

**USING TV PROGRAMS AS A SOURCE OF INPUT TO
ACQUIRE IDIOMS/IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS FOR
INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS
A SECOND LANGUAGE**

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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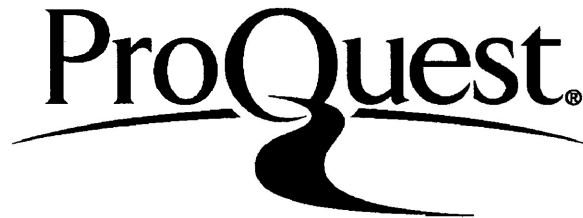
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CHAPTER I: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

For intermediate and advanced learners of English as a second language (ESL), language improvement lies mainly in the expansion of vocabulary (Alexander, 1984). The command of idioms/idiomatic expressions is an important part of this vocabulary expansion. Hammerly (1982) notes that ESL learners can never become real communicators if they do not understand the colloquial and idiomatic speech of native speakers. Television programs, such as soap operas and situation comedies are rich in this aspect of the language (Lafford, 1987). These programs present the language in simulated "real life" situations, and this cannot be achieved with conventional textbooks (Els, Bongaerts, Extra, Os & Dieten, 1986).

This study explored the potential of television programs in promoting awareness and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions with intermediate ESL learners. The theoretical framework was based on Krashen's (1985; 1987) second language acquisition theory, and focused particularly on two critical hypotheses: the input and affective hypotheses. Krashen (1985, 1987) contends that second language acquisition is achieved through receiving ample and comprehensible input in an anxiety-free environment, rather than conscious learning of the grammar and practicing of the structures. Apart from Krashen's hypotheses, the study was also based on the theory that activities which involve real communication promote language acquisition (Lafford, 1987;

Rosenbaum, 1971; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991; Long & Porter, 1985; Irujo, 1986; & Berwald, 1985).

The participants in this study acquired idioms/idiomatic expressions through exposure to television programs and engagement in activities that were intended to increase their awareness of and familiarity with idioms/idiomatic expressions.

The research design was qualitative. The methods included a pretest and posttest to assess comprehension of the stories and of idioms/idiomatic expressions, participant observation, ongoing interviews and document analysis of the participants' journals. The participants were five Chinese students attending postsecondary institutions in Thunder Bay, who volunteered to attend a six-week course designed by the researcher who acted as instructor and participant observer.

Research Questions

The study examined the potential of television programs in promoting awareness and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions of intermediate level learners of English as a second language (ESL).

The research questions were:

1. How does the use of TV programs as "comprehensible input" for intermediate ESL students a) promote learner awareness of idioms/idiomatic expressions; and b) foster comprehension of idioms/idiomatic expressions?
2. How do selected teaching strategies (group discussions, comprehension check, retelling, and free talks) facilitate or

impede the participants' comprehension and usage of idioms/idiomatic expressions?

3. How do students integrate idioms/idiomatic expressions into their language use?
4. What are students' perceptions of the value/benefits of the use of TV as comprehensible input to improve comprehension and usage of idioms/idiomatic expressions?

Background/Rationale

Personal Assumptions

The reasons I chose to investigate this problem stemmed partially from my own experiences of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Initially, I studied EFL for five years in high school. The methodology used then was a combination of grammar-translation and audio-lingual. The textbooks contained detailed analyses of grammar in my first language, bilingual vocabulary lists, texts with grammar points and vocabulary, and written exercises designed for practice of the grammar and the expressions of a particular lesson (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Classes were conducted primarily in our first language. The instruction was teacher-controlled. Students took a passive role and listened while teachers spent the entire time explaining grammar. Little attention was paid to listening and speaking in the target language. Thus, students had little ability to communicate orally or in writing after five years of EFL instruction in high school.

When I majored in English at university, there was less emphasis on grammar and an increased emphasis on listening comprehension and speaking ability.

The modes of instruction in China are the same now as they were when I was a language student ten years ago. At the university level, listening comprehension is a central aspect of the "intensive reading" course, because teachers spend most of the time explaining key language points, paraphrasing difficult sentences, and providing background knowledge on the texts in the target language. Students are expected to understand almost every word. The major distinction between foreign language instruction at the secondary and university levels is that postsecondary instruction is given in the target language rather than the first language. While translation is still one of the most widely used strategies for instruction, there has been a shift of focus from grammar to comprehension of spoken and written English. Students have frequent opportunities to listen to voices of native speakers in taped materials and to watch movies in English, and they have easy access to thousands of books, newspapers and magazines in English. Many subject courses are offered totally in the target language to help students obtain comprehensible input. Krashen (1987) states that "subject matter teaching has the full potential for encouraging language acquisition" (p. 169), because it satisfies the four requirements of "optimal input"¹ (p. 62)

¹. According to Krashen (1987), optimal input satisfies the following criteria: 1) it is understandable; 2) interesting and/or relevant; 3) not grammatically sequenced; and 4) sufficient in quantity (p. 62).

and makes it possible for students to concentrate on the content rather than the language forms. Along with basic language training (listening, speaking, reading and writing), courses include: American and English history, literature, world geography, linguistics, philosophy, social studies, business and economics and others. These constitute the core of senior level courses.

From my personal experience as a learner of English as a foreign language, I have found that the best way for me to develop an ability to use the English language is to listen to radio programs, watch movies or TV series, and read novels and newspapers. That is, I learn from receiving and making use of a lot of input.

But my lack of knowledge of idioms/idiomatic expressions constituted an obstacle to my understanding of native speakers and expressing my ideas and feelings. I spoke grammatically and I had little difficulty making myself understood, but I used very few idioms. Then I discovered that radio and TV programs, novels and newspapers contain many idioms--phrases or sentences "whose meaning is not obvious through knowledge of the individual meanings of the constituent words but must be learnt as a whole" (Hornby, 1980, p. 421).

For example, I once heard the following expression: "He's always stood by me **through thick and thin**." I could understand it with the help of context. But I may express the same idea by saying "He's always supported me in all circumstances," because the idiom 'through thick and thin' was not in my own language. While the latter is completely grammatical and correct, it does not have the color and flavor of the

former. A few more examples follow. A native speaker may say "It's **no picnic** for me." An ESL learner may say "It's not an easy job for me." A native speaker may say "The plan **went up in smoke**." An ESL learner would say "The plan was unsuccessful." This does not follow that ESL learners have to use many idioms in their own language. But the ability to understand idioms can significantly improve their comprehension of native speakers and enrich their expressions. ESL learners should be able to understand idioms. Meanwhile, they must avoid sounding "funny" by overusing idioms. They should be very familiar with them before using them.

The discovery of the concept of idioms led me to observe how native speakers talk. My strategy was to observe how native speakers used the language, how they expressed the ideas that I wanted to communicate. I started with those expressions and phrases which I could identify in my first language. I kept a small notebook to record idioms. I would then review these expressions time and again, five or ten minutes before I went to sleep or before I got up in the morning, or when I lined up for groceries. After four years in university, I found myself "armed" with five notebooks of idiomatic expressions, most of which are now an active part of my vocabulary. It has paid off, because these expressions have made my language use more idiomatic and versatile.

The Importance of Idiom-Acquisition

The importance of idiom-acquisition has been emphasized by many writers. Irujo (1986) gives the following example to show that literal interpretation of idioms may result in misunderstanding:

Girl: Why don't you **give me a ring** sometime?
Foreign boy: Oh, no! I don't know you well enough to marry you!
Girl: You must be **pulling my leg!**
Foreign boy: How can I pull your leg? I'm not even near you! (p. 239)

Alexander (1984) notes that for intermediate and advanced learners

...the development of linguistic competence is largely a question of lexical expansion, and ...the learning process may benefit if emphasis is placed on the three 'C's of vocabulary learning: collocation, context, and connotation. (p. 128)

Idioms/idiomatic expressions fall into what Alexander categorizes as "collocation" (p. 128). Hammerly (1982) also points out that ESL learners cannot become competent communicators if they do not understand the colloquial and idiomatic speech of native speakers. Sugano (1981) argues that the importance of mastering idioms for L2 learners cannot be overemphasized and that the lack of necessary idioms in the repertoire of L2 learners often results in failure of the learners to understand the native speakers or make themselves understood. This prevents real communication.

The literature offers a few practical tips for the teaching of English idioms to native English-speaking elementary school students (Lorenz, 1977; Wolchock, 1990; & Bromley, 1984), but there has been little research concerning the teaching of idioms/idiomatic expressions to ESL students, especially their acquisition via audiovisual media.

Despite the lack of literature on teaching and learning of idioms in the field of ESL, many first language teachers and theorists agree that idioms/idiomatic expressions are a significant part of vocabulary acquisition, and that the importance of learning to use them is critical (Lorenz, 1977; Wolchock, 1990; Irujo, 1986; Bromley, 1984, & May,

1979). Therefore, increasing one's vocabulary is not only a question of learning new words, but learning the collocation and combination of small and often-used words, which constitute the majority of idioms.

Definitions of Terms

Idioms/idiomatic Expressions

Many theorists and writers define an idiom as a phrase or group of words whose holistic meaning cannot be predicted from the individual meanings of those words, but must be learned as a whole (Messenger & Bruyn, 1986; Sugano, 1981; Hornby, 1980; Finocchiaro & Bonomo, 1973).

Little distinction is made between the definitions of idioms and idiomatic expressions in the literature. The terms are used interchangeably or together (Hornby, 1980; Bell, 1988). Throughout the text, I shall borrow the definition cited above and use idioms and idiomatic expressions together or interchangeably.

Second Language Learners

"Second language learners" refers to people who learn another language after the basics of their first language or mother tongue have been acquired. Second language learning may occur in a foreign language context where L1 is spoken, or in a host language environment where the second language is spoken (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). "Second language learners" will be used as a general term except where a distinction must be made between learning and acquisition.

Comprehensible Input

Input refers to the content or message to which language learners are exposed. This can be comprehensible (understood by learners), or incomprehensible (not understood by learners). Comprehensible input is the most important hypothesis in Krashen's second language acquisition theory (1985; 1987). It states that second language learners acquire language by understanding the message rather than by drilling and practicing grammar. Thus, language used to convey messages to learners needs to be at the appropriate level, interesting and sufficient to be comprehensible.

Fossilization

"Fossilization" (Krashen, 1987, p.43) refers to the arrest of progress of language due to inadequate or faulty language input or lack of language environment.

Collocation

"Collocation" (Alexander, 1984, p. 128) refers to the association or juxtaposition of a word with other words, or a group of words, in a sentence. This association of words is usually fixed and cannot be substituted by other words. An idiom/idiomatic expression is an example of a collocation of words.

ESL Learners of Intermediate Level

Second language learners of intermediate level refers to learners who can understand main ideas expressed in standard English and who can express themselves to a certain extent both orally and in writing; they

cannot express themselves idiomatically, and speak and write with mistakes that sometimes can obscure meaning.

Research Design and Methodology

The study was qualitative and the design was emergent (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982), reflecting the researcher/instructor's responses to participants' suggestions and changing needs. The methods for data collection included: pretest and posttest, participant observation, ongoing interviews and journal analysis. The researcher/instructor was also the participant observer in the study.

The Course

The vehicle for the study was a 12-class language course developed by the instructor. It was conducted in the instructor's and the participants' homes rather than in a formal classroom setting. The informal and natural language context was intended to reduce the participants' stress and tension. The study lasted six weeks, from February 1 to March 13, 1992, with two classes weekly of approximately two hours each. The first class each week was held in the first half of the week; and the second was held over the weekend. All sessions took place in the evening.

Participants

The participants were five Chinese students attending postsecondary educational institutions. They were volunteers and had studied English as a foreign language for several years prior to taking the course.

Significance and Limitations of Study

Most of the literature in the field of second language learning or acquisition focuses on beginning levels. Little attention has been paid to developing comprehension and communicative skills for more advanced levels (Lafford, 1987). There is even less literature on the acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions. In particular, there is a dearth of research on language acquisition from TV programs and other audiovisual forms of comprehensible input. Thus, the present study was designed to provide new information and to add to the existing body of literature on the ways idioms are understood and acquired by intermediate ESL learners, the application of Krashen's theory in idiom-acquisition, the potential of TV programs as comprehensible input, and the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

From my personal experience, I have found Krashen's input hypothesis useful and efficient at the intermediate level in understanding the process of the acquisition of idiomatic usage, in the retention of second language proficiency, and in the prevention of fossilization of the language.

TV programs are especially rich in idioms, and are "infrequently taken advantage of" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 153). They contain many idiomatic and colloquial expressions that are very important in understanding native speakers (Lafford, 1987, Hammerly 1982).

This study described and analyzed the process of idiom-acquisition by intermediate ESL learners through comprehensible television programs. As an application of Krashen's theory, it provided

insight into the way idioms are understood and acquired by intermediate ESL learners, and the effectiveness of TV programs as comprehensible input. This understanding in turn may lead to the development of ESL courses and the use of teaching strategies which promote more effective language acquisition than has been possible in traditional courses. It may also help to explain the process of idiom-acquisition and to develop a curriculum that makes full use of the potential of TV programs.

Limitations

The study involved five Chinese students, all of whom were friends of the researcher/instructor. The instructor herself was a non-native speaker whose less-than-perfect English may seem to be a disadvantage to some people, but it is viewed as an advantage by some theorists. Piasecka (1988) argues that ESL teachers who share a language other than the target language with the students can monitor the influence of the students' L1 on the target language, and better understand students' linguistic problems. A merit of students of homogeneous background, again as Piasecka articulates, is that the students get to know each other better, are less restrained and obliged to be polite, and are more open about their opinions. This relaxed atmosphere promotes communication.

The limited duration of the study (two classes weekly in a period of six weeks), the small class size and the homogeneity of the participants may make the findings less generalizable to intermediate ESL learners of other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This calls for more research. However, the study explained the process of idiom-acquisition through

comprehensible television programs. Thus, it may be transferable to learners of similar backgrounds and levels (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

This chapter has presented an overview of the purpose, rationale, design and methodology, significance as well as the limitations of the study. It has defined key terms that were used as the study was planned and implemented. The following chapter reviews related literature and explains the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents related literature in the field of teaching second languages. Three foci are discussed: 1) a historical overview of approaches and methods for teaching second language, based on Richards and Rodgers (1986); 2) the five hypotheses of Krashen's second language acquisition theory (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Krashen, 1985; 1987); 3) audiovisual aids as input in L2 acquisition. The second section articulates the theoretical framework on which the course was based.

Second Language Teaching Theories

Approaches/methods of Second Language Teaching

Richards and Rodgers (1986) identify six methods and approaches which have been used to teach second languages. These include: grammar-translation, oral approach and situational language teaching, audiolingual method, communicative language teaching, total physical response, and the silent way. Each will be discussed below.

Grammar-translation. Formal modern foreign language teaching began with the decline of Latin in Europe. The method used then was called "grammar-translation." This approach dominated Europe from the 1840s to the 1940s and is still practiced widely despite the fact that "it has no advocates" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 5). The method focused on the formal study of grammar. The ability to understand classical works and literature was achieved through translation. Speaking ability was not

emphasized. Richards and Rodgers (1986) explain that the grammar-translation method "approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language" (p. 3). Memorization of morphology and syntax was very important. Language learning was believed to be achieved through extensive discussion in the first language rather than the target language.

Oral approach & situational language teaching. This approach was developed and used in the 1920s and the 1930s by applied linguists such as Palmer and Hornby from Britain (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). It assumed that language teaching began with spoken language. New language points were introduced and practiced situationally with the help of contexts. Vocabulary and grammar were introduced according to perceived degrees of increasing difficulty. The target language was the language of instruction in the classroom. Reading and writing were introduced only after learners had acquired sufficient grammar and vocabulary. The language theory underlying this approach was "structuralism" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 35). Speech was regarded as the basis of language, and structure was viewed as the core of speaking ability. The use of situation illustrated the recognition of the functional and purposeful aspects of language teaching and learning. The theory of learning was behavioristic, which conceived the process of language learning as involving three sequential steps: receiving the knowledge or materials, fixing it in the memory by repetition, and using it

in actual practice until it became a personal skill (Frisby, 1957, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

The audiolingual method. The audiolingual method grew out of the demand for foreign language speakers and translators during World War II and was used in the United States beginning in the 1950s. Richards and Rodgers (1986) explain that this approach attributed the problems of learning a foreign language to the conflict of different structural systems between the mother tongue and the target language. Thus, grammar was the starting point. The approach advocated aural training (of structure) first, followed by speaking, reading and writing. It stressed the mechanical aspects of language teaching and learning. Analogy between the target language and the mother tongue rather than analysis of the target language was considered important to learning. The latter would come after practice. Thus grammar learning was inductive rather than deductive. Teaching cultural content of the language was also stressed (Lado, 1964).

Communicative language teaching. The terms "notional-functional approach" and "functional approach" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, pp. 65-66) refer to the same concept. Richards and Rodgers (1986) note that in the 1960s applied linguists in Britain emphasized another fundamental aspect of language--its functional and communicative potential. They also cite Chomsky's authoritative observation that structural language theories and methods of language teaching stressed the structural systems of language, but failed to account for the fundamental characteristic of language--the creativity and uniqueness of individual

sentences. Hymes (1972) and Hilgard and Bower (1966) point out that the theory of language and learning underlying this approach was that the goal of language teaching was to develop communicative competence and that activities involving communication promoted learning.

This approach considered communicative competence the goal of language teaching. It paid systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language (Littlewood, 1981). It assumed that learning could best be achieved through communication. Attempts to communicate were initiated from the beginning. Linguistic variation was central to the selection of materials and methodology. Comprehensible rather than accurate pronunciation was sought. Diversified and changing aspects rather than structure were emphasized, and it was assumed that language could be learned through actually practicing and using it in real and meaningful contexts.

Total physical response. The total physical response approach was used to teach oral proficiency at the beginning level (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). It was based on the belief that receptive comprehension abilities preceded expressive or productive skills in learning a language and that skills acquired through listening could transfer to other skills (i.e. reading or writing). Meaning rather than form was emphasized. Students learned through responding to commands given by the teacher. Language was divided into nonabstract and abstract usage. The former dealt with concrete words and verbal imperative; the latter was

introduced after enough nonabstract knowledge and competence had been built up (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

The silent way. The silent way was a method of language teaching created by Calet Gattegno (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). It was a learner-centered approach for beginners, but structural in nature. It was contrary to the "natural" or "direct" approaches to language teaching and assumed that second language learning was totally different from first language learning, thus it had to take place in an artificial learning environment. Richards and Rodgers (1986) note that this approach was "based on the premise that the teacher should be silent as much as possible in the classroom and the learner should be encouraged to produce as much language as possible" (p. 99). They summarize the learning hypotheses underlying this approach:

1. Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned.
2. Learning is facilitated by accompanying (mediating) physical objects.
3. Learning is facilitated by problem solving involving the material to be learned. (p. 99)

The difference between this and the approaches described earlier is that classroom activities were organized around the use of colored wooden sticks, and that the teacher's role was downplayed, so that more emphasis was placed on students' accountability.

Most of the above-discussed approaches and methods for teaching second language emphasize the structural aspect of a language (with the exception of Communicative Language Teaching). While Krashen's (1985, 1987) second language acquisition theory,

which is to be reviewed in the following section, breaks away from the tradition and puts much more emphasis on the "meaning" rather than "form" of language. This review will be followed by criticism of Krashen's hypotheses and Krashen's criteria for "optimal input" (Krashen, 1987, p. 62).

Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory

Krashen's (1985, 1987) second language acquisition theory has become popular in the past decade or so. His theory is deductive, because it starts with assumptions from which his hypotheses are derived (Mclaughlin, 1987). He articulates five hypotheses related to language acquisition:

- 1) the acquisition versus learning hypothesis;
- 2) the natural order hypothesis;
- 3) the monitor hypothesis;
- 4) the input hypothesis;
- 5) the affective hypothesis.

Comprehensible input lies at the heart of Krashen's second language acquisition theory. According to Krashen (1985, 1987), we acquire spoken fluency and other aspects of a second language through understanding messages from input, rather than consciously learning grammar and oral practice. The function of output is indirect. The main function of output is for learners to invite more comprehensible input. The following is a brief discussion of Krashen's five hypotheses.

The acquisition-learning hypothesis. The most fundamental principle in second language learning is the acquisition versus learning hypothesis. According to Krashen (1985), there are two distinct ways of developing knowledge and skills in a foreign language: learning and acquisition. **Learning** refers to the conscious mastering of the language, the knowing about a language: its grammar, syntax, morphology and so on. **Acquisition**, on the other hand, is a subconscious process through which learners acquire language in an informal, implicit manner, thus developing their skill in a language by using it in natural, communicative situations. Krashen considers these two ways of developing language proficiency as independent of each other. The former is deductive; the latter, inductive. Language knowledge obtained through "acquisition" rather than systematic learning of structures and rules initiates the construction of language and promotes fluency.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) note that "many researchers now believe that language acquisition is responsible for the ability to understand and speak second language easily and well" (p. 18). They cite a research study which illustrates that students taught by a natural approach: 1) performed equally well in grammar as those taught by grammar-based approaches; 2) did better in speaking and writing; 3) showed a larger range of vocabulary; 4) transmitted more information; and 5) were more accurate in syntax.

The most ardent criticism of Krashen's theory comes from Mclaughlin (1987). He argues that learning can cause acquisition and attempts to support his argument by presenting two subjective single

cases: himself and another theorist. He concludes that Krashen fails to prove this hypothesis with objective empirical evidence.

The natural order hypothesis. This hypothesis states that no matter what our first language is or when we begin to learn a second language, we acquire it in a "predictable order" (Krashen, 1985, p. 1), which is not solely decided by a syllabus. Krashen (1985, 1987) argues that although the order of the acquisition of first language (L1) elements and that of second language (L2) elements is not exactly the same, learners of different L1 backgrounds showed striking similarities when they acquire the same second languages. This hypothesis contradicts the assumptions underlying approaches such as the Silent Way which assume that L2 and L1 acquisition are very different.

Mclaughlin (1987) criticizes "natural order" hypothesis by arguing that L2 acquisition is very much influenced by one's L1. He supports his argument by citing research which shows that children perform poorly on the part of the grammar of the target language which is absent in their mother tongue. For instance, Korean children had great difficulty with the English articles, because the Korean language lacks this element, while Spanish children performed much better, because Spanish contains articles. Therefore, the order of L2 acquisition varies depending on L1. Edelsky (1982), and Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll and Kuehn (1990) also articulate that there is a high correlation between one's L1 and L2 acquisition, and that different educational and cultural backgrounds may result in different patterns of L2 acquisition.

The monitor hypothesis. Krashen's third hypothesis explains that the ability to produce utterances in a second language comes from acquisition, rather than from conscious learning (Krashen, 1985). All the grammar and rules we learn do not ensure fluent output. Learning relies heavily on the monitor function, a device for self-correction, whereby we correct our utterances in accordance with the grammatical rules. To "monitor," one needs to be conscious about correctness, and know the rules. This is a time-consuming, and difficult process during oral communication. Overuse of the monitor may result in interference with the flow of thinking and hesitance in output.

The input hypothesis. Krashen (1985) claims that language learners learn a language only by understanding the message conveyed. He uses "i" to represent the learners' current knowledge of structure, and "i+1" for the structure one step beyond. Learners understand the message containing "i+1" with the help of the context, extra-linguistic information, and their knowledge of the world. When the message containing "i+1" is understood, their language ability progresses.

The input hypothesis runs counter to our traditional conception of language teaching and learning, which assumes that we first learn structures, then practice using them in communication, and finally develop fluency. This hypothesis explains that learners acquire communication skills by focusing on meaning, and, as a result, they acquire the grammar (Krashen, 1987). Listening comprehension in this hypothesis is of primary importance. Speech emerges if the language

users are exposed to the situational context--the comprehensible input--long enough. Thus, when they understand the gist of the message, they begin to use the grammar naturally in the way that a child acquires his/her first language. Comprehensible input, however, does not automatically result in acquisition.

Mclaughlin (1987) articulates that it is impossible to decide individual learners' $i+1$ level in real classroom situations, therefore there is no way of knowing what the right input is. Long (1985) points out that output from learners is necessary in order to make sure that the language heard is really understood by the learners.

Despite the impossibility of deciding $i+1$ level of individual learners, input within learners' range of knowledge plus context, facial expressions, gestures and other extralinguistic information can help increase learners' degree of comprehension and, in the long run, more input of this nature, can cause acquisition. This is the basic theoretical foundation of the present study.

The affective hypothesis. Comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition, but it is not sufficient (Krashen, 1987). Krashen (1987) indicates that learners need to be open to the input. He describes this condition as the "affective filter" (p.3). When the filter is up, it acts as a "mental block," preventing the acquirers from fully receiving the message in the comprehensible input; when the filter is down, that is when learners are highly-motivated, self-confident and free from anxiety, they are open to the input and internalize it. In discussing the factors responsible for language acquisition, Krashen (1987) states:

The true causative variables in second language acquisition derive from the input hypothesis and the affective filter--the amount of comprehensible input the acquirer receives and understands, and the strength of the affective filter, or the degree to which the acquirer is 'open' to the input. (p. 9)

These five hypotheses assume that comprehensible input is the main source for acquiring a second language. Krashen (1985) argues that inadequate, improper or deformed input, plus a high affective filter in which learners are not motivated to receive input would lead to the "fossilization" (p. 43) of the learners' language ability.

Two hypotheses underpinning this study are the input and affective hypotheses because of the nature of idiom-acquisition. The course was designed to encourage acquisition of idioms and idiomatic expressions through: 1) constant exposure to the input--television programs; 2) activities to promote comprehension of the message conveyed; and 3) oral practice and journal writing. The classes were held in an informal environment rather than a formal classroom setting to reduce the participants' anxiety. To further motivate the participants and to keep their "affective filter" down, television programs were selected according to the participants' interests and approximate language levels.

Other criticism of Krashen's second language acquisition theory centers around its one-way communication. Krashen (1987) argues that learners "acquire spoken fluency *not* by practicing talking but by understanding input, by listening and reading" (p. 60), and that output only serves the purpose of inviting more comprehensible input. Many writers and theorists (Hammerly, 1982; Rosenbaum, 1971; Lafford, 1987; Irujo, 1986; MacWilliam, 1986; Long & Porter, 1985) emphasize the

importance of communication and conversation in language acquisition, and point out that output from the learners enables them to negotiate and clarify the meanings of the messages conveyed in the input. They also note that input without practice will not lead to automatic language acquisition. Lafford (1987) further explains that input containing social issues which students are interested in and familiar with can stimulate them to express their opinions in the target language.

The discussion of Krashen's five hypotheses raises the question of the nature of input that is optimal for acquisition. We shall examine Krashen's criteria for optimal input in the following section.

Criteria for optimal input. Krashen (1987) suggests that input should have four basic characteristics to be optimal. Firstly, input needs to be comprehensible. MacWilliam (1986) also points out that this is a critical ingredient for language acquisition.

Secondly, input needs to be interesting and relevant. The best input is so interesting and relevant that the acquirer may simply "forget" that the message is conveyed in a foreign language. Krashen considers this as the lowest filter position. The topics need to be easily identified and within students' range of experience in order to be interesting and relevant (Krashen, 1987; Lafford, 1987).

Thirdly, materials should not be grammatically sequenced, because with a grammatical focus the learners will concentrate on forms rather than content and consciously correct themselves whenever they make a grammatical mistake. Their sentences may be fragmented and the learners themselves hesitant to communicate. As a result,

communication suffers. Ideas and messages are the priority instead of structure or grammar.

Fourthly, input should be sufficient in quantity so that learners will have enough opportunities to practice the language. These four criteria together make an optimal input.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between input, affective filter and the acquisition of language according to Krashen's theory.

The above section introduced Krashen's second language acquisition theory, criticism of his hypotheses, and his criteria for optimal input. The following section discusses the use of audiovisual aids as input in L2 acquisition.

Audiovisual Aids as Input in L2 Acquisition

There are advantages and disadvantages to the use of audiovisual aids as input for language acquisition. Although televised programs have been used in foreign language teaching for three decades (Berwald, 1985), there has been very little research on the effectiveness of language comprehension through television and video programs (MacWilliam, 1986). In spite of this, many writers and language teachers share the view that audiovisual media have advantages over the conventional ways of teaching in the classroom (Ellis, 1986; Ellis et al. 1987; & Rosenbaum, 1971).

Snyder and Colón (1988) conducted a seven-week quantitative research on the effectiveness of audiovisual aids in foreign language acquisition. One hundred and seven high school students learning

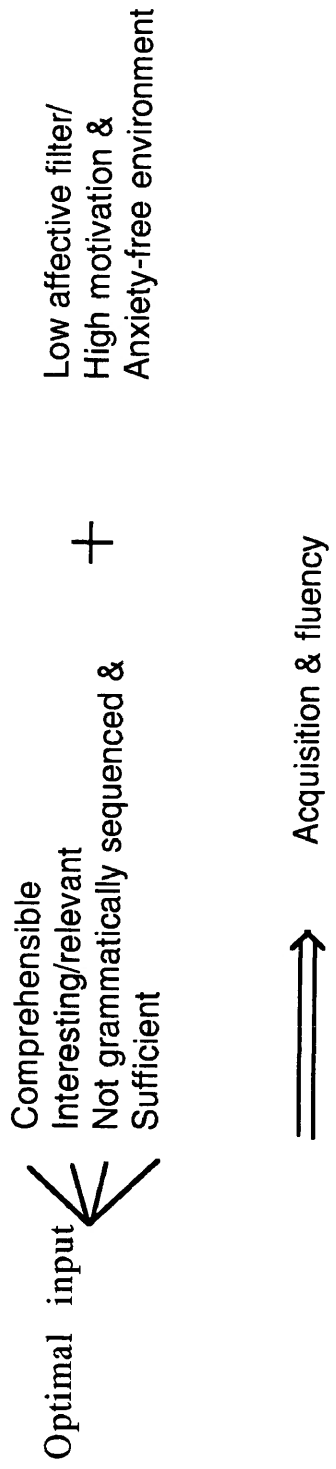


Figure 1: Relationship between input, affective filter & acquisition of language.

"Spanish Two" participated in the research. The students were divided into five groups: two without audiovisual aids and three with considerable audiovisual aids. The researchers found that the students in the audiovisual group performed significantly better in vocabulary and listening comprehension. They concluded that students learned more when visual aids were utilized.

Advantages. Els, Bongaerts, Extra, Os and Dieten (1986) note that one of the advantages of audiovisual media in language acquisition is that such media provide a considerable degree of "contextualization" (p. 290), that is, the presentation of authentic language used in real life situations. Lado (1964) contends that audiovisual media bring to the classroom a realism that cannot be attained otherwise. Valette (1967) states that more advanced learners "understand well when language is enunciated clearly" (p.77), but are less sure when native speakers use colloquial expressions and speak quickly and not clearly. Audiovisual aids give learners a chance to experience a wide range of colloquial expressions and speech.

A second advantage is that audiovisual aids provide stimuli for free conversation and "food for thought" (Lafford, 1987, p. 280). Lafford suggests that at high intermediate and advanced levels, TV programs are a very good means of input. They can be motivating to students, because they contain information which is appealing to them. Krashen (1987) notes that the "affective filter" is down when learners are motivated and when learning is an interest rather than merely a requirement. Interesting

or appealing content also makes it possible for learners to concentrate on content rather than form.

The third advantage is that television programs may enrich students' vocabulary by exposing them to terms in a specific area while showing them situational programs (Lafford, 1987). At more advanced levels, a great variety of TV shows such as soap operas and situation comedies might provide learners with examples of several language "registers": slang expressions, regionalisms, social class speech differences, and street languages. Thus, learners have access to listening to live language expressions which are difficult to access through conventional text-book methods.

A fourth advantage is that television programs make it possible for learners to hear different accents of native speakers, to check their own utterances and to improve their listening comprehension (Els et al., 1986). Hammerly (1982) stresses the importance of listening to native speakers. He indicates that many teachers of French do not understand native speakers even though they have developed so-called "speaking" ability. He argues that language learners must have systematic listening practice in which they hear language spoken by native speakers. A second language learner cannot become a competent communicator if s/he cannot understand rapid and colloquial speech. Thonis (1977) stresses the importance of listening in second language acquisition. He argues that the improvement of listening comprehension requires "the hearer to be open, to be ready, to be reasonably disposed to accept the meaning as well as to understand the message" (p. 8). This is consistent

with Krashen's comprehensible input theory, and that "accurate listening forms the basis for correct speech" (p. 8).

Lastly, audiovisual aids can be used over and over again, an impossibility in conventional classroom teaching where an oral discussion cannot be recreated a second time.

Disadvantages. There are limitations to the use of audiovisual aids in the classroom. Els et al. (1986) note that televised materials may need adaptations, because most of the linguistic information may be far above the level of proficiency of the learners. Audiovisual aids might contain too much language information and therefore would not be effective in the classroom, especially for learners below intermediate levels. Krashen (1985) warns that input which is not understood by learners does not facilitate comprehension.

Els et al. (1986) point out that audiovisual media might distract learners' attention if not used properly. In contrast, Lafford (1987) argues that TV programs are easier to comprehend than auditory media, because they provide "visual reinforcement" (p. 280). Hammerly (1982) describes TV as a "passive medium," because it offers the possibility for seeing and listening but not speaking. It is a vehicle of one-way communication. Krashen's input hypothesis explains that we acquire spoken fluency not by engaging in talk, but by understanding input (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Krashen, 1985 & 1987). Explaining the function of conversation/output, Krashen argues that output does have some effect on language acquisition, but it is indirect: the more we talk, the more input we invite. It also affects the quality of input in that the more

proficient in the second language we are, the more readily we can receive unmodified input.

The disadvantages of audiovisual aids, especially their "one-way" communication, has led many scholars to explore how to accommodate their inadequacies. Rosenbaum (1971) states that teachers' follow-up procedures greatly contribute to the effectiveness of learning via audiovisual media (e.g. TV). He argues the need for a "two-way exchange of information" (p. 9) in the form of small group work in ESL classrooms. He notes that the "most effective single learning aid is a well-trained, highly motivated classroom teacher combined with instructional television" (p.9). Lafford (1987) shares Rosenbaum's views by suggesting that small group oral discussion on various topics may compensate for the disadvantage of "one-way" communication and provide teachers with feedback.

Idiom-acquisition and audiovisual aids. Idioms are part of vocabulary, which is a larger aspect of language learning. For ESL learners, vocabulary plays an important role. Alexander (1984) notes that especially for more advanced learners, "the development of linguistic competence is largely a question of lexical expansion..." (p. 128) Vocabulary refers to the "collocation, context and connotation" of words (p. 128). Hammerly (1982) states that ESL learners cannot become competent communicators if they do not understand the colloquial and idiomatic speech of native speakers. Sugano (1981) stresses that the importance of mastering idioms for second language learners cannot be overemphasized and that the lack of necessary idioms in the repertoire of

second language learners often results in failure of the learners to understand the native speakers or make themselves understood, a barrier to real communication. Marton (1977, cited in Meara, 1980) considers idioms the biggest obstacle to fluent comprehension in second language learners.

Many writers have described practical tips for teaching idioms to second language learners (Lorenz, 1977; Bell, 1988; Sugano, 1981; May, 1979; & Wolchock, 1990). There is also one audio kit (containing a booklet and an audio cassette) for the teaching of idioms to intermediate learners of English as a second/foreign language. "What's up," (McPartland, 1989) presents frequently used idioms in 10 areas such as education, sports, communications. Idioms are presented in meaningful contexts. Students listen to the texts first. There are questions to check their comprehension of content and idioms. Then the idioms are placed in a new context for the purpose of practice by learners. There are also topics for oral discussion and writing.

But there has been little documented research on idiom-acquisition, especially idiom-acquisition through audio-visual media. McCoy & Weible (1983, cited in Berwald, 1985) state that studies on the effectiveness of visual-based instruction, especially film and television, in foreign language teaching and learning are "elusive" (p. 12). Mueller (1980) notes that empirical support is needed to determine how visual aids enhance language teaching and the benefits for learners. This study provides insights into this methodology.

In this first section, related literature has been reviewed. In the next section, the theoretical framework for the study will be presented.

Theoretical Framework for the Course

The theoretical framework for the course was based on Krashen's second language acquisition theory, particularly two hypotheses: 1) the input hypothesis and 2) the affective filter hypothesis. The participants were not beginners and had learned (not acquired) all the important English grammar prior to the study, and the purpose of the study was not to teach them how to acquire grammar through TV programs. There was no conscious correction of the grammatical mistakes on the part of the students and from the instructor, because "meaning" rather than "form" was the focus. These were the reasons why the two most important hypotheses were used. Along with Krashen's hypotheses, the study was also based on the belief that teaching strategies which involve real communication promote language acquisition (Lafford, 1987; Rosenbaum, 1971; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991; Irujo, 1986; & Berwald, 1985).

The program, teaching strategies, role of the teacher, and role of the learners are discussed below.

The Program

The materials selected for the study consisted of situation comedies, talk shows and a documentary. The main function of these television programs was to supply comprehensible input, context for idioms, and ideas for discussion and communication. Comprehensible

input, according to Krashen (1985, 1987), forms the basis for language acquisition. Discussion and communication help to promote the participants' comprehension and provide more input and opportunities for practice. Television programs, especially situation comedies, contain "extra-linguistic" information and contexts that can help the participants understand both the content and idioms/idiomatic expressions involved.

The first and the last classes were designed by the researcher/instructor as pretest and posttest. The television programs and activities for other class were emergent--planned to accommodate the participants' interests and instructional needs. However, each class had a consistent structure which included viewing, comprehension check (of content and idioms), discussion and retelling.

Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies were designed to promote the students' comprehension and to provide opportunities to practice the language. In each class, the participants viewed the programs together. Class activities designed to enhance their comprehension, awareness and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions included: background information, comprehension check, group discussion, story retelling, free talks, and comprehension and practice of idioms/idiomatic expressions. Participants also kept a journal to reflect their thoughts about the selection of the programs, instruction and learning strategies, and to record the idioms/idiomatic expressions they had heard. Their journals served as feedback to the researcher/instructor as to the kind of programs which appealed to them, activities they found effective, their

concerns and strategies to integrate the idioms/idiomatic expressions into their own language repertoire. Journal writing also gave the students an opportunity to use the idioms to which they had been exposed.

The Role of the Teacher

Krashen (1987) states that the role of the teacher in the classroom setting is to provide comprehensible input if learners have not developed enough language proficiency to receive comprehensible input from outside the classroom. The purpose is to enable students to develop sufficient language competence so that they can obtain comprehensible input from both inside and outside the classroom. The participants in this study had achieved some language competence in understanding input related to their fields of study, but they were unsure what they could obtain from the general language environment outside the classroom, and/or how to achieve this. Accordingly, the responsibility of the teacher was to provide the students with comprehensible input and techniques of acquisition, to organize activities which promoted comprehension, and to provide the students with opportunities for language practice.

The Role of the Participants

The participants were required to attend all instructional sessions, and were asked to be open to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), a crucial factor leading to acquisition. They were asked to keep a journal to reflect on the course and to keep track of the idioms/idiomatic expressions they came across. They were encouraged to take the opportunity to dialogue with others and engage in group sharing and discussions. It was the responsibility of the participants to provide the

researcher/instructor with information concerning their goals and interests so that television programs or films chosen would be appealing to them.

The following chapter describes the research design and methodology for data collection, interpretation and analysis.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential of television programs in promoting awareness and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions by intermediate level students of English as a second language (ESL). The study was qualitative (Patton, 1990) and the methods included participant observation, ongoing interviews, analysis of students' journals and tests. The vehicle for the study was a six-week course for five intermediate second language learners. In this chapter, the design of the study, research methods employed and strategies for data analyses are described.

The theoretical framework for the course was based on Krashen's second language acquisition theory, particularly two hypotheses: 1) the input hypothesis and 2) the affective filter hypothesis. Apart from Krashen's hypotheses, the study was based also on the theory that activities which involve real communication promote language acquisition.

Research Questions

1. How does the use of TV programs as "comprehensible input" for intermediate ESL students a) promote learner awareness of idioms/idiomatic expression and b) foster comprehension of idioms/idiomatic expressions?
2. How do selected teaching strategies (group discussions, comprehension check, retelling, and free talks) facilitate or

impede the participants' comprehension and usage of idioms/idiomatic expressions?

3. How do students integrate idioms/idiomatic expressions into their language use?
4. What are students' perceptions of the value/ benefits of the use of TV as comprehensible input to improve comprehension and usage of idioms/idiomatic expressions?

Time Frame

The course was scheduled for six weeks, from February 1 through March 13. There were two classes weekly of approximately two hours each except for one time when the class extended to three hours. One class was in the first half of the week and the second on the weekend. The schedule was not fixed; it depended on the flexibility of the students' time. All the classes were held in the evenings, usually from seven to nine.

Student Profiles

Five Chinese students participated in the study. Four were male and one was female. All five participants had studied English as a foreign language for five to seven years in high school² and in college. The four graduate students took "cram courses" to prepare for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) before they were admitted into their programs. Their TOEFL scores ranged from 550 to 580. All of the male participants were in their second year of study in Canada. The female

². Foreign language learning in high school in China is one of the many compulsory subjects and consists of 90 to 180 minutes of instruction each week.

had lived in Canada for three and a half years prior to taking the course. Following is a profile of each of the five participants. Names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Jack. Jack, male, 30 years of age, was studying for his Master of Science degree in applied mathematics. He had studied English as a foreign language in high school and in university for seven years before coming to Canada. He took one "cram course" to brush up on his English before being admitted to the master's program. His TOEFL score was 580. His vocabulary was extensive in comparison to the other students. Jack could grasp the main ideas of a program and was able to get more details as the course went on. He did not do well in retelling because of his lack of practice. He tended to describe details while failing to present the key ideas in the story. For example, in the episode of "Full House" viewed during the last class, there were two themes. One concerned DJ, the other focused on Michelle. Students were asked to choose either one to retell. The following is part of Jack's retelling on the posttest:

Stephanie wanted to get rid of Michelle, so she scared her by tell [sic] her a tale about a hairy scary monster. At the very beginning, Michelle did buy it and felt really scared. But after Uncle Joey explained to her there was no so-called scary monster, she began to believe what Joey said was true. When Stephanie was trying to drive Michelle away the second time by play [sic] the same trick, it's not working. She herself was scared by the "monster" at the door... (Jack: Posttest)

Kyle. Kyle, male, 29, was studying for his Master's degree in mathematics. He had studied Russian for five years in high school with poor results and then took English as one of the compulsory courses in university. He also took "cram courses" to prepare for TOEFL and scored

560. His listening comprehension was much better than his written and spoken English. His English was influenced by his first language-- Chinese. When he did not know how to express himself in standard or idiomatic English, Kyle tended to think and organize his sentences by translating his ideas and phrases from Chinese to English. But he did better in retelling than in free talk because there was always a context and he could "borrow" some phrases from the programs. The following is Kyle's retelling on the posttest:

Stephanie and her friend were doing homework. Michelle insisted to sing a song [sic] for her sister. To get the little trouble-maker out of this room, Stephanie cheat [sic] Michelle by making a scare [sic] story. She told Michelle that if Michelle keep [sic] on to stay [sic], she would ask a so-called "scare-monster" to scare Michelle by calling the monster's name three times. After hearing her sister saying [sic], Michelle run [sic] to Joey's room looking for help. Joey told Michelle what Stephanie said was wrong. After then [sic], Michelle went back to see Stephanie and told her that she didn't buy the tale anymore. Finally, Joey went to their room to be a peace-maker.

Kyle said in his first journal entry that "my English is worse than what I thought" when he found he could only answer one third of the questions. But he noted during the last class that he suddenly felt he was "beginning to get on the right track of learning English."

Jim. Jim, male, 29, was a graduate student in computer science. He had studied English as a foreign language for seven years in high school and in university. His TOEFL score was 550. His written English was much better than his spoken English. Here is his retelling on the posttest:

DJ ran into the room with great exciting [sic], because she has [sic] just passed her driver's written test [sic]. She was anxious

to learn to drive the car immediately and asked for Dad to take her out to teach her how to drive the car. Her father finally agreed after she required [sic] again and again. In fact, her father was reluctant to teach her. He gave DJ many instructions and let her drive very carefully and slowly. DJ was not happy and told him that a snail had just passed them. At last, DJ could not put up with him any longer. She got out of the driver's seat and went to sit at the back. They went to [sic] home unpleasantly [sic].

Bert. Bert, male, 29, was enrolled in a Master of Science program. He had studied English as a foreign language for eight years. His TOEFL score was 580. He was the only participant who had been taught English by a native speaker, an American professor. His spoken English was the most fluent of the five and his writing was basically smooth and grammatical. He was outspoken and full of fun. The following is his retelling:

DJ has just passed her written test, therefore she is eligible to drive a real car. She asked her father to teach her how to drive. Her father was very cautious and gave DJ a lot [sic] instructions while she was driving that had nothing to do with real driving. DJ could not concentrate on the road. This caused some conflicts between the father and the daughter. DJ was mad that her father just could not let go. She was no longer in the mood of driving anymore and finally gave up and turned to her uncle for help.

Jane. Jane, 32, was the only female participant and the only student with family here. She was enrolled in an ESL program in the college. Jane used to be an athlete. She had studied English for four years and her English was basically "self-taught." She had never taken the TOEFL. Her language proficiency was the lowest of the five. She understood situation comedies, especially "Full House," much better than other programs selected for the course. She was engaged in a part-time job as a waitress where she had an opportunity to speak English. Jane also retold the part of the story concerning DJ and her driving lesson:

When DJ was 15 [sic] years old, she passed her driving written test. She was so happy with it, and asked her father to teach her to driving [sic]. Her father felt that she was still too young to drive. But he finally agree [sic] to teach her. DJ had a real hard time with her father. He taught her lots of things which DJ thought was [sic] useless. DJ then became angry and said that she was not in the mood of driving anymore...

Although the participants had studied English for quite a few years, they did not show a high degree of competence in communication. All of them had been taught by the grammar-translation method which emphasizes students' ability to read literature in their fields of study rather than oral and written competence. The four male students did not have much difficulty understanding lectures or their textbooks, but had great difficulty communicating, both orally and in written form, with native speakers. They said that their talks with native English speakers remained "skin-deep," and that they couldn't express themselves accurately beyond that. All of them invoked the language barrier as their main obstacle to socializing with local people.

Setting

The 12 sessions in the course were held in private homes, a strategy intended to reduce anxiety. The first six classes were conducted in the instructor's home; the other half were in a house shared by three of the five participants.

Methodology

Entry

There were fewer than twenty Chinese students in Thunder Bay at the time of the study. The close contact among the Chinese students

made it easy for the researcher/instructor to know their language proficiency levels. Students whose English language proficiency was at the intermediate level were approached. Five students volunteered to participate. The researcher/instructor contacted the participants by phone or in person, and explained the nature and purpose of the study and the expectations for participation. This information was discussed again during the first class. The participants read the letter describing the study and signed the consent form (Appendices A and B).

The five participants had studied English as a foreign language for four to eight years and had resided in Canada for two to three and a half years prior to the course. They felt that their English was not progressing because of their lack of socialization with native speakers and exposure to the language. Therefore, they were eager to make use of this opportunity to try new methods of learning English. They hoped they would have more time to communicate in the language and responded with enthusiasm.

The participants and I were friends. I had shared a house with four of them at different times. We often watched television together in the evenings after we came back from school or on weekends and holidays. The daily contact made it very easy for me to select programs that were used for the study, because I appreciated both their language proficiency and programs which appealed to them.

The first class was designed by the researcher/instructor. The programs and activities of later classes were planned to respond to the participants' interests and instructional needs as evidenced through

ongoing observations, interviews and their journal writings. Students were invited to participate in the selection of programs and in the design of instructional strategies.

For example, after the third class, Jane expressed her preference for "Full House" to other programs, because its language was more appropriate for her. Bert and Jim said that although they loved the movie "Green Card" very much, they would like to watch more situation comedies, because movies were usually much longer and required too much effort to concentrate. Based on students' suggestions, situation comedies formed the bulk of the programs we viewed. Bert suggested, at the end of class three, that he hoped we could set time aside for them to exchange ideas and information about what they saw or read in their spare time. Subsequently free talk was introduced for students to communicate and practice what they had learned.

Data Collection

The methods used to collect data included a pretest and posttest of the students' comprehension, participant observation, ongoing interviews with the participants, and analysis of participants' journals. Triangulation of methods (testing, interviewing, observation and document analysis) was used to strengthen the design and to ensure a better understanding of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Pretest & posttest. Tests used in the study were designed by the researcher/instructor according to the particular requirements of the course. The purpose was to assess the students' comprehension of content of the TV programs and idioms/idiomatic expressions and how

well the students could write idiomatically. Though there were only two written tests, the students' comprehension of content and idioms/idiomatic expressions, and their ability to express their ideas idiomatically were checked during each class.

For the pretest the students watched an episode of "Full House" (a situation comedy) for approximately fifteen minutes. Following the initial viewing, they were asked to answer in writing ten questions concerning the content, and to paraphrase five idioms/idiomatic expressions (Appendix C). The questions were not multiple choice, because multiple choice exercises contain "guess factors" (Hammerly, 1982, p. 541). The students' ability to answer the questions depended solely on their understanding of content. That is, if they failed to grasp the ideas, they could not know the appropriate answers.

At this first session, the students were given a cartoon (Appendix C) and were instructed to write a 100-word story based on the cartoon. They were advised to tell the main ideas and to write idiomatically. The purpose was to assess how well they could use idioms/ idiomatic expressions to express themselves.

In the posttest, given during the last class, the students watched another episode of "Full House." There were also ten questions to check comprehension and five idioms/idiomatic expressions for them to paraphrase. Following this, the students were instructed to retell the story of "Full House" in their own words in about one hundred words (Appendix D).

Journals. During the first class, participants were asked to keep a journal after each class to record their reflections and comments on the teaching strategies and the comprehensible input. The purpose of keeping a learning journal was to stimulate new thoughts and explore ideas from different perspectives (Holly, 1989). The entries allowed the instructor to develop more effective class plans. I responded to their entries verbally, either to the whole class or to individual students.

In their journals the students wrote about which programs they liked. For example, Jane expressed the idea in her second journal that she liked "Full House" better than other programs because its language was easier. Other students voiced their support in interviews or during class breaks. Their feedback helped in the selection of programs, and was, in part, the reason that almost half of the programs were episodes from "Full House."

Students also discussed the instructional strategies. For example, Jim wrote:

For some programs, I could not understand some aspects of the plots or some idioms. Group discussions gave me a chance to listen to how others understood them. which threw some light for me (Entry No. 4).

Students recorded idioms/idiomatic expressions they acquired both in and out of class. They described their strategies for acquiring idiomatic expressions in their daily life situations. Jack wrote:

I became more and more aware of how native speakers used idioms to express themselves. I learned one idiom from talking with my supervisor the other day. I jotted it down later and tried to use it the next time we met. But my supervisor stared at me with his mouth open. Obviously I used it in the wrong context, which made me embarrassed (Jack: Entry No. 5).

Jim tried to use one idiom he had learned in his journal: "... Learning English was certainly not an easy job. It is not like when you **had a crush on** a girl (Entry No. 2)."

I responded to their inappropriate use of idioms by explaining to the class that they should use idioms/ idiomatic expressions cautiously and only after they fully understood the meanings. To avoid misunderstanding and misuse, I explained the meanings of idioms/idiomatic expressions and in what situations they could be used. The students were asked to construct orally sentences using the idioms/idiomatic expressions to ensure that they understood the meanings.

The students also reflected their concerns in journals, as Jack's entry illustrates:

Group discussions were helpful all right in getting the facts and idioms straight. But second language learners talking among themselves without the teacher's correction may be responsible for fossilizing their grammatical mistakes (Entry No. 3).

I addressed Jack's concern in class. I explained that I had not had many opportunities to communicate with native speakers when I was learning English years ago in China. I learned to express ideas idiomatically by first studying how native speakers expressed themselves idiomatically. I read novels, newspapers and magazines, and watched TV programs. Then I practiced using idioms in my writing and in talking with other students. Over the years, these idiomatic expressions became part of my own language. So once I had an opportunity to converse with native speakers, I could express myself more idiomatically.

When the class met the second time, they explained that they had difficulty expressing themselves in writing in English because of their lack of practice. The students reported that one journal entry took them from one to two hours to finish. As well, their heavy loads at school also made it impossible to write an entry for each class. Therefore, we agreed to reduce the number of entries by half. Four of the five participants wrote six journal entries each. The fifth one, Bert, did not keep any journal because of his heavy school work. But he expressed his comments, experience and suggestions orally. This did not lessen the quality and quantity of data, because although they wrote less, the students talked more. They reflected orally about the ideas mentioned above.

Researcher/instructor's log. I kept a progress log for each class. The purpose was to describe class sessions, to record my observations, interviews and the students' language samples, to reflect on students' needs, and to plan for upcoming classes. For instance, after class seven, I wrote:

Today we watched a "Shirley Show" on Canadian farmers. I noticed that Jane was not as attentive as she used to be. She seemed to be thinking about something else. I talked with her during the break. She said that this topic did not appeal to her--there were a lot of numbers and new words. She further explained that she preferred "Full House" to talk shows (Instructor: Entry No. 7).

After the second class, I reflected in my log:

Bert suggested at the end of the class that we should set aside some time to talk about things they read, heard or watched outside class, because he felt sometimes he had an urge to share those things with someone else. It can also give them chances to communicate with each other. I'm going to add free talks to my teaching strategies (Instructor: Entry No. 2).

Interviewing. Interviewing was ongoing and took various forms, but was never formal. Interviews conducted after classes were in Chinese. I took note of what the students said and then translated it into English. Interviewing was used mainly to access insights and perceptions which could not be directly observed (Patton, 1990). I talked with the participants wherever possible: in class, during the break, on the phone and at their parties. The themes of interviews were emergent (Patton, 1990; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The interviews provided a strategy for data collection and were also employed in conjunction with participant observation to clarify analyses of the students' journals (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Sometimes questions arose when I was observing the students or reading their journals. These questions were probed later in interviews.

I reflected on the interviews in my log, coded them and developed themes and patterns. For example, Jim said in an interview:

Often I fumbled for the words or phrases to express myself in English, but I just couldn't find the right ones. Now I am beginning to pay attention to how natives expressed their ideas. Sometimes when I watched a program I would say: "Hey! This is the right expression I needed the other day" Then I would jot it down... Idioms are powerful in that they express your ideas and thoughts accurately and vividly.

I coded such data under "students' perception of idioms." These temporary codes were categorized further during data analysis.

Observation. Observation was used to supplement interviews and to study students' in-class behaviors. These data could not be obtained through talking with students (Patton, 1990). As a participant observer, I kept anecdotes to record the students' language samples and growth.

For example, the students tried to use the idioms/idiomatic expressions they had learned when talking about young intellectuals in China who wanted to make big money in business. Bert said, "Everybody wants to **hop on the gravy train** and to **make a big killing**." Jim said, "Some people are doing illegal things and **end up behind bars**."

I also took advantage of occasions when students were watching the programs or engaging in activities such as story retelling and group discussion to make brief notes on how they responded nonverbally to the programs and their use of idioms/idiomatic expressions. For example, on several occasions, I noticed that the students nodded or laughed when they watched a program. They appeared to have understood the meanings or the humor. If I thought that an idea or expression was difficult and had not been understood correctly, I would jot down a few words to remind me of the content and, later, to ask them some questions. I found sometimes that the students had laughed not because they had understood the intended meaning, but because of their own interpretation of the dialogues. This nonverbal behavior of the students could not be obtained by merely talking with students. My observation also generated questions which I later asked the students in interviews.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

As discussed earlier in this chapter, a combination of methodologies was used to strengthen the research design (Patton, 1990). Since data were added after each class, the constant comparative method was used (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Data analysis began with

data collection and continued through the study. The topics which the students discussed in their journals and interviews were wide-ranging. Data analysis involved coding descriptive data (journals, interviews and observation notes) according to their themes, regularities and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Interpretation of data involved the explanation of what was implied by the patterns which emerged. For instance, at the end of class two, Bert suggested:

Sometimes I watched some interesting news that I really want to share with others. If we could be given an opportunity to do so in class, it would be great. It would give us a chance to really communicate and to talk rather than practice.

I added free talk to the class activities, and recorded this in my log. Since Bert's suggestion reflected his perception of an effective teaching strategy and was related to the second research question, I wrote down "research question (R.Q.) 2: teaching strategy that promoted language growth."

The students' journal entries were coded in the same manner. For example, in the following excerpt, the highlighted words illustrate several codes:

I found my language enriched after I began paying attention to the use of idioms and how native speakers expressed themselves (**R.Q.4: benefits of acquisition of idioms**). I also tried to use the idioms I had learned (**R.Q.3: integrating idioms into her own language**). For instance, when I was waitressing a couple of days ago, I tried to use an idiom when I was talking with one of the customers who was a native speaker and frequented our restaurant. He looked surprised at my progress. I felt great when I knew I really could use idioms (**Motivation, Krashen's affective hypothesis**) and that I could put what I had learned into practice (Jane: Entry No.3).

Formal analysis of the data did not occur until data collection was complete (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). When data collection was complete, the temporary codes were categorized to correspond to the research questions. These are displayed in Table 1.

In summary, this chapter described the design of the study, methodology for data collection, and data analyses and interpretation. The following chapter will present the findings and interpretation of the study.

I. Television programs as comprehensible input
· Comprehensibility of TV programs
--language difficulty
--interest/relevance
--knowledge of the world
· Viewing
· Idiom-acquisition from comprehensible TV programs
II. The effectiveness of teaching strategies
· Background information introduction
· Comprehension check
· Group discussion
· Retelling
· Free talk
· Comprehension and practice of idioms
III. Strategies students used to integrate idioms/ idiomatic expressions into their own language
IV. Participants' perceptions of the benefits/values of TV programs as a source of comprehensible input

Table 1. Codes for data analysis & interpretation

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS & INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the findings and interpretation regarding the potential of television programs in promoting the awareness and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions by intermediate level ESL learners. The learning environment and the course are described in the first section. In the second section, the findings of the study are presented which address: television programs as a source of comprehensible input; effectiveness of teaching strategies; students' strategies to integrate the idioms/idiomatic expressions into their own language; and their perceptions of the benefits of television programs. The last section sets forth an interpretation of the findings.

The Learning Environment and the Course

The Learning Environment

All twelve classes were held in the researcher/instructor's or students' homes rather than in a formal classroom setting, in order to create a relaxed atmosphere. Krashen's low anxiety hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Krashen 1985, 1987) suggests that people learn more when they are not under pressure.

The first six classes were held in the researcher/instructor's living room, carpeted and spacious. The furniture consisted of a long couch, a sofa, several cushioned chairs, and a round table--large enough for six people to sit around and have discussions. Some participants preferred

to sit on the carpet and this made the atmosphere even more informal. There was a color television set and a VCR.

After six classes the participants suggested that we hold classes in a house shared by three of the five participants. There was a black and white TV set and no VCR. The participants felt at home in this familiar setting.

Description of the Course

The context for the study was a 12-class language course. These classes were held from seven to nine in the evening during a six-week period. There were two classes each week, one in the first half of the week, and the other in the latter half. The schedule of the classes was flexible, depending on students' availability. Each class was approximately two hours, with the exception of the third class which lasted three hours, because students watched the movie "Green Card" which lasted about an hour and a half.

Through the course, the participants watched 14 programs (in classes eight and ten, two programs were viewed). In the first half of the course, programs were pretaped and were viewed twice on a VCR; the rest of the programs were viewed live without a VCR. During the classes in which programs were viewed twice, I briefed the students on some necessary background, before they watched the program. Following the initial viewing, I checked the students' comprehension of both the content and the idioms/idiomatic expressions involved by asking them questions and by encouraging them to paraphrase the idioms/idiomatic expressions. The students had brief discussions and then watched the

program (or fragments of the program) a second time. After the second viewing, there was further comprehension check on those questions which students could not comprehend the first time. This was followed by more group discussions and retelling. During the latter half of the sessions when the students viewed a program only once, there were more extended discussions following the initial viewing. Collaboratively the students could get the answers to all the questions because of their growth in listening comprehension.

Group discussions facilitated understanding. The students were asked to retell the story in their own words, to summarize and/or explain the main ideas of each program, and to practice the idioms/idiomatic expressions they had learned. At the end of each class, a list of the idioms/idiomatic expressions was compiled by the class and the instructor. Following this, there was more practice of the idioms/idiomatic expressions to reinforce the students' understanding of the phrases they had just learned. Occasionally we had free talks. Table 2 provides an overview of the programs and the activities in each class.

The first and the last classes were used for a pretest and posttest. Comprehension and story-telling were assessed in written rather than oral form. The researcher/instructor spent the first half hour of the initial class explaining to the participants the purpose of the study, the concept of idioms, second language learning theories, Krashen's comprehensible input and affective filter hypotheses, and the proposed format of the classes. I also explained the in-class expectations and assignments.

Class	Program(s)	Type	Activities
1	Full House	situation comedy	·introduction of study ·program ·introduction ·pretest ·question & answer(Q & A) ·idiom-comprehension ·story-writing
2	Growing Pains	situation comedy	·program introduction ·Q & A ·group discussion ·retelling ·idiom-comprehension & ·practice
3	Green Card	movie	·program introduction ·idiom-comprehension ·discussion ·"sequel" ·free talk ·idiom-summary
4	Full House	situation comedy	·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·retelling ·discussion ·idiom-summary & practice
5	Full House	situation comedy	·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·discussion ·retelling ·idiom-practice
6	Full House	situation comedy	·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·discussion ·retelling ·idioms ·free talk
7	Shirley	talk Show	·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·discussion ·idiom-summary
8	Billy Graham Wonder Years	documen- tary situation comedy	·program-introduction ·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·discussion ·retelling ·idioms
9	Shirley	talk show	·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·discussion ·synopsis ·idiom-summary
10	Shirley Wonder Years	talk show situation comedy	·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·discussion ·retelling ·idiom-summary ·free talk
11	Full House	situation comedy	·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·retelling ·free talk
12	Full House	situation comedy	·posttest ·Q & A ·idiom-comprehension ·story-retelling

Table 2. Programs & class activities

Six of the 14 programs that we viewed were episodes of "Full House," a situation comedy which depicts a unique family situation. A widowed father, his three daughters, the girls' uncle, the father's and the uncle's buddy from childhood, and later the girls' baby twin cousins and their aunt, all lived under one roof. Though the girls do not have a mother, the friendly, caring and loving atmosphere makes it truly a full house.

"Full House" was viewed frequently because the language was appropriate for intermediate level learners: the dialogue was clearer and slower than most television situation comedies. This program has been on the air for several years. All the participants had watched it at least once. Some had even watched translations in China.

Like all the programs chosen for this study, "Full House" was not a serial. Therefore, comprehension did not depend on viewers' watching continuously to follow the plot.

For some programs that were taped before the class met, the researcher/instructor gave the participants a list of questions prior to viewing. Questions were arranged chronologically as the plots developed to support comprehension. The following is a list of questions from the second class:

1. Did Carol really want peanut butter? Why or Why not?
2. What did Carol and her father do when she was a little girl and had problems?
3. What was her problem this time?
4. What did Mike do for his neighbor?
5. What did Maggie want to do with her when Carol came back home?
6. What were Jason and his daughter planning to do?

7. What made Wendy, Mike's neighbor, think that the dog was not hers? And what was Mike's explanation?
8. What really happened to the dog? And why did Wendy love the new dog all of a sudden?
9. Why did Maggie become mad? What was her explanation and what was the real reason?
10. Why did Jason want to be closer to his kids?

In the latter half of the course, the students watched the programs when they were on the air. Therefore, they did not have a second opportunity to view the programs. The students had different views concerning the use of the VCR. Some thought that with the help of the VCR they could learn what they had failed to grasp the first time, others explained that they sometimes became bored viewing the same programs twice. The advantages and disadvantages of viewing TV programs with and without the help of the VCR will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Class activities varied and were emergent, depending on the specific programs and the participants' instructional needs. For instance, comprehension check and story retelling were used more often following situation comedies, while more group discussions were involved after talk shows and the movie.

The Findings

This study was based on the two most important hypotheses of Krashen's (1985, 1987) second language acquisition theory: 1) the input hypothesis; and 2) the affective hypothesis. That is, comprehensible input plus an anxiety-free learning environment are the crux in second language acquisition.

This section presents a discussion of 1) television programs as a source of comprehensible input for students to improve their comprehension and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions; 2) the effectiveness of selected teaching strategies; 3) the students' personal strategies to integrate the idioms/idiomatic expressions into their own language; and 4) the students' perceptions of the benefits/values of television programs.

Television Programs as Comprehensible Input

The programs chosen contained language information at "i" level-- learner's present knowledge of the language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Krashen, 1985, 1987). They also incorporated information that was beyond the participants' existing language proficiency. In Krashen's theory, "i" represents the learner's existing knowledge of the second language, for example grammar, while "i+1" is the input that contains knowledge of the language one step beyond the learner's command. For instance, if the learner knows the present tense of the English grammar, he/she can learn the past tense from input that contains his/her knowledge of the present tense and words such as "yesterday," "last week" and "two years ago," rather than by studying and analyzing the grammar in his/her first language. The learning of new language was assisted by non-linguistic information and the learner's knowledge of the world.

In this study, the participants had good command of English grammar prior to their taking the course. Since it is impossible to have a

completely homogeneous group of L2 learners, both "comprehensible input" and "i+1" can only be approximate. The selection of programs was therefore based on the students' suggestions about which programs were of appropriate language levels and appealed to them.

Factors Influencing Comprehension of Content

Comprehension of content was important to the students' acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions. The following factors were cited by the students as having influenced their comprehension: 1) level of difficulty of the language used in dialogues; 2) interest and/or relevance of programs; and 3) students' prior knowledge of the world.

Level of difficulty. The level of difficulty included: the number of technical terms, rate of speech, and clarity of pronunciation.

When talking about his past experiences of watching TV programs, Jim wrote:

I had never had any definite purposes when I watched TV other than to kill the time. I watched whatever that was there. Many programs were so difficult as far as the language was concerned that I could not follow what was talked about. There were lots of new words and idioms that I did not know. And the characters spoke so fast. When I tried to understand the individual words, the contents passed through. Sometimes I got so frustrated that I would turn the TV off (Entry No. 1).

When interviewed about how often she watched TV programs, Jane said "not too often," because "they were not interesting." For her, most programs were too difficult: rapid rate of speech and too much new vocabulary dampened her interest.

Other students expressed similar concerns about the level of difficulty, so the programs for this study were selected carefully. The main

ideas of most programs were comprehensible to students. I observed that on two occasions, when the class watched talk shows about Canadian farmers and religion, Jane's attention drifted frequently. She explained during the breaks that the language contained too many new words.

Interest/relevance of programs. The content of the programs was a factor which influenced comprehension. When the level of difficulty was not a concern, the more interesting the content was, the more the students could comprehend. Content that appealed to the students kept them interested and focused.

For example, interest was high when the class watched the movie "Green Card."³ Most of them had heard about people marrying in order to obtain a "green card"--immigrant status in the United States. The practice has been popular with many people coming from third world countries. But that a Frenchman married an American in order to obtain a "green card" was, to the students, something new and interesting. After watching the movie, Jim wrote: "I was so attracted by the plot that I almost forgot the movie was in English" (Entry No. 2).

Students watched a documentary about Billy Graham's tour of North Korea. Although religion was not a topic of interest to the group, one factor aroused their intense curiosity: North Korea is a country that

3. "Green Card": A Frenchman and an American woman got married in order to get something they wanted: immigrant status for the Frenchman, and a spacious apartment with a greenhouse for the lady. They went separate ways afterwards. Then a crack-down on such illegal marriages led two immigration officers to suspect that the marriage was a hoax. In their preparation to deal with the immigration officers, they found themselves madly in love. But the Frenchman was found guilty and deported.

strongly resists western culture, much like China two decades ago. How could it suddenly open its doors to a Western evangelist? This curiosity was sustained through the program. Kyle wrote in his journal:

World affairs have always been my interest. My attention was focused on the story rather than the language when I watched a program about which I have more background knowledge (Entry No. 4)

But a program that was interesting to one person might bore or repel another. Sometimes the students had conflicting interests. Jane wrote in her journal after watching several different programs that she preferred situation comedies, especially "Full House," to movies and talk shows because she lacked interest and background knowledge in areas such as politics and economics. Jack, on the other hand, did not like "Full House" as well as Jane did.

Subjects that the participants could relate to or considered relevant caught their attention and interest. During the break at one session, the students watched a piece of news on a new trend in China--many young intellectuals were moonlighting to make more money. The news drew them away from what they were doing, and a heated discussion followed in English.

Students' knowledge of the world. The students' background knowledge included not only their knowledge of specific settings, the characters and their relations to one another in a program, but also their prior knowledge of the world, such as cultures, politics, economics and religions. These were not the focus for most programs selected for the study, but some knowledge in these areas was needed in order to

understand the implications, humor, or motivation of the characters and their behavior. For example, one episode of "The Wonder Years" depicted some young Americans in the "Vietnam War" period. Historical information, such as why America went to war and how Americans perceived the war were essential to understanding the psychology of the young people of that time. Jim wrote in his journal:

Whether I could understand what was talked about in a program involved not only language difficulty, but also my general knowledge. Sometimes my lack of background knowledge result in my failure to understand the programs. I will try to accumulate my knowledge of the world in my everyday life (Entry No. 6).

Jane voiced a similar point in one interview:

My deficiency in background knowledge would build a shield around me against my getting the main ideas of some programs. This was also why I like "Full House," because its language is simple and it does not involve a lot background information.

Students also expressed the idea that their knowledge of the world facilitated or impeded their understanding of content when they watched TV programs at home, especially when they watched television news broadcasts.

All five students agreed that comprehension of the main ideas of TV programs was the first step towards understanding idioms/idiomatic expressions. To summarize, comprehensibility of input held the key not only to the students' understanding of idioms/idiomatic expressions, but also to their ability to use these phrases in communication. This was consistent with Krashen's (1985, 1987) and Lafford's (1987) theories that the ability to produce the language is based primarily on the understanding of messages.

Use of VCR to Confirm Comprehension

The VCR was used when classes were held in the researcher/instructor's home during the first half of the course. Programs were pretaped. Students usually viewed the same programs or part of the same programs twice. Talking about the advantages and disadvantages of the use of VCR, Jane wrote:

I feel it hard for me to learn the language from watching TV programs. When I read I can look up words and idioms in the dictionary. When I talk with native speakers, I can ask for explanation of certain words if I want. But when I watch TV, I do not have anybody to turn to for help, and I do not have any transcripts to trace. I like the idea of having the programs taped. That gives me a chance to watch them a second or even a third time. I taped most soap operas when I watched at home. And I found I could learn something new every time I watched them (Entry No. 4).

Kyle wrote:

After viewing some programs once through, I was frustrated because I felt I did not have a clear picture of what was talked about. The teacher's explanation and group discussions threw some light on the difficult points. So I could get almost every sentence after watching it twice. And I wanted to pay more attention to idioms for which, more often than not, I did not have much time the first time (Entry No. 5)

But sometimes the students noted that they did not watch carefully when they knew that there was a second viewing. Jack said he tended to get bored if he understood a lot the first time. For this reason, and because the students' comprehension had improved as the classes progressed, all programs were shown only once during the latter half of the study. But the students agreed that the use of VCR helped when they had different interpretations. The VCR gave them a chance to verify their arguments.

We now turn to a discussion of the students' comprehension and acquisition of idioms from the programs.

Idiom-acquisition from TV Programs

The students observed that before they came to the course they had paid little attention to idioms/idiomatic expressions when watching television. Kyle wrote:

When I watched TV, I was only interested in getting some information or having fun. It has never occurred to me that TV could be a means for me to learn the language. And idioms were so difficult that I had never dreamt of using them. Now I am beginning to pay attention to how native speakers express an idea apart from getting to know the main ideas. Only now have I found that TV programs are really rich in this respect (Entry No. 2).

From the beginning of the course, students were constantly reminded that, while focusing on main ideas, they should note how native speakers expressed themselves in idiomatic English. Because most of the programs were comprehensible to the students, they were able to pay some attention to idioms. As the course progressed and they grew more accustomed to registering/recognizing idioms while watching, students were able to jot down more of them. Jane said at one interview in the latter half of the course:

At the beginning, I depended solely on the teacher to learn idioms. The teacher listed some idioms and let us paraphrase. After a few classes, I found I could also jot down a couple of idioms while watching.

Jack summarized from his experience:

I found a second language learner has to have sharp ears, and to be very observant and sensitive to the language in order to learn idioms. It was really challenging (Entry No. 6).

The students noted that TV placed idioms in context rather than in isolation which helped them better understand and remember the meanings.

For example, when we viewed one program, the idiom "I don't buy it" was used. The students did not know that the word "buy" could also mean "believe." But when they watched two people talking and understood that one person was obviously kidding, they began to associate the word "buy" with "believe." Jim wrote:

I found learning idioms through watching TV programs is a very good way. They put idioms in contexts. I learn idioms when I understand its contexts. Therefore, similar situations will remind me of the idioms. I found it easier to memorize. (Entry No. 2)

The students said comprehension of the main ideas of a program and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions depended upon and complemented each other. Jane said in an interview at the end of the course:

I found the acquisition of idioms and comprehension of programs supplemented each other. A lot of times idioms and new words prevented me from understanding the programs. Now, after the teacher explained the idioms thoroughly, I found I could better understand the plots. In other circumstances, when I understood the main ideas, I could figure out through the contexts what some idioms may mean. It's like a spiral.

The students' ability to understand and acquire idioms/idiomatic expressions depended on such factors as the comprehensibility of TV programs and students' sensitivity to the use of idioms/idiomatic expressions by native speakers. They acquired them by understanding the message, by attending to the usage of native speakers and by using

them. This was a long process which involved students' constant exposure to comprehensible input and opportunities to practice.

The Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies designed for this study included:

- Background information introduction
- Comprehension check: questions and answers
- Group discussion
- Retelling
- Free talks
- Idiom-comprehension and practice

The following discussion assesses the effectiveness of the teaching strategies employed in the study.

Background Information Introduction

The programs selected for viewing were not serials. They included situation comedies, talk shows, a documentary and a movie. Therefore comprehension did not depend on the participants' continuously watching serials to follow the development of the plots. Despite this, I usually briefed the students on such background information as the relationships between the characters, the settings and specific terms that were crucial to the understanding of the programs.

For instance, I explained to the students, in class eight before we watched "Billy Graham," that Billy Graham was a well-known American missionary and that this was a documentary about his recent trip to North Korea.

When students watched "Full House" for the first time, most of them had a difficult time distinguishing the characters and remembering their names and relationships. I began by telling them the names and describing the relationships before we viewed the program. Five minutes into the program, I stopped the tape and asked them to discuss the characters and relationships among characters. After these had been established, they continued viewing. In evaluating the strategy Jim wrote:

When I watched some programs by myself, I always spend a lot of time trying to figure out who all the characters were and how they were related, which distracted my attention and prevented me from understanding the plots. I think that the teacher's explanation of the background before the program does help a lot (Entry No. 1).

I did not introduce every detail beforehand. For example, one program discussed "cross dressing." Before viewing the program, I asked students what the phrase "cross dressing" meant to them. None had heard the phrase and did not know what it implied. I did not explain; instead I asked them to predict the meaning as the program progressed. When the participants saw a panel of males appear on the stage dressed in female attire such as skirts and blouses, they began to have some idea of what the phrase meant.

Background introduction gave the students some preliminary information of the program and prepared them for the viewing.

Comprehension Check

Checking the students' listening comprehension consisted of two activities: comprehensive/literal listening and critical/interpretive listening (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991; Bromley, 1992). The former involved the

understanding of factual or literal information which usually had one right answer, while the latter went beyond what was conveyed by literal information. The comprehension of what was implied demanded critical thinking. And the ability to understand information on a critical/interpretive level depended partially on students' prior knowledge and experience (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991).

Comprehension check during the course usually took the form of questions and answers. Questions were addressed to both literal and critical levels of listening. The purpose was to help the students clarify and understand the literal meanings first so that they could use their critical thinking to appreciate the implications. In the first few classes I asked questions, and the participants answered. Students liked this activity, because by answering the questions they clarified their understanding of the ideas in the programs. Bert said: "I like to have the teacher ask questions, because I found that I could better understand the content and the main ideas when so doing." Other students shared this view. Jane noted: "It seemed efficient when the teacher asked questions and we answered them." Jim wrote:

It really helped my comprehension when I answered the teacher's questions. The questions were asked in the same order as the development of the plots. I found they became a story when I put the answers together and added a few transitional sentences (Entry No. 3).

In later classes, when students became increasingly active in answering questions and tried to give the appropriate responses, they were encouraged to ask each other questions. Questions generated by

students usually occurred when they wanted others to clarify or justify their ideas.

Questions to check critical listening were open-ended. Students incorporated their views of the world and experiences when answering. The students' responses were acceptable so long as they made sense.

For example, during Class Eight, we viewed one episode of "The Wonder Years." The episode told a story about Kelvin and Winnie, a couple of teenage lovers. Kelvin and Winnie had been going out "on and off" for years. One day, they went to a cafeteria. A girl at the bar appeared to have warm feelings towards Kelvin. She winked at Kelvin and tried to start a conversation by telling Kelvin that she had put his radishes on the side of his plate. Kelvin in return smiled and said that that was just the way he liked it. When he came back to the table where he and Winnie were sitting, Kelvin found Winnie's face full of anger. She pushed back her chair, stood up, and left, throwing Kelvin a parting comment that she was not hungry and that she hoped Kelvin would enjoy his radishes. After viewing I asked, "What was Winnie's reason for leaving the dinner table?" The students answered unanimously that she was not hungry. When I probed further why they thought Winnie left without eating, the students' answers were varied. "She left because she was jealous." "She was mad at Kelvin because of his ambiguous attitude towards the girl at the bar." "She did not like the way the girl flirted with Kelvin." "She thought Kelvin was her territory, and the girl should not behave the way she did." "She thought if Kelvin loved her, he should not give the girl any encouragement." Such answers to my question were not immediately

available from what the characters said, but were implied from the characters' body language--facial expressions and gestures. The students' ability to answer this question also depended on their past experiences of dating and their analysis of Winnie's psychology. This example suggests that the students exercised their critical thinking. Responses to questions like this sometimes triggered group discussions when the students had different views. Comprehension check was crucial. The students' comprehension of the contents of the programs was the basis for their understanding and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions, and the basis for group discussions and retellings.

Group Discussion

Discussion was part of every class. The purposes were to allow the students to exchange ideas, information, and opinions; to apply their critical thinking ability (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991); and to give the students an opportunity to practice the idioms/idiomatic expressions to which they had been exposed. Group discussion often was intertwined with comprehension check on critical listening. Their answers to critical listening questions usually extended into discussions. The students were asked to discuss the main ideas, idioms/idiomatic expressions, relations among the characters, the "moral" of some programs, and the development of the plots.

I usually did not ask one specific student to respond because this seemed to put pressure on the students. Instead I encouraged them to speak by asking open-ended questions. For example, after they watched the movie "Green Card," I asked them to imagine what would happen to

the Frenchman after he was deported and where his relationship with the American girl would lead. The students were very interested in this and imagined several possible endings to it. Bert commented at the end of class three: "This was interesting. I felt as if I were the author and were asked to write a sequel. I tried to use my imagination to give it an end."

The students even extended the discussion to talk about love and cross-cultural marriages, and true feelings and a "green card." Discussion like this was not a check of the students' comprehension but to give students an opportunity to negotiate and explain their points of view and to practice using the idioms/idiomatic expressions to which they had been exposed. The students also found group discussions helpful in understanding the plots and particular idioms/idiomatic expressions. Jim explained the value of discussion in clarifying ideas:

For some programs, I could not understand some aspects of the plots or some idioms. Group discussions gave me a chance to listen to how others understood them, which threw some light for me (Entry No. 4).

Discussion also gave students opportunities to communicate. Kyle noted:

Unlike oral practice, I feel that group discussion is less language learning oriented. I do not feel that I learn the language for the purpose of learning language. In group discussion, I tried to communicate and to get myself understood. I learned the language by using it. Sometimes I found myself using the idioms I had just learned which expressed accurately what was on my mind (Entry No. 4).

Jane said that she also learned to rephrase her sentences and clarify herself when her ideas were challenged by others. Jack

mentioned in his journal one aspect of group discussions that he considered a drawback:

Group discussion was helpful all right in getting the facts and idioms straight. But second language learners talking among themselves without the teacher's correction may be responsible for fossilizing⁴ their grammatical mistakes because the language of many L2 learners contain a lot of grammatical mistakes (Entry No. 3).

I talked with the students about this concern the next class. To make up for this drawback, the students were constantly reminded to attend to the ways native speakers expressed themselves--collocation of words and the use of idioms. I also explained to them from my past experiences that they could benefit in the long run by doing so.

Thus, group discussion provided students with opportunities to clarify and confirm ideas, to explore the meanings of idioms/idiomatic expressions, and to use the idioms/idiomatic expressions to which they had previously been exposed.

Retelling

After viewing, students were usually asked to retell the main ideas of a program to increase or promote their understanding of the plots and main ideas, and to provide an opportunity to practice the idioms/idiomatic expressions.

Story retelling took two forms: collaborative and individual. The former started with one student. Then others took turns to talk until the

⁴. I explained to the students Krashen's hypotheses of L2 acquisition and his terminology in the first class. This was probably why some students used Krashen's terms in their journal entries.

story was complete. The students learned how to respond to each other's insights and how to listen attentively. Talking about his experience in collaborative story retelling, Kyle wrote:

At the beginning I had great difficulty carrying on a story, because I tried to follow my own logic and train of thoughts rather than those of the students before me. I found it challenging to listen carefully what others before me had to say and then to come up with some ideas to carry on the story. But after practicing for some time, it was more like a game to me (Entry No. 3).

In the first several classes, the stories the students told in collaboration were not consistent and well organized. As Kyle mentioned above, students seemed to be preoccupied with their own trains of thought rather than with following what others had to say. But after some practice and my modeling, their retelling became more focused.

In the individual story retelling, the students were asked to retell a complete story. Frequently there was more than one theme in a program. To facilitate comprehension, they were advised to concentrate on one character or theme. Commenting on his experience of individual story telling, Jim wrote:

I had never done a story retelling in English before I came to the study. So when asked to do so after watching one "Shirley Show" about extreme [sic] tall and short people, I spoke whatever that came to my mind. Then I found that other students were not with me, because there were lots of missing links in my story. The teacher then told me that I should grasp the main idea, and follow a certain logic. She suggested that I outline the things I want to say and arrange them in a [sic] order. I followed this advice by first pointing out the issue of the talk show, and then the problems and embarrassment experienced by these tall and short people, and how they made up for their disadvantages. I did it. Story retelling is great. It taught me to talk logically in English (Entry No. 4).

One difficulty with story retelling was that the students tended to describe details rather than summarize the main ideas. Comprehension check showed that they could understand the main ideas, but some of the retellings were step-by-step accounts of the details. This was due to their lack of practice in doing story retelling. Webbing (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991) could be introduced to help students grasp the key points in a program.

Free Talks

In some classes the students had free talk wherein they discussed what they read or heard in their spare time. This strategy was suggested by two students after the third class. They wanted to be given a chance to talk about things other than the programs they watched. Bert suggested after class two:

Sometimes I watched some interesting news that I really want to share with others. If we could be given an opportunity to do so in class, it would be great. It would give us a chance to really communicate and to talk rather than practice.

But free talk had a disadvantage. Jack observed that communication between non-native speakers in less-than-perfect English might be responsible for their grammatical mistakes. Frequently the students resorted to Chinese sentence structures or ways of expressions when they did not know how to do so in English. They would think in Chinese, and translate their ideas to English. This translation was often word for word when equivalent English expressions were not readily available. This made their expressions neither English nor Chinese. A possible remedy for this problem was addressed at the end

of group discussion section. During free talks, I was involved as a participant and model. I probed to ask the students to clarify their views. They did the same with me, and I would summarize our discussions in the end.

Comprehension and Practice of Idioms

The primary objectives in the class were to help students: 1) identify and record idioms/idiomatic expressions while viewing a program; 2) understand the meanings; and 3) know in what context an idiom would be appropriate. To achieve this purpose the students were asked to try to record idioms/idiomatic expressions while they viewed a program. At the beginning, I noticed that they could understand the meanings of some idioms when I later checked their comprehension, but they did not record these phrases while viewing. The students told me that they were not accustomed to learning idioms this way and did not recognize them as idioms. Therefore, many idioms/idiomatic expressions went unnoticed. To ensure that they could jot down some phrases, I began to model, from the second class on, by recording all the idioms I could hear while viewing with the students. When they observed that I jotted down something, it reminded them that there had just been a special phrase. Some were then able to write down that phrase or at least recognize that they had just missed jotting it down. This strategy worked. I noticed that the students were able to jot down more idioms as the class progressed.

After viewing, students presented their lists of idioms/idiomatic expressions and explained what each phrase meant to them. I also told

them the phrases I had recorded and invited them to explain these. Occasionally I reconstructed a scenario and asked students to supply an idiom/idiomatic expression used for the situation in the program. For instance, after viewing one episode of "Full House," I asked the students, "What was the idiom DJ used when she explained to her sisters that they were still not out of trouble?" I expected the students to come up with "we are not **out of the woods** yet." Most often they could not supply the exact phrase. This strategy was not used frequently, because the students found it too difficult. As Krashen (1985, 1987) notes there is usually a silent period between the time a second language learner understands the language and the time s/he can reproduce it.

The students liked to paraphrase the idioms/idiomatic expressions both they and the instructor/researcher had recorded, because they could recall the context in which these idioms were used and derive their meanings comparatively easily. Kyle explained during the break of class 10, "Idiom-paraphrasing helps me understand clearly what the idioms mean, and when and where I should use them." Bert said in an interview:

I am more used to the way in which the teacher lists the idioms involved in a program and asks us to paraphrase them. This is less difficult. But I know I have to learn to catch the exact idioms while I am watching a program, because I will have nobody to turn to for a list of idioms once I watch a program all by myself.

Jim expressed the same feeling:

When I was asked to give the original idioms in a program, sometimes I couldn't do so, because first of all, I did not have enough time to jot them down while concentrating on what was talked about in the program; secondly, I could not give the correct spellings or I could not make sure which words were used in an idiom. So when I looked at them after watching the program, I

could not figure out what they meant. I need more time before I can come up with the idioms.

The purpose of asking students to define idioms/idiomatic expressions was to help them better understand the content and the meanings of the idioms/idiomatic expressions. Idioms/idiomatic expressions sometimes were the "key words" (Valette, 1967, p. 70) to students' comprehension. Comprehension of these key words helped students understand the plots. In return, content provided the context for students to acquire idioms/idiomatic expressions (Hammerly, 1982; Bell, 1988). Jane said in an interview at the end of the course:

I found the acquisition of idioms and comprehension of programs supplemented each other. A lot of times idioms and news words prevented me from understanding the programs. Now after the teacher explained the idioms thoroughly, I found I could better understand the plots. In other circumstances, when I understood the main ideas, I could figure out through the contexts what some idioms may mean. It's like a spiral.

Sometimes at the end of the class I asked students to construct a sentence using the idioms/idiomatic expressions they had just learned to ascertain whether they fully understood the meanings. Sometimes I noticed that they misunderstood and/or used an idiom/idiomatic expression in the wrong situation. I would explain further and then ask them to compose more sentences to better their comprehension of the meanings/implications. As Bell (1988) suggests, L2 learners should not be encouraged to reproduce idioms immediately unless they are familiar with their meanings and know when they can use them.

The students commented that certain idioms/idiomatic expressions were easier to understand and remember. Idioms that are present in Chinese and whose structures are similar to the Chinese expressions

were the ones that students said they could easily figure out and remember with or without contexts, for example, "to cry wolf," "to smoke like a chimney," and "to be in the same boat." Upon hearing phrases like these, students could quickly draw on their own prior knowledge, and appreciate the meanings.

Idioms which the students found confusing had structures identical to Chinese sayings, but the meanings were totally different. For instance, in English, the expression "to pull somebody's leg" means to tease or kid someone by telling the person something which is untrue; in Chinese, the expression means being an obstacle. Similarly, in English "to eat one's words" means to admit one was wrong, whereas in Chinese it means to fail to keep one's promise. The students tended to predict from the Chinese perspective when they did not understand the meanings. This occurred even when an idiom/idiomatic expression was used in context.

The majority of idioms did not fall into either of these categories. Idioms in one language are not generally present in the other. Table 3 lists some of the idioms/idiomatic expressions participants were exposed to during the course. Phrases with an asterisk (*) are the ones that were used later by the students in their discussions or journals.

Strategies Students Used to Integrate Idioms/idiomatic Expressions into Their Own Language

All the students noted that understanding idioms was one thing, and using them naturally was another. The latter needed much practice. Jack wrote:

Idioms/idiomatic Expressions Heard & Acquired	Jack	Kyle	Jim	Bert	Jane
to be above one's head			*		*
to be in the mood to do...	*				*
to get the picture					
to take one's word for it	*	*	*		
to pull somebody's leg		*		*	
to get turned on	*				
to wear one's heart on one's sleeve					
to hop on the gravy train	*			*	
to be taken in					
to be in a pickle	*				
to hit it off well with each other	*			*	
to have a thing for somebody			*		
to be out of the woods					
to have a crush on somebody		*	*		
to go down the drain			*		
to chicken out					
to keep one's shirt on					
to face the music	*				
to kill time		*			*
to cook up something					
to eat one's words					
to be in the same boat					
to go back on one's word					*
to cry wolf		*			
to go out of one's way to do ...					
a soft touch					
to act one's age not one's shoe size					
to buy what somebody says	*	*			
to let somebody down					
to keep one's fingers crossed				*	
to be behind bars	*				
to see things eye to eye				*	
to make a killing			*	*	
Total	9	6	6	6	4

Table 3. Idioms/idiomatic expressions heard & acquired during the course

It is comparatively easy for a non-native speaker with a large vocabulary to understand what an idiom means, especially in a given context. But it is going to take a lot more time to fill up the gap between understanding an idiom and talking idiomatically. Practice is an important means in achieving this goal (Entry No. 5).

The students tried to use what they learned in their communication with native speakers. Jane wrote:

I found my language enriched after I began paying attention to the use of idioms and how native speakers expressed themselves. I also tried to use the idioms I had learned. For instance, when I was waitressing a couple of days ago, I tried to use an idiom when I was talking with one of the customers who was a native speaker and frequented our restaurant. He looked surprised at my progress.

I felt great when I knew I really could use idioms and that I could put what I had learned into practice (Entry No.3).

Most of the students had little chance to converse with native speakers. The only opportunity they had was to talk with their professors and, occasionally, with their classmates. So they were advised to use the idioms/idiomatic expressions they had learned in their discussions, journal writings, and retellings.

For example, Jim noted, "I was sometimes frustrated about my English and felt that the many years I spent learning it **went down the drain** (Entry No. 3)." In the group discussion which focused on young intellectuals in China who tried to make a big profit by moonlighting in business, Bert commented: "Everybody wants to **hop on the gravy train** and to **make a big killing**." Jack said: "Some people are doing illegal things and **end up behind the bars**."

The following are some more examples of the idioms/ idiomatic expressions students used in discussions or journal writing:

They got into this nontraditional marriage. Now they will have **to face the music**" (Jack, Class 3).

I think the girl at the bar **had a crush on** Kelvin. You can see it from the [sic] eyes, the way she looks [sic] at him" (Kyle, Class 10).

Can you explain it? It is **above my head** (Jim, Class 4).

It was the first time I went to drink in a bar. I order [sic] some beer, and sat next to an old man. He was a little drunk. But he was a nice guy. We **hit it off well** and chat [sic] for an hour" (Bert, Class 11, Free Talk).

Sometimes I am very tired after work [sic] in the restaurant. So I am really not **in the mood of** [sic] learning anything. I just want to sleep (Jane, Journal entry No. 5).

Occasionally the students were so eager to try to put what they had learned into practice that they made mistakes. Jack wrote in his journal:

I became more and more aware of how native speakers used idioms to express themselves. I learned one idiom from talking with my supervisor the other day. I jot it down later and tried to use it the next time we met. But my supervisor stared at me with his mouth open. Obviously I used it in the wrong context, which made me embarrassed (Entry No. 6).

The focus of the course was more on increasing the students' awareness of idioms/idiomatic expressions than on encouraging them to use immediately what they had just learned in their daily communication. As Bell (1988) points out, the teaching and learning of idioms/idiomatic expressions should not be "to 'collect' them like postage stamps and subsequently 'display' them indiscriminately" which often ends up with "comic results" (p. 2). Instead, "the aim should be to stimulate in the

student an alertness to expressions, a gradual growth in familiarity with them, and finally a cautious use" (p.1).

Four students--Jack, Jim, Kyle and Jane--maintained separate note-books to record all the idioms they had learned from the classes. The records were kept in a well organized manner. Some numbered all the idioms with explanations underneath. The following are some of the expressions selected from Jim's class notes:

a pain in the butt: to mean that sb. is a nuisance (Class 1)

to kill time: to pass time (Class 1)

She had a thing for him: to have affection for...(Class 3)

to cook sth. up: to plot sth. secretly (Class 4)

I don't buy it: I don't believe what you said (Class 4)

to be in the same boat: in the same situation (Class 5)

to get turned on: to get excited (Class 7)

to take your word for it: to believe you (Class 7)

to be behind bars: to be in prison (Class 9)

To make up for their lack of opportunity to talk with native speakers, I encouraged them to watch other TV programs that they liked in their spare time. Lafford (1987) notes that "the importance of obtaining input outside the class cannot be overestimated" (p. 282). Most followed this advice. Sometimes they called before they watched a program and we would both watch it and discuss it on the phone afterwards. They also extended their opportunities to acquire idioms/idiomatic expressions to reading newspapers and advertisements.

The students learned not only idioms, but new ways of expressing their ideas. Kyle said in an interview:

When I watched TV programs, I learned not only idioms from TV, but ways of expressing some ideas that I did not know how to express before. Some expressions may not necessarily be idioms, but just the ways native speakers use which I cannot. They

are vivid and accurate. I would express myself in Chinglish if I did not know them.

The following are some of the expressions Kyle learned during the course:

- to spend **quality time**
- I don't **feel like company** now.
- Where were we** (after a conversation is interrupted)?
- I'm out of here.**
- Stop **babying** me.
- I've got enough **on my plate** (I've got enough things to worry about).
- Her charm **clouds** his good senses.

The students' main opportunities to integrate the idioms/idiomatic expressions into their own language was through in-class discussions and journal writings. Table 4 depicts the students' performance on the pretest and the posttest. It shows apparent improvement in terms of students' ability to comprehend and use idioms in their writings. The phrases that the students could use (as shown in Table 4) during the course were only a small proportion of what they heard from the TV programs. Krashen (1987) notes that if a learner is constantly exposed to comprehensible input, the language s/he receives will be internalized, and s/he will eventually acquire it subconsciously and be able to reproduce it.

Participants' Perceptions of the Benefits/values of TV Programs as a Source of Input

Jack commented after the posttest that TV programs were a valuable source of input to learn idioms/idiomatic expressions:

It is easier to understand when native speakers talk to me. They know that I am a foreigner, so they choose to use simpler words and avoid using idioms to assist my comprehension. But I

Name	Comprehension (10)		Idiom-acquisition (5)		No. of idiom(s) used in writing	
	pretest	posttest	pretest	posttest	pretest	posttest
Jack	3	7	2	4	0	2
Kyle	3	5	1	3	0	2
Jim	4	7	2	3	1	3
Bert	5	7	3	4	1	3
Jane	2	5	0	2	0	1

Table 4. The students' performance in pretest & posttest⁵

5. See Appendixes C and D for pretest and posttest.

find it a lot harder to follow when native speakers, especially teenagers, talk among themselves. They use a lot of idioms and slang. But I find, after taking this course, that purposeful watching TV programs gives me a chance to hear native speakers talking among themselves which I hardly have any opportunity and to learn the idioms involved...

Apart from the acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions, students found that TV programs were beneficial in helping them:

1. learn new ways to express ideas;
2. break the "fossilization" (Krashen, 1985, p. 43) of the students' language through constantly receiving comprehensible input;
3. have more opportunities to listen to dialogues among native speakers; and
4. learn the culture.

Commenting on the benefits of watching TV programs, Kyle said at the end of the course:

A lot of ideas I could not express when I talked to native speakers. Through extensively watching TV in the past month and a half, I learned some expressions that best described my ideas. They are not really idioms, but are the ways, you know, native speakers could use while I couldn't because of my lack of language sense for being a non-native speaker.

Jane noted in an interview at the end of the course:

It is not the idioms that I have learned that really mattered. I found I learned a new and effective way of improving my English, that is, to observe how native speakers expressed themselves. After all, learning a second language needs a lot of imitation. It is a foreign language and the rules and usage are not in your system. You've got to observe and use the expressions long before you can create your own sentences to express yourself.

Jim wrote:

I thought that my English would never be improved. But after taking part in this course, I found I not only learned a lot of idioms, but constant and purposeful watching of TV programs improved my listening comprehension ability. I used to consider watching TV a waste of time. But I do not think so any more, because I find something new is added to my own language every time I watch TV (Entry: No. 6).

Jim noted in an interview that situation comedies depict cultural aspects--how people in the Western culture live, what their values are, their concepts of what is right and wrong, and that these are important, too, in understanding the idioms and content.

Discussion of the Findings

This study explored the potential of television programs in promoting awareness and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions of intermediate ESL learners. It was based on Krashen's (1985, 1987) second language acquisition theory, particularly the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis which state that language acquisition occurs ONLY when learners understand the message conveyed by the input in an anxiety-free atmosphere. The study was further based on the theory that activities which involve real communication promote language acquisition (Hammerly, 1982; Rosenbaum, 1971; Lafford, 1987; Irujo, 1986; MacWilliam, 1986; Long & Porter, 1985). All the participants were volunteers and were very enthusiastic. The course was held in a homelike atmosphere which was meant to reduce anxiety. Learners' willingness and enthusiasm plus a low anxiety environment, according to Krashen (1983, 1985, 1987), are important factors for language acquisition. The following is an analysis of the findings in relation to the four research questions.

Research Question 1

How does the use of TV programs as "comprehensible input" for intermediate ESL students a) promote learner awareness of

idioms/idiomatic expressions; b) foster comprehension of idioms/idiomatic expressions?

The analysis of data revealed that comprehension of the main ideas in the TV programs held the key to students' ability to understand and to acquire idioms/idiomatic expressions. This is consistent with Krashen's input hypothesis that language acquisition occurs when a learner understands the message, and with Tompkins' and Hoskisson's theory (1991) that listening comprehension is the basis for other language arts (speaking, reading and writing). The comprehensibility of the programs depended on the level of difficulty, interest/relevance of the programs, and students' background knowledge.

TV programs place idioms/idiomatic expressions in meaningful contexts. They also provide extralinguistic information, such as body language, to aid and enhance students' comprehension of the idioms/idiomatic expressions. These supports are not available in conventional text books. Context and body language proved very important to the students' understanding of idioms/idiomatic expressions. The students were constantly reminded to note the ways native speakers in the programs expressed themselves. Comprehension of main messages was the first step towards comprehension of idioms/idiomatic expressions. meanwhile, an increase in students' awareness and comprehension of idioms/idiomatic expressions helped them further understand the programs.

The findings suggest that the students' general comprehension improved and that their comprehension and ability to use the idioms were moderate. The limited time scope made it impossible for the

students to come across and acquire a great amount of idioms. But what the students seemed to have achieved was an understanding of a process and a metacognitive awareness of the strategies which they could use to acquire more idioms and to monitor the learning themselves.

Research Question 2

How do selected teaching strategies (group discussions, comprehension check, retelling, and free talks) facilitate or impede the participants' comprehension and usage of idioms/idiomatic expressions?

Krashen (1987) states that "we acquire spoken fluency not by practicing talking but by understanding input, by listening..." and that the only purpose of output is to invite more comprehensible input. While this study illustrated that comprehensible input was important to the students' understanding of idioms/idiomatic expressions, it also showed that guided practice through using a variety of teaching strategies was crucial to language acquisition, a point Krashen plays down. Dialogue provided the students with opportunities to use the idioms/idiomatic expressions in meaningful contexts and to internalize the phrases. This supports Hornby's (1980) argument that second language learners need to have ample practice before idioms/idiomatic expressions become part of their own language.

Comprehension of idioms/idiomatic expressions developed through the students' understanding of the plots of the TV programs. Different teaching strategies were employed to help the students better

understand content and idioms and to give them opportunities to engage in talking and achieve spoken fluency.

Krashen (1985, 1987) suggests that fluency in the second language cannot be taught, but emerges with time after enough linguistic competence has been built up through understanding comprehensible input. This study demonstrated that oral practice helped students to speed up their familiarity with and internalization of the idioms/idiomatic expressions to which they had been exposed. Practice also improved the students' overall language proficiency. The effectiveness of the teaching strategies used in the course is described below.

Comprehension Check of Content and Idioms

Comprehension from watching television programs occurred primarily through listening. Comprehension of main ideas was the first step toward comprehension and acquisition of idioms. Comprehension check of content was intended to promote the students' active listening comprehension at both literal and interpretive levels. Literal comprehension focused on story line and awareness of idioms/idiomatic expressions. Interpretive listening involved critical thinking. Comprehension check of the students' understanding of idioms helped them appreciate the meanings of the idioms and know which contexts the idioms may be used. Reference was made incidentally about when and where certain idioms should be used, but the concept of language "register" (Halliday, 1978, p. 32)--the appropriate use of language in different situations--for this study, the distinction between standard,

colloquial, slang, vulgar, archaic and poetic usage of idioms, was not introduced systematically.

Group Discussions

The students exercised their critical thinking during group discussions. Discussion provided an opportunity for students to clarify the content and the meanings of the idioms/idiomatic expressions, and to state their own points of view. The students expressed that they found themselves using some idioms which they had heard from the programs in their discussions, because they found that these phrases best expressed their thoughts and arguments. They grew familiar with the meanings of the idioms by using them in real conversations.

Retelling

Retelling did not achieve the desired goals. The students' retellings were not focused and organized. I explained to them that they should try to follow an order of sequence or development and articulate the important points when retelling. On occasion, I demonstrated a retelling, thus providing a model for students. However, there were no systematic explanations and demonstrations of strategies such as note-taking while viewing, identifying key points, and organizing information.

I read some more literature during data analysis and interpretation and learned that an alternative strategy such as webbing (Bromley, 1992; Hoskisson & Tompkins, 1987) or a list might be introduced to help students identify important information. Teachers might demonstrate how to construct a web to structure information. Figure 2 is an example of how webbing or a list can be used to focus on key points.

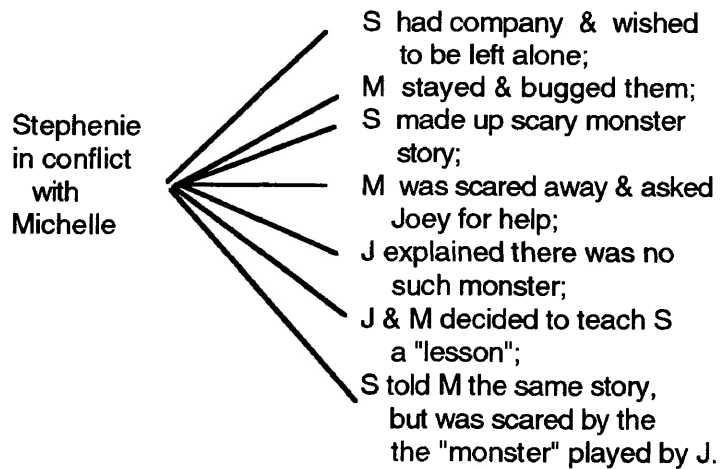
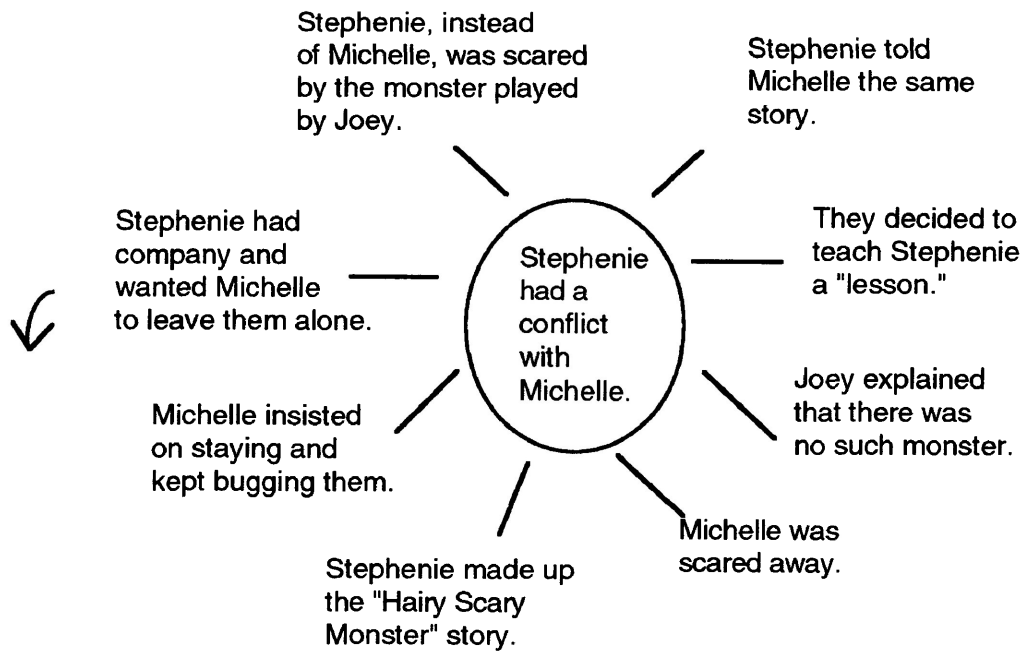


Figure 2: Use of webbing & a list to focus on key elements.

Teachers might discuss with students which points are essential to retelling of the main ideas and construct webs in collaboration with the students.

Free Talks

Despite the drawback mentioned by Jack that L2 learners talking among themselves may be responsible for the fossilization of their grammatical mistakes, free talk as a teaching strategy was important in that it gave the students opportunities to practice the idioms acquired. Lafford (1987) argues that although their language contains errors, students can provide speech at the $i+1$ level in small group discussions. Hornby (1980) also points out the importance of practice by noting that native speakers use idioms/idiomatic expressions "naturally and unconsciously" (p. xxvii) while L2 learners have to learn and practice before these expressions become a natural part of their language. Students can reduce their errors by consciously attending to the idiomatic usage of native speakers when receiving input (Bell, 1988).

To summarize, most teaching strategies helped the students better understand the meanings of content and the idioms/idiomatic expressions and provided them with opportunities to internalize the idioms/idiomatic expressions they had been exposed to.

Research Question 3

How do students integrate idioms/idiomatic expressions into their language use?

The five students had little social contact with local people. Therefore, they had little opportunity to converse with native English

speakers. Their main opportunities to practice the language were through in-class activities--answering questions, discussions, story-retelling, free talk and journal writing. The students also extended their opportunities to learn more idioms by watching more TV programs outside class. Jane also read some newspapers.

Discussion and retelling were two major in-class opportunities through which students practiced the idioms they had heard. By engaging in conversation students grew familiar with the meanings of the idioms/idiomatic expressions and when and where to use them.

The students also practiced the idioms/idiomatic expressions they had been exposed to through journal writings. Journal writing provided them with opportunities to develop fluency in writing. They also recorded idioms they learned outside class.

The students watched other programs outside class and read newspapers to extend their exposure to input. They recorded the idioms they came across in their journals and used some in their discussions. Lafford (1987) emphasizes the importance of obtaining input from outside class. She argues that learners cannot develop enough language proficiency by receiving input from inside the classroom only.

Bell (1988) and Irujo (1986) note that ESL learners should become familiar with the meanings of idioms and know under what situation an idiom can be used before they use them. Many writers and theorists (Hornby, 1980; Bell, 1988; Irujo, 1986; Berwald, 1985; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991; & McPartland, 1989) emphasize the importance of

practice in the target language. They argue that merely hearing a foreign language does not result automatically in acquisition.

To summarize, the students acquired the idioms through activities in which they heard the idioms, understood the meanings, and then used them in their dialogues and writings. Although the limited time did not allow them to hear and acquire more idioms, their increasing awareness and understanding of the strategies made it possible for them to learn more by themselves out of the classroom.

Research Question 4

What are students' perceptions of the value/ benefits of the use of TV as comprehensible input to improve comprehension and usage of idioms/ idiomatic expressions?

TV programs are especially rich in idioms/idiomatic expressions (Lafford, 1987; Irujo, 1986). The students reported that television programs were a good source to acquire idioms/idiomatic expressions: They provided meaningful contexts for the acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions. Such contexts helped the students know the meanings of the idioms and when and where they should be used. The visual reinforcement provides extralinguistic information to aid comprehension of idioms. TV programs also combine idiom-acquisition with entertainment, making it less stressful. Students learned the language while enjoying the programs.

Apart from being a source of comprehensible input, the students found that they benefited from TV in two other aspects: TV helped them learn about Western culture and improve their overall language proficiency.

TV programs are rich in culture (Berwald, 1985). They depict daily lives of the people in the West and discuss topics of their interests. The students became familiar with some aspects of the culture through constant viewing of TV programs. This increased the students' general background knowledge, which was important to their comprehension of content and idioms. Constant and attentive viewing of TV programs also increased their opportunities to receive comprehensible input.

This chapter described and interpreted the findings of a case study, which investigated the potential of TV programs as input to acquire idioms/idiomatic expressions by five intermediate ESL learners. The study found that exposure to comprehensible television programs combined with guided teacher-guided follow-up activities were effective in facilitating the students' comprehension and acquisition of idioms. The next chapter discusses the conclusions of the findings, recommendations for curriculum development and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential of television programs as a source of comprehensible input for promoting awareness and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions by intermediate learners of English as a second language. The participants were five Chinese students attending postsecondary education in Thunder Bay. They had learned English for four to eight years and had resided in Canada for two to three year and a half years before they took the course.

The theoretical framework was based on Krashen's (1985, 1987) second language acquisition theory, particularly two of his hypotheses: 1) second language is acquired through receiving comprehensible input; and 2) an anxiety-free environment promotes acquisition. In addition it was based on the theory that practice and guided activities which involve real communication promote language acquisition (Lafford, 1987; Rosenbaum, 1971; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1991; Long & Porter, 1987; Irujo, 1986; & Berwald, 1985).

The design of the study was qualitative. Methods of data collection included a pretest and a posttest, observations, interviews, and analysis of the students' journals.

This study described the students' processes of idiom-acquisition: awareness of idioms, attending to idioms used, appreciating their meanings, and using them in communication. The five participants were motivated because they were all volunteers and were under no pressure. The students' willingness to participate and the relaxed learning

environment were also responsible for fostering acquisition (Krashen, 1985, 1987).

This study showed that television programs were a rich source for acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions. TV programs placed idioms/idiomatic expressions in meaningful contexts and provided visual reinforcement to enhance comprehension, which cannot be achieved by conventional textbook instruction. The study supported Krashen's input hypothesis that second language learners acquire language through extensive exposure to comprehensible input and understanding the messages. This study also found evidence which calls into question Krashen's contention that we acquire a second language only by receiving comprehensible input and understanding messages. It confirms, rather, the theories proposed by Lafford (1987), Rosenbaum (1971), Tompkins and Hoskisson (1991), Long and Porter (1985), Irujo (1986), and Berwald (1985) that practice is a critical aspect of language acquisition, and that real communication gives learners opportunities to negotiate meanings and to make sure that they really understand the messages. The teaching strategies, such as comprehension check and discussions, promoted active listening, enhanced comprehension, and helped the students internalize the idioms/idiomatic expressions they had been exposed to through using the language. The study suggests that teacher modeling (for instance, in story-retelling) and explanation of language register (to avoid students' inappropriate use of idioms) may also be effective strategies.

Implications

Some implications arose from the study. This section discusses these implications in three key areas: 1) the benefit of TV as input for idiom-acquisition; 2) the importance of practice; and 3) the development of an ESL course to promote comprehension and practice.

Benefit of TV as a Medium for Idiom-acquisition

The study showed that television programs were a good source of comprehensible input for idiom-acquisition. Some of the benefits of TV programs were: 1) TV programs provide meaningful contexts for the comprehension of idioms; 2) their visual reinforcement enhances comprehension; 3) they provide opportunities for the students to hear native dialogues; and 4) the cultural content of TV programs increases the students' background knowledge. The selection of appropriate TV programs is crucial to promoting the students' comprehension and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions.

Importance of Practice

Practice was important in helping the students internalize new idioms/idiomatic expressions to which they have been exposed. The students grew familiar with the meanings of the idioms through using them in discussions and conversations. To assist comprehension of content and idioms/idiomatic expressions, and to help students use the idioms/idiomatic expressions they heard, instructional strategies such as background introduction, comprehension check and small group discussion were especially effective. Emphasis was given to one or more particular strategies according to the students' needs and the particular

program they had viewed. The study also found that there was a need for the students to watch extensively outside the classroom in order to increase their input.

Developing an ESL Course

This study demonstrated that television programs were an effective source of comprehensible input for learning idioms for the five respondents. The focus of the study was not simply to teach the students a few idioms, rather it was to enable them to develop an attitude regarding learning and a strategy for continuing to learn independently.

The study illustrated that effective teaching strategies improved the students' comprehension and promoted internalization of the idioms. This finding suggests that carefully selected TV programs, together with the use of teaching strategies designed to promote awareness and comprehension of idioms, may be a means to further students' language proficiency.

Considerations which should be taken into account in the development of an ESL course include: the theoretical framework, goals, resources, process and strategies, and evaluation.

Theoretical framework. The theoretical framework is based on an understanding of the nature of language learning. Language is best learned in context and through learners' receiving comprehensible input and using the language in real communication.

Goals. One of the goals of such an ESL course is to help students establish strategies for acquiring idioms/idiomatic expressions. An emphasis on generating students' awareness of idioms and the use of

different instructional activities may assist students in their comprehension and acquisition, thus improving their overall language proficiency.

Resources. A variety of TV programs may be used as sources of input. Teachers should select those TV programs which are of appropriate language levels, appeal to students, and do not require too much additional background knowledge.

Process and strategies. Language acquisition is an active and meaning-based process. Each class might include the following components.

1) Comprehensible input: Teachers may pretape programs to be viewed in class and introduce to students necessary background information for a particular program (teaching strategy: background introduction). They should advise students to record important details and idioms/idiomatic expressions while viewing and may explain and model the techniques of note-taking. They can give each student a progress sheet (See Appendix E) before each class.

2) Oral practice: After viewing, teachers may check students' comprehension of story and idioms (teaching strategy: comprehension check) by asking them to answer questions and paraphrase the meanings of the idioms they have heard. Students may be advised to write down brief answers (See Appendix E) and then discuss them in small groups. The content of some programs may provide topics for further oral practice. Students may discuss these topics in groups and then present their ideas to the class through retelling and/or critiques

(teaching strategies: group discussion and retelling). Teachers may explain the meanings of the idioms and the situations in which they are used (language register) and model the appropriate use of idioms in the speech.

3) Extension of practice: Teachers may ask students to record important elements of the stories and idioms/idiomatic expressions in writing while viewing (Appendix E), and to keep journals. Journals give students opportunities to respond to the content of the TV programs, and to record and practice the idioms. They allow teachers to gain insights into students' language development, their reflections about the course (the quality of instruction, and the appropriateness of TV programs).

4) Metacognition: Teachers may explain to students that the idiom-acquisition is a metacognitive process which demands their awareness of and attention to idioms. They may also explain self-monitoring strategies of idiom-acquisition to students.

Evaluation. Evaluation should be formative and summative. Both types of evaluation were used in this study. Formative evaluation begins when the course starts and is carried out throughout the process. In the role of the observer, teachers may keep a descriptive account of the development of the course. These data help teachers to record actual progress regarding the selection of programs, the effectiveness of teaching strategies, and the students' language samples and reflections. The data collected during formative evaluation may serve as a source for summative evaluation--the culminating evaluation--which assesses the learning which has occurred during the course and provides a basis for

improvement of the course. Evaluation methods may include students' in-class performance (discussions, story-retelling, speech samples, and tests), students' journal entries, and interviews.

Teachers may ask students to keep a record of the idioms/idiomatic expressions they hear, and encourage them to watch programs which appeal to them outside class. Krashen (1987) notes that students learn more when learning is not a requirement but an interest. Students can increase comprehensible input through continuously watching the programs they enjoy.

Limitations

This study involved five Chinese students and dealt basically with conversational English. Its in-depth nature made it difficult to involve a large number of students. The participants were of a homogeneous linguistic background--all were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese. Learners with other linguistic backgrounds may acquire idioms and other aspects of the language in different ways because of the different influences of L1 on L2 acquisition (Mclaughlin, 1987). The limited time of the study (two classes weekly, in a period of six weeks) prevented the students from acquiring large quantity of idioms/idiomatic expressions. Therefore, the findings of this study do not constitute generalization. But the study provided some insight into how idiom-acquisition can be achieved through viewing TV programs, how practice promotes learning, and what are the benefits of TV as input. The findings may be transferable to similar teaching contexts and students.

Recommendations and Suggestions

This section discusses recommendations for teaching and further research.

Pedagogical Recommendations

The study found that for the five ESL students in the course comprehension of the main ideas of the television programs was crucial to the comprehension and acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions. It is recommended that:

Television programs be selected carefully to ensure comprehensibility. Considerations for selection include: the appropriate language level, interest and/or relevance to students, and background knowledge.

Familiarity with the meanings of idioms/idiomatic expressions was important. It is recommended that:

Teachers monitor students' understanding of the meanings and explain to students about language "register" (Halliday, 1978, p.32)--the appropriate use of language in different situations--in this case, the distinction between standard, colloquial, slang, vulgar, archaic and poetic usage of idioms. Teachers should also caution students against hasty application to avoid misunderstanding and awkwardness.

Practice involving real communication is a critical step toward acquisition of idioms. It is recommended that:

Effective instructional strategies be utilized to provide students with ample opportunities to use and internalize the idioms to which they have been exposed.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study touched upon a field of research which has remained largely unexamined. Further research in this area is important to understanding and clarifying the effectiveness of TV as comprehensible input for idiom-acquisition and the process of idiom-acquisition by L2 learners.

Such research might approach the same topic by involving students from other ethnic or language backgrounds. It might explore 1) the effectiveness of idiom-acquisition through different television programs such as commercials, news, situations comedies, talk shows; 2) the effectiveness of idiom-acquisition through different media such as audio tapes, newspapers, as compared to TV situation comedies; 3) cultural influences in second language learning; and 4) the effectiveness of acquisition involving the use of different kinds of input and output (journal, listening, reading on related topics) to supplement comprehension.

Case studies may be used because of the nature of research in this field. They offer researchers opportunities to study in depth and detail individual outcomes (Patton, 1990) which would contribute to a better understanding of the process of how L2 learners acquire idioms. Experimental methods may also be used to allow comparison across control/experimental groups using different methods.

In conclusion, this study found that the use of TV as comprehensible input in an ESL course promoted the acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions in these five learners. It provided insights into the ways idioms are understood and acquired, into the application of Krashen's input hypothesis in idiom-acquisition, into the potential of TV programs as input, and into the effectiveness of particular teaching strategies. It did not support Krashen's theory that comprehensible input alone is directly responsible for fluency and acquisition.

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APPENDIX A

Cover Letter

Dear Participant:

The purpose of the study is to explore the potential of television programs in the acquisition of idioms/idiomatic expressions of intermediate level learners of English as a second language (ESL).

All participants are volunteers who have agreed to attend a six week ESL course. The course will involve two classes weekly of approximately two hours each. During the classes you will view television programs (chosen by the researcher or you in advance) with the other participants and the researcher, and discuss the plots and the idioms/idiomatic expressions involved.

You will be asked to keep a journal to record your thoughts, suggestions and comments, and to keep a record of the idioms/idiomatic expressions you hear and/or read. Individual interviews will be conducted to obtain further insights.

You may withdraw from the study at any time. No individual will be identified in any report of the study results. Thus, your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected.

You may obtain a summary of the study upon request. The full thesis will be available at the Lakehead University Library upon its completion.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours Sincerely

Xiaomei Li
School of Education
Lakehead University
Thunder Bay, ON.
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APPENDIX B

Consent Form

I have received an explanation about the nature of the study, its purpose, and procedures. I understand that the purpose of the study by Xiaomei Li is to explore the potential of television programs in the comprehension and usage of idioms/idiomatic expressions of intermediate learners of English as a second language (ESL). And I understand that:

1. I am a volunteer and may withdraw at any time during the study.
2. My confidentiality and anonymity will be protected.
3. I may get a summary of the thesis, upon my request, when the thesis has been completed.

I, _____, agree to participate in the study.

Signature of the Participant

Date

APPENDIX C

PRETEST

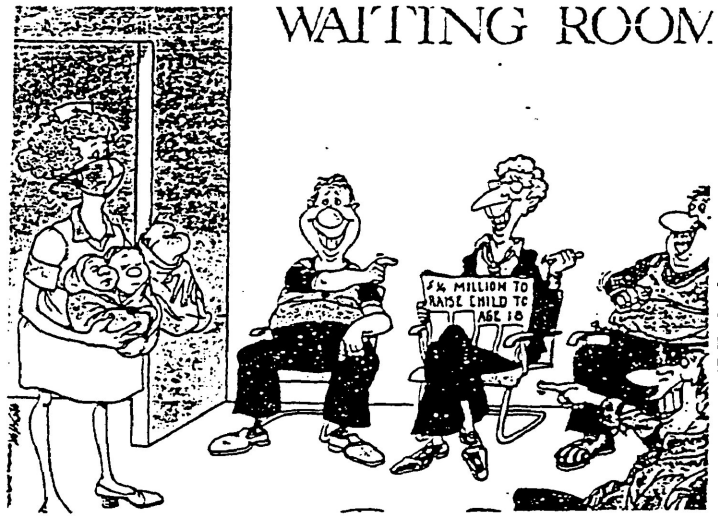
I. Answer the following questions:

1. How did J.D. tell Michelle to get money for her new "Piggy Bank?"
2. What did Stephanie tell her father to do? And why?
3. What made Jesse decide that the waiters at the reception would wear white gloves?
4. Why did Jesse keep postponing choosing his best man?
5. What are the best man and the head usher supposed to do respectively according to Danny?
6. What kind of person is Steve in DJ and her girlfriend's eyes?
7. What did Dan introduce Joey as when Steve came in and why?
8. Did Jesse really think that there was something wrong with Steve's way of walking? Why or Why not?
9. What did DJ and her girlfriend go upstairs for? What did DJ say when they ran into Steve hiding behind the door? And what was his reaction?
10. Why did Stephanie do tricks in front of the class? And what happened to her playing glasses?

II. Define the following sentences or phrases:

1. You've got to find a real "soft touch."
2. He is "a pain in the butt."
3. to kill the time
4. to have a crush on somebody
5. We are not "out of the woods" yet.

III. Write a story based on the following cartoon:



Reprinted from TESL talk 13(1), p. 25, 1982.

APPENDIX D

POSTTEST

I. Answer the following questions:

1. What was Joey looking for?
2. Why did Michelle say "you're busted" to Joey?
3. How did DJ's driving lesson with her father go?
4. What made Jesse and Danny argue about whose car they were going to use to teach DJ how to drive?
5. What did DJ think of her driving lesson with her father and her uncle?
6. Why did Stephanie tell Michelle the "monster tale?"
7. Did the story work? Why or Why not?
8. Why did Michelle come back again?
9. Why did Kimmy flunk her written test?
10. Did Kimmy finally pass the test? Why or Why not?

II. Define the following sentences or phrases:

1. What a "rip off!"
2. I'm not "in the mood of" sitting next to you.
3. to "let somebody down"
4. I "chickened out."
5. I won't "be taken in."

III. Retell the story in your own words based on the program we have just watched. You can choose to retell either the story about Michelle or the one about DJ.

APPENDIX E

Progress Sheet

I. Record important details and idioms while viewing.

Questions	Brief answers and/or explanations	Comments*
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

* √ for appropriate or right; x for inappropriate or wrong

III. Write a summary or retell the story. Try to write as idiomatically as you can.