

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms in Conversation and Paragraph Writing on EFL Learners' Idiom Learning

Mona Khabiri

Assistant Professor, Islamic Azad University,
Central Tehran Branch
mona.khabiri@iauctb.ac.ir

Zahra Masoumpanah

M.A., Islamic Azad University,
Central Tehran Branch
zmasoumpanah1356@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study investigated the comparative effect of teaching idiomatic expressions through practicing them in conversation and paragraph writing on intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning. The participants were sorted out of a population of 134 intermediate students in Zabansara Language School in Khorramabad based on their scores on a Preliminary English Test (PET) and an idiom test piloted in advance. The selected 84 participants were divided randomly into three groups: two experimental groups, namely, conversation and paragraph writing groups, and one control group. The two experimental groups received different treatments. In one class, idioms were taught and learners were asked to make a conversation practicing the new idioms, and in the other class, they were asked to write short paragraphs using the idioms. In the third class, the control group, the new idioms were presented and then practiced through different written exercises. At the end of the treatment period, the researchers administered an idiom posttest. The analysis of the collected data revealed that using new idioms in conversation and paragraph writing helped students learn idioms more efficiently than just practicing them through different written exercises. Moreover, the use of idioms in conversation proved to be more effective than using them in paragraph writing. The findings can have implications in preparing materials, teaching/learning foreign languages, and designing syllabus.

Keywords: Conversation, Paragraph Writing, EFL Learners, Idiom Learning

Received: December 2010; Accepted: November 2011

1. Introduction

In recent years, foreign language researchers have become increasingly interested in the central role of lexical acquisition in language learning. In fact, as Carter and McCarthy (1988) maintain, in learning another language, words have a central role and their acquisition and retention are seen by many as the main task. Nevertheless, a new vocabulary item may be larger than a single word and yet express a single idea. Examples of such vocabulary items are formulaic expressions, namely, expletives, serial and memorized speech, slang, sayings, clichés, conventional expressions, non-propositional language, and idioms, which form a large proportion of every speaker's competence.

More recently much attention has been diverted to the importance of idioms in language learning. According to Pawley and Syder (1983), idiom is held, first, to promote natural, native-like language use; second, to increase fluency; and, third, to drive the acquisition of the language system. This implies that idioms require special attention in language programs and should not be relegated to a position of secondary importance in the curriculum because they are so frequently encountered in both spoken and written discourse (Cooper, 1998).

Therefore, if language practitioners are to engage effectively in idiom teaching and learning, some questions are required to be answered. One of these questions concerns why learners should learn idioms. It appears that a strong knowledge of idioms will help students to be better speakers of and negotiators in the foreign or the second language and they will be in a much better position to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way. Moreover, it seems that when students reach a degree of self-awareness in their language learning, they realize that to become more native-like and more fluent, their utterances need to be not just more grammatically accurate, but

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

more idiomatic and more formulaic (Auld, 2001). Calling on idioms, also, is believed to be less cognitively demanding than constructing new utterances from scratch, and, therefore, it is thought that idioms may help speakers cope with the demands of real-time language production and comprehension while maintaining fluency (Coulmas, 1981; Kuiper, 2004; Pawley & Syder, 1983). Nevertheless, if the formulaic phrase of an idiom is incorrectly used, it might be disastrous and destructive at least to the confidence of the user. This may lead to the conclusion that the issue of teaching/learning idioms is not only important but also delicate and requires appropriate strategies and techniques.

The argument put forth so far implies a more important question concerning how idioms are best learned and practiced. Different techniques are used by teachers such as teaching the idioms through lists, translation, synonyms, antonyms, definitions, drawings, categorizing, and so on. Consequently, it is of considerable importance and contribution to the body of literature in Second Language Acquisition or Foreign Language Learning to attempt to find the most effective technique to teach idioms.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Any issue of importance to the field of second or foreign language learning calls for meticulous, well-designed, and context-specific research studies, and research into idiom learning is of no exception. In fact, Idiom Acquisition Research has uncovered a number of strategies that have pedagogical implications for idiom instruction. Most of the researchers, according to McCarthy (1998), have focused more on teaching idioms in context and have concluded that idioms are best learned contextually. Moreover, some of the foreign language researchers (e.g., Krashen, 1985; Swain, 1995; Zamel, 1992) have focused on input and output processing, the conclusion of which could tap

into the importance of both processing for learning of the language in general and learning of idioms in particular. This focus circles around the issue of how learners process various idioms while they appear in the input or output. Based on the two lines of research discussed above, the pertinent question for researchers is whether idiom learning occurs more efficiently if we make students contextually use them in their language production.

Mendis and Simpson (2003), for example, feel that learners should be taught the nature of an idiom first, and then, they should be taught how to guess the meaning from the context. They assert that teachers, then, should have students identify idiomatic expressions in excerpts from spoken and written discourse. Moreover, Guo (2008) suggests that for the purpose of encouraging long-term retention, raising learners' awareness of the original usage of idioms is preferable to ask students memorize idioms on the basis of their given meaning. Using illustrations has also long been known as an effective technique to teach vocabulary (Wu, 2008).

One source of input for learners can be provided through early exposure to and systematic practice of idioms (Liontas, 2002). Liontas (2000) argues that idioms should be introduced to learners as early as possible along with other aspects of semantics, pragmatics, socio-linguistics, culture, and conventions of discourse. He claims that idioms should not be separated from other aspects of learning a language, which may in turn entail integration of idioms into language skills.

Birjandi and Baradaran (2008), also, examined the effect of teaching topically-grouped idiomatic expressions on the retention of intermediate Iranian EFL learners and concluded that teaching topically-grouped idiomatic expressions had a significant impact on the retention of the idioms.

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

Although all the above-mentioned researchers have focused on the role of input for second language acquisition, others have drawn attention to the role of output (active use of the language resulting in the production of language). They have argued that understanding new forms is not enough; the learner must be given the opportunity to produce the new forms. What follows is a brief review of the related literature on the topic in question.

An impressive body of research has been conducted in order to ascertain the effects of writing on cognitive abilities (Barcroft, 2004; Lee, 2003; Swain, 1996; Zamel, 1992). Mirhassani and Talebi (2007), also, conducted a research to investigate the effect of sentence writing on EFL learners' retention of idioms in which a context was created for learners to make use of idioms they learnt. The results revealed that the sentence writing group recalled and recognized significantly more idioms than the control group. Second language acquisition researchers (e.g., Hatch, 1978) have also argued that learners acquire language through conversation. In using conversation to interact with others, learners gradually acquire the competence that underlies the ability to use language. Moreover, Sheppard (2007) considers an important role for spoken output in second language acquisition. Wu (2008), also, used Readers Theater to help students practice English idioms in order to enhance students' retention.

All the above-noted points reveal that idiom acquisition needs to be investigated more in both second and foreign language learning situations. However, no research has compared the impact of using idioms in conversation and paragraph writing on EFL learners' idiom learning. Accordingly, the present study aims to shed more light on this issue by focusing on two techniques of idiom teaching/learning. Investigating the impact of using idioms in the production of EFL learners' idiom learning will enlighten EFL teachers

on how to tackle this important aspect of learning a foreign language. If teachers learn about more effective ways of teaching idioms and learners learn about the effective ways of practicing them, learners will not only reach more efficient outcomes but also become more motivated as one of their obstacles for efficient communication will be removed.

In view of the importance of learning idioms as part of the vocabulary learning by EFL learners and the role of output on language learning, this study intended to answer the following question:

Q: Is there any significant difference between the effect of practicing idioms in conversation and paragraph writing on intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning?

In addressing the research question, the following hypothesis was put forward:

H₀: There is no significant difference between the effect of practicing idioms in conversation and paragraph writing on intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning.

3. Method

In this section the participants, instrumentation, procedure, and design of the study will be discussed.

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 84 male and female students selected from a larger population of 134 students (60 males and 74 females) studying English at Zabansara Language School in Khorramabad at two stages. At the first stage, the homogeneity of the aforementioned participants was confirmed as intermediate based on their scores on a Preliminary English Test (PET) which

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

had been piloted in advance. That is, 91 out of 134 participants were selected as those who obtained a score falling one standard deviation above and below the sample mean.

After selecting the 91 participants, they were given a piloted idiom test. Consulting an expert in the field, the researchers considered the participants who answered less than 20 percent of the questions as the ones assumed not to know the target idioms and so formed the target sample (N=85). In order to have three equal groups, another male student was also randomly omitted from the study. Then, they were randomly divided into three equal groups of 28 students: two experimental groups and one control group, each consisting of 14 male and 14 female learners. Therefore, the factor of gender was also held constant in the study.

The two experimental groups practiced new idioms through different treatments including using idioms in conversations and paragraph writing and the control group practiced the new idioms through different exercises.

3.2. Instrumentation and Materials

The instruments used in this study included the assessment materials, the course book, and the tasks and activities utilized for each group. The assessment materials were a test of general English proficiency, an idiom test, and a posttest. The PET was piloted and the results of the pilot study revealed that the test had a reliability of .93 estimated through Cronbach Alpha and so it was administered to 134 students.

The idiom test, which was prepared by the researchers, included 65 multiple-choice items and after the omission of two malfunctioning items as the result of the pilot study, the reliability was calculated to be .96 as measured by Cronbach Alpha. In addition to assuring the researchers that the participants

did not have prior knowledge of the target idioms, the results of this test indicated that the participants of the three groups were homogeneous in terms of their idiom knowledge prior to the treatment, thus assuring the certainty of the final results of the research study.

The posttest was another researcher-made test. A 60 multiple-choice item test was developed entirely based on the idioms that were taught during the treatment period. However, five items were omitted as the result of item analysis through the pilot study after which the test demonstrated a reliability index of .96. The aim of the posttest was to investigate the efficacy of the treatments provided to the experimental groups during the treatment period. It should be pointed out that the same idioms were tested in both the posttest and the idiom test that was used prior to the treatment. Both tests were in multiple-choice format, but the items in the two tests were different so that the students' test-wiseness would not affect the results of the study.

The book *'101 American English Idioms'* (Collis, 1987) was used as the course book for all the three groups. In addition to the assessment materials and the course book, certain activities and tasks were practiced during the course of instruction. Conversation tasks included giving the students the chance to talk freely about whatever they wanted to do. The first experimental group was supposed to make conversations using as many newly-learned idioms as possible. Short-paragraph writing tasks included giving the students the opportunity to write about some topics that they were interested in. The second experimental group was asked to develop a topic into a paragraph of about 80 words using as many newly-taught idioms as possible. Finally, various exercises such as matching the idioms with their definitions, completing the sentences using the new idioms, and filling in the blanks with the new idioms presented in a list were used as activities in the control group. These exercises were prepared

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

and photocopied by the researchers and handed to the students each session to practice the new idioms.

3.3. Procedure

At first, the PET was administered to 134 students and each participant was given a score based on his or her performance on the test. Out of the 134 students, those whose scores were between one standard deviation above and below the mean (N=91) were selected. Then, based on the piloted idiom test, those who answered more than 20 percent of the 65 items (N=6) were removed from the study. Moreover, one more participant was also randomly omitted to form three equal groups. Then, the remaining participants (N=84) were randomly divided into three groups; two experimental and one control. Normality of the distribution of scores and homogeneity of the variances of the three groups were checked and a one-way ANOVA was conducted to make sure there was no significant difference among the three groups' performance on the idiom test at the onset of the study.

The whole research project took place in six sessions for each group. The classes were held once a week with each session lasting for 90 minutes. In each session 15 to 20 idioms were taught. For all the three groups, the same instructor, who was one of the researchers, explained the meaning of the idioms using the illustrations, definitions, and sample sentences provided in the course book and tried to assist the learners in identifying and learning how and in what situations or contexts the idioms were used. The students in each group were required to guess the meaning of the idioms and in case they failed to do so, the teacher gave them the Persian equivalents of the idioms.

After that, in the conversation group the students were asked to use the idioms in making conversations in the classroom. First, they had some time to

design a context in which a conversation may take place. Then, they had their conversations in pairs about the topics they had selected to talk about using the newly-learned idioms. This was followed by practicing the conversation in pairs before they had a chance to act it out for the whole class. The students were supervised and only their errors on the use of idioms were corrected by the teacher after they had acted out their conversations. The teacher would also give examples of appropriate use of the idioms when commenting on the conversations.

However, the participants in the paragraph writing group had to write a short paragraph of about 80 words using the newly-learned idioms. Most of their writings were short stories, and about topics such as shopping and daily events. During the class, the teacher supervised to see if all the participants were practicing the idioms in their writings by walking in the aisles and monitoring the writings of individual students. At the end of each session, participants completed and handed in their writings. These were commented on and handed back to the students in the following session. The comments were written in the margins with examples of the correct use of the idiom. It should be noted that the teacher's comments focused on the correct use of the idioms in the context and not on the aspects of paragraph writing.

Finally, in the control group the students were supposed to do various exercises such as matching the idioms with their definitions, completing sentences with idioms where the list of idioms were not provided, true/false exercises, and filling in the blanks using the idioms given in a list. Meanwhile, the instructor supervised to see whether all the participants were doing the exercises and in cases where there was a problem, the teacher explained the exercise for them and corrected their errors in using the idioms. At the end, all

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

the exercises with their correct responses were presented to class to make sure that all students have noted the correct use and format.

At last, participants sat for the posttest. On the basis of this test, the efficacy of the three methods of idiom teaching was compared.

3.4. Design

Since 134 students comprised the entire sample of intermediate students at the aforementioned language school, the selection of the participants was based on convenient non-random sampling and thus the design of the study was quasi-experimental. Idiom instruction was the independent variable and the participants' idiom learning was the dependent variable. Since the participants were homogenized by means of PET and equal number of male and female participants was assigned to the three groups, language proficiency and gender were control variables of the study. However, age might have acted as the intervening variable in this study as the researchers were not able to control the age of the participants.

4. Results

As mentioned earlier, after piloting the PET, it was administered to 134 intermediate EFL learners. The mean of the scores for 134 students came out to be 21.76 and the standard deviation 8.91. Therefore, 91 students whose scores fell between 12.85 and 30.67 were selected as the participants of the study. Then, the piloted idiom test was given to the 91 selected students and six students who answered more than 20 percent of the items were omitted from the sample. Subsequently, the participants were randomly divided into three groups. In order to find out whether there was any significant difference among

the performances of the three groups on the idiom test at the onset of the study, a one-way ANOVA was run on the idiom test scores. The assumptions for running ANOVA were checked. Skewedness ratios for the three groups fell within the acceptable range of ± 1.96 and thus the distributions of the scores of the three groups were normal as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Idiom Test Prior to the Treatment

	No. of Cases	Mean	Std. error of the mean	SD	Skewness	Std. error Skewness	Skewness Ratio
Conversation Group	28	9.43	0.48	2.56	-0.53	0.44	-1.2
Paragraph Writing Group	28	9.5	0.44	2.35	-0.38	0.44	-0.86
Control Group	28	9.6	0.45	2.42	-0.33	0.44	-0.75

The results of the Levene's test also indicated that the p value was higher than .05. So, the three groups had homogeneous error variances (Table 2).

Table 2. Levene's Test on the Idiom Test Scores

F	df1	df2	Sig.
0.067	2	81	0.935

Since the assumptions were not violated, one-way ANOVA was safely used to check if the differences among the three groups (control group having the highest and conversation group the lowest mean scores) were significant.

Table 3. The Result of One-way ANOVA on the Idiom Test Prior to the Treatment

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	0.286a	2	0.143	0.024	0.976	0.001
Intercept	7581.000	1	7581.000	1266.851	.000	0.940
Group	0.286	2	0.143	0.024	0.976	0.001
Error	484.714	81	5.984			
Total	8066.000	84				
Corrected total	485.000	83				

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

As demonstrated in Table 3, there was no significant difference among the variances of the three groups ($F_{(81, 2)} = .024, p = .976 > .05$). This shows that the three groups were homogeneous in terms of their idiom knowledge prior to the treatment.

When the treatment period was over, the researchers administered the idiom posttest (which was piloted with 30 similar students) to compare the idiom learning of the three groups. Table 4 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of the posttest for the three groups.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the Three Groups' Posttest Scores

	No. of Cases	Mean	Std. error of the mean	Sd	Skewness	Std.error Skewness	Skewness Ratio
Conversation Group	28	49.68	1.33	7.06	-1.13	0.44	-2.57
Paragraph Writing Group	28	37.71	2.67	14.13	-0.21	0.44	-0.48
Control Group	28	29.57	2.72	14.38	0.62	0.44	1.41

As demonstrated in Table 4, the highest mean score was obtained by the conversation group (49.68), then by the paragraph writing group (37.71), and finally by the control group (29.57). Since the skewness ratio for the conversation group fell out of the range of ± 1.96 , the normality assumption for running ANOVA was not met. Moreover, the Levene's test of homogeneity of variance demonstrated that this assumption was also violated ($F_{(81, 2)} = 11.57, p = .0005 < .05$). The result of this test is demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Levene's Test on the Idiom Posttest Scores

F	df1	df2	Sig.
11.571	2	81	0.000

Since the assumptions of running ANOVA were violated, to determine whether there was any statistically significant difference among the idiom

learning of the three groups, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was run. Table 6 demonstrates the mean rank score of the three groups. As demonstrated, the conversation group obtained the highest mean rank score on the posttest.

Table 6. Mean Rank of the Three Groups on the Idiom Posttest

	Group	No	Mean Rank
Idiom posttest	Conversation Group	28	59.59
	Paragraph Writing Group	28	40.04
	Control Group	28	27.88

Table 7 shows the result of the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results indicated that there was a significant difference among the mean ranking of the three groups ($X = 24.139$, $df = 2$, $p = .0005 < .05$).

Table 7. The Result of the Kruskal-Wallis on the Posttest Scores

Idiom posttest	
Chi-Square	24.139
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.000

In order to locate the significant differences, comparison had to be done two-by-two by Mann-Whitney test, because Kruskal-Wallis does not provide a post-hoc test. The results of the Mann-Whitney test demonstrated a significant difference between the conversation and the control group ($U = 103$, $Z = -4.74$, $p = .0005$) with the large effect size of .63 (computed by $r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}}$). The results are depicted in Table 8.

Table 8. Mean Rank of the Conversation and Control Groups on the Idiom posttest Mann-Whitney Test

	Group	No	Mean Rank
Idiom posttest	Conversation Group	28	38.82
	Control Group	28	18.18
	Total	56	
Mann-Whitney U			103.000
Wilcoxon W			509.000
Z			-4.742
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			.000

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

The results demonstrated in Table 8 indicated that the conversation group significantly outperformed the control group in learning the idioms. This meant that the use of newly-learned idioms in conversation was significantly more effective than practicing them through various written exercises.

Moreover, a significant difference was found between paragraph writing and the control group ($U = 271.5$, $Z = -1.976$, $p = .048$) with a small to medium effect size of .26 (Table 9). This indicated that again the production of idioms through paragraph writing was significantly more effective than practicing them through various written exercises.

Table 9. Mean Rank of the Paragraph Writing and Control Groups on the Idiom

Posttest Mann-Whitney Test			
	Group	No	Mean Rank
Idiom posttest	Paragraph Writing Group	28	32.80
	Control Group	28	24.20
	Total	56	
	Mann-Whitney U		271.500
	Wilcoxon W		677.500
	Z		-1.976
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.048

Finally, a significant difference was found between the conversation and paragraph writing groups ($U = 202.5$, $Z = -3.11$, $p = .002$) with the medium effect size of .42, which indicated that the conversation group learned idioms significantly better than the paragraph writing group.

Table 10. Mean Rank of the Paragraph Writing and Conversation Groups on the

Idiom Posttest Mann-Whitney Test			
	Group	No	Mean Rank
Idiom posttest	Conversation Group	28	32.27
	Paragraph Writing Group	28	21.73
	Total	56	
	Mann-Whitney U		202.500
	Wilcoxon W		608.500
	Z		-3.111
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.002

5. Discussion

With respect to the results obtained from the analysis of data pertaining to the post-test, one can conclude that both experimental groups (conversation and paragraph writing) outperformed the control group. The effect size for the comparison of the conversation and control groups was large; however, the one for the paragraph writing and control groups was small, so the confidence with which we can interpret and generalize the results is low for the latter case.

Therefore, the data strongly suggested that the use of idioms in conversation can improve the intermediate students' idiom learning. The data also implicitly suggested that the use of idioms in paragraph writing can improve the intermediate students' idiom learning.

One possible reason for the outperformance of the two experimental groups compared to the control group might have been the mode of practicing idioms. In the two experimental groups, learners practiced the idioms through extended production, whereas in the control group the practice entailed either recognition or limited production as in the fill-in-the-blank exercises. Based on the output hypothesis (Swain, 1995), when learners produce language, their output performs a metalinguistic function by enabling them to reflect upon what they are learning and thus to control and internalize the language or language items they are learning. Moreover, they notice what they want to say in contrast with what they are able to say and thus, notice what they do not know or know partially.

Another reason for the significant idiom achievement in the two experimental groups might have been the fact that the participants of these two groups practiced the idioms in context rather than in isolated exercises as in the control group. The impact of contextual learning on the acquisition and

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

retention of vocabulary and idioms is supported by many scholars (e.g., McCarthy, 1998).

The results of this study, though limited in scope, are in line with other researches who suggest that for learning idioms using them in production is more effective than de-contextualized learning (e.g., Swain, 1996). The results can further challenge Waring (1995), Nation (1994), and Hulstijn and Laufer (2001), who have questioned the appropriateness of contextualized methods of vocabulary learning for all learners and believe that learning words ‘out of context’ by studying word lists, doing vocabulary exercises, or even by reading through a learners’ dictionary, are more useful, especially for beginning and intermediate learners. Consequently, attempts should be made to provide learners with situations in which English words and idioms are presented in the context of speaking and writing.

Moreover, the findings of this study suggested a significant difference between conversation and paragraph writing groups in favor of the conversation group with a medium to large effect size. Therefore, one can strongly conclude that out of the two treatments given to the two experimental groups, conversation had a significantly higher impact on the idiom learning of the participants. The outperformance of the conversation group could have been due to the fact that in designing and performing the conversations, the learners needed to interact with one another cooperatively, whereas in the paragraph writing group the learners engaged in writing individually. Interaction and cooperative learning have proved to result in more effective learning.

Interaction is said to provide input (Gass, as cited in Swain, 2000), cause negotiation or interactional modification (Pica, as cited in Swain, 2000), and result in focusing on the form of the input (Doughty & Williams, as cited in

Swain, 2000). Furthermore, Slavin (1995) asserts that through interaction, cognitive conflicts arise which in turn result in increased learning. Likewise, Swain contends that, “When a collaborative effort is being made by participants in an activity, their speaking (or writing) mediates this effort. As each participant speaks, their ‘saying’ becomes ‘what they said’, providing an object for reflection” (p. 113). She concludes that this way new knowledge is constructed because “our students’ performance outstripped their competence” (p. 113). As a result, according to Swain, learners get engaged in problem-solving and knowledge-building by means of collaborative dialogue. Therefore, one can interpret that being output-based, the paragraph writing and conversation groups outperformed the control group and being collaborative, the conversation group outstripped the paragraph writing group.

6. Conclusion

Most of the learners show serious problems in learning and comprehending idioms. This issue can be partly due to the lack of linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, and lexical knowledge. But as the results of this study indicated, part of this problem can also be due to the absence of effective teaching strategies that can help students learn idioms in context. The finding of this study suggested that for the purpose of encouraging idiom learning, using idioms in conversation and paragraph writing is preferable to asking students to do different written exercises.

The final conclusion is that the outperformance of the conversation group implies the effectiveness of interaction and cooperation that existed in this group. Therefore, the question put forth is whether writing paragraphs cooperatively would result in a similar impact on idiom learning as co-constructing and participating in conversations. Consequently, further research

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

is suggested to compare the effect of cooperative writing with cooperative dialogue on idiom learning of EFL learners and compare the results with those of this study to see whether or not it is the interactive and cooperative nature of the activity which overrides the mode of the output (spoken vs. written) in affecting learners' idiom learning.

Further study is also suggested to investigate the effect of the above-mentioned strategies at different levels of language proficiency and with the same age. Furthermore, in another research, other techniques of using idioms in context like using idioms in essay or story writing, e-mails, blogs, and on-line processing or through SMS as well as using them in free group discussions, lectures, or jokes can be investigated.

The results of this study, along with those of the previous studies, can help a diversity of professions concerned with language teaching/learning. Among all, we can name teachers, syllabus designers, and material developers. In addition, language learners can also take advantage of such strategies to learn and retain idioms more efficiently.

References

- Auld, S. (2001). Exploring idiom usage. *Teachers' voices*, 7, 120-129.
- Barcroft, J. (2004). Effects of sentence writing in second language lexical acquisition. *Second Language Research Journal*, 20(4), 303-331.
- Birjandi, P., & Baradaran, N. (2008). The Effects of teaching topically- grouped idiomatic expressions on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Retention of Idiomatic Expressions. *Roshd FLT Journal*, 23(4), 37- 45.
- Carter, R. A., & McCarthy, M. J. (1988). *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Collis, H. (1987). *101 American English idioms*. NTC Publishing Group.

- Cooper, T. C. (1998). Teaching idioms. *Foreign Language Annals*, 31(2), 255-266.
- Coulmas, F. (1981). Introduction: Conversational routine. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational routine: Explorations in standardized communication situations and pre-patterned speech* (pp. 1-17). The Hague: Mouton.
- Guo, S. F. (2008). Differential Effects of Etymological Elaboration and Rote Memorization on Idiom Acquisition in College EFL Learners. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(3), 127-145.
- Hulstijn, J. H., & Laufer, B. (2001). Intentional and incidental second language vocabulary learning: A reappraisal of elaboration, rehearsal, and automaticity. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 258-286). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hatch, E. (1978). *Second language acquisition*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis*. London: Longman.
- Kuiper, K. (2004). Formulaic performance in conventionalized varieties of speech. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *Formulaic sequences: Acquisition, processing and use* (pp. 37-54). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lee, S. H. (2003). ESL learners' vocabulary use in writing and the effects of explicit vocabulary instruction. *System*, 31(4), 537-558.
- Liontas, J. I. (2002). Exploring second language learners: Notions of idiomaticity. *System*, 30, 289-313.
- McCarthy, M. (1998). *Spoken language and applied linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mendis, D., & Simpson, R. (2003). A Corpus-based study of idioms in academic speech. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(3), 419-438.

The Comparative Effect of Using Idioms...

- Mirhassani, A., & Talebi, S. (2007). The effects of sentence writing on Iranian Intermediate EFL learners' retention of idiomatic expressions. *Roshd FLT Journal*, 22(2), 38-44.
- Nation, I. S. P. (Ed.).(1994). *New ways in teaching vocabulary*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
- Pawley, A., & Syder, F. H. (1983). Two puzzles for linguistic theory: Native like selection and native like fluency. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 191-225). London: Longman.
- Sheppard, C. (2007). *Noticing the gap and second language acquisition: A role for output in uptake and subsequent incorporation*. Paper presented at the Pacific Second Language Research Forum, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.
- Slavin, R. E. (1995). *Cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice (2nd ed.)*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *For H. G. Widdowson: Principles and practice in the study of language* (pp. 125-144). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swain, M. (1996). Integrating language and content in immersion classrooms: Research perspectives. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 52, 529-48.
- Swain, M. (2000). The output hypothesis and beyond: Mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 97-114). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Waring, R. (1995). *Second language vocabulary acquisition: Linguistic context a vocabulary task design*. Retrieved June 12, 2011 from <http://www1.harenet.ne.ip/waring/papers/BC.html>

- Wu, S.Y. (2008). Effective activities for teaching English idioms to EFL learners. *The Internet TESL Journal*. Vol. XIV, No. 3, March 2008. Retrieved September 24, 2011 from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Wu-TeachingIdioms.html>.
- Zamel, V. (1992). Writing one's way into reading. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26 (3), 463-485.