

An Analysis of Indonesian Students' Ability to Interpret English Idioms in Youtube Short Drama

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Abstract

Many studies have discussed Indonesian student's abilities in translating idioms into English. However, a few discussed the Indonesian students' ability to interpret English idioms from a short drama scene. An investigation into this is considered significant since English is called an idiom language. Indonesian students need to be able to interpret these English idioms to speak naturally, like a native speaker. This study intended to determine the ability of Indonesian students to interpret English idioms directly from a short drama conversation. The study participants were in the fifth semester of the English Education Department of the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. The data was taken by asking them to watch the drama to listen to the conversation containing idioms and filling in a Google form to interpret them. The findings revealed that most Indonesian students can interpret English idioms from YouTube short drama conversations. They use the reduction strategy in interpreting English idioms.

Keywords: interpretation, English idioms, Indonesian students

Introduction

Many Indonesian students may be able to speak English fluently even though some are struggling with the English structure. At the same time, some others are working on their pronunciation. However, at least they can communicate in English well if they need it for daily conversation.

However, English is not only about speaking using “normal” sentences if I can say that. Many English videos I have watched contained idioms - a group of words whose meanings differ from those of the individual words (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>). Most of the speakers on videos use idioms in their daily conversations. This fact, obviously, adds to the long, big homework for Indonesian students to learn about.

As De Caro (2009) mentioned, English has many idioms and unique ways of expressing oneself that often go against a language's grammatical and logical principles (or dialect). In fact, thousands of idiomatic phrases are available in it that may be used to convey the speaker's intentions in various contexts (Khosravi & Khatib, 2012). Therefore, even daily, English conversation is not as easy as responding to others' intentions correctly, but also how you can interpret what they say when using idioms.

Related to interpretation, I have assigned my students to translate many kinds of texts and interpret several English videos. I have found that some of them can do the translation quite well. However, it is a little bit challenging for them when they interpret the speakers on videos, even though it is a simple daily conversation. This is because most of the conversations in the

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videos contain idioms. Therefore, translating idioms and fixed expressions from source to target language is a complex task requiring a translator to be reasonably knowledgeable about both languages and cultures (Ali Al Mubarak, 2017). He also mentioned that translators must recognize and handle unforeseen issues and fine-tune the most accurate and similar inter-lingual idiomatic pairs. Thus, this study investigates: “How are the abilities of Indonesian students to interpret some idioms in English videos from a YouTube channel called Dhar Mann channel?” What is (are) strategy they use in interpreting the idioms?

Some Overview of Idioms Expression in English

Everaert et al., in Orfan (2020), asserted that a few terms are used for the word idioms in some literature. The researchers have their point of view related to the terms for idioms. Some of them are Glaser (1984), who picked up the “phraseological unit,” Moon (1997), adopted it as “multi-word items,” Carter (1998), who prompted it with “fixed expressions,” and Howarth (1998), referred to it by “phraseology”. Lately, Yi (2006) described idioms as “multiword expressions.” Yet, other researchers chose an old term for idiom. There is one; Mitsis (2004) refers an idiom as a range of nonliteral phrases that begins with common collocations, moves on to fixed collocations and metaphorical, and then concludes with idioms with abstract meanings completely. Thus, Al-kadi (2015) explained that idioms range in familiarity, unfamiliarity, transparency, and opaqueness. He further said that idioms are untranslatable since their meanings vary from the typical meanings of their component elements: sociocultural, historical, or political connotations.

English is one of the foreign languages in Indonesia. In linguistics, it is called idiomatic language, meaning there are phrasal verbs, speech figures, and idioms (Orfan, 2020). Idioms are a language technique that expresses and interprets viewpoints, cultural nuances, and abstract interpretations (Al-Kadi, 2015). Cowie et al. (1983) confirmed that the appropriate and accurate use of idioms by EFL/ESL students showed that they were proficient in the language in a way similar to that of native speakers. Additionally, this may be a useful standard for gauging the level of competency of EFL/ESL students.

Dixon (1994) added that idioms are essential for effective English communication in all contexts, including the four skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Both explained more that proficiency and precision in English demand a deeper comprehension of idioms. A deficiency in this knowledge leads to significant confusion. Shirazi and Talebinezhad (2013) proposed that a better understanding of idioms is required for English proficiency and accuracy, and a lack of such understanding results in a great deal of misunderstanding. Therefore, it is crucial for EFL students to acquire knowledge of English idioms to integrate successfully into the culture of the target language.

Translating English Idioms into Indonesian

A translator must have great knowledge about the source and target language to get a good translation product. Specifically in translating idioms, a translator finds it a bit tricky to get an appropriate translation product. As Baker (2007) mentioned, translators face several challenging situations related to translating idioms. Idioms and fixed expressions may not have an equivalent in the target language. They may have a similar counterpart in the target language but differ in the use context. It could also have different meanings or not be transferable pragmatically. An idiom may be used in the source language in both literal and idiomatic senses

simultaneously, and this play on idiom may not be successfully reproduced in the target language, and there may be differences between the source and target languages regarding conventions surrounding idioms in written discourse, the contexts in which they can be used, and their frequency of use.

Indonesian students find it difficult to translate/interpret English idioms. This could happen as well among the translators/interpreters. As Machali (2009) explained translators/interpreters could be misleading in interpreting English idioms since they thought the idiom's expressions were real. Meanwhile, Stathi (2006) describes idiom expressions as derived from various sources such as from work as in *Don't count your chicken*, history, and literature as in *the streets are paved with gold*, part of the body as in *break the leg*, rural life as in *eat like a horse*, feelings & emotions as in *high spirits*. These facts show that the English language has many kinds of idioms in every part of life.

2. Methods

Research Design

The research method was a qualitative descriptive method supported by qualitative data. This research was conducted by administering a short answer test. The test was given to the participants after they watched conversations containing idioms from a YouTube channel. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the data on Indonesian EFL students' interpretation of idioms in English conversation.

Site and Participants

This study was conducted on Indonesian EFL students at an Islamic university in Indonesia. The participants were selected as such voluntarily. The total number of participants was thirty Indonesian students in the third year. There were 6 males and 24 females. They have learnt and passed their translation and interpretation course. They were asked to watch several videos from a YouTube channel to see the context of the idioms from daily conversations. They ranged between 19 and 20 years old. They have had two translation courses: translation and interpretation and practicum of translation and interpretation.

Table I.
Participant Demographic Information

Demographic Variable		
Age	Frequency	Percent (%)
19-20 years old	30	100
Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	6	20
Female	24	80
Courses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Translation & Interpretation	30	100%
Practicum of Translation & Interpretation	30	100%

Instrument

The data was collected by using several idioms from some videos on a YouTube channel called the Dhar Mann channel. The participants watched and listened to the idioms in the conversation from the videos. Then, they were given a Google form containing 20 items of idioms written from the conversation they had heard. They wrote their interpretation in the space provided in the Google form.

Data Analysis

There are 30 answers from the participants due to interpreting idioms from the YouTube channel videos. The researcher analyzed the data by discussing the idiom interpretation done by the participants. Then, the researcher defined the ability to interpret the idioms. The steps were as follows: First, the researcher asked the participants to watch videos containing idioms in the conversation. Then, they were asked to fill in the Google Form containing 20 items of idioms they had heard and interpret the idioms based on the context of the conversation. After that, the researcher identified the students' abilities according to the idioms that they had interpreted. The researcher used the Indonesian dictionary to examine the variations in meaning from the students' translations. Additionally, the Cambridge online dictionary and the idiom and phrase dictionary were used to determine the meaning of each idiomatic utterance.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The study aims to analyze Indonesian EFL students' ability to interpret idioms from a YouTube video screenshot from several videos of the Dhar Mann channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@DharMann>). This section covered the data collection presentation and the explanation of the research results.

Case 1: Maybe the little rascal's finally turning over a new leaf.

McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs (2005) explains that the meaning of turning over a new leaf means you open up a new page of your life. The dictionary mentioned the term *to begin, to reform; the leaf is a fresh and clean page*.

Most of the students interpret this idiom correctly. Some of them interpreted the idiom *leaf* as *a new page*, and others interpreted it with the term *become a good person*. However, a few students interpreted the leaf as its meaning itself, *daun-* or the green thing-part of a plant. It means they interpret the idiom as its literal meaning – *mungkin si berandal kecil akhirnya membalikkan sebuah daun baru*.

Case 2: Why do you think Jay tries to get every babysitter to bounce?

To get (someone) to bounce means to make him quit. If the conversation is on, there is a hint from the speaker, which means to quit the job as a babysitter. There were 8 students who interpreted the idioms to mean quitting the job. However, 5 students interpreted the idiom as *feeling uncomfortable*. Then, the rest of them interpreted the idioms to literally *jump* or *bounce* because of the *bounce* term in the idiom as in *mengapa kamu pikir Jay mencoba membuat setiap baby sitter melompat?*. This indicated that the participants were not able to interpret the idioms based on the context of the conversation.

Case 3: Save it, Dad!

This idiom means *stop talking*, or *I heard enough* (McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs, 2005). Of 30 students who interpreted this idiom, 15 students answered it correctly as *sudahlah ayah!*, which in Bahasa Indonesia means stop talking, or the interlocutor no longer wants to hear it. Meanwhile, the rest of the students seemed to be misunderstanding between the word *save* which means *simpan* in literal meaning, and the word *safe* which mean *selamatkan*. Again some of the participants interpreted this idiom as its literal meaning. At worst, they translate it into the wrong word.

Case 4:and money has been tight lately.

Based on the English idiom dictionary, this idiom means money is not much, so you must save money. Apparently, all the students can interpret this idiom well. Maybe it is because this idiom has been popular among the students. They have heard this idiom in several videos.

Case 5: There you go again!

This idiom is *a way to emphasize that one action is repeated often* (Cambridge Dictionary). Collin dictionary mentioned that phrases such as *there you go again* are used to show annoyance at someone repeating something that has annoyed you in the past. *Ten students interpreted the idiom correctly as. Meanwhile, the rest interpreted the idiom as the sentence's literal meaning that is .*

Case 6: Don't take your mom for granted.

This idiom is quite popular among Indonesian EFL students. It means do not underestimate or do not be ungrateful to someone (something). Most of the participants interpret this idiom correctly. In contrast, only a few interpret it as not exactly the idiom's meaning. They interpreted the idiom as *meremehkan, merendahkan, menyia-nyikan*.

Case 7: It feels like we can't catch a break.

This idiom was on the scene of a poor couple who always have problems in their lives. Finally, the husband said this idiom after several bad things happened to them. Most Indonesian EFL students find it misleading to interpret the idiom. They interpret this idiom as the literal meaning of *break – Rasanya kita tidak bisa beristirahat*. One participant could interpret this idiom correctly, which means there is no time for them to get relief from problems.

Case 8: ... But don't worry about me, I'll land on my feet.

This idiom takes place in a scene of two fast-food restaurant employees. One of the employees got fired and felt it was not fair. However, he could not do anything about it. His friend wanted to help him, but he refused. Then he said: *"Don't worry about me; I'll land on my feet"*. It means he will find another luck in his life by himself. Related to this interpretation, most students seemed to not really understand how to interpret this idiom. Most of the interpretation is literally in its translation, that is: *"Aku berdiri/mendarat di atas kakiku"*. Some others interpret the idiom based on the context of the situation. This is because watching the scene makes the participants adjust their interpretation of the idiom.

Case 9: Did you ever take the plunge?

This kind of idiom is a bit new among the participants. It is interpreted that someone decides on something important. The example is usually related to deciding to get married. In the scene of one video, two old friends bump into each other and ask each other about their well-being. The man said he had married, then asked the woman: “*Did you ever take the plunge*”? Then the woman answered that she had got married as well. Six participants correctly interpreted this idiom, which deals with making a big life decision. At the same time, the rest of the participants interpreted the idiom to be more exaggerated as *mengambil resiko*.

Case 10: It's quite the pile of bricks.

This idiom is still in the scene between two old friends who bump into each other. The man said to the woman to come for dinner at his place. He said, “*I've just bought a brand-new house, and it's quite the pile of bricks.*” This idiom is interpreted to be related to the brand-new house that he just bought. However, the participants' interpretation was really in the literal meaning of the idioms. It seems that they have no clue about the interpretation of the idioms.

Case 11: She wishes she could take the credit.

I believe the word credit is a common word in daily life, especially in online media. It is usually used to give a kind of “reward” to those who own one creation when his creation is posted in someone else’s media. In fact, the interpretation done by the participant toward the idiom was good and correct. Most participants interpreted the idiom as its true interpretation, which is related to rewarding someone for his creation.

Case 12: A person who could start with you from scratch.

This idiom means someone who starts something from the very beginning. The scene in the video showed someone who started his life from the beginning until he succeeded. Most participants could interpret this idiom correctly. It may be because the context had been clear enough to explain the situation.

Case 13: You should start running unless you're gonna stuck in this size.

The scene in the video plays a girl whose body is quite big, and her mother comments on her by saying: “*You should start running unless you're gonna stuck in this size.*” In this situation, half of the participants interpreted this idiom correctly. Their interpretation is related to the weight of the girl. In contrast, the rest interpreted the idiom to be its literal meaning.

Case 14: The girls make fun of me for my clothes.

The scene in the video shows the mother reading her daughter's letter. Her daughter told the mother how her friends always laughed at her outfit. Most participants interpreted the idiom correctly. It seems that this idiom is quite familiar to them. This idiom means *teman-teman ku selalu mengejek pakaianku*.

Case 15: I've had to keep everything bottled up inside.

The daughter still told her mother that she must keep everything inside. The context is clear: her daughter never told her about every problem she had. So, she had to keep everything in his heart. Half of the participants interpreted the idiom correctly. They can analyze from the context that the girl is in trouble and cannot tell her mother about her problem. At the same time, the rest of the participants interpreted the idiom as its literal meaning – *Saya tidak dapat menyimpannya*

Case 16: I got your back no matter what.

Finally, in the scene, the mother realizes her mistake of not listening to her daughter. Then she told the daughter that she had her back no matter what. Most of the participants interpreted this idiom correctly. They know that it means someone supports someone else whatever happens.

Case 17: Got it?

This idiom means two things: understanding something and the way to congratulate someone for achieving something. Based on the scene's context in the video, the meaning is understanding something. It seems the idiom is very familiar to the participants. All participants could interpret the meaning of this idiom. It means understanding something.

Case 18: I know things look grim right now.

The situation in this scene is that there is a pregnant woman whom her husband has left. Moreover, nothing worse is that she got fired from her job. She felt devastated that her mother tried to support her. The mother said: *"I know things look grim right now"*. From this situation, the participants must be able to interpret the idiom. The result showed that most of the participants could interpret the idioms correctly. However, some of the interpretations result in the idiom's literal meaning.

Case 19: Can you give us a second?

This idiom is from a scene of two men inviting a woman to do a meeting. One man said: *"Can you give us a second?"*. This does not mean that he needs just a second. However, the time would not be too long. Mostly, the participants interpret this statement as waiting for a moment. Some of them said the meaning was giving a chance. While others interpreted the idiom to be giving a second chance. In fact, this idiom means to wait for the speakers for only a moment. In addition, it could be meant to give the speakers space in privacy.

Case 20: We have to find a financial partner, or the board will have our head.

These two men were arguing about their situation. One man said, *"We have to find a financial partner, or the board will have our head"*. This idiom - *will have our head* - means both could get fired if they cannot find a financial partner at the end of the day. The participants interpreted this idiom as being bankrupt, taking decisive action, firing, or taking over the company. While some others interpreted it as its literal meaning.

The Strategies Used by the Fifth Semester Students in Interpreting the Idioms

The fifth-semester students, as the participants, seemed to be using various strategies in interpreting the idioms. The data shows that the students of the English Education department were able to interpret some English idioms from some scenes in the videos in the Indonesian language. They interpreted the idioms from the context of the conversation from the scenes. There are two strategies for doing interpretation: Reduction and Achievement strategy (Faerach & Kasper, 1983). The reduction strategy has four subcategories: abandonment, skipping, incomplete sentences, and filtering. Then, the Achievement strategy has two subcategories: appeal for assistance and elaboration.

In making interpretation, the participants mostly used the reduction strategy. Abandonment is used by letting the idioms since the difficulties they found. The skipping strategy is used by avoiding one word or more as long as the interpretation for simplifying the lexical. However, they kept the meaning of the target language. An incomplete sentence strategy is used by deleting many words in the target language. Then, a filtering strategy is used by summarizing a long utterance or speech. This is done by choosing the fewest and the most important messages.

CONCLUSION

Idioms are not only identified in human language. They might be found in the different textual styles. It could be found in formal or dramatic texts that utilized idioms. Idioms that were often utilized in conversation were frequently misinterpreted by students. Additionally, the belief held by students was that languages only included vocabulary. Furthermore, they sometimes lost track of the meaning of the discovered idiom. Awareness of the linguistic idiom that went against fundamental rules of English spoken is a must. The researcher contended that the student's level of idiom interpretation in conversation was related to the study question outlined in the introduction. The researcher discovered several general-sense idioms for the study issue that the students were nevertheless unable to comprehend. Only a few students could interpret the idioms: *I'll land on my feet*, and *everything looks grim now*. When understanding a screenplay, teaching English was crucial. It became challenging for people who wanted to become better at English since there were often many new words that many pupils seldom learned. Pupils should be taught how to interpret the language and even how to comprehend the idioms accurately. This is especially important when interpreting idioms that should not be translated word for word but rather by capturing the meaning of the whole phrase from the context.

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