

Investigating Students' Difficulty in Understanding Idiomatic Expressions on EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to measure the student's ability to understand idiomatic expressions and to find out the student's difficulty in understanding idiomatic expressions. This research uses the descriptive qualitative method as the research methodology. The population in this study is the fourth-semester students in the English education department, faculty of teacher, training, and education of Muhammadiyah University of Sidenreng Rappang, and the sample in this study is 29 students (4 male students and 25 female) fourth semester, English department, faculties of teacher, training, and education of Muhammadiyah University of Sidenreng Rappang. The data collection methods used in this research are written test, interview, and recorder. A written test was chosen to measure students' ability to identify idiomatic expressions, interviews were used to find out the student's difficulty in understanding idiomatic expressions, and the recorder were used to record the interview process and also as data documentation. The data obtained from the test will be processed with a scoring technique and the data obtained from the interview will be processed by the descriptive analysis method. As the result of the study, the written test shows that 2 students categorized on a very good level, 7 on Good, 5 on Average, 3 on Poor, and 3 on very poor, while the interview shows that as many as 62% of respondents have difficulty because they lack vocabulary, 19% of respondents have difficulty understanding idioms based on their language style, and 33% of respondents have difficulty understanding idioms.

Keywords: Idiom, idiomatic expressions, difficulty, EFL classroom

INTRODUCTION

Idioms generally known as vocabulary words, phrases, or sentences that have strange meanings when interpreted literally. Idioms can be composed by combination of verbs, conjunctions, adjectives, animal, weather, etc., sometimes idioms only had one word, but their meaning differs greatly from the literal meaning of the word. Idioms commonly utilized as expression whose meaning does not relate to the literal meaning of it, an idiom could be a gather of words built up by utilization as having a meaning not deducible from those of the person words.

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The idiomatic expression is one of most important part in learning English language; it is very beneficial since they provide you with a unique and innovative approach to express oneself. Instead of stating 'You're correct,' use 'You hit the nail on the head,' which is a more complicated and fascinating term. Idioms may also be rather hilarious to employ, allowing you to express yourself more authentically, including displaying your personality and sense of humor. Furthermore, idioms can help you enhance your conversational abilities by demonstrating to native speakers that you grasp the cultural meaning and context of the phrase. It also helps to think of English as a soup — the foundations are OK, but it needs a bit more flavor to take it to the next level. In that way, idioms are the seasoning that you may add to your English abilities as you move through your EFL classes. Understanding the fundamentals of English is a fine place to start, but idioms may help you delve deeper and more meaningfully into the language. The more you practice this during your English language learning classes, the more comfortable and secure you will feel with your conversational talents.

Learning idioms is like learning vocabulary, which means memorizing is the key to understand it. Translating idiomatic expressions are different than translating a phrase or a sentence, translating idiomatic expressions requires much experience and creativity and skill to get a suitable meaning of it, this is the reason why the students were wrong to translating word by word to get the meaning of the idiomatic expressions in songs, movies and, texts (Caro, 2009;125). Even acknowledge and experience of the interpreter who have a good knowledge of the language and its cultural aspects are not enough to reach the ability of native speakers in deciding the meaning in what content type or context – certain idioms would or would not be suitable. The results of pre-research observations conducted by researchers on the fourth semester of English Education Department Muhammadiyah University of Sidenreng Rappang also showed that students considered idioms as something very difficult to understand.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher will try to investigate students' difficulty in understanding idiomatic expressions, on the fourth semester of English Education Department Muhammadiyah University of Sidenreng Rappang.

| Male | Female | Amount |
|------|--------|--------|
| 4 | 25 | 29 |

METHODS

This research use descriptive qualitative method as the research methodology. Descriptive qualitative study is aimed to record an event, situation, or circumstance (Fraenkell and Wallen; 2012). According to Sugiyono (2017), defines the meaning of variables as follows: Everything in whatever form is determined by researchers to study so that information is obtained, then conclusions are drawn. While the theoretical understanding of variables according to Sugiyono (2017) are: Variables are attributes of a person or object that have "variations" between one person and another or an

object with another object.

The variable of in this research is the fourth semester, English department, faculties of teacher, training, and education of Muhammadiyah University of Sidenreng Rappang with 29 students as participants. There were 4 males' students and 25 females students in the class. The English teaching and learning processes in this class were held three times a week for ten hours each day.

The operational in this research will be started by distribute some idioms to students for translating and then interview 29 students (4 males, 25 females); each interview lasted between 5 and 10 minutes. During the interview, the researcher will use the Indonesian language to make it easier for researchers to find out the difficulties of students in learning idioms. The population in this study is the fourth semester students in English education department, faculty of teacher, training, and education of Muhammadiyah University of Sidenreng Rappang.

TABLE 1/ Population of 4th Semester Student of English Education Department FKIP UMS Rappang.

Source: English Education Department UMS Rappang 2022

The data collection methods used in this research are:

1. Written Test

Zainal Arifin (2012) test is a technique that used in the context of carrying out measurement activities, which are it contains various questions or tasks that must be done or answered by students to measure the student's understanding ability. The procedure of collecting data by the written test will be carried out by following steps:

- a. First, the Researcher will distribute several discourses to students.
- b. Second, the Researcher will tell students to identify the idiomatic expressions in the discourse.
- c. Third, the Researcher will tell students to translate the idiomatic expressions that they had been found in the discourse.

TABLE 2/Classification of Students' Ability to identify idiomatic expression in discourse.

Source: (Depdiknas in Jusniar; 2013)

| No | Classification | Score | Final Score |
|----|----------------|-------|-------------|
| 1 | Very Good | 5 | 81-100 |
| 2 | Good | 4 | 61-80 |
| 3 | Average | 3 | 41-60 |
| 4 | Poor | 2 | 21-40 |
| 5 | Very Poor | 1 | 20 |

2. Interview

The data obtained from the interview will be processed by the descriptive analysis method. According to Sugiyono (2014:21), the descriptive

analysis method is a statistic that is used to analyze data by describing the collected data without making general conclusions or generalizations. The collected data will be processed based on four indicators by Ayuningtyas, Ifadah, Aimah (2018)

- a. Lexical Difficulty
- b. Stylistic Difficulty
- c. Cultural Difficulty
- d. Grammatical Difficulty

The students' answer from interview will be conversion to the following formula:

$$\text{Student's Difficulty classification} = \frac{\text{Student's Answer}}{\text{Amount of respondent}} \times 100$$

TABLE 3/Classification of Students' Difficulty Levels in Understanding Idiomatic Expressions.

| No | Classifications | Percentage % |
|----|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 | Very High | 81-100 |
| 2 | High | 61-80 |
| 3 | Relative | 41-60 |
| 4 | Low | 21-40 |
| 5 | Very Low | 1-20 |

Source: (Ayuningtyas, Ifadah, Aimah; 2018)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From 29 population in the 4th semester of the English Language Education Study Program at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang, there were only 20 people who attended as a sample /respondent. Respondents who are not present are marked with red.

1. Written Test

Table 4/Result of Written Test

| No | Sample Code | Gender | Semester | Idioms Found | Final Score |
|----|-------------|--------|----------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | RJ | L | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | SMR | P | 4 | 3 | 60 |
| 3 | JH | P | 4 | 5 | 100 |
| 4 | IL | L | 4 | 2 | 40 |
| 5 | AHR | P | 4 | 3 | 60 |
| 6 | AMN | P | 4 | | 0 |
| 7 | RRS | P | 4 | 4 | 80 |
| 8 | SF | P | 4 | 4 | 80 |
| 9 | NS | P | 4 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | |
|----|-----|---|---|---|-----|
| 10 | FY | P | 4 | 4 | 80 |
| 11 | DZK | P | 4 | | 0 |
| 12 | SA | P | 4 | | 0 |
| 13 | WA | P | 4 | | 0 |
| 14 | NSA | P | 4 | 4 | 80 |
| 15 | IS | P | 4 | | 0 |
| 16 | NH | P | 4 | 3 | 60 |
| 17 | FA | P | 4 | 4 | 80 |
| 18 | IA | P | 4 | | 0 |
| 19 | AMA | P | 4 | 5 | 100 |
| 20 | RA | P | 4 | 3 | 60 |
| 21 | RSM | L | 4 | | 0 |
| 22 | NRA | P | 4 | | 0 |
| 23 | AN | P | 4 | 2 | 40 |
| 24 | HA | P | 4 | 4 | 80 |
| 25 | AA | P | 4 | | 0 |
| 26 | RA | L | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 27 | ARA | P | 4 | 3 | 60 |
| 28 | JN | P | 4 | 2 | 40 |
| 29 | NF | P | 4 | 4 | 80 |

Table 5/Recapitulation of Table 4

| No | Classifications | Final Score | Frequency |
|----|-----------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | Very Good | 81-100 | 2 |
| 2 | Good | 61-80 | 7 |
| 3 | Average | 41-60 | 5 |
| 4 | Poor | 21-40 | 3 |
| 5 | Very Poor | 0-20 | 3 |

Table shows that 2 respondents scored more than 80 as very good, 7 respondents scored more than 60, 5 respondents scored more than 40, 3 respondents scored more than 20, and the remaining 3 scored 0.

Mabrurh (2015) in her study "An Analysis of Idioms and Their Problems Found in the Novel the Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain" The focus of this research is to learn about idioms, their types, dominant types, and difficulties in comprehending idioms. The English idiom in the novel The Adventures of Tom Sawyer was the subject of the study. The data consisted of phrases, words, and collocations found in the novel. Reading, identifying, and inventorying were used to collect the data. As the result of the study, the previous researcher found that, the first problem is the foreign learners are confused by the distinction between phrasal verbs that is idiom or not idiom. The second problem is translation of idiom. The third problem is the problem in understanding the closest meaning of idiom. The last problem is there is no grammatical rule of forming idiom. The previous study focused on the researcher identifying ability herself, while this research focused on students' ability in identifying and

understanding idiomatic expression.

On the other hand Strakšiene (2009) in her research "Analysis of Idiom Translation Strategies from English into Lithuanian", the research has shown that there is a lack of equivalent idioms in Lithuanian language. In addition, the most prevailing translation strategy turned out to be paraphrasing both: stylistic and explanatory, also there were examples of an idiom with the same meaning and form, idiom with the similar meaning but different form and omission. This research contains strategies in translating idioms from English into Lithuanian but however, the previous research is focused on translating idioms in book, while this research focused on students' ability in identifying and understanding idiomatic expression.

2. Written Test

TABLE 6/Result of Interview

| No | Sample Code | Indicators of Difficulty in Understanding Idiomatic Expressions | | | |
|----|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| | | Lexical | Stylistic | Cultural | Grammatical |
| 1 | SMR | X | | | |
| 2 | JH | X | | | X |
| 3 | IL | X | X | X | X |
| 4 | AHR | X | | | |
| 5 | AMN | | | | |
| 6 | RRS | X | | | X |
| 7 | SF | X | | | |
| 8 | NS | | | | |
| 9 | FY | X | | X | |
| 10 | DZK | | | | |
| 11 | SR | | | | |
| 12 | WA | | | | |
| 13 | NSA | | | | X |
| 14 | IS | X | | | |
| 15 | NH | | | X | |
| 16 | FA | X | X | X | X |
| 17 | IA | | | | |
| 18 | AM | | | | X |
| 19 | RA | X | | | |
| 20 | RSM | | | | |
| 21 | RJ | | | | X |
| 23 | AN | | | X | |
| 24 | HA | X | X | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| 25 | AA | | | | |
| 26 | RA | X | X | X | X |
| 27 | ARA | X | | | |
| 28 | NF | | | | X |
| 29 | JN | | | X | |
| | Percentage (%) | 62 | 19 | 33 | 43 |
| | Classification | High | Very Low | Low | Relative |

Table 6 shows data that as many as 62% of respondents have difficulty because they lack vocabulary, 19% of respondents have difficulty understanding idioms based on their language style, and 33% of respondents have difficulty understanding idioms. After all, they do not understand English culture, and 43% of the remaining has difficulty understanding the grammar used in an idiom. When collecting data, the researcher found that some respondents had difficulty with more than 1 indicator, so the total percentage was more than 100%.

Ayuningtyas, Ifadah, Aimah (2018) on their research about “Students’ Difficulties in translating Idiomatic Expressions from English into Indonesian”. Its goal is to discover how students translate idiomatic expressions and the obstacles they encounter during the translation process. The information gathered is grouped according to the respondents' accuracy in translating the idiomatic idioms they come across. According to their findings, 15% of students' translations were absolutely ineffective, 23% were ineffective, 10% were passable, 14% were nearly effective, and 38% were successful. The researcher found that students mainly translated idiomatic expressions through word-for-word translation based on the study's findings. They just translate idiomatic terms by transferring their meaning rather than converting English idioms to Indonesian idioms. Researchers discovered the similar problem in the written exam results, where the majority of respondents translated idioms word for word, resulting in findings that were far from correct. Unlike earlier studies, however, this one groups the data by the number of idioms discovered by the respondents. Interviews are also used to gather information about the respondents' difficulties in deciphering idiomatic terms, so that the results produced are more accurate, even if they are not generalized.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted by researchers, it can be concluded that many respondents still have difficulty in translating idiomatic expressions, this is supported by the data found by researchers in the written test, the test results show that there are only 2 and 7 of 29 respondents who fall into the very category good and good. The results from the interview test also show that as 62% of respondents have difficulty because they lack vocabulary, 19% of respondents have difficulty understanding idioms based on their language style, and 33% of respondents have difficulty understanding idioms. After all, they do not understand English culture, and 43% of the remaining has difficulty understanding the grammar used in an idiom.

However, this study was only able to measure and find students' difficulties in understanding idiomatic expressions, therefore it is hoped that further research will find solutions to overcome students' difficulties in understanding idiomatic expressions.

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