The Effect of Etymological Elaboration, Pictorial Elucidation, and Podcasting on Comprehension of Idioms

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of three idiom learning strategies; etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, and podcasting on idiom comprehension by the EFL learners. A total number of 60 homogeneous upper-intermediate learners studying English in Shiva language institute in Qom, Iran, were selected based on the result of Oxford Placement Test (OPT). After applying the Test, the attendees were randomly divided into three groups of almost equal size and took a thirty-item pretest to ensure their unfamiliarity with the idioms. The idioms that were familiar even to one attendee were eliminated and at last 30 idioms were chosen for the instruction. Then, the etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, and podcasting groups received their relevant treatments during 10 sessions. After the implementation of the experiment, the researcher administered the posttest to examine the influence of these strategies on idiom comprehension. Finally, the data were analyzed by one-way ANOVA. The results proved that etymological elaboration strategy was the less effective technique in developing learners' idiom comprehension and the two techniques of pictorial elucidation and podcasting had equal degree of impact in leading to learners' idiom comprehension.

1. Introduction

According to Hudson (1980), language is at the center of human life and the ability to learn a language is among the greatest mental achievements of humankind (as stated in Risi Gahroei & Tabatabaei, 2013). Vasiljevic (2012) claims that figurative language seems to have received less attention than it might deserve. A case in point is the treatment of idiomatic expressions. Abid Thyab (2016) believes that idiomatic expressions are part of every language. Idioms are consisted of several units of words that convey both literal and figurative meanings. In the majority of cases, every single word with a literal meaning of whole components which represent a sentence cannot reveal the figurative meaning of it effortlessly. Idioms are one type of multi-word units (MWUs). Yet over the years, though linguists and lexicographers made an effort to clarify and categorize idioms, their attempt returned no consensus categorization criteria. Cowie (1998) mentions this problem and states, "Differences between word combinations such as free phrases, restricted collocations and idioms – all crucial to the foreign learner – are neither presented consistently nor explained adequately in reference works." (p. 218). Wedgwood (2009) defines etymology as what steps does a word come to have the meaning in which it is actually found and what is the earliest source to which it can be traced. The crucial role of etymology in L2 vocabulary learning has long been enhanced by many researchers. Reisi Gahroei and Tabatabaei (2013) have already investigated the impact of etymology instruction on idiom learning of Iranian EFL intermediate learners. The result of their study revealed that the participants receiving treatments (roots, and origin of the idioms) in the experimental group performed better compared to the control group. Back to idioms, according to Haghshenas and Hashemian (2016), associating idioms with information about their origin and source domains is called *etymological elaboration* (p. 141). Recently, some researchers addressed the issue of the effectiveness of etymological elaboration in idiom learning and teaching (Coryell, 2012; Haghshenas & Hashemian, 2016; Zarei & Rahimi, 2012; Zolfagharkhani & Ghorbani Moghadam, 2011).

The other practical mode of idiom presentation is showing pictures. Using visual illustrations or asking students to provoke images for pairs of words have been found to increase the possibility that the imagery system will be activated and the input remembered (Clark & Paivio, 1991). According to Boers,

Lindstromberg, Littlemore, Stengers, and Eyckmans (2008), pictorial elucidation is a process of stimulating an association between a language and an image through the use of schematic drawings or pictures. Even though there are some difficulties in learning idioms, it is essential for language learners to learn most of them. For that reason, it is pivotal to find a practical method for teaching idioms to boost students' learning process. Some teachers are more successful than others in teaching the same subjects. Podcasting is another practical way of learning idioms in which it stands for Portable on Demand Broadcasting. Podcasting is a method for distributing any digital media file (podcast), or series of files, over the Internet for playback on portable media players, such as iPods, and personal computers. The podcasting process begins with the creation of content through the use of audio capturing and editing tools (Rajic, 2013). Rajic (2013) refers to podcasts as the educational multimedia technologies that are generally available and highly useful in modern educational practices (p. 90). Podcasts propose language learners with samples of real language and authentic materials (Thorne & Payne, 2005). Podcasts can be used as a supplement to students' textbook materials (Stanley, 2006). Honeck (1997), points that figurative language is a language that means one thing literally but is taken to mean something different. Usually, an idiom has a conventional meaning which cannot be attained by the meaning of its words (Gibbs, 1994).On account of the widespread use of idiomatic expressions in daily conversations and in order to develop speech fluency, L2 learners need to learn how to use idiomatic expressions appropriately (De Caro, 2009; Oppenheim, 2000), but these expressions often pose particular problems to L2 learning (Cooper, 1998; Fong, 2006; Steinel, Hulstijn & Steinel, 2007). For sorting out these problems, L2 researchers and instructors have presented some strategies to instruct idioms, such as L2 definitions, etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, L1 explanation, rote memorization, and so forth (Abbasi & Zarei, 2013). 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. Yet, quite a few studies have determined the effects of etymological elaboration and pictorial elucidation on idiom learning. Furthermore, there is almost no research on investigating learning idioms by podcasting. Therefore, the present study was an attempt to investigate the effects of three strategies, pictorial elucidation, etymological elaboration, and podcasting on the comprehension and retention of idiomatic expressions. Zarei and Rahimi (2012), believe that recently based on the pedagogical point of view, idioms have received a great deal of attention. This study has pedagogical value to those who are eager to teach or learn idiomatic expressions through facilitative strategies as well as those who are interested in investigating the area of idiomatic expressions. As a result, English language instructors/instructresses whose learners have difficulty learning idioms and are frustrated with comprehending them in traditional and uncreative ways can take the efficacious course of action to foster idiom acquisition and make the learners interested in learning idioms by paving the way of comprehending idioms. In addition, there are many learners who do not have the opportunity to take part in English courses because of many reasons such as economical and social issues; and have no choice but learning on their own as a self-study course. The findings of this study can make these groups of learners autonomous in being their own tutor and at the same time experiencing how it feels to be a material developer, especially in podcasting strategy. Moreover, materials developers may also use the findings of this study. They can develop idiom books or flash cards with pictures or related etymologies or both of them. At last, this study may persuade other interested researchers in this field to conduct further studies and investigations on the same topic with applying different treatments to the mentioned strategies, or even do more researches on other types and subcategories of idiomatic expressions and narrowly phraseology

1.1. Research Question and Hypothesis

RQ: Are there any statistically significant differences among the effects of etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, and podcasting strategies on idiom learning and retention by upper-intermediate EFL learners?

H0: There are not any statistically significant differences among the effects of etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, and podcasting strategies on idiom learning and retention by upper-intermediate EFL learners.

2. literature review

Idioms are consisted of several units of words that convey both literal and figurative meanings. In the majority of cases, every single word with a literal meaning of whole components which represent a sentence cannot reveal the figurative meaning of it effortlessly.

In addition to facing difficulties in acquiring and understanding idioms for L2 learners, a vast number of rather written or spoken texts is consisted of idioms. In addition to a study carried out by Pollio, Barlow, Fine and Pollio (1977) political debates, psychology texts, novels, and psychotherapy sessions were analyzed. ''Most English speakers utter about 10 million novel metaphors per lifetime and 20 million idioms per lifetime'' (p. 140). Cooper (1999) mentioned, ''Indeed, mastery of an L2 may depend on part how well learners comprehend at the outset and produce the idioms at long last encountering with every language" (p. 234).

2.1. Etymological Elaboration

According to (Ross, 1969), etymology is concisely determined as the scientific study of the origins and history of the changing meanings and forms of words. Etymology usage in L2 vocabulary learning has lengthy been grasped by ESL specialist. At the Chinese University of Hong Kong Pierson (1989) suggested pedagogy with etymology instruction. Particularly, he aimed to promote meaningful vocabulary learning in ESL by integrating the science of words' origins. Among his work, two examples are noticeable. The first example is involved in active learning of new words in reading materials. Commonly, Pierson's students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong were dictionary-reliant and liable to seek advice in dictionaries intuitively whenever they encountered new words in reading. Hence, Pierson advised them for learning strategy in case of possibility, trying to use an advanced learner dictionary and determine the origins of the words, not just simply catch their meanings.

2.2. Pictorial Elucidation

According to Boers, Lindstromberg, Littlemore, Stengers, and Eyckmans (2008), pictorial elucidation is a process of stimulating an association between a language and an image through the use of schematic drawings or pictures. Unluckily, attention has been absent to visual and other non-linguistic resources, which would be useful in learning idioms. The idea of the visual literacy of learners has appeared as a persuasive concept in this regard (e.g., Galda, 1993). To enhance students' motivation and interaction in class as well as in learning particular language skills and knowledge, it is suggested to

use particular visual-verbal aids (Danan, 1992). Image and word are possibly now more independent, regularly separated from one another, with a new relationship established on a distant connection. Benson (1997) explained the point by stating the idea that "words are the images of things" (p. 141).

2.3. Podcasting

Looking up the word podcast in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2015, you would come to the definition pod (i.e., from the Apple iPod) and broadcast. Podcasts are a series of digital audio and video recordings uploaded on the web with the aid of Rapid Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds (Lafferty & Walch, 2006). RSS feeds authorize listeners to download their favorite podcasts using podcatcher software like iTunes. Listeners do not need to visit every website frequently for new podcast episodes; they can now find a giant collection of podcasts on the iTunes store. Many types of podcasts are easily found on the Internet such as television podcasts, radio podcasts, classroom podcasts, and individual or group podcasts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study sample was made up of 60 upper-intermediate level EFL learners, all studying in a language institute in Qom, Iran, and was homogenized in terms of their general English mastery. All the participants were adults – above 19 years of age. Their age distribution could be found in Table 1.

Table 1 .*Age Distribution of the Sample*

Age Range	Population
Between 19 and 25	19
Between 25 and 30	24
Between 30 and 40	13
Over 40	4

The learners in the sample were only female, and they had a wide range of occupations, varying from housewives to medical doctors. The participants, also, possessed various levels of education, whose distributions are illustrated in Table 2.

Table2. Education Distribution of the Sample

Age Range	Population
Doctorate	2
Master's degree	17
Bachelor's degree	34
Associate's degree	3
Undergraduate Diploma	4

In order to increase the level of generalizability of this study, the researcher chose not to extend any types of delimitations to the sample in terms of individual differences (e.g. learning styles, personality variables, socio-economic status, etc.).

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

The first instrument the researcher applied was a past paper of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) in 2016. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) is a standardized test from Oxford University Press. It provides the information that is needed to find out about a learner's language proficiency level. To homogenize the participants prior to the instructional intervention program, the researcher applied the Oxford Placement Test. The listening section of the paper-based OPT is composed of 100 questions and requires test takers to choose which of a pair of similar sounding words they hear, for example the difference between "oarsman" and "horseman." The grammar section also contains 100 questions, and like the Michigan English Placement Test is delivered in multiple-choice format. The items focused on typical verb tense and sentence structure points taught in most ESL classes.

3.2.2. Idiom Test

For choosing idioms, different sources were used. First, the *Dictionary of Idioms and their Origins* (1992) and *Collins CoBuild Dictionary of Idioms* (2002) were the major sources of this study, and the majority of the idioms were selected from those that are stared* (as high-frequency idioms) in the second abovementioned dictionary. Second, the etymology of the idioms was taken into consideration. Among the idioms, only those were selected that have interesting and appropriate cultural origins. Third, the pictures of the idioms were assigned to the participants to be taken via the most available technology in hand (i.e., cell phones) and brought to the class to be discussed. Fourth, podcasts on idioms were used in the class to teach selected idioms. To ensure the learners' unfamiliarity with the idioms, a teacher-made pre-test including the list of 30 idioms selected from the *Dictionary of Idioms and their Origins* by Linda and Roger Flavell (1992) and *Collins CoBuild Dictionary of Idioms* (2002) was given to the three experimental groups. The idioms that are known even by one participant were crossed out and replaced with a new one, and finally, 30 unfamiliar idioms were chosen for instruction.

3.3. Procedure

Initially, the researcher selected 71 adult upper-intermediate interested learners who were studying English as a Foreign Language in a language institute in Qom, Iran. She administered the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to them, and after scoring the papers, she selected the learners with scores within one standard deviation above and below from the mean as the homogenous learners. This shrank the sample to 60 upper-intermediate learners. Then, she divided the sample into three 20-member groups and administered the teacher-made idiom pre-test to them. The idiom pre-test took 30 minutes and included 30 multiple-choice items. The first treatment group was the pictorial group (PG). The learners of this group were paired up. It means the class included 10 groups of two partners. An induction course was held to the class before the official start of the class to get them familiar with the process of the class. Therefore, adhering to Boers, Lindstromberg, Littlemore, Stengers and, Eyckmans (2008), every session a paper copy with the three expressions accompanied by their associated pictures meant to elucidate the literal sense of the keywords were given to learners. Then, the learners in pairs were given

five minutes to study and discuss the information, after which the copies were taken away from them. Then, they start guessing what the photo was trying to describe. After that, the allotted time was over, they were given a multiple-choice exercise where the same three expressions were listed and for each, the learners were asked to decide which of four (one option as the distracter) options, was the appropriate paraphrase. The teacher then went over the multiple-choice exercise to correct the misinterpretations through verbal-explanation. Finally, the learners were provided by the idiom itself and its meaning and examples from *Collins CoBuild Dictionary of Idioms* (2002). The second treatment group was etymological group (EG). The learners of this group were paired up, too. As mentioned above, it means the class included 10 groups of two partners. An induction course was held to the class before the official start of the class to get them familiar with the process of the class. Adhering to Boers, Eyckmans and, Stengers (2007), every session a paper copy of three expressions were given to learners. In the first step, they were supposed to do an identify-the-source task (i.e. 'what domain of experience do you think this idiom may come from?'). To do so, each pair was provided with a multiple-choice task that includes five options per idiom and the learners choose as many options as necessary for them to find the correct source domain. Only on choosing the right option the learners received feedback on the origin of the idiom by looking for the idiom in the *Dictionary of Idioms and their Origins* (1992). After that, the identify-the-source multiple-choice task over the pairs were provided with a comprehension task (matching the idiom with the correct definition) that offers three options per idiom and again they choose options until they find the correct one then they were asked to look for the idiom through going online in *Free Dictionary on Idioms* to check the correctness of their choice. Finally, at the end of the course, they were exposed to a multiple-choice test. This is meant to measure the recall of the idioms. After being sure of the correctness of their choice, it was time for presenting the origin and let others say the appropriate idiom. This process was continued every session until the 30 idioms were covered during the course. The third group was podcasting group (POG). An induction course was held to this group to inform them of the procedure. The learners were not paired up. Every session, three idioms were taught through podcasting in which were extracted from 'ESL Podcast' published by Afrand Software Publications. ESL Podcast is run by a team of experienced English as Second Language professors with over 30 years of high school, adult, and university ESL teaching experience.   To start, the teacher asks some questions from the students to let them become familiar with the content of the idiom before playing the podcast. The students were exposed to each podcast that aimed to teach a different idiom, three times. For the first time, they listened to it carefully and then told the teacher a general understanding of each. For the second time of listening, the teacher wrote the idiom on the board and retold the definition to the learners so they could get it more clearly. As the last step, the podcast was played for the third time to review what has been taught. Finally, after five weeks of instruction of the idioms in 10 sessions, the experimental period comes to the end. The post-test was run three days after it. Of course, the participants were not announced in advance that they were going to take part in this test. Twenty-four hours prior to the testing day, they were asked to participate in a review class. The post-test was the same as the post-test, which included 30 multiple-choice items.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 reveals that the statistical mean for the whole sample was 19.6, and the standard deviation was 3.85.

Table3. *Descriptive Statistics of Idiom Pre-test*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		
				Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Pre-Test	60	19.60	3.85444	.806	.309	2.61

Table 4 illustrates that the three treatment groups had means of 19.82, 19.35, and 19.65, which suggested they had little difference between them. Moreover, the Skewness ratio of the pictorial group (PG) was 2.42, which exceeded the normal distribution range. Hence, the nonparametric test of Kruskal Wallis was applied.

Table4. *Descriptive Statistics of Idiom Pre-Test within Groups*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		
				Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
EG	20	19.82	3.87731	.369	.512	0.72
PG	20	19.35	4.35920	1.241	.512	2.42
POG	20	19.65	3.46068	.807	.512	1.58

Table 5 depicts that the means rank of the etymological group (EG) was 31.5, that of the pictorial group (PG) was 28.35, and podcasting group's (POG) mean rank was 31.65.

Table5. *Kruskal Wallis Ranks on Pre-Test*

	Grouping	N	Mean Rank
	EG	20	31.50
	PG	20	28.35
Pre-Test	POG	20	31.65
	Total	60	

Table 6 illustrates that the asymptotic p value of the Kruskal Wallis test was .796 at the significant level of 95%, so no significant differences between the idiom scores of the three groups were reported.

Table6. *Kruskal Wallis Ranks on Pre-Test*

	Pre-Test
Chi-square	.457
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.796

Overall, it could be concluded that all the three treatment groups in this study enjoyed ample levels of homogeneity and inter-group homogeneity both for general English mastery, and idiom proficiency. Hence, the groups were ready for receiving the treatments that were assigned to them.

4.2. Checking the Null Hypothesis

As shown in Table 7, the mean score of the sample was 24.9 and the standard deviation was 5.96.

Table7. *Descriptive Statistics of Idiom Post-test*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		
				Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Post-Test	60	24.90	5.96941	.245	.309	0.79

As depicted in Table 8, the podcasting group (POG), with the mean of 28.75, staged the best performance in the post-test, followed by pictorial group (PG), with the average of 25.85. The etymological group (EG), with the average of 20.1, achieved the poorest scores. Since the Skewness ratios depicted all the three groups had normal distribution of scores, the Analysis of the Variance was administered in order to determine whether or not the differences between the means of the three groups in the post-test were significant.

Table8.Descriptive Statistics of Idiom Post-test within Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		
				Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
EG	20	20.10	3.09754	-.110	.512	-0.36
PG	20	25.85	6.04609	.054	.512	0.11
POG	20	28.75	4.86799	-.345	.512	-1.12

As depicted in Table 9, the p value of the ANOVA was 0.000 <0.05 (df between groups: 2, df within groups: 57, F: 16.65), hence, the Analysis of the Variance did report a meaningful difference between the scores of the three groups. Hence, the null hypothesis of this study was rejected, and it was confirmed via data analysis that a statistically significant difference did exist between the impact of podcasting, pictorial elucidation, and etymological elaboration strategies of teaching on the improvement of learners' idiom progress.

Table9.ANOVA on Idiom Post-Test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	775.300	2	387.650	16.650	.000
Within Groups	1327.100	57	23.282		
Total	2102.400	59			

In order to pinpoint the location of the mean differences that ANOVA reported, the researcher opted for administering the post-hoc Scheffe test. As it could be depicted in Table 10, the difference between the means of POG and PG groups was not significant (sig: 0.174 > 0.05). However, the differences between the means of EG and POG (0.000 < 0.05) and PG (0.002 < 0.05) were significant. Hence, it could be argued that the etymological elaboration strategy of teaching, with the average of 20.1, was less effective in the development of learners' idiom than the other two strategies. Nonetheless, although the mean of POG was 28.75 and higher than the mean of PG (25.85), podcasting did not have a stronger impact in improving learners' idiom than pictorial elucidation strategy, since Scheffe test did not report any significant differences between the two means.

Table10. Scheffe Test on Post-Test Scores

(I) Grouping	(J) Grouping	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
EG	POG	-8.65	1.52	.000	-12.4852	-4.8148
	PG	-5.75	1.56	.002	-9.5852	-1.9148
POG	EG	8.65	1.52	.000	4.8148	12.4852
	PG	2.90	1.52	.174	-.9352	6.7352
PG	EG	5.75	1.52	.002	1.9148	9.5852
	POG	-2.90	1.52	.174	-6.7352	.9352

Table 11 depicts that the subsets of the three groups confirmed the results of the Scheffe test. The EG had a smaller mean than the other two groups, which had a significant difference with them. Nevertheless, POG and PG had higher means than EG, but with no significant differences.

Table 11. Subsets of the Scheffe Test on Post-Test

Grouping	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
EG	20	20.1000	
PG	20		25.8500
POG	20		28.7500
Sig.		1.000	.174

Overall, based on the data analysis of this study, etymological elaboration strategy of teaching proved to be the least effective technique in developing learners' idiom than podcasting and pictorial elucidation strategies. Moreover, the data analysis of this study proved that podcasting and pictorial elucidation strategy were both equally effective in boosting learners' idiom proficiency.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion

The findings of the study agree with Rezapour, Gorjian, and Pazhakh's (2012) who argued that listening on podcasts improve confident and fluency of learners and if participants work forward on this way they past faster their level than ever thought in which prove direct evidence of improving fluency in speaking. By comparing fluency in the experimental pre-test and post-test, fluency is reinforced in the experimental post-test. In their study experimental group outperformed the control group, but in comparison to accuracy in the experimental group. It reveals that their accuracy scores were higher than the fluency in the tests. Moreover, the findings of their study showed that the background knowledge of both groups may reinforce more by the reconstruction podcasts instruction. The lower scores of the control group may be due to the teacher-centeredness of the instruction or low motivation of participants that

may make the students bored. Braun (2007) examining also supported the findings by stating that authentic and relevant podcasts have a positive effect on librarian speaking skill and their motivation. Some previous studies are also in line with the findings of this study. For example, Boers, Piquer Piriz, Stengers, and Eyckmans (2009) suggest that pictorial elucidation helps learners comprehend and remember the meaning of L2 idioms. The finding of the present study is consistent with a number of other studies 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. Based on their research, it seems that addition of a picture enhanced the learner's understanding of meaning as well as preserving the form of the idiom in the memory. This is in line with the claim of the generative theory of multimedia teaching (Mayer, 1997, 2001). As Mayer (2005) believes, it is through two channels that human beings represent and manipulate knowledge: a visual-pictorial and an auditory-verbal (Mayer, 2002, 2005).

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