



Idiom comprehension in children: the effects of context and linguistic type of idioms

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The aim of this study is to investigate the ability of eight and ten-year-old children to comprehend idiomatic expressions, focusing on the presence of a linguistic context and the linguistic type of the idioms.

There have been studies investigating the role of context and semantic analysability in idiom comprehension in children of similar age (Levorato–Cacciari 1999, Levorato–Nesi–Cacciari 2004). However, there have been no Hungarian research in the field so far, and idioms are language-specific, so I investigate whether the context has an effect on idiom comprehension in case of Hungarian idioms.

Idioms do not form a homogeneous group, they can be grouped by important linguistic factors. My research is based on the following groups: 1) idioms having abstract meaning only (idioms with unique elements, alogisms) and 2) idioms having both literal and abstract meaning (opaque and non-opaque metaphors, idioms with idiomatic complements).

The aim of the present study is, on the one hand, to collect Hungarian data testing the role of context in idiom comprehension, and, on the other, to check my hypothesis, saying there is difference in the comprehension of idiom types from different groups.

The participants (100; aged 8 and 10) took part in two experiments. In Experiment 1, 30 idioms were used to compile a multiple-choice task without context, while in Experiment 2, idioms were embedded in short stories.

According to the results, the presence of context greatly contributes to the comprehension, showing that context has a significant effect on idiom comprehension in both age groups.

The linguistic type of the idiom does not have a significant effect on comprehension, however, the comprehension of the first group of the idioms (those having one meaning only) has proved to be better.

References:

- Levorato, M. C.–Cacciari, C. (1999). Idiom comprehension in children: Are the effects of semantic analysability and context separable? *European Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 11(1), 51–66.
- Levorato, M. C.–Nesi, B.–Cacciari, C. (2004). Reading comprehension and understanding idiomatic expressions: A developmental study. *Brain and Language* 91, 303–314.