

A Case Study of Indonesian Learners In Comprehending English Idiomatic Expressions: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach.

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate whether the students can comprehend idiomatic expression through decoding tools deeper than encoding tools and the students can comprehend idiomatic expression in parts of body idioms theme deeper than the other two idioms, parts of body idioms theme and social idioms theme. The relevance theory that use to analyze the data is Fillmore's theory in 1988 about elements of tools in comprehending idiomatic expressions, there are encoding and decoding. Therefore, this research paper applied a mixed method. The main instruments utilize for data collection is a translation test (containing 30 idioms in sentences) concludes parts of body idiom theme, foods idiom theme, and social theme. The test was given to 30 students of English linguistics department at the seventh grade at Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia as respondents. The obtained data through the translation test showed that the students can comprehend idiomatic expression through decoding tools deeper than encoding tools one and the students can comprehend idiomatic expression in parts of body idioms theme deeper than the other two idiom., parts of body idioms theme and social idioms theme.

Keywords: *idioms expression, encoding, decoding..*

1. INTRODUCTION

Fotovatniaa and Goudarzi (2014: 499) suppose 'idioms' are phrases whose meaning is something different from the literal interpretation of their individual words. There have been many models trying to portray how people understand idioms. One possibility is that metaphorical structures help people understand idioms according to previous experience.

Idiom comprehension becomes even more of a challenge when there is a vague or even no relationship between the surface structure and figurative meaning of an idiom (e.g., to go spare). Since metaphors and idioms are considered the foundation for much of figurative language, the debate regarding the nature of idiom representation, access, and storage is worth considering. In other words, understanding different interpretations of idioms literary translated from an unfamiliar language which is the main focus of the present study, can lead to consciousness-raising as to how various sorts

of idioms taken from other languages are processed in the mind.

A construction grammar itself will affect the way the people comprehend the idiomatic expression. This model of people knowledge only account for what is regular in language, and leaves aside idiomatic units, which according to Fillmore et al (1988: 504), have the status of an 'appendix to the grammar'. In other words, in the standard generative model, the only the complex units that are 'stored whole' are those whose properties cannot be predicted on the basis of the regular rules of the grammar.

Lakoff et.al (1993) in Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014: 1000-1001) contend that idiomatic meaning is not arbitrary; that most idioms can be categorized in metaphor patterns in our conceptual system, and so, the idiomatic meaning is motivated by conceptual metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson further in development of their ideas coined the term

'conceptual metaphor' which "is used to refer to a connection between two semantic areas at the level of thought, such as the metaphorical connection between anger and fire for speakers of many languages" (Lakoff, 1987 in Deignan et. al., 1997: 352). Regarding the distinction between linguistic and conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguists point out that while conceptual metaphors rest on the level of thought and form mental schemas which the human mind uses to establish correspondences across abstract concepts and concrete terms, linguistic metaphors are the concrete realization of conceptual metaphors in language. It is worthy to note that in the course of recent researches on the conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), it has been revealed that a wide number of conceptual metaphors are universal across languages, particularly those which are concerned with simple bodily experiences such as HAPPINESS IS UP and SADNESS IS DOWN (as one can easily relate this upward and downward orientation to the state of happiness and sadness in daily life).

Therefore, the Indonesian learners especially the students of English linguistics department at the seventh grade at Universitas Padjadjaran in Indonesia have different ways in comprehending idiomatic expressions. It can be affected by the background knowledge and the cultural. Through this sense, the researchers focus on analyzing the students' comprehending idiomatic expressions through 2 elements of idiomatic expressions tools that proposed by Fillmore in 1988, those are encoding and decoding. The researchers also focus on comprehending idiomatic expressions in parts of body, foods, and social condition as themes.

1.1 Formulations of the study

The following questions are posed to meet the objectives of the study:

- 1) What element of Fillmore's tools in comprehending idiomatic expression can the students comprehend deeper?
- 2) What theme can the students comprehend in comprehending idiomatic expression?

1.1 Objectives of the study

In order to explain the answer of two formulations of the study above, the researchers conclude two objectives of the study, those are:

- 1) To describe the students' comprehending of idiomatic expression through decoding tools.
- 2) To describe the students' comprehending of idiomatic expression in parts of body idiom theme.

1.3 Studies done in this field

Along with the term, there are many studies that have done in this field. Those are: a research that done by Fotovatniaa and Goudarzib (2014) in their journal 'Idiom Comprehension in English as a Foreign Language: Analysis ability in Focus'. Their study aims to test if analyzability matters in processing the idioms of a language with which participants are not familiar. In the final sense, a group of Persian undergraduate students received 90 English idioms literary translated into Persian from three categories of normally analyzable, abnormally analyzable, and unanalyzable. The students were asked to assign each idiom presented on the screen to one of the three semantic domains of anger, revelation, or secrecy.

In Maltese's research paper in 2012 named 'Linguistic prosody and comprehension of idioms and proverbs in subjects of school age'. The study demonstrates that an understanding prosodic correlates with the understanding of idioms and proverbs, which are crucial for the achievement of metalinguistic awareness, are influenced by the level of schooling and socio-cultural.

In 2015, Giang and Inho did their research paper named 'Comprehension of Figurative Language by Hearing Impaired Children in Special Primary Schools' examined the comprehension of figurative language of 215 hearing impaired children at special primary schools, and 557 hearing children at regular primary schools in Vietnam. The results showed that hearing impaired children comprehended figurative

language much lower than hearing children. The figurative language knowledge of hearing impaired children developed over grades, and their figurative language knowledge was found to be related to reading levels, but not to the ages or hearing levels.

2. Methodology

2.1 The model of the research

It is determined the use of method in this research focus on mix method by using scientific source. A mixed method research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and “mixing” both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2012: 535). The basic assumption is that the uses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself.

2.2 Participants

The participants who took part in the research were chosen among 30 males and females EFL learners of English linguistics department at the seventh grade studying at Universitas Padjadjaran in Bandung, Indonesia. The participants aged 20 to 23 and took English linguistics class in the above mentioned university.

2.2.1 Instruments and materials

The materials and instruments used in this study is a translation test was utilized when participants were done with taking the tests. It was incorporated to serve an important purpose of giving the participants a chance to reflect on their theme preference after the treatment. In other words, they could report any theme preference shift if any existed. This phenomenon could finely distinguish practice from theory. With employing the test, the researchers could make sure the results and the conclusions were not merely based on the objectives made before the treatment only, but based on what happens after the treatment as well. The participants were asked to define the idioms that given.

2.3 Procedure

The experiment, lasting for 45 minutes, was conducted at the English literature classroom of the above mentioned university. The step took in this study was a translation test contains idiomatic expressions of 30 idioms in the sentences was administered to 30 males and females intermediate EFL learners. The allotted time was 45 minutes. 30 participants were chosen based on their grade.

3. Result and Discussion

A study can't be separated from theory. Therefore, the theory is an important part of the research. In this chapter, it will be presented on the basic theory in connection with one's understanding of the idiom is different, according to background knowledge, language acquisition and cultural background of each individual. First of all, we have to know what is idiom first.

Cullen and Hands (2000: 3) state the term 'idiom' is not an easily defined one - it can refer to many kinds of words and phrases. The traditional definition of an idiom is 'a group of words which has a different meaning from the sum of its parts'. For example, you can make someone's blood boil or say they are a sight for sore eyes. Knowing the meanings of all the words in such a phrase will not necessarily help you to understand the meaning of the whole phrase.

Writers and public speakers use idioms generously. The purpose behind this vast use of idioms is to ornate their language, make it richer and spicier and help them in conveying subtle meanings to their intended audience. Not only do idioms help in making the language beautiful, they also make things better or worse through making the expression good or bad. For example, there are several idioms that convey the death of a person in highly subtle meanings and some do the same in very offensive terms.

They are also said to be exact and more correct than the literal words and sometimes a few words are enough to replace a full sentence. They help the writer makes his sense clearer than it is, so that he could convey maximum meanings through minimum words

and also keep the multiplicity of the meanings in the text intact. It has also been seen that idioms not only convey subtle meanings but also convey a phenomenon that is not being conveyed through normal and everyday language and also they keep the balance in the communication. Furthermore, they provide textual coherence, so that the reader could be able to piece together a text that he has gone through and extract meanings the writer has conveyed.

Exploring idiomatic expressions

Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor (1988) in Evans and Green (2006: 643) argue in favour of a model in which, like the lexical item, the complex grammatical construction has semantic and pragmatic properties directly associated with it. We are going to explore Fillmore's typology of idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic expressions are those that a speaker cannot 'work out' simply by knowing the grammar and the vocabulary of a language. This is why idiomatic expressions are described as non-compositional. Instead a speaker has to learn them whole, rather like individual lexical items. Fillmore develop a typology of idiomatic expressions based on four main parameters:

1. Decoding and encoding idioms
2. Grammatical and extra grammatical idioms
3. Substantive versus formal idioms
4. Idioms with and without pragmatic point

Decoding and encoding idioms

Decoding idioms like *kick the bucket* have to be decoded or learnt whole in the sense that meaning of the expression cannot be worked out on first hearing. In contrast, encoding idioms like *wide awake* may be understood on the first hearing. The adjective *wide* functions as a degree modifier, and it is possible to work out that this expression means 'completely awake'. However, the speaker would not be able to predict the conventionality of the expression. In other words, there is nothing in the rules of English that enables a speaker to predict the existence of this expression as opposed to, say, narrow

awake, narrow asleep or wide alert. Encoding idioms also include expressions that are perfectly regular but just happen to represent the conventional way of saying something. For example: Driving license = Driving document = more precise "*a driving permit*"

Grammatical and extra grammatical idioms

Grammatical idioms are expressions that obey the usual rules of grammar. For example, in the grammatical idiom *spill the beans*, a verb takes a noun phrase complement. In contrast, extra grammatical idioms like *all of sudden* do not obey the usual rules of grammar. In this expression, the quantifier *all* is followed by a preposition phrase, where we would expect to find a noun phrase. Furthermore, an adjective, *sudden*, occurs after a determiner where we might expect to find a noun.

Substantive versus formal idioms

Substantive idioms, like most of those we have seen so far, are lexically filled, which means that they have fixed lexical items as part of their composition. For example 'kick the mop' does not have the same communicative impact as 'kick the bucket' and 'spill the beans' does not have the same communicative impact as 'spill the champagne'. Both 'kick the bucket' and 'spill the beans' are substantive idioms because most or all of the substantive or content expressions involved are intrinsic to the idiom. In contrast, formal idioms provide syntactic frames into which different lexical items can be inserted. An example of a formal idiom is the '*let alone* construction'. George doesn't understand math, let alone rocket science. George can't wash up, let alone cook.

Idioms with and without pragmatic point

Some idiomatic expression have a very clear pragmatic function, such as greeting 'how do you do?' or expressing a particular attitude 'what's your car doing in my space?' in contrast, other idiomatic expression appear to be pragmatically neutral, in the sense that they can be used in any pragmatic context. For

example, “by and large” is decoding idiom that is extra grammatical.

Distinction in idiom types/tools

1. Decoding : Neither meaning nor conventionality can be predicted.
2. Encoding : Meaning may be predicted, but not conventionality.
3. Grammatical : Obeys the rules of grammar.
4. Extragrammatical : Does not obey the rules of grammar.
5. Substantive : Lexically filled.
6. Formal : Lexically open.
7. Pragmatic point : Specific pragmatic function.
8. No pragmatic point : Pragmatically neutral.

3.2 Result

In this research, we take two elements of Fillmore typology of idiom or tools, those are: decoding and encoding. Decoding idiom can be said the idiom which is their meaning nor conventionality can be predicted and encoding idiom is the idiom which the meaning may be predicted, but not conventionality. We can conclude that decoding is easier, as our research with 30 students at the seventh grade of English linguistics department at Universitas Padjadjaran as respondent. We give three kinds of idioms, such as part of body idioms, foods idioms, and social idioms to be interpreted and the result are as shown in the table. The first table contains part of body idiom.

Table 1. part of body idiom

NO	PARTS OF BODY IDIOM	DECO DING	ENCO DING	EMP TY	RES PONDENT
1	fight to get the upper hand	18	12	0	30
2	Head in the clouds	17	13	0	30
3	The apple of my eye	18	12	0	30
4	It cost me arm and legs	19	11	0	30
5	Cold shoulder	18	12	0	30
6	All ears	17	13	0	30
7	Cold feet	19	11	0	30
8	Break a leg	18	12	0	30
9	Zip your lip	18	12	0	30

10	Two heads are better than one	19	11	0	30
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Then, the second table contains social idioms:

Table 2. social idioms

NO	SOCIAL IDIOM	DECO ING	ENCO DING	EMP TY	RES PONDENT
1	Social butterfly	4	1	25	30
2	Let the cat out of bag	5	0	25	30
3	Burns a hole in pocket	5	0	25	30
4	Cry your heart out	5	0	25	30
5	Build bridges	4	0	26	30
6	fair-weather friend	4	0	26	30
7	good walls make good neighbors	5	0	25	30
8	be an item	5	0	25	30
9	know someone inside out	5	0	25	30
10	move in the same circles	5	0	25	30

The third table contains foods idioms. We know that foods are the closest segment, but the result shows us that the respondent could not define the meaning correctly as they define parts of body idiom. But 25% of the respondent still can decode it correctly.

Table 3. foods idioms

NO	FOODS IDIOM	DECO DING	ENCO DING	EMP TY	RES PONDENT
1	The apple of my eye	7	1	22	30
2	Piece of cake	7	1	22	30
3	Use your noodle	6	0	24	30
4	Turn as red as tomato	8	3	19	30
5	Smart cookie	7	1	22	30
6	Top banana	7	1	22	30
7	Big cheese	7	1	22	30
8	Bad apple	6	0	24	30
9	Bread and butter	8	2	20	30
10	To sell like hot cakes	7	1	22	30

4. Conclusion

We can conclude that most of the respondents more interested in parts of body idioms. So, the percentage reaches 18 or 60% out of 100% from 30 respondent. Then, 7 or the same with 25% out of 100% from 30 respondent, and 5 or 15% out of 100% from 30 respondent. As shown in the fourth table and the diagram.

Table 4. respondents' interest in idioms

FILLMORE TOOLS	PARTS OF BODY IDIOM	FOODS IDIOM	SOCIAL IDIOM	RESPONDENT
DECODING	10	5	3	18
ENCODING	8	1	0	9
EMPTY	0	1	2	3
TOTAL RESPONDENT	18	7	5	30

Finally, we know that in daily life sometimes we use idiom for communication. Whether in English or in Indonesian often come across a phrase or sentence that is the real meaning of every word but its meaning has turned around 180 degrees (idiom). English Idiom comprehension is very important, especially for learners at English department. From this research, we can see that 30 respondents at the seventh grade at English linguistic department Univesitas Padjadjaran can define the meaning of three kinds of idiom, although not completely true.

As shown in the table and diagram, most of respondents can comprehend the idiom deeper in decoding element than encoding element through the percentage reach 18 or 60 % for decoding, 9 or 30 % for encoding, and 3 or 10 % for empty answer. Most of them can predict the meaning although not completely true.

Then, for the second result, most of the respondent mastered parts of body idiom through the percentage reach 18 or 60% out of 100% from 30 respondents. Then, 7 for food idiom or 25% out of 100% from 30

respondents, and 5 for social idiom or 15% out of 100% from 30 respondents.

In order to make clear the results of the research, let us look at the pie diagrams below:

diagram 1. Idiom mastery

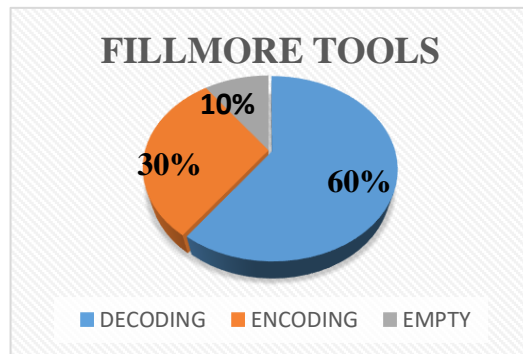
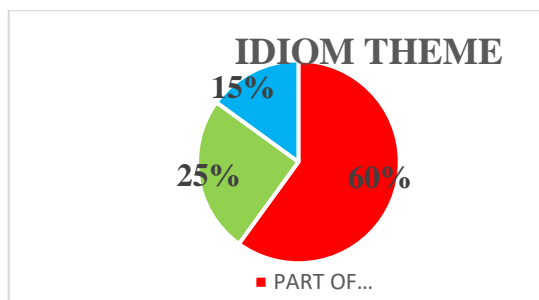


diagram 2. Idiom theme percetage



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