

COMPREHENSION OF UNFAMILIAR ENGLISH IDIOMS BY CHINESE EFL LEARNERS IN READING

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Abstract

This study sets out to investigate how Chinese EFL learners comprehend unfamiliar English idioms in reading and what strategies they employ in this process . Data were collected by means of the think aloud procedure . Eight intermediate and eight upper intermediate EFL learners were asked to verbalize their thoughts as they arrived at the meanings of four different types of English idioms in reading . Analysis revealed that the subjects' idiom comprehension performance and strategy use were influenced by both idiom type and their L2 proficiency . Some pedagogical suggestions derived from the findings are presented .

Key words

idiom ; comprehension ; strategy use

1 . Introduction

An idiom is a conventionalized expression whose meaning cannot always be readily derived from the canonical meaning of its constituent elements (Long et al . 1990) . Idioms abound in both spoken and written English , yet they present a special language learning problem for L2 learners (Boers & Demecheleer 2001 ; Cooper 1999 ; Irujo 1986) . Marton (1977 , see Laufer 2002 : 151) , for example , sees the problem of idioms as the biggest obstacle to fluent comprehension in L2 reading . In the process of comprehending and interpreting idioms by L2 learners , nonliteralness has been regarded as one of the leading causes of difficulty (Carter & McCarthy 1988 ; Danesi 1993) . As the definition of idiom indicates , it is hard to tell the meaning of an idiom from the literal meaning of its individual constituent words . For instance , the idiomatic meaning of we have been chewing the fat for a couple of hours has nothing to do with " chew " or with " fat " in their literal sense .

In recent years , continuous efforts have been made to explore the underlying mechanisms in L2 idiom comprehension (e . g . Abel 2003 ; Cooper 1999 ; Liontas 2001) . However , Chinese EFL learners' comprehension of English idioms remains largely unexplored . To deepen our understanding of Chinese EFL learners' processing of English idioms , it is necessary to investigate how learners access the idiomatic meaning (instead of the literal meaning) of unfamiliar idioms in context and what strategies they employ during the process .

2 . Research on L2 idiom comprehension

Many earlier idiom studies mainly dealt with native language processing (e . g . Gibbs 1986 ; Cacciari & Tabossi 1988 ; Titone & Connine 1994) . It was only until recent years that researchers began to pay attention to the learning and processing of L2 idioms (e . g . Abel 2003 ; Boers & Demecheleer 2001 ; Cieslicka 2006 ; Cooper 1999 ; Irujo 1986 ; Kellerman 1979 , 1983 ; Liontas 2001) . These studies , in general , are concerned with two central issues : the effect of L1 on L2 idiom comprehension and the strategies that learners adopt in comprehending L2 idioms .

Studies focusing on L1 transfer in L2 idiom comprehension . Most L2 idiom research in the earlier stage focused on L1 transfer in L2 idiom comprehension (e. g. Boers & Demecheleer 2001 ;Irujo 1986 ; Kellerman 1979 ,1983 ;Liontas 2001). Kellerman (1979 ,1983) investigated the relationship between native language (NL) knowledge and interpretation of the figurative use of target language (TL) expressions . He considered the strategy of “transfer ” of NL items into TL expressions to be an active learner strategy dependent on the learners notion of (psychotypological) “distance ” between the NL and the TL and the markedness of the structure in the L1 . He suggested that these two factors combined may serve to prevent facilitation of transfer where L1 and L2 are typologically close ,and also to prevent interference where L1 and L2 are different .

Later ,Irujo (1986) investigated whether advanced students of English relied on knowledge of their native Spanish in order to comprehend and produce L2 idioms . She divided English idioms into three types in comparison with Spanish . One type was identical in form and meaning with Spanish equivalents ,the second type was similar to Spanish equivalents ,and the third type different from Spanish idioms . Irujo observed that idioms which were identical in both L1 and L2 were the easiest to comprehend and produce ,idioms which were similar in L1 and L2 presented learners with only somewhat more difficulty , while idioms completely different in L1 and L2 proved the most difficult for learners to comprehend and produce . Irujo concluded that there was both positive and negative L1 knowledge transfer in the case of same or similar idioms when the learners first language was close to the second language .

Studies investigating strategy use in L2 idiom comprehension . To understand the comprehension processes that L2 learners go through when they attempt to interpret the meanings of L2 idioms , researchers have carried out studies to examine the comprehension strategies that are used in L2 idiom comprehension (e. g. Chen 2004 ;Cooper 1999 ;Liontas 2001) .

Cooper (1999) investigated the on line processing strategies used by a sample of nonnative speakers of English with varying L1 backgrounds . The participants were asked to give the meanings of 20 target idioms presented in a written context . Data were collected by means of a think aloud task . Analysis of the think aloud data revealed that most of the participants engaged in a heuristic approach to idiom comprehension ,employing a variety of strategies through trial and error to find the meanings of the idioms . Specifically ,eight major strategies were identified ,including :guessing from contexts ,discussing and analyzing the idiom ,using the literal meaning ,requesting information ,repeating or paraphrasing the idiom ,using background knowledge ,referring to an L1 idiom ,and others .

By way of an idiom comprehension test and a think aloud task ,Chen (2004) studied the comprehension of English color idioms by Chinese EFL learners . The effects of idiom type and the learners L2 proficiency level were investigated in relation to strategy use . It was found that strategy use differed with idiom types . Specifically ,the amount of strategy use increased with the degree of difficulty of color idioms . Concerning the effect of the learners L2 proficiency ,statistics showed that strategy use by the advanced learners was more diversified and more effective .

A critique of previous research on L2 idiom comprehension . While previous studies have offered enlightening theoretical and practical insights into the comprehension of L2 idioms ,there have been some limitations which are to be improved . First of all ,most participants in the previous studies have a first language close to the target language . For example ,Irujo (1986) examined Spanish speaking learners of English . It is not clear if the results will be the same in the case of a distant language . So far ,little research has approached the comprehension of English idioms by Chinese EFL learners . Secondly ,the role of learners L2 proficiency in idiom comprehension has been downplayed in these studies ,leaving it an issue worth further investigation . Last but not least ,most of the earlier L2 idiom studies are concerned with the comprehension of idioms per se ,not idiom comprehension in the process of reading . As pointed out by Liontas (2001) ,in light of the pervasiveness of idioms in both written and spoken discourse ,research into idiom understanding must be text situated and context based .

The current study ,based on both theoretical and empirical research on L2 idiom processing ,will examine Chinese EFL learners comprehension of idioms in reading . Specifically ,the study will address the following research questions :

- 1) How do Chinese EFL learners comprehend English idioms in reading ?
- 2) What strategies do they adopt during idiom comprehension ?
- 3) Do idiom type and learner proficiency have a role to play in strategy use ?

3 . Methodology

In this study ,think aloud protocols were implemented to gain an in depth understanding of L2 learners online comprehension processes of unfamiliar English idioms in reading .

3 .1 Participants

Sixteen Chinese EFL learners at University of Electronic Science and Technology of China participated in the study . Among them eight were university freshmen majoring in automatic control and eight third year English majors .

Apart from their L2 -English learning experiences in formal educational institution , another criterion i. e. ,performance on a vocabulary test¹(Hever 2001) was administered (see Appendix 1 for the test) . Table 1 summarizes the personal profiles of the participants in each group ,including the range , means and standard deviations of each groups scores on the vocabulary size test . Results of independent samples t test indicate that the two groups differ significantly in English vocabulary size (F = .003 ;p = .000) .It can therefore be concluded that the participants represented two distinct levels of L2 -English proficiency .

Table 1. Grouping of participants based on years of L2 English learning and scores on English Vocabulary Size Test

Learner Group	Learner Profile		Vocabulary Size Test		
	Education	EFL Years	Range	Mean	S .D .
Intermediate (n = 8)	Non -English major freshmen	7	30 —66	46 .25	10 .90
Upper Intermediate (n = 8)	English major juniors	9	63 —96	79 .50	10 .46

3 .2 Materials

3 .2 .1 Selection of the target idioms

With reference to earlier L2 idiom processing studies (e. g. Irujo 1986 ;Laufer 2000 ;Liontas 2001) , the degree of L1 -L2 similarity was taken as the primary criterion in classifying English idioms in the present study . Specifically ,according to whether the idiom can be translated directly from English to Chinese ,four types of idioms are identified :

- 1) English idioms which have exact Chinese translation equivalents (ET idioms for short ,standing for exact translation ;for example ,swallow the bait ,meaning “to fall into a trap ” ,in Chinese ,“ 上钩”) ;
- 2) English idioms which have partial translation equivalents in Chinese (PT idioms for short ,standing for partial translation ;for example ,drag one s feet ,meaning “to proceed unwillingly or with delaying tactics ” ,in Chinese ,“ 拖拖拉拉”) ;
- 3) English idioms which cannot be translated literally into Chinese and whose literal translation makes no sense in Chinese (NET idioms for short ,standing for non equivalent translation ;for example ,chew the fat ,meaning “to chat in an informal and friendly way ” ,in Chinese ,“ 聊天”) ;
- 4) English idioms which cannot be translated literally into Chinese ,yet whose literal translation makes sense in Chinese and denotes a different meaning other than the target English idiom s idiomatic meaning (FF idioms for short ,standing for false friend ;for example ,pull one s leg ,meaning “to say something ,in a joking way ,to tease someone ” ,in Chinese ,“ 开玩笑” ,if

translated literally into Chinese ,means “to hinder someone in doing something ” ,“ 拉后腿”).

In the same vein as several L2 idiom studies (e. g. Abel 2003 ;Liontas 2001) ,to control for the syntactic aspect of the idioms ,the present study restricted the target idioms to those of “verb + noun / noun phrase ” construction . Based on the above criteria ,16 English idioms (4 idioms for each type) unfamiliar to the subjects were chosen as the target idioms of this study²(see Appendix 2 for a list of the idioms) .

3.2.2 Writing of the vignettes

Since no ready -made vignettes containing the target idioms were available ,the researcher searched online and obtained sixteen passages each containing one target idiom . The researcher then perused the passages and rewrote them into vignettes of 80 -120 words long . After that ,two native English speakers were invited to go through the vignettes and examine whether they were of fluent ,natural ,and standard English . This ended up with 16 vignettes ,which were used as the materials in the think aloud task (see Appendix 3 for the vignettes) .

3.3 The think aloud procedures

The think aloud sessions were conducted individually and tape recorded ,including the following steps :

Step 1 :Instruction

Each participant was given a sheet of paper on which the instructions were printed ,including an explanation of the nature of the think aloud task ,the procedures of the task ,and some warm up practice (see Appendix 4 for the instruction) . The instructions emphasized the following points :1) The participant should try to verbalize initially whatever he /she thought in mind ;2) The participant could choose to use whatever language that can best express him -/herself .

Step 2 :Warm up practice

Two model vignettes containing two English idioms were used for warm up practice to make sure that the participant understood the procedures ,providing the participants with an opportunity to get used to reflecting their thoughts in words .

Step 3 :The think aloud task

The sixteen target idioms were given to the participant in a random order . For each item ,a slip of paper with a vignette containing the target idiom was shown to the participant . All the target idioms were in bold and underlined so that the participants had no difficulty locating them .

The participant was required not to explain the meaning of the whole vignette or the whole sentence containing the target idiom . In the case when there was a silent span of more than 10 seconds ,the interviewer would usually prompt the participant . The typical prompts were :“ keep talking ” ,“ Tell me what you are thinking about ” ,“ Anything else ? ”

3.4 Data analysis

The audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim ,yielding 112 double spaced pages containing approximately 45 000 words . The verbal protocol data were then coded and analyzed with the software Win Max (Strauss &Corbin 1998) .

The first step in coding was to score the participants comprehension of the 16 idioms . A correct answer to the meaning of each idiom was granted 1 point ,while wrong comprehension or indication of not knowing the meaning of the idiom was scored 0 .

With reference to previous studies dealing with online L2 idiom comprehension (Cooper 1999 ; Liontas 2001) and online L2 reading comprehension (Grabe 2004 ;Nassaji 2003) ,a total of ten comprehension strategies were identified as used by the subjects in the task . A detailed description of the strategies will be presented in the next section .

To test the reliability of the researcher's coding, a second rater, a Chinese EFL teacher, was invited to code the transcribed verbal protocols. Interrater agreement was 92 % for idiom comprehension and 88 % for strategy identification. Sections where discrepancies occurred were discussed and a consensus was finally achieved.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Learners' comprehension of English idioms in reading

With regard to the comprehension of English idioms in reading, the results of the think aloud task show that (Table 2), taken the two L2 groups as a whole, PT and NET idioms posed the greatest difficulty in comprehension, next came FF idioms, while ET idioms were the easiest to comprehend. The results converge with findings of previous L2 idiom studies (e.g., Kellerman 1979, 1983; Irujo 1986), namely, the greater the degree of similarity between the idiom and the L1 translation counterparts, the easier idiom comprehension is, and vice versa.

Table 2. Correct comprehension of idioms in the think aloud task by two L2 groups

Idiom type	Number of idioms	Intermediate groups (n = 8)	Upper intermediate group (n = 8)	Total (n = 16)
ET	4	28	32	60
PT	4	10	21	31
NET	4	14	24	38
FF	4	22	26	48

Concerning the effect of L2 proficiency on the learners' idiom comprehension performance, Table 2 demonstrates some differences in comprehension performance between the two L2 groups. The Upper-Intermediate learners maintained a higher rate of correctness across all four idiom types, and the gaps between the two L2 groups in PT and NET idioms were bigger than those in ET and FF idioms. The results are compatible with the findings of L2 reading research which show that the students' general proficiency levels or reading skills are related to the rate of successful inferencing in context (e.g., Mori & Nagi 1999; Morrison 1996).

4.2 Comprehension processes of idioms by L2 learners in reading

4.2.1 Comprehension strategies identified in L2 idiom comprehension

Based on a careful examination of the verbal reports given by the sixteen participants, ten types of strategies were identified as used in the process of comprehending the target idioms³.

1) Making schematic inferences. The participants discussed the context in which the idiom was embedded and clearly made reference to the situation to infer the meaning of the target idiom.

e.g. 1 (Target idiom: tighten one's belt)

The company is facing a financial loss this month and the power of the architect is fading. The company, therefore, has to reduce its size⁴. (UI8F⁵)

2) Literal translation. Some participants were aware of the metaphorical aspect of idioms, and concentrated on the literal meaning of the expressions as a key to the figurative meaning.

e.g. 2 (Target idiom: lift a finger)

In fact, during this critical period, the so-called friends... "(not) lift a finger" means that those in power and declared friends... did not reach out a finger to help the Jews. (I1M)

3) Using cohesive devices. The participants resorted to cohesive devices to discern the meaning of idioms, for example, also indicating juxtaposition, while but implying opposition.

e.g. 3 (Target idiom :pull one's weight)

In the beginning ,the coach said that although Ronaldo had two goals ,he was still not at his best .
... Here the man "also commented that he did not pull his weight "."Also" indicates that what the man commented is in conformity with what the coach said . Therefore , "pull his weight " means that he did not try his best . (UI1F)

4) Analyzing the idiom . The participants exercised their skills of logical thinking to solve the linguistic puzzle represented by the unknown L2 idiom .

e.g. 4 (Target idiom :draw a blank)

"They " refers to the policemen . They drew a blank They searched the house ."Blank " means nothing . Maybe they found nothing ... The police searched his house and inquired of a few persons . (I4 M)

5) Making image associations . Sometimes the subjects visualized an image based on the literal meaning of the idiom . Then an interpretation of the idiom was obtained on the basis of the generated image .

e.g. 5 (Target idiom :drag one's feet)

When I read (dragging their feet) ,I feel like that one is handicapped and could not move swiftly ... Are the banks sluggish in the issuing of new cards ? (UI2F)

6) Relying on the tone of the vignettes . Occasionally ,the subjects made comments or meta analysis on the tone of the text ,defining it as either positive or negative ,whereby ascertaining whether an idiom was commendatory ,neutral ,or derogatory . They then tried to work out the meaning of the idiom in conformity with the tone of the vignette .

e.g. 6 (Target idiom :get one's goat)

The vignette says that he is a talented tennis player and his shots are natural .The vignette praises him ...for his confidence in court and modesty off the court . And he will never let frustrations of missed shots "get his goat " . This remark should also be complimentary about him . "Get his goat " may mean negative effects on his emotions . (UI1F)

7) Using background knowledge . The participants drew on their personal experiences and encyclopedic knowledge to interpret the figurative meaning of the idiom .

e.g. 7 (Target idiom :take the biscuit)

... S2 students "have taken the biscuit " ...Presumably ,S2 students are either the best or the worst in the speech contest . It is impossible that the vignette reports on the worst group in the contest ,so S2 must be the best one . "Take the biscuit " ,therefore ,should mean "take the first place "just like a news report ,first providing the main events ,and then moving on with details ...If the S2 students were not the champion ,the vignette would not mention their preparation ,since it would be meaningless doing that . Yes ,sometimes common sense knowledge is useful in understanding an idiom . (UI1F)

8) Using grammatical information . The participants utilized grammatical clues whenever such information was available ,such as tense ,part of speech .

e.g. 8 (Target idiom :chew the fat)

The subject of this sentence is a group of people and "chewing the fat "is the predicate ,indicating what the people are doing ... According to the whole sentence ,are they analyzing the components of food ? (UI5 M)

9) Referring to L1 idioms . Sometimes the participants recalled Chinese idioms that were identical or similar enough to the English idioms to aid in their interpretation .

e.g. 9 (Target idiom :tighten one's belt)

There is an old saying in Chinese ,“把裤腰带系紧”, meaning that one has to tight his belt if he is hungry . The English idiom ,let me see ,...er ,it resembles the Chinese idiom . After the financial loss , the company has to be thrifty and careful in the use of money .(UI2F)

10) Guessing . There were times when the subjects found it extremely difficult to discern the meaning of the target idioms and therefore made wild guesses , which consequently led to wrong comprehension .

e .g . 10 (Target idiom : make one s bed)

It s very difficult to understand ...it s too difficult ... maybe it [make one s bed] means ruining one s fame ,destroying one s reputation .(I5 M)

4 .2 .2 Frequency of strategy use

The participants usually adopted more than one strategy to process an idiom ,but not every strategy they used led to correct comprehension . The quantity of strategies and the effectiveness of strategy use were of equal importance to reveal the comprehension processes of the participants . Therefore ,we will present the results of the verbal reports from two perspectives :the frequency and effectiveness of strategy use .

Table 3. Strategies by frequency of use (for all the participants)

No .	Strategies	Total	% of all uses
1	Making schematic inferences	220	62 .5 %
2	Using cohesive devices	26	7 .4 %
3	Literal translation	23	6 .5 %
4	Analyzing the idiom	23	6 .5 %
5	Relying on the tone of the vignette	17	4 .8 %
6	Making image associations	14	4 .0 %
7	Referring to an L1 idiom	12	3 .4 %
8	Using gram matical information	8	2 .3 %
9	Using background information	7	2 .0 %
10	Guessing	2	0 .6 %
	Total	352	100 %

Table 3 ranks the strategies used by all the participants in descending order of frequency of occurrence . Notably ,there was a predominance of making schematic inferences among all strategies , accounting for more than three fifths of the total . By contrast ,the participants relied on the strategy of guessing the least frequently . With regard to the other eight strategies in between ,the gaps between the frequency of use were not that distinct ,ranging from 7 (using background information ,accounting for 2 . 0 % of the total)to 26 (using cohesive devices ,7 .4 %).

4 .2 .3 Idiom type and frequency of strategy use

Figure 1 shows the number of strategies used in comprehending each type of idioms . As can be observed ,the participants strategy use varied as they encountered different types of idioms . Certain types of idioms (e .g . PT & NET idioms) tend to be correlated with more frequent use of strategies , suggesting that the participants were making greater efforts in figuring out the meaning .

Figure 1 . Strategy use and idiom type

For ET idioms ,because they have direct Chinese translation equivalents ,the learners relied on their L1 in interpreting them more than they did in interpreting other types of idioms ,resulting in relatively frequent use of literal translation and referring to an L1 idiom . The number of strategies used in the interpretation of PT idioms ranked first across all four idiom types . Since PT idioms had only partial translation equivalents in Chinese ,fewer L1 related strategies were found compared with ET idioms . With regard to NET idioms ,since they do not have Chinese translation equivalents ,none of the L1 -related strategies were found in use in interpreting them . Notably ,among all the idiom types ,the participants used the fewest number of strategies in interpreting FF idioms .

While the preference of strategy use differs among idiom types , making schematic inferences took a leading role among all strategies and the frequency of adopting this strategy did not vary much across the four idiom types ,indicating that the L2 learners relied heavily on schematic information in the interpretation of idioms .

4.2.4 Proficiency level and strategy use

The two groups of participants were both active strategy users as far as the quantity of strategies is concerned . The total number of instances of strategies used by the Intermediate group was 169 (48 .15 % of the total) , which was slightly smaller than that used by the Upper Intermediate group (182 ,or 51.85 % of the total) . The two groups of subjects ,however ,differed in their preference for specific strategies . Table 4 summarizes the strategies employed by the Intermediate and Upper Intermediate learners respectively .

Table 4. Strategy use by the two L2 groups

No	Strategies	ET		PT		NET		FF		Total	
		IN	UI	IN	UI	IN	UI	IN	UI	IN	UI
1	Making schematic inferences	26	26	29	28	25	31	23	32	103	117
2	Literal translation	9	9	2	1	0	0	3	0	14	13
3	Using cohesive devices	0	0	6	11	6	3	0	0	12	13
4	Analyzing the idiom	2	0	2	7	6	3	1	3	11	13
5	The tone of the vignette	1	2	1	1	4	4	2	2	8	9
6	Image association	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	1	7	5

No	Strategies	ET		PT		NET		FF		Total	
		IN	UI	IN	UI	IN	UI	IN	UI	IN	UI
7	Using background information	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	0	5	1
8	Referring to an L1 idiom	1	7	1	1	0	0	2	0	4	8
9	Using grammatical information	0	0	1	2	0	1	3	1	4	4
10	Guessing	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
	Total	40	45	43	52	44	46	42	39	169	182

Note :IN :The Intermediate Group ;UI :The Upper Intermediate Group .

A close examination of the Table 4 shows that the first five most frequently employed strategies presented in Table 3 topped the strategy list of both L2 groups . These five strategies accounted for 87 .6 % of total strategy use for the Intermediate group , and 89 .6 % for the Upper Intermediate group , suggesting the Upper - Intermediate participants used these strategies slightly more often than the Intermediate learners .

The biggest difference in strategy use between the two groups lay in making schematic inferences , which was used 103 times and 117 times by the Intermediate and Upper Intermediate learners respectively . When it comes to the remaining nine strategies , although slight variation was seen between the two L2 groups , the difference was less pronounced .

4 .2 .5 Effectiveness of strategy use

a . Effective use of strategies

Of the 256 test items (16 test items x 16 participants) ,177 were answered correctly , representing a 69 .14 % success rate among the participants . Although in many cases the participants used more than one strategy to discern the meaning of the idiom , only the one that led directly to the correct response was included in this account (cf . Chen 2004 ;Cooper 1999) .

Table 5. Frequency of effective strategies in the think aloud task (for all the participants)

No .	Strategies	Frequency	% of all uses
1	Making schematic inferences	133	75 .14 %
2	Literal translation	16	9 .04 %
3	Referring to an L1 idiom	10	5 .65 %
4	Using cohesive devices	6	3 .39 %
5	Analyzing the idiom	5	2 .83 %
6	Making image associations	5	2 .83 %
7	Using background information	2	1 .12 %
	Total	177	100 %

In rank order the strategies leading to correct interpretations were making schematic inferences , literal translation , referring to an L1 idiom , using cohesive devices , analyzing the idiom , making image associations , and using background information . Three strategies , relying on the tone of the vignette , using grammatical information , and sheering guessing , are absent in Table 5 . Because they did not lead to successful interpretation of idioms , these strategies are considered as ineffective in interpreting the idioms .

b . Effective strategy use and idiom type

Recall that Figure 1 shows that the participants strategy use differed as they encountered different

types of idioms . A close examination of the successful strategies used in interpreting the four types of idioms also points to the same conclusion . Figure 2 presents a summary of effective strategy use for each idiom type . As can be seen , ET idioms ranked first in the number of effective strategies used (60 tokens of effective strategies) , next came FF idioms (48 tokens) , which was followed by NET idioms (38 tokens) and PT idioms (31 tokens) .

In accordance with strategy use in general (see Table 3) , the most popular successful strategy was making schematic inferences across all four idiom types . Although this strategy ranked first in strategy use for each idiom type , it seemed the most effective in interpreting FF idioms (44 tokens) . For ET idioms , since they had Chinese translation equivalents , the participants often drew on their L1 knowledge in interpreting them , resulting in relatively frequent occurrence of such strategies as literal translation (15 tokens) and referring to an L1 idiom (8 tokens) . With regard to PT idioms , although the lowest number of successful strategy use was found (31 tokens) , these strategies covered six types . In sharp contrast , only three types of successful strategies were used in the interpretation of NET idioms .

Figure 2 . Effective strategies used for each idiom type

c . Effective strategy use and learners L2 proficiency

To further probe whether successful strategy use was related to the learners L2 proficiency , the number of successful strategies adopted by both L2 groups was counted (see Figure 3) .

Note : IN : The Intermediate Group ; UI : The Upper Intermediate Group .

Figure 3 . Frequency of effective strategies used by the two L2 groups

As is evident in Figure 3, for both L2 groups, making schematic inferences was the most efficient strategy in idiom comprehension. The Upper Intermediate learners, however, were more capable of making good use of contextual clues to derive the meaning of the idioms (79 tokens for the Upper-Intermediate group and 54 tokens for the Intermediate group). Besides, their use of L1 knowledge was also more successful than that of the Intermediate group (for the Upper-Intermediate group, 8 tokens of literal translation and 8 tokens of referring to an L1 idiom; for the Intermediate group, 8 tokens of literal translation and 2 tokens of referring to an L1 idiom). With regard to the use of the rest four strategies, only trivial differences were observed between the two L2 groups.

5. Conclusion

The data obtained in the think aloud task suggest that both idiom type and learners' L2 proficiency have a role to play in L2 idiom comprehension. To be specific, PT and NET idioms posed the greatest in comprehension, next came FF idioms, while ET idioms were the easiest to comprehend, showing that increased degree of L1-L2 similarity between an English idiom and its Chinese translation equivalent foreshadows easier comprehension. Understandably, choices of strategies differed with idiom type. The subjects utilized more strategies in comprehending PT and NET idioms, suggesting that they were making efforts figuring out the meaning of these idioms. Both the Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate learners were active strategy users; however, the Upper-Intermediate learners used the comprehension strategies more successfully than the Intermediate ones and therefore performed better in comprehending the idioms.

The findings of the present study bear some pedagogical implications for EFL teaching. As the study demonstrates, idiom type has a role to play in idiom comprehension. During L2 instruction, therefore, instead of treating all the idioms in the same way, differential attention should be paid to different types of idioms. For example, for L2 idioms which have L1 equivalents (e.g. ET idioms), since comprehension will no longer be a problem, L2 teachers may focus on the productive use of them. For L2 idioms which cannot be translated directly into the L1 (e.g. NET and FF idioms), however, comprehension should be privileged over production in classroom instruction.

Concerning the learners' use of idiom comprehension strategies, the study showed that although both the Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate learners were active strategy users, strategy use by the Upper-Intermediate learners were more effective. This indicates that teaching readers how to use reading strategies should be a prime consideration in the reading classroom. In reading strategy instruction, it is advisable that L2 teachers explain to the students what the strategy is, why and how it should be learned, where and when to use the strategy, as well as how to evaluate the effectiveness of strategy use.

With regard to the on-line comprehension of L2 idioms, future research might expand on the present study in several ways. To begin with, being exploratory in nature, this study involved only 16 participants and 16 English idioms. Other studies might include a larger sample and a larger number of target idioms to see whether the results obtained could be generalized or not. Another limitation of the study is that it did not probe into the differential roles of different contexts in idiom comprehension. L2 reading researchers have revealed that different contexts exert different effects on inferring meanings of new words in L2 reading (e.g. Li 1988; Mondria & Wit-Boer 1991). Although our study has demonstrated the important role of context in L2 learners' idiom comprehension, it did not consider the effects of different contexts on this process. More studies are necessary in this regard. Finally, while semantic decomposability has been widely considered as a swing factor in the comprehension of idioms (e.g. Abel 2003), the present study did not take semantic decomposability as an independent variable affecting L2 idiom processing. Further research is needed to measure the effects that semantic decomposability might have on the comprehension of L2 idioms.

Notes

1. The test consisted of 120 multiple-choice items. In scoring, each correct choice was awarded one point and no point was given to incorrect choices. Thus, the maximum score was 120 points.
2. A pilot study testing the idiom knowledge of EFL learners whose English proficiency levels were similar to those of the two groups of subjects showed that the sixteen target idioms were unfamiliar to them.

- 3 . The idiom comprehension strategies used by the participants were identified according to the idea units instead of T units of the participants verbal reports (cf . Cooper 1999 ;Liontas 2001). For examples ,please go to the excerpts listed after each strategy in this section .
- 4 . As mentioned in §3.3 ,in the think aloud task ,the participants were free to use either Chinese or English . Consequently ,the verbal reports were a blend of both languages ,with Chinese the predominate one . In the present article ,all the excerpts listed were translated into English .
- 5 . For the sake of convenience and clarity ,each subject participating in the think aloud task was labeled in such a way that their proficiency level ,order of task participation ,and sex were manifest . For example ,in “ UI1F ” , “ UI ” refers to “ Upper Intermediate ” , “ 1 ” shows that she was the first subject in the Upper Intermediate group ,and “ F ” means that the subject was female . In the same vein , “ I1M ” means that the subject was the first one in the Intermediate group and was male .

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Appendix 1 The vocabulary test

Instructions(说明) :本问卷的目的在于调查您英语词汇量的大小。试卷由120 个单词组成 ,每个单词旁列有5 个选择项。您的任务是在5 个选项中挑选一个与测试词同义或相关的词 ,然后将代表这一选项的字母填在 Correct Choice 这一格的下面。

注意 :回答本问卷的方法可能与您以往做过的词汇测试卷有所不同。您并不总是选择同义词 ,有时您应选择与测试词相关的词。下面举例说明 :

举例1

Test word	A	B	C	D	E	Correct Choice
surgery	anger	celebrate	defeat	hospital	wave	D

举例2

Test word	A	B	C	D	E	Correct Choice
novelty	booklet	Christmas	diamond	poem	new	E

现在 ,您可以开始做题了 !

A Vocabulary Test

姓名 : 班级 : 专业 :

No .	Test word	A	B	C	D	E	Correct Choice
1	power	face	foot	force	garden	jewel	
2	during	crisis	round	time	tool	weapon	
3	experience	careful	industry	know how	loneliness	pleasure	
4	office	army	illness	stable	typist	ugly	
5	obvious	evident	funny	lovely	naughty	poison	
6	consider	bright	decide	plunder	reflect upon	relate	
7	issue	correct	fabric	law	limit	magazine	
8	rule	govern	house	huge	small	wheel	
9	benefit	advantage	animal	clothing	loyalty	well behaved	
10	charge	battery	conversation	fire	regret	snake	
11	secret	animal	bureau	collar	liquid	private	
12	pattern	animal	design	flower	garden	theatre	

No .	Test word	A	B	C	D	E	Correct Choice
13	remove	argue	catch	close	lock	take away	
14	occasion	accident	event	hunger	limit	progress	
15	maintain	favour	hill	keep	organize	wonder	
16	opinion	character	engine	plant	tree	view	
17	beat	calm	food	hit	piece	teeth	
18	task	elephant	hard	job	odour	weapon	
19	threat	agreement	handle	menace	strength	swallow	
20	royal	clerk	enemy	king	monk	star	
21	tower	animal	fortress	plant	skill	vegetable	
22	expensive	religious	strange	thoughtful	valuable	wide	
23	crop	bird	body	golf	harvest	police	
24	joke	carriage	clothes	laugh	royalty	weight	
25	trace	competition	peace	rope	sew	track	
26	soil	cook	earth	lazy	metal	weak	
27	chamber	jewel	poison	room	smoke	wheel angle	
28	county	aristocracy	clock	lesson	region	song	
29	stomach	bird	body	create	plant	violence	
30	approve	evidence	like	quarrel	regret	test	
31	sin	fool	late	offence	race	relative	
32	agriculture	farmer	ghetto	nobility	slavery	stoneage	
33	divorce	doctor	maths	police	separate	share	
34	toy	funny	lazy	play	shy	sweets	
35	mess	church	many	network	untidy	wet	
36	neglect	contact	disregard	jewellery	money	pyjamas	
37	employee	company	director	messenger	navy	warship	
38	prayer	carpenter	dog	musician	religion	ship	
39	compel	beg	calculate	declare	force	prosecute	
40	disgust	broom	conversation	sicken	stormy	tasty	
41	shower	joke	music	performance	pretend	rain	
42	pad	bolster	friend	mess	skirt	wheel	

No .	Test word	A	B	C	D	E	Correct Choice
43	widow	basket	bride	bright	funeral	tree	
44	deprive	alter	inherit	lonesome	take away	understand	
45	wool	bird	fish	food	house	lamb	
46	clay	dress	paper	pot	tool	weapon	
47	weep	bird	cry	cloth	grass	turn	
48	brass	clothes	fire	game	layer	metal	
49	decay	deterioration	distribute	encourage	entrap	lump	
50	adolescent	hospital	smell	smooth	teenager	unfaithful	
51	scar	frighten	hard	kitchen	rare	wound	
52	inherent	belonging to	recent	regular	relative	superior	
53	lazy	boat	flower	idle	rope	windy	
54	conspicuous	apparent	disease	fierce	guilty	miniature	
55	warrior	anxiety	carriage	computer	quarrel	soldier	
56	incentive	incapable	insensitive	spur	urgent	useless	
57	brood	offspring	needlework	reactor	water	wide	
58	hurl	bump	hair	leg	prevent	throw	
59	sorrow	animal	fruit	grief	plough	weave	
60	torch	cake	hinder	light	pest	ship	
61	bud	flower	move	offer	twinkle	virus	
62	execution	abandon	apology	enlargement	irritation	kill	
63	grape	clutch	reach	seduce	wine	yellow	
64	ominous	exciting	lovely	mature	nasty	threatening	
65	foam	beer	berry	mud	odour	plant	
66	spice	fish	flavour	fruit	insect	nail	
67	trifle	guess	gun	important	little	rage	
68	bloke	animal	cover	guy	hinder	ship	
69	paw	cat	disease	river	sound	swan	
70	wallet	boy	fish	money	service	stone	
71	treason	betray	branch	clothes	ship	wire	
72	barren	awkward	desert	ship	shrewd	tree	

No .	Test word	A	B	C	D	E	Correct Choice
73	elevate	appreciate	electricity	raise	referendum	reproach	
74	bladder	cave	climb	fruit	gossip	organ	
75	gorgeous	happy	healthy	hopeless	lovely	sad	
76	suspension	bridge	cricket	field	food	retirement	
77	eloquent	disease	luxurious	probable	well spoken	youth	
78	discern	anxiety	deteriorate	distinguish	simplify	uneven	
79	snug	cosy	cut	disadvantage	handsome	sleep	
80	wasp	catch	insect	material	stir	tree	
81	reconciliation	cowardice	degradation	desire	reconstruction	settlement	
82	wistful	mean	merry	nasty	teasing	thoughtful	
83	stationary	booklet	com municative	motionless	paper	transportation	
84	ailment	breath	illness	reptile	smoke	weapon	
85	cuddle	fondle	fruit	golf	horse	spice	
86	durable	exact	lasting	major	metallic	slippery	
87	languid	compassionate	inactive	polyglot	sensuous	speechless	
88	masonry	household	lawyer	plywood	steelworks	stonework	
89	maple	corn	fabric	pillar	title	tree	
90	obstruct	attack	fight	hinder	isolate	persecute	
91	pneumonia	disease	flower	simulation	subconscious - ness	tool	
92	tycoon	bird	businessman	hurricane	monkey	parasite	
93	cutlery	fork	obstruction	occupation	sew	stab	
94	tranquil	bohe mian	border	calm	contest	elaborate	
95	inert	deficient	motionless	nervous	rude	transparent	
96	obesity	brutal	fatness	force	hindrance	repulsive	
97	inkling	feud	hint	inscription	widower	wretch	
98	inquest	demand	discipline	election	investigation	overdraft	
99	antic	rapid	ridiculous	sharp	shy	stiff	
100	secluded	circular	exclusive	isolated	marginal	spatial	
101	posh	animal	bad	carry	fine	ugly	
102	vacate	empty	hide	interfere	tear	wonder	

No .	Test word	A	B	C	D	E	Correct Choice
103	blemish	barbaric	defect	misconception	recoil	weed	
104	custodian	artist	border	guardian	loner	maverick	
105	urchin	dwarf	fabric	goblin	roguish child	small urn	
106	cobweb	seaweed	shellfish	spider	upholstery	weapon	
107	itinerary	edition	fretful	itching	liberal	route	
108	mirth	failure	fish	fun	sadness	soil	
109	belligerent	exquisite	floral	impertinent	loving	warlike	
110	dexterity	depression	idleness	indifference	mixture	skill	
111	cleat	cushion	garden	glue	rag	rope	
112	coalesce	carbon	celebrate	diverge	enlighten	unite	
113	arson	archer	bribery	colour	fire	poison	
114	banister	caretaker	container	food	handrail	lawyer	
115	reverie	clergyman	dream	fruit	reconsider	territory	
116	thrift	crevice	dessert	disagreement	economy	flower	
117	obnoxious	church	dutiful	poison	repellent	slanting	
118	specs	clothes	glasses	sharp	stain	tongs	
119	exaltation	confusion	disappointment	excitement	proficiency	relief	
120	extradite	criminal	delete	extinguish	restore	specific	

Appendix 2 The idioms used in the think aloud task

ET Idioms :tighten one s belt ;leave one s mark ;swallow the bait ;lift a finger

PT Idioms :find one s feet ;drag one s feet ;draw a blank ;turn the tables

NET Idioms :pull one s weight ;get one s goat ;chew the fat ;take the biscuit

FF Idioms :pull one s leg ;eat one s words ;make one s bed ;move heaven and earth

Appendix 3 Vignettes used in the think aloud task (with target idioms in bold and underlined)

1) Sir Norman Foster , CEO of Foster Group International , is an architect who revels(喜欢) in working on the most prestigious(有声望的) schemes . He has projects in 22 different countries and currently is building Beijing airport , thought to be the largest single construction project on the planet . The company , however , filed a £544 000 loss this month and the key factor appears to be the quadrupling(翻四倍) of its bill for taxes relating to previous years . The power of the world s most celebrated architect might be fading and the company has to tighten its belt . A series of measures have been introduced at the London headquarters , including the cancellation of a takeaway contract for late night staff meals and after hours taxis home .

2) Phishing is the latest deceptive practice on the Internet that involves a “ phisher ” sending out

legitimate looking e-mail messages that appear to be sent by well known banks ,credit card companies , online retailers and even Internet service providers . For instance ,you receive an e-mail with a “serious looking ”subject line like “ Warning :You Must Update Your Account Information Immediately ” ,which tells you there s a problem with your account or service that requires you to verify certain information such as your password ,account code ,federaltax ID number or social security number .If you respond to the phishing e-mail as requested ,you have swallowed the bait . The phisher can immediately use your confidential information to loot(洗劫) your bank account ,run up tremendous charges on your credit cards and ,in some cases ,engage in complete identity theft .

3) After Martin Luther King Jr . was assassinated(暗杀)in 1968 ,Coretta Scott King devoted almost 38 years of her life to pursuing her husband s legacy(遗留物) ,but it is less than fair or accurate to define her as if she were little more than an annex(附属物) of the martyred civil rights leader . Mrs . King founded the Martin Luther King Jr . Center for Nonviolent Social Change ,in Atlanta ,and used it to confront hunger ,unemployment ,voting rights and racism . She has left her mark on the nation and is regarded as the first lady of the civil rights movement .

4) On April 19 ,1943 ,the Bermuda Conference gathered in order to discuss saving the Jews of Europe . The participants knew of the annihilation(消灭) of the Jews ,but they did everything in their power to avoid dealing with the problem . All the suggestions for rescue operations which the Jewish organizations presented were rejected .

Indeed ,during this most terrible ,critical period of mass murder ,those in power and the declared friends of Jews did not lift a finger . This is the Jewish lesson of the Holocaust(大屠杀) :to depend on no one . The State of Israel has learned this lesson . Since its establishment ,it has done its utmost to defend itself and its citizens .It provides a haven(避难所) for any Jew ,wherever he may be . The Jews and Israel know that they can trust no one but themselves .

5) Millions of people with credit cards issued by big banks could be unable to use them during May sales because of the antifraud(防伪) measures that take effect today . These may obstruct(阻碍) spending at this month s sales . The banks ,however ,are dragging their feet on the new antifraud “ chip and pin ” cards ,which are protected with a microchip and personal identification numbers .

HSBC(汇丰银行) has admitted they have not yet sent new cards to nearly a third of their customers . Although consumers will be able to sign for purchases for a “transitional period ” ,retailers may be reluctant to accept signatures and have the right to refuse to do so . A spokesman for HSBC says that they are doing everything they can to make sure people have chip and pin cards as soon as possible .

6) Nearly two weeks after a non-bailable(不可保释的) warrant was issued ,the police on Friday raided the official residence of Jaiprakash Narayan Yadav ,but they drew a blank .

Armed with a copy of the warrant ,a police team searched Mr . Yadav s Five Ashoka Road bungalow (平房) for about half an hour ,questioning some residents including his servants . On October 24 a court in Jamui in Bihar issued non-bailable warrants against Mr . Yadav and four others ,including his brother and RJD candidates in the Assembly election .

This is the second time a police team ,armed with a non-bailable warrant ,raided the official residence of a Union Minister in the United Progressive Alliance Government . Political commentators say that Yadav s behavior is an affront(冒犯) to democracy .

7) Local handset(手机) manufacturers like Ningbo Bird and TCL have been taking share from global giants in China ,capitalizing on their wider distribution networks and making up for what they lack in techy features . But statistics indicates that foreign handset vendors Nokia and Motorola have turned the tables on China s domestic producers .

Domestic vendors(销售商) thrived because their strengths were foreign vendors weaknesses . Outside companies focused their sales and distribution on China s big cities ,while local companies forged sales networks out into smaller cities and rural areas . Though foreign handsets have a better reputation for quality and features ,local devices were brought to market very quickly and focused on fashion and

design . But now foreign companies like Nokia and Motorola have retooled (重组) their sales and distribution to reach a much wider market and take back share .

8) While many know him as Gandhis (甘地) secretary , few have a real sense of the role Mahadev Desai played in Gandhis life . Born in 1892 in a poor family , Mahadev studied hard , acquiring a law degree when he was 21 . In 1917 , Mahadev Desai was one of the earliest people who decided to work with Gandhi . For a young man who had had a life beset (困扰) with poverty and was beginning to find his feet in the world , it was a momentous (重大的) decision . Mahadev had to give up his job in a bank as well as the high salary , while Gandhi only offered a precarious (不稳定的) future . In the twenty five years afterwards , Mahadev left behind an immense trail of selfless service to Gandhi . Its no exaggeration to say that Mahadev sacrificed his life for the nation and the people he so loved .

9) Brazil emphatically (坚决地) booked their place in the World Cup quarterfinals after a 4-1 performance which left Chile reeling (踉跄) . Barely ten minutes after the match began , Cesar Sampaio took off like a human dart to head home the first goal . Sampaio crashed home a second and Ronaldo hit the third and fourth . Ronaldo , the world player of the year , has now notched three goals at the World Cup .

Brazilian coach Mario Zagallo could already see the trophy (奖杯) in his hands , but he warned that Ronaldo , despite the fact he scored two goals and twice hit the woodwork , was still not at his best . Former Brazilian star Zico also commented that Ronaldo hadn't pulled his weight in the first round .

10) Over the past year , the aura of U . S . teen tennis sensation Andy Roddick has swelled based on wins . Roddick , 18 , has climbed from No . 596 in the ATP's tournament entry rankings to No . 30 .

After nearly a full year on tour , Roddick's game is overwhelmingly better . His groundstrokes angle inbounds instead of out . His volleying (击球) is so natural . He serves accurately and fast . He is very confident on the court and very humble off the court . He never lets the frustrations of missed shots get his goat .

Some tennis prodigies (天才) , like Andre Agassi and Jennifer Capriati , couldn't stop fame from damaging them . Roddick looks as if he could persevere through tennis stardom (明星地位) . He has an athletic 6 foot 1 , 180 pound frame , and now he has a head to go with it .

11) Nearly a dozen foodservice executives with credentials (资格证) in research , menu development and purchasing gathered recently for a Health & Nutrition Roundtable , sponsored by America's Beef Producers , Kraft Foods and Ventura Foods LLC , chewing the fat on food and diet trends for two days . The panelists (小组成员) were joined by sponsor representatives and touched on topics ranging from current consumer interest in healthful foods to operational challenges created by such interest to speculation about the " next big thing " in nutrition . They also discussed new measures to combat the growing problem of childhood obesity (肥胖) , calling for a ban on junk food advertising .

12) Speakers from St Joan of Arc Secondary School have demonstrated their mastery with words . The school's S2 Faith boys have taken the biscuit at the 56th Hong Kong Schools Speech Festival .

No fewer than 37 students from S1 and S6 took part in the solo verse speaking , prose reading and Bible reading sections . All students underwent intensive training from mid-September to the end of November . During the first week of November , all contestants attended a propaedeutic (预备的) performance in the school in order to gain more confidence in performing in front of an audience , as well as to learn the techniques of reciting a poem or reading prose or the Bible .

Most of the students were rookie (新手) public speakers . They worked very hard during practices and their efforts paid off . Staff and students aimed at achieving better results next year .

13) For six-year-old Rohit , going to school was becoming a nightmare . His scores in spelling had dropped remarkably and he wasn't able to recognize alphabets (字母) . His classmates often pulled his leg , taking advantage of the fact that he couldn't even spell " bat " or " dog " .

Rohit is affected by dyslexia . Dyslexia , a lifelong language based learning disability , is characterized

by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. Although affected children have language processing and learning difficulties, they can do other things quite well.

Though there is no specific cure for dyslexia, certain ways can be developed to assuage(缓解) the inability. The child's teacher and parents should be extremely patient with the child and work on the inherent talents that the child has, develop them and encourage them to be used more often.

14) In 1997, Steve Jobs returned to Apple, the company he helped start in 1976. Shortly after his return, Dell's founder and chairman, Michael Dell, was asked at a technology conference what might be done to fix Apple, then deeply troubled financially. Dell said, "I'd shut it down and give the money back to the shareholders."

Since returning to Apple, Jobs has revitalized(注入活力) the company's computer business and created its wildly successful iPod division. In 2000 he pulled the company out of its financial nose dive. Last week, the 12 percent surge in Apple's stock price pushed the company's market capitalization to \$72.13 billion, passing Dell's value of \$71.97 billion. Last Friday afternoon, after the close of the stock market, apparently savoring(品味) the moment, Jobs sent a brief e-mail message to Apple employees, suggesting that Michael Dell should eat his words.

15) By word of mouth, leaflets passed hand to hand, and email messages, student activists are building a grassroots(民众) network for the June 24 "Millions for Mumia" marches in Philadelphia. "Millions for Mumia" is a fund-raising campaign built to save Mumia Abu Jamal, an African American political prisoner on death row in Pennsylvania. Students are moving heaven and earth to stop the execution of Mumia.

On June 7, students plan to hold news conferences in 11 cities. There they will recall how Mumia Abu Jamal first became a target of government subjugation(制服) when he joined the Black Panther Party. They will point out how the award-winning journalist was charged in 1981 with killing a white Philadelphia cop, and how his political affiliations(加盟) were used by prosecutors to justify the death penalty after a trial riddled(充满) with bias.

16) Thursday night's speech by President Bush was a mere down payment on the extraordinary outlay(开支) that will be needed to rebuild New Orleans. The president is in the unenviable position of having to accommodate some \$200 billion or more in unanticipated expenditures to help the families of the region.

This president inherited a budget surplus from the previous administration — a cushion that could have been used to soften the budgetary blow of exactly this sort of monetary emergency. He has made his bed by recklessly wasting that surplus on bloated(膨胀的) government spending, reckless tax cuts for his wealthy pals(同伙), and an even more reckless war in Iraq.

\$200 billion is not a small number. Bush needs to work to make sure spending is implemented wisely on the Katrina reconstruction.

Appendix 4 Instruction for the think aloud task

你好！欢迎参加我们的研究。

习语(idioms)在语言中普遍存在,使用广泛。英语习语一般由几个单词构成,可能具有一定的历史渊源或文化内涵,其整体意义不是各个单词词义的简单总和(如 rain cats and dogs 下倾盆大雨 bring the house down 博得满堂喝彩)。在英语学习中,英语习语是学习者的一大困难。我们将研究英语学习者在英语阅读当中,如何理解英语习语。

在你面前,有16张卡片。每张卡片上都有一个英语习语以及一篇含有该习语的小短文。请你说出每个习语的意思,并且进行有声思维(think aloud),即说出从你看到该习语的第一眼开始,到你得出它的意义的过程中你所有的心理活动。比如,看到一个习语之后,你可能会想:中文里有没有类似的表达?该习语的字面意义和它的真实意义之间有什么联系吗?能不能从该习语中的某个词猜出整个习语的意义?这个习语能让人有什么联想?上下文对理解该习语有帮助吗?.....

请你从看到每个习语的第一眼开始就说出你的心里所想,直到你弄清楚了该习语的意思为止。说的时侯,无需刻意进行计划,只要说出你当时所想的一切即可,就好像你一个人待在房间里,在自言自语一样。请持续不停地说出你的心理活动,如果你停止了,我会提醒你往下说。

下面是一个热身练习:请你看句子,说出该习语的意义,并说出你得到它的意义的过程。

I m afraid I don t have green fingers . I ve killed every plant I ve ever owned .

下面再做一个热身练习:

“ It s really difficult to see what they want ,” said a Hong Kong source in London . “ They keep on muddying the waters by raising other political issues .”

现在,你明白该如何进行有声思维了吗?如果有什么疑问,请尽管提出。如果你觉得可以开始了,我们进入正式实验。

我们将对整个过程录音,所收集的数据仅用于研究目的。

谢谢合作!

(...continued from p .41)

2 skateboard

- A . I don t remember having seen this word before .
- B . I have seen this word before but I don t know what it means .
- C . I have seen this word before , and I think it means _____. (synonym or translation) .
- D . I can use this word in a sentence : _____ (write a sentence) .

3 clarinet

- A . I don t remember having seen this word before .
- B . I have seen this word before but I don t know what it means .
- C . I have seen this word before , and I think it means _____. (Synonym or translation) .
- D . I can use this word in a sentence : _____ (write a sentence) .

Vocabulary Recognition Test

please choose the correct meaning of the following words :

- 1 . reawaken a . 说服 b . 重做 c . 重新唤醒 d . 重塑
- 2 . skateboarding a . 乘冰筏 b . 滑滑板 c . 冰上舞蹈 d . 滑冰
- 3 . concrete lined a . 列队的 b . 成纵行的 c . 混凝土浇灌成行的 d . 具体安排的
- 4 . ditch a . 沟 b . 针线 c . 挖掘 d . 小溪