Chapter 2
Understanding Idiomaticity in CALL

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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this chapter is to investigate the effectiveness of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) technologies, tools, and resources for figurative language in general and idiom learning in particular. The secondary aim is to explore the CALL training practices affecting the attainment of idiomaticity in English as a second or foreign language. Idiomaticity training is anchored in an online methodology of idiomaticity teaching that takes into account learners' interests and active involvement. Such focus is particularly useful for the purposes of diagnosis and achievement, and the research to date is a promising start to further work on idiomaticity. The chapter provides recommendations for idiomaticity training-and-teaching as well as time-tested practices for further theorizing and research. It is hoped that the practices and recommendations explored here will spur on more research in this vein. Pedagogical and research implications are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The rising importance of online pedagogy in American higher education is fast becoming a topic of intense research interest for online teacher training. Many Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) practitioners in teaching English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL), including general English, adult workplace English, intensive English programs (IEP), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), remain interested in the ways the English language and culture is impacted by online education in their teaching and research (Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain, & Youngs, 2000; Arnold & Ducate, 2011). Even so, only a small number of online (or hybrid) ESL/EFL programs attempt to include in their curricula, for example, idiom, metaphor, simile, metonymy, hyperbole, proverb, slang, cliché, collocation, colloquialism, or various tropes of figurative language (henceforth *idiomaticity*) as a viable area of exploration for their PreK-12 teachers and teacher educators working with linguistically and culturally

diverse learners in local or international settings. Lack of information, training, and experience with online education emphasizing idiomaticity has led to marginal results at best.

Understanding Idiomaticity in CALL addresses this gap in an effort to foster a new kind of CALL knowledge concerning the reconstructive nature of idiomatic understanding and production in English. The argument presented here for *idiomaticity training* is anchored in an online methodology of *idiomaticity teaching* that takes into account learners' interests and active involvement, with special attention paid to how such training can be best utilized in online instructional contexts reflecting authentic language use. To this end, the chapter begins with a brief discussion of some of the most significant themes and concepts spanning the CALL literature to date before highlighting critical notions of idiomaticity research and praxis. It then prioritizes the challenges and the opportunities present in today's interactive digital tools and resources while advocating for authentic intercultural communication practices through CALL, mobile learning, electronic learning, and Web 2.0 technologies.

A considerable amount of discussion is devoted to how best ensure successful technology integration in pedagogic constructs promoting language learning in general and idiomaticity in particular. Both the advantages and disadvantages derived from such purposeful technology integration are emphasized amid digital and multimedia environments known to support diverse conditions for learning across various educational and cultural contexts. This is followed by a detailed exposition of what CALL practitioners and language teachers need to know and do to take full advantage of the emerging technologies, applications, or tools available for attaining idiomaticity in CALL. For ease of presentation, the account termed here *idiomaticity training-and-teaching*—from inception through development to application and integration—encompasses key theoretical considerations and pedagogical constructs worthy of critical reflection. An array of solutions and recommendations in applying idiomaticity resourcefully in CALL *with a purpose* and *for a purpose* follows. The discussion concludes with a brief summary of time-tested, task-based projects that make a significant contribution to the next generation of CALL scholarship on idiomaticity. Throughout, pedagogical and research implications for technology integration with proven teaching practices supporting the needs of language teachers and their students through sustainable CALL initiatives are also discussed.

BACKGROUND

No discussion of CALL training practices affecting the attainment of idiomaticity in English as a second or foreign language can be complete without first exploring what is meant by using CALL technologies, electronic tools, and digital resources in online English education. To "see how the CALL land lies," we begin with the term itself: Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) or Information Communication Technology (ICT), as it is called in Europe. Levy (1997) succinctly but broadly defined CALL as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (p. 1). It follows that computer applications 'searched for' and 'studied' are designed to promote and enhance language teaching and learning in specific areas of language use (listening, speaking, reading, writing), including vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, and culture.

What started as relatively naïve drill-and-practice software with limited language practice in the 1960s and 1970s, today CALL is widely associated with and characterized by web-based distance learning, virtual learning environments, interactive whiteboards, computer-mediated communication, and mobile-assisted

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