Jamileh Rahemi, Ph.D Student (TEFL)
Islamic Azad University, Naragh Branch
jamilehr@yahoo.com

Reciprocal Teaching as a Tool to Foster Autonomy: Practical Considerations in Iranian High schools

چکیده

از آن جا که هیچ فراگیری نمی تواند به طور دائم به معلم یا هر راهنمای دیگری دست رسی داشته باشد، ایجاد و رشد استقلال[1] در یادگیری، اساسی ترین رکن آموزش در تمامی جنبه ها از جمله در آموزش زبان دوم به شمار می رود. اگر استقلال در یادگیری را به عنوان توانایی دانش آموز در استفاده و کاربرد آموخته بدون تکیه به معلم تعریف کنیم، روش تدریس دوسویه[2] بارزترین نمونه ی آن است. این روش که به طور خاص برای آموزش مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب به کار می رود، در عین حال که درک فراگیر را از متن مورد نظر می افزاید، او را در تبادل کلامی تجربیات و مهارت های خود با معلم و سایر دانش آموزان کلاس نیز مشارکت می دهد. با توجه به اهمیت مهارت خواندن متون زبان انگلیسی و نیاز به این توانایی در سراسر طول زندگی، مجهز کردن دانش آموزان به راهبردها و راهکارهایی که بتوانند در خارج از محیط آموزشی و بدون حضور معلم از آن ها استفاده کنند و متون مورد نیاز یا علاقه ی خود را بخوانند و درک کنند، امری بسیار ضروری به نظر می رسد. یکی از روش های مؤثر پیشنهاد شده در حیطه ی آموزش زبان دوم، «روش دوسویه» است. این روش که اولین بار توسط Palinscar و Brown در سال ۱۹۸۴ طراحی و استفاده شد، شامل سه مرحله ی اصلی است. در **مرحله ی اول** که مرحله ی مدل سازی[3] نام دارد، معلم مستقیماً یک مجموعه راهبردهای خاصی را به دانش آموزان معرفی و علت، مکان و زمان مناسب استفاده از آن ها را برای دانش آموزان تشریح می کند. در این مرحله، دانش آموزان در گروه های کوچک، بخشی از متن را در سکوت می خوانند. سپس معلم چگونگی کاربرد راهبردهای معرفی شده را به صورت عملی به آن ها نشان می دهد. در **مرحله ی دوم** که مرحله ی گفت و گو[4] نام دارد، به دانش آموزان این فرصت داده می شود تا اشکالات احتمالی خود در مورد راهبردها یا بخش های مشکل تر متن را بپرسند.

در **مرحله ی پایانی** که مرحله ی کناره گیری معلم[5] است، او به تدریج کنترل کلاس را به خود دانش آموزان واگذار می کند. دانش آموزان در گروه های کوچک یا دو نفره، به خواندن متن ادامه می دهند، از راهبردهای معرفی شده استفاده می کنند، متن را به طور کامل می خوانند و درنهایت

needing more creativity on the part of teacher to prepare the materials, teaching will be much fun, for the information will be following a specific order or logic that makes them memorable for both teachers and learners. On the other hand, it aids learners who wish to internalize every aspect of their favorite foreign language in order to gain native _ like mastery _ any foreign language learner's ultimate goal.

From the pedagogical point of view, it is worth noting that presenting vocabulary, idiom, slang, and other lexical items would be more effective in the long run when accompanied by more effort on the part of teachers and also syllabus designers in aiming at producing materials that help learners create mental association in learning. According to previous research findings, once a mental link is created as a result of a certain teaching technique, the presented items would stick to learners' minds, and become significantly memorable. In such case one can claim that retention is guaranteed automatically.

Mental association could be promoted by telling relevant short stories or jokes, presenting a tangible example creating a vivid image in the learners' minds, ordering ideas and/or grouping them according to a quality they all share, etc.

In sum, syllabus designers generally and teachers specifically can contribute to provide EFL learners with well-organized curricula relying on materials which contain lexical items categorized according to their topics and/or any other attribute they may have in common.

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expressions. Ten other texts were also designed for control group each of which embraced 6 randomly selected idioms.

Procedure

Twenty short texts were produced for the members of both groups, each text embracing 6 idioms. Control group members experienced a treatment lasting for 10 sessions each of which featured the presentation of a short text containing randomly selected idioms. The experimental group for the same number of sessions enjoyed exposure to the same number of idioms and texts, each text fitting 6 topically grouped idioms. It is worth noting that the texts presented to both groups were followed by a matching task in order to check the learners understanding of the meaning of the Idioms they faced in the text, where they had to guess the meaning of idioms with the aid of the context clues.

During the treatment period, in each session the participants were presented with a text and they were asked to read individually in order to mathc each idiom with its meaning in the task set after each text. Next, they were asked to check their understanding through pair or group work. This procedure went on in both groups, for methodology was not the focus of the experiment but manner of idiom presentation.

Subsequently, the teacher checked the learners' understanding of the texts and the meaning of idioms by asking key questions about the text and the idioms in a way the learners were able to associate each item with its meaning, taking hint from context clues. In some cases, to provide a link, and therefore promote understanding, the teacher even asked the students to give the Persian equivalent of some of the idioms.

Administering the post-test was the final phase of the study. At this stage, all participants took a teacher-made recognition type test on the presented idioms. Seemingly, post-test results held the key to clarifying and evaluating learners level of retention of idiomatic expressions as far as the manner of presentation tested was concerned.

Result and Discussion

The table below tabulates the facts about both group's performance on post-test.

Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	S^2
Experimental	30	15.16	20.17
Control	30	10.33	18.75

$T_{obs} = 4.34$
$T_{crit} = 2.000$

The value of T-observed was greater than T-critical reassuring that presenting idiomatic expressions – an indispensable part of any language – in groups with regard to their themes or topics facilitate retention.

In fact, on the basis of the results achieved from the present study and also the researcher's experience in teaching, one can claim that creating a mental association in any way can benefit learners in terms of a better learning and retention of the presented information. As previously mentioned, the study at hand focused on one specific means of creating mental association, namely, grouping items according to their themes or topics. Of course, there are many more ways to help learners associate items in their minds while learning. To a large extent creating such a tool depends on a teacher's creativity in terms of applying new teaching techniques. In fact, utilizing this technique can benefit both parties in the teaching trade. On the one hand, it could help teachers to present materials more effectively using less time and classroom. Furthermore,

bizarre image or definition a teacher can make the meaning of words more memorable, and therefore, accelerate the learning process.

Presenting Lexical Items in Groups

An individual word in an language frequently acquires meaning because of the relationship between it and the other words. Awareness of certain kinds of relationships makes explaining vocabulary easier for the teacher and learning it simpler for the learners. Some of the important relationships from the view point of Lewis and Hill (1990) are:

a. **Synonyms** *(sometimes, a teacher can simply say 'enormous' means the same as 'very large'*

b. **Antonyms** *(which are thought of as 'opposites' such as hot/cold*

c. **Complements** *(two words one of which automatically excludes the other – single and married.*

d. **Converses** *(which refer to a pair of words each implying the other parent/child)*

e. **Hyponyms** *(car, van, bus, and lorry are hyponyms of vehicle).*

(p.101)

Naturally, many more ways or techniques are created and applied by some teachers some of which are more suitable for only particular words. However, a combination of techniques is mostly recommended by experienced teachers.

The Study

This paper describes a small-scale study aimed at investigating the effect of teaching topically grouped idiomatic expressions on the retention on Iranian EFL learners. The details of the study are stated below.

Participants

The participants in this study were sorted out of a population of 90 female intermediate students in Ghalam-e-Bartar and Majd English language Institutes.

In order to evaluate the homogeneity of the aforementioned subjects, an actual version of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) was administered. On the basis of the results obtained from this proficiency test, 60 students whose scores fell between 1 standard deviation above and below the mean score were selected to be the target sample in this study and they were set into experimental and control groups.

Materials

In order to prepare the materials to be presented to the two groups, certain steps were taken. First, the researcher provided a checklist of 120 idioms – fitting in 10 thematic groups. The next step was to consult some Native Americans to check the frequency of idioms. The researcher e-mailed the prepared list to several Native Americans, so that they would choose the most frequently used idiomatic expressions, and eliminate the rest. Based on the feed back from the FL teachers and native speakers asked, 80 idioms were identified as the most frequently used ones.

Subsequently, each student in both groups was handed a list of the verified idioms to provide a definition for the already known ones. The rationale behind this action was to ascertain that the idioms which were planned to be taught were totally new and unfamiliar to the learners, and therefore, could produce more reliable results.

Finally, the researcher selected 60 idioms fitting in 10 groups of 6 topically related idiomatic expressions such as, animal, food, body, color, etc.

At the next step, a context was created for each group of idioms. Accordingly, 10 short texts were prepared for the experimental group, each text containing 6 topically grouped idiomatic

establishes a context for an idiom, but the idiom is omitted. Then students are asked to complete the paragraph with a word or a short phrase which fits the context. When they have done this correctly, they are told what the idiom is, and shown that they have already guessed the meaning of the idiom from context. When they are proficient at this exercise, they may move on to guessing the meaning when the idioms have not been omitted from the paragraph.

Presenting Lexical Items

Rivers (1981) asserts, as it is mentioned above, students need to learn *how to commit vocabulary to long-term memory*, which does not necessarily mean 'memorizing'. Simply knowing translations for L2 words does not guarantee that the learner will be able to get to grips with the vocabulary and assimilate it for the long time. There are lots of ways of presenting the meaning of a lexical item: Illustration, Mime, Synonyms/Antonyms/ Gradable items, Definition, Translation, Context, etc.

From another standpoint, Oxford (1990) suggests memory strategies to aid learning, and these can be divided in to:

● Creating mental linkages: grouping, associating, placing new words into a context;
● Applying images and sounds: using imagery, semantic mapping, using keywords and representing sounds in memory;
● Reviewing well, in a structured way;
● Employing action: physical response or sensation, using mechanical techniques.

What is the focus of attention in this research is close to the first point. The teachers can teach idioms by grouping them and creating associations, and therefore, help, students to learn the meaning of idioms for long-term. Here are some useful techniques for presenting lexical items.

Mnemonics Techniques

American Heritage Dictionary (1997) defines "mnemonic" as a device, such as a formula or rhyme, used as an aid in remembering.

Mnemonics are methods for remembering information that is otherwise quite difficult to recall. The basic principle of mnemonics is to use as many of the best functions of the human brain as possible to code information. Basic mnemonics are a simple association technique such as: *Linked lists, Peg words* (Link information to specific placeholders in your memory), *Mental journey* (to link information to a 'mental story'), *Roman Rooms* (Link information to a mental image of rooms in your home or another building). Visualization, verbalization, simulation, performance, and repetition are other techniques for aiding memory. According to Carter and Nunan (2002), "Mnemonic strategies help learners link a new item with something known. These devices relate one thing to another in a simplistic stimulus-response manner" (p. 167).

Creating Mental Linkage

Memory is the brain's storehouse; the reservoir of the accumulated knowledge. Remembering is an important part of learning. However, do not mistake memorizing for learning; they are not the same thing. In order not to have a sieve-like memory, we should engage long-term memory. One of the mnemonic devices that can help us is to create mental linkage. Students' interest and curiosity about words are stimulated when they learn the logic behind word origins and the many stories that underlie how words came about. And it is also important to realize that learning these aspects about words reveals that words are not only interesting but also fun.

When you find pleasure in what you learn, you probably want to remember it. By using an odd or

into the target language so as to share with the class their own culture's method of metaphorical encoding.

Boers and Demecheleer (2001) also draw attention to the cultural aspects of teaching idioms. They claim that the possible impact of cross-cultural variation on learners' interpreting idioms invites language teachers to give extra attention to figurative expressions in the target language that relate to metaphoric themes that are less salient in the native language. Furthermore, they believe that an approach to teaching idioms will benefit from a teacher's awareness of cross-cultural as well as cross-linguistics differences.

O'Dell (1994, cited in McCarthy & Schmitt, 1997) names three approaches as how to categorize and teach idioms. A traditional way of categorizing idioms is to present them in groups which share a base word; the word *red* in *to deal with a red letter day, to be in the red, to be caught red-handed* is the base word. Another approach is to look at the origins of idioms and to group together, say, those which are connected with horse-riding – so *to keep a tight rein on something* is learnt alongside *to be in the saddle* and *to give somebody free rein*. The third approach used in 'English Vocabulary in Use' (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2003) is to link idioms functionally so that ones which are used for, say, describing feelings and moods or for praising and criticizing are presented together. The last approach has the advantage of focusing on meaning rather than form, which may help students to use them in an appropriate way. Mendis and Simpson (2003) advocate striking a balance between a 'holistic approach' that focuses on learning idioms as chunks; that is, paying attention only to their composite meaning, and an 'analytical approach' that teaches the meaning of an idiom by explaining the meaning of its constituent parts. They also assert that in FL teaching, some idioms lend themselves better to the latter approach even though native speakers store them as holistic chunks. For instance, students understand and remember the idiom *a drop in the bucket* easily if they know what *drop* and *bucket* mean. They also conclude that first, teachers must convince students to learn some idioms as chunks and not attempt a constituent analysis. Second, teachers must also urge students to learn idioms as analyzable chunks.

According to McCarthy (1998) idioms are best studied in context. He states that if a context is provided, it tends to be an imagined one. Using real speech samples from contexts that learners will be exposed to has distinct advantages over using conventional methods of teaching idioms. Then, teaching idioms in authentic contexts will relieve teachers of the need to create contrived contexts for idioms and teach them as disembodied items.

Based on what went on above about teaching idioms, it's clear that there is a definite need for teaching strategies to help learners deal with both comprehension as well as production of idioms inside and outside of the classroom setting.

Learning the meaning of a few idioms will help in only a limited ways. Mendis and Simpson (2003) feel that learners should be taught the nature of an idiom first, and then, they should be taught how to guess the meaning from context. Teachers, then, should have students identify idiomatic expressions in excerpts from spoken and written discourse. It is also felt that comparing the idiomatic expressions with their equivalents in students' native language will be of great use.

A useful technique to help students guess meaning from context is a modified cloze exercise. In this technique, a paragraph is written which

language that hinders the acquisition of idioms by non-native speakers.

The tendency to play with idioms, whether spoken or written, is universal and very common among native speakers. The love of puns and wordplay, often based on idioms, can be very confusing to non-native speakers, as in:

(Two friends in a pub after a long drive)
Things can only get bitter (Ibid. p.43).

Here, 'bitter' is both a reference to a king of beer and a pun on 'better'. Such features of native speaker uses of English are a major obstacle for non-native speakers wishing to acquire 'native-like' idiomaticity. Idioms are difficult to acquire and creative idiomaticity is even more difficult to acquire. Liontas (2002) believes that an effective way to develop idiomatic competence over time is through extensive exposure to and systematic practice with idioms. This argument is supported by the results from his study using questionnaires regarding idiom instruction given to L2 learners. He also argues that idioms should be introduced to learners as early as possible along with other aspects of semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, culture, and conventions of discourse. He claims that idioms should not be separated from other aspects of learning a language. In short, idioms should be integrated into the language curriculum right from the start.

Another approach to teaching idioms has been proposed by Lennon (1998), who suggests that exercises of a problem-solving nature can help learners to discover the metaphors in idiomatic expressions. He argues that since idioms are so semantically opaque, they are well-suited to a problem-solving approach in teaching which can exploit learners' innate cognitive drive to make sense of their environment. He also claims that comparisons with the L1 should be encouraged so that learners can become aware of the differences between the metaphors in the target language and their native language. Furthermore, Lennon believes that students will become highly motivated to translate their language's metaphors

Foreign Language Teaching Journal

FLT 42
No.89.Winter.Vol.23

(Cooper, 1998; Fernando, 1996). Cooper (Ibid.) asserts that since idiomatic expressions are so frequently encountered in both spoken and written discourse, they require special attention in language programs and should not be relegated to a position of secondary importance in the curriculum. He claims that idioms are often left until last or are ignored in language classrooms. However, sooner or later, imprecise idiomatic usage will cause difficulties even for a student with an excellent knowledge of grammar and a high level of vocabulary attainment. Through a teacher's conscious effort, students can receive effective practice in comprehending and producing idioms.

Pollio et al. (1997) analyzed approximately 200,000 words from: political debates, taped psychology sessions, and compositions written by students and adults. They concluded that those people used about 4.08 idioms per minute.

Cooper (1998) transcribed the idioms from three hours of taped television programs where Idioms occurred at the rate of about three per minute. Needles to say, understanding those idioms was crucial to understanding the plot.

Approaches to Teaching Idioms to L2 Learners

Since idioms are figurative expressions that do not mean what they literally state and since they are so frequent in spoken and written discourse, understanding and producing them present L2 learners with a special vocabulary learning problem (Ibid.). Students seem to avoid using idioms, or when they do try and use them, their speech slows down; they hesitate, stumble, and often produce errors. Whereas idiomaticity makes native speakers fast and fluent, it tends to make non-native speakers slow and ponderous (Prodromou, 2003). The non-compositionality of idioms, whether syntactic, semantic or pragmatic

in nature, means that they must be "recognised, learned, decoded and encoded as holistic units" (Moon, 1997, p.57). In an effort to help learners overcome these many difficulties, idiom acquisition research has uncovered a number of findings that have pedagogical implications for teaching idioms to L2 learners (Cooper, 1999).

It would appear that the way for second language learners to become more fluent in the target language is not only to have a good command of grammar and vocabulary but also a good command of the 'idiom principle' (Prodromou, 2003). The 'idiom principle' refers to the reliance on multi-word syntagmatic chunks which may well be the basis underlying principle of language production under normal circumstances (Lennon, 1998). Therefore, Prodromou (Ibid.). proposes the need for greater idiomatic competence for the non-native speaker. Idioms reflect the language used daily by the native speakers of the target language. Textbooks should try to more accurately mirror the language that is used by native speakers in real world contexts. Furthermore, in the post-corpus era, there are more accurate descriptions of written and spoken native speaker language available. Such descriptions have revealed the extent to which natural languages are phraseological and idiomatic. He claims that in the past, teachers relied heavily on grammar and dictionaries to help them teach but that these were not based on naturally occurring language.

Prodromou (2003) argues that there is a paradox of idiomaticity in native and non-native uses of English. One example of this is the way teachers stress the fixed nature of idioms in the classroom only to discover that their fixedness for native speakers is very flexible. He claims that the flexible nature of so-called 'fixed expressions' is one of the many paradoxes of idiomatic

recognize that an idiom exists, and they may assume the literal meaning. Second, it is unusual to be able to substitute one word for another and provide a translation into non-idiomatic English. So, without having an access to a good dictionary providing examples for idioms, an idiom cannot often be translatable.

Nonnative speakers of English can reach a point in their knowledge of English language where they feel comfortable with standard literary speech; however, they are liable to find themselves in trouble when confronted with the idiomatic expressions they do not know. When hearing an idiom, they may feel frustrated and confused, since the true meaning of the idiom cannot be generally determined by the mere knowledge of its component parts (Collis, 1987).

Because figurative meaning is unpredictable, idioms present a special language learning problem for virtually all groups of learners, i.e., native speakers, bilingual FL speakers, and learners. It's hard to tell from the literal meaning of the individual words, for example, that both *to kick the bucket* and *to bite the dust* mean *to die* (Cooper, 1999). Cooper also states that even though complete mastery of idioms may be nearly impossible, every language learner must be prepared to learn them because idioms occur so frequently in spoken and written English discourse.

Idioms are useful devices providing users of language with ready-made phrases that communicate a clear meaning. Cooper further argues that because of their lower level of linguistic competence in the target language, FL learners have much difficulty in understanding FL figurative expressions; howerver, they will meet them in conversations, lectures, movies, radio broadcasts, TV programs, newspapers, magazines, and books. Indeed, mastery of a FL may depend

partly on how well learners comprehend, retain, recall, and finally, produce idioms in every day language.

Nearly all foreign language learners including the Iranian EFL learners wish to gain a sort of native-like mastery in all skills of the English language, and it seems necessary that they be presented with idioms used in the natural context, in order to enable them to understand the natural language they will mainly be exposed to, once in a foreign country. But, of course, teaching idioms in one thing and retaining them another thing. Accordingly, idioms should be presented to the students in a way facilitating retention, for the presented items' later recall is one of the most challenging tasks to meet for both teachers and learners. At this point, either the teaching method or the manner of presentation, which can be regarded a sub branch for the teaching method applied, were addressed in this study in order to promote retention. In this study, we aimed at observing the effect of two manners of idiom presentation, i.e., presenting topically grouped idioms, one group at a time versus presenting the same idioms at random.

Significance and Frequency of Idioms

Idioms reflect the language used daily by the native speakers of the target language. Lennon (1998) asserts that idioms – the colourful side of languages – are one of the symbols used while we are communicating our thoughts and feelings. He further notes that idioms give life and richness to the language by taking the existing words, combining them in a new sense, and creating new meanings, just like a work of art.

The sheer number of idioms and their high frequency in both spoken and written discourse make them an important aspect of vocabulary acquisition and language learning in general

دو گروه به مدت ۱۰ جلسه در معرض آموزش اصطلاحات رایجی که در متنی به کار برده شده بودند ، قرار گرفتند .

در هر جلسه ، یک متن کوتاه حاوی شش اصطلاح گروهی به گروه آزمایشی ارایه شد (اصطلاحات میوه‌ای ، عددی و غیره) . گروه شاهد نیز هر جلسه با متنی مشابه روبه‌رو شد ، تنها با این تفاوت که اصطلاحات به کار رفته در آن متن به طور تصادفی کنار هم قرار گرفته بودند و در یک گروه معنایی نبودند .

در پایان ۱۰ جلسه‌ی آموزشی ، آزمون پسین معلم ساخته شده از موارد تدریس شده برگزار شد . سپس برای مقایسه‌ی عملکرد دو گروه مزبور ، فرمول T-test اعمال گردید . نتیجه‌ی این عمل آماری ، نشانگر وجود تفاوت معناداری در میانگین نمرات گروه شاهد و آزمایشی در آزمون پسین بود .

این تحقیق ، ثابت کرد ، تدریس اصطلاحات به طور گروهی می‌تواند ، این اصطلاحات و معنی آن‌ها را در ذهن دانش‌آموزان ایرانی دوره‌ی متوسط ماندگار سازد .

با استناد به نتیجه‌ی این تحقیق و هم‌چنین یافته‌های تحقیقات مشابه در این زمینه می‌توان به این نتیجه‌ی کلی رسید که ایجاد یک ارتباط معنایی و یا موضوعی به هر شیوه‌ی متعارف و غیرمتعارفی می‌تواند عامل ارتقای ماندگاری اطلاعات در ذهن زبان‌آموزان شود . البته خلاقیت مدرس ، نقشی اساسی در ایجاد یا انتخاب تکنیک مناسب برای ارایه‌ی مطالب ایفا می‌کند .

کلیدواژگان : اصطلاحات گروه‌بندی ، اصطلاحات براساس موضوع ، اصطلاحات مجازی و عبارات

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the facilitative effect of a specific manner of idiom presentation, i.e, topically grouping, on EFL learners' retention. Initially, this paper zooms on the importance and frequency of idioms. Subsequent to that, various approaches respective to teaching idiomatic expressions are presented to back up the hypothesis central to the study carried out. Next, some teaching techniques for lexical items are offered one of which is empoyed in carrying out the treatment section in this study.

The aim of the study at hand is to prove that creating mental association through using the technique of *topically grouping* in teaching lexical items generally, and idioms specifically, can boost the retention of these items in Iranian EFL learners.

Key Words: ideams figurative expressions, topically grouped idiomatic expressions

Introduction

In the recent years, foreign language researchers have become increasingly interested in the central role of lexical acquisition in language learning. To a large degree, improving our understanding of FL learning depends on improving our understanding of how learners learn the foreign language lexicon.

Vocabulary or lexical item, as Chastain (1988) holds, plays a more important role in communication than the other components of language. Therefore, words and their meanings are the greatest tools we can present our students in order to guarantee their success in language learning as far as vocabularies and their meanings and uses are concerned.

The commonly occurring type of multi word unit in English – especially in informal conversational settings – that should not be taken for granted is idiom.

Carter et al. (2001) indicate that idioms present very real problems to learners of a language: First, it is not always possible for listeners or readers to