



Comprehension of L2 idioms – audio-visual  
versus written context

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# **Comprehension of L2 idioms – audio-visual versus written context**

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## **Abstract**

The main objective of the present study is to investigate whether there is a difference in comprehension between two groups of Swedish L2 learners of English when they are faced with idioms in either a written context or in an audio-visual context.

The investigation was performed at a Swedish upper secondary school. The subjects of the investigation are two different groups, where group 1 consists of 21 subjects and group 2 of 26 subjects. To one group, the idioms were presented in a written context, which is a transcribed version of the audio-visual context to which the second group was subjected.

The results of the study are statistically confirmed, which means that they are generalizable to any two similar sets of students taking the same two tests and they show that there is a difference in comprehension for L2 learners if they are presented with idioms in an audio-visual context in comparison to when they are presented with a written context. This difference suggests that the comprehension of L2 idioms can be strengthened when the idioms are presented in an audio-visual context.

Keywords: L2 idioms, audio-visual, written context, transparency.

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# 1 Introduction

It would not be a very bold statement by the present author to claim that idiomatic expressions such as *it's raining cats and dogs* have fascinated the human race for a very long time. The fact that our language does not seem sufficient or diverse enough to have the ability to express feelings of, for example, greatest joy or deepest sadness at every given moment, shows that our language needs these idiomatic expressions in order to function.

The idea for the present study was formed during one of the many hours spent in front of the television, where an impression began to emerge. There appeared to be rather a high frequency of idioms in the television shows being watched. Therefore, during a few weeks, whilst continuing watching the television shows, notes were made whenever an idiom was used. The lasting impression was that idioms appeared to be frequent vocabulary items.

Moreover, the present author formed the hypothesis that, based on the assumption that many Swedish-speaking people, especially adolescents, who watch English and American television shows, both translated (with subtitles) and not translated, do not fully understand the meaning of the idioms used. In fact, many times it might be a question of simply not hearing or noticing them. Thus, the assumption was made that the understanding of idioms from the context of a television show might be a new way of looking at the processing and comprehension of these expressions. This led to the present study's research questions:

- Firstly, does the context in which idioms appear help learners understand them?
- Secondly, is there a difference between acquiring an idiom within a written context, and the context of a television show?

## 2 Theoretical background and previous research

The aim of this section is to give an understanding of what idiomatic expressions are, and to define and exemplify terms that are used in the study. Also, another purpose of this section is to highlight previous research done in the field.

### 2.1 Definition of idiom

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), their third definition of the word *idiom* reads:

A form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc., used in a distinctive way in a particular language, dialect, or language variety; *spec.* a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from the meanings of the individual words. OED, Online. (March 2013)

The term ‘idiom’ is commonly used as an umbrella term (Gustawsson 2006:12). In fact, it is among scholars seen as “all fixed phrases, clichés, formulaic speeches, proverbs, slang expressions, and, at the extreme, even single polysemic words” (Liu 2008:3), which would then make it “an ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways” (Moon 1998:3).

Moon (1997:46) gives several examples of what she considers to be *classical idioms* and defines ‘idioms’ as “multi-word items which are not the sum of their parts: they have holistic meanings which cannot be retrieved from the individual meanings of the component words”. To give examples of these classical idioms Moon mentions *spill the beans*, *have an axe to grind* and *kick the bucket*. Some expressions are either simple to decode, e.g. *bite off more than I can chew*, or much more difficult to decode, i.e. opaque, such as *it’s raining cats and dogs* (discussed further in subsection 3.1).

Both definitions mentioned above (Moon 1997, OED) consider these multi-word items, i.e. idioms, proverbs, formulaic speeches etc., along three different non-absolute continuums. These three continuums involve: *non-compositionality*, i.e. the possibility of understanding the figurative meaning of an idiom when simply reading it on a word-by-word basis, *institutionalisation* (or *lexicalization*), i.e. the focus on how common the idiom is (not of particular interest to the present study), and, lastly, *fixedness* which describes how frozen the idiom is in its form.

Idioms are among researchers considered to be lexically fossilized (non-compositional) items, i.e. items that in general cannot be understood simply by a reading of the parts of the idiom. Idioms have also for a long time been considered as frozen units of meaning, which indicates that they are normally rated high on the third continuum, i.e. the fixedness continuum, too. However, more recent research suggests that this previously suggested frozen state might not be as static as considered before (Moon 1997:44; Moon 1998:7-8). It is even put forth by Gustawsson that “due to corpus-based research, the view on idioms is shifting. Once regarded as frozen phrases with monolithic meaning, idioms are today recognised as surprisingly flexible phrases whose meanings may be unexpectedly complex.” (2006:7). This is supported in Liu (2008:36) where he discusses the research

done by Moon (1998) and points to the fact that there are quite the number of different examples of idiom variation, e.g. *set/start the ball rolling* (a variation of the verb), *a skeleton in the closet/cupboard* (a variation of the noun), *a level/even playing field* (a variation of the adjective/modifier). One of the idioms of the present study is *to kill two birds with one stone* (S3), which in the original context of the television show is used in the following manner: *tapping the table kills both birds with one stone*. Something that again illustrates that idioms are not as frozen as previously thought

## 2.2 L1 idiom processing and comprehension strategies

In this subsection the major approaches within the field of L1 idiom processing and comprehension, and the development of the theoretical thinking behind them, will be discussed.

In Liu (2008:63), the author discusses the many theories on L1 idioms processing and comprehension and summarises the research into five major hypotheses. These hypotheses consist of: (1) *the literal first* or *idiom-list* hypothesis, (2) the *dual-processing* or *lexical representation* hypothesis, (3) the *direct access* hypothesis, (4) the *compositional* hypothesis, and (5) the *dual idiom representation* model.

Bobrow and Bell (1973) constructed one of the very first hypotheses regarding idiom processing, the *literal first*, or *idiom-list* hypothesis. It states that when a language user encounters an idiom he or she first processes it literally. However, when the context does not aid a literal interpretation, the person then accesses a special idiom list, a list that is not part of the everyday mental lexicon. They based this hypothesis on an experiment carried out in their study where subjects were presented with either a number of sentences, with literal but ambiguous meanings, or with a number of sentences containing idiomatic expressions that could be interpreted either literally or figuratively. An example of the a sentence with literal but ambiguous meaning could be *Mary fed her dog biscuits*, a sentence that could either mean Mary gave biscuits to her dog or Mary gave dog biscuits to a female person, depending on where you put the stress. An example of an idiomatic expression with either a literal or figurative meaning could be *John and Mary buried the hatchet* which could be interpreted literally or idiomatically, i.e. John and Mary had a hatchet that they decided to bury, for some peculiar reason, or that John and Mary stopped arguing. After having been confronted with either sentence type, the two groups of subjects

were then introduced to yet another sentence, this too ambiguous, i.e. it could be interpreted both literally and figuratively. The results indicated that the subjects who initially had been faced with sentences of the literal type opted for the literal reading of the test sentence, whereas the subjects confronted with sentences of the idiomatic type tended to go for the figurative meaning first. Thus, the conclusion was made that literal meanings are more quickly understood than idiomatic meanings. However, this has in later studies been contradicted (Gibbs 1980; McElree & Nordie 1999).

The *lexical representation* hypothesis, put forth by Swinney & Cutler (1979), assumes that idioms reside in the mental lexicon as sets of long words alongside the ordinary words, i.e. there is not a separate list of idioms as was suggested by the above discussed *literal first* hypothesis. Speakers would, in this case, then access both literal and figurative expressions at the same time until they decide on the appropriate interpretation based on what context that surrounds the idiom. This hypothesis was based on the discoveries from a study where the subjects were asked to read 152 sequences of words on a computer screen and judge if they were meaningful English expressions or not. Of the 152 sequences, 23 were meaningful grammatical idioms (eg. *break the ice*) with either a literal or figurative interpretation, 23 of the type *break the cup*, i.e. where one word in each of the idiomatic sequences was replaced by a word of similar length, speech part, and equally or more frequent, 30 grammatically correct but non-idiomatic phrases, and, lastly, 76 ungrammatical sequences (e.g. *stranger is during*). The results illustrated that the subjects all recognised the idiomatic expressions faster than the non-idiomatic control sequences. Swinney & Cutler were because of this then led to believe that idioms are stored as fixed units alongside with non-idiom phrases. The idioms were processed faster than the non-idioms because the non-idioms required a complete linguistic processing, including: a lexical, syntactic (sentence structure) and semantic analysis.

The *direct access*, or *figurative first*, hypothesis is a radical development of the previously discussed *lexical representation* hypothesis and it was a model introduced by Gibbs (1980). It suggests that native speakers rarely attempt to comprehend an idiom in a literal way because they are often aware of the idiom when they see it and could therefore access the idiomatic meaning directly, omitting all sort of linguistic processing. In Gibbs' study the subjects were showed sentences such as *He is singing a different tune*, which could be interpreted literally (*He is singing a different song*) or figuratively (*He has now*

*changed his mind about something*). All of the sentences were given to the subjects in four different ways, either in a context, which in turn forced either a literal or figurative reading, or in no context so that the expressions themselves had the character of either being literal or figurative. After having encountered the four types, they were told to account for whether a paraphrase, with either a literal or figurative meaning, was correct or incorrect. The response time of the subjects indicated that they in fact needed less time to understand the idiomatic uses than the literal ones. Subsequently, as mentioned above, Gibbs could then claim that native speakers do not need to do a literal reading of the idiom because they recognise it when they see it and therefore skip all the detours and reach the figurative meaning of the idiom instantaneously.

The *compositional* hypothesis, one of the more recent hypotheses, introduced by Gibbs, Nayak & Cutting (1989) (Flores d' Arcais (1993 also discusses it)) suggests that idiom processing and comprehension not only consider everyday language processing, in contrast to the previously discussed hypotheses, but also that a pragmatic interpretation of the idiom occurs alongside this processing. Something that would suggest that idiom comprehension does not require a special type of mode. Gibbs et al. (1989) based this hypothesis on experiments done where subjects were presented with idiomatic word sequences that were either decomposable or non-decomposable in a semantic way. A semantically decomposable idiom, i.e. a transparent idiom, is one whose parts have either literal or figurative meanings that contribute, on their own, to the understanding of the idiom in its entirety as in *my hand are tied* (T1) and *there are other fish in the sea* (T2). A non-decomposable idiom, on the other hand, has an opaque character and its individual components do not, in any way, contribute to the figurative meaning of the phrase. Thus, the idiomatic or figurative meaning cannot be obtained simply via an analysis of the words that constitute the idiom, as in the examples of the present study *mum's the word* (O3) or *chip off the old block* (O2). The results of their experiments indicated that the subjects did not require nearly as much time to process the decomposable idioms as the non-decomposable ones. This suggests, quite clearly, that in processing idiomatic expressions, people first attempt to understand what the individual parts of the idiom mean. However, would this be unsuccessful, only then would it force the learner to consider the expression in question impossible to decipher.

### 2.3 L2 idiom processing and comprehension strategies

The *dual idiom representation* model is one of a few hypotheses that handles the processing and comprehension of both L1 and L2 idioms. The foundation of this hypothesis was based on the work of Titone & Connine (1994), later developed further by Abel (2003). Primarily, Titone & Connine gave their subjects (fifty-six native speakers of English) 169 idioms and had them state whether the idioms were decomposable or non-decomposable. The participants of the study were later requested to rate, on a seven-point scale, the degree of familiarity of the idioms. The results indicated that native speakers considered 41.9% as decomposable and 51.8% to be non-decomposable in character. In the study it was also found that the subjects rated the decomposable idioms to be more well-known in comparison to the non-decomposable ones. The experiments of Abel's study (2003) were very similar, the great difference being, however, that the subjects were L2 students with German as their native language. The first experiment carried out consisted of the subjects rating 56.6% of the idioms to be decomposable versus 43.5% non-decomposable. The result of the second experiment had 55.2% in comparison to 44.8%. The results of both experiments thus correspond well with the one another. However, one weakness of the model, pointed out by Liu (2008:55) is Abel's claim that "noncompositional idioms require an idiom entry" (2003, 342:343). Liu continues by mentioning that when a speaker first encounters a noncompositional idiom, such as *mum's the word* (O3), there is no initial idiom entry. Instead, as the previously discussed *compositional analysis* hypothesis suggests, the speaker will start by approaching the idiom using a literal reading. If the idiom is not fully understood, the speaker will then have to make use of his or her pragmatic knowledge to be able to comprehend the actual meaning of the idiom. Thus, as mentioned above, a non-decomposable idiom does not have any form of idiomatic meaning to start with; such a thing could only exist after it being fully acquired by the speaker as an idiom.

As mentioned before, Liu (2008:74) is one of the authors who attempts to summarise the difference between L1 and L2 idiom processing and comprehension. He does this by stating that:

L2 idiom comprehension appears to be a slower and much more complex process than for L1. It involves the use of more strategies in terms of both type and quantity. The process does not seem to conform to

any of the major L1 idiom comprehension models... Instead, it takes the form of a *heuristic* approach, a process in which L2 learners approach an unknown idiom as a problem and try to solve it on a trial and error basis by using a variety of strategies.

Several of these strategies are discussed further in Liu (2008).

For L2 learners, one of the most frequent and effective strategies in order to understand an idiom is to make use of the context the idiom is surrounded by. Cooper (1999) performed a study in which eighteen ESL students' (on a college level) use of strategies in idiom comprehension was examined. The study identified eight types of strategies where using information from the surrounding context made up 28%, the highest percentage. Alongside the strategies that followed this, such as 'discussing and analysing' (24%) and 'using literal meaning' (19%), they accounted for 57% of all the idioms that were given a correct answer to. From these findings, one may easily come to the conclusion that the use of contextual information is indeed very effective. However, it does not always lead to a correct understanding of an idiom. This strategy will be discussed further in 2.4.

Using the knowledge of one's native language is yet another strategy used by L2 learners during the processing of an idiom and it is particularly helpful if the L2 idiom in question has a counterpart in the L1. One study that illustrates this was conducted by Irujo (1986), where the author investigated L2 idiom comprehension with advanced Venezuelan ESL learners. She not only investigated the L2 idiom comprehension but also their recall, and production of idioms. The findings of the study suggests that the subjects' performance was better when the L2 idioms had direct counterparts in their L1 in comparison to when there were no counterparts. Similar results could be seen in a study performed by Abdullah & Jackson (1998), where the researches wanted to investigate the comprehension and translation of English idioms by Syrian college students. Their results also indicated that the students scored very low with *false cognate idioms*, i.e. idioms that look exactly the same in both L1 and L2, but with different meanings. Also noticed by the authors was that even though the subjects showed positive results when translating these identical L2 idioms into their native language, they still showed reluctance when they were to translate the very same idioms from their L1, into the L2. Thus, a conclusion that learners seem to think that idioms are specific to culture and are therefore reluctant in translating identical idioms from the L1 into the L2, even when completely possible, was drawn by the

researchers. One could then claim that the use of the knowledge of one's native language not only achieves positive results; instead it might actually interfere with the processing and comprehension of L2 idioms.

To be able to use one's general cultural knowledge in the L1 is also a strategy. It was shown by Boers, Demecheleer & Eyckmans (2004), that if there appears to be a great number of idioms in specific areas of life in a learner's L1, for example, animals or the weather, this would aid the comprehension of these types of idioms. The opposite also appears to be true, i.e. idioms that are extremely culture specific, e.g. *Kiss the Blarney stone (If someone is very lucky)* and *Go Dutch (To split the bill)*, normally present a problem for L2 learners mainly because they are both difficult to recall and to comprehend.

The final strategy of this subsection is a strategy in which L2 learners make use of their knowledge of the world, i.e. pragmatic knowledge. For example, as discussed above, in the study conducted by Abdullah & Jackson (1998) the authors showed that their subjects were able to understand the idiom *to give someone the cold shoulder* by stating that the subjects interpreted the word *cold* as *unwelcome*, because *cold* means the exact opposite of *warm* (e.g. *a warm welcome*). The subjects also used this pragmatic knowledge for the interpretation of the idiom *skate on thin ice*, where they interpreted this as some form of gambling that included some form of risk taking. The results of the study also indicated that this knowledge of the world seems to be more useful when learners are to understand idioms possible to decompose than with idioms that are impossible to understand on a literal basis, i.e. non-decomposable ones.

Finally, as is visible from the above discussion, there are many different strategies to choose from for L2 learners when L2 idioms are to be processed. However, as is elegantly pointed out in the continuation of the excerpt from Liu (2008:74) above:

this *heuristic* approach does not seem to apply to known idioms, for when a person, be it a native speaker or L2 speaker, encounters a known idiom, a normal linguistic analysis may not be activated or may soon lead to a direct memory retrieval. Thus, a complete L2 idiom comprehension model needs to be a dual-process one, with the *heuristic* approach in charge of unknown idioms and direct memory retrieval being used for known idioms in most cases.

As this concludes the section on L2 idiom processing and comprehension strategies it is apparent to the reader that this particular process and comprehension appears to be a more complex occurrence than the previously discussed L1 idiom equivalent.

## **2.4 Learning words and idioms from written context**

One of the most frequently used strategies (briefly discussed in 2.3), both used by L1 and L2 learners, for processing idioms, and vocabulary in general, is to use the context in which the word or idiom is presented to one's advantage. One specific type of processing is *lexical inferencing*, discussed in Haastrup (1991:13) where the author defines the process as:

making informed guesses as to the meaning of a word in the light of all available linguistic cues in combination with the learner's general knowledge of the world, her awareness of the co-text and her relevant linguistic knowledge.

Once again, it is visible that the learner's pragmatic knowledge plays a big part in the comprehension of unknown words and or expressions. This lexical inferencing, mentioned in the above quote, is also discussed in Qian (2004) where the author states that, while there are a number of ways of dealing with unknown words, this way of informed guessing is seen as a popular approach to when a text is being processed by a L2 learner.

Furthermore, in Nation (2001:232, 236) it is clearly stated that learning words from context is the most important source for vocabulary learning, especially for native speakers learning their first language, something that should also be the case for L2 learners. However, according to the author, the conditions needed for this learning to take place are not experienced enough by L2 learners. In fact, findings from the limited number of satisfactorily conducted studies where subjects, consisting of non-native speakers, are to guess the meaning of words from the target language in a context, have neither shown a large number of correct guessing nor learning.

Moreover, what number of unknown words could actually be deduced from context? To be able to respond to this question it would be necessary to scrutinise this guessing from contexts with favourable conditions, and also realistic ones, i.e. when learners are already familiar with the majority of the words that make up the text. In Nation (2001:233) it is stated that at least 95% of the text's words need to be known by the learners in order for

them to be able to guess their meaning from context. A coverage of 95% would suggest that there is about one unknown word in every 20 running words, or one in every two lines. On the other hand, with a 98% coverage, only 1 in every 50 words would be unknown, a condition that appears to be the most optimal.

## **2.5 Learning words and idioms from audio-visual context**

A generative theory, put forth by Mayer (1997), suggests that the way you design multimedia instructions could have effects on the amount of cognitive processes made by learners. This means that learners would engage in these cognitive processes, as they are important for a meaningful learning. According to Mayer, when learning vocabulary it is common by learners to construct visual and verbal cues in order for them to retrieve information that has previously been stored in memory. Al-Seghayer (2001:226) builds on this where the author states 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.” The author also states that the *working memory* appears to be helped by the connection made by learners between the verbal and visual system, something that helps when long-term memory is desired. Since it is the retrieval of information that is more difficult, not the actual storing, it would be possible, according to Al-Seghayer (2001), for teachers to provide learners with a number of different signs of retrieval by simply integrating at least two different forms of audio, visual, or audio-visual cues.

Another study of interest to the present study was performed by Sydorenko (2010) where the author emphasises what powerful influence input modality can have on vocabulary acquisition. The author claims that captioned video tends to benefit the recognition of written word forms and the learning of word meaning because they provide additional input in the L2, while non-captioned video tends to improve listening comprehension. Captions are onscreen text transcripts in the same language as the audio while subtitles are translations of the audio into the native language of the learners. In the present study, test (2b) where the subjects were presented with the idioms in their original context (television show), no caption of any form was included. In addition, Sydorenko (2010:64) discusses the pedagogical implications of her study, stating that “different types of video input seem to provide different benefits.” She also suggests that visually well-

supported captioned video could be of great help, for beginners in the target language in particular. Normally, learners of this type are seldom allowed to practice in this fashion, with authentic input, as it is considered a too demanding task.

Within the research area of cognitive theory of multimedia learning (CTML), three basic assumptions are put forth (Austin, 2009:2). The first, *dual channel processing assumption*, states that visual and auditory information is processed in separate channels. The second assumption deals with the *limited capacity* of the human working memory and claims that our minds are penetrable, as an overload of irrelevant cognitive information would force learners to learn in an ineffective way. The final assumption is *active processing* and it states that, in order for any real learning to be transferred and withheld, learners need to actively process and organise any given information in order for it to develop into an understandable representation within their own minds, i.e. personal cognitive engagement is required (Austin, 2009).

Lastly, a study conducted by Sueyoshi & Hardison (2005) wanted to investigate what influence gestures and facial cues had to L2 learners' listening comprehension of a pre-recorded lecture done by a native speaker. 42 subjects, consisting of low-intermediate and advanced L2 learners of English, were assigned in a random fashion to three different conditions of stimuli: AV-gesture-face (audiovisual including gestures and face), AV-face (no gestures) and audio-only. The result indicated that the subjects who received some form of visual cues produced higher scores on a multiple-answer test than those who did not have any visual cues. The questionnaire given to the subjects after the test showed that they expressed positive attitudes towards the visual cues, something that would illustrate the effectiveness of face-to-face interactions.

### **3 The present study**

The main objective of the present study is to investigate whether there is a difference in comprehension between two groups of Swedish L2 learners of English when they are faced with L2 idioms in either a written context or in the context of a television show.

#### **3.1 Material & method**

In the present study, the material was collected from an experiment that took place at an upper secondary school. The experiment was conducted with two groups of students. The

first group of students (group 1) consisted of 21 subjects and the second group (group 2) consisted of 26 students. Both groups contained students who were studying their second year at the upper secondary school level.

All in all, 9 idioms (see app. No 1 for a list of the idioms), collected by the present author from four different television shows, presently airing as of 2013, were used as basis for the experiment. The television shows are: *The Big Bang Theory*, *Cougar Town*, *House of Cards*, and *Mr Selfridge*. The context in which they appear will not be discussed further here. Instead, the full (transcribed) context is visible to the reader in appendix no 2.

*The Big Bang Theory* is an American situation comedy (sitcom) that portrays the everyday life of four scientists and their across-the-hall neighbour Penny. From this television show, two of the idioms were collected: *mum's the word* (O3) and *give someone a run for their money* (O1).

*Cougar Town* is set in the fictional town of Gulfhaven, Florida. The series focuses on a recently divorced woman, Jules (Courtney Cox), in her forties, who faces the often humorous challenges and rewards of the next chapter of life. From this series, one of the idioms was collected: *it's a slippery slope* (S2).

*House of Cards* is a series set in present day Washington, D.C. The story centres on Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey), a Democrat from South Carolina's 5th congressional district and the House Majority Whip. After getting passed over for appointment to Secretary of State, the main character decides to execute his revenge on those who betrayed him. The collected idioms from this television show are: *my hands are tied* (T1), *knock on wood* (T3), *never slap a man while he's chewing tobacco* (S1) and *to kill two birds with one stone* (S3).

The fourth, and final television show is *Mr Selfridge*. It is a television drama which centres on the real-life story of the extravagant and visionary American founder Harry Gordon Selfridge and his London department store Selfridge & Co. This show is the source of the two final idioms: *chip off the old block* (O2) and *there are other fish in the sea* (T2).

The idioms tested are divided into three categories: *transparent*, *semi-transparent* and *opaque items*, the categorization of which is based on Karlsson (2012:136). This degree of transparency is considered from an L2 learner's perspective and based on two criteria, where the latter is of most interest to this study as it deals with the possibility to grasp the

meaning of an idiom by a literal reading of its constituents. Idioms that tally with this description are here categorised as transparent: *my hands are tied* (T1), *there are other fish in the sea* (T2). The third item, *knock on wood* (T3), is categorised as transparent due to the fact that we have the same one in Swedish: *ta i trä*, and not only because its constituents help. As for the semi-transparent idioms, two of them: *never slap a man while he's chewing tobacco* (S1) and *it's a slippery slope* (S2), an additional factor was considered, namely that certain key words in the idioms may make the meaning more difficult for the L2 learners. The idiom *to kill two birds with one stone* (S3) has similarities to the idiom (T3) as it also has a Swedish counterpart in *slå två flugor i en smäll*. However, (S3) it is less transparent due to its constituents not being literally translatable into the L1. Finally, the idioms whose constituents offered no help at all were categorized as opaque items. These are: *to give someone a run for their money* (O1), *chip off the old block* (O2) and *mum's the word* (O3).

In both groups, the subjects were first presented with a pre-test (1a & 2a) in which the aim was to see whether the students were familiar with the idioms beforehand. This pre-test consisted of the 9 idioms discussed above in a decontextualized form (see example (1)).

Example (1)

**Translate the following English expressions (in bold) into Swedish. Also, answer the requested information about each expression.**

#1) **My hands are tied**

A

- I have heard/seen this expression before
- I have not heard/seen this expression before

B

- I am sure I know what this expression means = \_\_\_\_\_
- I think I know what this expression means = \_\_\_\_\_
- I do not know what this expression means

In part A, as is visible in example (1), the subjects were asked to answer whether they had seen the expression before or not. In part B, the subjects were requested to give information about the degree to which they knew the idiomatic expression. The students could here indicate that they were sure they knew what the idiom meant, that they thought they knew what it meant, or that they did not know what the idiom meant. This pre-test was identical to the subjects of both test groups.

The subjects of group (2) were then shown a new test (2b), where the idioms were placed in their original context, i.e. in their respective television show. The present author attempted to structure the context of the idioms so that, even though only a short passage was derived from the television show, the subjects would have enough information to form an understanding of each idiom. Attention was also given to the “cutting process” to maintain as much content as possible, from the humour (e.g. in *The Big Bang Theory* and *Cougar Town*) to the more serious aspects (e.g. in *House of Cards* and *Mr Selfridge*). The final product ended up being a clip with a running time of 7 minutes and 29 seconds for the nine idioms, and it was presented to the subjects on a large video projector. The only aid the subjects here was given was that the present author paused the video clip after each idiom and gave the subjects time to write down their answers. Similarly, as described above, the students were here asked to indicate to which degree (completely certain, thought they were certain, or they did not know) the context helped, or if it did not help them to come to an understanding of the idiom. See example (2) below.

Example (2)

**Idiom #4 Cougar Town (dialogue between Jules and her dad)**

From the context, idiom #4: “it’s a slippery slope”

- I am sure I know what this expression means = \_\_\_\_\_
- I think I know what this expression means = \_\_\_\_\_
- I do not know what this expression means

The subjects of group (1) were also shown a new test (1b) where the idioms were placed in a written context. The written context in which the idioms appear is a transcribed version of their original context in the television shows described above (see example (3) below). As mentioned above, attention was given to the cutting process to preserve the different atmospheres in each television show. However, yet another aim was to have the finished transcribed product being a digestible amount of text for all subjects, i.e. not too much text. The subjects were then asked to rate their understanding of the idiom when it was placed in this context. They were also asked to indicate if they were sure that they knew, that they thought they knew, or that they did not know the meaning of the idiom. If the idiom was indicated to be known or thought to be known, the informants were also asked to state its meaning.

Example (3)

**Idiom #3 The Big Bang Theory (dialogue between Sheldon and Leonard)**

- Listen, I don't wanna be rude, but Prya is gonna be calling any minute.
- Ah, yes, Prya. Leonard, you know I make a point of never interfering in your personal affairs.
- Yes, I have always admired that about you (\*said sarcastically\*)
- As well you should. But, I'm going to make an exception here.
- Oh good! (\*said sarcastically\*)
- Prya has moved back to India to pursue her law career. Now, instead of desperately trying to keep this intercontinental relationship alive, you could use that time to take up a hobby.
- A hobby?
- Yes! I read recently about a fellow in Kansas with an enormous ball of twine. **I bet you could give him a run for his money.**
- You know, some people might say that it's great that we're trying to make things work long distance. They say things like: love is stronger than the miles between you.
- When I rise to power, those people will be sterilized!

**From the context, idiom #3: "give someone a run for their money"**

- I am sure I know what this expression means = \_\_\_\_\_
- I think I know what this expression means = \_\_\_\_\_
- I do not know what this expression means

In neither of the two groups, a time limit was given, the students simply handed in their tests when they were finished.

The tokens, for which the students indicated on the pre-tests either that they knew, or that they thought they knew, and were correct, were excluded from the results. The reason for this exclusion was that the focus of the present study was to investigate whether there is a difference in comprehension between idioms in an audio-visual context, versus idioms in a written context, rather than stating that the students who knew the idioms beforehand also performed well on the tests that followed.

Many of the analyses based on errors that learners make are often criticised, as they do not consider the number of errors in relation to the number of potential errors (Karlsson, 2002:11). Ellis (1994:57) concurs with this in that he states that "to say anything worthwhile about error frequency we need to know the number of times it would be possible to for learners to have committed different errors".

In the present study, it was important not only to consider the number of errors made by the learners, but also when they did not give an answer or when they were correct, in relation to the number of times a specific answers could occur, i.e. potential answer. Therefore, these potential answers were the sum of the remaining answers when the

subjects who responded in the pre-tests either that they knew, or that they thought they knew the idiom, and were correct, had been excluded.

The answers were calculated on a student-by-student basis. On each pre-test there were 9 different potential answers per student, there being 9 idioms in total. This conveys the numbers present in table (1) and (2) in the following section.

## 4 Results and discussion

In this subsection, the results of the two different experiments described above will be presented and discussed. The results have been statistically confirmed with the help of a *chi-square test* (Butler, 1985) which means that they are generalizable with any two similar sets of students taking the same two tests.

### 4.1 Test 2b – Audio-visual context group

Out of the 99 potential answers, 27 of them, or 27%, remained unknown after seeing the idioms in an audio-visual context. 38 of the answers (38%) given were incorrect after seeing the idiom in the written context, whilst 31, or near 31% of the answers were correct. There was only one single case of a blank answer, which corresponds to the last 1%.

Table (1)

Student	Correct answer/ Potential answers	Wrong answer/ Potential answers	Did not know the answer/Potential answers	No answer
1	2/5	3/5	-/5	-/5
2	-/4	-/4	-/4	-/4
3	-/3	2/3	1/3	-/3
4	1/3	2/3	-/3	-/3
5	1/4	2/4	-/4	1/4
6	-/4	1/4	3/4	-/4
7	-/2	2/2	-/2	-/2
8	3/4	-/4	1/4	-/4
9	2/4	2/4	-/4	-/4
10	1/4	2/4	1/4	-/4
11	1/4	-/4	3/4	-/4
12	1/2	1/2	-/2	-/2
13	2/7	2/7	3/7	-/7
14	2/4	-/4	2/4	-/4
15	1/5	4/5	-/5	-/5
16	-/2	2/2	-/2	-/2
17	1/2	-/2	1/2	-/2
18	1/3	2/3	-/3	-/3
19	1/2	1/2	-/2	-/2
20	2/5	-/5	3/5	-/5
21	2/4	2/4	-/4	-/4
22	-/2	1/2	1/2	-/2
23	-/3	1/3	2/3	-/3
24	3/4	1/4	-/4	-/4
25	1/8	3/8	4/8	-/8
26	3/7	2/7	2/7	-/7
	<b>31/99 ≈ 31%</b>	<b>38/99 ≈ 38%</b>	<b>27/99 ≈ 27%</b>	<b>1/99 ≈ 1%</b>

## 4.2 Test 1b – Written context group

Out of the 111 potential answers, 70 of them, or 63%, remained unknown after seeing the idioms in a written context. 22 of the answers given, 20%, were incorrect after seeing the idiom in the written context, whilst 16, or near 14% of the answers were correct. There was also a case where 3 answers were left blank, constituting the last 2,7%.

Table (2)

Student	Correct answer/ Potential answers	Wrong answer/ Potential answers	Did not know the answer/Potential answers	No answer
1	-/6	1/6	5/6	-/6
2	2/5	2/5	1/5	-/5
3	1/4	2/4	1/4	-/4
4	-/6	3/6	3/6	-/6
5	1/6	2/6	3/6	-/6
6	1/6	1/6	4/6	-/6
7	-/4	1/4	3/4	-/4
8	2/4	-/4	2/4	-/4
9	-/5	-/5	5/5	-/5
10	1/3	-/3	2/3	-/3
11	1/6	2/6	3/6	-/6
12	-/4	1/4	3/4	-/4
13	1/7	-/7	6/7	-/7
14	1/6	-/6	5/6	-/6
15	1/7	-/7	6/7	-/7
16	-/2	1/2	1/2	-/2
17	1/5	4/5	-/5	-/5
18	3/6	2/6	1/6	-/6
19	-/3	-/3	3/3	-/3
20	-/8	-/8	8/8	-/8
21	-/8	-/8	5/8	3/8
	<b>16/111 ≈ 14%</b>	<b>22/111 ≈ 20%</b>	<b>70/111 ≈ 63%</b>	<b>3/111 ≈ 2,7%</b>

### **4.3 Comparison between test 2b & 1b**

The attentive reader has already noticed the differences in percentages presented in tables (1) and (2). It is visible in table (1) that there is a higher percentage of correct answers given, 31%, in comparison to the 14% in table (2). This suggests that an audio-visual context assists the comprehension of the idioms to a greater extent than does a written context. This tallies with research put forth by Al-Seghayer (2001); Mayer (1997); Sueyoshi & Hardison (2005) and Sydorenko (2010) where they, respectively, talk about what different benefits video inputs have on comprehension. However, it is also important to draw attention to the fact that the percentage, when a wrong answer was given, is higher on the audio-visual test than it is on the written context, 38%, in comparison to 20%. It could be argued, of course, that this is a negative consequence due to the audio-visual context. Moreover, the difference in percentage for the cases where the students still did not understand the meaning of the idiom is significantly lower on the audio-visual test, 27%, in comparison to the 63% on the written context test. This might suggest that many of the subjects were helped, or engaged in some form, by the audio-visual context, and even if they did not all give correct answers, at least there was an increase in the cognitive processes regarding the acquisition of the idioms. This tallies with the theory put forth by Mayer (1997) where the author suggests that the design of multimedia instruction could have effects on the degree of which learners engage in the personal cognitive processes required for meaningful learning. Thus, according to Mayer, when engaged in vocabulary learning, learners tend to construct visual and verbal cues for retrieving information that has previously been stored in memory. Moreover, being subjected to an audio-visual test might also have been a new and exciting way of being tested and therefore the students tried more (only 27% indicated that they did not know on the audio-visual test, versus 63% on the written context test). However, hearing and grasping information from an audio-visual context appears to be harder than in a written context for some students, we see 38% of incorrect answers in comparison to 20% on the written context test. This suggests that some learners are “audio-visual learners” whereas others prefer a written context to make inferences from.

## 4.4 The three idiom categories

Table (3)

Correct answer /Potential answers on both tests	Correct answer /Potential answers on both tests	Correct answer /Potential answers on both tests
TRANSPARENT	SEMI-TRANSPARENT	OPAQUE
13/210 $\approx$ 6,2%	18/210 $\approx$ 8,6%	16/210 $\approx$ 7,6%

In table (3), all the potential answers on both tests were added together. The 13, or 6,2%, out of the 210 potential answers, that were correct, belonged to the transparent category, 18, or 8,6% to the semi-transparent, and 16, 7,6%, to the opaque. It is instantly visible that the semi-transparent and opaque categories both consist of a higher percentage. However, one of the reasons for this is the fact that many of the transparent idioms were excluded from the potential answers, as many students already knew their meaning.

In the following subsections, the difference between the two contexts will be presented and discussed.

#### 4.4.1 The audio-visual context (2b)

Out of the 99 potential answers on test 2b, where the students gave a correct answer, 7%, belonged to the transparent category, 13% to the semi-transparent, and lastly, 11% to the opaque.

Table (4)

Students	Correct answer /Potential answers	Correct answer /Potential answers	Correct answer /Potential answers
	TRANSPARENT	SEMI-TRANSPARENT	OPAQUE
1	1/5	1/5	-/5
2	-/4	-/4	-/4
3	-/3	-/3	-/3
4	-/3	-/3	1/3
5	-/4	1/4	-/4
6	-/4	-/4	-/4
7	-/2	-/2	-/2
8	-/4	-/4	3/4
9	-/4	1/4	1/4
10	1/4	-/4	-/4
11	-/4	-/4	1/4
12	-/2	1/2	-/2
13	2/7	-/7	-/7
14	-/4	2/4	-/4
15	-/5	-/5	1/5
16	-/2	-/2	-/2
17	-/2	1/2	-/2
18	-/3	1/3	-/3
19	1/2	-/2	-/2
20	-/5	1/5	1/5
21	-/4	1/4	1/4
22	-/2	-/2	-/2
23	-/3	-/3	-/3
24	-/4	1/4	2/4
25	1/8	-/8	-/8
26	1/7	2/7	-/7
	<b>7/99 ≈ 7%</b>	<b>13/99 ≈ 13%</b>	<b>11/99 ≈ 11%</b>

#### 4.4.2 The written context (1b)

Out of the 111 potential answers on test 1b, where the students gave a correct answer, 5,4%, belonged to the transparent category and 4,5% to the semi-transparent and opaque categories respectively.

Table (5)

<b>Students</b>	<b>Correct answer /Potential answers TRANSPARENT</b>	<b>Correct answer /Potential answers SEMI-TRANSPARENT</b>	<b>Correct answer /Potential answers OPAQUE</b>
1	-/6	-/6	-/6
2	1/5	1/5	-/5
3	-/4	-/4	1/4
4	-/6	-/6	-/6
5	-/6	1/6	-/6
6	-/6	1/6	-/6
7	-/4	-/4	-/4
8	1/4	1/4	-/4
9	-/5	-/5	-/5
10	-/3	-/3	1/3
11	-/6	1/6	-/6
12	-/4	-/4	-/4
13	1/7	-/7	-/7
14	-/6	-/6	1/6
15	1/7	-/7	-/7
16	-/2	-/2	-/2
17	1/5	-/5	-/5
18	1/6	-/6	2/6
19	-/3	-/3	-/3
20	-/8	-/8	-/8
21	-/8	-/8	-/8
	<b>6/111 <math>\approx</math> 5,4%</b>	<b>5/111 <math>\approx</math> 4,5%</b>	<b>5/111 <math>\approx</math> 4,5%</b>

#### 4.4.3 The three idiom categories – a comparison between the two contexts

The difference in percentage between tables (4) and (5), where in table (4) the percentage for correctly given answers are higher across all three idiom categories in comparison to table (5), is here visible to the reader. Again, what this suggests is that an audio-visual context aids the comprehension of idioms to a greater extent than does a written context (Al-Seghayer (2001); Mayer (1997); Sueyoshi & Hardison (2005); Sydorenko (2010).

It is of particular interest that the percentage of the semi-transparent and opaque categories are both, independently, higher than is the transparent category. However, as previously mentioned, the reason for the low percentage of correctly given answers within the transparent idiom category is due to the fact that many students already knew the meaning to most of these idioms. Naturally, as a logical consequence of this, the other two categories will have higher percentages as they appeared more difficult to the students during the pre-tests.

The transparent and semi-transparent items of the present study appear to have a more recognisable meaning than the opaque items by the subjects. This correlates well with the compositional hypothesis where Gibbs et al. (1989) suggested that a semantically decomposable idiom, i.e. a transparent idiom, where the constituents have either literal or figurative meanings, are more easily recognisable. It also tallies with the studies conducted by Titone & Connine (1994), and later by Abel (2003), where the subjects of the first study, fifty-six native speakers of English, were asked to judge whether 169 different idioms were decomposable or non-decomposable and at the same time rate the familiarity of the idioms. The results illustrated that the native speakers claimed 41.9% of the idioms to be decomposable in character and 51.8% to be non-decomposable where, at the same time, the decomposable idioms were rated as being more familiar than non-decomposable ones. An example of a transparent idiom from this study would be *there are other fish in the sea* (T2), an idiom that nearly all subjects gave a correct explanation to.

Moreover, an example of a semi-transparent idiom from the present study, on which the students performed well, would be *to kill two birds with one stone* (S3), an item that has a Swedish counterpart in *att slå två flugor i en smäll*. Here, a literal translation of the idiom is not possible, but the amount of transparency due to there being a Swedish counterpart still makes the idiom comparatively easy to decompose. This is apparent in the number of

correct answers given to the idiom. This tallies with the experiment conducted by Irujo (1986), where the author investigated L2 idiom comprehension with advanced Venezuelan ESL learners. Her findings suggested that the subjects' performance was better when the L2 idioms had direct counterparts in their L1, in comparison to when there were no counterparts

Lastly, an example of an opaque idiom would be *mum's the word* (O3). As discussed in 2.2, when L2 learners are to access a L2 idiom one of the most frequent strategies is to make use of the information derived from the context surrounding the idiom. This was impossible to do for the subjects in the pre-tests since there was no context surrounding the idioms, which inevitably made it very hard to access the opaque items on the pre-tests. Therefore, it was of particular interest to see whether the comprehension of these opaque items was aided, both in the written and audio-visual context. Within the written context, there was no such indication. Instead, during the analysis of the material, it became apparent to the present author that the opaque idiom *mum's the word* (O3) was the idiom that received the largest number of incorrect answers. The specific context, in which this specific idiom (O3) was presented (app. No 2, #7), might have given some of the subjects the impression that the meaning of the idiom involved the carrying of a child. Thus, on at least four separate occasions, explanations such as "she is going to be a mom", "she is pregnant" etc. are given by the subjects. This is an example that tallies with the study put forth by Abdullah & Jackson (1998), in which the authors discuss the subjects' pragmatic knowledge of the world, i.e. when they in this case put two pieces of information, known to them beforehand, together to arrive at a conclusion. The present author also appreciates the fact that this specific idiom could have been presented in a different context, a context where no ambiguity was detected. In addition, similar answers to the ones described above, regarding O3, were given on the audio-visual context test (test 2b). However, on five separate occasions an answer similar to "keep it secret" is given, answers that are not apparent in the written context test. Since this explanation to the idiom is correct it might suggest that idiom processing from an audio-visual context seems to have benefits over seeing the idioms in a written context, something that correlates with the study conducted by Sueyoshi & Hardison (2005) where they wanted to investigate whether a contribution of gestures and facial cues improved the subjects' results. In this specific case then, certain

gestures and facial cues might have benefitted the subjects who took the audio-visual context test.

Furthermore, during the analysis of the results of the three separate categories something of specific interest to the present study arose. On two separate occasions, during the audio-visual context test, students 8 and 15, on the answers they gave correctly, 100% of the idioms belonged to the opaque category. In student 8's case, three correct answers were given, i.e. to all three different opaque idioms of the present study. Student 15 answered one idiom correctly and it was the opaque idiom *chip off the old block* (O2). In addition, the accuracy of the explanations given by student 8 is remarkable. To the idiom *give someone a run for their money* (O1), the student answered "challenge someone about a task". The next idiom, *chip off the old block* (O2), the student gave a Swedish equivalent to in "äpplet faller inte långt från trädet", an idiom that also exists in English as *the apple doesn't fall far from the tree*. To the final idiom, *mum's the word* (O3) the student gave the answer "keep it secret". Since all of these explanations are correct it again suggests that idiom processing from an audio-visual context seems to have benefits over seeing the idioms in a written context.

## 5 Conclusions

The objective of the present study was to investigate whether there was a difference in comprehension of L2 idioms by Swedish L2 learners of English at the upper secondary school level when they were presented with the idioms either in an audio-visual context or in a written context. What this study suggests is that there indeed appears to be a difference in comprehension.

In table (1), where the results of the audio-visual test are presented, there is a higher percentage of correct answers given, 31%, in comparison to the 14% in table (2) where the results of the written context test are presented, something that suggests that an audio-visual context assists the comprehension of the idioms to a greater extent than a written context. In addition, the percentage to when a wrong answer was given is higher on the audio-visual test than it is on the written context (38%, in comparison to 20%). This suggests that a majority of the subjects were more engaged by the audio-visual context than the written context. Being subjected to an audio-visual test might have encouraged the

students to try harder and therefore only 27% indicated that they did not know on the audio-visual context test, versus 63% on the written context test. However, hearing and grasping information from an audio-visual context appears to be harder for some students than in a written context, since we see 38% of incorrect answers in comparison to 20% on the written context test. As previously pointed out, some learners might be “audio-visual learners” while others in turn would need a written context in order for comprehension to take place.

Furthermore, the results showed that the transparent idioms were, in general, the items of which the subjects gave the most satisfactory explanations on the pre-tests. This is due to the fact that transparent idioms, where the constituents have either literal or figurative meanings that contribute, independently, to the interpretation of the idiom as a whole, are more easily understandable.

In the presentation of the results, it was also apparent on the pre-tests that the opaque idioms, where the individual components do not, in any way, contribute to the figurative meaning of the phrase, were the most difficult to give a satisfactory answer to. In the case of the opaque idiom *mum's the word* (O3), it is visible that there is a higher ratio of satisfactory answers given when the idiom was presented in its original context, in comparison to where it was given in a written context. This might suggest that the audio-visual presentation of the idiom engaged certain cognitive processes in the mind of the subjects in order for them to grasp the meaning of the idiom, even though the idiom was non-decomposable from its constituents.

In addition, in the presentation of the results all the potential answers to both tests were also added together in table (3) where it was instantly visible that the semi-transparent and opaque categories consisted of a higher percentage. However, the fact that many of the transparent idioms were excluded from the potential answers, as many students already knew their meaning, was given as a plausible explanation to this.

The generalizability of the findings is somewhat limited, due to the small number of subjects taking part. However, as mentioned previously, the results have been statistically confirmed, which means that they are generalizable with any two similar sets of students taking the same two tests. Moreover, many of the findings tally with previous research done in the area, both on how L2 learners process idioms and how an audio-visual context

can help comprehension, and the results can subsequently be used to strengthen this previous research.

Several questions were answered in this study, but further research is necessary to continue investigating how L2 learners process idioms from an audio-visual context.

It would be possible for future studies to take different directions when investigating the comprehension of idioms for L2 learners. For example, one factor, not considered in this study, is the differences in modality preferences, which indeed could influence the comprehension of idioms from an audio-visual context. Some people, as mentioned before, are visual learners, some are kinaesthetic learners and some are auditory learners, etc. Another area would be to investigate to which degree the idioms are remembered by the subjects in a more long-term based investigation. In closing, research focusing on having the idioms appear in their original context, but with closed captions, would also be an interesting field of study.

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## Appendices

### No 1 The idioms

T1 (transparent)	<i>my hands are tied</i>
T2 (transparent)	<i>there are other fish in the sea</i>
T3 (transparent)	<i>knock on wood</i>
S1 (semi-transparent)	<i>never slap a man while he's chewing tobacco</i>
S2 (semi-transparent)	<i>it's a slippery slope</i>
S3 (semi-transparent)	<i>to kill two birds with one stone</i>
O1 (opaque)	<i>give someone a run for their money</i>
O2 (opaque)	<i>chip off the old block</i>
O3 (opaque)	<i>mum's the word</i>

## No 2 Test 1b

### The idioms in a written context

#### Idiom #1 House Of Cards (dialogue between Claire and Catherine Durant)

-The reason I'm here, is that CWI has a large shipment of water filters, stuck in south Sudan, and they've been in storage for the last four months, just sitting there, and the Sudanese government...

-Won't release the shipment through customs, my depute briefed me on the latest.

-Right, and I know that Francis spoke to you about this not too long ago, but lately we haven't heard much from the state department so I was wondering if you could help.

-We've done our best Claire, I put my top people on this, the Sudanese are just not responding.

-Well, is there anything else we can do? There's over 200 000\$ worth of equipment.

-I wish I could, I know how important this is to you, but we're about to cut of diplomatic ties. It's a directive straight from the president. We can't ignore the human rights violations anymore.

-What about back channels?

-Well, once we cut ties I can't contact their government officially, or unofficially.

-Well is there someone you could put me in touch with?

-I'm sorry Claire, **my hands are tied**. I will move mountains for you and Frank, but I've done all I can.

-Of course.

#### From the context, idiom #1: "my hands are tied"

I am sure I know what this expression means =

I think I know what this expression means =

I do not know what this expression means

#### Idiom #2 House Of Cards (dialogue between Francis and Remy)

-You don't have the same kind of relationship with the republicans that you have with me.

-They will adapt.

\*big sigh from Francis\*

-We both have votes to count, good luck!

-You tell Sancorp they're being foolish.

-I'm not gonna do that.

-Well, then you're being foolish.

-Come on Frank, let's not make this personal.

\*Frank turns and talks straight to the viewer\*

I can't compete with Sancorp's war chest. My only option is asymmetrical, to pick off the opposition one by one, like a sniper in the woods. There will come a time to put Remy in my crosshairs, but not right now. As we used to say in Gaffney: **never slap a man while he's chewing tobacco.**

**From the context, idiom #2: "never slap a man while he's chewing tobacco"**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I think I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #3 The Big Bang Theory (dialogue between Sheldon and Leonard)**

-Listen, I don't wanna be rude, but Prya is gonna be calling any minute.

- Ah, yes, Prya. Leonard, you know I make a point of never interfering in your personal affairs.

-Yes, I have always admired that about you (\*said sarcastically\*)

-As well you should. But, I'm going to make an exception here.

-Oh good! (\*said sarcastically\*)

-Prya has moved back to India to pursue her law career. Now, instead of desperately trying to keep this intercontinental relationship alive, you could use that time to take up a hobby.

-A hobby?

-Yes! I read recently about a fellow in Kansas with an enormous ball of twine. **I bet you could give him a run for his money.**

-You know, some people might say that it's great that we're trying to make things work long distance. They say things like: love is stronger than the miles between you.

-When I rise to power, those people will be sterilized!

**From the context, idiom #3: "give someone a run for their money"**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I think I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #4 Cougar Town (dialogue between Jules and her dad)**

-Dad, why won't you let me take care of you?

-Oh, hell “Ju-bug”, you’re my little girl. I’m supposed to take care of *you!* It’s a dad’s worst nightmare. Getting to the place where his own child has to be looking after him.

-You were thrown from a horse! That could happen to anyone!

-I wasn’t thrown, I fell trying to get on. I’ve been riding my entire life, I have never fallen once!

**It’s a slippery slope** just getting old. I’m just lucky that I have lived such a great life.

-Okay, you’re *not* old.

-I’m 76, honey.

-Well, you can live another 40 or 50 years!

-\*her father laughs\*

**From the context, idiom #4: “it’s a slippery slope”**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

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I think I know what this expression means =

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I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #5 Mr Selfridge (scene between Mr Selfridge, his son Gordon, Sir Ernest and a number of journalists )**

-Harry Selfridge! Good to see you beyond the poker tables. I won’t be quick to put myself up for a trouncing again.

-Great to see you again Sir Ernest!

-Oh, Ernest, please Harry, I keep having to look over my shoulder whenever someone says Sir.

\*there are a great deal of camera flashes as the two are being photographed\*

-Last photographs gentlemen, if you don’t mind.

-Sir Ernest, Sir Ernest! When will you return to Antarctica? Do you think the South Pole can still be bagged for His majesty? Do you ever think you might not make it back?

-Oh, eh, what, what about you young man? What’s your name? \*points to a young boy (Gordon, Harry’s son) in the audience\*

- Ehm, ehm, Gordon, Sir, Gordon Selfridge.

-Ah, **chip off the old block**, eh? Well, I’m sure you have a question, most young fellows have.

-I’d like to know what you think would make a good leader.

-That’s a good question; I’d have to think about that.

**From the context, idiom #5: “chip off the old block ”**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

I think I know what this expression means =

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I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #6 Mr Selfridge (a scene between Mr Selfridge, Lady Loxley and Mr Colleano)**

-Cast your eye over this. It's utter nonsense of course.

-Suffrage women are some of the most elegant women I know.

-Oh, so you support suffrage?

-I live in a house of women, I have no choice; what can I do?

-Actively endorse the cause. Sell our memorabilia.

-These are Mrs Pankhurst colours, doesn't she advocate violence?

-Only as a last resort, when the men who oppose her are particularly intransigent. I would like a table reserved in this restaurant every Tuesday lunchtime for the London branch of movement.

-I would be honoured.

-I thought you would.

-Mr Colleano, Lady Loxley is requiring a large table every Tuesday.

-Yes Mr Selfridge. (\*Lady Loxley watches closely as the waiter Mr Colleano walks away\*)

-Who knows? You may have done me a favour. I'm rather bored with Tony and **there are**

**other fish in the sea.**

-\*Harry smiles\*

**From the context, idiom #6: "there are other fish in the sea "**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

---

I think I know what this expression means =

---

I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #7 The Big Bang Theory (scene between Penny, Amy and Leonard)**

\*Penny opens the door\*

-Oh, hey Amy, Bernadette just texted me. Howard proposed??

-Yes, not important! Just stopped by to let you know I'm getting orthotics. Also, I'm carrying Sheldon's baby. **Mum's the word!**

\*Amy meets Leonard in the staircase, Leonard looks up from his phone\*

-You're pregnant??

-Wow, is there anything on there about orthotics?

**From the context, idiom #7: “mum’s the word ”**

- I am sure I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I think I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #8 & #9 House of Cards (dialogue between Francis and Raymond Tusk)**

\*Raymond is on the phone, turns to Francis. It’s late at night and they are both wearing pajamas\*

-Listen, I still haven’t showered and my mind is on China here. What do you say? You get a few more of these (\*points to something eatable on the table\*) and we try this again in a few hours, with our clothes on?

-Sounds like a plan.

-Meet me at my office at 9:30, I’ll have a driver pick you up.

\*Francis taps one of the rings on his hand two times on the wooden table\*

-Can I ask why you do that?

-Do what?

-Tap your ring like that; I’ve seen you do that on TV. Two taps every time you get up from a table or leave a lectern.

-It’s something my father taught me. It’s meant to harden your knuckles so you don’t break them if you ever get into a fight. It also has the added benefit of **knocking on wood**. My father believed that success is a mixture of preparation and luck. Tapping the table **kills both birds with one stone**.

-Your father, was a peach farmer?

-Yes, he was. Not a very successful one.

-Lack of preparation or lack of luck?

-Lack of both. He was better at giving advice than following it.

-Mm.

**From the context, idiom #8: “knock on wood ”**

- I am sure I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I think I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I do not know what this expression means

**From the context, idiom #9: “kill two birds with one stone ”**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I think I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not know what this expression means

## **No 3      Test 2b**

### **The idioms in their original context**

**Idiom #1 House Of Cards (dialogue between Claire and Catherine Durant)**

**From the context, idiom #1: “my hands are tied”**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I think I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #2 House Of Cards (dialogue between Francis and Remy)**

**From the context, idiom #2: “never slap a man while he’s chewing tobacco”**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I think I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #3 The Big Bang Theory (dialogue between Sheldon and Leonard)**

**From the context, idiom #3: “give someone a run for their money”**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I think I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #4 Cougar Town (dialogue between Jules and her dad)**

**From the context, idiom #4: “it’s a slippery slope”**

- I am sure I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 I think I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #5 Mr Selfridge (scene between Mr Selfridge, his son Gordon, Sir Ernest and a number of journalists )**

**From the context, idiom #5: “chip off the old block ”**

- I am sure I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 I think I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #6 Mr Selfridge (a scene between Mr Selfridge, Lady Loxley and Mr Colleano)**

**From the context, idiom #6: “there are other fish in the sea ”**

- I am sure I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 I think I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #7 The Big Bang Theory (scene between Penny, Amy and Leonard)**

**From the context, idiom #7: “mum’s the word ”**

- I am sure I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 I think I know what this expression means =  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 I do not know what this expression means

**Idiom #8 & #9 House of Cards (dialogue between Francis and Raymond Tusk)**

**From the context, idiom #8: “knock on wood ”**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I think I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not know what this expression means

**From the context, idiom #9: “kill two birds with one stone ”**

I am sure I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I think I know what this expression means =

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not know what this expression means

Knowledge is power.



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