What Makes Learning Idioms Challenging for Korean L2 Learners? Idiom Types, Factors, and Pedagogical Implications*

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Nam, Hyunjeong. 2018. What Makes Learning Idioms Challenging for Korean L2 Learners? Idiom Types, Factors, and Pedagogical Implications. *The Journal of Studies in Language* 33.4, 657-676. The study identified the most challenging types of idioms for the Korean L2 learners in their self-study and investigated the linguistic and psychological factors affecting the learning idiom. The findings from 84 college students' idiom production using t-test suggest that decomposable idioms with L1 equivalents were the most difficult to learn. In idiom production, which is different from idiom comprehension since the overall meaning of the idiom has already been provided for learning, the learners did not need to decompose the idiom for comprehension. In the absence of instruction promoting semantic analysis of idioms, Korean L2 learners used rote-memorization skills for learning, and in the absence of L1-promoting instruction the L1 effect was not evident. Different findings from the previous research suggest that different test methods and learners' orientation of learning may yield different test results. In addition, findings from Pearson correlation suggest negative relationship with the length of idioms and positive relations with learners' preference. As a result, not only linguistic properties of idioms but also the learners' psychological variables may affect their idiom learning. **(Dong-A University)**

Key words: idiom, comprehension, production, decomposability, learners' preference

1. Introduction

Among the various approaches to second language vocabulary learning, special attention has been paid to lexical items comprising multi-words in the past few decades (Lewis, 1993, 1997, 2000; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Schmitt, 2004; Sinclair, 1991). In particular, the importance of

idioms has been recognized in second language acquisition. For example, Kang (2002, p.204) regards "control of idiomatic expressions" as one of the challenges EFL learners should overcome to achieve native-like proficiency. Idioms have also been considered a critical attribute to attainment of native-like proficiency (Pawley & Syder, 1983) and "non-native speakers' dilemma" (Szczepaniak, 2006, p.30).

The main focus of previous research in the realm of linguistics has been on either the semantic and syntactic analysis of individual cases of idioms concerning decomposability (Fellbaum, 2015; Svensson, 2008; Titone & Connine, 1999) or empirical examination of idiom principles regarding their 'literal vs. figurative comprehension first' (Levelt & Meyer, 2002; Kweon, 2011). Research in applied linguistics and education has primarily concerned the pedagogical suggestions for effective teaching methods of idioms (Kim & Lee, 2008; Park & Song, 2007; Vasiljevic, 2011)

Due to the complex nature of idioms, researchers have not reached a consensus on the exact extent of decomposability and semantic transparency of individual idioms (even in the case of the most cited idiom "kick the bucket") and moreover empirical evidence for effective teaching methods has not pointed in one direction. Studies concerning linguistic analysis have focused on only a few cases of idioms while studies regarding teaching methods have included a number of idioms in their tests, and yet failed to concern the variation of the individual idioms on the continuum of idiomaticity and decomposability. Given that different types of idioms may have different response to a particular teaching method (Nam, 2015), more elaborated approach may be necessary in this regard.

Of greater importance, the answer to the question regarding 'what types of idioms are the most challenging to Korean L2 learners' should precede the discussion of effective teaching methods of idioms. Thus, the present study aims to identify the most challenging types of idioms to Korean L2 learners and further investigate the factors including the linguistic and psychological aspects that affect the difficulties in their idiom learning.

2. Literature review

2.1 Decomposability of Idioms

Traditional views that idioms are noncompositional multiword units (e.g., Swinney & Cutler, 1979) have been replaced with compositional view of idioms (Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Gibbs et al., 1989; Titone & Connine, 1994). The school of the compositional view classifies idioms based on the decomposability.

The decomposability concerns both semantic and syntactic properties of idioms. In terms of semantic analysis, in a nondecomposable idiom, there does not seem to be any semantic contribution of any component word of the idiom (e.g., *kick the bucket*) while in the case of decomposable idiom, comprehension of the component words facilitates the understanding of its overall meaning (e.g., *the question* in *pop the question*). For example, a decomposable idiom *let off steam* is comprehended based on the relationship between the components (e.g., *steam*) and their figurative referents (e.g., *anger*). This occurs through a metaphorical mapping when both the concepts (*steam* and *anger*) exist in the same semantic field (Gibbs, 2014; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990).

In the syntactic analysis, the decomposable idioms which allow for semantic contribution of their components to the overall meanings of the idioms are apt to be more syntactically productive than the nondecomposable idioms (Gibbs & Nayak, 1989). Contrary to the decomposable idioms, the nondecomposable idioms do not permit syntactic variation in general. For example, the meaning of the idiom *carry a torch for* may be hard to be comprehended in a passive form (e.g., *A torch for Sally was carried by Jim*) (Gibbs, 2014). The nondecomposable idioms only allow an extremely limited range of lexical variations such as inflection (e.g., *kicked the bucket*) and reflexive pronouns (e.g., *speak one's mind*) (Sag et al., 2002).

2.2 Idiom comprehension

In addition to the semantic and syntactic analysis of the individual idioms, the issue of 'literal vs. figurative comprehension' has been

rigorously studied in terms of the time measurement. For example, Gibbs and his colleagues (e.g., Gibbs, 1992; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Gibbs, Nayak, & Cutting, 1989) found that comprehension of decomposable idioms was faster than that of nondecomposable idioms. Kweon (2011) compared leaners' reading time between idioms and novel non-idioms. She confirmed that literal comprehension of idioms was obtained before the figurative meaning for Korean L2 learners.

Lee and Kim (2008) utilized translation tasks (English-to-Korean). Korean L2 learners were found to have more difficulties comprehending nondecomposable idioms than decomposable idioms. Lee (2003) also observed the advantage of comprehension of decomposable idioms. One of the few research projects that tested idioms in production, Kim (2012) also confirmed Gibbs et al. (1989)'s 'idiom decomposition hypothesis'.

However, research regarding this issue seems controversial. For example, Tabossi et al. (2008) found that decomposability did not affect idiom comprehension. Moreover, in the test of eye movement Titone and Connine (1999) yielded antithetical findings corollary to a given context.

2.3 Idiom instruction

Researchers concerning second language acquisition have investigated a better way to learn L2 idioms. For example, Vasiljevic (2011) compared learning conditions between idioms grouped by conceptual metaphor and semantically unrelated idioms. It was found that learning the idioms grouped by conceptual metaphor was more effective than learning the semantically unrelated idioms. Similarly, from the comparison between the instruction of conceptual metaphors and alphabetical memorization of idioms, Kim & Lee, (2008) confirmed the effect of conceptual metaphors on idiom learning. They further compared learning idioms in universal source domains with those in language-specific domains and found the advantage of learning idioms in universal source domains. Park & Song (2007) also observed the effect of adopting cognitive motivation to idiom instruction in high school.

2.4 Cross-linguistic factors

As Gibbs et al. (1989) suggest, conceptual metaphor plays a role in understanding idioms, in particular, decomposable idioms and it encompasses universal and language specific sources. With emphasis on the language specific features of conceptual metaphor, the cross-linguistic features of idioms have long attracted researchers in second language acquisition (e.g., Yoshikawa, 2008; Irujo, 1986, 1993; Laufer, 2000; Vasiljevic, 2011).

Irujo (1993) observed that the L2 idioms that have identical or similar L1 equivalents were better understood by the learners and the L1 effect was more evident for the low proficient learners in the translation task (from L1 Spanish to L2 English). Concerning Korean L2 learners, Shin (2004) compared idioms that have identical equivalents in L1 and those without any L1 equivalents. He found that a degree of reliance on L1 in idiom comprehension was evident for the low proficient learners but insignificant for the advanced L2 learners. Those findings supporting the L1 effect can be understood in the Revised Hierarchical Model (Kroll & Stewart, 1994). Since the concept (meaning) of a lexical item is closely connected to L1, the L1 effect manifested itself. However, as L2 proficiency advances, the direct link between the concept and the L2 is developed, and thus the L1 effect diminished for the proficient learners. Nam (2015) compared types of primes that retrieve idioms and found that semantically related L1 idioms triggered the target L2 idioms. In addition to the L1 effect on L2 comprehension and production, Vasiljevic (2011) found the positive L1 effect on L2 idiom instruction. That is, the effect of learning conceptual metaphor in idioms was more evident when the concepts were presented in L1.

Nevertheless, some researchers have also warned about the negative L1 effect on learning idioms. Even Irujo (1986) who suggested the L1 effect on the L2 idiom comprehension for the idioms that were 'identical' in both languages, observed interferences from the learners' knowledge of the L1 idioms in their acquisition of the L2 idioms that were 'similar' in both languages. Mäntylä (2004) also found that the Finnish students' reliance on their repertoire of the L1 idiom resource led to erroneous comprehension of L2 idioms. In the comprehension task, the students

focused on only one component of the target L2 idiom which was a common element in both languages, and consequently drew on the meaning of the L1 idiom that contained the common component.

2.5 Present study

Previous research concerning idiom processing has yielded findings supporting the effect of decomposability (Kim, 2012; Lee, 2003; Lee & Kim, 2008) and in favor of L1 influence (Nam, 2015; Shin, 2004). However, there is also contradictory evidence. For example, in Laffey's study (2016) testing Korean college students, the advantage of decomposability was not present in idiom comprehension. In addition, L1 interference was found in L2 idioms that had similar L1 equivalents in the Irujo's study (1993).

It should be noted that inconsistent results may be derived from inconsistent experiment designs. Among the previous research, even the studies that agreed on the effect of decomposability deployed different test methodologies and inconsistent proficiency level of the L2 learners. First, in the translation tasks (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2008; Park & Song, 2007), if the direct association between the overall meaning and the L2 idiom is not yet fully developed in the learners' mental lexicon, learners may rely on word to word translation, which may favor decomposable idioms in comprehension. During the translation into L1, concepts of each constituent part of the target idiom which are closely connected to L1 (Revised Hierarchical Model in Kroll & Stewart, 1994) may be triggered more easily. Moreover, the closely connected L1 idiom knowledge may be readily retrieved, which leads to the L1 effect (Nam, 2015). As a result, the task itself may possibly contribute to the effect of decomposability and the L1 influence. Second, the multiple-choice test (e.g., Kim, 2012; Shin, 2004) may not successfully prevent the learners from using guessing strategy, which may be hard to fully reflect the complete knowledge of idioms. More importantly, the majority of the studies have focused on idiom comprehension rather than production. In few studies concerning the Korean L2 learners' idiom production, the test was provided in a format of multiple-choice and it required only a constituent element of the target idiom to be filled. Still, other research

has not presented empirical evidence.

The differences between the present study and the previous research may be summarized as follows. First, rather than solely dealing with idiom comprehension that was mostly studied in the previous research, the present study focused on idiom production. Second, in recognition of the issue of the L2 learners' use of a wrong component of an idiom due to their incomplete knowledge of its totality (e.g., *draw a line* in place of *draw the line*) which would change its overall meaning, the present study utilized the production test that required a complete knowledge of the idiom. Third, in order to reflect the use of idioms in real-life production, L1-inducing tasks or L1 stimuli were not provided in the test. Fourth, the present study does not intend to compare different teaching methods but to investigate the challenges that the learners face in idiom learning. This is because thorough identification of the problems in learners' idiom learning should precede the suggestions for teaching methods. Therefore, the study started off with a clean slate excluding any instructional influence. Lastly, psychological factors which have been neglected in the previous research such as learners' preference for particular idioms and the learning burden caused by the length of idioms were included as variables in the present study. Taking a comprehensive approach from linguistic to psychological factors, the present study aims to explore Korean the L2 learners' idiom learning with the following research questions.

1. Which type of idioms (classified in terms of decomposability and L1 congruency) is the most challenging for Korean L2 learners to learn?
2. Do psychological factors (learners' preference for particular idioms and the learning burden caused by the length of idioms) also affect their idiom learning?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were college students majoring in English at a local university. They were taking an English course 'English words and

idioms'[1]). At the initial stage, 93 participants responded to the preliminary survey[2]) to confirm that they had no prior knowledge of the target idioms. Eighty five learners were selected at the first screening. One learner had to be excluded because of his insincere answer in the idiom test (the test score was 0); thus, a total of 84 Korean English learners participated in the study. They were at an intermediate level of proficiency (mean of TOEIC practice test scores=575).

3.2 Materials and Procedure

In the preliminary survey the participants were asked first, their prior knowledge of the target idioms, second the L1 congruency of the idioms, and third the idioms which they favored.

The target idioms were 20 items which have good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient .80. The idioms were selected from previous research in order to obtain credibility for the properties of idioms.

<Table 1> List of Idioms

	Idioms	Properties of the idioms confirmed by	Decomp osability	L1 congruency	Length of idioms	Learners' preference
1	kick the bucket	Fellbaum (2015)	Non	No L1	3	88.10%
2	bite the dust	Fellbaum (2015)	Non	No L1	3	51.19%
3	red tape	Kovács (2016)	Non	No L1	2	84.52%
4	hair of the dog that bit you	Kovács (2016)	Non	No L1	7	85.71%
5	chew the fat	Titone & Connine (1999)	Non	No L1	3	89.29%
6	face the music	Sag et al. (2002)	Non	No L1	3	67.86%

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1) The class met twice a week and the instruction lasted for 90 minutes.
2) An example of the question was "Do you know any of the following idioms? Please write the meanings either in Korean or in English."

7	pain in the neck	Sag et al. (2002)	Non	No L1	4	77.38%
8	beat around the bush	Gardner (2013)	Non	No L1	4	75.00%
9	shoot the breeze	Sag et al. (2002)	Non	No L1	3	54.76%
10	trip the light fantastic	Sag et al. (2002)	Non	No L1	4	28.57%
11	lay down the law	Havrila (2009)	De	No L1	4	34.52%
12	carry a torch for	Havrila (2009)	De	No L1	4	46.43%
13	pop the question	Svensson (2008)	De	No L1	3	95.24%
14	let off steam	Gibbs (2014)	De	No L1	3	72.62%
15	pull strings	Moreno (2007)	De	No L1	2	42.86%
16	touch a nerve	Wasow et al. (1983)	De	L1	3	45.24%
17	speak your mind	Mini et al. (2011)	De	L1	3	82.14%
18	pour cold water on	Li (2000)	De	L1	4	70.24%
19	play with fire	Gibbs (2014)	De	L1	3	84.52%
20	draw the line	Moreno (2007)	De	L1	3	80.95%

Note. Non: non-decomposable idiom, De:decomposable idiom, No L1: The idioms which have no L1 equivalents L1: The idioms which have L1 equivalents, Length of idioms: the number of component words in the target idiom, Learners' preference: the percentage of the number of learners who liked the idiom

As shown in Table 1, they were first divided into two categories according to its decomposability. Further classification was made based on the L1 congruency. Due to the culture-specific or arbitrary nature of the meanings of non-decomposable idioms, their equivalents with full semantic overlap could not be found in L1. Therefore, only the decomposable idioms were divided into two groups based on the L1 congruency.

A list of idioms with and without the L1 equivalents from Shin's study (2004) were initially considered; however, the idioms in his study

vary in decomposability. Therefore, through the procedure to cross-check their decomposability in other previous research, four idioms were selected. For the rest of the target idioms, their decomposability was confirmed in previous research and the L1 congruency was judged by the participants. The idioms which were perceived to have no L1 equivalents by the participants are *lay down the law, carry a torch for, pop the question, let off steam, pull strings*. The idioms which were considered to have L1 equivalents are *touch a nerve, speak your mind, pour cold water on, play with fire, draw the line*.

In addition, the learners' preference over the idioms was also considered. Prior to the treatment, the learners were asked to choose the idioms they liked. Regarding the additional question to identify the underlying reasons for choosing certain idioms, they responded that their preference was based on the practicality of the idioms (41.8%), the interesting mental images that the idioms conjured up (30%), the personal liking of their sounds (17.3%), and unidentified reasons (10.9%). The idioms which were most favored by the learners are *pop the question* (95.24%), *chew the fat* (89.29%), *kick the bucket* (88.10%), *hair of the dog that bit you* (85.71%).

The present study intends to identify the challenges that the learners face in idiom learning. In particular, in order to probe into the causes which may arise from the learners, any variables from instructional influence were excluded. Therefore, the target idioms were self-studied. The learners were provided with the target idioms with their definitions and contexts in the L2 and were informed of the upcoming test in three subsequent days. The production-based test was provided as follows.

Target idiom: *hair of the dog that bit you*
Definition: An alcoholic drink taken as a cure the morning after an occasion when you have drunk too much alcohol
Question: When Anne had a bad hangover, Paul offered her a Bloody Mary and said, 'Have a little of the (   )'.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

First, the test scores were organized using Microsoft Excel, then the

data were fed to SPSS 24. Second, to compare the participants' idiom knowledge based on the decomposability and the L1 congruency, independent t-test was used. Third, ANOVA was used to compare the participants' idiom knowledge among the types of idioms. Fourth, Pearson correlation coefficient was used for any relationship between their idiom knowledge and the length of idioms and between their idiom knowledge and their preference.

4. Results

<Table 2> Comparisons of Idiom Production Based on the Decomposability

	Non-decomposable		Decomposable		t	p	d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Decomposability	8.48	1.65	7.43	2.58	3.14	.00*	.10

In Table 2, an independent t-test was conducted to compare the test scores in idiom production between the idioms in terms of decomposability. There was a significant difference between non-decomposable idioms (M=8.48, SD=1.65) and the decomposable idioms [M=7.43, SD=2.58; t(141)=3.14, p=.00]. The magnitude of the differences in the means was large (eta squared=.10). The finding indicates that decomposable idioms were more difficult to retrieve in production.

<Table 3> Comparisons of Idiom Production Based on the L1 Congruency

	without L1 equivalents		with L1 equivalents		t	p	d
	M	SD	M	SD			
L1 congruency	3.88	1.34	3.55	1.46	1.54	.13	.02

As shown in Table 3, an independent t-test was conducted to compare the test scores between the two types of decomposable idioms. There was no significant difference between idioms which have no equivalents in L1 (M=3.88, SD=1.34) and the idioms with L1 equivalents [M=3.55, SD=1.46; t(166)=1.54, p=.13].

<Table 4> Relationship between Length of Idioms and Idiom Production

		Length of idioms
Pearson Correlation	1	−.10
Sig.(2-tailed)		.68
N	20	20

In Table 4, the relationship between the length of idioms (from N=2 to N=7) and idiom production was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was small negative correlation between the two variables, r=−.10, n=20, p<.001, with larger number of component words in the target idiom associated with the lower test scores in idiom production. However, it was not statistically significant.

<Table 5> Relationship between Learners' Preference and Idiom Production

		Learners' preference over the target idiom
Pearson Correlation	1	.50*
Sig.(2-tailed)		.02
N	20	20

Table 5 shows the relationship between learners' preference over the target idiom and idiom production. There was positive correlation between the two variables, r=.50, n=20, p<.001, with high levels of the learner's preference associated with the higher scores in idiom production test.

<Table 6> Difficulty of Idiom Learning

Ranks	Idioms	Learners' preference	Properties	M	SD
1	touch a nerve	88.10%	D L1	0.52	0.50
2	pour cold water on	51.19%	D L1	0.63	0.49
3	let off steam	84.52%	D NL1	0.70	0.46
4	lay down the law	85.71%	D NL1	0.74	0.44
5	trip the light fantastic	89.29%	ND NL1	0.75	0.44
6	draw the line	67.86%	D L1	0.75	0.44
7	beat around the bush	77.38%	ND NL1	0.76	0.43
8	carry a torch for	75.00%	D NL1	0.76	0.43
9	pull strings	54.76%	D NL1	0.76	0.43

10	pain in the neck	28.57%	ND NL1	0.77	0.42
11	shoot the breeze	34.52%	ND NL1	0.77	0.42
12	speak your mind	46.43%	D L1	0.79	0.41
13	hair of the dog that bit you	95.24%	ND NL1	0.81	0.40
14	chew the fat	72.62%	ND NL1	0.85	0.36
15	play with fire	42.86%	D L1	0.85	0.36
16	face the music	45.24%	ND NL1	0.88	0.33
17	pop the question	82.14%	D NL1	0.93	0.26
18	bite the dust	70.24%	ND NL1	0.94	0.24
19	red tape	84.52%	ND NL1	0.96	0.19
20	kick the bucket	80.95%	ND NL1	0.98	0.15

Note. 1: ND NL1: Non-decomposable idioms with no L1 equivalents, D NL1: Decomposable idioms with no L1 equivalents, D L1: Decomposable idioms with L1 equivalents

Table 6 presents the difficulty of idiom learning and the statistically significant factors affecting it. The most challenging idiom for the Korean L2 learners to self-study was *touch a nerve.* It is one of the decomposable idioms that have L1 equivalents and one of the least favored idioms. The most successfully self-studied idiom was *kick the bucket.* It is one of the non-decomposable idioms that has no L1 equivalents and one of the more favored idioms.

5. Discussion

5.1 The most challenging type of idioms to Korean L2 learners

The findings of idiom production in the present study seem unexpected in that they are different from those of idiom comprehension in previous research. Idioms which are decomposable and have L1 equivalents were found to be more difficult to learn than the nondecomposable idioms with no L1 counterparts. The reasons of the results can be explained in the following perspectives.

5.1.1 The way an idiom is learned reflects the way it is retrieved in production

To understand the findings regarding decomposability, it is useful to reiterate that since the present study excluded any instructional

variables, the learners self-studied the target idioms. Since the participants were freshmen college students, they may have used the learning skills they had been trained in their secondary education. According to Park & Song (2007)'s survey and interview with secondary school teachers, noncompositional view of idiom teaching focusing on rote memorization was most prevalent in Korea. This suggests that the learners in the present study may have felt accustomed to learning idioms by rote-memorization without any attempts to analyze the constituent items of each idiom. As a result, the advantage of decomposable idioms was not evident in the study.

In regard to the L1 effect, the findings suggest that the L1 effect was not found since the L1 was not used in the learners' learning method. This corroborates with Nam's study (2015) which suggested the positive effect of the L1 idiom knowledge on the L2 idiom production was attributed to the learners' learning method in which the L1 was used as a cue for memorization. This may explain the findings of the present research. In this study, the learners were not provided with any L1 information for learning, and since semantic analysis to retrieve L1 idiom knowledge may require extra efforts, they may have chosen simple rote-memorization skills for the test, which in turn did not lead to the L1 effect.

5.1.2 Different task methods may yield different results

As Laffey (2016) found, Korean L2 learners inferred the meaning of constituent word of unfamiliar idioms in idiom comprehension. However, different from many previous studies, the present study tested idiom production rather than comprehension. In idiom comprehension, if the overall meaning of the idiom is not available in the learners' mental lexicon, they are apt to resort to semantic analysis of each component of the idiom to infer its overall meaning. However, in idiom production as in the present study, since the overall meaning of the idiom was already provided for learning, the learners did not need to decompose the idiom for comprehension. Once the target idiom is learned, the direct link between the overall meaning and the idiom is developed. Then, the overall meaning of the idiom can be retrieved in the same way as other

single lexical item (see also, Direct Access Hypothesis in Gibbs, 1980), which as a result does not promote the effect of decomposability. In addition, the learners in the present study were aware that their idiom knowledge would be tested, which may have motivated them to focus on learning for memorization rather than semantic analysis for genuine comprehension. Therefore, it can be speculated that test type and learning goal can influence the results.

In regard to the L1 effect, the present study, different from the previous research, did not deploy any L1-inducing tasks such as translation tasks during the test. Furthermore, different from Nam's (2015) study that utilized L1 primes in the test, any presence of the L1 as a stimulus was not present in the current study. The different finding of the present study that is attributed to the different task methods suggests that not only the L1-based learning method but also the L1-inducing task method may influence the L1 effect.

5.2 Other factors affecting idiom learning

In addition to decomposability and cross-linguistic influence, the present study included two more variables which had not been dealt with in previous research. First, regarding the length of an idiom, negative relationship was found with idiom production in that longer idioms created more difficulty for the participants to learn. This implies that the idioms comprising a number of words may be psychologically burdensome for memorization. However, the negative relationship was not statistically significant. Rather than simple word counts, the accuracy of an idiom in production was affected by a particular word class. For example, a significant number of responses with incorrect use of articles (e.g, *kick a bucket* in place of *kick the bucket*) were found, which marked down the test scores of idiom production.

The learners' preference over certain idioms also affected their idiom production. A positive relationship was found, suggesting that the more favored an idiom was, the more successfully it could be learned. This may be understood in terms of learners' motivation for learning. As such, not only the linguistic properties of idioms but also the learners' psychological variables may affect their learning of idioms.

5.3 Pedagogical implications

In line with Nam's (2015, p.165) finding that "the way idioms are memorized may influence the way the idioms are retrieved", the present study identified the factors that make the Korean L2 learners' idiom learning rather challenging. In the absence of instruction that can promote the semantic analysis of idioms, the Korean L2 learners were inclined to use the rote-memorization skills for idiom learning. In addition, in the absence of the L1-promoting instruction, the L1 effect was not evident.

Therefore, some pedagogical suggestions can be made based on these findings. For those who seek to obtain the effect of decomposability and the L1 effect, certain level of semantic analysis of idioms including comparisons with the L1 may be useful in the idiom instruction. However, it should be noted that this does not suggest that educators should resort to drawing lexical associations between the L1 and the L2 idioms in the classroom. It is important to acknowledge that there are a considerable number of idioms that do not have matching L1 equivalents, and further, heavy reliance on the L1 may lead to the negligence of the importance of the L2 context. As Kim (2016) pointed out, idiom education in Korea has a strong need for various examples that provide their usage in contexts. Therefore, presenting the target L2 idioms in various contexts should also be important for the L2 learners to use in real-life contexts.

6. Conclusion

The present study identified the most challenging types of idioms to Korean L2 learners and the linguistic and psychological factors that may engender the difficulties in their idiom learning. In the absence of instruction which can promote either the semantic analysis of idioms or reference to the L1 equivalents, idioms which are decomposable and have L1 equivalents were found to be more difficult to learn than the nondecomposable idioms with no L1 counterparts.

In idiom production, which is different from idiom comprehension in the previous research, since the overall meaning of the idiom had already been provided for learning, the learners did not need to decompose the

idiom for comprehension. In the absence of the instruction focusing on decomposability, the Korean L2 learners used rote-memorization skills for idiom learning. Further, in the absence of the L1-promoting instruction, the L1 effect was not present. Different findings from the previous research suggest that test method and learners' orientation towards learning may influence the test results. More importantly, the learners' preference over certain idioms positively affected their idiom learning. This suggests that not only the linguistic properties of idioms but also the learners' psychological variables may affect their idiom learning.

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