Enhancing ESL Learners' Idiom Competence: Bridging the Gap between BICS and CALP

By

Raj Kumar Guduru

Abstract

Second language learners at the college level, especially those who come from the mother tongue medium schools, seem to lack the knowledge and competence of 'figurative language' that marks fluency and creative language construction. This lack of knowledge of phrases or multi-word-units, in particular, most frequently occurring academic idioms, poses a number of difficulties for these learners in learning academic language which involves cognitive processes, complex relationships, and abstract concepts that are difficult to see, point to, touch, or act out (Zwiers, 2007). Consequently, these learners carry out academic langauge only with basic interpersonal communication skills in English (BICS) (Cummins, 1979). Hence, academic language in terms of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979) is absent. In this context, the present study emerges as an immediate need to bridge the gap between the learners' BICS and academic success by improving learners' CALP i.e. by integrating idioms as one of the core dimensions of academic language. The sample of the study was 100 first generation/disadvantaged adult learners from two Government English medium colleges. They were within the age group of 19-22 years. Learners belong to subject streams such as arts, science, and commerce. Research tools such as learner questionnaire, academic idiom checklist and informal interviews with learners were used to gather data. Learners were taught some useful idiom comprehension strategies to enhance their idiom competence. The data was interpreted qualitatively. A noticeable finding in the process of learning was that learners began thinking and reflecting on the authenticity of their guessing the meanings. Some learners, while guessing the meanings, even separated idioms into their constituent parts. These strategies of self-inquiry and analyzing can be seen as examples of the cognitive decision-making processes that the learners used to interact with the text and formulate and test their already known version of meanings of idioms against the new meanings.

Keywords: Enhancing, Academic Idioms, ESL Learner, Competence, Academic Language

Introduction

Idiomatic expressions create a significant portion of our everyday communication. Therefore, understanding idioms is one of the advanced and fundamental aspects of vocabulary/word knowledge (Nation, 1990). Since, the language at higher level is mostly operated on idiom choice principle, the knowledge of idioms in learning a new language is essential for second language learners as they go up higher levels of learning. The idiom principle postulates that

the word choices or combinations are not random and language users also have available to them "a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments" (Sinclair, 1987, p. 320). This principle involves the appropriate use of idioms which are metaphoric in meaning and not literal. Thus, we can say that 'idiom principle' relies on multi-word syntagmatic chunks which may be the underlying principle of language production (Lennon, 1998).

The disadvantaged learners come from poor educational backgrounds and therefore experience the "pedagogy of entrapment" (Macedo 1994; cited in Zwiers, 2007), i.e. lack of academic discourse skills and knowledge. Having acquired only basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and a limited amount of proficiency in language skills at schools, these learners struggle to cope with academic demands such as many of the knowledge bases, culturally specific communication cues, and thought patterns typically found in learning situations and materials. Such a fact indicates that these learners are severely lacking in advanced linguistic skills (knowledge of idioms or word combinations) that constitute cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Such a lack adversely affects their academic success. As the result, these learners' academic performance is much lower than what their counterparts (i.e. learners from good educational background) can exhibit.

Part of the reason for the low language proficiency of the disadvantaged learners can be attributed to their non-English background coupled with deficient cognitive abilities and poor motivation. The situation is worsened by impoverished language use patterns such as: poor articulation and expression, avoidance of complex structures both in speaking and writing, avoiding use of metaphor, etc. The sum of it all is that disadvantaged learners seem to develop only superficially fluent L2 communicative skills.

Thus, it is evident that the disadvantaged learners do not possess the language proficiency required to perform advanced L2 cognitive/academic tasks. The present study posits that this gap in language proficiency between what is required and what the disadvantaged learners currently possess can be attributed to the latter's lack of knowledge and competence in figurative language. Within figurative language, this study deals specially with academic idioms because they occur more frequently than any other figurative expressions such as metaphors, proverbs, sayings, etc. Thus, the present study tries to bridge the existing gap by enhancing learners' comprehension of the most frequently occuring academic idioms which is one of the core dimensions of CALP.
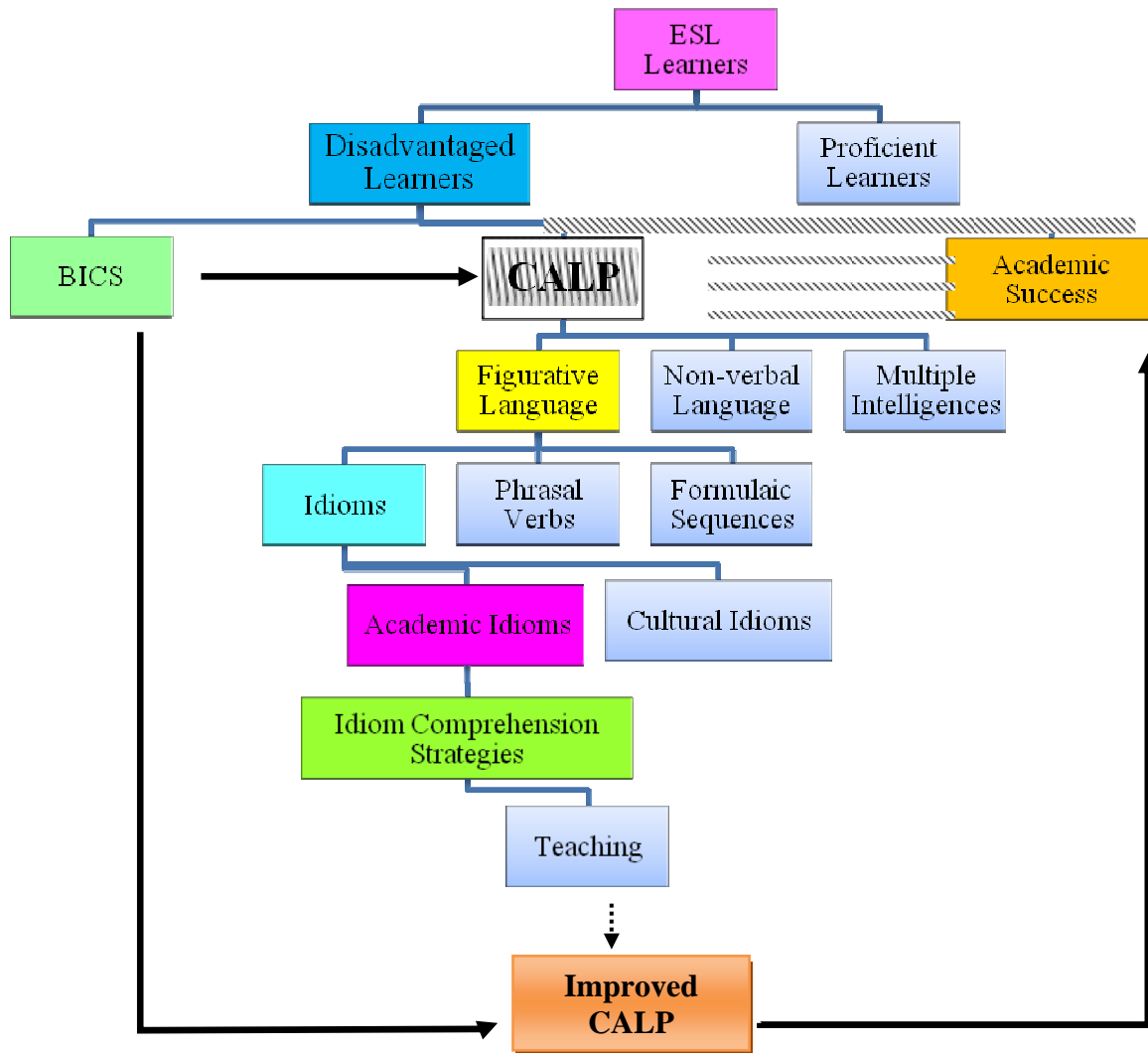
Research Issue

The disadvantaged learners' awareness of language as a system seems inadequate which results in thwarted CALP because of which their academic achievement suffers. The present study attempts to strengthen their CALP by enhancing the comprehension abilities of these learners through appropriate strategy training. The figure on the next page attempts to schematically represent the research issue.

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The figure 1 throws light on a number of aspects that have a direct bearing on the present study. The research framework, as shown in the figure above perceives two kinds of ESL learners in an academic context: disadvantaged learners and proficient or advanced learners. The present study focuses exclusively on the problems of the disadvantaged learners at the tertiary level in an academic context.

Figure: 1

Schematic Representation of the Research Issue

It is a known fact that academic success involves both Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979). BICS refers to the basic interpersonal communication skills which enable learners sail safely

through their everyday language needs. Whereas CALP involves learners to perform higher order skills such as comparing, conceptualizing, synthesizing, evaluating, inferencing, and reasoning. Together these two, i.e. BICS and CALP, ensure the academic success of second language learners.

However, the disadvantaged learners possess only BICS but are not fully equipped with CALP or have very inadequate/limited CALP (as shown in the distorted box, figure 1). To elaborate, disadvantaged learners seem to manage academic requirements mostly with the help of basic interpersonal communication skills. CALP remains unattained, or even unattainable for these learners and this inadequacy hampers their academic success. It is a fact that learners' academic success entails sound knowledge CALP (Cummins, 1979). However, these learners, because they are from the disadvantageous backgrounds, do not possess CALP. And the absence of CALP thwarts their academic success at higher levels of formal education. The gap between BICS and academic success (in terms of the absence of CALP) is shown by the broken line from BICS to academic success. The horizontal arrow from BICS to CALP stresses on the importance of CALP in academic success. However, unfortunately, in the case of the disadvantaged learners, CALP is either inadequate or fully absent as shown by the smudged lines between CALP and academic success. The present study therefore claims that the disadvantaged learners can attain academic success if they are helped to build/enhance their CALP.

Among others, CALP entails three major higher level language skills such as figurative language, non-verbal language, and multiple intelligences. The present research assumes that figurative language, which includes idioms, phrasal verbs, and formulaic sequences, forms the core part of the learners' CALP. Further, it considers idioms as the most important part of language as learners meet them frequently both in academic as well as in non-academic contexts.

Based on the nature of idioms, they can be divided broadly into two categories: one, cultural idioms, and two, academic idioms. The present study deals with academic idioms which learners come across frequently in the academic context. The assumption here is that despite the frequency of occurrence and the primacy of place that the academic idioms occupy in academic success, the learners at the tertiary level seem to be unaware of their usefulness. In addition, learners do not possess effective idiom comprehension strategies. The study claims that idiom comprehension can be improved through appropriate teaching. This is shown by the arrow from teaching towards improved CALP. Such improved awareness and use of idioms, it is further claimed, would lead to enhanced CALP thereby leading to academic success of the learners. To elaborate, the CALP which was absent or inadequate is built/improved and hence equipped with both BICS and CALP, the learners will now be able to attain academic success. This idea is captured through the arrow that connects BICS with academic success through improved CALP (shown at the bottom of the figure 1). Hence, the study attempts to improve the disadvantaged learners' idiom comprehension strategies which facilitate easy learning of academic idioms.

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Criteria for Choosing 100 Most Frequently Used English Idioms

The '100 most frequently used English idioms' list has been adopted from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) http://www.idiomconnection.com/ mostfrequent.html). MICASE recorded fifteen different types of academic speech events and four major academic divisions within those types: Humanities and Arts, Social Sciences, Biological and Health Sciences, and Physical Sciences.

The 100 most frequently used English idioms, chosen for the study, fall into a mixed group of word categories such as; phrasal verb idioms, idioms, connectors, and others. The 100 most frequently used English idioms list has been chosen for the study because of the following reasons: firstly, the analysis of the course book of the learners has revealed that these idioms frequently occur in the course book; also, learners meet these idioms while listening to lectures and class presentations on various topics in the present academic contexts; secondly, research (Ellis, 1997; Wray, 2000) also suggests that learning idioms from a consolidated readymade list will help learners focus more attention on idioms as also enables faster learning when compared to sporadic, piecemeal learning; thirdly, language teachers and learners find these idioms quite interesting and useful in the academic context and finally, these idioms are considered appropriate for disadvantaged learners since these will enhance the learners' cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) which results in academic achievement. Therefore, the criteria for choosing the 100 most frequently used English idioms are: frequency, usefulness, relevance and formal simplicity. These criteria are further explained below.

Frequency

These idioms occur most frequently in various academic environments like: lectures, discussion sections, student presentations, seminars, interviews and others (Simpson, Briggs, Ovens, & Swales, 2002: cited in Simpson & Mendis, 2003).

Usefulness and relevance in communication

These idioms are relevant and useful for learners to function successfully in academic contexts such as: making presentations, writing reports, participating in group discussions, elocutions, debates, etc. According to Simson and Mendis (2003), idioms also perform many important discourse functions, further warranting their inclusion in an ESL curriculum.

Simplicity of vocabulary

Disadvantaged learners' vocabulary and other linguistic abilities to perform in L2 are very low. Therefore, the 100 most frequently used English idioms list is found suitable as all the words in the list fall within the 2075 word list of the graded books *Advanced Stories for Reproduction* 1 & 2 (L. A Hill, 1987, OUP), and other well known graded word lists like *The Basic English Word List* (Charles K. Ogden, 1930), *The General Service Word List* (Michael

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West, 1953), *The Dolch Word List* (Edward, W. Dolch, 1948), *The 331 Most Common English Verbs List* (These are the top 331 verbs from the 3500 most common words in native English, according to the Macmillan Essential Dictionary) which are meant for low level lelarners.

Methodology

The Aim and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to facilitate disadvantaged learners' competence of the most frequently occurring academic idioms. The objectives of the study therefore are: to examine the extent to which the difficulties that the disadvantaged learners face in using idioms in academic speech and writing; to help learners to comprehend idioms by teaching them apprropriate idiom comprehension strategies.

Research Question

The study morally focused on the research question: would developing idiom competence of the learners through appropriate strategies help enhance learners' academic achievement in L2? In other words, does improving learners' comprehension as well as use of idioms bridge the gap between BICS and CALP?

Design of the Study

The study has been carried out in three phases. Phase one attempts to gauge the learners' exiting level of knowledge and competence of idioms and other aspects of vocabulary. Phase two involves training learners in using appropriate/effective idiom comprehension strategies. Phase three offers results and discussion. The data have been analyzed and presented quantitatively. Each of the phases has been described below.

Phase I: Appraisal

Phase I attempts to assess the learners' current knowledge of L2 idioms. The rationale for this phase lies in the attempt to find empirical evidence for the 'hunch' that learners lack awareness and knowledge of academic idioms. The tools used in this phase are: a) learner's questionnaire, b) academic idiom checklist, and c) informal interviews with learners.

A. Learner's questionnaire.

The first section of the questionnaire furnishes information on learners' personal profile. All the learners chosen for the study are from two Government English medium colleges in Secunderabad and Hyderabad. They are within the age group of 19-22 years. Learners belong to subject streams such as arts and science, and study courses like (B.A, B.Com, B.Sc, Computers). At these colleges English is taught as a second language for these learners. Although 22% of the disadvantaged learners had English as the medium of instruction at

intermediate level (11th & 12th std), the rest of them (78%) studied in Telugu medium. All the learners studied in Telugu medium at the school level. So far as the educational background of the parents is concerned 57% of the parents are illiterates, 22% have only primary education, 15% of them have secondary education and only 6% of them have intermediate education.

Their exposure to L2 is restricted to the L2 being a subject of study. Further, language input is availed to these learners only within classroom contexts since they are from socio-economically impoverished backgrounds. These learners seem to have acquired basic functional literacy or basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) in English language but they cannot perform advanced level language functions that demand CALP.

B. Academic idiom checklist.

Academic idiom checklist (see Appendix) contains *100 most frequently used English idioms,* (see Appendix) a list adopted from MICASE (The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English). The checklist aims at testing three aspects of idiom knowledge: form (structure), meaning (semantics), and use (pragmatics). The checklist was administered to learners in the classroom for about 60minutes.

Learners' performance on the checklist informed the researcher about their current knowledge and understanding of academic idioms. This information helped the researcher to select and focus more on those idioms which the learners do not know. From the analysis of the checklist it was found that most of the learners have exhibited only partial knowledge of some of the idioms. To elaborate, learners acknowledged that they had only seen the idioms but did not understand their meanings – nor could they use them in sentences of their own.

C. Informal Interviews with Learners

Informal interviews with learners were conducted after class hours. Learners were inquired about their background, learning preferences of English, L2 environment at colleges etc. During the interviews it was found that many learners were comfortable speaking their L1 (Telugu) and avoided English. Some questions that were posed to the learners were:
- *'how will you manage to do well in your academics, if you don't speak well in English?'*
- *'How will you face job interviews?*
- *How will you function in situations at your job?*
- *How will you be able to get information from your friends who cannot speak your mother tongue?'*

The information gathered through informal interviews helped the researcher to understand not only the learners' perceptions about their strengths and weaknesses but also the teaching and learning scenario in which the learners are placed. This has in turn enabled the researcher to appreciate how learners think, act and function within the academic context.

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These insights could be gainfully used to plan the intervention phase as well as arrive at implications in the later part of the study.

Phase II: Intervention

After having understood learners' problems of idioms in phase I and also keeping in view the learners' socio-linguistic backgrounds, approriate and useful strategies have been devised in order to facilitate learners' idiom comprehension.

Teaching Idiom Coprehension Strategies

Generally, second language learners take two approaches while dealing with new or unknown words in English. They either avoid/skip the word or ask teachers for the meaning. To a large extent, the same tendency was observed with the learners in the present study. Therefore, strategy teaching was planned as part of the intervention phase in order to wean learners away from avoidance of idioms or dependence on the teacher. The useful strategies used in the study were: learning idioms through definition, elaboration, paraphrasing, and guessing meaning of idioms from context. These are discussed in detail below.

Definition: Defining idioms is used as a strategy to aid comprehension. This involves explaining the meaning of a word/phrase (in this case an idiom) in an easy manner. This strategy also facilitates transfer of L1 knowledge of idioms by enabling learners find the L1 equivalents to the difficult idioms.

Examples:
1. *Kishore was able to* **catch up** *the complex ideas which the teacher explained. He really seems to be the most intelligent student in the class. He understands the difficult concepts quickly.*
2. *I am still not able to understand how such a misunderstanding* **took place** *between you and me. For a better relationship, we should make sure that such misunderstanding will not happen next time.*
3. *Kumar has investigated the problem* **in detail**. *It is quite interesting the way he has explained each and every phase of it.*

In the examples above the information immediately following the idiom (*catch up*, *took place*, *in detail*) served as an explanation/definition of the idioms. Learners were able to read and understand the explanation given which in turn facilitated easy comprehension of the meaning of the given idioms. While decoding such definitions learners could also recall L1equivalents to *catch up* (grahinchu/artham chesukonu), *take place* (sambhavinchu/jarugu), etc.

Learners found it difficult to remember and use certain idioms where L1 equivalents were not provided (e.g. *for good*, *put up with*, etc). In such cases, they were supplied with a collocation, preferably an adjective or an adverb which acted as an additional support (e.g. **all** *for good*; **difficult/easy/simple** to *break up*; **all**/**well** *in place*, etc).

Elaboration: In order to enhance learners' idiom comprehension and use, the strategy of idiom elaboration i.e. giving learners the meaning of idioms, was used as part of the training. Learners were exposed to two types of lexical elaboration: explicit (i.e. when learners are told that the meaning of an idiom is given) and implicit (i.e. when learners are given the meaning without being told that they are being given the meaning). Given below is a task on implicit lexical elaboration.

Task:
Read the sentences below and write the meanings of the idioms in the space provided below.
1. The police said that they will deal with, take action about, the culprits tomorrow.
   Meaning: ……………………………….
2. It does not *make a difference*, cause a change in a situation, whether our boss comes to the meeting or not.
   Meaning: ………………………………..
3. The large company wants to *take over*, to take control of some of the small companies in our area.
   Meaning: ………………………………..
4. I hope that everything will *work out*, to end successfully for my friend when she moves to London next week.
   Meaning: ………………………………..
5. What time did your friend *show up*, be present, for the party?
   Meaning: ………………………………..

The purpose of the task above was to test the learners' knowledge of understanding the meaning of idioms when meaning was presented in an implicit manner. The learners were helped to become aware of noticing/identifying the meanings of the idioms both implicitly and explicitly through examples (see the table below).

Table: 1 Examples for Explicit and Implicit Elaborations

Explicit Elaboration:	**Implicit Elaboration:**
(all of a sudden, back and forth, figure out, get back to, break down, carry out, deal with)	(all of a sudden, back and forth, figure out, get back to, break down, carry out, deal with)
• One hot summer day, *all of a sudden*, which means suddenly or without advance warning, it became cloudy and began to rain. • For an hour or so, the argument went *back and forth*, which means first one way and then the other way, before the judge made a wise decision.	• One hot summer day, *all of a sudden*, suddenly or without advance warning, it became cloudy and began to rain. • For an hour or so, the argument went *back and forth*, first one way and then the other way, before the judge made a wise decision.

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• I finally *figured out*, which means tried to understand, how to use the new DVD player. • I was happy to *get back to*, which means to return to, my work after my holiday. • We have decided to *break down*, which means to divide into simpler parts, the problem for further study. • The scientist wanted to carry out, which means to accomplish something, several experiments before discussing the new medicine.	• I finally *figured out*, tried to understand, how to use the new DVD player. • I was happy to *get back to*, to return to, my work after my holiday. • We have decided to *break down*, to divide into simpler parts, the problem for further study. • The scientist wanted to carry out, to accomplish something, several experiments before discussing the new medicine.

Paraphrasing: Paraphrasing is restating the given words/phrases/sentences in one's own words in such a way that it reflects the intended meaning. Learners were taught to paraphrase difficult idioms through a number of examples.

Examples:
1. The bad weather *accounts for* the fact that few people came to the meeting.
   The bad weather is **the reason** for the fact that few people came to the meeting.
2. I will go to the movie with you *for sure* next week.
   I will **certainly/surely** go to the movie with you next week.
3. I was *kind of* tired when I arrived home last night.
   I was **somewhat/more or less** tired when I arrived home last night.

Gradually, learners were trained to paraphrase short conversations that contained idioms (see a sample task below).

Task
Paraphrase the idioms in the conversation below.
(Context: *Two friends meet in a supermarket. They haven't seen each other for a long time*).
A: Hey, Raj, **what's up?** How is life?
B: Everything's good. Haven't seen you for ages!
A: Guess who I **ran into** last week at the post office? It's Anita.
B: Really? I haven't seen her for a long time. Is she still **going out** with your brother?
A: Gosh, no. He **fell in** love with someone he met last summer holidays. They're planning on getting married next April. In fact, they're **dropping by** my apartment soon and I'm all **out of** snacks, coffee, and........
B: You'd better **hop to it** then... get your shopping done and not **show up** late!

Of the 8 idioms given in the task learners could paraphrase 6 idioms taken from the list (*100 most frequently used English idioms*), failed to do so in the case of the 2 idioms (*going out* and *hop to it*) taken out of the list. This was because these 2 idioms, learners felt that, were more complex and occurred less frequently.

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Guessing Meaning from Context: Guessing meaning from context is a widely used strategy in learning any foreign language. Guessing words in context enhances the chance of long term retention. And hence learners were taught to utilize contextual cues to arrive at the meaning of idioms. For the purpose, a few extracts adapted from sources such as story books, newspapers, etc were used. Given below is a sample extract, a story.

Story: Late one night, Nasreddin was *woken up* by a terrible noise in the street outside his house. It sounded *as if* a terrible fight was *going on*, and as Nasreddin loved nothing better than to watch a fight in the street, he opened his window and *looked out*. He saw two young men fighting just outside his front door, but when they saw him watching them, they *went round* the corner of the house and continued to shout at each other and to hit each other there. Nasreddin did not want to miss anything, so he *ran down* and opened his front door, but, as it was a cold night, he wrapped himself in a blanket before he *went out*.

He walked to the corner of his house and *looked round* it. The two men were still shouting and struggling. Nasreddin went closer to them, both to see the fight better and to try to *find out* what the men were fighting about. But *as soon as* he was within easy reach of them, they stopped fighting, attacked him, seized his blanket and *ran away* into the darkness with it. Nasreddin was too old to *run after* them, so he could do nothing but *go* sadly *back* to bed without his blanket. 'Well,' said his wife. 'What were they fighting about?'

'It seems that they were fighting about my blanket,' answered Nasreddin, 'because *as soon as* they got it, their quarrel ended.'

(Advanced Stories for Reproduction, First Series. By L. A. Hill. Story-14)

When asked to identify idioms used in the extract, learners could not recognize some idioms because they were in the past tense form. However, with a little help they were able to arrive at the following list. They were later asked to provide the present/base forms of these idioms.

> *woken up; as if; going on; looked out;*
> *went round; ran down; went out; find out;*
> *as soon as; ran away; run after; go back*

Further, learners were encouraged to guess the meanings of particular idioms using contextual cues. For instance, they were asked to guess the meaning of the idiom *as if* in the sentence *It sounded as if a terrible fight was going on*. Learners came up with different options based on their understanding of the context such as: *in the same way/like/perhaps/ as though* (synonymy), *may be/sometimes* (nearness in meaning to the given idiom), *likely* (related to the context).

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Phase III: Results and Discussion

The learners' responses to the informal interviews were quite varied and reflected their views and efforts in learning English. Some learners responded that they would attend spoken English courses for improving their communication skills; some others stated that they were trying their best to learn English by speaking to friends and reading newspapers. Some expressed helplessness about the absence of input rich environment. Some learners were silent and did not speak a word. To the query whether their colleges offered special coaching in communication skills, learners responded that although they had a full length course on communication skills, classes were not held regularly and even when they were held, very few learners attended them.

When learners found it difficult on working out the meanings of idioms on definition tasks, they were advised to refer to idiom dictionaries, definition lists and were also made to discuss among themselves. Such activities helped learners to not only learn definitions but also aspects of collocations (related words) and pronunciation of certain idioms. Learners were provided extensive practice and were encouraged to define idioms explicitly on their own. In a class test, it was observed that learners could process idioms more easily through definitions than through examples.

From the analysis of the learners' perfomance on the tasks of elaboration strategy, it was found that majority of the learners could not easily find the meanings of idioms from the given sentences. It indicates that learners were either not aware of the meaning elaboration technique or they seemed to have overlooked the implied meanings in the sentences. However, it was observed that explicit elaboration had aided learners to learn both the form and the meaning of idioms. On the other hand, implicit elaboration helped learners to recognize only the form. In other words, reading a text with explicit elaborations seemed to be more conducive to L2 learners' recognition of the meanings of unknown idioms than reading a text with implicit elaborations. The greater the elaboration, the greater is the possibility of idiom retention. It was observed that retention happened more from depth of analysis. Elaboration also facilitated learners the knowledge of linking new information to known information and use of important contextual clues. In the next section we shall see how paraphrasing as a strategy could help learners' idiom comprehension.

It is worth noting that paraphrasing led learners to self-inquiry of their intended meanings because learners constantly checked/evaluated their paraphrased version of phrases. Thus, learners repeatedly rectified paraphrased meaning until they were satisfied with correct/suitable phrases or substitutes.

Overall observation on learners' performcance shows that during the task performance, learners had shown two tendencies: one, in case of known and somewhat familiar idioms they preferred to work out the meanings on their own and also showed interest in doing them first; two, when they met unknown and unfamiliar/difficult idioms, they preferred to work on these in small-groups or with the help of a dictionary. After the strategy training, learners were able

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to use strategies such as guessing the meanings from context, referring to dictionary, memorizing and others. A further noticeable development that occurred in learners was 'thinking and reflecting' on the authenticity of guessing the meanings. Some learners, while guessing the meanings, even separated idioms into their constituent parts (e.g. *come into* (as come + into) i.e. verb + preposition). These strategies of self-inquiry and analyzing can be seen as examples of the cognitive decision-making processes that the learners used to interact with the text and formulate and test their already known version of meanings of idioms against the new meanings. This gradually led learners to perform higher language skills which in turn supported their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).

The analysis above shows that although some of the strategies were more related to successful comprehension than others, the overall contribution of these strategies was partial and limited. This suggests that success in comprehension and use may not depend only on the use of certain strategies; rather success depends also on how effectively the use of strategies is combined and coordinated with the use of other sources of information within and outside the text. In the present study, the strategies which learners used were: definition, elaboration, and guessing from context.

During the post intervention phase, it was observed that learners used idioms both in the spoken as well as written discourse, but very limitedly. However, learners acknowledged the usefulness of idioms in day today communication. Phrasal verb idioms were among the most frequently used idioms by the learners. Learners could feel the difference both in speech and writing because idioms have not only added colour to their language but also helped them to express mood that is otherwise absent in their conversation.

Measures for Remedial Teaching

Research shows that teaching and learning idioms is the difficult part of vocabulary instruction (Laufer, 1997). Hence, the present study suggests some remedial measures for teaching idioms.

Since it is difficult to learn and teach all aspects of idiom knowledge as part of the classroom learning, teachers may adopt appropriate strategies and techniques to teach them. Research suggests two potential ways of teaching idioms in the classroom: one, either teach them along with the lesson they can be associated with, or arrange idioms around a small number of verbs (e.g. *make*, *give, blow* and so on) whenever learners come up with one of these verbs; two, group idioms according to themes for successful retrieving and organizing them in a more effective way (Schmitt, 1997). Teachers may consider the above methods for teaching idioms on the remedial course.

As part of the remedial classes teachers may provide learners with adequate input for practicing idioms. Also, transparent idioms, and idioms which are simple in form and vocabulary may be preferred than idioms which are passive, negative, low frequency in

vocabulary, and are unusual in form. However, teachers should not forget the fact that activation of meaning of an idiom is a continuous process.

Conclusion

The present study has attempted to enhance disadvantaged learners' comprehension of academic idioms. From the results and dicussion above, it could be said that an adequate knwoledge of idioms was imparted to learners and as a result of which they are able to comprehend and use idioms in the academic context to a certain extent. This improved awareness and comprehension of idioms has enchanced learners' communicative competence as the learners are now able to read and understand idioms in an L2 text and context. Such knowledge, it is believed, would certainly facilitate disadvantaged learners' academic success at higher levels of formal education. Thus, the present study, to some extent, has bridged the gap between learners' BICS and CALP.

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Enhancing ESL Learners' Idiom Competence: Bridging the Gap between BICS and CALP

January, 12, 2011. http://micase.elicorpora.info/about-micase.

January, 15, 2011. http://www.idiomconnection.com/mostfrequent.html.

Appendix

Learner's Questionnaire

I. Personal profile:

Name: _____ Age: ____ Gender: Male / Female
Mother Tongue: _____ Course: _____
Name of the College: _____ City: _____
Home Town: _____ District: _____
Phone/e-mail: _____ Date: _____

1. Medium of instruction at:

	English	**Telugu**	**Any Other? (specify)**
a) School:	☐	☐	_____
b) College (+2):	☐	☐	_____
c) UG:	☐	☐	_____

2. Father's Education: _____
3. Mother's Education: _____

II. Learners' proficiency in English:

1. How often do you do the following activities? (Please tick the appropriate box for each statement)

	Always	**Sometimes**	**Never**
a) Listen to English programmes on the radio	☐	☐	☐
b) Watch TV programs in English	☐	☐	☐
c) Watch English films	☐	☐	☐
d) Interact with others in English	☐	☐	☐
e) Participate in elocution/debates in English	☐	☐	☐
f) Read English newspapers	☐	☐	☐
g) Read English novels/stories	☐	☐	☐
h) Write poems, stories and essays in English	☐	☐	☐

2. How often do you use English in the following contexts? (Please tick the appropriate box for each statement)

a) At home

Always	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

b) At college

Always	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

c) Among friends

Always	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. What is your level of proficiency in the following skills in English language?

Listening:	25%	50%	75%	100%
Speaking:	25%	50%	75%	100%
Reading:	25%	50%	75%	100%
Writing:	25%	50%	75%	100%

100 Most Frequently Used English Idioms

about to (do something)	according to (someone or something)	Account for (something)
after all	all of a sudden	as a matter of fact
as far as	as for	as if
as long as	as soon as	as to
as well	as well as	back and forth
better off	break down (something)	break up
by the way	carry out (something)	come on!
come up	come up with (something)	deal with (something)
end up (doing something or going somewhere)	figure out (someone or something)	fill in (something)
find out (something)	first of all	for good
for sure	get back to (something)	get into (something)
get into (somewhere)	get out of (somewhere)	get rid of (something)
get through (something)	go ahead	go on
go over (something)	go through (something)	go with (something)
hang out (somewhere/with someone)	have (something) to do with (something)	hold on
in a way	in case	in common
in detail	in effect	in fact
in favor of (someone or something)	in general	in order to
in other words	in place	in some ways
in terms of (something)	in time	keep (someone or something) in mind
kind of	look for (something)	look up (something)

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make a difference	make sense	make sure
more or less	no matter	not at all
of course	on the other hand	on time
once again	open to (something)	pick up (something)
point out (someone or something)	put out (something)	regardless of (something)
right away	rule out (someone or something)	run into (something - a fact/trouble/problems/difficulty)
set up (something)	show up	so far
so to speak	sort of (something)	stick with (something)
take advantage of (someone or something)	take care of (someone or something)	take out (something)
take over (something)	take place	to the extent that
turn in (something)	turn out	up to
up to (someone) to decide/do (something)	used to	with respect to (something)
work out (for the best)		