

SALIENCE EFFECT ON THE PROCESSING OF IDIOMS IN L1: EVIDENCE FROM MALAY SIMPULAN BAHASA

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Abstract

Experimental investigations into figurative language processing have received little attention for languages other than English and several major European languages. Research on the Malay language, in particular, has been very limited. This study thus aimed to investigate the figurative language processing of familiar Malay idioms by L1 native speakers. Familiarity or salience is hypothesised as having a dominating effect in the processing of idiom meaning. This means, regardless of context or other possible factors, salience is said to determine processing advantage. A total of 24 participants completed a timed lexical-decision task after listening to idiomatic stimuli. Eight highly familiar idioms embedded in neutral sentences were used as auditory stimuli, and were paired visually together with either their figurative or literal meaning as target words. Results revealed a similar processing speed for responses to both literal and idiomatic meanings. Hence, it was concluded that the salience levels of both meanings are balanced in line with the Graded Salience Hypothesis.

Keywords: figurative language processing, salience, timed lexical-decision, Graded Salience Hypothesis

Introduction

For over four decades, figurative language has been studied widely in the area of experimental psycholinguistics mainly involving English and other European languages. The unique property of figurative language for generally having non-literal meanings is the factor driving research interests into how it is processed in the human mind. Idioms, in particular, are amongst those widely investigated because of its importance and abundance in human interaction. This, however, is limited to languages with existing psycholinguistic resources such as English as opposed to other languages that have only recently received attention for studies pertaining to language processing.