THE EFFECT OF IDIOMS ON CHILDREN'S READING AND UNDERSTANDING OF PROSE

by

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ABSTRACT

A survey of related literature showed that, although many educational researchers have stressed the importance of idioms in the English language, very few experimental studies have been carried out to ascertain the role played by idioms in the reading process. The author conducted a study to determine whether idioms cause difficulty for children in the reading and understanding of prose.

A pilot study was performed to facilitate the selection of test items and to establish testing procedures.

The experimental study consisted of four randomly chosen groups in each of two schools. Randomly assigned children in each group were given one of the four reading tests as follows: Non Literal 1 (N.L. 1), which contained idioms in all eighteen test items; Non Literal 2 (N.L. 2), which contained idioms in twelve of the eighteen test items; Non Literal 3 (N.L. 3), which contained idioms in six of the eighteen test items; Literal, which did not contain idioms in any of the eighteen test items. The children read their assigned test and answered comprehension questions by selecting one of the four multiple choice alternatives for each test item.
The following statistical results were obtained: the treatment effect was highly significant; the means increased steadily, with the highest scores associated with the Literal test and the lowest scores associated with Non Literal 1 test. There was no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys in the tests; there was no linear or curvilinear interaction with I.Q. and treatment, nor was there a sex by treatment interaction. An analysis of the four treatment groups showed that there were significant differences between the means of all groups except Non Literal 1 and Non Literal 2, the two groups containing the greatest number of idioms in the test items.

The results of the study raised several implications which necessitate further research. Several questions are concerned with the incidence and type of idiomatic language used in books and the best method of teaching idioms to school children. Another raises the possibility of allowing for idioms when compiling readability formulae. A further implication is that there may be a need for strictly literal reading materials which would serve as a transitional link between the multiplicity of dialects existing in society today, and the need to read and understand written Standard English.
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CHAPTER I
DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

I. INTRODUCTION

There is considerable evidence in education research to show that a great many normal children have difficulty in understanding what they read. This study proposes to test one reason why the reading difficulty may occur.

Several researchers have pointed out the vital role of idioms in the English language. (Chafe, 1967; Makkai, 1969). A number of recent classroom studies have illustrated the incidence of idioms in school texts and have suggested the need to teach idiomatic language as part of the English language programs in school. Very few research projects, however, have concentrated on the effect of idioms on the ability of a child to understand a passage of prose. (The issues raised here will be dealt with in Related Research).

It is the purpose of this study to determine whether idioms cause children to experience difficulty when reading prose. A test containing a number of idioms which are in common usage in English prose will be constructed and administered to randomly assigned grade eight students. It will then be argued that the inclusion of idiomatic expressions into prose content causes
difficulty in understanding for the students.

II. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

By the time a child enters formal education in the elementary school he 'displays language performance which reflects a high degree of competence'. (Ruddell, 1970) That is, most first graders can both converse and 'process' or understand what is being said to them. They therefore understand sentence patterns and a variety of transformations: (e.g. commands, statements, questions, embedded sentences, etc.).

The first reference to a teaching of idioms in A Guide to Teaching the English Language Arts in the Intermediate Years, Department of Education, Victoria, B.C., 1968, occurs on page 78, under the heading, "Study Skills": Dictionary: 2. Derive meanings: Point #14; 'ability to interpret idiomatic usages, for example, "to pick a bone with"'. Presumably the teaching of idioms would be left to the discretion of the individual teachers involved. Yet it has been stated that an appreciation of idioms is basic for understanding the (English) language, since they constitute a large part of it (Adkins, 1970).

The writer has personally noted the lack of understanding of idiomatic language by Canadian and Australian youngsters alike. Much of children's literature is written by people who use a great variety of idioms as part of their style. If it can be demonstrated
that reading materials which include idiomatic expressions are less easily comprehended by children than the same passages in which only literal expressions are used, all other factors being controlled, then:

(a) A presumption will have been established that reading materials constructed of literal English should be used for instructional purposes in the following situations:

(i) with students who are at the beginning phase of their reading experiences;
(ii) with students who are experiencing difficulty with the reading process;
(iii) with English second-language students.

(b) A basis will have been laid for further experimental studies to evolve satisfactory methods of instruction to improve pupil comprehension of prose that contains idiomatic language.

III. DEFINITION OF TERMS

IDIOMS As used in this study, idioms will refer to expressions or phrases which are peculiar to a given language and which carry either a literal meaning or a non-literal meaning depending on the intent of the writer. In other words idioms, as the term is used here, are ambiguous, and to be understood must either be known as a unit, or deduced from the context. That is, the intended meaning cannot be arrived at by literal analysis.
e.g. 'he kicked the bucket' can literally mean just that, but it usually conveys its idiomatic meaning: 'he died'.

**LITERAL** This refers to writing which means exactly what the words state. It is analysable in terms of the referent meanings of its constituents.

**PROSE** In this study, prose writing will be restricted to the type of writing found in narrative works, and will exclude 'scientific' writing designed solely to impart knowledge.

**STANDARD ENGLISH** This term will represent the written dialect of the educated users of the language in Canada and will not include slang.

IV. HYPOTHESIS

Non-literal passages of prose will be more difficult for children to understand than comparable passages of literal prose.

Difficulty of understanding will be measured in terms of the number of correct responses to the questions asked about the passages. Greater difficulty will be indicated by fewer correct responses by an individual or group, and less difficulty by more correct responses.

While it is expected that this hypothesis will hold for
children with different levels of general mental ability (measured by the Lorge-Thorndike I.Q. test), this is not hypothesized. Instead the following question is posed:

Will the effect postulated in the hypothesis hold to the same extent for all individual cases regardless of I.Q., or will there be an interaction effect?

V. RELATED RESEARCH

The word "idiom" is derived from the Greek word "idioma" which means "peculiar phraseology"

IDIOMS AS LANGUAGE

The problem of thoroughly examining the structure of idioms and their influence on the understanding of the English language has been strangely neglected by linguistics and educational researchers alike. Halliday (1961) pointed this out when he stated that linguists have all too often 'given up' on the problem of analysing the effect of idioms on the English language.

Makkai (1969) supports this view in the introduction to his analysis of idiomaticity. This involved, but very enlightening, study defines the two major areas of idiomatic usage where
misunderstandings may occur. Makkai postulates that there are polylexonic lexemes such as 'hit the roof', 'kick the bucket', 'blackmail', etc; and polysemic sememes typified by 'a chip off the old block' and 'too many cooks spoil the broth'.

FIGURE I

THE TWO IDIOMATICITY AREAS IN ENGLISH (MAKKAI, 1969)

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The first category of idioms contains parts of speech which are readily understood when used separately in other situations. However, polylexonic lexemes which contain lexons that are not independent lexemes when used separately are termed 'pseudo-idioms' by Makkai. Expressions such as "kith and kin" and "spick and span" are in this category, for the lexons "cran", "kith", and "spick" have no semonic meaning when used separately.
The second type of idiom also contains lexons which occur elsewhere in the language as lexemes. Makkai points out that the sememic idiom, "don't count your chickens before they're hatched", contains lexemes which if re-arranged would make sense in an entirely different situation. "Don't hatch your chickens before they're counted", therefore, might be considered good advice to a poultry farmer but the statement would have lost its idiomatic quality.

Thus the meaning of an idiom is not a combination of the meanings of each of its parts, but is more like the meaning of a single lexical item. Chafe (1968) illustrates this by using the idiom 'kick the bucket'. He notes that the meaning of this idiom is not derived from 'kick' (verb), 'the' (definite article), 'bucket' (noun), but rather 'kick the bucket' has a meaning something like 'die'.

This example also emphasises the 'concrete' nature of literal expressions and the abstract meaning conveyed by idioms. It is this move away from literal English towards an abstraction of ideas which makes many idioms difficult to decode.

It should be noted at this point that a reader's ability to cope with idiomatic language may be related to his or her understanding the process of making and decoding metaphors. That is, the facility to discern the metaphorical aspect of an idiom will often enable the reader to successfully comprehend the meaning
of an idiomatic expression.

In this study, Makkai's two types of idioms were used; e.g. polylexonic lexemes, ('hit it off', 'to take issue with'); and polysemic sememes, ('wild goose chase', 'a fly in the ointment').

Both types of idiomatic expression present difficulty in decoding, for idioms rarely give 'signals' that they are about to appear. Linguistic research into idiomaticity, according to Makkai, would allow not only a deeper understanding of the structure of English, but would also give further insight into structural semantics on a comparative basis if a universal factor could be established.

In "Language as Symbolization", (1967) Chafe also states his surprise at the paucity of research on idioms, particularly in the field of idiomaticization. He cites one reason for this being the great emphasis historical linguists have placed on phonological surface semological aspects of language. Chafe's concept of the deeper implications of semological theory is illustrated in Figure 2.
Chafe maintains that idioms enable a language to cope with more experiences by greatly extending the vocabulary. He points out that even though all idioms have literalizations, not all have literal counterparts. The idiom 'hit the roof' can be broken down into its parts and each word will have a literal meaning as shown in Figure 3.
This applies to all idioms. However not all idioms have a literal interpretation as they stand. The expression, 'to trip the light fantastic', is certainly idiomatic but it means nothing other than the particular meaning attached to it -- it cannot be taken literally as an entity. On the basis of the "literal counterpart" aspect, Chafe is able to classify idioms as 'live' (having a literal counterpart) -- or 'dead'. The value of this concept is that it focuses attention on the effect of idioms on the reading process. If the reader is aware of the presence of a 'live' idiom, he is faced with the task of using it either idiomatically or literally. Therefore according to Chafe any sentence which contains a live idiom is necessarily ambiguous. If the reader is not aware of the 'live' idiom, he decodes the sentence literally, and is
automatically wrong! The writer has often seen children completely confused by statements such as, 'his right-hand man' (only one hand?), etc. Faced with a 'dead' idiom, the reader either knows it and can symbolize its role in the language structure, or he is bewildered by its apparent, but non-existent, literal counterpart. For example, imagine the consternation of a young reader endeavouring to understand 'trip the light fantastic'!

Adkins (1968) stresses the need to have an operational definition of 'idiom' before attempting to engage in research. She points out that idioms can be descriptive phrases ('to be short-handed'); can be composed of verbs and prepositions, ('to fill in'); or can be combinations of verbs and adverbs ('look forward'). Examples of these types of idioms which were used in the study are given in APPENDIX IV.

Wingfield (1969) suggests that there are four main divisions of English idioms: (i) 'Culture-bound' idioms which are now accepted as lexical items in the language; e.g. They took a short-cut to the park. Many phrasal verbs such as put off (postpone) and keep back (retain) are in this group. (2) Metaphorical idioms which are readily understood; e.g. The soldier lost his head completely. (3) Metaphorical idioms which require some background knowledge of their source; e.g. They knew that the man had something up his sleeve (conjuring). (4) Culture-bound idioms
which can be used only in specific situations; e.g. The girl said that she couldn't stand the man. This latter section also contains numerous phrasal verbs, but with a cultural connotation; e.g. let on (reveal), turn up (appear).

The classification outlined here has two main weaknesses. In the first place, it doesn't explain how 'culture-bound' idioms are also not metaphorical. (One could pose the question; Aren't all idioms metaphorical?) Secondly, Wingfield makes no attempt to give his classification a taxonomical structure. The reader can only surmise that the divisions of idioms are not necessarily meant to be in order of difficulty or complexity.

In another article, Chafe (1968) insists that the Chomskyan paradigm, which led to so much fruitful research into linguistics over the last decade, will have to be modified to explain adequately the functions of idiomaticity. He suggests that the generative syntax approach of Chomsky's theory cannot successfully account for the peculiarities of idiomatic language. Chafe's point is that linguistic models should now shift from a generative syntactic position to a generative semantic one. To support his premise, Chafe notes that both Katz and Postal, and later Weinreich, have proposed the inclusion of lists of idioms in dictionaries to help facilitate an understanding of idiomatic 'pit-falls' for the unskilled or unaware reader.
IDIOMS AND UNDERSTANDING

Most children beginning their formal education would appear to have a reasonably adequate set of language skills. Strickland (1962) observed that children exhibited far greater skill in using language patterns than was previously realized. Yetta M. Goodman conducted a study with first grade children and reported that they were able to 'sample and draw on syntactic and semantic information when the reading material was presented as fully formed language'.

Reading, however, is not merely word-calling. A perceptual process must accompany the deciphering of graphic symbols. Dechant (1970) states this admirably when he refers to the complete reading act being an involvement in which the reader brings meaning to the printed symbols through his cultural and experiential background. The perceptual process involves seeing the printed word, recognizing the word, understanding its meaning, and relating the word to its context.

But what if an adequate knowledge of vocabulary depends on what Pei (1967) refers to as an understanding of stale metaphors, similes, and idioms, which in the words of George Orwell, 'construct

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1 From a doctoral study of development of reading in first grade children by Yetta M. Goodman, College of Education, Wayne State University.
Your sentences for you....think your thoughts for you....and conceal your meaning even from yourself'? In effect if we use Chomsky's model of deep sentence structures transforming experiences into phonological or graphological surface units, the reader must be able to choose the correct interpretation even when the sentence is truly idiomatic and therefore ambiguous. (Wardhaugh 1968)

The problem is exacerbated if the child does not have a satisfactory home environment where he can be exposed to a wide variety of language and reading experiences. Ruddell (1970) mentions the fact that a young person's language comprehension is directly related to his 'strategies and objects'. If the child has had little or no experience in identifying and understanding the complexities of idiomatic language, he will be at a disadvantage when confronted with idioms in his reading material. As mentioned earlier, a good understanding of metaphors will usually help alleviate this difficulty. Familiarity with idioms and metaphors will also enable a young person to cope more effectively with the changing nature of the English language.

Idioms, in numerous instances, are the results of the evolutionary aspect of language. An interesting example of this is given by Bolinger (1968), who cites the manner in which leftovers consigned as bird food came to be accepted as 'it's for the birds' -- worthless.
Idiomatic expressions in reading material pose further difficulties when adults write books for children without first making a careful study of the prevailing modes of popular language usage. The successful authoress, Maria Wotzchowski, maintains that writing children's books should be attempted only by writers who can appreciate the needs and abilities of their young readers. This perhaps over-emotional observation has nevertheless some validity from a strictly linguistic point of view. Lachenmeyer (1969), in postulating his concept of feeling in language, states that he had considered the arguments of both Osgood's stimuli and response theory of word meanings (later modified by Mowrer), and Skinner's insistence on a strictly 'functional approach' where 'go to hell you bastard!' is simply an adverse reaction to someone you don't like! Lachenmeyer concludes by stating that we arrange words in a particular way and this causes associations to the words to produce results. This concept, however, would not seem to apply to idiomatic language, for in the case of 'live' idioms we often do not mean anything like the words we use. Furthermore Chafe's (1968) comment that speakers are aware of literalizations and the relation between idioms and their literal counterparts is interesting to consider at this stage. Chafe's point is that if the encoder of the language was not aware of the confusion caused by idioms, 'many puns would be impossible to create and appreciate, and literature would be a very different and much duller thing than it is'. Surely this is the
issue! What if children don't follow the use of idiomatic language? What indeed does happen to communication and literary appreciation? Bolinger appears to make the same faulty generalization. He states that the essence of syntax is choice, and the main consideration one should have for his audience is the fact that syntax will follow clearly defined rules. Again it would seem idioms remain an uncontrolled variable. Likewise the semantic theory closely related to Chomsky's, which proposed that reading material without lexical items that could be interpreted 'in a manner consistent with each other' should be rejected, would also appear to ignore an idiomatic possibility of interpretation. (Wardhaugh, 1968).

A good example of this last point is illustrated by the following sentences:

1. "Tom is a fat cat".
2. "Thomas is a rotund, feline quadruped".

Goodman (1970) argues that when a child reads the second sentence, he 'stores' words in his memory bank until he can deduce their meaning - or until he looks the word up in a dictionary.

The writer wonders, however, what would happen if in effect the easier sentence of the two: "Tom is a fat cat", was in effect more difficult! What if this sentence referred to the modern idiomatic usage of the term, "fat cat", (e.g. Tom is a rich shrewd person; a 'cool customer'). The reader would then be faced with
the problem of solving an ambiguous statement solely with the aid of contextual clues which in many cases are not provided. It is for this reason that Constance McCullough (1968) suggested in her work for the Indian Government that to enable the reader to progress satisfactorily, elementary and secondary school textbooks should have idioms and their meanings listed.

RESEARCH STUDIES

As Makkai and Chafe noted earlier in this paper, there has been little evidence of research work into the effects of idioms on reading comprehension. Weiner, who compiled a book on idioms and figures of speech found in English, echoed their sentiments, as did Robert J. Dixon who suggested teaching idioms through the use of extensive practice exercises. (Adkins, 1968).

The few experimental studies reported in research literature have taken place in the United States of America, and have concentrated on students learning English as a second language. Holmes (1959) in an unpublished Master's thesis, reported a study into children's ability to comprehend "extra-literal" language. Her paper also pointed out that there was a constant use of figurative and idiomatic speech in textbooks which the children were reading. The subjects being tested in Holmes' study were a group of fifth-grade Negro children of low economic status. She found that there was a vital need to help the children concerned to understand the role played
by idiomatic and figurative language in reading comprehension. Holmes recommended the direct teaching of this area of language through word exercises to develop basic concepts.

In another unpublished Master's thesis, Maurine Yandell found that fourth grade Anglo-American children had a decided advantage in comprehending common idiomatic expressions when compared to sixth grade Indian and Spanish American students. The latter groups tended to interpret the idioms in a literal sense and as a result their median scores when compared with those of the Anglo-American children were at the second percentile and first percentile respectively.²

Several studies of a similar nature but on a much larger scale have been conducted by Patricia Adkins (1968) from the University of Texas. In order to test the belief that idioms should be taught to students learning English as a second language, Adkins set up a pilot study in two high schools: one in El Paso, Texas, the other in Gasden, New Mexico. The purpose of this initial investigation was to determine the incidence of idiomatic and figurative expressions in the seventh grade reading textbooks, then being used by the grade nine E.S.L. students in the two states. The study of reading

²Maurine Yandell, "Some Difficulties Which Indian Children Encounter with Idioms in Reading". (unpublished Master's thesis, the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1959).
material revealed that there was an average of 3.32 idioms and figures of speech per page throughout the basal readers and social studies texts. Accordingly a group of forty-two Spanish speaking students were tested on their understanding of idiomatic and figurative language. Adkins reported that only 37% of the language examples tested were known. Furthermore a high proportion of the wrong answers were either misconceptions or cases where no answer had been attempted. Adkins thus concluded that there must be a considerable quantity of prescribed reading material which was not really understood by the ninth grade children who were tested.

In another research study with sixty-two grade three children in El Paso, Texas, Patricia Adkins (1967) set up two groups consisting of thirty-one native English speakers and thirty-one native Spanish speakers, respectively. On this occasion a story, "Nathan and the Peddler", was selected from a school basal reader, Looking Ahead, (Houghton Mifflin), and was examined for idiomatic and figurative language. As a result, forty-five expressions were used in a series of comprehension tests throughout the daily reading of the thirty-eight page story. The results confirmed the belief that the children could not comprehend many of the "extra-literal" passages. A "t" test computed on the mean difference, equalled 3.51, significant beyond .001, with 88 degrees of freedom. When the 'error means' for both groups were compared, the Spanish speaking
group was considerably higher (10.62 to 6.93).

All of the research projects cited here attempted to ascertain whether children understood the meaning of various idioms. As a result the idioms were presented both in context and in isolation, and the students were given multiple choice alternatives. The present study, however, was not merely concerned with the understanding of a number of idioms. It sought to establish that the inclusion of idiomatic expressions into English prose causes difficulty in understanding for the student reader. The study thus examined the question of idioms and the reading of prose in much greater depth than had been previously discussed in published research studies.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS

The problems of students attempting to understand idiomatic content in reading materials are clearly illustrated by culturally deprived children. There has been a considerable amount of research in this field and an examination of some of the findings will add background to the study being pursued in this paper.

Chall (1968) raises the pertinent question: Why the cumulative deficits found in reading achievement among disadvantaged children? If reading is the 'psycholinguistic guessing game'
suggested by Goodman, Chall proposes that we should look further. Figure 1 claims that the problem is that disadvantaged children don't really understand basic Standard English patterns, a feeling which is shared by Muriel Saville (1970). Chafe, however, has previously shown that idiomaticity pervades the English language and forms a major part of its understanding, so that even if children appear to 'know' the components of what they are reading, the comprehension of the message may escape them.

A recent study by Cohen and Kornfield (1970) appear to lend support to Chafe's position outlined above. They decided to test the theory that urban disadvantaged black children have smaller vocabularies than middle-class children of the same age, and that this factor accounts for the blacks' retardation in reading. After using the Thomas oral vocabulary procedure on a group of first-grade urban ghetto children who were experiencing difficulty in reading, they found that these students were in fact capable of handling most of the vocabulary in the basal readers for grade one.

The authors concluded that a great deal more work remained to be done in the area of how Standard English reading materials affected reading performance in disadvantaged youngsters. Now the point is that even though the grade one books would probably not contain very much idiomatic usage, the negro children were still bringing to the reading act their own variety of idiomatic language learned in their homes and neighborhood. Saville adds support to
this observation. She maintains that the question is bound up in the incongruencies which exist between the syntax of the native tongue and that of Standard English. Shuy (1964) agrees, adding that if a child's oral language doesn't reasonably match his reading materials, he will experience difficulty. Metaphors and other types of unpredictable language (idioms) will, according to Shuy, worsen the position. Mamenta (1969) is yet another researcher who has supported this argument. Her work involved reading programs and oral instruction in English for Filipino children. She concluded that there was need to investigate a possible rapproachment between 'acceptable language structures used by English Second Language children and reading passages consisting of Standard English'.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that teachers are also at fault when teaching disadvantaged children to read, by not realizing that they speak one 'language' (middle-class Standard English), and their pupils speak another (dialect or sub-Standard English). Labov has described this as 'the ignorance of Standard English rules by the readers, and the ignorance of non-Standard English rules by the teachers and writers'. (Baratz, 1969) Surely this also applies to children who are neither E.S.L. students nor culturally deprived. If they don't understand idioms which are frequently used in reading material, they have a language problem!

Several studies have offered suggestions and procedures
to help alleviate the problem facing E.S.L. students. Stewart (1969) states that it might be best to allow the child to begin reading in his own dialect and then move to Standard English. Saville agrees, pointing out that unless a child's spoken language habits (slang, idiomatic expressions) are considered carefully, reading programs for disadvantaged children will not be effective. A corollary to this is Goodman's theory that children should be made to read Standard English materials, but then be allowed to discuss them in their own dialect. If one considers the last point carefully it can be seen that this is what really happens when anyone relates an experience. (Surely we all retell stories, etc., in our own particular style, and how many of us use no idioms or colloquialisms to color our description!) This is what Scott (1964) emphasised when he stated that being able to read another language involves learning something of the culture of the native speakers.

McDavid Jr. (1964) suggests that the best approach would be to teach Standard English to disadvantaged children as a foreign language. That is, it would not be a case of adding on to the child's language structure, but more of making a completely new start, teaching the basics first and continuing from there. The difficulty with this proposal is that if care is not exercised, literature and reading experiences can degenerate into mere skill-building lessons. The main task is to adapt the reading selection so that the students can utilize linguistic patterns which they already possess.
CHAPTER II
RESEARCH DESIGN
1. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Selection of Classes and Assignment of Treatments

In order to test the hypothesis and answer the question posed, the study was conducted in two secondary schools in the North Vancouver area. Four classes were randomly selected from each school.

One hundred and twenty-eight grade eight children were used from each of the two schools. The children were selected from heterogeneously grouped classes and were not classified as "academic", "vocational", or "occupational" students.

The students' scores of general mental ability measured by the Lorge-Thorndike scale were recorded. The Lorge-Thorndike scale has been used by North Vancouver schools for some time and so standardized scores were available for all students.

A table of random numbers was used to assign the students equally into four experimental conditions within each class. Thus I.Q. and sex were randomly distributed over the four tests.

All students received a set of eighteen passages of prose, the same for each experimental condition, except as follows:
N.L. 3 (Non-Literal 3) All passages contained idiomatic language. These were the original eighteen passages chosen.

N.L. 2 (Non-Literal 2) The same eighteen passages except that six of them were rewritten in Literal English.

N.L. 1 (Non-Literal 1) The same eighteen passages except that twelve of them were rewritten in Literal English.

LIT (Literal) All eighteen of the passages were rewritten in Literal English.

The sets of prose were made up into test booklets (see APPENDIX IV) and questions were asked about each prose selection. In order to answer the questions correctly, the students were required to have an understanding of the idiomatic expressions, or literal counterparts, in context. Four alternatives, (a), (b), (c), (d) were given for each passage. The alternatives were expressed in Literal English and were identical for the four sets. If the students didn't agree with any of the choices being offered, they were told to write what they considered the best answer next to (e).

The criteria for inclusion of the prose passages and alternatives were as follows:

ITEM CRITERIA

1. To obtain a correct answer to an item (other than by random choice), the student must have understood the passage as a whole. This applied to both the idiomatic and the literal
2. It must not be possible for a student who understands the idiom (or its equivalent in the literal version) to fail to comprehend the passage as a whole. The passage therefore must contain no further language difficulties of any kind.

3. It should not be possible for students to infer the meaning of a passage if they do not comprehend the idiom (or its literal counterpart). If the idiom or its equivalent in the literal version was not understood by the student, comprehension of the passage must be impossible and a wrong answer must ensue (except for guessing).

4. There should be no opportunity for the student to perceive similar wording or structural similarity between the prose passage and the correct multiple choice alternative being offered.

A panel of four judges accepted the criteria and independently appraised each alternative to determine whether a person responding with the keyed answer displayed an understanding of the meaning of the passage while a person who responded otherwise did not. One hundred per cent agreement among judges was required for each item to be included, thus contributing to content validity.
Measurement Condition

The reading passages were timed to ensure that students could complete the work in a normal school period. The schools used in the study were checked to ensure that the class periods were uniform and of adequate duration. As an added precaution, a pilot study was conducted in another school having the same period length as the schools used in the study, to ensure that the tasks could be completed in the time available.

The test booklets were given at similar times in each school. The study was carried out in late January, as by that time the children had settled down after the Christmas holidays and were not distracted by impending exams.

The test booklets were constructed to look like normal class exercises. No mention of the terms "literal" or "non-literal" was made at any time during the testing. Regular staff members conducted the tests in each school employing instructions that were standard for all groups. (APPENDIX III)

Reading materials used in the test booklets were selected from, or were similar to, resource materials designed for use by grade-eight students in British Columbian schools.
II. STATISTICAL DESIGN

Three statistical procedures were employed in the study.

The main analytic technique was a one-way ANOVA to test the hypothesis that non-literal passages of prose would be more difficult to understand than literal passages.

The ANOVA was preceded by a series of regression analyses to explore the possibility of sex effect or a treatment-by-I.Q. effect. This was necessary to see whether differences between treatment groups held to the same extent at all levels of I.Q.

After finding that there was no such effect, either linear or curvilinear, (described in Chapter IV), a one-way ANACOVA was performed using I.Q. as covariate. This procedure determined whether differences among treatments remained when I.Q. was held constant or when the groups were statistically equalized on I.Q. The ANOCOVA was merely a refinement on the ANOVA, since the four groups were random.

The F values for both the series of regression analyses and the ANACOVA were calculated by a multiple-regression program using the University of British Columbia's I.B.M. 360/67 computer.
The ANOVA, which indicated a highly significant treatment effect, was followed by:

(a) a Newman-Keuls test to locate which means differed significantly; and

(b) a test of trend to determine whether the trend of means was in fact linear or had some element of curvilinearity.
# RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The means for all treatment groups and the means for boys and girls are presented in TABLES I and II respectively. TABLE II contains other information pertinent to this study.

## TABLE I
**MEANS FOR ALL TREATMENT GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
<th>NL₁</th>
<th>NL₂</th>
<th>NL₃</th>
<th>LIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>14.47</td>
<td>15.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## TABLE II
**TREATMENT MEANS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
<th>BOYS</th>
<th>GIRLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>12.92</td>
<td>13.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL₁</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>13.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL₂</td>
<td>14.54</td>
<td>14.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL₃</td>
<td>15.47</td>
<td>15.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE III
TOTAL GROUP MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.Q.</th>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEAN 112.68</td>
<td>14.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD. DEV. 11.274</td>
<td>2.108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The S.D.'s were computed using N-1 in the denominator

I. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

A model which employed treatments, I.Q., treatments x I.Q., and treatments x I.Q.² as variables, was used in the study. The contributions to prediction of test variance calculated from increments to the multiple R², were as follows:

TABLE IV
SOURCE OF TEST VARIANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREDICTOR</th>
<th>PROPORTION OF TEST VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment x I.Q.²</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment x I.Q.</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatments</td>
<td>0.236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.Q.</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.365</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The inclusion of both sex and sex x treatment terms in the model increased the proportion of test variance accounted for by only .01.

Of all the predictors considered, only treatments and I.Q. were significant. Both were significant beyond the 0.00001 level. It was expected that differences in I.Q. level would be related to test performance differences.

The important conclusions from this preliminary analysis are:

1. Treatments did not interact with I.Q., so the ANACOVA procedure is justified.
2. Treatments accounted for a significant and substantial proportion of test variance. This result was confirmed in the succeeding analyses.

II. ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE

In this procedure, treatment and sex were used as independent variables and I.Q. was used as a covariate. The results confirmed the earlier observations, that the treatment effect was highly significant even when differences in ability among groups were controlled, and that the sex factor exerted no significant effect on the study.
It should be noted here that the F values depended on the order of testing because the design was non-orthogonal, (127 boys and 129 girls). However the F values for treatment for two different orderings were 30.8291 and 30.6364. In either case, when I.Q. was controlled, treatments accounted for some 24% of test variance.

TABLE V
SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE
(Effects Tested in Reverse Order of Listing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>d.f. (num)</th>
<th>d.f. (den)</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment x Sex</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>0.8265</td>
<td>0.4802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>0.6941</td>
<td>0.40579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Treatments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td>30.6364</td>
<td>.00000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

The hypothesis stated that non-literal passages of prose will be more difficult for children to understand than comparable passages of literal prose. The summary of the analysis of variance is in TABLE V. On the basis of these results, the null hypothesis was rejected, just as in the preceding and somewhat more refined analyses.
### TABLE VI
SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>S.S.</th>
<th>M.S.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>245.43</td>
<td>81.81</td>
<td>23.24</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within cells (error)</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>887.025</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>1132.455</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F = \frac{23.24}{3,252} F = \frac{2.65}{3,252; .95} \]

In order to determine which means differed sufficiently to lead to rejection of the overall hypothesis that all four means would be equal, a Newman-Keuls test was performed.

**Newman-Keuls Test**

The results of this procedure showed that there were significant differences between all pairs of means except those for groups NL\(_1\) and NL\(_2\) which had the highest proportion of idiomatic items. The following table gives a summary of the results.
TABLE VII
SUMMARY OF NEWMAN-KEULS TEST*
(Underlining indicates significant differences between means)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORDER</th>
<th>NL₁</th>
<th>NL₂</th>
<th>NL₃</th>
<th>LIT</th>
<th>qr**</th>
<th>Rr***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NL₁</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL₂</td>
<td>0.5781</td>
<td>1.4687</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL₃</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1250</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.6543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means (13.000)</th>
<th>(13.5781)</th>
<th>(14.4687)</th>
<th>(15.5937)</th>
<th>α = .05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* Figures in the table are differences between pairs of means.
** The qr are the critical values of the studentized range statistic.
*** The Rr are the critical ranges for α = .05

\[
\sqrt{\frac{M.S. \text{ error}}{n}} = \sqrt{\frac{3.520}{64}} = 1 (1.876) = .2345
\]

\[
Rr = .2345 \text{ qr}
\]
Tests for Trend

The tests for trend are presented in two parts; (a) test for linearity, and (b) test for non-linearity.

The procedures follow those discussed in Winer, pp. 177 - 186.

The procedure involves partitioning into two components the variability among scores resulting from differences among treatments. These components are a sum of squares (S.S. \_lin) resulting from the tendency of the treatment means to follow a straight-line trend, and a second sum of squares (S.S. \_non-lin) reflecting the tendency for the means to depart from this straight-line trend. The significance of these components is tested by obtaining the corresponding mean squares for linearity and non-linearity, and forming their ratios with the mean square for errors (M.S. \_W), these ratios being distributed as F. The calculation of the component sums of squares, using orthogonal polynomial coefficients, is shown in TABLE VIII.
### TABLE VIII

**TESTS FOR TREND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NL₁</th>
<th>NL₂</th>
<th>NL₃</th>
<th>LIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sums (Tₐ)</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear coefficients (Cₐ)</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CₐTₐ</td>
<td>-2496</td>
<td>-869</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>2994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cₐ²</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \sum C_j T_j = 555 \]
\[ n \sum C_j^2 = 1280 \]

\[ \text{M.S.}_\text{lin} = \frac{\text{S.S.}_\text{lin}}{1280} = \frac{(555)^2}{1280} = 240.65 \]

(a) **Test for Linearity**

\[ F_{1,252} = \frac{\text{M.S.}_\text{lin}}{\text{M.S.}_w} = \frac{240.65}{3.52} = 68.37 \]

Critical value was: \( F_{1,252} < .95 = 3.90 \)
(b) **Test for non-linearity**

\[
S.S. \text{ non lin} = S.S. \text{ between } - S.S. \text{ lin} = 245.430 - 240.650 \\
= 4.78, \text{ d.f. } 3 - 1 = 2
\]

\[
M.S. \text{ non-lin} = \frac{4.78}{2} = 2.39
\]

\[
F_{2,252} = \frac{2.39}{3.52} < 1 \text{ (N.S.)}
\]

The conclusion is that the slightly curvilinear trend in the sample means can be explained by differences in random samples. The effect cannot be claimed to be a result which would hold for the population.

**IV. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS**

The study was designed to (i) investigate the effect idioms have on children's understanding of prose, and (ii) to see if there was an interaction effect between I.Q. and performance. The procedures followed made use of (a) a series of regression analyses, (b) analysis of covariance, (c) analysis of variance, (d) post hoc comparisons between pairs of means, and (e) trend analysis. The sex factor was also considered in the two initial procedures. This section of the study deals with all procedures except the analysis of covariance.

Children with high I.Q. scores performed better in any
given test than did children with low I.Q. scores.

Boys performed much the same as girls did in the tests.

The null hypothesis which stated that idioms will not cause difficulty to children's understanding of prose was rejected. The treatments differed, with means ranging from 13.0000 for the N.L.1 test, to 15.5937 for the LITERAL test. The differences were significant far beyond the .00001 level. Idioms, therefore, have considerable effect on children's ability to understand prose, as defined in this study.

The analysis of variance procedure, however, did not indicate the significance of variations between pairs of means. The Newman-Keuls test showed that the only means which were not significantly different were N.L.1 and N.L.2. These two groups contained the greatest number of idiomatic items: eighteen and twelve respectively. When compared with the other two groups which were mainly literal in content, significant differences between pairs of means were obtained. These findings substantiated the results of the analysis of variance which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

The results of the test for linearity supported the significant linear trend between the stages of the test. Children experienced decreasing difficulty with test items as idiomatic content was replaced with its literal counterpart.
There was no reliable evidence in the data for a curvilinear trend. The slight curvilinearity between the stages of the test was attributable to sampling variability.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

I. CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to attempt to determine whether or not idioms had an adverse effect on children's reading and understanding of prose. A highly significant effect was found. The results of the study also showed that there was a positive relationship between the incidence of idioms in the test material and the amount of difficulty experienced by the children. Further, the effect seemed not to depend on sex, and although children with high I.Q.'s had less difficulty than those with low I.Q.'s, this held equally at all levels of idiomaticity.

The assumption can be made, therefore, that children who lack an understanding of idioms and yet are asked to read material containing numerous idiomatic expressions will experience difficulty unless they can utilize other techniques such as context clues to gain understanding.

II. LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study can be applied only to the student body from which the subjects were randomly chosen.
Replication of the study in other areas would be valuable to establish whether the effects obtained are general or local.

A total of eighteen idioms was used in the tests. This number was chosen because it enabled three variations of the original test to be constructed. Other multiples of three could have been used; (e.g. 21, 24, 27), but it was decided to concentrate on eighteen items which exhibited good content validity and which could conveniently be administered in the time available to the investigator.

The item stems were brief and were designed merely to facilitate an overall understanding of the passage which contained the idiom or its literal counterpart.

Because of the brevity of the test stems, the student was unable to gain much assistance from context clues.

The items containing idioms were evenly spaced throughout the tests in which they appeared. No attempt was made to experiment with other arrangements or combinations of idiomatic and literal items.

III. DISCUSSION

The author feels that it would be unfair to label children as "poor readers" without first defining the type of reading material they were using. Children who can function
adequately when reading literal English (as defined in this study) should receive praise and encouragement. These youngsters should then be motivated to continue to the next phase of their reading experience - that of Standard English that includes idioms.

This situation has particular meaning for Canadian Indian children and other minority groups who lack an understanding of the cultural background expressed in most of the books that they read. However there are many disadvantaged Canadian children who are not members of a minority group and they also need attention in this regard.

IV. IMPLICATIONS

Several areas for further research are indicated by the results of this study.

A great deal needs to be known about the incidence and type of idiomatic language encountered by Canadian students in their prescribed and recreational reading materials. Such information would be useful to educational authorities involved in the selection of school text books and in curricula planning. Aspiring authors of reading material designed for schools would no doubt also find the information useful.

The effect of idioms on types of reading material
other than prose remains to be investigated. Perhaps the occurrence of idioms in the descriptive style of writing found in many social studies books would produce similar results.

Various methods of teaching an understanding of idioms should be explored. Should idioms be taught as isolated units, or should they be taught in context? Is it possible to train children to discern idioms by the use of 'context clues', or should idioms be taught through an understanding of metaphorical language? The answers to these and other questions would be instructive to teachers in the classroom.

The role of idioms in language may necessitate a modification of existing readability formulae to make allowance for a new level of difficulty in reading material - namely the incidence and type of idiomatic expression encountered.

Reading selections of strictly literal material could serve as a transitional link between written Standard English and the multiplicity of dialects which exist in Canada today. This would in effect create three levels of English; non-literal, literal, and dialect.

It is to be hoped that future research into reading difficulties experienced by Canadian children will concentrate more on the non-literal aspects of English language. In this way when there are valuable lessons to be learned from research studies in
the United States of America and elsewhere, at least a comparative assessment will be possible.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX I

TEST CONSTRUCTION

A major difficulty experienced in this study was in attempting to ensure the content validity of the test items. Criteria established for this purpose were discussed in an earlier chapter dealing with the design of the study.

A sample of approximately 200 idioms was taken from the grade eight text books:

- The Craft of Writing, R.J. McMaster, Longmans (Ont. 1965);
- Accent on Reading (ed) G.M. Chronister, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, (Toronto 1968); and
- from other supplementary reading materials. This figure was reduced by half before the idioms were presented in test form. Some forty idioms were then selected for possible use and twenty of these were used in a pilot study (See APPENDIX II). Finally eighteen idioms were accepted by the judges and the test was compiled.

The following examples will serve to illustrate some of the problems encountered in the construction of the test.

1. The main problem in item construction was caused by the need to have two 'basic tests:

   (a) one test containing an idiom in every item;
   and
(b) one test containing a literal counterpart for the idioms. The other two tests were variations of these two basic tests. (See Chapter II).

Because of this format, the most accurate literal counterpart was unavailable for the multiple-choice answers accompanying each item, and so another valid synonymous expression had to be obtained in each case.

In many instances, however, synonyms do not mean exactly the same thing as the words they replace. Also the number of synonyms which can be used in a given situation is limited. Both of these factors had to be carefully considered.

e.g. #13: The Canadian golfer was in the running for the trophy until the last hole of the golf tournament.

The idiom 'in the running' has as its literal counterpart 'had a chance to win'. However this had to be used in the literal form of the test, so another suitable alternative had to be found.

The multiple-choice answers therefore contained the following:

(a) The Canadian golfer increased his lead.
(b) The Canadian golfer was out of breath.
(c) The Canadian golfer was awarded the trophy.
(d) The Canadian golfer was not awarded the trophy.
The correct answer (d) had to give the same interpretation when used with the item containing the idiom 'was in the running', as it did when it was used with the item containing the literal counterpart 'had a chance to win'.

2. The multiple-choice answers accompanying each item had to be free of any possible value judgment on the part of the student.

e.g. #13: The Canadian golfer was in the running for the trophy until the last hole of the golf tournament.

What happened at the last hole?

(a) The Canadian golfer increased his lead.
(b) The Canadian golfer stopped hurrying.
(c) The Canadian golfer was awarded the trophy.
(d) The Canadian golfer was not awarded the trophy.

It is valid to offer as an alternative (a) 'The Canadian golfer increased his lead', because in fact he couldn't have. Therefore this is a legitimate response which cannot possibly be correct.

However (b), 'The Canadian golfer stopped hurrying', is not valid, for we are not told in the content that he didn't play better when he hurried his shots. This alternative therefore was rejected and was replaced with 'The Canadian golfer was out of breath'. Similarly the following item is not acceptable, because the lady in question could presumably be 'put out' or 'annoyed' by
(a), (b), or (d). This entire item was finally rejected by the judges.

e.g. The lady who wanted to change the toaster was put out by the store manager's letter.

What was the store manager's decision?

(a) The lady was allowed to choose a free gift.

(b) The lady was evicted from the store.

(c) The lady was allowed to change the toaster.

(d) The lady was not allowed to change the toaster.

3. Care had to be taken that words which were used in the test stem were not inadvertently used again in the multiple-choice answers, thus serving as "cues" or "signals" to the testee.

e.g. "Well, shall we go on with the experiment?" asked Mr. Griffiths, looking at Todman.

"Why not?" answered Todman. "Of course no one will believe us".

"That is the one fly in the ointment", said Mr. Griffiths.

What was Mr. Griffiths' opinion of the experiment?

(a) He thought that no one would believe them.

(b) He thought it would produce a monster.

(c) He thought it was not a complete success.

(d) He thought it was a complete success.

Obviously alternative (a) is a direct visual clue to the testee, as the wording "no one - believe - " is in both the stem and the alternative.
The testee can thus answer this item correctly without understanding the passage. Thus alternative (a) was rejected and replaced with 'it was completely ruined'. The stem was also rewritten as:

#1: Dr. Griffiths said that the experiment still had a fly in the ointment.

4. The multiple choice answers must be stated in a similar manner; i.e. either be all positive, all negative, or all neutral.

e.g. After the women had seen the young boy win the skating championship, they agreed that he was a chip off the old block.

What are you told about the boy?

(a) He was rather stupid.

(b) His father was a very good skater.

(c) He was not popular.

(d) His parents couldn't skate very well.

The only 'positive' answer among the alternatives is (b). This answer tends to stand out among the others and could therefore be selected correctly on this basis alone. (This test item was finally considered unsuitable and was rejected.)

5. Items selected for use in the test had to be constructed so that the correct answer was not inferred by the stem.

e.g. After listening to the old man for half an hour, the boys were still not sure what he was driving at.

What was the old man trying to do?
(a) Get his car to start.
(b) Explain something to the boys.
(c) Injure the boys.
(d) Run into something.

In this item there is direct inference from "listening to the old man" to "explain something to them". This answer (b) which is correct, is the only answer associated with communication. For this reason the item was not used in the test.

6. All test items had to deal with subject matter which was considered to be "common knowledge" to grade eight students.

Example: When the condemned prisoner heard the result of his appeal, he knew that the writing was on the wall.

What did the news tell the prisoner?

(a) There wasn't enough evidence to convict him.
(b) He was going to be set free.
(c) His appeal had been dismissed.
(d) His appeal had been granted.

The term "appeal" was considered by the judges to necessitate an understanding of court procedure and therefore the test item was rejected.

Similarly the terms "fraud", and "manslaughter" in the following item were considered too difficult and the item was rejected.
e.g. When the police found out that the robbery was a put up job they made a quick arrest.

What would the police charge be?
(a) Armed robbery
(b) Attempted murder
(c) Attempted fraud
(d) Manslaughter

7. The vocabulary used in the test items had to be at the level of grade eight students in British Columbia schools. This requirement exacerbated the problem outlined earlier in No. 1, for in many cases synonymous phrases for a particular expression were found to be more difficult than the idiomatic content they were replacing.

The idiom 'split hairs' was initially considered for inclusion in the test, but its literal counterparts 'make subtle distinctions' or 'make fine distinctions' were deemed too difficult and the idiom was rejected.

Many other idioms which presented the same difficulty as a result of their "literal transformation" were also rejected.

e.g. | IDIOM          | LITERAL                        |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wet behind the ears</td>
<td>inexperienced or immature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drummed out</td>
<td>cashiered or courtmartialed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rough diamond</td>
<td>good qualities under a rough exterior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
white elephant rare but burdensome

8. The imagery evoked by the idiom had to be free of other figurative connotations in the stem of the test item.

e.g. The plans to launch the rocket were up in the air when the accident happened.

The associative imagery of "up in the air" and "rocket" was considered to be too positively related, and thus the test item was invalidated.

e.g. When the police found out that the robbery was a put up job they made a quick arrest.

The connotation between "put up job" and "put 'em up!" (robbery) was a major reason for rejecting this item.

9. The literal counterparts of idioms being considered for selection in the test had to be carefully examined to ensure that they were in fact "literal". In many cases the best synonymous alternative for an idiomatic expression was found to be non-literal itself and the items were therefore rejected.

e.g. IDIOMS ALTERNATIVE ("literal" counterpart)

(i) beat around the bush not to come straight to the point
(ii) sailing close to the wind on the border of dishonesty or indecency
(iii) playing second fiddle always being under
(iv) sit on the fence not to take sides
(v) wild goose chase            a false lead
(vi) settle a score             get even with
(vii) pull together             get on together
(viii) throw light on           make clear
(ix) fall back on               turn to for help

10. Numerous idiomatic expressions come under the heading "slang or colloquial terms". Idioms of this nature were not included in test items because they are mainly used in conversation and are not acceptable in standard English writing.

e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDIOMATIC EXPRESSION</th>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to cut classes</td>
<td>colloquial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to gun a motor</td>
<td>slang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suits me down to the ground</td>
<td>colloquial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to hang out somewhere</td>
<td>slang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Idioms which required an understanding of archaic practices or which were considered to be too far removed from the cultural background of Canadian grade eight students, were not included in the test.

e.g.

(i) 'flash in the pan' necessitates a knowledge of old fashioned fire-arms.

(ii) 'to buy a pig in a poke', had its origins in an English rural setting.
(iii) 'show the white feather', is based on a white feather in the tail of English game birds which denotes bad breeding.

(iv) 'scot free' refers to the historic practice in England of having to contribute one's share to municipal expenses.
APPENDIX II

PILOT STUDY

There were three major reasons for conducting a pilot study. The author wished to establish which of the twenty test items were suitable for inclusion in the experimental study; how long a similar type of test would take; and what type of problems were encountered by students and teachers.

The pilot study was held in a Vancouver elementary school and 125 grade seven students were selected. One type of test containing twenty test items (all with idioms included) was administered to the students. The students were classified by their teachers as "good", "average", or "poor" readers and the numbers 1, 2, or 3 were used to denote the classification.

The pilot study was given at the same time to the students and was presented as a normal English lesson. The test took approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes to administer and no problems were reported by the teachers.

As a result of the pilot study, nine of the twenty test items were discarded. Most of the others were rewritten and modified in some way. A discussion of this aspect of the pilot study is given in Appendix I.

A summary of the range of test scores is given in Table IX.
### TABLE IX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of items correct (x)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Cum. Frequency</th>
<th>FX.</th>
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</tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS:</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>1367</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MEAN** \((\bar{x}) = 10.9\)

**Median** = 11.1
READING COMPREHENSION

NAME: ________________________ SEX: ______ AGE: ______
(First) (Last)

CLASS/COURSE: __________________ DATE OF TEST: ______

SCHOOL: _______________________

DIRECTIONS: Read each passage carefully.
Choose the best answer and circle the letter in front of it: (a), (b), (c) or (d).
If you don't agree with any of the answers given, write your own answer in the space provided: (e).

1. "Shall we go on with the experiment?" asked Mr. Griffiths. "Why not?" answered Todman. "Of course no one will believe us." "That is the one fly in the ointment," said Mr. Griffiths.

What is Mr. Griffiths worried about?

(a) He thinks that Todman is stupid.
(b) He thinks that no-one will believe them.
(c) He thinks that the experiment has been ruined.
(d) He thinks that they may create a monster.

(e) _______________________

2. The blackmailer was furious when he heard that his victims were going to draw the line on how much they would pay him.

What made the blackmailer so angry?

(a) He knew the police had now set a trap for him.
(b) He knew that his victims were using marked bank-notes.
(c) He thought that he wasn't going to get any money.
(d) He wanted more money from his victims.

(e) ________________________
3. "You think you're good just because you were chosen to lead the group!" Bob yelled. "I'm not wet behind the ears, anyway," replied Dick.

Why did Dick say that he was chosen to lead the group?

(a) He was the most popular.
(b) He didn't yell like Bob.
(c) He was tidier than Bob.
(d) He was the most experienced.
(e) 

4. "Mr. Hopper will jump at any offer that you make him on that property," Michael told his friend.

What did Michael know about Mr. Hopper?

(a) He was a nervous man.
(b) He wanted to sell the property.
(c) He didn't want to sell the property.
(d) He would attack his friend.
(e) 

5. When the condemned prisoner heard the result of his appeal, he knew that the writing was on the wall.

What did the news tell the prisoner?

(a) There wasn't enough evidence to convict him.
(b) He was going to be set free.
(c) His appeal had been dismissed.
(d) His appeal had been granted.
(e) 

6. Lance and Margaret hit it off the first time that they met.

What do you know about Lance and Margaret?

(a) They liked each other.
(b) They hated each other.
(c) They were both athletic.
(d) They fought a lot.
(e) 


7. "I'd be careful of accepting any offer Mr. Jackson made you," Bill told his friend. "He usually has an axe to grind."

What was Bill warning his friend about?

(a) He thought that Mr. Jackson was mad.
(b) He thought that Mr. Jackson was going to kill his friend.
(c) He thought that Mr. Jackson was selfish.
(d) He thought that Mr. Jackson was old-fashioned.
(e) ____________________________________________________________________

8. The man said that a year in the army would lick the boy into shape.

What was the man's opinion of army life?

(a) He thought that it would do the boy good.
(b) He thought that it would be too hard for the boy.
(c) He thought that it was cruel to young people.
(d) He thought that it would teach him bad habits.
(e) ____________________________________________________________________

9. The beggar's pleading for food and money left the people in the marketplace cold.

How would the people treat the beggar?

(a) Take no notice of him.
(b) Give the beggar a lot of money.
(c) Beat him and drive him away.
(d) Give the beggar blankets.
(e) ____________________________________________________________________

10. When the police found out that the robbery was a put up job they made a quick arrest.

What would the police charge be?

(a) Armed robbery
(b) Attempted murder
(c) Attempted fraud.
(d) Manslaughter.
(e) ____________________________________________________________________
11. The people of the city found out that their new opera house was a white elephant.

What do you know about the new opera house?

(a) It was mainly designed for circus shows.
(b) It was a great success.
(c) It was only half built.
(d) It was not successful.
(e) ________________

12. Mr. Johnston took the old couple in with his advice of how they could safely invest their money.

What do you learn about Mr. Johnston?

(a) He was an honest man.
(b) He was a dishonest man.
(c) He was a wealthy man.
(d) He was a helpful man.
(e) ________________

13. The mayor was accused of putting the cart before the horse when he spoke to the meeting.

What was wrong with the mayor's speech?

(a) It was only about transport.
(b) It dealt with old-fashioned things.
(c) It was very disorganized.
(d) No-one could understand what he said.
(e) ________________

14. When John heard Barry's opinion of the war in Vietnam he decided to join issue with him.

What did John think of the war in Vietnam?

(a) He agreed with Barry.
(b) He had no opinion.
(c) He wasn't going to tell anyone.
(d) He disagreed with Barry.
(e) ________________
15. After their wild goose chase, the two mounties returned to police headquarters to make out a report.

What would the mounties' report state?

(a) Their mission had been a success.
(b) They had been on vacation.
(c) Their mission had failed.
(d) They had arrested an escaped prisoner.
(e) ___________________________________________________________________

16. The lady who wanted to change the toaster was put out by the store manager's letter.

What was the store manager's decision?

(a) The lady was allowed to choose a free gift.
(b) The lady was evicted from the store.
(c) The lady was allowed to change the toaster.
(d) The lady was not allowed to change the toaster.
(e) ___________________________________________________________________

17. When the detectives questioned the suspected bank-robber they were certain that he was beating around the bush.

What would the detectives think of the suspect's story?

(a) They would think that he was telling the truth.
(b) They would think that he was trying to hide something.
(c) It told them where the suspect had been hiding.
(d) They knew where the money was hidden.
(e) ___________________________________________________________________

18. The results of the test were published yesterday and Gloria has been crowing about it all evening.

What result did Gloria get in the test?

(a) She got a very high mark.
(b) She failed badly.
(c) Her paper had still to be marked.
(d) She had forgotten to do the test.
(e) ___________________________________________________________________
19. "It's usually those students who are at a loose end who get into trouble," the principal said.

How could the principal best help the students?

(a) Give them extra free periods.
(b) Get them medical attention.
(c) Find out what they would like to do.
(d) Leave them alone.

(e) ____________________________

20. After listening to the old man for half an hour, the boys were still not sure what he was driving at.

What was the old man trying to do?

(a) Get his car to start.
(b) Explain something to them.
(c) Injure the boys.
(d) Run into something.

(e) ____________________________
APPENDIX III

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING THE TEST

Suggested Procedure for Teachers:

1. I have written students' names on each test. Please have them complete other information at the top of page 1.

2. Present as "informally" as possible. Make it just like another class exercise.

3. Children may take all period if you wish - or you may collect the papers as they finish.

4. Try to treat queries about the test on an individual basis as there will be four variations of the test in each of your classes.

5. Please don't mention idioms at any time during the test.

6. Collect papers and leave them at the office.

Thank you for your co-operation.
APPENDIX IV
TEST I
Page 1
NON-LIT I

READING COMPREHENSION

NAME: ___________________________ SEX: __________ AGE: __________
CLASS/COURSE: ___________________ DATE OF TEST __________
SCHOOL: __________________________

DIRECTIONS: Read each passage carefully. Choose the best answer and
circle the letter in front of it; (a), (b), (c) or (d).
If you don't agree with any of the answers given write your
own answer in the space provided at (e).

1. Dr. Griffiths said that the experiment still had a fly in the ointment.

What was Dr. Griffiths' opinion of the experiment?

(a) He thought it was completely ruined.
(b) He thought it would produce a monster.
(c) He thought it was not a complete success.
(d) He thought it was a complete success.
(e) __________

2. "Mr. Harper will jump at any offer that you make him on that property,"
Michael told his friend.

What did Michael know about Mr. Harper?

(a) He was a nervous man.
(b) He wanted to sell the property.
(c) He didn't want to sell the property.
(d) He would attack his friend.
(e) __________

3. Lance and Margaret hit it off the first time that they met.

What are you told about Lance and Margaret?

(a) They liked each other.
(b) They disliked each other.
(c) They were both athletic.
(d) They fought a lot.
(e) __________
4. Many people in Canada today live from hand to mouth.

What are you told about the people?

(a) They always have plenty of money.
(b) They never have very much money.
(c) They don't use knives and forks.
(d) They usually eat at a drive-in.
(e) ____________________________

5. The man said that a year in the army would lick the boy into shape.

What was the man's opinion of army life?

(a) He thought that it would be too hard on the boy.
(b) He thought that it would do the boy good.
(c) He thought that it was cruel to young people.
(d) He thought that it would teach the boy bad habits.
(e) ____________________________

6. The beggar's pleading for food and money in the market-place left the people cold.

How did the people treat the beggar?

(a) They gave him blankets.
(b) They gave the beggar a lot of money.
(c) They beat him and drove him away.
(d) They took no notice of him.
(e) ____________________________

7. When John heard Barry's opinion of the war in Vietnam he decided to take issue with him.

What did John think of Barry's opinion of the war?

(a) He wasn't going to tell anyone.
(b) He agreed with Barry.
(c) He disagreed with Barry.
(d) He had no opinion.
(e) ____________________________
8. After their wild goose chase, the two mounties returned to police headquarters to write a report.

What would the mounties' report state?

(a) They had arrested an escaped prisoner.
(b) They had taken a holiday.
(c) Their mission had been successful.
(d) Their mission had failed.
(e) ________

9. The results of the test were given out yesterday and Gloria has been crowing about it all evening.

What result did Gloria get in the test?

(a) She scored a high mark.
(b) She failed badly.
(c) She found that her paper had not been marked.
(d) She had been absent from the test.
(e) ________

10. "It's usually those students who are at loose ends who get into trouble," the teacher said.

How did the teacher think he could best help the students?

(a) Give them extra free periods.
(b) Leave them alone.
(c) Get them medical attention.
(d) Provide them with extra activities.
(e) ________

11. Many soldiers in World War II thought they would lose face if they surrendered to the enemy.

What were the soldiers concerned about?

(a) What people would think of them.
(b) What food the enemy would give them.
(c) Whether they would be tortured or disfigured.
(d) Whether they would ever be set free.
(e) ________
12. Diana and Alice didn't like the teacher because his lessons were always over their heads.

What didn't the girls like about the teacher?
(a) He never looked straight at them.
(b) He didn't give them enough work.
(c) The work he gave them was too difficult.
(d) The work he gave them was too easy.
(e) 

13. The Canadian golfer was in the running for the trophy until the last hole of the golf tournament.

What are you told happened at the last hole?
(a) The Canadian golfer increased his lead.
(b) The Canadian golfer was out of breath.
(c) The Canadian golfer was awarded the trophy.
(d) The Canadian golfer was not awarded the trophy.
(e) 

14. Although Tania was in only one act of the play at the Pacific Coliseum, she stole the show.

What do you know about Tania?
(a) She was very nervous.
(b) She couldn't be trusted.
(c) She was very entertaining.
(d) She was not very entertaining.
(e) 

15. Mr. Johnson took the old couple in with his advice on how they could invest their money.

What do you learn about Mr. Johnson?
(a) He was an honest man.
(b) He was a dishonest man.
(c) He was a wealthy man.
(d) He was a helpful man.
(e) 
16. When the hockey player was told he was to be transferred, he said it was the red-letter day of his life. How did the hockey player feel about his transfer?

(a) He said he would retire.
(b) He refused to comment.
(c) He was very sad.
(d) He was very pleased.
(e) __________

17. The politician said that he wasn't going to give the figures on taxation off the top of his head. What made the politician so angry?

(a) He wasn't sure that the figures were correct.
(b) He thought that people would laugh at his appearance.
(c) He said that nobody would listen to him.
(d) He said that people would think that he was mad.
(e) __________

18. The blackmailer was furious when he heard that his victims were going to draw the line at $5,000.00. What made the blackmailer so angry?

(a) He didn't like to hurt people.
(b) He knew that he would be given marked bank notes.
(c) He thought that he wasn't going to get any money.
(d) He wanted all the money he had demanded.
(e) __________
TEST II
Page 1

READING COMPREHENSION

NAME: ____________________________ SEX: ____________________________ AGE: ____________________________

(First) (Last)

CLASS/COURSE: ____________________________ DATE OF TEST: ____________________________

SCHOOL: ____________________________

DIRECTIONS: Read each passage carefully. Choose the best answer and circle the letter in front of it; (a), (b), (c), or (d). If you don't agree with any of the answers given, write your own answer in the space provided at (e).

1. Dr. Griffiths said that the experiment still had one thing wrong with it.

What was Dr. Griffiths' opinion of the experiment?

(a) He thought it was completely ruined.
(b) He thought it would produce a monster.
(c) He thought it was not a complete success.
(d) He thought it was a complete success.
(e) ____________________________

2. "Mr. Harper will jump at any offer that you make him on that property," Michael told his friend.

What did Michael know about Mr. Harper?

(a) He was a nervous man.
(b) He wanted to sell the property.
(c) He didn't want to sell the property.
(d) He would attack his friend.
(e) ____________________________

3. Lance and Margaret hit it off the first time that they met.

What are you told about Lance and Margaret?

(a) They like each other.
(b) They disliked each other.
(c) They were both athletic.
(d) They fought a lot.
(e) ____________________________
4. Many people in Canada today are unable to save anything. What are you told about the people?

(a) They always have plenty of money.
(b) They never have very much money.
(c) They don't use knives and forks.
(d) They usually eat at a drive-in.
(e) 

5. The man said that a year in the army would lick the boy into shape. What was the man's opinion of army life?

(a) He thought that it would be too hard on the boy.
(b) He thought that it would do the boy good.
(c) He thought that it was cruel to young people.
(d) He thought that it would teach the boy bad habits.
(e) 

6. The beggar's pleading for food and money in the market-place left the people cold. How did the people treat the beggar?

(a) They gave him blankets.
(b) They gave the beggar a lot of money.
(c) They beat him and drove him away.
(d) They took no notice of him.
(e) 

7. When John heard Barry's opinion of the war in Vietnam he decided to argue with him. What did John think of Barry's opinion of the war?

(a) He wasn't going to tell anyone.
(b) He agreed with Barry.
(c) He disagreed with Barry.
(d) He had no opinion.
(e) 
8. After their wild goose chase, the two mounties returned to police headquarters to write a report.

What would the mounties' report state?

(a) They had arrested an escaped prisoner.
(b) They had taken a holiday.
(c) Their mission had been successful.
(d) Their mission had failed.
(e) 

9. The results of the test were given out yesterday and Gloria has been crowing about it all evening.

What result did Gloria get in the test?

(a) She scored a high mark.
(b) She failed badly.
(c) She found that her paper had not been marked.
(d) She had been absent from the test.
(e) 

10. "It's usually those students who have nothing to do who get into trouble," the teacher said.

How did the teacher think he could best help the students?

(a) Give them extra free periods.
(b) Leave them alone.
(c) Get them medical attention.
(d) Provide them with extra activities.
(e) 

11. Many soldiers in World War II thought they would lose face if they surrendered to the enemy.

What were the soldiers concerned about?

(a) What people would think of them.
(b) What food the enemy would give them.
(c) Whether they would be tortured or disfigured.
(d) Whether they would ever be set free.
(e) 

12. Diana and Alice didn't like the teacher because his lessons were always over their heads.

What didn't the girls like about the teacher?

(a) He never looked straight at them.
(b) He didn't give them enough work.
(c) The work he gave them was too difficult.
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13. The Canadian golfer had a chance to win the trophy until the last hole of the golf tournament.

What are you told happened at the last hole?

(a) The Canadian golfer increased his lead.
(b) The Canadian golfer was out of breath.
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14. Although Tania was in only one act of the play at the Pacific Coliseum, she stole the show.

What do you know about Tania?

(a) She was very nervous.
(b) She couldn't be trusted.
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15. Mr. Johnson took the old couple in with his advice on how they could invest their money.

What do you learn about Mr. Johnson?

(a) He was an honest man.
(b) He was a dishonest man.
(c) He was a wealthy man.
(d) He was a helpful man.
(e) _______
16. When the hockey player was told he was to be transferred, he said it was the happiest day of his life.

How did the hockey player feel about his transfer?

(a) He said he would retire.
(b) He refused to comment.
(c) He was very sad.
(d) He was very pleased.
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17. The politician said that he wasn't going to give the figures on the taxation off the top of his head.

What was the politician worried about?

(a) He wasn't sure that the figures were correct.
(b) He thought that people would laugh at his appearance.
(c) He said that nobody would listen to him.
(d) He said that people would think that he was mad.
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18. The blackmailer was furious when he heard that his victims were going to draw the line at $5,000.00.

What made the blackmailer so angry?

(a) He didn't like to hurt people.
(b) He knew that he would be given marked bank notes.
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What was the man’s opinion of army life?

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What was the politician worried about?

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