

## Effects of Audiovisual Contextualization of L2 Idioms on Enhancing Students' Comprehension and Retention

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**Abstract :** The positive effect of a supportive written context on comprehension and retention when faced with a previously unknown idiomatic expression is today an indisputable fact, especially if relevant clues are given in close proximity of the item in question. Also, giving learners a chance of visualizing the meaning of an idiom by offering them its source domain and/or by elaborating etymologically, i.e. providing a mental picture in addition to the spoken/written form (referred to as dual coding), seems to enhance comprehension and retention even further, especially if the idiom is of a more transparent kind. For example, by explaining that walk the plank has a maritime origin and a canary in a coal mine comes from the time when canaries were kept in cages to warn miners if gas was leaking out at which point the canaries succumbed immediately, learners' comprehension and retention have been shown to increase. The present study aims to investigate whether contextualization of an audiovisual kind could help increase comprehension and retention of L2 idioms. 40 Swedish first-term university students studying English as part of their education to become middle-school teachers participated in the investigation, which tested 24 idioms, all of which were ascertained to be previously unknown to the informants. While half of the learners were subjected to a test in which they were asked to watch scenes from various TV programmes, each scene including one idiomatic expression in a supportive context, the remaining 20 students, as a point of reference, were only offered written contexts, though equally supportive. Immediately after these sessions, both groups were given the same idioms in a decontextualized form and asked to give their meaning. After five weeks, finally, the students were subjected to yet another decontextualized comprehension test. Furthermore, since mastery of idioms in one's L1 appears to correlate to a great extent with a person's ability to comprehend idioms in an L2, all the informants were also asked to take a test focusing on idioms in their L1. The result on this test is thus seen to indicate each student's potential for understanding and memorizing various idiomatic expressions from a more general perspective. Preliminary results clearly show that audiovisual contextualization indeed has a positive effect on learners' retention. In addition, preliminary results also show that those learners who were able to recall most meanings were those who had a propensity for idiom comprehension in their L1.

**Keywords :** English, L2, idioms, audiovisual context

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