

## **The Effects of Technology on Idioms: with a Focus on Law Terms (A Study in Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran)**

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**Abstract** – The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of technology on learners' law terms repertoire. To this purpose, two intact groups of university students (number of each group was 20) were chosen. The researcher randomly divided them into a control group and an experimental group. Both groups were taught through the same method in the classroom except that the experimental group was supposed to make a group in telegram by their cellphones. The researcher was a member of the experimental group, to control the learners' activities. Each member was expected to send one law term along with the explanation to the other members of the group each day on the whole semester. The results indicated the outperformance of the participants in the experimental group over the performance of the participants in the control group in post-test. The findings support the arguments regarding the importance of technology-based instruction on language learning. It is assumed that this technique encouraged shy students to participate freely. It also helped all members to create a strong sense of community, and to promote self-learning.

**Keywords:** technology, idioms, law terms, telegram

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Serious work using computers to support language teaching and learning began in the 1960s, but it was not until the beginning of the 1980s when microcomputers began to proliferate that groups of practitioners began forming professional groups and a formal identification of the field occurred. Although the early promise of computer-assisted language learning (or 'CALL'), to revolutionize second-language learning has not been met, the past quarter century has seen a fascinating range of growth. This is not only because of lessons learned from research and practice, but also due to the rapid and continuing shifts in the technology itself. Nominally a branch of applied linguistics, CALL is truly interdisciplinary, drawing its core concepts not only from linguistics, but also from computer science, speech engineering, psychology, sociology, second-language acquisition, and general education.

### **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **A. Origins of the Term CALL**

The term Computer Assisted Language Learning emerged in the 1980s and originated from the earlier used term of Computer Assisted Language Instruction. The reason for this

change was the close association of CALL and the outdated teacher centered approach, which drew heavily on behaviourism rather than the currently developing learner centered approach. While audio-lingual method was considered the approach entailing “repetitive language drills” and was “referred to as 'drill and practice’” (Warschauer, 1996, p. 3). CALL widened its scope, embracing the communicative approach and a range of new technologies. The new technology should form an integral part of a modern language teaching strategy. According to Pinkman (2005), CALL should not be distinguished among approaches but instead become a natural part of teaching, therefore not necessitating a name of its own. He mentions, Normalisation is therefore the stage when a technology is invisible, hardly even recognized as a technology, taken for granted in everyday life, but CALL has not yet reached that normalised stage. In other words, one criterion of CALL’s successful integration into language learning will be that it ceases to exist as a separate concept and field for discussion.

### **B. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)**

Different terminologies have been coined to refer to the use of technology in educational settings including: CAI (Computer-Assisted Instruction), CBI (Computer-Based Instruction), CMI (Computer-Mediated Instruction), TML (Technology-Mediated Learning), CAL (Computer-Assisted Learning), CSL (Computer-Supported Learning), TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning), and CALL(Computer-Assisted Language Learning).Some scholars (Hewett, 2000; Satish and Kaila, 2005) believe that all of these terms more or less refer to the same or similar trend of applying computers in educational contexts. However, one cannot find one current terminology as the standard since, “computers can play different roles in various learning contexts and experts tend to offer various names for the same or similar roles” (Satish and Kaila, 2005, p. 99).

Nowadays, one of the most widely applied terminologies is CSL (Computer-Supported Learning), and to some extent, in more specific sense CALL, which can be viewed as an umbrella term for different aspects of technology integration in language education. The term that is applied in the discussion of the present study from among the terminologies mentioned above is CALL.

### **C. Cell-phone and Telegram**

Another technology that is prevalent nowadays is cellphone. This device is mainly invented for the communication purposes, but it also has many facilities; it is used as a media player, as a calculator, etc. Cell-phones can be programmed different software including Telegram, Viber, and so on. In the present study, the researcher asked the learners to form a group in telegram and he himself became a member of the group. Each night one of the learners sent a message including an idiom (especially a law term) along with its definition to the group. And the other learners were supposed to check their cell-phones every night to read the new message. The trend continued the whole semester.

#### D. What is meant by Idiom?

What follows is what appears in Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary (2005) as the definition for idiom: a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words. Here are some other definitions:

Carter (1987) writes idioms are “restricted collocations which cannot normally be understood from the literal meaning of the words which make them up.”

“The traditional definition of an idiom states that its meaning is not a function of the meaning of its parts and the way these are syntactically combined; that is, an idiom is a non-compositional expression” (Linder, 1992, p.223). Greater details about non-compositionality of idioms will be given later.

“I shall regard an idiom as a constituent or a series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives of which it is composed” (Fraser, 1970).

“An idiom is any string of words for which the meaning of the whole expression cannot be determined from the meanings of the individual morphemes that make up the string” (Falk, 1973, p. 420).

As it is clear, all these definitions have something in common: one cannot determine the meaning of an idiom by finding the meaning of every morpheme which makes up the idiom. As an example, a person who takes the bull by the horns is someone who faces the problems with determination. Obviously there is no relationship between taking the bull by its horns and the meaning of the idiom.

Some scholars (Cooper, 1999; Mendis and Simpson, 2003) believe that the boundary between highly idiomatic phrases and other expressions is not so clear. They state there should be a scale of idiomaticity. By a scale of idiomaticity, they mean that idioms which are "pure" should be put at the beginning and phrases which are not thought of as idioms should be placed at the bottom. However, there are some expressions which can be named as "semi-idioms" because they don't fall under either "idioms" or "non-idioms" category. As a result, due to the fact that it is impossible to think of a clear boundary between idiom and non-idioms, they should be put in a scale of continuum.

Cooper (1999) classifies idioms as decomposable and non-decomposable. Decomposable idioms are those which can be analyzed. For example, *pop the question*. In this idiom, figurative and literal meaning correspond: *pop* means *ask* and *the question* refers to *proposing for marriage*. Non-decomposable idioms, on the other hand, cannot be analyzed. In fact, the meaning of the words in non-decomposable idioms has nothing to do with the figurative meaning. For example, *to kick the bucket* which means *to die*.

According to Mendis and Simpson (2003) idioms can be defined as multi-word expressions through three criteria:

- a. **Fixedness or Compositeness.** It means that words cannot be either deleted or changed.
- b. **Institutionalization.** It is about the degree to which an idiom is recognized in a speech community.
- c. **Semantic opacity.** It states that the words in an idiom have nothing to do with the meaning of the idiom. For example, the words which make up the idiom *on the nose* are not of any help to understand what it means.

Up to this point, compositionality has been used as the criterion to define idioms, which means the words making up idioms don't help predict the meaning of them. However, these expressions are called 'core idioms'. Based on the following reasons, it is believed that the previous criterion is rejected:

1. The criteria are general.
2. They cannot tell idioms from a non-idiom.
3. They just attribute same features to some idioms.

However, two criteria as to how to define idioms are given by them:

1. Idiomatic expressions are non-compositional.
2. Idioms are nonfigurative. Expressions which are figurative are analyzable and understandable through finding the meaning of the words in them, but it is not true about idioms.

## E. L1 and Comprehension of FL Idioms

Learners usually face lots of different problems in the process of learning a foreign language. This sometimes persuades or even tempts them to rely on their L1. It has been observed more among beginner language learners. When it comes to learning idioms, the very first thing learners do is to consider idioms' literal meaning which is available in the context and try to guess the meaning. It is because idioms deal with figurative language which is always challenging. Sometimes foreign language learners become more interested in making use of their mother tongue. What is more is that even students of advanced levels also tend to rely on their mother tongue to grasp the meaning of an idiom. Therefore, it has been in question whether using or depending on L1 is of any help in learning FL idioms or not.

In a study by Irujo (in Cooper, 1999) participants' comprehension of three groups of English idioms was examined. She reached the conclusion that those idioms which were different in the languages were the most difficult and those which were very similar and identical to their L1 were the easiest to comprehend. Also, Cooper (1999) believed that L1 is important in FL idiom processing. This was revealed through an investigation. Another study by Irujo (1986) showed that identical idioms were easily comprehended and produced while different idioms were the hardest ones to comprehend and produce with less interference than identical ones.

Considering the fact that learners can benefit from the similarity between their L1 and foreign language to understand the figurative meaning, yet this similarity can mislead them as well. To make it clear, when a learner reads or hears the sentence "They'll be on your back", he may think it means "They'll support you", while it means "They'll criticize you". What happens here is that the learner relies on his mother tongue since he trusts it, and based on the individual words concludes that it is talking about *supporting*, which is false.

## **F. Research Question and Hypothesis**

The present study tried to answer the question raised about the effects of task types on listening comprehension.

Q1: Does the technology have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' idioms?

To reveal the purpose of this study, the researcher tried to find the confirmation or rejection of null hypothesis presented here:

Ho1: The technology does not have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' idioms.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **A. Participants**

The participants for this study were chosen among the two intact groups of university students in Kangavar. 40 students (two classes) were selected out of 100 learners (five classes) as the participants of the study, and then they were randomly assigned to an experimental and a control group.

All participants were female and male, and differed in terms of age. None of them had ever lived in a foreign country or traveled to an English speaking country. The classes were conducted in the afternoon once a week and 90 minutes a session.

### **B. Instrumentation**

Two instruments were utilized to achieve the goals of the present study: Parallel test of idioms were utilized for the pre-test and post-test of the study both of which were extracted from Payame Noor Tests Package. In order to ensure the reliability of the tests, the researcher used coefficient Alpha reliability analysis to compute the reliability and to determine if they could be employed in the language center classes in Iranian EFL context. According to Coefficient Alpha formulae, the reliability was 0.69, and 0.71, respectively which indicated that the tests were reliable enough.

### **C. Procedures**

The study was conducted at the start of the semester. The researcher selected two groups (classes) randomly from five groups and assigned them to the control group and

experimental group of the study. Afterward, all participants were given a pre-test of idioms and law terms. The test was extracted from Payame Noor Tests Package. The questions were in the form of the multiple choices; the next phase of the study started with some treatment sessions. Both groups received the same treatment in the classroom. The experimental group got a special treatment by making a group in telegram. Each night one of the learners sent a message including an idiom (especially a law term) along with its definition to the group members. And the other learners were supposed to check their cell-phones every night to read the new message. The trend continued the whole semester. After the treatment sessions came to an end. A parallel test of idioms was administered. Parallel tests are tests which measure the same construct; they have the same mean and the same standard deviations (Bachman, 1990, P. 168). Finally, the results of both the pretest and the posttest were compared.

## IV. RESULTS

This section outlines the entire technical and statistical procedures involved in the study. It describes all the steps taken by the researcher in the analysis of the relevant data and elaborates on the results.

### A. Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics encompassed the means, standard deviations. Inferential statistics comprised the application of an Independent sample T-Test to test the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance.

### B. Statement of the Problem

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Q1: Does the technology have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' idioms?

To reveal the purpose of this study, the researcher tried to find the confirmation or rejection of null hypothesis presented here:

H<sub>0</sub>1: The technology does not have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' idioms.

### C. Independent Sample T-test as the Pre-test

First of all it is worth noting that Independent Pair t-test is used to determine whether there is any significant difference between the means of two independent groups. Since there were two groups in the present study, the researcher used Independent Pair t-test to compare the means of different groups.

**Table 1: Descriptive data for two groups in pre-test**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
control	20	20.00	45.00	65.00	54.00	3.68
experimental	20	25.00	35.00	60.00	52.33	3.51
Valid N (list wise)	20					

Table 1 provides useful descriptive statistics for two groups. The data include the mean, the standard deviation, minimum / maximum scores, and range.

**Table 2: Output of the independent pair t-test analysis for two groups in pre-test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
peripheral	Equal variances assumed	.542	.468	1.267	38	.216	1.66	1.315	-1.02	4.36
	Equal variances not assumed			1.267	37.94	.216	1.66	1.315	-1.02	4.36

Table 2 indicates the output of the Independent Pair t-test analysis and whether there is any significant difference between the means of two independent groups. As can be seen in this table the significance level is 0.216 ( $p=.216$ ) which is above 0.05, therefore, there is no statistically significant differences between the groups. Therefore, it can be said that two groups are homogeneous.

**Table 3: descriptive data for two groups in post-test.**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
control	20	15.00	50.00	65.00	57.00	3.68
experimental	20	15.00	70.00	85.00	76.66	4.87
Valid N (listwise)	20					

Table 3 shows useful descriptive statistics for two groups. The data include the mean, the standard deviation, minimum/ maximum scores, and range.

**Table 4: Output of the independent pair t-test analysis for two groups in post-test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
peripheral	Equal variances assumed	2.441	.129	-12.45	38	.000	-19.66	1.578	-22.90	-16.43
	Equal variances not assumed			-12.45	36.04	.000	-19.66	1.578	-22.91	-16.42

Table 4 indicates the output of the Independent Pair t-test analysis and whether there is any significant difference between the means of two independent groups. As can be seen in this table the significance level is 0.000 ( $p=0.000$ ) which is below 0.05, therefore, there is statistically significant differences between groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis could be rejected. It means that telegram-based instruction was effective.

## V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the effects of technology on increasing idiomatic repertoire of Iranian EFL learners. The participants were 40 EFL university learners in Kangavar. They were divided into an experimental group and a control group.

The research question addressed in the present study was whether technology-based instruction can lead Iranian EFL learners to greater increase in L2 law terms or not. To analyze the data the researcher used pre-test and post test scores and he ran independent T-test based on SPSS software (IBM Corp., Released 2013) for this study. Results displayed an increase in students' performance in idiomatic enhancement due to the effect of telegram sharing.

One of the most important facets of this technique is that it promotes learners' idiomatic repertoire by providing them with plenty of opportunities to receive out of the classroom. Other important aspect of this technique is that it triggers learners' subconscious mind by providing them with a lot of visual aids (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, P. 81). Finally

messages are colorful and automatically attract learners' attention and there is no need to compel the learners to memorize them.

Generally speaking, according to the obtained results, the technology-based instruction in EFL students tended to improve through exposure to messages.

### **A. Summary of the Main Findings**

Telegram increases students' interest, motivation and confidence. Telegram can provide an exciting and motivating learning environment where students have a sense of ownership and readership. They can be used to create social interactions between students and the instructor.

Telegram is recommended to foster students' English language development in a genuine learning environment.

The following points could be taken as the advantages of telegram in teaching idioms. Using telegrams could help learners:

1. To read each other's posts.
2. To interact and comment on each other's posts by challenging each other's thoughts and views.
3. To write posts in response to each other's posts.
4. To increase the sense of community in a class. Making telegram can help foster a feeling of community between the members of a class, especially if learners are sharing information about their interests, and are responding to what other students are writing.
5. To encourage shy students to participate. There is evidence to suggest that students who are quiet in class can find their voice when given the opportunity to express themselves in a telegram.
6. To help build a closer relationship in large classes. Sometimes students in large classes can spend all year studying with the same people without getting to know them well. A cell phone is another tool that can help bring students together.

To sum up, Telegram offers a useful learning environment that gave the students a chance to create a strong sense of community in which they can participate actively while learning. Most importantly, they could practice the language, in an authentic learning environment. Students often learn as much from each other as from instructors or textbooks but making telegrams offers another mechanism for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and acquisition. They also learned from their peers and themselves; thus this promoted self-learning. Self-learning signals students' ability to be independent and thus become their own 'player' in the learning process. Telegram users in language learning created better postings and attracted new readers. Using telegram to support student learning was very successful. The students improved their grammar editing skills, showed an increase in motivation and became more autonomous learners. Clearly, telegrams could be a very useful and adaptable learning aid that promoted student-centered learning. The challenge for educators is to

determine how to appropriately integrate telegram into curricula to best meet their students' needs.

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