The Comprehension of Indonesian Idiom in Indonesian speakers

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Abstract.

The study of how idioms are processed in human cognition is essential to find out whether the idioms are comprehended according to their idiomatic meanings that have one referent, or are comprehended according to the meaning of the words in the idioms. The majority of idiom comprehension studies that have been carried out are studies on English idioms, whereas for other languages the study of idiom has not been carried out, including in Indonesian. So the hypothesis related to comprehension of idioms cannot be said to be universal. This study aims to find out how the idioms are comprehended in Indonesian speakers' cognition. This is a preliminary study which employs qualitative method with two stage tests. The first stage is to find out the familiarity of Indonesian idioms for Indonesian speakers, and the second stage is to find out how those idioms are comprehended.

Keywords: idiom; psycholinguistics; language processing; language comprehension; Indonesian.

1 Introduction

Idioms are one type of non-literal language that is included in the metaphor. Metaphor according to Danesi (2004) shows the basic tendency of the human mind to think of certain referents at once. Idioms according to Cruse (1986) are expressions whose meaning does not refer to the literal meaning of their parts. Traxler (2012) states that in idioms, ordinary words that have literal meanings will have other meaning that is greater than the words in those idioms. Because of its unique form, the perception of idioms began to attract many studies to find out about how humans perceive idioms.

There are several theories to understand the process of perceptual idioms in human cognition. The classical theory of (Chomsky, 1980; Katz, 1973) states that idioms are processed in their entirety like the meaning of one word regardless of what the composers say. Listeners or readers do not access words individually. This model is also known as the Direct Access Model. (Gibbs, 1984; Schweigert, 1985, 1991).

Then, Hamblin & Gibbs (1999) try to explain that idiom expressions have one meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the compiler, but the constituent words still contribute to the figurative meaning possessed by idioms, both decomposable idioms and non-compostable idioms. The theory supports the theory that literal meaning contributes to the overall meaning of idiomatic meaning called the Lexical Representation Model or Compositional Model (Glucksberg, 1993)

However, Kreuz & Graesser (1991) states that idiom research so far still has shortcomings, because the majority of studies always use English-language idioms, so idiomatic expressions are very limited. Because of this, conclusions from existing theories cannot reflect universal idiom theory. In the Indonesian language, the processing and understanding of idioms has not been widely studied. Research on many idioms focuses on research on translation and analysis of meaning by researchers. To find out how Indonesian language idioms are perceived by the native speaker, research is needed in relation to whether or not the idioms used as research are familiar or not. Because, research that does not consider these factors can be called inconsistent and contradictory results (Schweigert, 1985). Schweigert (1985) also added that whether or not an idiom would be familiar would affect the way humans perceive idioms. So, the authors conducted a study of idiom familiarity in Indonesian society first to find out which idioms were familiar and those who were less familiar. After that, this study aims to find out how Indonesian idioms are understood by Indonesian native speakers.

2 Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative methods. To achieve the objectives of this study, a two-stage test was conducted, those are Idiom Familiarity Test and Idiom Comprehension Test.

2.1 Idiom Familiarity Test

The method used to test the level of Indonesian language idiom familiarity with Indonesian speakers is online surveys. The number of idioms that are assessed as being familiar is 30 idioms taken from the Dictionary of the Indonesian Language Expression (Chaer, 1997). 30 idioms are chosen because 30 of these idioms are assumed to be representations of familiar and unfamiliar idioms, also assumed to be not burdensome and do not require much time for the people who took part in the survey. This familiarity instrument was filled by 85 people with the following criteria:

• Indonesian speakers
• classified as young adults aged 20-40 years (Hurlock, 1980)
• does not have a formal education background in the field of language & literature.
• not classified as people with special needs such as ADD, ADHD, aphasia, autism, and dyslexia.

The scale used is a 5 point scale. With a scale range of 1 for idioms that are unfamiliar to scale 5 which shows very familiar idioms. Then, the familiarity scale will be calculated on average for each idiom so that the idiom can be ranked according to the degree of creativity.

2.2 Idiom Comprehension Test

Tests for idiom understanding are done by distributing questionnaires to speakers of Indonesian with the same criteria as testing idiom familiarity. The number of participants is 20 people. Participants were told that a list of idioms in Indonesian would be displayed. The questionnaire contains two parts, interpreting the idiom meaning given directly and using the idiom in the context of a sentence.

3 Findings and Discussion

The finding and discussion consists of two parts. First, the idiom familiarity test and the second is the Indonesian Idiom Comprehension.

3.1 Idiom Familiarity Test

The following are data on idiom familiarity in Indonesian:

Rank	Idiom	Literal Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Average
1	*Adu domba*	Sheep Fight	Bring two parties or more into conflict to fulfil one's benefit	4,81
2	*Bahu-membahu*	Shoulder and shoulder	To help each other, together.	4,74
3	*Anak emas*	Golden boy	Someone's favourite person. (Boss' favourite employee or parents' favourite child)	4,72
4	*Harga mati*	Dead Price	Prices that cannot be changed. Circumstances that cannot be changed	4,69
5	*Salam Tempel*	Sticking Handshake	Give bribe	4,67
6	*Cinta buta*	Blind Love	To love someone while ignoring every fault and imperfection from that person in a negative sense.	4,59
7	*Ambil pusing*	Take a headache	To care about something	4,55
8	*Nyawa melayang*	Fleeting/Flying Soul	To Die	4,54
9	*Air mata buaya*	Crocodile's tears	To act sad (When actually is not)	4,51
10	*Berada dipersimpangan jalan*	At a crossroad	Doubt in deciding a choice	4,35
11	*Sampai hati*	Arrive at the heart	No mercy	4,15
12	*Berada di atas angin*	On top of the wind	Lucky	4,07
13	*Berakal panjang*	Long mind	To overcome all kinds of difficulties	4,06
14	*Mengambil jarak*	Take the distance	No longer close/friendly	4,06
15	*Berada di atas awang-awan*	Above the air	Very Happy	3,82

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16	*Jalur hijau*	Green line	City lane planted with trees	3,69
17	*Berada di luar garis*	Outside the line	To not interfere	3,65
18	*Bermandikan Cahaya*	Bath with lights	Very bright light conditions	3,45
19	*Beradu mata*	Colliding eyes	Gaze or look at each other	3,36
20	*Percaya angin lalu*	Believe in the past wind	Believe in the news that is not necessarily true	3,32
21	*Adu lidah*	Colliding tongue	To argue	3,26
22	*Macan ompong*	Toothless tiger	Rulers who no longer have power	2,91
23	*Biaya Siluman*	Mystical creature's money	Bribe. Illegal money	2,86
24	*Asap hitam*	Black smoke	Sad/bad situation	2,72
25	*Menjadi Angin*	Being the wind	Vanished without a trace	2,61
26	*Berbalik akal*	The mind which turn around	Crazy. Insane.	2,58
27	*Menyebelahkan hati*	To set the heart aside	Share the love	2,46
28	*Membawa kaki*	To carry feet	Go without direction and destination	2,35
29	*Bulan jatuh di haribaan*	Moon falls on the lap	To Get a huge benefit	2,29
30	*Alas Perut*	abdominal pads	The first food to be eaten in the morning	2,21

Table. 1. Indonesian idiom familiarity

Table 1 above illustrates the level of idiom familiarity from the most familiar with a value of 4.81 and the least familiar idiom has an average value of 2.21. From these data, they are grouped into two categories, which are familiar and unfamiliar idioms. A familiar idiom is assumed to be an idiom that has an average value above 3.50. Then, the results of 17 familiar idioms and 13 unfamiliar idioms were obtained.

3.2 Idiom Comprehension Test
The idiom comprehension test is divided into two parts to see differences in idiom familiarity with the process of understanding. From the results of idiom familiarity, only 24 idioms were taken which were divided into 12 of the most familiar idioms and 12 of the most unfamiliar idioms. Whereas 6 idioms that have middle values are ignored. Here are the results:

3.2.1 Familiar Idiom Comprehension Test

Table 2 shows how the familiar idioms are accessed by Indonesian native speakers. For discussion, idioms are discussed with code I (idioms).

Code	Idiom	Direct access (%)	Lexical access (%)
I1	*Adu domba*	95	5
I2	*Bahu-membahu*	100	0
I3	*Anak emas*	75	25
I4	*Harga mati*	50	50
I5	*Salam Tempel*	100	0
I6	*Cinta buta*	0	100
I7	*Ambil pusing*	70	30
I8	*Nyawa melayang*	100	0
I9	*Air mata buaya*	100	0
I10	*Berada di persimpangan jalan*	60	40
I11	*Sampai hati*	100	0
I12	*Berada di atas angin*	100	0
Average value		87.08	12.91

Table. 2. Familiar idiom result test

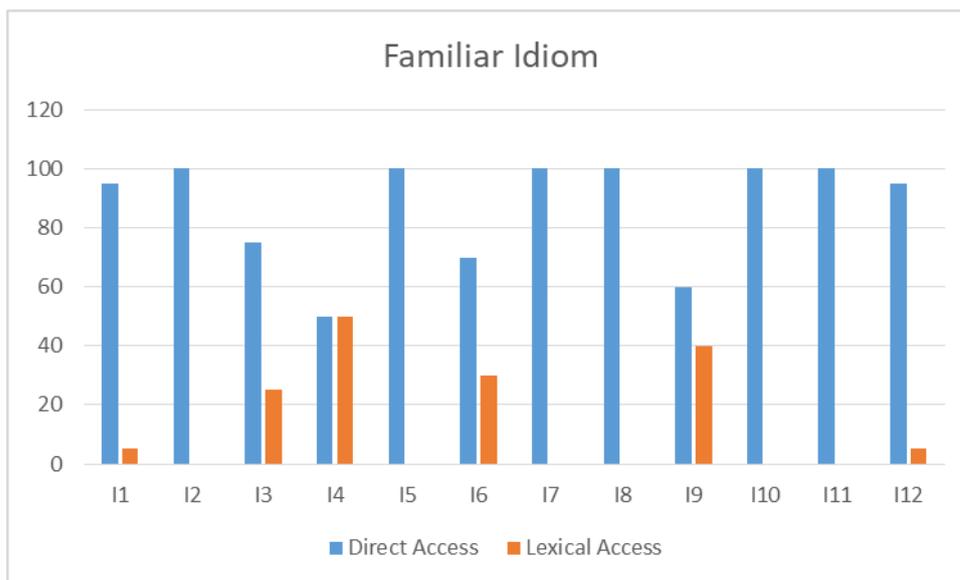From the following table, the difference can be seen in the fig 1.

Fig. 1. Familiar idiom

From Fig. 1 it can be seen that in understanding Indonesian idioms, native speakers use direct access models. After knowing that the words are idioms, the respondents immediately look for their idiomatic meanings and ignore the words that compose them. Only in a few idioms, there are some people who use the meaning of the constituent words. This is because I3, I4, I6, and I9 are idioms whose constituent meaning does affect the original meaning.

3.2.2 Less Familiar Idiom Comprehension Test

In table 3, the result of less familiar idioms comprehension test is shown.

Code	Idiom	Direct access (%)	Lexical access (%)
I13	Beradu mata	95	5
I14	Percaya angin lalu	10	90
I15	Adu lidah	25	75
I16	Macan ompong	95	5
I17	Biaya Siluman	65	35
I18	Asap hitam	65	35
I19	Menjadi Angin	55	45
I20	Berbalik akal	85	15
I21	Menyebelahkan hati	60	40
I22	Membawa kaki	80	20
I23	Bulan jatuh di haribaan	75	25
I24	Alas Perut	90	10
Average Value		63.33	36.66

Table. 3. Less Familiar Idiom Comprehension Test Result

To be able to see a clearer picture, the following is a diagram of the test results:
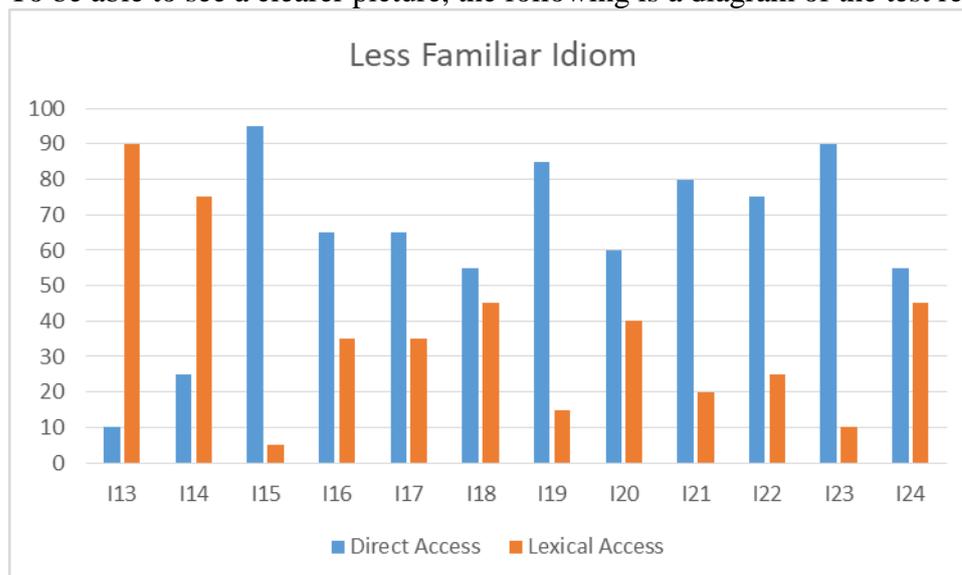

Fig. 2. Less Familiar Idiom

The diagram in Fig. 2 shows that in Less familiar idioms, most Indonesian speakers still use direct access, which is 63% the average value. Direct access and lexical access are almost balanced in comprehension. Here, it can be seen that in less familiar idioms, respondents try to interpret idiomatic meanings with the help of their constituent words. Even so, direct access to idiomatic meanings still proved to occupy the highest comprehension. Therefore, this finding support the theory of Direct Access Model. (Gibbs, 1984; Schweigert, 1985, 1991)

3.5 Conclusion

From the survey results related to idiom familiarity in 30 idioms, 17 familiar idioms were found and 13 unfamiliar idioms. Furthermore, this data can be used for advanced idiom comprehension studies to find out how familiar and unfamiliar idioms are perceived by human cognition. In the idiom comprehension test, it can be seen that most Indonesian speakers directly access their idiomatic meanings especially in very familiar idioms. In unfamiliar idioms, most Indonesian speakers still use direct access, although it cannot be denied, that the constituent words still affect the comprehension.

As a preliminary study, this study is certainly has its setbacks. This study provides an initial overview and research framework for understanding how idioms are processed in human cognition. The number of idioms used in the test and also the increasing number of respondents involved in research will make this research better.

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