Enhancing Idiom Competence of Iranian EFL Learners: Idiom Etymology and Short Story in Focus

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Learning the meaning and application of idiomatic expressions in English have always been challenging to the foreign language learners. This is mainly because such expressions display non-conventional and figurative senses. The present study was aimed to investigate authentic, systematic and influential ways of exposing EFL learners to idiomatic expressions. To this end, short stories, as an important component of literature, and etymological elaboration, as a crucial aspect of language, were used to present the meaning of such expressions to L2 learners. The participants in this study were 60 intermediate EFL learners studying at a private language institute, who were chosen based on their scores on Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Idiomatic expressions were taught to three groups: one control and two experimental groups. Expressions were taught to the control group through conventional method of description offered by the teacher, while the first experimental group was exposed to short stories to learn the same expressions, and the second experimental group was instructed through the application of etymological elaboration. Pre- and post-tests were administered at the beginning and at the end of the study, and the required data were analyzed by the use of SPSS. The findings of the study revealed the considerable effect of short stories in raising L2 learners' awareness of the concepts underlying idiomatic expressions in comparison with the use of etymological elaboration. Moreover, it disclosed the positive effect of the use of etymological elaboration in a higher level of idiomatic development in contrast to mere teacher descriptive definition used in the control group. The
results of this study can provide some useful ways for EFL/ESL teachers to expose EFL/ESL learners to idiomatic expressions using short story and idiom etymology. Keywords: conceptual system, etymology, idiom, idiomatic competence.