

Eliciting Idiom Retention through Alliteration in a Classroom Activity

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ABSTRACT

Alliteration comes up as one of the efforts that follow the notion of linguistic motivation in creating language retention and memorization to learners. Idiom is one of the language phenomena where alliteration takes place as part of its non-arbitrariness principle. The claim underlying the effectiveness of alliteration in aiding language retention in idiom is tried to be applied in some classroom activities which may consist of pre, whilst, and post-teaching. All the activities in the teaching session are arranged to be integrated with idiom learning using alliteration. Learners' ability to recall idioms containing alliteration will also be tested in the provided exercises. The success of the expected retention on learners will be measured from the result gained from the activity divided simply into three phases, pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching where it will be conducted for approximately 90 minutes. As some deviations possibly made can influence the result, the teacher should figure out some considerations affecting the effectiveness of the lesson given. Reflection phase should be conducted maximally, so that learners' response is really fruitful that it can be known whether they are engaged with the activity and gain the material well. In the first activity, they work semi-independently, so that the assessment is expected to be more objective, covering the combination of group and individual work.

Keywords: *alliteration, classroom activity, eliciting, idiom*

INTRODUCTION

In relation with the notion stating that language can be motivated, there comes cognitive engagement which enables memory trace. Furthermore, Boers (2001) acknowledges that many parts of figurative language tend to be motivated rather than being merely non-arbitrary entities. Most importantly, the implementation of motivation is expected for awareness-raising and retention of language. Further, linguistic motivation to learners is needed as the condition of incidental acquisition of formulaic sequences seems to be slow (Stengers et al. 2010; Laufer & Waldman 2011, as cited in Boers, 2013). Shortly, motivated language can be grouped into three forms; explainable form-form connections (alliteration), explainable form-meaning

connections (iconicity), and explainable meaning-meaning connections (polysemy) (Radden & Panther, 2004, as cited in Littlemore, 2009).

One of the forms frequently encountered is alliteration. The salient attribute of alliteration is its ability in drawing learner's attention which is an important part of retention as suggested by Schmidt (as cited in Eyckmans et al., 2016). Learners usually encounter alliteration in their daily life, such as in songs, poetry, or books, but often its occurrences are unrecognized. The existence of alliteration in language retention is claimed by Boers et al. (2014) to take part in TESOL depicted in some phrasal expressions, and one of them is idiom. It is predicted that 20% of English idioms are in the form of alliteration. This inevitably suggests that how learners recognize idioms can be done through alliteration in which it doesn't only occur in English but also in some other languages (Lindstromberg & Boers, 2008). Memory trace in idioms can be easily gained if the idioms have short expressions and the words showing alliteration come closely. That in the end, idioms showing alliteration are suggested to be memorable (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2005, as cited in Lindstromberg & Boers, 2008). In this discussion, it will be focused on how idiom awareness-raising can be gained through alliteration.

The Idiom Retention through Alliteration in a Classroom Activity.

Cited from the criteria of choosing idioms set by Boers and Lindstromberg (2008), all the idioms used in this activity are frequently used based on Collins Cobuild Idiom Dictionary, so that it is important for the teacher and learners to understand and be able to use them, especially in ESL/EFL context. Also, the idioms are expected to raise learners' discussion and critical ideas related to the meaning of the idioms, and all of them contain phonological motivation in the form of alliteration. Some of the chosen idioms are various in number of words, so that they offer different level of difficulty to learners mainly regarding memory trace. The idioms are as follows; *cut corners*, *count the cost*, *bite the bullet*, *bread and butter*, *have a hollow ring*, *practice what you preach*, *it takes two to tango*, and *back to the drawing board*.

This activity is intended to intermediate level students in a medium class consisting of approximately 16 students divided into 8 pairs, in order to make the activity can be handled by the teacher and the material can be delivered clearly. The time allotment for the whole phase is 2x45 minutes. The first phase is pre-teaching where they will be given tongue twister game. The game is intended to elicit learners' awareness about alliteration. Divided into eight groups,

each group will be given sentences containing tongue twister written in a piece of paper. Only the first person in the group can look at the paper, then he has to whisper the sentence to the second person who later writes the sentence on the blackboard. After that, the teacher will choose the best group that is the group that can write the answer as close as written in the paper. Time allotment for this game must be set by the teacher. Then, the teacher will ask students what makes the given tongue twister distinguished from common sentences. They will be given 10 minutes to finish this phase.

Next, the teacher gives learners the idioms written in some pieces of paper. Each group has approximately one minute to read the idiom. After the teacher says, “move”, they have to move the card to the next group, until all the eight groups can read all the eight idioms. It can be repeated twice until learners feel that they can memorize the idioms. Next, they will be given three kinds of exercise, in which each exercise contains 8 idioms integrated with the questions. Firstly, they will be asked to fill in the blanks in the given statements. Each student in the same group has different part to fill in. For instance, the first student gets this question, “*The government _____ cost of the newly ratified constitution, as it started being protested massively*”. The second student might be given, “*The government count _____ of the newly ratified constitution, as it started being protested massively*”. The questions are written in one card that they need to flip the card in turn. The second student has to wait for the first student to finish his work. However, the second student cannot see the answer given by the first student. The order can be changed once they move to another question. The level of difficulty of the questions ranges from the easiest to the most difficult one. Therefore, if the first question has one deleted word, the next number can have two or three deleted ones. To make it fair, the number of deleted words are made the same between one student and another. The teacher must set the time limit for this activity.

In the next activity, learners then guess the meaning of the idioms in multiple choice questions. Although learners must answer all the questions, each group will be only asked to give their answer and reason on one number. The teacher can ask randomly and not based on the number of the group. For example, group 1 is asked about their answer in number 2, while group 2 will be asked their choice in number 4, and so forth. The group having no idea about which number their turn will be needs to prepare the answer and reason for choosing it. The choices will be made almost similar in meaning that they have to discuss and think more. However, it should be prevented to give learners a choice containing literal meaning which

sounds almost similar to the non-literal one. For example, giving them the choice “*beating something in the bush*” for the idiom “*beating around the bush*” as learners’ mindset has been formed from the beginning that they will learn non-literal meaning, so that leaving them with a choice of literal meaning like this will be useless. The teacher may give feedback and relate it with pre-learning activity to know the real purpose of the activity. It can also be discussed what makes idioms containing alliteration can be recognized easier, for instance, the similarity is on the initial consonant sound, so that it can be recognized and memorized easily. The teacher can also show the percentage of idioms in the form of alliteration and some other interesting findings regarding alliteration. Given enough time for sharing session, this activity is expected to finish within 45 minutes.

The last activity is they will be required to make sentences from the eight idioms. First, learners will be asked in what context they usually encounter the related idioms, so that they can make sentences based on the context. Each group then chooses two idioms to be presented in front of the class, followed by question and answer session, in which the teacher functions as the facilitator. 20 minutes is predicted to accommodate this activity. Post-teaching phase requires the teacher to make a conclusion from the activity collaborated with learners’ opinion regarding their process in acknowledging idioms through alliteration including their challenges and difficulties. It will take around 15 minutes.

How the Effectiveness of the Lesson is Tested

During the activities, learners are given the idioms in the form of sentences, not in a single idiom or isolation. Therefore, one of the criteria of the assessment, they have to be able to use the idioms in correct sentences and real contexts. The teacher must also consider the level of difficulty of the lesson material given to learners, so that they can follow the lesson well and gain good result in test. It is also important to consider mental representation in the idioms, how learners generate their mental imagery to form a concept in an idiom and how learners are able to connect the idioms with the mental imagery existing in their mind and apply them in the real context. As cited from the notion given by Boers (2013), in this part, cognitive engagement in the activities can appear when learners try to guess the relation between the given idioms. The teacher should also ascertain whether learners’ mental conception of a certain thing has existed before the idiom is given. Different exposure toward idiom between one another may impact the result of the test, that it might not be objective anymore. The

teacher must also consider any side effect that may influence the result of the test which can be internal or external factor. Regarding cultural differences, it is required to give an input to learners if they meet difficulties in understanding a certain culture or habit that comes up in idioms but they don't encounter it in their own cultures. As the activity conducted only runs in one class meeting, learners are given immediate test instead of the delayed one. Despite the benefits offered by delayed test such as it measures learners' longer retention, immediate test intends to prevent any input other than the material given by the teacher in the class to come to learners.

The activities are made in pairs as they enable learners to share their ideas regarding the idioms, and low learners can be aided by their pairs. Inferring one of the findings of a study conducted by Boers (2013), about too small discrepancy of the result of pre and post-test from the CL-style instruction applied in his study, it is expected that in the activities given, the result of learners' work will be assessed carefully, so that, for instance, the score in a question containing one deleted word is not the same with those having some deleted words. Next, based on the study conducted by Boers et al. (2014), learners may make errors that they recognize orthographic forms instead of the given phonological motivation. Therefore, the teacher is also suggested to pay attention to the type of errors possibly made by learners. If learners frequently make mistakes and confound the understanding of phonological motivation and orthographic one, it might be better for the teacher to conduct an evaluation.

From Eyckmans, et al. (2016), manipulation strategies do not completely guarantee better result instead of utilizing learners' own mnemonic strategies. There will be a possibility where learners use their own habitual mnemonic strategies rather than using what they gain from the activity. In this case, the teacher should ponder on how far they use it, do they still use the strategies given, or combine them, and what is the influence. The importance of the teaching of idiom to be conducted carefully is in line with the notion asserting that learners' formulaic sequence is claimed to be in line with their proficiency (Boers, et al. 2006, as cited in Boers, 2013). In other words, if learners can perform well in their idiom learning, their language proficiency can be considered good as well.

CONCLUSION

Despite some weaknesses existing from previous research findings, some suggestions are made to prevent similar shortcomings to occur and to assess the effectiveness of the activities conducted. The teacher has to pay attention to how learners discuss and form their ideas of the meaning of the idioms and other things that may influence the idiom learning. Regarding the form of the test whether it is immediate or delayed, it might be able to be adjusted with the context of and the purpose of the activity. The last but not least, learners' background knowledge regarding idiom puts an important consideration as it might influence the learning.

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APPENDIX

The idioms; *cut corners*, *count the cost*, *bite the bullet*, *bread and butter*, *have a hollow ring*, *practice what you preach*, *it takes two to tango*, and *back to the drawing board*.

PART 1**TONGUE TWISTER (PRE-TEACHING)**

Example: *Where she sits she shines, and where she shines she sits.*

PART 2**RUNNING CARDS (WHILST-TEACHING)**

CUT CORNERS	HAVE A HOLLOW RING
COUNT THE COST	PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH
BITE THE BULLET	IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO
BREAD AND BUTTER	BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

PART 3**EXERCISES (WHILST-TEACHING)****EXERCISE 1**

First Side of the Card

Complete the following idioms.

- Cutting _____ to get your work done will only make it worse.
- The government tried to _____ cost of the agreement made last year to adapt it with the current condition in the country.
- Getting married in such a young age is biting _____ for me.
- I cannot lose my job, as this is my bread _____.
- The club's claim to be the richest football club in Europe has _____.
- You keep giving people advice, but before that it is better for you to _____ preach.
- Instead of blaming your friend for cheating on the exam, I think, it _____.
- Because you can't reach the target, your plan has to be set back _____.

Second Side of the Card

Complete the following idioms.

- a. _____ corners to get your work done will only make it worse.
- b. The government tried to count _____ of the agreement made last year to adapt it with the current condition in the country.
- c. Getting married in such a young age is _____ bullet for me.
- d. I cannot lose my job, as this is my _____ butter.
- e. The club's claim to be the richest football club in Europe _____ ring.
- f. You keep giving people advice, but before that it is better for you to practice_____.
- g. Instead of blaming your friend for cheating on the exam, I think, _____ tango.
- h. Because you can't reach the target, your plan has to be set _____ board.

EXERCISE 2**Choose A, B, C, or D which best represents the meaning of the following idioms.**

1.	Cut corners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To find the easiest ways to do something. b. To do something illegally c. To cheat on someone d. To close something
2.	Count the cost	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To make something predictable b. To state the risk of doing something c. To understand and feel how something bad affected d. To make something understandable
3.	Bite the bullet	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To do something dangerous b. To sacrifice yourself c. To make something more complicated and risky d. To accept something difficult and try to deal with it
4.	Bread and butter	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Something that can be predicted b. Someone's livelihood c. Something that makes a good combination

		d. Something that makes people happy
5.	Have a hollow ring	<p>a. Something that feels insincere or false</p> <p>b. Something that is very important that it cannot be neglected</p> <p>c. Something that is urgently needed</p> <p>d. Something that requires hardwork</p>
6.	Practice what you preach	<p>a. To do something useful</p> <p>b. To truly believe in someone</p> <p>c. To do the things advised to other people</p> <p>d. To respect people's different beliefs</p>
7.	It takes two to tango	<p>a. Being unable to responsible for the risk</p> <p>b. People must figure out the risk of doing something bad</p> <p>c. Both parties involved in a bad thing should be responsible</p> <p>d. Avoiding the consequences by denying the mistake that has been made</p>
8.	Back to the drawing board	<p>a. To make people amazed</p> <p>b. To give a clear description of something important</p> <p>c. To teach people how to do something</p> <p>d. To start from the start</p>

EXERCISE 3

MAKE SENTENCES FROM THE IDIOMS, CHOOSE TWO SENTENCES YOU ARE MOST CONFIDENT WITH, AND PRESENT THE SENTENCES IN FRONT OF THE CLASS.