

Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Idiomaticity

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with current notions of idiomaticity. It argues that lack of adequate empirical study and scholarship has prompted some authors to apply research findings from first language (L1) to second language (L2) contexts without scrutinizing more closely the factors affecting L2 idiom understanding. As a result, certain propositions regarding (1) the frequency of idiom use; (2) the difficulties that L1 learners have comprehending and processing idioms; (3) the processing and production challenges that L2 learners face when encountering figurative language; and (4) the classification of idioms by phrase, clause, or sentence pattern, grammatical category, or thematic category require critical examination. The validity of these propositions in recent research is investigated, their weaknesses acknowledged, and new suggestions for teaching and learning idioms in the context of authentic second and foreign language use are offered. It is suggested that a critical pedagogy of idiomaticity can aid the development of idiomatic competence, and should be incorporated into educational programs for second language learners as early in their education as possible. Potential curricula applications for idiom learning are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, a growing body of research regarding the lexical representation, processing, and comprehension of idioms has developed. Despite significant progress in these areas, researchers have paid very little attention to second language learners, foreign language learners, or bilingual learners. This lack of attention has prompted some authors to apply research findings from first language (L1) to second language (L2) contexts without scrutinizing more closely the factors affecting L2 idiom understanding. As a result, certain propositions regarding (1) the frequency of idiom use; (2) the difficulties that L1 learners have comprehending and processing idioms; (3) the processing