

DEGREE THESIS



Idioms in English as a Second Language

Contextualization of L2 idioms (written context versus still pictures) and its effect on students' retention

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Abstract

The main aim of the present study is to investigate whether there is a difference in retention between two groups of Swedish second language learners of English when they are faced with idioms in a written context or in the form of still pictures. The subjects of the investigation are two different groups at a high school in Sweden. Both Group 1 and 2 consist of 24 subjects each. For this study, 15 idioms were randomly selected. To Group 1, the idioms were presented in a written context and to Group 2 the idioms were presented in the form of still pictures. The subjects were given a pre-test and two post-tests to measure their retention. Moreover, the subjects were given a questionnaire in order to learn more about their perception of idioms. I believe that, on the immediate post-test, Group 1 (the “written context group”) did better than Group 2 (the “still pictures group”). Nevertheless, on the delayed post-test (testing long-term retention), Group 2 remembered more idioms than Group 1. But, it is important to note that contextualization of L2 idioms using written context and/or using still pictures resulted, in general, to be effective strategies for the retention of idioms.

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1. Introduction

When learning a new language it is of great importance to have a good knowledge of vocabulary. Vocabulary is a very broad study area that is constantly changing. Even though language is constantly changing, it remains full of fixed metaphorical expressions and so called idioms. According to D'Angelo Bromley (1984, p.272), idioms exist in all languages and are used among speakers of every language, but, how good is the knowledge of such fixed expressions for second language learners of English?

As far as I can remember, I have never, as a student, worked with idioms explicitly in class, either in Swedish or in English. However, I have encountered idioms on TV shows, movies and different types of English texts but not been able to fully understand their meaning. This opened up my eyes to investigating whether today's students are familiar with English idioms.

Teaching and learning idioms were neglected areas for a long time and specialists have been wondering whether teachers of English as a second language should or should not teach English idioms (Tarcaeanu, 2012). Students most likely encounter idiomatic expressions through TV shows, movies, or in English-speaking countries. According to Cooper (1998, p.225) idioms are the most frequently encountered kind of nonliteral expressions. Moreover, one needs to comprehend idioms in order to understand the plot when idioms occur on TV-shows. For this reason, it is very important to develop students' idiom knowledge.

The mastery of idioms is what distinguishes a native speaker from a non-native speaker because idioms are influenced by the culture and therefore very unique to each language. A learner mastering idioms often indicates a proficient learner and it is claimed that "knowledge of slang and idioms is fundamental to non-native speakers' understanding of the language that native speakers actually use" (Burke, 1998, p.5). Previous research by Trulsson (2007) has shown that young learners tend to understand and consequently also use a lot fewer idioms than older learners in their first language. If this is the case, how are young learners supposed to be able to master idioms in a second language and ultimately sound like a native speaker if they barely know idioms in their first language? It would be a good start to teach students idioms which are identical to their first language. If classes in the first language included more idiomatic expressions, it would facilitate the comprehension of idioms in a second language, at least for the idioms which are identical to the students' first language. As a result students would ultimately be able to sound like a native speaker (Irujo, 1986).

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

As mentioned above, it is important to include idiomatic expression into the teaching and also to vary the strategies used. Students are all different, some might learn better with the help of written context and some need pictures. Therefore, teachers are supposed to give the students the opportunity to work in different ways and facilitate their learning process. The aim of the present essay is primarily to study whether there is a difference between acquiring idioms within a written context or a visual context. The essay aims to answer the following questions:

- Is there a difference between remembering an idiom with the help of a written context and the context of still pictures?
- What methods do the students use in order to remember new idioms?

1.2 Structure

A literature review of the chosen topic is the second main section of the essay. The literature review aims to give the reader the theoretical background needed for this study (Sections 2.1 – 2.4.2). The third section is the methodology where the procedure of the study is presented in detail to give the reader a full account of the planning and conducting of the study (Sections 3.1-3.3). The methodology section is then followed by the fourth main section of the essay, the results. In this section the results from the conducted experiment and questionnaire will be presented in forms of tables together with a short discussion (Sections 4.1-4.10). The fifth section of the essay is the conclusion which aims to give concrete answers to the research questions (Section 5).

2. Literature Review

This section will present theoretical background and previous research.

2.1 Second Language Learning

Mitchell, Myles, and Marsden (2013, p. 1) define second languages as languages learned “later than in earliest childhood” and second language learning defines the learning of any other language that takes place later than the acquisition of the first language. Another definition made by Ellis (1997) states that: “ ‘L2 acquisition’ [...] can be defined as the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of the classroom, and ‘Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as the study of this’ ” (p. 3). Learning a second language could mean that one studies a foreign language which is a language that is not spoken in the nearby community, or a second language which is a language that is spoken in the surrounding community. However, the expression *second language learning* is used to describe both the learning of a foreign and a second language (Yule, 2010, p. 187).

Before the 1960s, studies were carried out to help teachers improve their language teaching and the studies were usually done from a theoretical point of view. Today, however, second language acquisition is considered to be theory neutral (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 5). This means that research confirms that similar approaches and linguistic features are presented in both first and second language learning in children. This means that the linguistic and cognitive process of second language learning in children is generally very similar to first language learning. Also, it is stated that the second language learning of an adult is more affected by the first language. Furthermore, the later the second language learning process occurs the more the first language affects the learning process of the second language (Brown, 2007, p. 72-73).

2.2 Vocabulary Learning

The neglect of vocabulary has been a recurring theme in the literature of English language teaching and learning. It was noted already in the 1970s that there were remarkably few studies done on vocabulary learning that could be of any interest to language teachers. It is said that the neglect of vocabulary is because of the importance that is placed on vocabulary learning by the learners. Regardless of the neglecting of vocabulary, there has been a better awareness of vocabulary learning during recent years (Hedge, 2000, p. 110-111).

The question is how second language learners acquire vocabulary? Taking Swedish students as an example, it is acknowledged that when they start studying English as their second

language they have already been in contact with the language when for example listening to music or watching movies. Being in contact with the second language facilitates the learning process of it. Also, vocabulary learning in English as a second language is all about learning the words that one already knows in one's first language. This means that the vocabulary students have in their first language facilitates the acquisition of English vocabulary (Lundahl, 2012, p. 338).

Tornberg (2009) describes five different learning styles, based on Gardner's intelligence theory, which language learners use when learning vocabulary:

1. Linguistic intelligence
2. Logical-mathematical intelligence
3. Visual – spatial intelligence
4. Musical intelligence
5. Bodily – kinesthetic intelligence

Learners with linguistic intelligence study vocabulary by writing their own sentences using the words and construct their own word games. The learner with a logical-mathematical intelligence would most likely make vocabulary lists, use dictionaries and play word games on the computer. The student with a visual-spatial intelligence makes use of pictures to acquire vocabulary. Having a musical intelligence signifies that one learns new words with the help of music. One could for example sing the words out loud or maybe listen to the words by someone else. Lastly, the student with a bodily-kinesthetic intelligence would make use of their own body by example dramatizing the words (Tornberg, 2009; Gardner, 1983). Hedge (2000, p. 117-118) points out that some of the strategies used for vocabulary learning can be called *cognitive* which she defines as “direct mental operations which are concerned with working on new words in order to understand, categorize, and store them in the mental lexicon”. Some cognitive strategies teach words in groups, use keywords, making use of context and similarity to the words in their first language. Other strategies, specifically indirect strategies can be called *metacognitive*. Such strategies include making word cards, word lists and collecting words from their context.

2.3 Idioms

One specific kind of vocabulary is known as *idiom* which is a term with many definitions. The availability of many definitions suggests that researchers do not completely agree what an idiom is. It is, for example, said that idioms are of metaphorical origins but that they now are “frozen, semantic units” as they have lost their metaphorical sense over time (Gibbs R. , 1992, p. 485). According to Gibbs (1992) idioms are dead expressions that share the same meaning of simple literal expressions. Gibbs discusses how idioms are explained and defined in dictionaries and it is found that dictionaries give simple definitions of idioms. The article refers to other research done by Cruse (1986) and Palmer (1981) which both claim that “the meanings of idioms are best represented by simple definitions because idioms are mostly dead metaphors” (Gibbs R. , 1992, p. 485). This is something noticed when working with the dictionary of Collins for this study. All idioms are defined with simple literal expressions. Yet, it is important to mention that more recent research done in the field suggests that the idea of idioms as frozen units is not as static as before. Gustawsson (2006, p.7) states that “due to corpus-based research, the view on idioms is shifting. Once regarded as frozen phrases with monolithic meaning, idioms are today recognized as surprisingly flexible phrases whose meanings may be unexpectedly complex”. The online dictionary of Merriam Webster (2015) defines an idiom as “[a]n expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but that has a separate meaning of its own”. The same definition is provided by Cacciari & Tabossi (1988, p. 688) who define an idiom as “a string of words whose semantic interpretation cannot be derived compositionally from the interpretation of its parts”. This means that an idiom cannot be understood when studying the separate words of it, but one has to study the idiom as a whole. For example, when studying the words of the idiom *paint the town red* we reach the literal meaning of the idiom which is that one paints the town using the color red. However, the semantic interpretation of the idiom means that one has fun without caring about the consequences. This example demonstrates that there is no obvious relation between the literal meaning of the idiom and the semantic meaning. Cooper (1998) explains that “[a]n idiom can have a literal meaning, but its alternate, figurative meaning must be understood metaphorically. For example, *over the hill* can mean *on the other side of the hill*, but the figurative meaning is *to be very old*” (p. 225). This point of view is also supported by Glucksberg (2001, p. 68) who states “[w]hat sets idioms apart from most other fixed expressions is their ‘non-logical’ nature, that is, the absence of any discernible relation between their linguistic meanings and their idiomatic meanings”. Furthermore, it is stated that the meanings of idioms cannot be determined from its literal translation “nor can meaning

always be determined from the surrounding material” (D'Angelo Bromley, 1984, p. 274). Vocabulary learners will, with no doubt, be facing a difficulty if they are not able to define an idiom with the help of its literal meaning or by the surrounding tools as for example still pictures.

2.4 Second Language Idiom Processing

This section will discuss the processing and comprehension strategies used by second/foreign language speakers of English to comprehend figurative expressions as idioms. This section will help the reader to understand how nonnative speakers process idioms. Research in this field has focused on the influence of the learner's first language into the processing of idioms in second/foreign languages.

Second language (L2) learners cannot fully understand figurative expressions in the language they are studying even though they will encounter such expressions in all kinds of discourse: in movies, conversations, lectures, and many more (Cooper T. , 1999, p. 234). There are many strategies of how to learn new vocabulary when learning a second or a foreign language and it is important to know that language learners could benefit from using different strategies (Oxford, 1990, p. 40).

Previous studies have shown that the first language plays a role in second language idiom processing. A study conducted by Irujo (1986) shows that it was easier for the advanced learners of English to comprehend and learn English idioms that were identical to the idioms in their mother tongue, Spanish. This means that the more similar the idioms are between the languages, the easier it is for second/foreign language learners to comprehend and acquire these idiomatic expressions. It was also shown that the subjects' mother tongue was dominant in the production tests they had to take. Again, we are able to see the influence the first language has on second/foreign language learning.

Cooper (1999) examined the processes/strategies of understanding English idioms used by non-native speakers. The study examined how non-native speakers attempt to understand English idioms when they encounter them. The subjects were presented with 20 idioms in written context on the computer and they were asked to identify the idioms on the spot. Participants stated that “a stumbling block in comprehension was often the lack of a clear and close relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of the idiom.” (Cooper T. , 1999, p. 244). This means that the participants had a hard time comprehending those idioms whose literal and figurative meaning was not close. It was found that the most frequently used

strategies was *guessing from context*, *discussing and analyzing the idiom*, and *using the literal meaning of the idiom*. These three strategies were used 71% of the time.

The first strategy *guessing from context* was used 28% of the time. Participants did, with the help of the context in which they encountered the idiom, discuss the context in order to conclude the meaning of the idiom. The second strategy used was *discussing and analyzing the idiom* and this strategy was used 24% of the time. This strategy was based on general discussions about the idiom and the context before the participants attempted to guess the idiom's meaning. The third strategy *using the literal meaning of the idiom* was used 19% of the time. The participants who made use of this strategy knew that the idioms had a figurative meaning. However, they concentrated on the literal meaning of the expressions to be able to reach the figurative meaning. (Cooper T. , 1999, p. 246-249).

According to Cooper (1999), L2 learners must experiment with possible solutions when encountering unknown idiomatic expressions since they do not have the same linguistic competence degree as native speakers do. Therefore, Cooper (1999) suggests the following: "L2 learners must develop an interpretive approach, a heuristic method, for solving the linguistic problem" (p.254). Cooper further defines what is meant by heuristic method and states that "a problem is solved by discovery and experimentation in a trial-and-error, rule-of-thumb manner /.../" (p. 254-255). Moreover, in teaching, the heuristic method encourages learners to learn, comprehend, experiment and solve their own problem. It is further stated that this method captures the processing of idioms for second language learners.

Another method to approach idioms for second language learners is to present a method for comprehending the idioms they face. It has been stated that learners tend to process idioms thinking out loud and it is suggested that teachers can adapt this procedure in class. In this case, the teacher has to help the students to tackle the problem of understanding the idiom. The teacher will have to give hints about the meaning of the idioms and also introduce to them the different strategies, discussed in previous paragraph, that exist to use. With the teacher's help, students will be able to reach a correct interpretation (Cooper T. , 1999, p. 256).

2.4.1 Learning Idioms from Written Context

As previously mentioned, one of the strategies used for L2 processing of idioms is to use the context in which the learner encounters the idiom. It is stated that learning vocabulary from context is the most important strategy for vocabulary learning especially for first language learning but also for second language learning. However, it is also stated that the conditions needed for learners to learn from context is not experienced by many second language learners (Nation, 2001, p. 232). According to Cooper's study (1999) guessing the meaning of idioms from context is used 28% of the time. However, to be able to use this strategy the learners need to know around 95% of the text's words. Learning by guessing from context allows learners to develop their vocabulary knowledge. In fact, findings from a number of studies conducted in this field present high percentage of success in guessing vocabulary from context (Nation, 2001, pp. 233-234). Using the strategy of guessing word meaning from context is found to be one of the most favored learning strategy among learners of a second or foreign language (Paribakht & Wesche, 1999; Harley & Hart, 2000).

Mediha and Enisa (2014) compared the traditional and contextualized methods used in vocabulary learning and teaching. The aim of the study was to investigate their effectiveness on the acquisition of vocabulary in English as a foreign language of 80 Turkish 9th graders. The results of the study show that integration of literature has a positive effect on vocabulary learning. In other words, using contextualized methods where students are able to encounter new vocabulary in context has a positive effect on the enhancement of students' vocabulary knowledge. Another study (Cetinaevci, 2014) investigated whether Turkish English foreign language learners use contextual clues in the process of guessing new words or not. The study tested their strategy use. The results indicated that unknown words in a rich context were guessed more successfully than words in a poor context.

Karlsson (2012) conducted a study with 15 first term university students. One of the aims was to investigate to what extent students used context to interpret idioms in their first language (Swedish) and second language (English). The results show that in most cases the students made use of the context in order to be able to offer a correct translation of the idiom. Most of the students indicated that they had used the context when interpreting the idiomatic expressions. In a study conducted by Cooper (1998), the results show that the comprehension of idioms is facilitated by contextual support. Cooper (1998) states that "when the idiomatic expression is found in context, learners use an already constructed representation of what has gone before (the context) as a conceptual framework for interpreting a target sentence, or any

other linguistic unit” (Ortony et al. 1978, p. 476). This is also found in another recent study by Holsinger (2013) which states that “contextual information of the idioms guides the learners’ interpretations of the idioms” (p. 389). Furthermore, Liontas (2003) conducted a study trying to gain information about how second language learners process, comprehend and interpret idiomatic expressions in and out of context. The study shows that idiom comprehension in Spanish improves if the idiom is given with contextual information.

Kavianpanah and Alavi (2008) conducted a study where two important factors that affect the guessing ability of unknown words in context were highlighted. The first factor is what is called reader-related variables which include the reader’s vocabulary size, knowledge of grammar, language proficiency, and cognitive and mental effort. The second factor is the text-related variables which include the characteristics of the words in the text, the presence of contextual clues in the text, and topic familiarity. All of these factors affect how well or bad the language learner is able to guess the meaning of unknown words. Since there are so many factors affecting the guessing of the words in context, the researcher chose to study how precise the understanding of English foreign language learners of unknown words is when guessing words in context. However, the results of the study point out that the reliability of the learners’ assessment is very low. According to the researcher of the study it is due to the fact that English second language learners are not aware of the fact that they do not know the meaning of unknown words and because of this their guessing is not reliable. The findings of this study are indeed interesting since guessing from context is the most preferable strategy among second language learners.

The general idea found in the studies presented above is that context facilitates the comprehension of vocabulary as well as idiomatic expressions. Guessing word meaning from context is one of the most preferred vocabulary learning strategies.

2.4.2. Learning Idioms with Still Pictures

Working with words in their context is one strategy in order to acquire new vocabulary. However, it is not the only strategy. One of the strategies one could use is to work with vocabulary together with visual aids in order to comprehend. Al-Seghayer (2001, p. 226) claims that “exposing learners to multiple modalities of presentation (i.e., printed text, sound, picture, or video) produces a language-learning environment which can have a real impact on learning”. In order to learn new words, it is very useful to link the verbal with the visual because images will then be transferred to long-term memory (Oxford, 1990, p. 40).

Furthermore, it is stated that using strategies to apply images is very useful for learning new expressions that one has encountered before. Also it is a good way to remember the words one has encountered (Oxford, 1990, p. 61). Additionally, it is preferable to use for teaching in order for the students to achieve knowledge that is transferred directly to long-term memory (Olivestam & Ott, 2010, p. 115). It is also claimed that the learning process of vocabulary is faster when students see a word/expression together with a picture/object (Hatch & Brown, 1995, p. 375). Learning idioms, or vocabulary for that matter, with the help of pictures is found to be very useful for students with dyslexia. Visualizing text as images makes them acquire the words/idioms easier (Boström & Svantesson, 2007, p.59).

Boers (2009) conducted a study with Dutch students in Brussels where he examined the effect of pictorial education and found that using pictures to illustrate the meaning of idioms has a distracting effect on idiom comprehension among the students. However, another study conducted by Nasab and Hesabi (2014) found differing results on the impact of pictures on idiom comprehension. They conducted an experiment where they divided 39 English translation and literature students into two groups which worked with idioms differently. Group 1, the control group, was presented to the idioms with definition and examples whereas Group 2, picture group, was presented to the idioms with definition, examples and pictures. The result of the study shows that there is a positive correlation between the subjects' use of pictures and learning styles when working with idioms. This means that Iranian learners seem to gain from the use of pictures and illustrations which is a conclusion that contradicts Boers findings. Another study (Fotovatnia & Khaki, 2012) also investigated the effect of using pictures on the learning of 20 idioms by 68 Iranians. The study compared the effect of using pictures for idiom comprehension with giving Persian translation equivalent or English definition of the idioms. In all conducted tests, the picture group outperformed the other group. The pictures used in this study enhanced the subjects' understanding of the idiom as well as preserving the idiom in the memory. Moreover, Ghaderia and Afshinfar (2014) investigated the effects of using animated versus static funny pictures on idiom comprehension and intake. The aim of the study was to find out whether funny pictures could lead to higher intake of English idioms among the Iranian English learners. The results of the study show that using pictures, more specifically animated funny pictures, could enhance learners' intake and retention of idioms.

The general idea found in the studies above is that pictures facilitate the comprehension of vocabulary and idioms. It is a common finding in memory research that pictures are remembered better than words.

3. Methodology

The objective of the present study is to investigate if there is a difference in retention between two groups of Swedish second language learners of English when they face English idioms in either a written context or a visual context. This section will present the methods which were used to carry out the present study.

3.1 Experiment

The material was collected from an experiment done with two groups of Swedish students taking their last English course at a high school. The experiment was conducted with two groups with 24 students in each. The chosen groups consist of students that are taking the course “English 7” which is the last and highest level of English at high schools in Sweden. At the high school where the experiment was conducted, the English 7 course is optional. This means that all of the students who are taking this course have selected it. Students taking course English 7 were chosen for this study as it is considered that they have a higher level of English and it is assumed that they have encountered idioms before.

All in all, 15 idioms were randomly selected from *The Intriguing Sources of Hold Your Horses and Other Idioms* by Arnold Ringstad (2012). The transparency and frequency of the idioms were considered when choosing the idioms in the book. When dealing with the frequency of the idioms, the chosen idioms were divided into three subcategories: very frequent, frequent, and infrequent. The categorization of the frequency of the idioms is based on Collins Cobuild’s *Idioms Dictionary* (2012). The idioms that are very frequently used are marked with an asterisk in the dictionary. Those idioms categorized as *frequent* are idioms found in Cobuild’s dictionary but not marked with an asterisk meaning that they are used but not very frequent. Finally, idioms which are not mentioned in Cobuild’s dictionary were subcategorized as *infrequent* indicating that they are not frequent nor commonly used. When it comes to the transparency of the idioms, the idioms were divided into two subcategories: *transparent* and *opaque*. The transparency aspect of the idioms was taken from a second language learner’s point of view, in this case the perspective of Swedish L2 learners. The degree of transparency was based on two criteria: the literal translation of the idiom and the

semantic translation of the idiom. The subcategory *transparent* consists of both fully transparent idioms and semi-transparent idioms.

An example of a fully transparent idiom is *blue blood*. The English idiom *blue blood* means that someone belongs to a very noble family. In Swedish we have the same expression *blåblodig*, which means exactly the same thing as *blue blood*. Therefore, *blue blood* is considered as a fully transparent idiom. The English idiom *dressed to the nines* is classified as a semi-transparent idiom because both the literal and semantic translation do partly help to reveal the meaning behind the idiom. The literal translation of the idiom would be “klädd till nior” and the semantic translation is “*uppklädd till tänderna*”. The common aspect of this idiom is that number nine is the highest one-digit number. As previously mentioned, some of the idioms were categorized as *opaque* meaning that neither the literal translation nor the semantic translation helps the students to reveal the meaning of the English idiom. An example of an opaque idiom is *money for old rope* where the literal translation would be “pengar för gammalt rep” and the Swedish semantic translation would be *lättförtjänta pengar/ett lätt jobb*.

Table 1 – Frequency and Transparency

Frequency	Transparent	Opaque
Very Frequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Start from scratch</i> • <i>Off the hook</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Put your foot in your mouth</i> • <i>A chip on your shoulder</i> • <i>Down to the wire</i>
Frequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dressed to the nines</i> • <i>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</i> • <i>Paint the town red</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Money for old rope</i> • <i>Hold your horses</i>
Infrequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>On pins and needles¹</i> • <i>Blue Blood</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Get out of Dodge</i> • <i>Break the fourth wall</i> • <i>Keep mum</i>

¹ Acknowledgement: Unfortunately, this idiom has been categorized incorrectly. It is not an infrequent idiom but rather a frequent one. This mistake was not recognized until later in the study.

The first group of students is referred to as Group 1 and this group consists of 24 students 15 of whom are female and 9 male. Group 1 was tested on whether the English idioms put into a written context help the students to remember the idioms easier. The second group of students is referred to as Group 2 and this group consists of 24 students, 11 of whom are male and 13 female. Group 2 was tested on whether the English idioms presented with the help of still pictures affect the students to remember the idioms easier.

First of all the students had to do a pre-test to see whether they already knew any of the idioms. When all of the students had done the pre-test, each group had a class where the idioms were presented to them. For Group 1, the idioms were presented with the help of written contexts. A Power Point presentation was prepared where the idioms appeared to the left of the slides and the written context to the right. The examples of the sentences where the idioms were put in context are explanations presented in Ringstad's book (2012).

Example:

Off the hook

"Spencer had gotten **off the hook**. His mom thought he had eaten all the ice cream, but his dad admitted to it"

Group 2 was presented with the same kind of Power Point presentation, but instead of written contexts to the right of the slide the students were shown pictures of the idioms taken from Ringstad's book (2012).

Example:

Off the hook



An interesting point to make concerning the pictures taken from Ringstad's book is the fact that some illustrations show the meaning of the idiom in a clear way, while other illustrations are a literal drawing of the meanings of the words used in the idiom.

Example:

- *Literal drawing of the idiom*

A chip on your shoulder



- *Illustration which demonstrates the meaning of the idiom*

Keep mum



The students of both groups were provided with an answering sheet on which they also had the idiom and the written context/picture where they could write down the correct explanation for each idiom with their own words.

Lastly, to see the effects of the written and visual context given during the presentation, the students had to do two decontextualized post-tests. The first post-test took place only a week after the presentations and the second post-test took place three weeks after the first post-test. The first post-test is considered to indicate the students' short-term retention whereas the second post-test is considered to show the students' long-term retention. Since the purpose of the essay is to investigate the effects of written and visual context, the students were not aware of the fact that they were going to have two post-tests. Also, it is important to note that

the idioms which the students already knew for the pre-test were omitted from the two post-tests. Since all students know different idioms, customized tests were made for each student in order to see how many idioms each student was able to remember. However, it is important to note that what students know fluctuates which means that there might have been idioms the student did know on the pre-test that they did not know on Post-test 1. However, for this study it is assumed that the idioms which the students gave correct answers to are idioms they actually know.

All of the students present at the reading sessions took part in the post-tests.

3.2 Questionnaire

To find out more about the students' thoughts on vocabulary learning and their acquisition of the idiom, a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was put together. A questionnaire was used in order to complete the results of the tests with students' ideas. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part investigates their thoughts on idioms and vocabulary learning and the second part investigates their thoughts on their retention of the idioms. The questionnaire was handed out to the students when they were done with the second post-test. Also, the questionnaire was given in Swedish to avoid any misunderstandings.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Taking ethical considerations into account when writing a research project is very important and this is due to the great importance of the participants' welfare. All participants should be aware of the purpose of the research project. Moreover, they have to be aware that they have the freedom to withdraw from the project at any stage. It is also important to make sure that everyone has understood and therefore it is claimed that one has to adapt the language to the participants. To make sure that everybody understood all of the information and instructions, the questionnaire was given in Swedish. Furthermore, it is important to clarify the fact that all of the material collected will be treated with high confidentiality and that the data collected will be anonymous. Therefore, no names will be presented in the present study.

4. Results

In this section, the results of the three different tests will be presented and briefly discussed. Each subsection will present the results of one test and one group at a time followed by a short discussion for the results of each table.

4.1 Pre-test - Group 1: Written context

In Group 1, 24 students took the pre-test and *table 2* demonstrates the number and the percentage of the students, who answered correctly, incorrectly and the number of no given answer. It is important to note that by the results of the questionnaire in both groups, it was found that a total of 3 students in Group 1 have been in an English speaking country for more than three months. This means that they might have a better knowledge of idioms since they more likely have encountered them during their stay in the English speaking country. For this study this means that the chosen idioms might be already known for these students. These students should have been excluded on the post-tests. However, since the questionnaire was anonymous it was impossible to identify these specific students.

The results of the pre-test shows that a total of 35.00% of the idioms were correct, 34.00% were incorrect and 31.11% of the idioms were not identified.

Table 2

Idiom	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	No given answer
<i>Start from scratch</i>	24/24 (100%)	0/24	0/24
<i>Off the hook</i>	10/24 (41,66%)	9/24 (37,5%)	5/24 (20,83%)
<i>Put your foot in your mouth</i>	5/24 (20,83%)	10/24 (41,66%)	9/24 (37,5%)
<i>A chip on your shoulder</i>	0/24	13/24 (54,16%)	11/24 (45,83%)
<i>Down to the wire</i>	0/24	15/24 (62,5%)	9/24 (37,5%)
<i>Dressed to the nines</i>	18/24 (75,00%)	4/24 (16,66%)	2/24 (8,33%)
<i>Money for old rope</i>	0/24	10/24 (41,66%)	14/24 (58,33%)
<i>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</i>	10/24 (41,66%)	4/24 (16,66%)	10/24 (41,66%)
<i>Paint the town red</i>	4/24 (16,66%)	8/24 (33,33%)	12/24 (50,00%)
<i>Hold your horses</i>	16/24 (66,66%)	5/24 (20,83%)	3/24 (12,5%)
<i>Get out of Dodge</i>	9/24 (37,5%)	10/24 (41,66%)	5/24 (20,83%)
<i>Blue blood</i>	7/24 (29,16%)	12/24 (50,00%)	5/24 (20,83%)
<i>On pins and needles</i>	12/24 (50,00%)	5/24 (20,83%)	7/24 (29,16%)
<i>Break the fourth wall</i>	8/24 (33,33%)	6/24 (25,00%)	10/24 (41,66%)
<i>Keep mum</i>	3/24 (12,5%)	11/24 (45,83%)	10/24 (41,66%)
Total	126/360 (35,00%)	122/360 (34,00%)	112/360 (31,11%)

4.2 Pre-test – Group 2: Visual context

In Group 2, 24 students were tested and *table 3* shows the number and percentage of students who answered correctly, incorrectly and the percentage of no given answers.

The results of the pre-test shows that 28.61% of the idioms were given correct answers, 36.39% of the idioms were incorrect and 35.00% of the idioms remained unidentified.

Table 3

Idiom	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	No given answer
<i>Start from scratch</i>	24/24 (100%)	0/24	0/24
<i>Off the hook</i>	5/24 (20,83%)	11/24 (45,83%)	8/24 (33,33%)
<i>Put your foot in your mouth</i>	3/24 (12,5%)	10/24 (41,66%)	11/24 (45,83%)
<i>A chip on your shoulder</i>	0/24	11/24 (45,83%)	13/24 (54,16%)
<i>Down to the wire</i>	2/24 (8,33%)	8/24 (33,33%)	14/24 (58,33%)
<i>Dressed to the nines</i>	14/24 (58,33%)	10/24 (41,66%)	-
<i>Money for old rope</i>	0/24	8/24 (33,33%)	16/24 (66,66%)
<i>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</i>	11/24 (45,83%)	4/24 (16,66%)	9/24 (37,5%)
<i>Paint the town red</i>	3/24 (12,5%)	12/24 (50%)	9/24 (37,5%)
<i>Hold your horses</i>	15/24 (62,5%)	5/24 (20,83%)	4/24 (16,66%)
<i>Get out of Dodge</i>	0/24	7/24 (29,16%)	17/24 (70,83%)
<i>Blue blood</i>	7/24 (29,16%)	13/24 (54,16%)	4/24 (16,66%)
<i>On pins and needles</i>	12/24 (50%)	9/24 (37,5%)	3/24 (12,5%)
<i>Break the fourth wall</i>	4/24 (16,66%)	10/24 (41,66%)	10/24 (41,66%)
<i>Keep mum</i>	3/24 (12,5%)	13/24 (54,16%)	8/24 (33,33%)
Total	103/360 (28.61%)	131/360 (36.39%)	126/360 (35.00%)

4.3 Comparison between Group 1 & 2 (Pre-test)

Out of fifteen idioms the students in both groups were able to give a correct answer to twelve idioms. This means that the majority of the idioms were to some extent identified at the pre-test. In terms of transparency it has been found that the idioms with the highest scores as exemplified by *Star from scratch* (100%-100%), *Dressed to the nines* (75%-58.33%), *Scrape the bottom of the barrel* (41.66-45.83%) and *On pins and needles* (50%-50%) in both groups are all transparent idioms, which could explain why more students gave a correct answer for these idioms. Moreover, these idioms are considered to be very frequent/frequent. Also, both groups had three opaque idioms which remained unidentified. Some were frequent and some infrequent. However, one can also see that an opaque idiom *hold your horses* (66.66%-62.50%) got very high scores in both groups compared to other transparent idioms.

The results in the first and second table show a difference in idiom knowledge for each group. The total score for Group 1 was 35.00% while Group 2 scored a total of 28.61%. This means that Group 1 scored 6.39% better than Group 2. This indicates that idiom knowledge is slightly higher for students in Group 1. There could be many explanations to why Group 1 scored better than Group 2. As previously mentioned, the questionnaire revealed that 3 students in Group 1 had been in an English speaking country for more than three months which could affect their idiom knowledge. This could be *one* explanation to why Group 1 scored higher on the pre-test than Group 2 but this explanation is not proved to be the reason behind the scores of Group 1.

Another interesting point to highlight is the section of incorrect answers. The students of Group 1 and 2 scored 31.11% and 35.00% for incorrect answers. This section is interesting due to how the students have interpreted some of the idioms incorrectly. The majority of the students indicated that the idiom *Paint the town red*, which is a frequent and transparent idiom, refers to war, blood, and murder. This might be due to the color red which usually is connected to blood or love. The idiom *Blue blood* is an infrequent idiom but very transparent since the corresponding idiom in Swedish is “*blåblodig*” and means the same thing. However, many of the students explained the idiom *blue blood* as someone who is coldhearted. Other interesting incorrect explanations are those given to the idiom *Put your foot in your mouth*. Students indicated that the idiom means telling someone to be quiet and this is probably due to the literal meaning of the idiom.

4.4 Post-test (1) – Group 1: Written Context

For the first post-test in Group 1, the tests were customized depending on what idioms the students already knew before. Therefore, the idioms of which some students already knew were omitted from their copy of the first post-test. The calculations of this table demonstrate the number of the rest of students who recognized the idioms after seeing them in a written context. The idiom *Start from scratch* was excluded from the first and second post-test since all of the students already knew the meaning of the idiom. A total of 24 students took the first post-test.

The results of the first post-test for Group 1 demonstrates a total score of 66.67% for correct answers, 11.63% for incorrect answer and 12.40% for no given answer. The results of the first post-test show an increase of idiom knowledge. This indicates that students of Group 1 were able to, some extent, remember the idioms. The results of the first post-test show an improvement with 31.67 percentages for correct given answers.

Table 4

Idiom	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	No given answer
<i>Start from scratch</i>	0/24	0/24	0/24
<i>Off the hook</i>	8/14 (57.14%)	6/14 (42.85 %)	0/14
<i>Put your foot in your mouth</i>	12/ 19 (63.16%)	5/19 (26.31%)	2/19 (10.53%)
<i>A chip on your shoulder</i>	14/24 (58.33%)	3/24 (12.50%)	7/24 (29.17%)
<i>Down to the wire</i>	15/24 (62.50%)	4/24 (16.67%)	5/24 (20.83%)
<i>Dressed to the nines</i>	6/6 (100%)	0/6	0/6
<i>Money for old rope</i>	20/24 (83.33%)	1/24 (4.17%)	3/24 (12.50%)
<i>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</i>	12/14 (85.71%)	0/14	2/14 (14.29%)
<i>Paint the town red</i>	14/20 (70.00%)	4/20 (20.00%)	2/20 (10.00%)
<i>Hold your horses</i>	6/8 (75.00 %)	0/8	2/8 (25.00%)
<i>Get out of Dodge</i>	12/15 (80.00%)	1/15 (6.67%)	2/15 (13.33%)
<i>Blue blood</i>	15/17 (88.24%)	0/17	2/17 (11.76%)
<i>On pins and needles</i>	8/12 (66.67%)	1/12 (8.33%)	3/12 (25.00%)
<i>Break the fourth wall</i>	13/16 (81.25%)	2/16 (12.50%)	1/16 (6.25%)
<i>Keep mum</i>	17/21 (80.95%)	3/21 (14.28%)	1/21(4.76%)
Total	172/258 (66.67%)	30/258 (11.63%)	32/258 (12.40 %)

4.5 Post-test (1) – Group 2: Visual Context

As in 4.4 the tests were customized depending on what idioms the students already knew before. Therefore, the idioms of which some students already knew were omitted from their copy of the first post-test. The calculations of this table demonstrate the number of the rest of students who recognized the idioms after seeing them in a written context. Since all of the students knew the idiom *start from scratch* in the pre-test, it was omitted from the first and second post-test. A total of 24 students took the first post-test.

The results of the first post-test for Group 2 demonstrates a total score of 64.41% for correct answers, 11.74% for incorrect answer and 15.30% for no given answer. The results of the first post-test show an increase of idiom knowledge. This indicates that students of Group 2 were able to, some extent, remember the idioms. The results of the first post-test show an improvement of 35.8% for correct given answers.

Table 5

Idiom	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	No given answer
<i>Start from scratch</i>	0/24	0/24	0/24
<i>Off the hook</i>	15 /19 (78.95%)	0/19	4/19 (21.05%)
<i>Put your foot in your mouth</i>	18/21 (85.71%)	1/21 (4.76%)	2/21 (9.52%)
<i>A chip on your shoulder</i>	17/24 (70.83%)	5/24 (20.83%)	2/24 (8.33%)
<i>Down to the wire</i>	15/22 (68.18%)	2/22 (9.09%)	5/22 (22.72%)
<i>Dressed to the nines</i>	5/10 (50.00%)	2/10 (20.00%)	3/10 (30.0%)
<i>Money for old rope</i>	16/24 (66.66%)	5/24 (20.83%)	3/24 (12.50%)
<i>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</i>	10/13 (76.92%)	0/13	3/13 (23.07%)
<i>Paint the town red</i>	14/21 (66.66%)	3/21 (14.28%)	4/21 (19.04 %)
<i>Hold your horses</i>	7/9 (77.77 %)	0/9	2/9 (22.22%)
<i>Get out of Dodge</i>	10/24 (41.66%)	4/24 (16.66%)	10/24 (41.66%)
<i>Blue blood</i>	14/17 (82.35%)	3/17 (17.64%)	0/17
<i>On pins and needles</i>	10/12 (83.33%)	2/12 (16.66%)	0/12
<i>Break the fourth wall</i>	12/20 (60.00%)	3/20 (15.00%)	5/20 (25.00%)
<i>Keep mum</i>	18/21 (85.71%)	3/21 (14.28%)	0/21
Total	181/281 (64.41%)	33/281 (11.74%)	43/281 (15.30%)

4.6 Comparison between Group 1 & 2: Post-test (1)

The first post-test took place one week after the presentation of the idioms and it shows a remarkable improvement of idiom knowledge for both of the groups. Comparing the score of correct given answer for Group 1 and 2 it can be stated that Group 1 (written context) performed better for the first post-test. Group 1 scored 66.67% while Group 2 scored 64.41%. Based on the results of the first post-test it can be stated that learning with the help of written context is, at this point, more helpful than learning with visual context.

The results for the first post-test were quite high for all of the idioms. Since the students in both groups were able to identify most of the idioms in the pre-test and since the majority of the idioms are transparent, it is difficult to claim how the transparency and frequency affected the results of the testing in a whole. Also, it was mentioned previously that the illustrations used in Group 2 either showed the idiomatic meaning of the idiom while other illustrations were a literal drawing of the meanings of the words used in the idiom. This could of course affect the idiom retention of the students in Group 2. However, no result can be found on whether the kind of pictures used did have any effect on the students' idioms retention. The number of illustrations used in this study is too small to be able to prove such thing. Here are some details:

In the pre-test the idioms with lowest percentage for Group 1 were *A chip on your shoulder*, *Blue blood*, and *Keep mum*. For example, the results of the pre-test showed that only one student knew the idiom *A chip on your shoulder*, which is an opaque idiom but frequent. However, the results of the first post-test show that 14 more students knew the idiom. The idiom *Blue blood*, which is known to be very transparent, was recognized by 7 students according to the results of the pre-test and the results of the first post-test show that 15 more students recognized the idiom after the presentation. Furthermore, the results of the pre-test showed that there were some idioms which were completely unknown for the students. The first post-test shows that students have, to some extent, managed to acquire these specific idioms. For example, there was an improvement with 62.50 percentages for *Down to the wire* and 83.33 percentages for *Money for old rope*. The numbers found in Table 4 prove the effectiveness of learning idioms with written context.

As Table 5 demonstrates, one could note a significant improvement in the results of Group 2 as well. From the results of the pre-test we learnt that there were four idioms with really low score for correct given answers. However, after the first post-test it is shown that the

knowledge of these idioms has improved considerably. For example, the idiom *Put your foot in your mouth*, which is an opaque but frequent idiom, was recognized by 18 more students. Also one can note that the students of Group 2 managed, to some extent, to acquire the idioms which they did not know during the pre-test. For example, total of 17 students knew the idiom *A chip on your shoulder* after the presentation of the idioms, which is an improvement of 70.83 percent. The numbers found in Table 5 prove the effectiveness of learning idioms with still pictures.

4.7 Post-test (2) – Group 1: Written Context

For the second post-test, the students were tested on the same idioms as the first post test. However the idioms were presented in a different order. The second post-test was also personalized for each student since the first post-test was customized to each student. A total of 24 students took the second post-test.

The results of the second post-test for Group 1 demonstrates a total score of 48.45% for correct answers, 17.83% for incorrect answer and 23.86% for no given answer. The results of the second post-test show a decrease of idiom knowledge. The result of the second post-test show how much the students of Group 1 actually remember. There was a decrease of 18.22% for correct given answers.

Table 6

Idiom	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	No given answer
<i>Start from scratch</i>	0/24	0/24	0/24
<i>Off the hook</i>	6/14 (42.85%)	2/14 (14.28 %)	6/14 (42.85%)
<i>Put your foot in your mouth</i>	7/19 (36.84%)	5/19 (26.31%)	7/19 (36.84%)
<i>A chip on your shoulder</i>	10/24 (41.66%)	6/24 (25.00%)	8/24 (33.33%)
<i>Down to the wire</i>	9/24 (37.50%)	6/24 (25.00%)	9/24 (37.50%)
<i>Dressed to the nines</i>	4/6 (66.66%)	2/6 33.33%	0/6
<i>Money for old rope</i>	17/24 (70.83%)	2/24 (8.33%)	5/24 (20.83%)
<i>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</i>	9/14 (64.28%)	3/14 (21.42%)	2/14 (14.29%)
<i>Paint the town red</i>	10/20 (50.00%)	3/20 (15.00%)	7/20 (35.00%)
<i>Hold your horses</i>	4/8 (50.00 %)	3/8 (15.00%)	7/8 (35.00%)
<i>Get out of Dodge</i>	8/15 (53.33%)	2/15 (13.33%)	5/15 (33.33%)
<i>Blue blood</i>	14/17 (82.35%)	1/17 (5.88%)	2/17 (11.76%)
<i>On pins and needles</i>	5/12 (41.66%)	4/12 (33.33%)	2/12 (16.66%)
<i>Break the fourth wall</i>	7/16 (43.75%)	4/16 (25.00%)	5/16 (31.25%)
<i>Keep mum</i>	15/21 (71.42%)	3/21 (14.28%)	3/21 (14.28%)
Total	125/258 (48.45%)	46/258 (17.83%)	68/258 (26.36%)

4.8 Post-test (2) – Group 2: Visual Context

For the second post-test, the students were tested on the same idioms as the first post-test. However, the idioms were presented in a different order. The second post-test was also personalized for each student since the first post test was customized to each student. A total of 24 students took the second post-test.

The results of the second post-test for Group 2 demonstrates a total score of 53.74% for correct answers, 14.95% for incorrect answer and 22.78% for no given answer. The results of the second post-test show a decrease of idiom knowledge. The results of the second post-test demonstrate a decrease of 10.67% for correct given answers.

Table 7percent

Idiom	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	No given answer
<i>Start from scratch</i>	0/24	0/24	0/24
<i>Off the hook</i>	13/19 (68.42%)	2/19 (10.52 %)	4/19 (21.05%)
<i>Put your foot in your mouth</i>	16/21 (76.19%)	3/21 (14.28%)	2/21 (9.52%)
<i>A chip on your shoulder</i>	15/24 (62.50%)	4/24 (16.66%)	5/24 (20.83%)
<i>Down to the wire</i>	12/22 (54.54%)	4/22 (18.18%)	6/22 (27.27%)
<i>Dressed to the nines</i>	4/10 (40.00%)	2/10 20.00%	4/10 (40.00%)
<i>Money for old rope</i>	13/24 (54.16%)	5/24 (20.83%)	6/24 (25.00%)
<i>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</i>	7/13 (53.84%)	3/13 (23.07%)	3/13 (23.07%)
<i>Paint the town red</i>	10/21 (47.61%)	4/21 (19.04%)	7/21 (33.33%)
<i>Hold your horses</i>	6/9 (66.66 %)	1/9 (11.11%)	2/9 (22.22%)
<i>Get out of Dodge</i>	8/24 (33.33%)	6/24 (25.00%)	10/24 (41.66%)
<i>Blue blood</i>	13/17 (76.47%)	1/17 (5.88%)	3/17 (17.64%)
<i>On pins and needles</i>	8/12 (66.66%)	2/12 (16.66%)	2/12 (16.66%)
<i>Break the fourth wall</i>	10/20 (50.00%)	3/20 (15.00%)	7/20 (35.00%)
<i>Keep mum</i>	16/21 (76.19%)	2/21 (9.52%)	3/21 (14.28%)
Total	151/281 (53.74%)	42/281 (14.95%)	64/281 (22.78%)

4.9 Comparison between Group 1 & 2 (Post-test 2)

The second post-test tests the students' long term retention of the idioms. The results of the second post-test, which took place three weeks after the first post-test, show that there is a slight decrease of percentage for correct given answer in both groups and mostly for Group 1. At this point it can be stated that learning idioms with still pictures is more helpful. A more detailed discussion is presented below.

4.10 General comparison between Group 1 & 2

According to the results of the questionnaire, the majority of Group 1 and 2 believe they have been able to learn some of the idioms which demonstrate the effectiveness of both written and visual context for idiom retention. The majority of both groups also found that the presentation and the answering sheet were very helpful and that they influenced their learning. Even though both groups worked with the idioms differently, the results of the questionnaire show that both ways seem to have been helpful. This is also demonstrated by the results of the post-tests where both show an improvement of idiom knowledge compared to the results of the pre-test.

One can easily notice the significant development of idiom retention within both groups. Group 1 had, in general, higher scores on the idioms for the pre-test than Group 2. Also, it was found by the results of the questionnaire that Group 1 seemed to be more familiar with the concept of idioms than students of Group 2 which could explain why Group 1 scored better on pre-test. The following table will summarize the results of the second post-test for both Group 1 and 2.

Table 8

Idiom	Group 1 Post-test 1	Group 2 Post-test 1	Group 1 Post-test 2	Group 2 Post-test 2
<i>Off the hook</i>	8/14 (57.14%)	15 /19 (78.95%)	6/14 (42.85%)	13/19 (68.42%)
<i>Put your foot in your mouth</i>	12/ 19 (63.16%)	18/21 (85.71%)	7/19 (36.84%)	16/21 (76.19%)
<i>A chip on your shoulder</i>	14/24 (58.33%)	17/24 (70.83%)	10/24 (41.66%)	15/24 (62.50%)
<i>Down to the wire</i>	15/24 (62.50%)	15/22 (68.18%)	9/24 (37.50%)	12/22 (54.54%)
<i>Dressed to the nines</i>	6/6 (100%)	5/10 (50.00%)	4/6 (66.66%)	4/10 (40.00%)
<i>Money for old rope</i>	20/24 (83.33%)	16/24 (66.66%)	17/24 (70.83%)	13/24 (54.16%)
<i>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</i>	12/14 (85.71%)	10/13 (76.92%)	9/14 (64.28%)	7/13 (53.84%)
<i>Paint the town red</i>	14/20 (70.00%)	14/21 (66.66%)	10/20 (50.00%)	10/21 (47.61%)
<i>Hold your horses</i>	6/8 (75.00 %)	7/9 (77.77 %)	4/8 (50.00 %)	6/9 (66.66 %)
<i>Get out of Dodge</i>	12/15 (80.00%)	10/24 (41.66%)	8/15 (53.33%)	8/24 (33.33%)
<i>Blue blood</i>	15/17 (88.24%)	14/17 (82.35%)	14/17 (82.35%)	13/17 (76.47%)
<i>On pins and needles</i>	8/12 (66.67%)	10/12 (83.33%)	5/12 (41.66%)	8/12 (66.66%)
<i>Break the fourth wall</i>	13/16 (81.25%)	12/20 (60.00%)	7/16 (43.75%)	10/20 (50.00%)
<i>Keep mum</i>	17/21 (80.95%)	18/21 (85.71%)	15/21 (71.42%)	16/21 (76.19%)
Total	172/258 (66.67%)	181/281 (64.41%)	125/258 (48.45%)	151/281 (53.74%)

When looking at Table 8 one can notice that there is no great difference in total scores for the two post-tests between Group 1 and Group 2. However one can notice that Group 2 got higher score than Group 1 for the second post-test. Also, as previously mentioned Group 1 scored better on the pre-test than Group 2. But, Group 2 managed to make a greater improvement on the first post-test than Group 1. This shows that the visual strategies, in this case still pictures, had a great influence on remembering the idioms. This does not exclude the fact that remembering with the help of written context is also an effective strategy. The results of the second post-test demonstrate that idiom knowledge increased slightly more for Group 2 after the presentation with still pictures. Again, it is difficult to establish whether the students learnt more transparent/frequent idioms for the post-tests since the students seemed to already know most of the idioms in the pre-test.

If we compare the idioms which did not get any score for both Group 1 and 2 (*Money for old rope* and *A chip on your shoulder*) in the pre-test with the results of the first and second post-tests, it will be easier to notice the effectiveness of the two learning strategies. The idiom *A chip on your shoulder* is an opaque idiom and very frequent. Moreover, the still picture used for this idiom shows the literal meaning of the idiom. For this idiom we can see that more students in Group 2 have managed to acquire this specific idiom. A total of 17 students managed to give a correct answer when taking the first post-test and the second post-test had a decrease of 2 students which means that 15 students seem to have acquired the idiom. In Group 1, on the other hand, only 14 students managed to give a correct answer for the first post-test and for the second post-test only 10 students managed to give a correct answer. For this specific idiom we can notice that learning with still pictures seems to be most effective. However, Group 1 had better scores for the idiom *Money for old rope* for both the first and second post-test. A total of 17 students seemed to have acquired the idiom in Group 1 while only 13 students were able to give a correct answer on the second post-test. In this case, learning with the help of written context seemed to have been more effective. The still picture for the idiom *Money for old rope* does not illustrate the meaning of the idiom, which might make it more difficult for the students to remember it. Both of these idioms had an illustration that showed the literal meaning of the idiom and still the students' acquired these two idioms differently. No result can be found on what kind of effect the pictures used had on the students' idiom retention.

In general, both groups performed very well on both post-tests. Since the students in Group 2 had a lower percentage of idiom knowledge than Group 1, the improvement in Group 2 is

more evident and it is proved when testing the students' long term idiom retention. This shows how useful it is to link the verbal with visual images as images are transferred to long-term memory (Oxford, 1990). It is found, in previous research, that pictures help the idiom comprehension (Nasah & Hesabi, 2014). Also, this quite minor study seems to contradict the findings of Boers (2009) who found that pictures are distracting. However, it is important to point out that both of the groups made significant improvement which is proof of how effective both of the strategies are for vocabulary learning. According to the questionnaire the majority of the students in both groups shared the same strategies in order to acquire vocabulary:

- Read books
- Watch movies
- Translate difficult words
- Put the words into context
- Create pictures of the vocabulary

What is interesting about this finding is that students seem to make use of context and visual aids in order to acquire vocabulary. Reading books and watching movies are also two ways of context-based studies to acquire vocabulary. This indicates that written context and visual context are strategies that students use when trying to acquire new vocabulary. This shows that contextualization of L2 idioms using still pictures or written contexts are learning strategies which the students find useful. However, learning with the help of context, e.g. read books and put the words into context, is more used by the students than visual strategies since they are more accessible than visual strategies.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this essay was to study whether there is a difference between remembering idioms with the help of a written context or visual context in the form of still pictures. Therefore, the present study was conducted with two groups of English second language students in a Swedish high school. What this study suggests is that it appears to be a slight difference in comprehension between learning the idioms in context and with still pictures. However, it is important to note that due to the small number of subjects taking part, the generalizability of the findings is limited.

The findings of this study show that both of the learning strategies, written context and visual context, are effective for idiom learning. The findings of this essay speak in favor of learning/remembering idioms with the help of visual context in the form of still pictures. This study proves that the students of Group 2 had better long term idiom retention than Group 1 which indicates that learning with visual strategies is more helpful. The majority of the chosen idioms are considered to be transparent. Students in both groups were able to identify most of the idioms which were transparent and frequent on the pre-tests and were still known by the students throughout both of the post-tests. These are some reasons which explain why it is difficult to indicate whether the students' learnt more transparent/opaque or frequent/infrequent idioms.

As previously mentioned, this is a quite small study and further research is necessary to continue investigating the impact of written context and visual context for idiom/vocabulary retention. It would be possible for future studies to approach a study carried out during a longer period of time to see to which degree the idioms are remembered. In addition, it would be interesting to study what impact different kinds of illustrations have on the students' learning and how the aspect of transparency and frequency affects students' learning as well. Also it would be interesting to have investigated whether there is a difference between how male and female students process idioms in their second language learning and whether context based teaching or visual teaching has different impacts on the two sexes.

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Appendix 1 – Idioms in written context

Start from scratch

”A breeze blew Bronson’s homework out the window and into a puddle. Now he would have to start from scratch”

Off the hook

”Spencer had gotten off the hook. His mom thought he had eaten all the ice cream, but his dad admitted to it”

Put your foot in your mouth

”Victoria put her foot in her mouth when she called her teacher ’dad’”

A chip on your shoulder

”The villain in the movie had a chip on her shoulder”

Down to the wire

”Omar could tell that the bicycle race would come down to the wire”

Dressed to the nines

”Steven is always dressed to the nines on the first day of school

Money for old rope

”Anything Rosemary earned from the yard sale was money for old rope”

Scrape the bottom of the barrel

”The only bananas left at the grocery store were turning brown. It looked like Justina would be scraping the bottom of the barrel.”

Paint the town red

”It was Ben’s birthday, and there was no school the next day. He and his friends would paint the town red that night!”

Hold your horses

””Hold your horses, students!’ Ms.Lonetti said ’Don’t start the math test until everyone has it’”

Get out of Dodge

”Cory had to get out of Dodge. His mom was cooking his least-favourite dinner, meatloaf.”

On pins and needles

”Consela was on pins and needles while she waited to find out her test score”

Break the fourth wall

”The whole audience laughed when Takeo’s character in the play broke the fourth wall”

Keep mum

”It was hard for Enrique to keep mum. He wanted to tell his friend the ending of his new book”

Blue blood

”Whenever Brenna walked by the country club, she could see the **blue blood** playing shuffleboard”

Appendix 2 - Illustrations of idioms

Start from scratch



Off the hook



Put your foot in your mouth



A chip on your shoulder



Down to the wire



Dressed to the nines



Money for old rope



Scrape the bottom of the barrel



Paint the town red



Hold your horses



Get out of Dodge



On pins and needles



Break the fourth wall



Keep mum



Blue blood



Appendix 3 – Questionnaire

Enkät

Male ☐

Female ☐

Mother tongue:

☐ Swedish

☐ Other _____

1. Vet du vad idiomatiska uttryck (idioms) är för något?

Ja

Nej

2. Har du stött på engelska idiomatiska uttryck innan? Om ja, från vilken kontext?

Ja

Nej

3. Anser du att det är viktigt att lära sig uttryck som är speciella för Engelska språket?
Motivera varför/varför inte du anser att det är viktigt!

Ja

Nej

4. På vilket sätt lär du dig/studerar du in nytt vokabulär/uttryck på engelska? Förklara ditt sätt så utförligt som möjligt.

5. På en skala från 1-5, hur lätta/svåra tyckte du att uttrycken som testades var?

1

2

3

4

5

Väldigt
svåra

Varken eller

Väldigt
lätta

6. På en skala från 1-5, hur många av de engelska uttrycken anser du att du har lärt dig?

1

2

3

4

5

Inga

Inte många
Inte få

Många (nästintill alla)

7. På en skala från 1-5, hur mycket anser du att presentationen/stencilen av uttrycken påverkat ditt lärande av uttrycken?

1

2

3

4

5

Inte mycket

Varken eller

Väldigt mycket

8. Skulle du kunna tänka dig att lära dig nya ord/uttryck med hjälp av att sätta orden i kontext/se orden på bild?

Ja

Nej

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