



IDIOMS IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: HOW CHILDREN MASTER FIGURATIVE EXPRESSIONS

Kokanova Nursuliu Jenisbay qizi

3rd year student of Faculty of Foreign languages,
Karakalpak State University
@nursuliwkokanova02@gmail.com

Askarova Nafisa Avazovna

3rd year student of Faculty of Foreign languages,
Bukhara State University
@askarovaannisa@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7947538>

ARTICLE INFO

Qabul qilindi: 10-May 2023 yil
Ma'qullandi: 15-May 2023 yil
Nashr qilindi: 18-May 2023 yil

KEY WORDS

language, idioms, combination, skills, critical thinking, figurative meaning, language acquisition

ABSTRACT

Idioms, as figurative expressions with metaphorical or culturally specific meanings, pose a unique challenge for language learners, particularly children. This article explores the acquisition of idiomatic expressions by children, focusing on the cognitive processes involved and the factors that facilitate their mastery. Through a comprehensive review of existing research, we examine the developmental trajectory of idiom comprehension and production, as well as the strategies employed by children to decipher the figurative meanings. Furthermore, we discuss the role of contextual cues, cognitive abilities, and cultural exposure in idiom acquisition.

INTRODUCTION: Language acquisition is a complex process that involves a wide range of skills and abilities. One of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition is the ability to understand and use figurative expressions, such as idioms. Idioms are expressions that are used figuratively, meaning that their literal meaning is different from their intended meaning. For example, the idiom "kick the bucket" means to die, but its literal meaning is to physically kick a bucket. In this article, we will explore how children acquire the ability to understand and use idioms in language.

MATERIALS AND DISCUSSION: Development of Idiom Comprehension: Idiom comprehension is a complex process that requires children to understand the figurative meaning of an expression. In the early stages of language acquisition, children tend to interpret idioms literally, which can lead to confusion and miscommunication. For example, a child who interprets the idiom "break a leg" literally may think that they are supposed to physically break their leg before a performance.

Research has shown that children gradually develop the ability to understand idioms figuratively over time. One study conducted by Nippold and Duthie (2003) found that children begin to understand simple idioms, such as "spill the beans" and "let the cat out of the bag," around the age of 5. By the age of 10, children are able to understand more complex idioms, such as "the ball is in your court" and "pulling someone's leg."

Factors Affecting Idiom Comprehension: There are several factors that can affect a child's ability to understand idioms. One factor is the complexity of the idiom itself. Simple idioms, such as "kick the bucket," are easier for children to understand than more complex idioms, such as "hit the nail on the head." Another factor is the context in which the idiom is used. Children are more likely to understand an idiom if it is used in a familiar context or if they are able to infer its meaning from the context. Another factor that can affect idiom comprehension is the child's prior knowledge of the topic. For example, a child who has never been to a baseball game may have difficulty understanding the idiom "out of left field," which refers to something unexpected or surprising. However, a child who is familiar with baseball terminology may be able to understand the idiom more easily. [1.78]

Development of Idiom Production: In addition to understanding idioms, children also need to learn how to use them appropriately in language. Research has shown that children begin to use simple idioms in their language around the age of 7 (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988). By the age of 10, children are able to use more complex idioms appropriately in language (Nippold & Martin, 1989). Like idiom comprehension, there are several factors that can affect a child's ability to use idioms appropriately. One factor is the child's knowledge of the idiom's meaning. Children who do not fully understand the figurative meaning of an idiom are less likely to use it appropriately in language. Another factor is the context in which the idiom is used. Children need to learn when it is appropriate to use idioms and when it is not.

The acquisition of idioms involves various cognitive processes. One important process is the ability to recognize and interpret non-literal language. Children need to understand that idioms have a figurative meaning that may not be directly related to their literal interpretation. This requires cognitive flexibility and the ability to grasp abstract concepts. Idioms are part of a broader category of figurative language, which also includes metaphors, similes, and proverbs. Research suggests that the development of figurative language understanding follows a similar trajectory to idiom acquisition. Children typically acquire a basic understanding of literal language first before progressing to more abstract and figurative language expressions. Idioms are deeply embedded in a language's culture and society. They often reflect cultural values, historical events, and social norms. Therefore, the acquisition of idioms also involves cultural and social learning. Children gradually become familiar with the idiomatic expressions commonly used in their language community through exposure to conversations, literature, and media. While idioms are primarily acquired through exposure and natural language use, explicit instruction can also support their acquisition. Teachers, parents, and caregivers can introduce idioms in a structured manner, providing explanations of their meanings and contexts of use. However, it's important to note that idioms are most effectively learned through authentic and meaningful interactions rather than rote memorization. Acquiring idioms can be challenging due to their non-literal nature and the wide variability in their meanings and usage. Some idioms have multiple interpretations or vary in meaning across different contexts. [2.93]

This variability can pose difficulties for children, especially those with language impairments or those learning a second language. Children's acquisition of idioms may vary based on individual factors such as cognitive abilities, language proficiency, and exposure to idiomatic language. Some children may grasp idioms more quickly and naturally, while others may require more explicit instruction and practice. The development of idiom comprehension

and production follows a continuum. Children progress from initially interpreting idioms literally to gradually grasping their figurative meanings. Similarly, their ability to use idioms appropriately in language also evolves over time, reflecting their growing understanding and mastery of figurative language.

Understanding and using idioms is a crucial aspect of language proficiency, as these expressions play a significant role in everyday communication and contribute to one's overall language competence. Further research in the field of idiom acquisition continues to shed light on the underlying processes and effective strategies for supporting children in mastering figurative expressions. [3.74]

Understanding idioms requires not only knowledge of their figurative meanings but also the ability to interpret them in specific contexts. Idioms often rely on contextual cues to convey their intended message. For example, the idiom "raining cats and dogs" would be understood to mean heavy rain if it is used in a conversation about weather. Children gradually develop the ability to recognize and interpret idioms within the appropriate context as they acquire more language experience.

Idioms can vary in their degree of semantic transparency, which refers to the extent to which the literal meaning of the words in an idiom relates to its figurative meaning. Some idioms, like "break the ice," have a high degree of transparency because the literal meanings of the words are connected to their figurative interpretation (e.g., initiating a conversation to break the tension). In contrast, idioms like "let the cat out of the bag" have low semantic transparency because the literal meanings of the words provide little clue to their figurative meaning (e.g., revealing a secret). [4.612]

Idioms are highly culture-specific, and different languages and cultures have their own unique idiomatic expressions. This poses a challenge for children learning a second language or for individuals from different cultural backgrounds. They not only need to acquire the idiomatic expressions of the new language but also understand the cultural connotations and nuances associated with them.

Children's awareness of figurative language, including idioms, can influence their comprehension and production. Metalinguistic awareness, which is the ability to reflect on and manipulate language, plays a role in understanding the figurative nature of idioms. As children develop metalinguistic skills, they become more adept at recognizing figurative language and understanding that idioms operate beyond literal interpretations. Using idioms appropriately requires pragmatic competence, which encompasses understanding the social and cultural rules governing language use. [5.63] Children need to learn not only the meanings of idioms but also when and how to use them in specific communicative situations. Pragmatic development occurs gradually as children gain experience and knowledge of the social norms and conventions of their language community. Difficulties with idiom comprehension and production can be observed in individuals with language disorders, such as Specific Language Impairment (SLI) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). These individuals may struggle to understand the non-literal meanings of idioms and may have challenges incorporating idiomatic expressions into their own language use. Targeted interventions and strategies can be employed to support their acquisition of idiomatic language.

CONCLUSION: In summary, acquiring idioms involves not only understanding their figurative meanings but also developing skills in contextual interpretation, semantic transparency,

cross-cultural awareness, metalinguistic understanding, pragmatic competence, and more. The mastery of idioms enhances language proficiency and facilitates effective communication, highlighting the importance of supporting children in their journey to master these complex aspects of language. In conclusion, the acquisition of idioms is a complex process that involves both comprehension and production skills. Children gradually develop the ability to understand and use idioms figuratively over time, with simple idioms being learned earlier than more complex ones. Several factors can affect a child's ability to understand and use idioms appropriately, including the complexity of the idiom, the context in which it is used, and the child's prior knowledge of the topic.

References:

1. Cacciari, C., & Tabossi, P. (1988). The comprehension of idioms. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 27(6)
2. Nippold, M. A., & Duthie, J. K. (2003). Mental imagery and idiom comprehension: A comparison of school-age children and adults. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 46(6)
3. Nippold, M. A., & Martin, S. (1989). Idiom interpretation in isolation versus context: A developmental study with adolescents. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders*, 54(4)
4. Nippold, M. A. (2004). Idioms: Figurative language comprehension, retention, and production in children with and without language impairment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 47(5)
5. Nippold, M. A., & Rudzinski, M. (1993). Idiom understanding in youth: Further examination of familiarity and transparency. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*
6. Berman, R. A., & Slobin, D. I. (Eds.). (1994). *Relating events in narrative: A crosslinguistic developmental study*. Psychology Press.