

Thinking in Chinese: Optimizing Strategies for Learning Figurative Language

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Abstract

Encountering the phrase “eat vinegar” in a Chinese text has nothing to do with cooking or dinner, instead, this idiomatic phrase means “to be jealous,” showing how literal translation misses the true meaning. Idioms are a serious problem for second language learners, since their meaning often depends on cultural knowledge rather than literal interpretation. Considering this, my research examines how learning strategies based on translation, cultural background, and context contribute to the understanding and production of Chinese idioms among multilingual learners. The main hypothesis is that students initially rely on literal translation and their own cultural background when interpreting idioms, but contextual information may improve understanding.

The project is within the framework of the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and is based on scientific knowledge in the field of idioms and translation pedagogy. Most of the existing research is devoted to English idioms and quantitative experiments, while teaching Chinese idioms remain insufficiently studied, especially in multilingual locations. However, my research bridges this gap by studying the assimilation of Chinese idioms by multilingual students in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the research utilizes the concept of idiom transparency, defined by Ebersberger (2010) as the extent to which the figurative meaning can be guessed from the idiom’s literal form. Thus, this key factor allows me to compare how different learning strategies operate depending on the idiom’s transparency.

The study used a mixed method combining quantitative tests of understanding and qualitative reflections of students. The experiment consisted of a translation and guessing task (stage 1), context-based recognition task (stage 2), and contextual production task (stage 3). Fifteen intermediate Chinese language learners took part in a three-step classroom experiment using twelve Chinese idioms. Those idioms were divided into more understandable ones for interpretation (transparent) and less understandable ones (opaque).

The results show some progress in understanding across three stages, and generally transparent idioms were easier to understand, while contextual cues reduced the difficulty of using opaque ones. The findings support the initial hypothesis, but the results also show that successful comprehension does not lead to effective productive usage, suggesting the need for future research in the field. Overall, this project illustrates that translation is a crucial starting strategy in learning Chinese idioms, but its meaningful assimilation requires knowledge of culture and contextual interaction.

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1. Introduction

Did you know that in China, a decent person would never read a “yellow book?” The color yellow carries with it a negative meaning, indicating x-rated content. This example demonstrates that figurative language and idioms function due to simple but culturally significant objects, like colors. A universal feature of idioms is that each idiom is specific to a particular place, and its content and meaning are imbued with historical and cultural context. This is supported by Korney Chukovsky (2012) who states that literal translation of idiomatic phrases leads to distortion due to the fact that the meaning of those expressions are culturally bound and must be interpreted figuratively (pp. 106-107). We usually notice this when we start learning a new language, especially when the culture of the target language is very different from our own traditions and perspectives. As I have studied Chinese language, I have come to understand the importance of “thinking in Chinese” meaning my goal was to know native speakers’ background in culture, so that I could use vocabulary and grammar naturally and freely. However, some parts of the language and culture are not acceptable to learn and understand fast enough to be on the level of a native speaker. For second-language learners, Chinese idioms can be both fascinating and intimidating, since idioms are very local, they cannot be understood only through grammar or vocabulary, as the cultural aspect is very crucial. Besides the complexity that idioms have, knowing and using idioms correctly indicates a high level of language proficiency, which leads to the ability to read complex literature and understand native speakers.

Considering the importance of idioms in language learning, this project focuses on the translation of idioms, as translation offers a practical method for exploring how learners navigate cultural and linguistic complexity. So, this work explores how non-native speakers of Chinese, like myself, often focus on translating and understanding Chinese idioms, as translation offers a practical way to explore how learners interact between language form and

cultural meaning. Initially the research builds the hypothesis that when non-native speakers translate idioms, they rely on their own cultural background to understand the meaning of unfamiliar word phrases. Idioms have a cultural aspect in their meaning which creates an assumption that students use both translation and cultural knowledge during learning activity to memorize new vocabulary.

Looking at the aspects of the translation and cultural knowledge in this project, the research is conducted within the broader field of Second Language Acquisition or SLA, with a focus on such subfields as translation studies and intercultural pragmatics. Also, the central language of the study is Chinese, as only idioms in this language are explored. By structuring the project in this way, the research aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion at SLA field about how cultural competence is connected with linguistic knowledge, especially in languages, where idioms contain deep cultural background.

The understanding of the importance of background depth comes from my experience of learning Chinese. Culture differences influenced my learning path, especially when I saw phrases that have colors. While idioms with colors are not commonly found in literature in the CIS countries and English culture, the Chinese language is full of expressions that use colors and elements of nature, like 白手起家, where the literal translation is “the white hands start the family/house” and the figurative meaning is “to achieve success through determination.” Even though this idiom is more than understandable, since in Kazakhstan people may consider white things as good or even divine, its meaning is not that straightforward.

When we encounter idioms, we can guess them by only relying on our cultural background and critical thinking skills. The guessing may be correct depending on the level of semantic transparency, a factor that all idioms have. Barbara Ebersberger (2010) defines transparency as the level of complexity with which an idiomatic expression may be

understood “from literal interpretations of its constituents” or in other words, of its components (p.3). Therefore, the semantic transparency may show how much of the figurative meaning of an idiom can be figured out from its literal meaning. This concept is crucial because it helps explain why some idioms are easier to learn than others. For instance, a transparent idiom 八九不离十 (lit. “eight or nine, not far from ten”) meaning “almost correct” provides a clue to its meaning through logic, while an opaque idiom such as 吃软 (lit. “to eat soft food”), which means “living off someone” does not give a clear hint of its literal wording. Therefore, understanding the difference between transparent and opaque idioms is important for developing effective learning strategies, as transparency affects how students interpret idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, as Nunberg et al. (1994) state idioms’ meaning cannot be entirely predicted from the literal meanings, since they have such property as “conventionality” (p.492). Thus, understanding each component of an idiom does not guarantee correct understanding of the figurative meaning. As a result, idioms with low transparency often require additional cognitive effort, as they rely more on memorization rather than analytical reasoning.

Relying on the experience of language learning and the assumption that translation and cultural background play key a role in memorising new words, this research raises two research question:

1. How do cultural-cue, translation-based, and context-based learning strategies individually and jointly support L2 learners’ comprehension and productive use of Chinese idioms in Kazakhstan multilingual context?
2. How does idiom transparency level influence the effectiveness of idiom acquisition through these strategies?

Thus, this project aims to show how integrating general cues about the culture in the learned language can help students move from passive recognition to productive

use of idioms. This paper supposes that transparent idiomatic phrases are easier for learners to understand and memorise, while the opaque ones need more work with. Also, by conducting the experiment in a multilingual space this research contributes to the gap of exploring students from an environment where their language learning strategies may be shaped by many different languages.

2. Literature Review

For this study, I reviewed the literature within the framework of second language acquisition (SLA), focusing on how translation and cultural background intersect when learning idioms. The literature review is divided into three sections: the role of idioms in SLA, translation as a teaching method, and Chinese learning. By organising the review in this order, I move from general challenge of idioms in language learning to translation-based strategies that may improve understanding, finishing with specifics of Chinese culture to contextualise these approaches.

The first section focuses on the idea that idioms are a serious problem for second language learners, since figurative meaning often escapes literal understanding and depends on cultural knowledge and transparency level. Further the review discovers that teaching idioms is also about teaching translation. Translation is not just a passive exercise, but an active cognitive process that requires students to notice and comprehend linguistic forms and cultural nuances in both their native and second languages. Finally, I am narrowing down the literature to the main language of the study, namely Chinese and its culture. As the first two sections explain complexity of idioms and the importance of translation in language learning, the last section establishes visual and structural complexities of Chinese. By studying the assimilation of Chinese idioms by multilingual speakers, this study fills the research gap regarding non-Western languages and different strategies used by learners in multilingual

environments.

2.1 The Role of Idioms in SLA

The theoretical perspectives provided by SLA scholars directly shaped the methodology of this project. As for instance, a methodological review by Heidari and Aliyar (2025) shows that although idioms are crucial for fluency in a language, there are significant research gaps in the field of SLA in this area. Firstly, most studies focus closely on English idioms and rely on quantitative experiments. Moreover, they often overlook factors such as idioms' features, varying levels of language proficiency, and sampling rigor (finding participants and data for study). The review highlights that idioms include linguistic and cultural components, and ignoring non-English idioms creates a “skewed perspective on idiom acquisition” (Heidari & Aliyar, 2025, p. 172). This research contributes to the SLA by providing a methodological map of idiom research, demonstrating biases. For instance, in relation to English, most studies prefer to look at explicit teaching methods, such as direct explanation of idioms, and involve intermediate level students. This shows that some language learners and languages are overrepresented, while others are neglected. So, in my research by focusing on Chinese as a target language, this project partially fills the gap left by dominance of English idiomatic studies. Furthermore, by conducting the experiment in Kazakhstan, I address the lack of research on how students from diverse linguistic backgrounds use their cultural logic to Chinese idioms. The interaction between multiple language systems and a new culture highlights the complexity of idiomatic expressions and the study.

According to a number of SLA studies the ease of remembering an idiom depends on its level of transparency. The more transparent an idiom is, whether figuratively or literally, the easier it is to remember (Ebersberger, 2010). The study distinguishes between two types

of transparency. The first is metaphorical transparency, when figurative meanings of idioms can be determined using a metaphorical display. Another one is literalness, when the literal component provides a key to understanding the meaning. Ebersberger (2010) makes a hypothesis that both of them have a positive effect on memory. The results show that idioms with higher metaphorical or literal transparency are remembered more accurately, while idioms that are semantically opaque and culturally unfamiliar are harder to remember. For example, the research considered idioms like “be an Ignorant Lindsay,” with the literal meaning of “ignorant,” were easier to remember than opaque ones.

This tendency to rely on literal components demonstrates that L2 learners often first translate idioms literally, using L1 language equivalents or guessing them based on familiar vocabulary (Cooper, 1999). When the literal meaning cannot be understood, they look for contextual clues or reconstruct the meaning by analogy. Moreover, Cooper (1999) by exploring how English language learners understand idiomatic expressions stated that idioms similar to L1 language expressions are easier for students to learn. This study supports the hypothesis of my research about the influence of transparency of idioms on the learning process.

Studies also highlight the importance of context. For example, Türker (2016) finds that idioms that are similar in both languages are easier to learn at first, but when students get enough context, they do not have to depend so much on their native language. Türker (2016) conducted an experimental project that involved 36 English-speaking students studying Korean. The study used three categories of idioms: the same L1–L2, different L1–L2, and only for L2. Also, the study used three types of tasks, like production, interpretation, and meaning. For example, the production task meant that students had to remember the idiom themselves and use it, for instance, to fill in a missing word in a sentence. Türker (2016) concluded that thanks to the rich context students can learn idioms that are not found in their

native language. Thus, context matters more than similarity of idioms. Using this study I incorporate various stages for my experiment to observe the difference in the results across each type of task. Furthermore, in my research I study how context in Chinese influences idiom understanding.

2.2 Translation as a Teaching Method in SLA

Linguistics and translation studies researchers question the idea that translation is outdated, claiming that translation is cognitive and pedagogical for L2 students. Early works, such as Cordero (1984), laid the foundation for rethinking translation as a legitimate and useful method within the framework of SLA, as translation plays a greater role than memorizing grammatical constructions. The author argues that translation is a valuable skill and works as a pedagogical tool if it is used correctly, since it develops understanding, vocabulary, linguistic awareness, and prepares for professional translation work. Thus, translation functions not only as a teaching method, but also “as a method of furthering proficiency in the foreign language,” which strengthens its legitimacy within the framework of L2 pedagogy (Cordero, 1984, p.351). In the context of my study, Cordero’s perspective guided the inclusion of translation-based tasks as a main component of the experimental design.

Translation should work as a tool to complement teaching methods and not replace them. On importance of translation Izumi (1995) notes, direct methods that rely on making language learning understandable through gestures or visuals is often impractical, because those methods are suited only for studying specific everyday topics, while for abstract words there can be a “danger of misinterpretation by learners or too much effort required from teachers” (p.227). However, translation can help students understand the meaning quickly before they fully master L2, since association of a word in L2 with the word from the first

language reduces the dependence on the native language with every encounter with this word in different contexts. Thus, translation, if considered within the framework of the communicative and cognitive paradigms, should be considered as a legitimate form of teaching a second language and as a link between SLA and translator training. However, the methodology of this study does not provide participants with a list of idiom translations. Instead, this project uses translation as an active discovery tool, challenging learners to translate idioms by their own as a part of a cognitive process.

Also, it is important to note that some researchers, such as Machida (2011), consider the translation process as an active language learning process, when earlier it was thought that it is a passive method. Translation requires students to notice and reflect on linguistic forms and some cultural nuances in both their native and second language. Thus, translation is a bridge between linguistic systems and cultural frameworks of both languages, which deepens understanding and cognitive connections for learning (Machida, 2011). Furthermore, it is claimed that L1 and L2 are not stored separately in the brain, but share a common conceptual network. In this way, translation activates and strengthens the links between both languages. Using Machida's conclusions my research uses translation tasks as a means of observing how students use cross-linguistic connections when translating idioms.

2.3 Chinese Language Learning

As it was stated before, minimal attention is paid to Chinese idioms, which reveals a gap in research directly related to learning Chinese. Besides the neglect, Chinese idioms usually have complex grammar structures and are poorly studied because existing resources, like textbooks or dictionaries, do not always provide sufficiently accurate definitions. Also, they are not able to show the full range of grammatical functions. Wang and Luo (2021) argue that the corpus approach can improve the teaching of idioms by providing several

examples that emphasize meaning and grammatical function. They examined 100 examples of sentences with the idiom 拔苗助长 (lit. “helping shoots grow by pulling them out”; fig. “demanding quick results contrary to the laws of nature”) and only 4 used a literal meaning, while 96 used a figurative one. Thus, they demonstrated that Chinese idioms often have multiple meanings, which makes the process of learning Chinese idioms difficult. This study affected the experiment of my research in a way of how sentence-based tasks help to understand how participants interpret idioms in context and whether they can distinguish between literal and figurative meanings.

Another crucial factor that we can meet in idioms is the fact that idioms are culturally ingrained expressions of a language. Since idiomatic language is figurative so that components of such phrases, translators need strategies to ensure that the audience who sees the translation reacts similarly to the audience of the source. Based on this information Zhang and Wang (2010) emphasize Eugene Nida’s theory of functional equivalence in translating Chinese idioms into English. Functional equivalence theory means that a translation has the same effect on the target audience that the original text had on its original audience. Thus, instead of focusing only on the accuracy of the translation, the translator should prioritize how readers understand the text. The authors argue that Nida’s theory offers a great base for translating idioms, because it focuses on the perceiver’s reaction rather than formal equivalence. Therefore, they argue that translators should strive for the “closest natural equivalent,” making a balance between fidelity and meaning (Zhang&Wang, 2010, p.881). Although literal translation works in some cases, it often fails when the cultural background is unclear to the target reader. In such cases, other methods are needed to achieve functional equivalence, such as free translation, borrowing, or omission.

Adding to translation of idioms, Wen and van Heuven (2017) investigated English-to-Chinese translation norms by examining how bilinguals translate single English

words into Chinese. The main claim of their article is that translation ambiguity is widespread and influenced by lexical and participant-related variables, like word frequency, concreteness, and bilingual proficiency. The authors argue that having a large standard database of translation norms is crucial for bilingual and translation research. The complexity of the Chinese language also extends to the visual and structural levels. These results help explain the variability in participants' responses in my research, as differences in language proficiency and vocabulary familiarity may have affected the accuracy of interpreting or translating idioms.

In addition to other difficulties in studying Chinese, Li, Shi, and Wang (2025) demonstrate that similarities between Chinese characters can increase cognitive load and confusion. This refers to errors found in this study when participants confused symbols or changed their order, indicating difficulties not only with meaning, but also with spelling. Thus, learning Chinese idioms requires not only semantic and contextual understanding, but also careful attention to character form, which complicates the acquisition process of this language. This complication arises because learners must process multiple layers at the same time, as they need to recognize the character correctly, translate it, and interpret the meaning. Therefore, cognitive load increases, which makes meaning understanding more difficult to get.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed mixed methods, combining quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative part consists of short comprehension tests, while the qualitative part includes students' reflections, collected through a brief survey at the end of the first stage. This design was chosen because the acquisition of idioms is

considered a cognitive process that can be analysed using accuracy measures, and the understanding of culture can be better understood through open feedback from students. Moreover, mixed methods are encouraged in current idiom research, since most of the existing studies rely heavily on experimental quantitative methods, ignoring the subjective experiences of learners (Haydari&Aliyar, 2025, p.166). The authors argue that this narrow focus may lead to a lack of consideration of the interactions between factors such as cultural background and the learner's own psychology. In my research, each participant completed a structured sequence of tasks during a class time of Chinese lessons

3.2 Participants

The study involved 15 students who are taking intermediate-level Chinese courses at an English-language university in Kazakhstan and know approximately 1,000 characters. All of them are fluent in three languages, namely Kazakh and Russian as dominant societal and personal languages, and English as the main language for their study. This means that during the research students did not use only one language system, instead they worked with several linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The first reason why this group was chosen is that the idioms are appropriate for their level of Chinese proficiency. At the intermediate level of the language, students already have sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to literally translate many popular idioms and phrases, as they are composed of daily-used characters. However, knowing the characters is not sufficient to use idioms freely without understanding their figurative meaning. As Türker (2016) notes, idiomatic knowledge often lags behind general vocabulary knowledge, making students at this level suitable for testing (p.133). Secondly, students are taught at the same university and class-level, which reduces significant differences in language proficiency differences. Thus, it ensures that test results reflect the effect of idiom translation rather than general language abilities. Finally, it is feasible to give

a group of 15 people several tasks related to the topics they have covered and still obtain enough data for analysis. Additionally, the experiment was conducted during Chinese language classes under the supervision of the participants' professor. The teacher has shown an academic interest in the topic of the research since this is consistent with the broader goals of Chinese language teaching, namely the development of cultural awareness and understanding complex phrases. Also, her participation helped to create a comfortable atmosphere for the participants because students were familiar with her teaching style and expectations, so they were more likely to take the assignment seriously.

3.3 Materials

The key part of the methodology is the careful selection of idioms. The idioms were chosen based on the following principles:

1. Level of difficulty: characters in idioms are comprehensible to intermediate learners.

This ensures that the tasks would test idiomatic knowledge rather than basic vocabulary.

2. Balance of transparent and opaque idioms: Some idioms not only intuitively understandable, but also common across languages, such as 黑马 (lit. "black horse"; fig. "an unexpected winner"), while others are exclusively Chinese, such as 冷门 and 热门 (lit. "cold door" and "warm door"; fig. "unexpected event" and "expected event"). Including both types allows this experiment to test whether translation works differently depending on the cross-linguistic similarity.

3. A variety of topics: Idioms were taken from daily-used topics such as food, animals, colors, and numbers. This range prevents overexposure to a single topic.

Considering the principles above, for the research each student worked with 12 Chinese idioms that are in the tables below, where the first table represents transparent idioms, while the second one shows opaque phrases.

Transparent Idioms

Idiom	Literal Translation	Actual Meaning
丢脸 (diū liǎn)	lose face	to feel ashamed / lose reputation
大鱼吃小鱼 (dà yú chī xiǎo yú)	big fish eat small fish	the strong overpower the weak
话里有话 (huà lǐ yǒu huà)	words inside have words	hidden meaning
八九不离十 (bā jiǔ bù lí shí)	eight, nine, not far from ten	almost correct

Opaque Idioms

Idiom	Literal Translation	Actual Meaning
爱吃醋 (ài chī cù)	love eungratefulat vinegar	to be jealous
白眼狼 (bái yǎn láng)	white-eye wolf	an ungrateful person
吃软饭 (chī ruǎn fàn)	eat soft food	live off someone
红人 (hóng rén)	red person	a favored or popular person
热门 (rè mén)	hot door	trending topic
二百五 (èr bǎi wǔ)	two hundred five	a silly person
不管三七二十一 (bù guǎn sān qī èr shí yī)	regardless three seven two one	to act without hesitation
一日千里 (yī rì qiān lǐ)	one day thousand miles	to progress very fast

3.4 Instruments and Procedure*Pilot Phase*

Before the main research, the pilot phase was conducted, in which ten students from the English-speaking university of Kazakhstan answered a survey using a Google form. They were asked to translate 12 Chinese idioms literally (see the tables above) and then to guess their figurative meaning. They could answer in any language that is

comfortable for them.

This initial experimental work with students has shown that people often start by translating idioms into their native language or English, and then use their personal or cultural knowledge to guess the meaning. Most of the mistakes in this phase occurred not because of a lack of vocabulary, but because of a lack of cultural understanding. These results suggested that although translation helps students navigate the structure of idioms, a cultural context is still necessary for their correct interpretation. Thus, the experimental data of the pilot phase served as the basis for the development of the questionnaire and the three-stage design, starting with short cultural cues and doing the translation tasks, then moving on to context recognition, and finalising with context production tasks

Main experiment (pre-stage + three stages)

On three consecutive days, each participant attended regular Chinese language classes, where the researcher at the beginning of the class handed out assignment sheets that included a questionnaire. The researcher briefly explained the format, but did not provide any hints or explanations regarding the meanings of the idioms. For better results, students were allowed to use any language that was comfortable for them, namely Kazakh, Russian or English. Also, they were prohibited to use phones, any other sources or discuss the test with others. Besides this, some words in the text that were not related to idioms were translated, as learners of this level have a limited vocabulary and to make the context of tasks more understandable it was needed to use words that students have not learnt yet.

Looking at the results of the control group in the pilot phase, the experiment was created and divided into a pre-stage and three stages that took place over the course of three lessons. Each stage corresponded to increasing cognitive complexity, from

recognition to production. This sequence allowed for a comparison of the understanding and application of new idioms.

Instead of giving students a list of definitions, the experiment provided them with a list of cultural associations, using certain characters found in the idioms. It was in the pre-stage that had Chinese characters with the theme of colors, animals, numbers. Such a method was done to direct students' guessing, so that cultural cues activated basic knowledge and prepared students to perceive idioms from a cultural point of view. As a result, the next list was printed for the students:

1. Red (红) = good.
2. White (白) = negative.
3. Face (脸) = person.
4. Fish (鱼) = survival.
5. Hot (热) = good.
6. Wolf (狼) = negative
7. Eating = dependence.
8. Numbers may show closeness, growth or character.

After receiving the list with those cues, students could start the first stage, which is a translation and guessing task (about 20 minutes). Participants could use cultural cues during this stage. Each student received 12 idioms written in Chinese characters. Students had to write a literal translation into any convenient language for them, and then guess a possible figurative meaning in order to reveal how students use translation and their own cultural logic to interpret idioms. For example, participants needed to translate and guess the idiom 红人 (lit. "red person"; fig. "popular person") and they could find in the list with cultural cues that "红" (red) means "good" So, they needed to fill in the table, like this:

No	Idiom	Literal Translation	Guessed Meaning	Confidence (1–5)
1	红人 hóng rén			

For each idiom students rated their level of confidence for guessing the phrase. Also, they optionally answered short answer questions and wrote general information about them that may influence the results.

At the beginning of the following class period (approximately 10 minutes), was a short reading and the opportunity to choose from several options. Each text contained one idiom used in a one to two sentence situation, followed by four possible meanings. This part may assess how well students recognize idioms in context. Thus, students got papers with 12 sentences, like this:

1. 他是一个红人。每个人都知道他，因为他太有钱了。

[tā shì yī gè **hóng rén** 。 měi gè rén dōu zhī dào tā , yīn wéi tā tài yǒu qián le 。]

- A. a popular person
- B. a rich person
- C. a funny person
- D. an angry person

The third stage is a contextual production task and it was the next day after the second one (about 20 minutes). So, it included the productive use of idioms in sentences with missing words. This stage consisted of two parts, where in part A, students were given a wordbank, while in part B, they had to rely on their memories alone. Two idioms were not applicable in part A, but they should have been used in another part, where the list of the

idioms was not given, so that four sentences check the production of idioms using students' memory to apply some idioms from the previous stages. This section may assess whether students can remember and correctly apply idioms without prompting. Below is the sample of the tasks that students got.

Task 1: Below you can see six sentences with blanks. Use the idioms from the list in [...]. There are *two* idioms that are not for these sentences. Please do this stage first before going to another stage.

Chinese Characters List	Pinyin
红人	hóng rén
一日千里	yī rì qiān lǐ

1. 他现在是_____, 大家都知道他, 因为他特别有名。
[tā xiàn zài shì gè _____, dà jiā dōu zhī dào tā, yīn wéi tā tè bié yǒu míng.]

Task 2: Below you can see six sentences with blanks. Try to fill in the blanks with idioms from previous stages. You may write characters or pinyin (it is okay not to write tones). *You may put (-) in case there is no idea what to write.*

1. 今天我们有考试, 但是他忘了带笔了, 他真是_____
[jīn tiān wǒ men yǒu kǎo shì, dàn shì tā wàng le dài bǐ le, tā zhēn shì gè _____!]

Each section was filled in individually. The teacher and researcher stayed in the classroom to introduce the instructions and clarify them, but did not help students with the meaning of idioms. Also, 14 out of 15 participants completed all three consecutive stages of the experiment, where only one participant did not come to class during the Stage 2, which could slightly affect the results.

4. Results

For all participants, the average overall accuracy of understanding idioms increased from 15% (recognition) to 88% (reception) and 53% (production), respectively, in the three stages. Transparency correlates with the correctness of answers. The bar chart below (Table 1) shows how opaque and transparent idioms behave in three stages. The main pattern is that

the percentage of correct answers in Stage 2 is extremely high for both factors, while in Stage 1 it is very low, especially for the opaque idioms, and in Stage 3 the results are in the middle. Another pattern is that transparent idioms consistently scored higher results at all stages, while the opaque ones were always lower, especially in Stage 1, which was the lowest (6.05%). Then, the gap between transparent and opaque idioms narrowed in Stage 2, which suggests that context reduces the impact of idiom opacity. However, Stage 3 showed that productive use of Chinese idioms remains a challenge, since deeper cultural integration is required for memorization.

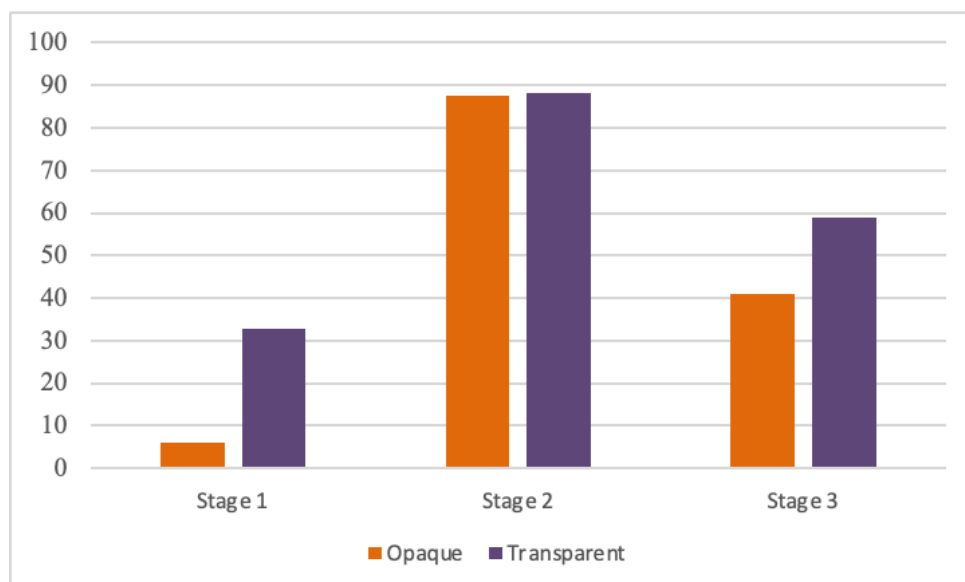


Table 1: Opaque and Transparent Idioms across 3 stages

The three-stage comparison shows some patterns, like in Stage 1, participants mainly relied on their background knowledge, but general cues created the direction to interpret idiomatic phrases for most of the students. In Stage 2, understanding of idioms improved significantly due to contextual cues. While in the third stage, the accuracy of responses decreases as students move from understanding to the production, which requires a deeper integration of cultural knowledge.

4.1 Pilot phase: online translation and guessing

The answers from Google forms showed that for idioms that are transparent, for example, 大鱼吃小鱼 (lit. “big fish eats small fish”; fig. “the strong overpower the weak”), 90% of participants guessed the accuracy correctly, while the percent of correct answers for opaque idioms were lower, like “吃软饭,” (lit. “eat soft food”; fig. “to live off someone”) which was only 10% correct answers. Many students reported that they first used a literal translation, and then relied on their cultural background from their native language to determine the meaning. By conducting this phase, the results formed the further research by coming to the conclusion that participants need to activate cultural knowledge before translation practice. For instance, an idiom 热门 (lit. hot door; fig. popular topic) was translated correctly by 100% of participants, while only 20% guessed the figurative meaning. Most of the participants found idioms complicated to comprehend, especially opaque ones, but through open comments elaborated that cultural background helped with guessing. As one of the participants stated “...knowledge of some proverbs and sayings in my native language helped me to associate them with Chinese ones.” The results and comments demonstrate language learners guess the phrases through their knowledge. Thus, before the translation task students should get some directions with general culture cues which can support more accurate interpretation of idioms.

As cultural cues decided to be a pre-stage and a part of the first stage, before starting the main experiment, participants answered the general survey and according to it they spent between 4 and 12 hours a week studying Chinese, including the four academic hours of the classes, making the average of seven hours of studying looking at their answers. Additionally, 86.6% of participants indicated that Russian or English was their primary language of communication. Also, about 80% of the students reported that they thought in English or Russian when learning Chinese, while only two of them sometimes thought in Kazakh and

one in Chinese. Thus, these results confirm the linguistic and cultural diversity of the students, which may affect further results.

4.2 The first stage: recognition

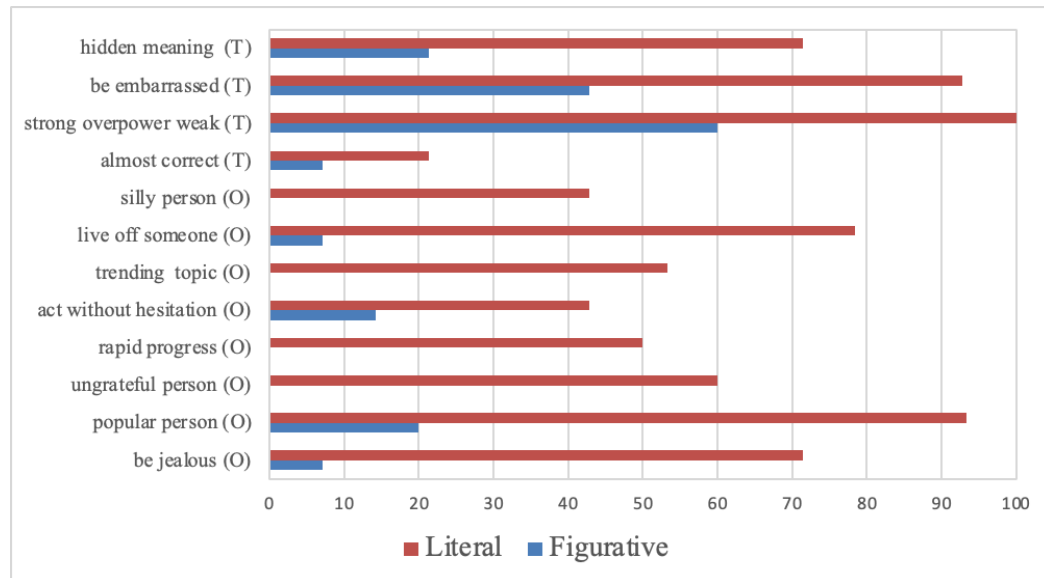


Table 2: % of Correct Answers for Figurative Meaning and Literal Translation

In Stage 1, participants were asked to translate the idioms literally from Chinese to any language that is convenient for them and then guess their figurative meaning. Stage 1 showed that the average accuracy of literal translation was 65%, while the average accuracy of understanding the meaning of idioms was 15%. This difference suggests that students generally understood the vocabulary of idioms, but it was more challenging to grasp deeper cultural meaning. Idioms with transparent imagery, such as 大鱼吃小鱼 (lit. “big fish eats small fish”; fig. “the strong overpower the weak”) and 丢脸 (lit. “to lose face”; fig. “to be ashamed”), achieved the highest rates of comprehension in figurative senses (60% and 42.8% respectively). In contrast, opaque idioms, such as “吃软饭,” (lit. “eat soft food”; fig. “to live off someone”) and 一日千里 (lit. “one day a thousand miles”; fig. “rapid progress”), were much less frequently understood (6% and 0% respectively).

At the end of this experiment, they gave some feedback about the importance of cultural references. 14 out of 15 students found general cues, which were distributed in the beginning, were useful to do the task. The qualitative comments obtained from Stage 1 support the quantitative patterns. Many students noted that idioms “made more sense” when they knew why certain symbols, like a color, had certain positive or negative connotations. For example, after learning that “red” equals something good in Chinese culture, students did not think about negative connotations of this word, as being aggressive or blood-related things. Even though the accuracy for 红人 (lit. “red person”; fig. “popular person”) was not high (20%), most of the students (66.7%), understood it as “the person is good” or “the person is favoured,” which is quite close to the original meaning of “a popular person.” However, in some answers students did not use general facts, as one of the participants guessed 红人 (lit. “red person”; fig. “popular person”) as “communist” and two other participants depended on their own cultural background and understood it as “an aggressive person.” Moreover, participants reported that even when they recognized individual characters, they tended to interpret the idiom according to the logic of their native language. For example, one participant translated 白眼狼 (fig. “ungrateful person”) literally as “white eye wolf”) and assumed that it meant a popular Russian phrase “белая ворона” (lit. “white crow) with the negative meaning of a person who is different from others. This may demonstrate a logical but culturally inaccurate interpretation.

Based on the results of the pilot phase, I expected that participants in this stage would do a translation task relatively high, achieving 90% of success rate with some minor mistakes or misunderstandings. However, the actual rate of correct answers for this part of the task was 64.8%. The difference in almost 25% in the expected result showed that many students struggled due to two main issues in this task. The first one is that students did not know some characters, so they put a minus or a question mark near them. While the translation accuracy

in the first stage could have been higher, some words, such as 不管, (regardless) from 不管三七二十一 (lit. regardless of the consequences three seven twenty one; fig. to act without hesitation) were not familiar to the students, so it affected the results.

The second issue was that they often confused visually similar characters. According to Wen and van Heuven (2017), surface processing strategies such as visual recognition of characters often lead to instability of lexical representations and increased error rates, especially in tasks that require cognitive effort. In addition, Zhang and Wang (2010) emphasize that Chinese characters often have visual and semantic similarities, which increases cognitive load and increases the risk of confusion among L2 level students. So, even though the participant's vocabulary knowledge might have been enough to do the task, some words were translated due to other factors like inattentiveness.

The problem with confusing characters may be explained through polysemy or in other words in Chinese many characters have multiple meanings, such as “日,” which can represent both “the sun” and “the day,” which could influence the interpretation of idioms. Another case is the character “里” which appeared in two idioms but had different meanings, namely “mile” and “inside.” The complexity of Chinese idioms of having polysemy and cultural aspects make students rely on familiar semantic patterns or cultural analogies from their L1, which can lead to creative but inaccurate interpretations. As Gryzbek (2009) states, polysemy in Chinese characters may create ambiguity due to the fact that translation usually depends on a context. Idioms are cognitively and socially rooted, meaning that learners need both lexical and contextual knowledge to understand the intended meaning. For example, one of the participants translated the idiom 话里有话 (lit. “words have words inside”; lit. “hidden meaning”) as “speech, mile, have, speech.” So, the guess was a Russian idiom “the tongue will take you to Kiev,” which means that speaking with different people can help a person get the needed help or answer. Thus, instead of getting the right meaning from this transparent

idiom, this translation reminded another idiom from the cultural background of a person.

Idioms are cognitively and socially rooted, meaning that learners need both lexical and contextual knowledge to understand the intended meaning.

Beside polysemy, another issues was that some Chinese characters look similar with each other, such as 日(day/sun), 百(hundred), and 白(white), and all of them appeared in the same questionnaire, which also affected the translation. Li, Shi, and Wang (2025) argue that orthographic similarity increases mental effort during lexical processing, especially for learners that learn languages with the need of developing character awareness, like Chinese. Thus, when symbols have common structural components or similar stroke patterns, students may rely on surface visual cues rather than accurate morphological analysis. For instance, an idiom 二百五 (lit. two, hundred, five; fig. a silly person) was translated as “two, white, five,” so that a student could not guess the meaning and rated 1 out of 5 for the confidence for this idiom. Thus here a student mixed up 百(hundred) with 白(white). According to Machida (2009), the translation process is about “noticing” or in other words it requires students to pay close attention to both form and meaning (p.741). Therefore, the confusion between visually similar symbols demonstrates how translation reveals gaps in spelling and character recognition.

The errors found during the experiment of literal translation were not accidental. Rather, they revealed weaknesses in students’ visual processing. So, incorrect interpretation of the hieroglyph led to an inaccurate semantic hypothesis, which then formed a common interpretation of the idiom. Thus, the selection of idioms in the further studies should take into account the factor of how the characters’ appearance in them. Furthermore, the positive results for idioms with numbers were low and the confidence rate was not high. Those idioms were translated incorrectly because of misreading the characters or not knowing them at all.

Besides the results for the translation part, the number of correct answers for guessing figurative meaning was not high and regardless of the positive use of general cues, some participants noted that a literal translation was “not enough” because idioms require emotional or social understanding. Several participants could not use cues for idioms with numbers as they were “too general” and it was hard to guess them. That is why, number idioms, such as 二百五 (lit. “250”; fig. “silly person”), had low percent of correct answers and many students could not write any meaning for them. In case of 二百五 (lit. “250”; fig. “silly person”), all of the answers were incorrect and 73.3% of participants put a minus (-) as they did not know what to write. Only 13.3% of participants used their background knowledge, as one participant mixed up “250” with another Chinese phrase “520,” which means “I love you,” so the answer “I like you” was written. Another case is the answer “I have known him for 205 years” with the meaning of “this person is really close to me.” These examples show that cultural background plays a big role in understanding idioms, despite their intransparency. As Zhang and Wang (2010) claim that literal translation might not be enough, since for some idioms “the historical background or their origin” should be acknowledged (p.883). Incorrect responses by students reflect compensatory strategies based on superficial analytical processing rather than deep conceptual integration (Wen & van Heuven, 2017). It may show that lexical reasoning is not an accurate method in teaching the idioms, since cultural understanding is also important.

4.3 The Second Stage: Reception

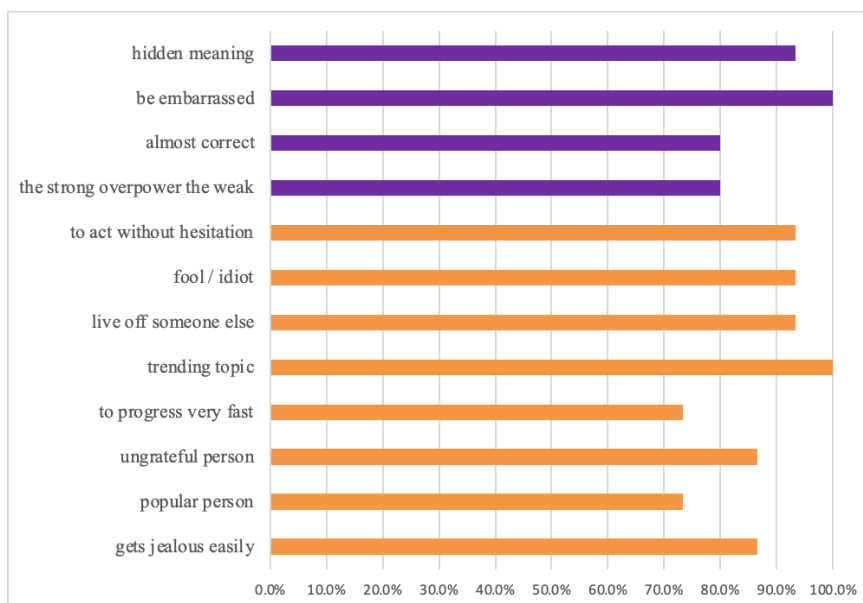


Table 3: Correct Answers in Stage 2

In the second stage, participants were presented with each idiom in a brief text, and they had to choose the most appropriate meaning of the idiom from four options. The results of this stage demonstrate a clear improvement compared to the first stage. While understanding the meaning of idioms, the recognition accuracy was again in favor of transparent idioms (see Table 3; transparent - purple; opaque - orange). Thus, transparent idioms such as 话里有话 (lit. “words have words inside”; lit. “hidden meaning”) and 丢脸 (lit. “to lose face”; fig. “to be ashamed”), and achieved almost perfect accuracy (93.3% and 100% respectively), while opaque phrases remained difficult but the results were still high, like 白眼狼 (fig. “ungrateful person”; lit. “white eye wolf”) which had 86.6% of correct answers.

Based on the fact that most of the results, both for transparent (88.3%) and opaque (87.4%) idioms are high, this stage shows that contextual cues significantly improved students’ understanding of idioms that were initially unclear. This supports the hypothesis that cultural factors and contextual learning improve the understanding of idioms. This

improvement in the results shows that context determines the strategies students use when interpreting idioms. As Rohani et al. (2012) support the idea that students do not rely on just one mechanism, but instead combine prior knowledge and their logical capabilities (p.108). Even idioms that were initially misunderstood became recognizable after being presented with context-based sentences. As for an opaque idiom 吃软饭 (lit. “eat soft food”; fig. “to live off someone”) the results of guessing in the first stage was only 6%, while in the second stage there was an increase up to 93.3%. Such an increase in accuracy may indicate that students stopped literally perceiving the phrases and began using context to determine the figurative meaning.

However, the results of the second stage also show that context does not completely eliminate difficulties with opaque idioms, even when they are presented in context. This conclusion can be explained through Cooper (1999) who states that literal components of idiomatic expressions contain a little amount of useful information, so students try to use a variety of strategies that might not be that effective in comparison with understanding transparent phrases (p.236). As a result, students rely on context, which leads to incorrect interpretations. Students’ incorrect answers show that although context can guide understanding, it can also mislead participants if it is ambiguous. Thus, the understanding of idioms depends not only on the context, but also on the interaction between the context. This result aligns with findings by Rohani et al. (2012) who emphasize that students actively choose strategies based on how idioms “are understood in relation to the context in which they are used,” which explains why some participants succeeded, while others relied on incorrect cues (p.105).

The idiom with the least correct answers was an opaque idiom 红人 (lit. “red person”; fig. “popular person”), chosen correctly by 66.7% of participants. The sentence was, “他是一个红人。每个人都知道他, 因为他太有钱了,” which translates as “he is a really popular

person (lit.red person). Every person knows him, because he is rich.” The wording of the sentence was based on the fact that usually in Chinese culture only “red person” is so rich that every human knows it. The options for this multiple choice question was: a rich person; a funny person; an angry person; a popular person, which is the correct answer. Here two of the answers suit the meaning, namely “rich” and “popular” options, while other answers do not support the meaning, but they could be interpreted in this way without the context. Out of five incorrect answers, four students chose “a rich person” and only one chose “a funny person.” Choosing the word “rich ” instead of “popular” suggests that students were influenced by the context’s components, namely the word “rich,” rather than the actual figurative meaning of the idiom. Such misinterpretation is explained by Guo (2007) who argues that understanding idioms requires “active mental participation” meaning that students try to construct meaning based through perceived associations rather than common idiomatic expressions (p.160). In this case, the misinterpretation between wealth and popularity led to a partial understanding and wrong interpretation.

4.4 The third stage: production

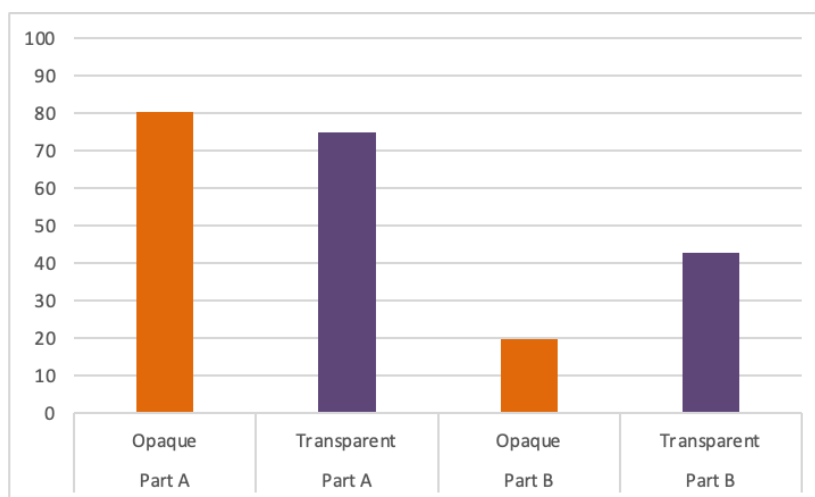


Table 4: Average % of Correctness among transparent and opaque idioms

The final stage involved the practical application of idioms in context. The questionnaire evaluated students' ability to memorize and correctly apply idioms in the context of a given sentence. It was divided into two parts, where the first part had six sentences and a word bank to be put in blank spaces, and the second part was the same, but without a word bank. The average number of correct answers among the participants was 77.68% for part A and 31.25% for part B, which indicates a decrease compared to the recognition stage. This decrease suggests that productive skills develop more slowly than comprehension, which highlights the mechanism of idiom acquisition. The decrease in students' scores at this stage is consistent with Šarić (2022) who claims that students are better at receptive tasks than productive ones, since production requires deeper processing and a more precise knowledge (p.106). Adding to this, Webb (2008) argues that vocabulary develops gradually and that memorizing lexical units requires more cognitive effort than recognizing them in the context (p.232). Therefore, this research explains why productive skills develop more slowly than comprehension.

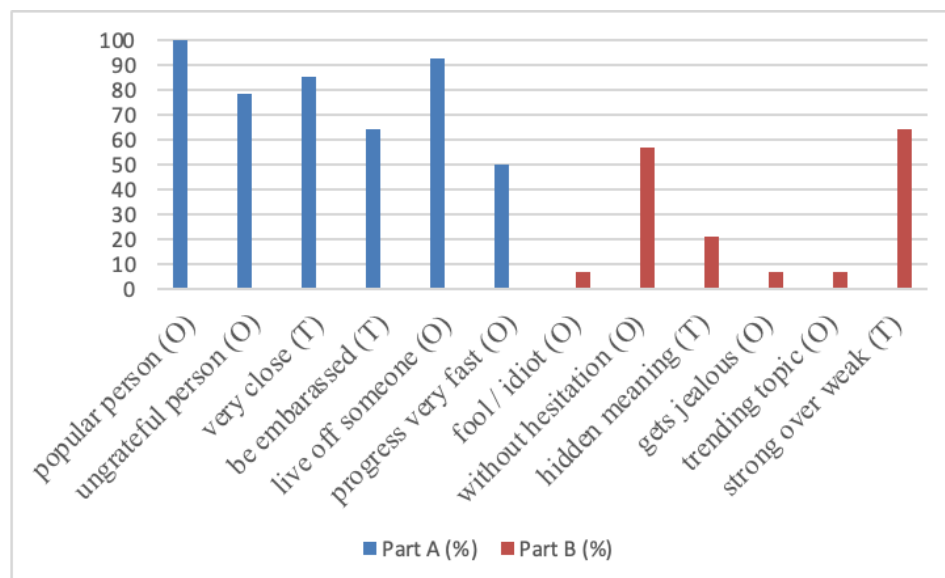


Table 5: Correct Answers in Stage 3

Most participants carefully used transparent idioms with an average of 75% for part A and 42.86% for part B. However, opaque idioms, such as 热门 (lit. “hot door”; fig. “popular/expected topic”), were confused or not even written, so the percent of correct answers for both part A and part B were 80.36% and 19.64% respectively. For example, several students placed in part B an idiom “红人” (lit. “red person”; fig. “popular person”), in the sentence describing popularity of an object, which reflects a lack of understanding of the use of this word. The sentence was:

这几年, AI是最_____的专业之一 (*one of*), 所以很多大学都有这个专业。

“This year AI is one of _____ majors, so many universities have this major.”

The correct answer in this sentence is 热门 (lit. “hot door”; fig. “popular/expected topic”) and an interesting observation was made. In this sentence participants tried to write this idiom by using the character 红 (red), which means red, and comes from “popular person” idiom. Other two students just wrote 红人 (lit. “red person”; fig. “popular person”). Also, two participants wrote idiom incorrectly by writing only one character 热 (hot) and mixing up the sequence of the word, making it 门热 (lit. “door hot,” instead of “hot door”). Another participant just wrote “popular,” indicating not remembering the idiom itself. Those results show that it was very difficult for the participants to accurately memorize and recall opaque idioms. They often remembered only the general meaning of popularity but forgot or confused the actual Chinese words that make up the idiom.

Regardless of this, the sentence where 红人 (lit. “red person”; fig. “popular person”) is a correct answer that is 100% accurate. The participant got the sentence like this in the first part:

他现在是个_____, 大家都知道他, 因为他特别有名。

“Now he is _____, everyone knows him, because he is well-known.”

Since, the sentence's answers are all correct and the mistakes are made in the second part in the sentence about the popularity, the conclusion is made that participants generally remember that 红人(lit. "red person"; fig. "popular person") is about popularity, but they do not have a full understanding of where to use it.

While the part A with a word bank showed relatively high accuracy, the part B decreased significantly in terms of results, which supports Web's (2008) claim that it is more complicated to extract vocabulary without contextual support than to recognize it, since "many contexts may be deceptive leading learners to infer an incorrect meaning" (p. 233). Overall, the last stage showed that memorising opaque idioms was complicated for participants (see Table 5). Even though most of the opaque idioms were chosen correctly in part A, having 80.36% right answers, part B showed a low result of 19.64%, where four out of six sentences had only one or three correct results. In this part, the idiom with the most correct answers (57.2%) was 不管三七二十一 (lit. "regardless of three seven twenty one"; fig. "regardless of consequences"). Another note on transparent idioms is that for the first part production of opaque idioms slightly exceeds that of transparent idioms with 80.36% and 75% respectively. The difference of five percent indicates that general cues and context may affect learning of opaque idioms more than transparent ones.

4.5 Overall

At all three stages, several consistent patterns in students' answers are revealed. Firstly, one of the notable patterns concerns the role of cultural cues. One of the students in the survey of the first stage noted that cultural cues were not useful, and as a result, answered correctly the fewest number of times in all stages. This suggests that students may underestimate the importance of cultural significance in understanding idioms, since limited attention towards cues in the first stage ended up with low results. As Izumi (1995) states that

the key issue in language learning is how to make input comprehensible, so relying on a single type of context may not be enough, especially when it comes to abstract or opaque expressions (p.233). This means that students need multiple sources of support, such as linguistic, contextual, and cultural cues, to fully understand complex expressions such as idioms. This indicates that effective learning of idioms requires a balanced integration of different strategies, rather than relying on a single approach.

Secondly, there is a strong correlation between correct literal translation and correct answers overall. Participants who translated idioms correctly at the first stage tended to do better at both recognition and problem setting. This confirms Izumi's (1995) claim that translation works as a "very important tool for 'semanticizing' language" by directly linking new lexical units with existing knowledge in the student's native language, making the input more accessible (p.225). Thus, translation works here as a cognitive tool to reduce ambiguity.

Another pattern concerns the gap between understanding and usage. Even when students demonstrated correct understanding or recognition of idioms, they often failed to reproduce them accurately. This is consistent with the findings of Wang and Luo (2021), who show that idioms are complex due to "their complexity in meaning and grammatical functions, which require not only semantic understanding, but also knowledge of how idioms function in sentences (p.285). The data from this study also shows that students can understand common meanings, but still have difficulty using the idioms themselves.

5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the understanding and usage of Chinese idioms by intermediate-level students in multilingual space depends on interrelated strategies, such as translation, cultural knowledge and context. The research shows that even though students initially rely on literal translation and their cultural background, short cultural cues and context support the learning development, especially in the case of opaque idioms. However,

the results also show that successful understanding does not lead to accurate productive use, highlighting the gap between recognition and production skills, which motivates for further studies in the field. Although the students showed significant improvement in the performance of contextual recognition tasks, their productive use of idioms remained significantly lower, which may be due to the fact that the experiment was too fast, namely, it consisted of three days. This demonstrates that future research may require additional steps before the productive task, which will give more time and knowledge to prepare students. Thus, the results obtained indicate that the assimilation of idioms should not be based on a single strategy or a rapid transition from one stage to another. Instead, effective language learning may require multiple interacting strategies and multiple steps to effectively memorize and use idioms. In addition, the small number of students, idioms, and the short duration of the experiment limit the possibility of generalizing the results, which means that further research involving larger groups of participants is needed. Overall, my study suggests practical ways of teaching Chinese idioms in a multilingual space, applying different strategies as an effective tool for a deeper understanding.

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Appendix

Below you can see papers with tasks.

Day 1:

General Information

Date: _____

Participant №: _____

Hours studying Chinese per week: _____

Which language do you use most often in daily life?

☐ English ☐ Kazakh ☐ Russian ☐ Other: _____

In which language do you usually think when learning Chinese?

☐ English ☐ Kazakh ☐ Russian ☐ Other: _____

Please read **some general facts** before turning the page:

1. Red (红) = good.
2. White (白) = negative.

3. Face (脸) = person.
4. Fish (鱼) = survival.
5. Hot (热) = good.
6. Wolf (狼) = negative
7. Eating = dependence.
8. Numbers may show closeness, growth or character.

*Note: please **do not** use any devices and **do not** ask your peers while doing the task on the next page!*

Stage 1: Translation & Guessing Task

Below you can see several *Chinese idioms*. Please read the instructions carefully and write answers in the table.

For each idiom, please:

1. Translate it **word by word** into English/Kazakh/Russian (literal translation). [e.g: 好吃 - good, eat]
2. Guess what it **really means** (guessed meaning). [e.g: 好吃 - tasty]
3. Rate your confidence from 1 (*not confident*) to 5 (*very confident*)

No	Idiom	Literal Translation	Guessed Meaning	Confidence (1–5)
1	爱吃醋 ài chī cù			
2	红人 hóng rén			

3	白眼狼 (狼-wolf) bái yǎn láng			
4	八九不离十 bā jiǔ bù lí shí			
5	一日千里 (里-mile) yī rì qiān lǐ			
6	不管三七二十一 bù guǎn sān qī èr shí yī			
7	大鱼吃小鱼 dà yú chī xiǎo yú			
8	丢脸 (丢 - to lose) diū liǎn			
9	话里有话 huà lǐ yǒu huà			
10	热门 rè mén			

11	吃软饭 chī ruǎn fàn			
12	二百五 èr bǎi wǔ			

1. Did you use the general facts when translating? (**Answer: Yes / No**) Why/Why not?

2. How helpful were the general facts in this task? (**Answer: 1-2-3-4-5**) Why/Why not?

Day 2:

Participant №: _____

Stage 2: Short Reading and Multiple Choice

Instructions

- Read each short situation and *choose* the correct meaning of the **idioms**. Please *circle clearly* the answers. [15 minutes] Even if you do not know, take a guess.
- Please **do not** use any devices and **do not** ask your peers while doing the task.
- Translation for some words: 狼-wolf; 里-mile/inside; 丢 - to lose; 离 - away from; if the sentence has words in brackets (), then it is the translation for the word before it.

1. 他看到女朋友和别的男生说话, 他很生气。这个人太爱吃醋了。

[tā kàn dào nǚ péng yǒu hé bié de nán shēng shuō huà , tā hěn shēng qì 。 zhè gè rén tài ài chī cù le 。]

- A. a person feels love
- B. a person feels irritation
- C. a person feels jealousy
- D. a person feels loneliness

2. 他是一个红人。每个人都知道他，因为他太有钱了。

[tā shì yī gè **hóng rén** 。 měi gè rén dōu zhī dào tā , yīn wéi tā tài yǒu qián le 。]

- A. a popular person
- B. a rich person
- C. a funny person
- D. an angry person

3. 我帮了他那么多，但是他忘(*forget*)了我了！他真是个白眼狼。现在我不喜欢他。

[wǒ bāng le tā nà me duō , dàn shì tā wàng le wǒ le ! tā zhēn shì gè **bái yǎn láng** 。 xiàn zài wǒ bù xǐ huān tā 。]

- A. a forgetful person
- B. an ungrateful person
- C. a friendly person
- D. a clever person

4. **A:** “你知道他多大了吗？我猜(*guess*)他三十五岁了。”

[A: nǐ zhī dào tā duō dà le ma ? wǒ *cāi* tā sān shí wǔ suì le 。]

B: “你猜(*guess*)得不对，不过八九不离十了，他其实三十六岁了。”

[B: nǐ *cāi* dé bù duì , bù guò **bā jiǔ bù lí shí** le , tā qí shí sān shí liù suì le 。]

- A. very close
- B. very helpful

C. totally incorrect

D. this idiom DOES NOT mean anything

5. 她刚(*just*)开始学汉语的时候, 发音不太好, 但是现在她的汉语越来越好了。发音进步(*progress*) 很大, 可以说是一日千里。

[*tā gāng kāi chǐ xué hàn yǔ de shí hòu , fā yīn bù tài hǎo , dàn xiàn zài tā de hàn yǔ yuè lái yuè hǎo le 。 fā yīn jìn bù hěn dà , kě yǐ shuō shì yī rì qiān lǐ 。*]

A. a nonsense

B. a stability

C. a process

D. a progress

6. **A:** 外面(*outside*)下大雨了, 你还要走吗?

[*A: wài miàn xià dà yǔ le , nǐ huán yào zǒu má ?*]

B: 不管三七二十一, 我是都是要走的。

[*B: bù guǎn sān qī èr shí yī , wǒ shì dōu shì yào zǒu de 。*]

A. because of the noise

B. regardless of the consequences

C. nn fear of the consequences

D. out of curiosity

7. 在商场上, 常常是大鱼吃小鱼, 所以大公司容易生存(*survive*), 小公司很难生存。

[*zài shāng chǎng shàng , cháng cháng shì dà yú chī xiǎo yú , suǒ yǐ dà gōng sī róng yì shēng cún , xiǎo gōng sī hěn nán shēng cún 。*]

A. the weak overpower the strong

B. the brave inspire the fearful

C. the powerful dominate the powerless

D. the determined achieve the impossible

8. 在教室他忘了老师的名字, 所以他的同学笑了。他觉得自己很丢脸。

[zài jiào shì tā wàng le lǎo shī de míng zì , suǒ yǐ tā de tóng xué xiào le 。 tā jué dé zì jǐ hěn **diū liǎn** 。]

- A. he felt confident
- B. he felt shy
- C. he felt embarrassed
- D. he felt nothing

9. 今天我没有做作业。老师说“有的人需要多写作业”, 我觉得他话里有话。

[jīn tiān wǒ méi yǒu zuò zuò yè 。 lǎo shī shuō “ yǒu de rén xū yào duō xiě zuò yè ”, wǒ jué dé tā **huà lǐ yǒu huà** 。]

- A. the teacher was praising me
- B. the teacher was hinting at me
- C. the teacher said it clearly
- D. the teacher ignored me

10. 最近这些年, AI是一个很热门的专业, 所以很多大学有这个专业。

[zuì jìn zhè xiē nián , AI shì yī gè hěn **rè mén** de zhuān yè , suǒ yǐ hěn duō dà xué yǒu zhè gè zhuān yè 。]

- A. the major is so bad
- B. the major is not important
- C. the major is ordinary
- D. the major is really popular

11. 他不工作, 喜欢吃软饭。他靠他的女朋友生活。

[tā bù gōng zuò , xǐ huān **chī ruǎn fàn** 。 tā kào tā de nǚ péng yǒu shēng huó 。]

- A. a person lives off somebody
- B. a person does not have a job

C. a person dreams to earn money

D. a person likes to eat food

12. 考试的时候, 他才知道他今天忘了带笔了。他真是个二百五!

[kǎo shì de shí hòu , tā cái zhī dào tā jīn tiān wàng le dài bǐ le 。 tā zhēn shì gè èr bǎi wǔ !]

A. a smart person

B. a stupid person

C. a greedy person

D. a lazy person

Day 3:

Participant №: _____

Stage 3: Contextual Production

Instructions

- Read each task and do what it asks (filling in the blanks)
- Please **do not** use any devices and **do not** ask your peers while doing the task.
- **Translation** for some words: 狼-*wolf*; 里-*mile/inside*; 丢 - *to lose*; 不管 - *regardless*; 离 - *away from*; if the sentence has words in brackets (), then it is the translation for the word before it.

Task 1: Below you can see six sentences with blanks. Use the idioms from the list in [...]. There are *two* idioms that are not for these sentences. Please do this stage first before going to another stage.

Chinese Characters List	Pinyin

白眼狼	bái yǎn láng
一日千里	yī rì qiān lǐ
不管三七二十一	bù guǎn sān qī èr shí yī
丢脸	diū liǎn
话里有话	huà lǐ yǒu huà
吃软饭	chī ruǎn fàn
红人	hóng rén
八九不离十	bā jiǔ bù lí shí

1. 他现在是个_____, 大家都知道他, 因为他特别有名。

[tā xiàn zài shì gè_____, dà jiā dōu zhī dào tā, yīn wéi tā tè bié yǒu míng.]

2. 我以前帮过他很多忙, 可是他不记得(*remember*)我了! 他真是_____, 现在我真的不喜欢他。

[wǒ yǐ qián bāng guò tā hěn duō mang, kě shì tā bù jì dé wǒ le! tā zhēn shì gè_____, xiàn zài wǒ zhēn de bù xǐ huān tā.]

3. **A:** “你知道他多大了吗? 我猜(*guess*)他四十六岁。”

[A: nǐ zhī dào tā duō dà le ma? wǒ cāi tā sì shí liù suì.]

B: “你猜得差不多, _____, 他其实四十七岁了。”

[B: nǐ cāi de chà bù duō, _____, tā qí shí sì shí qī suì le.]

4. 他在课上忘(*forget*)了老师的名字, 同学们都笑了, 他觉得非常_____。

[tā zài kè shàng wàng le lǎo shī de míng zì, tóng xué men dōu xiào le, tā jué dé fēi cháng_____.]

5. 他自己不工作, 总是靠女朋友生活, 真是喜欢_____。

[tā zì jǐ bù gōng zuò, zǒng shì kào nǚ péng yǒu shēng huó, zhēn shì xǐ huān_____.]

6. 她刚开始学习中文的时候发音不好,但是现在进步(*progress*)很快,可以说是

_____。

[tā gāng kāi shǐ xué xí zhōng wén de shí hòu fā yīn bù hǎo, dàn shì xiàn zài jìn bù hěn kuài, kě yǐ shuō shì _____].

Task 2: Below you can see six sentences with blanks. Try to fill in the blanks with idioms from previous stages. You may write characters or pinyin (it is okay not to write tones). *You may put (-) in case there is no idea what to write.*

1. 今天我们有考试,但是他忘了带笔了,他真是_____!

[jīn tiān wǒ men yǒu kǎo shì, dàn shì tā wàng le dài bǐ le, tā zhēn shì gè _____!]

2. A: 外面(*outside*)正在下大雨,你还打算出去吗?

[A: wài miàn zhèng zài xià dà yǔ, nǐ hái dǎ suàn chū qù ma?]

B: _____, 我都要出去。

[B: _____, wǒ dōu yào chū qù.]

3. 今天我没有扔垃圾(*throw garbage*)。妈妈说:“有人需要帮我打扫整理房间。”我觉得她

_____。

[jīn tiān wǒ méi yǒu rēng lā jī. mā ma shuō: “yǒu rén xū yào bāng wǒ dǎ sao zheng li fang jiān.” wǒ jué de tā _____.]

4. 他看到女朋友和别的男人一起笑,他生气(*angry*)了。这个人真的_____。

[tā kàn dào nǚ péng yǒu hé bié de nán ren yī qǐ xiào, tā shēng qì le. zhè gè rén zhēn de _____.]

5. 这几年, AI是最_____的专业之一 (*one of*), 所以很多大学都有这个专业。

[zhè jǐ nián, AI shì zuì _____ de zhuān yè zhī yī, suǒ yǐ hěn duō dà xué dōu yǒu zhè gè zhuān yè.]

6. 在商场 (*business world*) 上, _____是常见(*common*) 的现象 (*phenomenon*), 大公司容易发展(*develop*), 但是小公司 很难生存 (*survive*)。

[zài shāng chǎng shàng, _____ shì cháng jiàn de xiàn xiàng, dà gōng sī róng yì fā zhǎn, dàn shì xiǎo gōng sī hěn nán shēng cún.]