

Japanese Idiom Learning through Cognitive Linguistics Concept (Idioms Presentation)

Dedi Sutedi*, Juju Juangsih, Linna Meilia Rasiban

Department of Japanese Language Education, Faculty of Language and
Literature Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

*Corresponding author email: dedisutedijepang@upi.edu

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Abstract

Idioms in Japanese are crucial and intricate for pupils to acquire, as they necessitate rote memorization. Occasionally, the figurative interpretation of an idiom involving a Japanese language cannot be inferred from its literal definition. Consequently, pupils must commit them to memory without relying on any mnemonic devices. An effective approach to consider is the application of the principles utilized in cognitive linguistics. Specifically, this involves elucidating the connection between the literal meaning of words and their figurative meanings by examining three rhetorical devices: metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. The purpose of this is to offer further support to Japanese language students in comprehending the significance of each idiom they acquire. This study aims to implement a series of steps to teach 27 idioms in the Japanese language to fourth semester students. The objectives of this research are: (1) to describe the figures of speech present in each idiom used as teaching material; (2) to assess the learning outcomes of Japanese idioms after applying three figures of speech to connect the lexical and idiomatic meanings; and (3) to determine if there is a significant difference between the experimental class, where students were given explanations using the three figures of speech, and the control class, where students studied independently. The data analysis reveals that the connection

between the literal meaning and figurative meaning of each idiom can be illustrated through the use of metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. Furthermore, the t-test analysis demonstrates a notable disparity between students who were taught idioms by utilizing associated figures of speech, as opposed to those who simply memorized them independently. Essentially, using figures of speech to illustrate connections between ideas is significantly more impactful than doing so without them. Moreover, acquiring idioms through this method is widely regarded as significantly more pleasurable and accessible for pupils to actively participate in.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics; idiom; metaphor; metonymy

INTRODUCTION

Proficiency with Japanese idioms is essential for pupils as they greatly enhance effective verbal communication. Nevertheless, achieving proficiency in Japanese idioms cannot be deemed as successful since students are often compelled to commit every encountered idiom to memory. Memorizing every idiom by heart can be quite demanding for kids.

An effective approach to enhance the retention of idiomatic meaning is to elucidate the correlation between idiomatic meaning and lexical meaning (Sutedi, 2019). This approach has gained significant traction among cognitive linguists in Japan, experiencing a recent surge in popularity. Notable works in this field include Momiyama (1995, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2009, 2010), Lee (2010), and various other contributions.

In the field of linguistics, phrases in which certain words only have a literal meaning and lack any idiomatic meaning are classified as ordinary phrases. Conversely, there are phrases where certain words only have an idiomatic meaning and lack any literal meaning. Additionally, there are phrases where certain words have both a literal meaning and an idiomatic meaning. (Sutedi, 2019). The first type poses no issues as the phrase's meaning can only be

determined through lexical analysis. However, the second type is considerably challenging as the lexical meaning and idiomatic meaning are entirely unrelated. Similarly, the third type follows the same pattern, making phrases or idioms of this nature regarded as intricate, which must be committed to memory.

An attempt to facilitate students' comprehension and retention of Japanese idioms is made by offering diverse illustrations that elucidate the connection between the literal meaning and idiomatic meaning of these expressions (Momiya (1997), Sutedi, et al. (2016), Lee (2010), etc.). Undoubtedly, this will enhance comprehension and facilitate endeavors to offer support to individuals learning the Japanese language (Yamada & Kasihino, 1998).

These specialists employ three rhetorical devices, specifically metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche, to elucidate the correlation between lexical meaning and idiomatic meaning inside an idiom. These three figures of speech are commonly discussed in the field of cognitive linguistics, particularly when examining the connection between the fundamental meaning and the extended meaning in a polysemy.

The constraints of the three rhetorical devices employed in this study pertain to the viewpoints of Japanese scholars in cognitive linguistics, including Momiya (1997, 1998), Sato (1998), Seto (1995 & 1997), and other experts. A metaphor is a rhetorical device that draws a comparison between two entities, A and B, highlighting their similarities, whether they are tangible or abstract. Metonymy is a rhetorical device that establishes a relationship between two entities, A and B, that are near one other in both physical and temporal dimensions. Proximity in space can manifest as a connection between a possessor and the possessed, while closeness in time can manifest as a relationship of causality, means, and goals. Synecdoche is a rhetorical device where a specific relationship is used to symbolize a broader concept, or vice versa, when a more specific thing is used to communicate a general idea. For instance, the term "*hana*" is commonly employed to explicitly refer to eggs from domestic chickens, such as in the phrase

"eating eggs." Conversely, the word "*Sanyo*" (a brand of water pump machine) is specifically utilized to designate water pump devices in a broad sense, as in the statement "my Sanyo is broken."

Several research findings from cognitive linguistics hold potential for application in Japanese language instruction. As an illustration, Sutedi, et al. (2016) examined a specific Japanese idiom, specifically *hana ga takai*. This idiom is derived from the phrase '*high nose'. While this expression does not exist in Japanese lexically, it carries an idiomatic meaning of 'arrogant'. Essentially, this phrase or idiom possesses solely an idiomatic significance, devoid of any lexical significance.

The metonymic relationship between the lexical meaning (high-nosed) and the idiomatic meaning (arrogant) in the given idiom is the explanation for their connection. The accompanying visual representation serves to clarify the concept. Japanese individuals typically demonstrate respect for others by performing a bow, known as "*ojigi*". During this bowing posture, the nose naturally assumes a lower position than normal, therefore exhibiting a drooping appearance. If he lacks respect for someone, he will refuse to bow, thereby keeping his nose elevated. Essentially, a Japanese individual will demonstrate respect by lowering their nose, but failing to do so would involve keeping their nose elevated. Individuals who consistently display an elevated nasal posture are commonly associated with arrogance, thus giving rise to the moniker "*hana ga takai*," meaning "high nosed."

The aforementioned actions might be viewed as a gesture of deference, where lowering the nose signifies showing respect, while elevating the nose signifies highlighting arrogance. The relationship between 'means' and 'goals' is within the domain of metonymy. If students inquire about the reason for using the lexical word "high-nosed" to convey the connotation of arrogance, the answer lies in its semantic equivalence. The answer lies in the approach and objective, which involves refraining from lowering the position of the nose, hence indicating a lack of desire to demonstrate respect for others (arrogance). This is an instance of

metonymy. The reason for mentioning the nose is that Japanese individuals typically indicate themselves by pointing their index finger towards their nose, whereas Indonesians commonly point towards their chest. To clarify, the nose can be regarded as a symbol of Japanese identity, while the chest is seen as a symbol of Indonesian identity.

The research conducted by the aforementioned experts is solely focused on creating and enhancing readers' comprehension of research findings pertaining to idioms. There is a scarcity of study findings that have been implemented in the field of Japanese language instruction, particularly for those who are not native speakers. Hence, the author aims to utilize diverse findings from prior research on the interpretation of idioms to instruct Japanese to the author's students.

Assuming the student had sufficient comprehension of the figures of speech employed in cognitive linguistics to enhance the process of reinforcing the memory of a Japanese idiom's meaning. The primary aims of this research are: (1) to analyze the figures of speech present in Japanese idioms utilized as instructional materials; (2) to assess the impact of incorporating three figures of speech in connecting the lexical and idiomatic meanings on the learning outcomes of Japanese idioms; and (3) to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between the group of students who received explanations employing the three figures of speech and the group of students who studied independently.

METHOD

The investigation identified a total of 27 figures of speech utilized as objects. The correlation between lexical meaning and idiomatic meaning is evident through the three categories of figures of speech. A qualitative analysis was conducted to examine the correlation between the meanings in each figure of speech. The findings of the analysis conducted on the 27 idioms examined in this study are

described in table 1.

Once the sort of figure of speech in each idiom was identified, experimental procedures were employed to teach fourth semester students about idioms. In this lecture, the instructor provides a detailed explanation of both the literal and figurative meanings of each idiom. Additionally, the presentation includes a comprehensive analysis with visual examples that highlight the various figures of speech associated with each idiom.

The experimental class received the treatment by being presented with 27 Japanese idioms in a tabular format. Each table included columns for the number, idiom, lexical meaning, and idiomatic meaning. The tables concluded with a figure of speech that described the relationship between the lexical meaning and the idiomatic meaning. The teacher elucidates the correlation between lexical meaning and idiomatic meaning in each idiom by categorizing the figure of speech as either metaphor, metonymy, or synecdoche. Regarding the control lesson, the instructor solely presented a compilation of idioms together with their idiomatic interpretations, subsequently elucidating them without explicitly referencing the specific figures of speech they encompassed. Students in this control class are granted autonomy to internalize information according to their own methods.

On April 11, 2022, a test was conducted in both classes. The test consisted of writing down the idiomatic meanings of the 27 idioms that had been previously covered. After a week, interviews were carried out with select experimental classrooms to assess if the introduction of figures of speech had an impact on reinforcing students' learning or not. Interviews were performed in certain control courses to investigate the methods by which students retained and learned idiomatic expressions. The outcomes of the two tests were examined using t-values.

Table 1. Japanese idiom being taught

No	Japanese Idiom (足)	Lexical Meaning	Idiomatical Meaning	Relation
(1)	足が出る [Ashi ga deru]	Feet out	Expenditures are greater than budget	Metaphor
(2)	足が重い [Ashi ga omoi]	Heavy feet	Feeling lazy to move	Metaphor
(3)	足を洗う [Ashi wo arau]	Washing feet	Realize (repent), stop from evil deeds	Metaphor
(4)	足を伸ばす [Ashi wo nobasu]	Extend the legs	Continue your journey to another place	Metaphor
(5)	足を運ぶ [Ashi wo hakobu]	Carrying legs	Go somewhere	Metonymy
(6)	足を引っ張る [Ashi wo hipparu]	Pulling legs (disturbing others)	Trick someone	Metonymy → metaphor
(7)	手が上がる [Te ga agaru]	Hands up (raise the hands)	Be clever	Metaphor
(8)	手が掛かる [Te ga kakaru]	Needs hands	Complicated job	Metonymy
(9)	手が出ない Te ga denai	Hands don't come out	There is no ability to do anything	Metaphor
(10)	手が届く Te ga todoku	Hands up (reachable)	Able to do work down to small things	Metonymy
(11)	手が長い [Te ga nagai]	Long hands	Likes to steal	Metaphor
(12)	手を借りる [Te wo kariru]	Borrowing a hand	Ask other people for help	Metaphor
(13)	手を出す [Te wo dasu]	Take your hand out	Intervention; likes to hit	Metonymy
(14)	目が高い [Me ga takai]	High eyes	Good at sorting out the good and the bad	Metaphor
(15)	目がない [Me ga nai]	Eyeless	Get carried away	Metaphor
(16)	目が利く [Me ga kiku]	His eyes are effective	Good at judging things	Metonymy
(17)	目が鋭い [Me ga surudo]	His eyes were sharp	His gaze was frighteningly sharp	Metonymy
(18)	目が回る [Me ga mawaru]	Eyes roll	Dizziness/headache	Metonymy
(19)	目を三角にする [Me wo sankaku ni suru]	The eyes become triangular	Angry/emotional	Metonymy
(20)	頭が下がる [Atama ga sagaru]	Head bowed	Honor	Metonymy
(21)	頭が上がらない [Atama ga agaranai]	Head doesn't rise	Respect/salute	Metonymy
(22)	頭を掻く [Atama wo kaku]	Scratching the head	Feel embarrassed	Metonymy
(23)	頭に来る [Atama ni kuru]	Coming to a head	Angry/offended	Metonymy
(24)	頭が悪い [Atama ga warui]	Ugly head	Stupid (not intelligent)	Synecdoche
(25)	顔が広い [Kao ga hiroi]	His face is wide	Famous	Metaphor
(26)	顔を出す [Kao wo dasu]	Take out the face	Deposit/attendance	Synecdoche
(27)	顔に泥を塗る [Kao ni doro wo nuru]	Daub your face with mud	Embarrassing	Metaphor

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the investigation into the correlation between the lexical and idiomatic meanings of these 27 idioms indicate that they all fall within three categories of rhetorical devices, specifically metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. There are a total of 12 idioms that metaphorically express relationships, another 12 that metonymically express relationships, and 2 that synecdochically express connections. The relationship between the lexical meaning and idiomatic meaning in Japanese idioms can be elucidated by employing these three figures of speech, which align with the principles of cognitive linguistics.

The test results from both the experimental class and control class were examined, verifying each student's response. The experimental class can process a maximum of 22 samples, while the control class can process up to 25 samples. Subsequently, a t-test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the test results for the two classes. The following data was collected from the results of statistical calculations.

Table 2. Result of statistic calculation on t-test

No	Calculation	Experiment group (X)	Control group (Y)
1	Sample (N)	22	25
2	Mean (M)	25.64	19.80
3	Standard of Deviation (Sd)	2.057	5.079
4	Standard Error Mean (SEM)	0.4489	1.1299
5	Standard Error Mean XY (SEMx.y)		1.1299
6	Score of <i>t count</i>		5.936
7	<i>Score of t table</i>	2.02 (95%)	2.69 (99%)
8	Interpretation	significant	significant

Table 2 provides the following information. The initial sample consisted of 22 individuals in the experimental group and 25 individuals in the control group.

The average test score for the experimental group was 25.64, while the control group had an average score of 19.80. Furthermore, the average data for the experimental class and control class are not merely a chance occurrence, but rather exhibit a considerable disparity. This is demonstrated by the computed t value (5.936) being significantly greater than the t table value, both at the 5% significance level (2.02) and at the 1% significance level (2.69). This indicates that the mean value for the experimental group is considerably distinct, or not due to random chance, from the mean value for the control group. Furthermore, the mnemonic technique employed by the experimental group students to memorize the significance of BJ idioms surpasses the approach utilized by the control group students.

Hence, it may be inferred that the most effective and memorable approach to retaining Japanese idioms involves elucidating the connection between their literal and figurative meanings with metaphors, metonymy, and synecdoche, rather than relying just on rote memorization.

Subsequently, interviews were carried out with a selection of the experimental classes as well as a subset of the control classes. Each group consists of 10 individuals from the experimental class and 10 individuals from the control class. Out of the 10 samples, 3 were identified as brilliant pupils, 4 were classified as intermediate, and 4 were considered inadequate. The objective of this interview is to verify the participants' recollection of the idioms' meanings and to investigate any difficulties they may have encountered.

The method used by control group students

Students in the control class have learned several idioms through various means. Some idioms are memorized by heart, which takes a considerable amount of time. Others are written down while being memorized, allowing individuals with a strong memory to recall all 27 idioms. However, economically disadvantaged pupils may require more than the allocated one week to complete their tasks.

Despite one's efforts to recall the literal definition, there are instances where it becomes challenging to remember the figurative meaning, since it may exceed their initial expectations. Essentially, they struggle to locate the keyword "ungkuk" due to the idiomatic connotation of a Japanese phrase.

Drawbacks entail experiencing significant fatigue while relying solely on rote memorization without the aid of keywords. Memorizing a single phrase requires time, therefore, they desire keywords to aid in recall. However, it was discovered that among the students in the control class who had good grades, they employed other associations that resulted in similarities with figure of speech presentations. For instance, some students recall the term "ashi wo arau" or establish a connection between the literal and figurative meanings, specifically the act of "washing feet" performed by someone seeking to pray or repent.

The method used by experiment group students

The experimental class students endeavor to recall the significance of idioms by examining three rhetorical devices taught in class, specifically metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. This strategy is seen highly successful and efficient for diligent and persistent pupils, as it facilitates rapid retention of the meaning of each Japanese idiom. The issue, however affecting only a minority of pupils, is directly linked to the confusion between metonymy and synecdoche. Each student in this class employs a nearly identical approach: when seeing a Japanese idiom, they promptly attempt to associate it with a specific figure of speech in their memory. For instance, some students quickly recall the metaphor when they hear the term "ashi wo arau," and so on. Discovering the keyword "ashi wo arau," which signifies washing feet, symbolically suggests the term "insaf," as the act of washing feet results in clean feet.

One problem is that there is a limited number of pupils who lack comprehension of the principles of metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. Specifically, there is a degree of ambiguity regarding the distinction between

synecdoche and metonymy. Several students believe that the notions of metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are advantageous for comprehension and reinforcement. The presentation of these three figures of speech is substantially facilitated, particularly for idioms that lack a literal meaning.

The vast majority of students (95.45%) found the application of figures of speech to be significantly more engaging and straightforward, with a notably greater impact compared to the previously employed strategy. Meanwhile, 4.55% of the participants held the belief that this was a typical occurrence. Upon conducting interviews, it was found that the student lacked comprehension of the three figures of speech.

This study is an experiment that aims to teach Japanese language idioms by using figures of speech as a means of reinforcement. Additional scholars, including Chen (2018) and Wu (2018), who have examined idioms from a cognitive linguistics standpoint, have offered diverse interpretations of the meaning of Japanese idioms. In this study, the author builds upon their work by applying these interpretations to the field of Japanese language instruction. The findings offer a comprehensive depiction and can be further investigated by other researchers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above description, the following deductions can be made. (1) The correlation between the literal meaning and figurative meaning in each idiom can be elucidated by three rhetorical devices, specifically metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. (2) The application of cognitive linguistics utilizing three figures of speech significantly enhances students' capacity to retain the meaning of Japanese idioms, surpassing the effectiveness of other methods employed by individual students. (3) There exists a notable disparity between students who retain idioms with figurative language, and pupils who retain Japanese idioms by rote memorization. (4) The majority of students find the inclusion of figures of

speech in the study of Japanese idioms to be significantly more engaging, comprehensible, and enduring.

Several aspects that require more investigation based on this research are as follows: (1) The scope of this study was restricted to 27 idioms for instructional purposes. To assess the efficacy of this approach, additional investigation might be conducted using a greater quantity of idioms and samples. (2) Employing figures of speech to elucidate meaning can also be attempted when acquiring other vocabulary, particularly for terms that possess several meanings (polysemy).

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