four groups randomly. All the groups received 2 stories a week in pdf format through Email. Each story contained 7 to 10 idioms. The instructor taught the same content to all the students enrolled in the course. However, there were some obvious differences in the way content was delivered. Each group received the content with a different mode of presentation. That is to say, the meaning of the idioms was clarified through various modes for each group:

In group A (textual gloss group), the participants received instruction through textual gloss. To be exact, this group was provided with materials in which the meaning of the target idioms was clarified in a glossary at the end of each story. Participants were asked to read English definition of idioms in a list. In group B (textual hyperlink group), the same materials were sent to the

participants. However, the selected mode of presentation for this group was textual hyperlink. When the participants clicked on a hyperlinked idiom, a new page appeared and showed the idiom and its English definition. The third group, group C (pictorial gloss group), were exposed to the same materials. However, for this group, relevant and clear pictures which depicted target idioms were provided in a glossary at the end of each story. Also, group D (pictorial hyperlink group) were provided with the same materials. They had access to the pictures of idioms by just one click. In other words, when the participants clicked on a hyperlinked idiom, a new page appeared and showed the idiom and its picture.

The fourth phase was the administration of the posttest. A 30-item multiple choice idiom test was administered to all groups to compare the effects of the four presentation modes (textual gloss, textual hyperlink, pictorial gloss, and pictorial hyperlink) on SL idiom comprehension.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The aim of the research question was to investigate whether or not there are any significant differences among the effects of various presentation modes (pictorial hyperlink, pictorial gloss, textual hyperlink, and textual gloss) in distance learning context on L2 idiom comprehension. To do so, a One-Way ANOVA procedure was used. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, etc. are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the ANOVA on idiom comprehension

groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pictorial hyperlink	15	24.3333	3.65800	.94449	22.3076	26.3591
Pictorial gloss	15	23.7333	5.57375	1.43914	20.6467	26.8200
Textual hyperlink	15	19.0000	3.33809	.86189	17.1514	20.8486
Textual gloss	15	18.8000	4.45934	1.15140	16.3305	21.2695
Total	60	21.4667	4.96587	.64109	20.1838	22.7495

Based on Table 1, it can be observed that the highest mean on the idiom comprehension test belongs to the pictorial hyperlink group ($\bar{x} = 24.33$) followed by the pictorial gloss group ($\bar{x} = 23.73$). The third highest mean belongs to the textual hyperlink group ($\bar{x} = 19$). The group instructed through the textual gloss has the lowest mean ($\bar{x} = 18.80$). To see whether or not the differences among the groups are statistically significant, the One-Way ANOVA procedure was used. The obtained results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: ANOVA on learners' idiom comprehension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	398.267	3	132.756	7.036	.000
Within Groups	1056.667	56	18.869		
Total	1454.933	59			$\omega^2 = .23$

In Table 2, based on the observed F value and the significance level ($F(3,56) = 7.03, P < .05$), we can safely claim that there are significant differences among the means of the groups. So, the null hypothesis developed in chapter one is rejected. At the same time, the index of the strength of association ($\omega^2 = .23$) shows that 23% of the total variance in the dependent variable (idiom comprehension) is accounted for by the independent variable (mode of presentation). This means that the remaining 77% of the variance is left unaccounted for. To locate the significant differences, a post hoc Scheffe test was used, the results of which are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple comparisons for the ANOVA on idiom comprehension

(I) group	(J) group	Mean (I-J)	Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pictorial hyperlink	Pictorial gloss	.60000		1.58615	.986	-3.9719	5.1719
	Text hyperlink	5.33333*		1.58615	.016	.7614	9.9053
	Text gloss	5.53333*		1.58615	.011	.9614	10.1053
Pictorial gloss	Text hyperlink	4.73333*		1.58615	.040	.1614	9.3053
	Text gloss	4.93333*		1.58615	.029	.3614	9.5053
Textual hyperlink	Text gloss	.20000		1.58615	.999	-4.3719	4.7719

As the above table shows, there are statistically significant differences between both of the pictorial groups and the textual groups. In other words, the pictorial groups outperformed the textual groups in both hyperlink and glossing conditions on the idiom comprehension test. At the same time, there are no statistically significant differences between the pictorial groups. It can be claimed that pictures (regardless of whether they are hyperlinked, or glossed) can positively influence idiom comprehension in the distance learning context.

Discussion

Regarding the research question of this study, the outcomes supported the positive effect of pictures on L2 idiom comprehension in the context of distance learning. This finding of the present study is consistent with a number of studies some of which were reviewed in chapter 2, such as Fotovatnia and Khaki (2012), who pointed out the pedagogical value of pictures in the teaching of both meaning and form of decomposable idioms. Also, Yushi (2006); and Zarei and Salimi (2012) showed the positive effect of pictures in teaching and learning L2 words. Likewise,

Kost, Foss, and Lenzini (1999); Shahrokni (2009); and Yousefzadeh (2011) supported the superiority of multimedia gloss in improving L2 learners' comprehension of L2 words. All these studies confirmed the significant effect of picture elucidation in idiom comprehension and word learning. Also, the results of the present study are in accordance with the claim of the cognitive theory of multimedia learning (CTML) (Mayer, 1997, 2001). According to Mayer (2005), human beings process knowledge through two channels: a visual-pictorial and an auditory-verbal (dual-channels assumption); each channel has a limited capacity for processing (limited capacity assumption); and active learning involves carrying out a synchronized set of cognitive processes (active processing assumption). The cognitive theory of multimedia learning specifies five cognitive processes in multimedia learning: selecting relevant words from the presented text or narration, selecting relevant images from the presented illustrations, organizing the selected words into a coherent verbal representation, organizing selected images into a coherent pictorial representation, and integrating the pictorial and verbal representations and prior knowledge. In other words, presentation of the information visually and textually might lead to a deeper level of learning. In this study, pictorial groups were provided with the textual form of idioms in addition to related pictures. They had the opportunity to integrate the textual form of idioms with concrete visual pictures. This may have engaged L2 learners' mind in processing and integrating written form of an idiom and its relevant picture simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to investigate the effects of various presentation modes namely; pictorial hyperlink, pictorial gloss, textual hyperlink, and textual gloss on L2 idiom comprehension in distance learning context. The findings showed that the pictorial groups outperformed the textual groups in both hyperlink and glossing conditions on the comprehension test. To conclude, the addition of relevant and clear pictures makes materials appealing and facilitates comprehension of L2 idioms.

Implications

As multimedia make materials appealing, using this presentation mode can be useful for both teachers and learners. The present study may also have implications for material writers, textbook authors, CALL package designers and distance learning planners in that it may encourage them to add pictorials to the verbal input.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following limitations and delimitations need to be taken into account about the present study:

1. The first and the most important limitation was the difficulty of finding 60 homogeneous participants who had access to computer and internet, and enjoyed a satisfactory level of familiarity with computer-based learning for this self-access study.
2. The sex of the participants was limited to female learners; therefore, the results of the study may not be generalizable to male learners.
3. The participants of this study were limited to the intermediate level learners. So, care must be exercised in generalizing the results beyond its proper limits.

4. Another factor to be taken into account is the small sample of the participants. This further limits the generalizability of the findings.
5. Modes of idiom presentation are classified into different types. It is impossible to compare all the modes in one study. This study has chosen to focus on only selected modes of presentation.
6. There are many ways of conducting distance education; this study was carried out through only one way of distance learning (instruction through Email).
7. The result of this study may be affected by other variables, like age, personality and social factors. These factors have not been taken into account in the present study.

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