The Presentation of English Idioms to Nigerian L2 Learners: The Example of the English Project Series for Secondary Schools

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Abstract

English course books have received little or no attention in existing studies on L2 idiom acquisition. Consequently, this study examined the presentation of English idioms in the English Project Series for junior and senior secondary schools in Nigeria. The data comprised 184 idiomatic expressions. Its analysis entailed classifying the idioms into types, ascertaining their distribution, determining each presentation's thematic focus, and identifying the presentational techniques adopted. Idioms featured in the JSS and SSS books at a ratio of 5:1 in favour of the latter, and 42 percent occurred in SSS3 alone. Figurative forms, idioms proper, phrasal verbs, metaphors, and proverbs were the idiom types presented, with idioms proper and phrasal verbs respectively accounting for 74 and 21.2 percent. Each presentation focused on 1) recognition, identification and differentiation; 2) origin, source and context of occurrence; 3) meaning and comprehension; or 4) usage and application as theme. Three techniques of presentation were employed: 1) definition and description; 2) listing and exemplification; and 3) questioning and directives. Whereas 72 percent of the idioms featured in linguistic context and 21 percent in situational context, only 8 percent was de-contextualised. Nigerian L2 learners of English idioms dependent on the English Project Series could benefit from increased, systematic exposure among other critical improvements.

Keywords

Idioms, Idiomatic Expressions, Distribution of Idioms, Typology of Idioms, Thematic Focus of Presentation, Presentational Techniques

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the presentation of idioms in *English*

Project, a popular English course book series written specially for Nigerian L2 learners of English in junior and senior secondary schools. Specifically, the study determines the distribution of idioms in the six-book series, identifies the typology of idiomatic expressions presented, determines the thematic focus of each presentation, and evaluates the techniques of presentation adopted. Idioms are a special type of vocabulary, comprising a number of words, the meaning of which differs from the combined meanings of its constituent words. An integral aspect of the lexicon in their own right, English idioms are important because their correct usage not only adds colour to the language but marks the user as highly proficient and competent. For the native speaker, idiom usage comes quite naturally because it is a part of their culture. In the case of the L2 user, however, limited exposure and inaccessibility to the situations that make the use of idioms second nature to the native speaker create problems. This is particularly true of the average Nigerian user of English, many of whom lack idiom awareness, avoid idiom usage due to uncertainty about its correctness and appropriateness, and misuse commonplace idioms, producing such idiomatic oddities as "Cut your coat according to your size" and "Make haste while the sun shines". These issues led researchers into wanting to unravel what the real problems are and how they might be tackled. In the history of L2 acquisition studies, however, little or no attention has been paid to the role that course materials play in the acquisition of English idioms. Attention appears to be concentrated on learners (e.g., Amos & Abas, 2021), teachers (e.g., Bulut & Çelik-Yazlci, 2004; Rizq, 2015), attitudes (Pucelj, 2018), and techniques (e.g., Asri & Rochmanati, 2017). There is no known study dedicated to the presentation of idioms in English course books. What exist are mere acknowledgments of the possible role of textbooks in L2 idiom acquisition. For instance, Noor and Fallatah (2010) recommended that idioms be given a space in English textbooks like other aspects of vocabulary. Pucelj (2018) admitted that it was necessary to incorporate idioms in English course books, after citing a 1986 report by Irujo on the complete omission of idioms from textbooks and Vasilejvic's (2015) lamentation that the situation had remained unchanged. Yet textbooks are undoubtedly the most important resource available to learners of idioms for whom English is a non-native language. No one appears to have recognised this fact more than Liontas (2017) who, following an earlier observation that "idioms have not been a topic of intense research interest" (p. 16), rationalised that an adequate theory of L2 idiom acquisition and production would advance a wide range of applied linguistics issues, including materials development (with textbooks implied). Nigerian L2 learners of English idioms and their teachers rely heavily on recommended course books for the attainment of their respective goals, and the English Project Series is the course book of choice. Here lies the background against which this study is undertaken.

2. Perspectives on Idioms and L2 Idiom Acquisition Research

This review of the theoretical and methodological perspectives on idioms and L2

idiom acquisition research covers conceptualisation of idioms, research in L2 idiom acquisition, and presentation of idioms in L2 course books.

2.1. The Conceptualisation of Idioms

Blinova's (2021) recent assertion that there is no "scholarly consensus on what idioms are in contemporary research" (p. 0324), and an earlier one by Pucelj (2018) that there is "no generally accepted definition of an idiom" (p. 3), are signals that the subject of idiom is fraught with difficulty. Indeed, Liontas (2017) admitted that "one of the thorniest issues in idiom research has been the question of how to define idioms", known also "as slangs, proverbs, simile, dead metaphors", etc. (p. 6). There are nevertheless definitions from which researchers can gain useful insights into the subject idiom. This review of the conceptualisation of idioms therefore encompasses its definition, importance, sources, and typology.

2.1.1. Definition, Importance, and Sources of Idioms

A well-cited definition of idioms is that by Seidl and McMordie (1978), which states that "an idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone" (p. 4). Moon (1998) and Simpson and Mendis (2003), cited in Blinova (2021: p. 0324), respectively defined an idiom as "multi-word expressions that are not the sum of their parts" and "a group of words that occur in a more or less fixed phrase which overall meaning cannot be predicted by analysing the meaning of its constituent parts". Asri and Rochmawati (2017) observed that "Idiomatic expressions are phrases that carry different meanings than the literal definition of their component words" (p. 47). They quoted Rohani and Ketabi's (2012) definition thus: "a figurative expression that can usually be interpreted literally but that takes a non-literal meaning when used in a specific context". These definitions show that an idiom is inherently figurative in meaning and that its meaning can also be literal or both literal and figurative.

It has been stated that "English is very rich in idiomatic expressions" and that it is difficult to imagine anyone speak or write English without using idioms, which underscores their significance. Idioms are so important in the language that non-native speakers strive making the correct use of idiomatic English their goal (Seidl & McMordie, 1978: p. 4). In fact, it is claimed that the knowledge of idioms aids communication (Konopatskoya, Yarmakeev, Pimenova, & Abda-rafikova, 2017: p. 658) and that its teaching can make the L2 learner "become more native-like" (Amos & Abas, 2021: p. 3), expose them to the culture of the English, and enhance their knowledge of "how culture permeates and dictates linguistic behaviour" (Liontas, 2017: p. 7).

According to Liontas (2017), English idioms are "rooted in the peoples' history, politics, sports, and culture"; they are the "mirrors" of Englishmen's "world, their hopes and fears, their lives and deaths", and have indeed "become part of the spiritual soul of their language" (p. 9). Thus, many English idiomatic expres-

sions derive from the "every-day life of Englishmen", and have been traced to several sources as follows: home (e.g., *to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*), food and cooking (e.g., *to eat a humble pie; out of the frying pan into the fire*), agricultural life (e.g., *to put one's hand into the plough*), nautical life (e.g., *when one's ship comes home*), military life (e.g., *to fight a pitched battle*), parts of the body (e.g., *to keep someone at arm's length*), animals (e.g., *to kill two birds with one stone*), colours (e.g., *the black sheep of the family*; *to be in the* red), the Bible (e.g., *to turn the other cheek*) (Seidl & McMordie, 1978: pp. 5, 216-221), and Shakespeare (e.g., *a fool's paradise*; *love is blind*; see Wolman, 2010, cited in Aboulalaei, 2015). Second language learners of English idioms do not inhabit the time and space that gave rise to the idiomatic expressions used by Englishmen and so remain seriously disadvantaged in their attempt to effectively encode and decode idiom meaning. These are critical issues that must be taken into cognisance in L2 idiom acquisition research.

2.1.2. Typological Classification of Idioms

The typological classification of English idioms differs markedly according to scholars and criteria. Beginning with structure, Saidbakhramovna (2018: p. 36) pointed out two inherent features of idioms emphasised in Koonin's (1996: p. 287) definition of an idiom as "a stable combination of words with a fully or partially figurative meaning". The two inherent features are as follows: 1) Idioms have "lexical and grammatical stability" (They have fixed forms that disallow substitution and rearrangement capable of resulting in loss of primary meaning) and 2) Idioms are "integral units" (They possess indivisible completeness, with components bound together). These agree with Seidl and McMordie's (1978: pp. 4-7) earlier dichotomous subdivision of idioms into fixed and unfixed subtypes. Fixed idioms cannot be changed at all (e.g., *to give someone the cold shoulder*) whereas unfixed idioms allow limited changes in some parts, such as tense of the verb (e.g., *to take/have/enjoy forty winks* and *to keep a sharp/careful/watchful/professional eye on someone*). Seidl and McMordie (1978) particularly noted that some idioms are characterised by illogicality and ungrammaticality while others "are completely regular and logical in their grammar and vocabulary" (p. 4) and that this explains why idioms must be taken as a whole. Idioms were thus classified into three according to whether they are structurally regular with unclear meaning (e.g., *to have a bee in one's bonnet*, meaning "to be obsessed with an idea"), structurally irregular with clear meaning (e.g., *I am good friends with him*), or both structurally and semantically irregular (e.g., t*o be at large*).

A wholly semantic classification of idioms is that of Liontas (1999), cited in Pucelj (2018: p. 4), which distinguished transparent, semi-transparent, and opaque subtypes. Transparent idioms have a clear meaning connected to the literal meaning (e.g., *give the green light*) while semi-transparent idioms lack obvious connection between literal and figurative meanings (e.g., *break the ice*). Opaque idioms are semantically opaque in that their figurative meaning is not inferable from the individual words' literal meaning (e.g., *spill the beans*).

From a combined semantic and structural dimension emerged other classifications. There are thus pure idioms ("a type of conventionalised, fully opaque, non-literal multi-word expression", e.g., *kick the bucket*), semi-idioms ("partly opaque idioms having one or more literal constituents and one with non-literal sub-sense"), and literal idioms (which are either invariable or allow little variation; either transparent or admit interpretation on the basis of their constituent parts) (Asri & Rochmanati, 2017: p. 49, citing Strakšiene, 2009; Shojaaei, 2012, who cited Fernando, 1996). Referring separately to Cooper (1998) and Makkai (1972), Zarei (2020: p. 219) distinguished between decomposable and non-decomposable idioms as well as encoding and decoding idioms. Decomposable idioms exhibit a connection between figurative and literal meanings while non-decomposable idioms are strictly figurative and show no connection between constituent words and meaning. Encoding idioms combine words expressing clear meanings with collocational restrictions while decoding idioms are those that are not easily understandable using formal regularities. Proaromou (2005), cited in Blinova (2021: pp. 324-325), identified four subclasses of idioms based on a combination of form and meaning thus: (i) formulaic idioms, (ii) collocations, (iii) phrasal verbs, and (iv) cultural idioms. Formulaic idioms are either prepositional phrases (e.g., *at home*) or transparent bi-tri nominals (e. g., *bed and breakfast*) while collocations can be open (e. g., *sun +rise*) or restricted (e.g., *spur somebody's memory*). Phrasal verbs are exemplified by *to turn around* while cultural idioms include colourful binominals (e.g., *chalk and cheese*), metaphors and figurative expressions, similes, proverbs, and literary allusions. Blinova added that classes (i)-(iii) are formulaic idioms and that they are frequent in use, less opaque in meaning, and fixed in form. In contrast, class (iv) idioms are idiomatic phraseological expressions characterised by infrequent use, semantic opaqueness, and syntactic irregularity.

The foregoing shows the apparent lack of consensus on the types of idioms and the criteria for classifying them. Since this is not a study of idiom competence, comprehension or usage, a formal typological classification is considered sufficient. In this regard, I recognise a five-member class of idioms comprising figurative forms, idioms proper, phrasal verbs, metaphors, and proverbs. By "idioms proper" I mean any expression that is ordinarily understood as an idiom and that falls outside the other subclasses. Metaphors subsume simile, figurative forms refer to lexical words used figuratively, proverbs include aphorisms, and phrasal verbs cover all verb + prep constructions with idiomatic functions. I shall also make reference to the formal v informal (colloquial) dichotomisation of idioms as appropriate.

2.2. Research in L2 Idiom Acquisition

This review of L2 idiom acquisition research covers the relevance and problems of L2 idiom learning, orientation of L2 idiom acquisition research, techniques of L2 idiom teaching, and studies on textbook presentation of idioms.

2.2.1. Relevance and Problems

Research into L2 idiom acquisition becomes relevant due to the difficulty associated with teaching, learning and using idioms. According to Qureshi, Anwar and Tahir (2018), idioms are "one of the most controversial and complicated areas" of L2 pedagogy, which probably explains why it suffers neglect in some contexts (Rizq, 2015). English "Idioms pose great difficulties for learners" due to semantic obscurity and L1 interference (Prodromou, 2003, cited in Blinova, 2021: p. 0324). There are other sources and causes of problems in L2 idiom acquisition. Learners' non-possession of requisite knowledge about the situational contexts in which idioms are most appropriately used (Seidl & McMordie, 1978: p. 7) is one (Recall that English idioms are sourced from Englishmen's everyday life, which is remote from the L2 learner's experience). Others are semantic unpredictability of idioms (Rizq, 2015; Asri & Rochmanati, 2017), cultural restrictedness, leading inevitably to L1 interference (Asri & Rochmanati, 2017), and non-native speakers' ignorance about what the image of an idiomatic expression stands for (Thyab, 2016). Noting that idioms are institutionalised expressions, Maisa and Karunakaran (2013) reported that learners confuse idioms with proverbs and colloquialisms and that learning idiomatic English can promote language fluency.

2.2.2. Idiom Teaching Techniques

Asri and Rochmanati (2017) observed that the teaching of idiomatic expressions had traditionally fallen into neglect and that idioms had been presented in isolation as "though they were an obscurity in language" (p. 50). Consequently, they suggested some innovative teaching strategies, such as using idioms in essay writing and conversation. Konopatskoya, Yarmakeev, Pimenova and Abdarafikova (2017: pp. 657-658) credited Cooper (1998) with identifying sixteen approaches to consolidating new idioms. These are choosing, discussing, defining, drawing, and dramatizing idioms. The rest are retelling exercise, add-on story, discuss idioms from newspapers, idioms in cartoons, idioms from TV shows, paragraph completion, interview classmates, idiom-of-the-day mobile, idiom board game, and idiom jazz chants. While they left unanswered the question of whether idioms should be presented explicitly or incidentally, their study concluded that anecdotes and humoresques contribute to the consolidation of idiomatic expressions. Rizq's (2015) investigation of teachers' perception of idiom teaching reported that 60 percent preferred the mixed explicit and implicit method. Liontas (2017: p. 17) advocated the presentation of idioms in authentic texts while Zulfikorova (2021) recommended the use of thematic derivatives (e.g., sports-related-idioms) and conversation as teaching techniques, instead of bombarding learners with endless lists of idiomatic phrases. Saidbakhramovna (2018: p. 36) identified translation tasks as one of the specific features of idiom teaching in the Uzbek EFL context, whereas for Zarei (2020: pp. 220-221), the techniques of presentation are a cocktail of visualisation, games, storytelling, and lexical awareness (cf. Long, 2014). Finally, recourse to etymo-

logical background in EFL idiom teaching produced long-lasting impacts on overall comprehension, with positive implications for the creative use of idiomatic expressions, as Qureshi, Anwar and Tahir (2018: p. 274) have found.

2.2.3. Orientation of Research

The studies reviewed show clearly that the orientation of L2 idiom acquisition research is primarily towards meaning and comprehension (e.g., Noor & Fallatah, 2010) and techniques of presentation (e.g., Zarei, 2020). For instance, although Amos and Abas (2021) selected test items from primary school English course books and dictionaries, their focus was on idiom comprehension. In fact, these two areas alone accounted for 63 percent of the sixteen studies sampled, with five representations each, only two of which were not empirical studies. Apart from perception studies with two representations, the four other areas of research interest (attitude, problems, relevance of idiom teaching, and theory) featured only once each.

2.3. Studies in Course Book Presentation of English Idioms

Liontas' (2017) assertion that "idioms have yet to receive the attention in second language acquisition studies accorded to them by learners of second languages" (p. 6) can best be interpreted to mean that research output on L2 idiom acquisition does not match the demand for intervention, given the millions of learners of English from diverse linguistic backgrounds and the problems therefrom. It does not however mean that there is no work being done. What it does mean is that the work is probably insufficient or negligible. Nowhere is this neglect more pronounced than in the area of English course book research. Yet course books provide invaluable resource for L2 idiom learning as already stated. There are therefore no known studies to review, which provides further justification for the current research interest.

3. Methodology

Each book in the *Junior English Project* and *Senior English Project* Series contains an outline Scheme of Work that matches the prescribed Curriculum for English for secondary schools in Nigeria. The Scheme of Work has columns ranging between nine and fourteen and bearing identical headings with only slight variations in nomenclature (e.g., Spoken English/Oral English & Listening; Vocabulary/Vocabulary Development). For instance, the Scheme of Work for Junior Secondary School Student's Book 1 has ten columns arranged in the following order: Unit, Spoken English, Reading, Vocabulary, Listening, Grammar, Skills Focus, Writing, Literature, and Test. The column for vocabulary was scanned in order to ascertain the presence or absence of idioms. This was marked with the corresponding unit. Each idiom-bearing unit was thereafter carefully examined to identify and mark the precise part of the Vocabulary Development section in which idioms were presented and what each presentation entailed. All the idioms therein were identified and copied out in situ and their

total number was determined. In all, 184 idiomatic expressions were identified, and this constitutes the data for the study.

The analysis of data took the form of first examining the distribution of idioms according to units, books, and the junior-senior dichotomy. This way, the number of idiom-bearing units relative to the total number of units in the books was determined, and the total idiom occurrence relative to the estimated number in the language was computed. This constitutes the preliminary analysis. The main analysis began with a careful examination of the184 idiomatic expressions to identify the subtype to which each idiom belongs (e.g., idioms proper) and categorise them accordingly. Thereafter, each presentation was critically examined to determine its thematic focus in terms of origin and source or meaning and comprehension, for instance. The number of times each identified theme was focused upon was also determined. Finally, each presentation was revisited to identify and evaluate the specific technique (s) employed (e.g., definition and description). Each of these activities was done for every unit and for every book in the series. Some statistics in the form of simple percentages aided the analysis.

To end this description of methodology, the six books from where the data for the study was extracted are formally identified with their authors as follows:

1) *Junior English Project for Junior Secondary Schools: Student's Book 1.* (Grant et al., 2014)

2) *Junior English Project for Junior Secondary Schools: Student's Book 2.* (Brennan et al., 2014a)

3) *Junior English Project for Junior Secondary Schools: Student's Book 3.* (Brennan et al., 2014b)

4) *Senior English Project for Secondary Schools: Student's Book 1.* (Grant et al., 2011a)

5) *Senior English Project for Secondary Schools: Student's Book 2.* (Grant et al., 2011b)

6) *Senior English Project for Secondary Schools: Student's Book 3.* (Grant et al., 2011c)

4. Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results

This analysis of data and discussion of results is in four parts: distribution of idioms, typology of idioms, thematic focus of idiom presentation, and techniques of presentation.

4.1. Distribution of Idioms

Table 1 displays the distribution of the 184 idiomatic expressions that constitute the data according to books and units.

Table 1 shows that idioms were presented in every book in the six-book English Project Series. It also reveals that 25 units, representing approximately 23 percent of the total 108 units into which the schemes of work was broken, explicitly indicated idioms as topic. While there were eight idiom-bearing units in SSS

Table 1. Distribution of idioms in the English project series.

Books		No. of Units	Units with Idioms	No. of Idioms	Percentage of Data
	1	17	2	7	4
JSS	2	20	1	3	2
	3	17	3	20	10
Subtotal		(54)	(6)	(30)	(16)
	1	19	4	40	22
SSS	2	17	7	37	20
	3	18	8	77	42
Subtotal		(54)	(19)	(154)	(84)
Grand Total		108	25	184	
Percentage			23	1.84 (of 10,000)	

Book 3 (the highest), JSS Book 1 and JSS Book 2 had two and one respectively. Thus, although there were equal number of units in the JSS and SSS books (54 each), the number of idiom-bearing units relative to this number was over three times more in the latter (19 or 35 percent) than in the former (6 or 11 percent). Table 1 also reveals that the SSS books had 154 idioms, which contrasts sharply with the 30 of JSS. These figures respectively represent 84.and 16 percentage of the 184 instances of idiom-occurrence, and translate to an approximate ratio of 5:1 in favour of the SSS books.

While it is noteworthy that the English Project Series introduced idioms to secondary school pupils literally from Day One, the number and frequency of encounter call for concern. The 184 idiomatic expressions represent only 1.84 percent of the estimated 10,000 idioms in use in English (Brenner, 2011, cited in Konopatskoya, Yarmakeev, Pimenova, & Abdarafikova, 2017: p. 656). This proportion of idioms is inadequate particularly against the backdrop of Noor and Fallatah's (2010: p. 149) report that insufficient coverage of idioms in language materials contributes to difficulty in learning. It could be argued that no English course book can cover every known idiomatic expression in the language—which is both sound and reasonable—and no one would expect that because it is an impracticality. However, while it is acknowledged that idiom acquisition is not restricted to the English classroom as there are other veritable sources of idiom experience available to the learner (people, newspapers, TV, Radio, English-medium lessons, other school activities, etc.), it remains doubtful whether this degree of formal exposure is sufficient to produce the idiomatically literate English user that the Senior School Certificate holder is expected to be. The number of idioms encountered and the frequency of idiom-bearing units could benefit from some increase, and this would be to the greater advantage of learners. Given the nature of idioms and the acclaimed difficulty associated with their acquisition and use in L2 contexts, a more regular and sustained idiom ex-

perience is desired. In other words, the presentation could be gradual but systematic and at more regular intervals between the years. Emphasis appears to be on examination practice, judging by the number of idiomatic expressions presented in SSS Book 3. That volume alone accounted for 42 percent of the data with 77 occurrences, whereas there were 40 in SSS Book 1, 37 in SSS Book 2, 20 in JSS Book 3, 7 in JSS Book 1, and 3 in JSS Book 2.

4.2. Typology of Idiomatic Expressions

To have an insight into the types of idiomatic expressions presented, it is expedient to identify them first. Table 2 lists all the 184 idioms in sequential order of occurrence and in the exact form in which they featured in the six course books.

Table 2 reveals there were five subtypes of idioms introduced to the Nigerian L2 learner of English through the English Project Series. The subtypes, in the order in which they were first encountered, are figurative forms, idioms proper, phrasal verbs, metaphors, and proverbs. These are closely examined in turns.

Table 2. Idiomatic expressions presented in the English project series.

S/N	Idiom	Book	Unit	Page
1.	to horse	JSS 1	12	106
2.	clad			
3.	perchance			
4.	a mountain of homework		13	116
5.	It has been ages (since I wrote)			
6.	(I feel)terribly lucky			
7.	(I really) feel at home			
8.	neck and neck	JSS 2	6	49
9.	took up their positions			
10.	was catching up			
11.	fed up with	JSS 3	7	72
12.	get on with it			
13.	put up with it			
14.	keen on			
15.	to no avail		9	93
16.	in fact			
17.	in secret			
18.	at once			
19.	in debt			
20.	to my surprise			

Continued

21.	at least		
22.	in my opinion		
23.	at last		
24.	by the way		
25.	went up in smoke	12	123
26	set fire to		
27.	open fire		
28.	play with fire		
29.	burn the midnight oil		
30.	not hold water		
31.	covered a lot of ground	SSS1 5	35
32.	turned over a new leaf		
33.	reap where we have not sown		
34.	(I warned him not) to put all his eggs in one basket		
35.	kept waiting	11	92
36.	don't keep asking (questions)		
37.	kept (wanting)		
38.	keep (destroying)		
39.	keep (reminding)		
40.	keep (watering)		
41.	Mudslinging	16	141
42.	black market		
43.	are taking the bread and butter out of the mouths of small traders		
44.	Bullish		
45.	men of straw		
46.	get through	17	148
47.	set about		
48.	go about		
49.	applied for		
50.	turned me down		
51.	took me on		
52.	save up		149
53.	looking after		
54.	look down on		
55.	cut off from		

Continued

56.	turn to			
57.	applied for			150
58.	went in for			
59.	saved up			
60.	fall back on			
61	looked down on			
62.	stepped up			
63.	turned me down			151
64.	took me on			
65.	in the same boat			
66.	white-collar job			
67.	blue-collar job			
68.	things so far have run smoothly			
69.	stepped up			
70.	more power to your elbow			
71.	clinch (a medal)	SSS2	1	5
72.	steal the show			
73.	occupied centre stage			
74.	deep down in her heart		2	16
75.	in her heart of hearts			
76.	broke her heart			
77.	very kind-hearted			
78.	set his heart on			
79.	from the bottom of his heart			
80.	straight from his heart			
81.	the heart of the problem			
82.	turns a deaf ear to		4	35
83.	up in arms		5	46
84.	(turned out) in force			
85.	stuck to my guns			
86.	came to blows			
87.	fights shy of			
88.	had got the wrong end of the stick		8	81
89.	put the cat among the pigeons			
90.	added fuel to the fire			

Continued

91.	sold a pup			
92.	took the wind out of his sails			
93.	weren't his cup of tea			
94.	making a mountain out of a molehill			
95.	carry out		14	141
96.	carry on			
97.	following a red herring		17	175
98.	born with a silver spoon in his mouth			
99.	a bit of a rough diamond			
100.	wouldn't touch (that offer) with a barge pole			
101.	puts her foot in			
102.	cut our coat according to our cloth			
103.	on the fiddle			
104.	dash your hopes			176
105.	is taking us all for a ride			
106.	a wolf in sheep's clothing			
107.	had burnt his boats			
108.	twist everyone round his little finger	SSS3	5	62
109.	little love lost			
110.	throw his heart into the ring			
111.	bitten off more than he can chew			
112.	take the rough with the smooth			
113.	keeps our noses to the grindstone			
114.	weathered the storm			
115.	toe the line			
116.	like an open book to me		6	72
117.	were brought to book			
118.	take a leaf out of the book			
119	throws the book at him			
120.	bad books			
121.	not worth the paper it's written on			
122.	look alright on paper			
123	to paper over the cracks			
124.	burn the midnight oil		7	81
125.	broke the ice			

Continued

126. added fuel to the flames		
127. hold a candle		
128. worlds apart		
129. vanished into thin air		
130. count his chickens before they are hatched		
131. light at the end of the tunnel		
132. let the grass grow under her feet		
133. couldn't see the wood for the trees		
134. once in a blue moon		82
135. with a pinch of salt		
136. far and away		
137. has a heart of gold		
138. a piece of my mind		
139. One man's meat is another man's poison.	8	99
140. Money doesn't grow on trees.		
141. Too many cooks spoil the broth.		
142. Make hay while the sun shines.		
143. Every cloud has a silver lining.		
144. took off	9	110
145. pulled through		
146. 'll let (you) off		
147. laid down		
148. make out		
149. break up		
150. take in		
151. show off		
152. turned up		
153. pick out		
154. get through		
155. runs out of		
156. (for) donkey's years	10	118
157. from pillar to post		
158. bark was worse than his bite		
159. gave (Hart) a wide berth		
160. kept his nose to the grindstone		

Continued

161.	could hold a candle to him		
162.	to hold the fort for him		
163.	throw a new fellow in at the deep end		
164.	a feather in his cap		
165.	he was pushing his luck		
166.	has drawn up his battle ground	16	143
167.	ironing out (the misunderstandings of)		144
168.	let's bury the hatchet		
169.	…take a leaf out of your brother's book		
170.	not to get all steamed up		
171.	throwing away the baby with the bathwater		
172	I called her bluff		
173.	read between the lines		
174.	(…it is Mrs Lobula who) wears the trousers		145
175.	have a go at (poetry)		
176.	(he is) out of pocket		146
177.	(The zoo-keeper) was making his rounds		147
178.	(dependent for company on) cats and dogs		
179.	was being too clever by half		
180.	on the edge of a precipice	18	165
181.	a bone of contention		
182.	to be in the doldrums		166
183.	Some eyebrows are being raised		
184.	to come round		

4.2.1. Figurative Forms

The first set of idioms presented were three archaic "words" appropriately identified as "idioms" and "old-fashioned words". Contained in a reading comprehension passage extracted from the English translation of Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's Hausa novel *Shaibu Umar*, the "words" are "to horse'", "clad", and "perchance" and they mean "to mount a horse", "to clothe or dress", and "by chance" respectively. Extracts (1)-(3) below show them in the context in which they were used in the passage (JSS Book 1, pp. 105-106). As "clad" further affirms in "*When we have to deal with such, we clad ourselves in their contraries*" (OED, p. 423), the three "words" only function as figurative idioms, being obsolete "words". The writers seem to have recognised this fact when they noted that "these old-fashioned words help to give the story its historical taste, or favour" (p.106), and directed learners to not use them but only rewrite them in modern

English. So "to horse'", "clad", and "perchance" are obsolete "words" used figuratively only.

(1) "We had hardly left the farm when we heard the distant hoof beats of horses in the forest, and people calling out "T*o horse, to horse*; today your beds shall lie empty."

(2) "Then we saw in the distance a horseman on a grey horse, *clad* in chain mail."

(3) On hearing this, the head of the family said, "God willing, *perchance* it's your bed that shall be the loser".

4.2.2. Idioms Proper

The next subtype of idioms formally presented in the English Project Series was idioms proper, which make up 74 percent of the data with 136 instantiations. Two forms were however repeated: *to burn the midnight oil* (S/N 29, JSS 3, p.123; S/N124, SSS3, p. 81) and *to keep one's nose to the grindstone* (S/N 113 & 160, SSS 3, pp. 62 &118). One striking feature of the typological presentation seen relates to the formality scale. Although there was evidence that both formal (e.g., "neck and neck" S/N 8) and informal (e.g., "bitten off more than he can chew", S/N 111) idioms were introduced, only twice was the necessary distinction between them formally made and this was only partial. Reference to "informal idioms" was first noticed in the opening statement of the Vocabulary Development section of Unit 1 in SSS Book 2 in the following way: "The language of sports journalism is full of everyday idioms. The writers use a slightly informal style of writing because sports people are not interested in texts that are difficult, or seem boring" (p. 5). The second instance involved the use of the term "colloquial idioms", as opposed to its less technical synonym "everyday idioms". Used to possibly draw learners' attention to the fact that idioms can be formal or informal, "colloquial idioms" occurred in the directive "Check the meanings of the colloquial idioms used in the sentences below" (SSS Book 3, p.81). Nowhere in the series was the term "formal idioms" used in reference to non-colloquial idioms, and this is a flaw. Janus-faced idioms that function in both formal and informal contexts (e.g., "a feather in his cap", S/N 164) were similarly not distinguished. Pupils ought to be formally introduced to both formal and informal (colloquial) idioms in order to ensure accurate differentiation and appropriateness of use.

From the structural point of view both fixed and unfixed idioms were presented. An example of unfixed idiom is *to keep one's nose to the grindstone*, meaning "to work hard all the time without resting", which was syntactically realised as "keep our noses to the grindstone" and "kept his nose to the grindstone". Another is *to count one's chickens before they hatch/are hatched,* which means "to be over optimistic, over-confidence" and which was presented as "count his chickens before they are hatched"(S/N 130). The syntactically fixed or invariable idiom is exemplified by "weathered the storm" (S/N 114) and "a wolf in sheep's clothing" (S/N 106), meaning "to come safely through a period of diffi-

culty" and "a person who pretends to be a friend but who is really not" respectively. At a more delicate level of analysis idioms are further categorised syntactically based on combinatorial elements such as adjective-noun or verb-combinations (cf. Seidl & McMordie, 1978). In the entire 25 idiom-bearing units of the six-book series, only once was a syntactic variant of idioms categorically introduced. This was in JSS Book 3 (Unit 9), with the heading "Idioms with prepositions" (p. 93). After identifying "to no avail" in a reading passage as an idiom, the course book went on to state that "Like this one, many idiomatic phrases begin with a preposition", and cited further examples such as "in fact", "at last", and "by the way". The extent to which this formal identification of a structural variant of idioms would go in enhancing idiom recognition and comprehension is great. It is regrettable that other structural variants were not so specified. Some notable ones are nevertheless identified in Table 3.

Table 3. Syntactic variants of idioms proper in the English project series.

S/N	Variants	Examples with Serial Numbers
1.	Initial prep	to my surprise, 20; in my opinion, 22; to raise one's eyebrows, 183
2.	Prep + prep	from pillar to post, 157; on the edge of a precipice, 180
3.	Verb + verb	don't keep asking (questions), 36
4.	Noun + noun	neck and neck, 8 ; cats and dogs, 178
5.	Verb + prep	play with fire, 27; vanished into thin air, 129
6.	Verb + adv.	reap where you have not sown, 33
7.	Adj. + noun	black market, 41; bad books, 120
8.	Noun + prep	light at the end of the tunnel, 131
9.	Verb + adj.	was being too clever by half, 177
10.	Verb + noun	open fire, 27; covered a lot of grounds, 30; broke the ice, 124
11.	Prep + noun	out of pocket, 176
12.	Adv. + adv.	far and away, 136

4.2.3. Phrasal Verbs

Sequentially the third subtype of idiomatic expressions introduced in the English Project Series, phrasal verbs constitute 21.2 percent of the data with 39 occurrences. Twenty occurred in SSS Book1 (pp. 148-151) in extracts from two TV interviews on "Unemployment". Probably because of the subject matter of the interview, six of the eight instances of repetition featured there. Repetition of lexical form, particularly in contiguous or proximate contexts, has the advantage of aiding idiom comprehension (See excerpts (4) and (5) below). This was unfortunately not pursued any further. In terms of form, five phrasal verbs, exemplified by "fed up with" (S/N 11), were of the three-word type while the rest comprised two words (e.g., "pulled through" S/N145).

(4) "Interviewer: Ah. And how did you go about that?

James: I *applied for* various jobs, er, but in each case they *turned me down*…"

(5) "Ibrahim: Yes, I too went through similar experiences.

Interviewer: You mean you actually *applied for* several jobs?"

4.2.4. Metaphors and Proverbs

There was only one metaphorical idiom thus: "Uche is *like an open book to me*', said Comfort smugly" (SSS Book3, p. 72). However, there were five proverbs and all were syntactically simple sentences (See S/N 139-143 for "One man's meat is another man's poison" and others). Unlike metaphors, proverbs were accorded distinct recognition as a type of idiomatic expression in their own right.

In summary, idioms proper, phrasal verbs, proverbs, figurative forms, and metaphors were the five subtypes of idioms presented. Respectively, they represent 74, 21.2, 5, 3, and 0.54 percent of the data's 184 idiomatic expressions. Idioms proper was numerically the dominant type of idioms in the English Project Series.

4.3. Thematic Focus of the Presentation

It transpired that each instance of idiom presentation had a distinct theme as its focus: It tended to focus on a specific aspect of the idiom as a subunit of lexical description, and this is laudable. Four themes were identified as follows: 1) recognition, identification and differentiation, 2) origin, source and context of occurrence, 3) meaning and comprehension, and 4) usage and application. That there were 25 idiom-bearing units but only four thematic categories suggests that two or more units might have had the same theme as focus. For instance, recognition, identification and differentiation as theme was associated with eleven units and all six course books. It similarly follows that a given presentation potentially had a primary and a secondary theme. One such possibility was the co-occurrence of meaning and comprehension with usage and application as themes. What is examined in this section therefore is the thematic focus of the presentation of idiomatic expressions in the English Project Series.

4.3.1. Recognition, Identification and Differentiation

As a subunit of lexical description with unique structural and semantic properties, quite different from the more familiar lexical word, pupils' ability to recognise, identify and differentiate idioms is both critical and essential. So the focus on this theme in eleven out of the twenty-five units in which idioms were presented in the English Project Series is in order. The priority given to recognition, identification and differentiation was second only to meaning and comprehension. Indeed, it could be argued that every instance of presentation had recognition, identification and differentiation as its underlying theme, if due cognisance is taken of the fact that, with the probable exception of some tests and practice exercises, every idiom presented was graphically marked in the form of italicisa-

tion, underlining, or inverted commas (e.g., "There is <u>little love lost</u> between those two political stalwarts", SSS Book 3, p.62). These graphological features are mnemonic devices aimed at easy and accurate recognition, identification and differentiation. Other overt indicators of this theme are what I have termed IDDD: interrogatives, declaratives, definitions, and directives. Declaratives first appeared in the introduction of "old-fashioned words" already referred to above. Another instance is the following statement introducing phrasal verbs as a subclass of idioms in SSS Book 1: "The verbs *italicised* in the two passages are all examples of phrasal verbs" (p. 151). Since definitions are separately considered under presentational techniques below, it is only sufficient to illustrate how defining idioms, or a subclass of it, helped to focus on recognition, identification and differentiation as theme. The excerpt below is on phrasal verbs. Notice that it includes descriptive statements and that it pays special attention to correct identification of the prepositional particles that combine with verbs to form phrasal verbs (See the discussion on "Idioms with prepositions" under "Idioms Proper" above).

> (6) "A phrasal verb is a kind of idiom, made up of a verb followed by a preposition such as *up*, *out*, *off*, etc. Sometimes two prepositions follow" (SSS Book 3, p. 110).

On at least three occasions and in identical imperative clauses, directives aimed at ensuring that learners properly recognise, identify and differentiate given idiomatic expressions were issued in the following ways: "Make a note of the idioms above in your vocabulary notebook…" (JSS Book 1, p. 116) "Make a note of them in your vocabulary notebook" (JSS Book 2, p. 49), and "…note them in your vocabulary notebooks" (SSS Book 4, p. 151). This particular directive actually followed the declarative statement "Here are some more idioms". Lastly, interrogatives, with the singular aim of assisting recall, are exemplified by "Do you remember what an idiom is?" (JSS Book 3, p. 123; SSS Book 4, p. 35).

4.3.2. Origin, Source and Context of Occurrence

In addition to identifying the first three idioms introduced as dated or obsolete, attempts were made to trace the origin and source of some more idioms. One of these is "neck and neck", said to have probably originated "from horse-racing" but now associated with sports (JSS Book 2, p. 49). Another is a set of five idioms "drawn originally from military usage" (See S/N 84-88). These were simply listed in sentence context as in "The students *were up in arms* when they were told to pay another deposit" (SSS Book 2, p. 46). Significantly, many more idioms were presented in their natural context of occurrence and context of use, achieved using texts depicting different fields of human endeavour. This text-based presentation familiarises learners with idiom sources and origins, with the advantage of facilitating comprehension and correctness of usage of the idioms so encountered. One such source is *slavery and slave raids* from where "to horse" in (1) above was taken. Another is sports in (7):

(7) "Mrs Adenuga stood at the starting line. All the runners *took up their positions*, 'Ready! Steady! Go!'" (JSS Book 2, pp. 48-49)

Natural elements were acknowledged as sources of many English idioms but only fire and water were named. Five examples listed with their meanings later served as "fillers" in a sentence-completion exercise. Excerpts (8) and (9) show the only fire-connected idiom isolated from "My experiences in California" (the reading passage themed "natural disasters") and the single water-related idiom respectively.

(8) "The nation watched as the American dream *went up in smoke*." (JSS Book3, p. 121)

(9) "His claim that he had paid for those shoes *does not hold water*". (JSS Book3, p. 123)

Following the reading passage on animal husbandry ("Rearing your own rabbits") and a discussion of relevant words, sentence (10) and three others were listed as "sentences containing idioms connected with farming and nature". The same book also featured five sentential examples of idioms connected with business and commerce. One of them is (11).

(10) "Be careful when you go into business partnership with someone: some of us are rather lazy and like to *reap where we have not sown*". (SSS Book 1, p. 35))

(11) "These new companies *are taking the bread and butter out of the mouths* of small traders." (SSS Book 1, p. 141)

Sports journalism and parts of the body were respectively the sources of three and eight more idioms in SSS Book 2. The idiom *steal the show* in (12) below and two others featured in the reading passage "Africa and the Olympic Games", and were appropriately identified as belonging to "the language of sports journalism".

(12) "In athletics, Chioma Ajunwa *stole the show* by becoming the first Nigerian woman to win a gold." (p. 4).

Idioms originating from parts of the human body only preceded those originating from military usage as the last to be formally focused on. They were presented in sentence context after these statements: "There are many idioms in English that refer to the parts of the body. Look at the following idioms about the heart". It is instructive to note that idioms of the heart followed the reading passage ("The wonders of medical science") in which the heart was focused upon and that vocabulary treatment centred on organs of the human body and their definitions.

(13) "Mary still loved him, *deep down in her heart*." (p. 16)

In summary, therefore, ten idiom origins and sources were brought to the consciousness of learners as follows: slavery and slave raids, horse-racing, sports,

fire, water, farming and nature, business and commerce, sports journalism, parts of the body, and military. Reading passages extracted from TV broadcasts, books, journals, and newspapers provided actual and authentic contexts of occurrence and contexts of use. Thirty-eight idioms representing approximately 21 percent of the data were formally traced to their origins or sources. Since knowing the etymological background of an idiom facilitates knowing its meaning (Qureshi, Anwai, & Tahir, 2018), it is commendable that Nigerian L2 learners of English idioms are opportune to learn about how some of the idioms they encounter came into being and how they are used in actual situations. This account is of the idioms formally linked to their sources in the course books; it does not include several others with known but unspecified sources. One example is *to be born with a silver spoon in the mouth*, which originated from the Englishmen's social life but which was not so introduced in the series. Another is a set of eight idioms derived from book publishing (See S/N 116-123) and exemplified by "This assessment is *not worth the paper it's written on*" (SSS Book 3, 72). It is pedagogically unsound and unhelpful to attempt to account for every idiomatic expression presented in terms of its origin or source. Thankfully, the authors were not unmindful of the need for learners to try to do some source tracing with the assistance of their teachers.

4.3.3. Meaning and Comprehension

Meaning and comprehension are grouped together as a thematic focus because idiom meaning and idiom comprehension can hardly be divorced from each other. They are semantically intertwined in this regard. That meaning and comprehension is the dominant theme focused upon in the presentation of idioms is underscored by the fact that, with the probable exception of the "old-fashioned words" and another where the primary focus was on recognition (Unit 12 of JSS Book 2), every other idiom-bearing unit gave meaning and comprehension a pride of place. This was achieved using all the three clause types of affirmative (2) imperative (7), and interrogative (8) in the number of times indicated in brackets. The use of interrogative clauses to focus on meaning and comprehension involved both polar and non-polar interrogatives as shown in (13)-(14) while imperative clauses giving directives featured the verbs *choose, check, explain*, and *discuss* shown as in (15) and (16). Affirmative clauses functioned in test and examination practice contexts requiring learners to choose the correct interpretation of a given idiomatic expression from possible options. This is illustrated as (18).

(14) "What is meant by these idioms?" (Listed from a passage: JSS Book 1, p. 116)

(15) ("Here are some idioms connected with business and commerce") "Can you explain what they mean?" (SSS Book 1, p. 141)

(16) "Check the meanings of the colloquial idioms used in the sentences below." (SSS Book 3, p. 81)

(17) ("After each of the following sentences, a list of possible interpretations is given,") "Choose the interpretation that you consider most suitable." (SSS Book 2, p. 81)

(18) "Patrick tidies his room *once in a blue moon*." This means he tidies it: (a) when the moon is bluish in colour (b) every month (c) very seldom (d) when he is feeling happy." (SSS Book 3, p. 82)

Another aspect of meaning and comprehension as thematic focus relates to where an idiom's meaning was supplied and learners were directed to provide the meaning of the rest.

(19)"Look at the following idioms that occur in the passage, and use them in sentences of your own.
1. *fed up with* (line 34): means the opposite: *He was fed up with watching TV every evening* means he found it boring.
2. What do you think these phrasal verbs mean?
a) *got on with it* (line 64) b) *put up with it* (line 79)" (JSS Book 3, p. 72)

Yet another is stating the meaning of a given idiom first, before providing more examples with their meanings. A good case is "went up in smoke" in (8) above: After identifying it as an idiom in the passage on fire, its meaning was given as "was consumed by fire", and this preceded the tabulation of five more fire-and-water-related but non-text-based idioms and their meanings. One is "set fire to", meaning "begin burning". The only instance of meaning explication by means of glossary involved "neck-and-neck", defined as "closely matched in a competition" (JSS 2, p. 49). Meaning and comprehension as thematic focus was further reinforced through reference to the dictionary, which featured twice thus: "Check the meanings of these idioms in the dictionary" (JSS Book 3, p.93) and "Discuss their meanings with your teacher, using the dictionary as necessary" (SSS Book 1, p. 35).

4.3.4. Usage and Application

Usage and application as thematic focus was seen in relation to sentence construction and essay writing in JSS Book 3 and SSS Book 3 only (thrice each). Learners were required to construct sentences of their own with given idioms as proof of knowledge of their meaning, comprehension, and use. The types of idiom upon which usage and application was focused and their frequency are idioms proper (3), phrasal verbs (2), and proverbs (1). Sample instructions are (a) "Check the meanings of these idioms in the dictionary; then use each idiom in a sentence of your own that shows you know the meaning of the idiom" (JSS 3, p. 93) (See also (18) above)) and (b) " Proverbs are wise sayings. How might you use these proverbs?" Focus on learner's actual ability to use English idioms was seen in the single essay test in SSS Book 3. It began with focus on meaning and comprehension thus: "What do the idioms underlined in these sentences mean?" Immediately after the sentences bearing the eight idioms listed as 108-115 in Table 2 was the following instruction: "In pairs, select one of these

idioms; then write a very short story—not more than one paragraph—showing a context in which the idiom could be used. This story should include the words of the idiom you have chosen". (p. 62).

The foregoing reinforces the fact that, in an L2 learning situation, ability to use the language and apply the knowledge of its form in appropriate situations is paramount. This is what makes the aspect of essay writing (Asri & Rochmanati, 2017) really commendable because essays represent the ultimate test of learners' actual language use ability. It is however curious that usage and application as thematic focus was comparatively infrequent and was reserved for the examination years only. The essay aspect was even grossly inadequate, with only one encounter in a six-year secondary education programme.

4.4. Techniques of Presentation

Three techniques were employed to present English idioms to Nigerian learners in the English Project Series as follows: definition and description, listing and exemplification, and questioning and directives. These are considered in turns, followed by a brief comment on contextualisation

4.4.1. Definition and Description

Definition and description as techniques of presentation are considered together because they complement each other pedagogically. Definition as technique of presentation facilitates the recognition and understanding of given concepts. In the treatment of idioms three terms were defined, namely idiom, phrasal verbs, and proverbs in that order. The term idiom was defined twice thus: (a) "An idiom is a group of words that means something different from the original meaning" (JSS Book 3, p. 49) and (b) "It is an idiom—a phrase with a special meaning, which is hard to understand just by looking at the individual words." (JSS Book 3, p. 93). While the first definition was the opening statement under the topic "Idiom", the second was in relation to the identification of *to no avail* as an example of "Idioms with prepositions". Both definitions reflect the syntactic and semantic characteristics of idioms and serve their purpose adequately. The same applies to phrasal verbs, defined as "a kind of idiom, made up of a verb followed by a preposition such as *up*, *out*, *off,* etc." This occurred in SSS Book 3 (p. 110), although phrasal verbs had been formally introduced earlier in SSS Book 1.The question then is: Why were idioms and phrasal verbs not defined at the point they were first introduced? Proverbs were defined simply as "wise sayings".

Even though the English Project Series typifies pedagogical grammar books, some sort of descriptive statements were nevertheless made (See Figurative Forms above). Description was embedded in the definitions. Take a look at the definition of phrasal verbs which ends with the descriptive statement "Sometimes two prepositions follow". This comprehensiveness was however lacking in the definition of proverbs, which left out vital information about their nature and function (See Seidl & McMordie, 1978: p. 241). There was however a wholly descriptive

presentation involving idioms initiated by the catenative verb *keep*. First, learners' attention was drawn to the passage from where the sentence "Kangemi …did not like to be *kept waiting*" was extracted. This was followed by statements identifying *kept waiting* as an idiom, highlighting the morphological properties of *kept* as a verb form, and specifying its collocational behaviour and semantic features as follows: "Here, *kept waiting* is an idiom meaning 'delayed'. *Kept* is the past participle of *keep*, and often we use this verb before the *-ing* form of another verb, with the meaning 'continue', or 'do many times'." (SSS Book 1, p. 92) No learner ought to have difficulty recognising and using *kept*-initiated idioms, following this explicit and accurate description.

4.4.2. Listing and Exemplification

Listing and exemplification jointly functioned as technique of idiom presentation, and was almost invariably heralded by identical inverted sentences: (a) "Here are some more idioms" (JSS Book 2, p. 49), (b) "Here are a few more" (JSS Book 3, p. 93), (c) "Here are a few more idioms with their meanings" (JSS Book 3, p. 123, after (8) above)), (d) "Here are some idioms connected with business and commerce" (SSS Book 1, p.141; See (14) above)), and (e) "Here are some idioms used in the text" (SSS Book 2, p. 5). Sentences (a) and (b) were preceded by the definitions already cited above and they were, in turn, followed by examples. Sentence (e) was however linked to the discussion on everyday idioms used in sports journalism. Idioms listed after statements (a) and (e) were text-based (two each) whereas those following statements (b), (c) and (d) were indisputably intuition-derived, with nine examples for (a) and five each for (c) and (d). The noun *example* was sometimes seen in the context of identification thus: "The verbs *italicised* in the two passages are all examples of phrasal verbs" (SSS Book 1, p. 151). Listing and exemplification, as seen in these contexts, has the advantage of promoting permanent idiom literacy because of its capacity to facilitate recognition, identification and differentiation of the idioms so presented.

4.4.3. Questioning and Directives

It was shown above that interrogative and imperative clauses served to focus on meaning and comprehension as a theme of idiom presentation in the English Project Series. In this subsection focus is on questioning and directives as technique of idiom presentation, and the same clause types featured. Some statistical information is pertinent at this point. The English Project Series contains 25 idiom-bearing units as already reported. Some of the units—especially those connected with practice exercises and tests—had more than one idiom encounter. There were 28 separate episodes of idiom encounter in all, and 61 percent of this (17) presented idioms straight away using questioning and directives. The remaining 39 percent (11)—even when they featured questioning and directives—began with preliminary or introductory statements. Questioning featured 15 times as polar (7) and non-polar *wh*-questions (8), and nearly all were on meaning and usage (e.g., "Can you work out what they mean?" in JSS Book 2,

p. 49 and "How might you use these proverbs?" in SSS Book3, p. 99). But they served more fundamental functions from the pedagogic viewpoint: They provided learners with an avenue to introspect and be more cognitively involved in the processing of idiom meaning, which leads ultimately to desired accuracy in idiom interpretation and usage. The *do-think* questions (2, e.g., "What do you think is the meaning of each of these sentences?" in SSS Book2, p.16) are a further attestation to this fact. Questioning potentially assists recall (2: "Do you remember what an idiom is?" JSS3, p. 123) and awakens pupils' consciousness to certain aspects of idioms. A case in point is the antonymous idioms: "What is a 'blue-collar worker'?" in contrast to "white-collar job", mentioned in the TV interview extract used as reading passage (SSS Book 1.p. 151).

Giving directives was recorded 26 times and was approximately 1.7 times more frequent than questioning. This is significant because directives actually specify concrete actions that learners are meant to carry out, in demonstration of their knowledge or proficiency level as these pertain to the themes. Twelve test-related verb lexemes initiated the imperative clauses and *choose* was dominant (9). The rest are *use* (3), *discuss* (3), *explain* (2), *look* (2), *make* (2), *check* (1), *complete* (1), *change* (1), *note* (1), *select* (1), and *write* (1). The presence of *discuss* and *explain* is an indication of commitment to idiom usage in oral communication, while *change* in (20) draws learners' attention to pertinent grammatical facts about idiom usage, namely verb morphology and tense. Two examples will suffice.

(20) "*Choose* an idiom from those above to complete the sentences that follow. *Change* the verb form as necessary." (JSS Book 3, p. 123)
(21) "Complete these sentences in any suitable way": 1. "You kept—to borrow money from me." (SSS Book1, p. 92)

This discussion on questioning and directives naturally leads to the issue of testing as technique of idiom presentation. All twenty-eight manifestations of questioning and directives as presentational technique translate to the same number of tests and exercises found. This means that virtually every instance of idiom presentation doubled as assessment of learners' ability to recognise, comprehend, or use English idioms as well. This underscores the fact that idioms are an integral part of the lexical component of the Senior School Certificate English Language Objective Tests. The objective technique was the main testing technique employed, and its multiple-choice variant was dominant with nine samples in SSS only. There were two sentence-completion exercises (with and without options), three tests of sentence construction (JSS Book 3 and SSS Book1 only), and three open-ended questions, including that on proverbs. Discussion and dictionary-aided oral explanation accounted for three each. There was only one instance of the essay technique and one rewriting exercise. No single test exceeded ten items, and this includes those labelled Examination Practice in SSS Book 3.

4.4.4. Contextualisation

The English Project Series presented English idioms to Nigerian L2 learners essentially in meaningful contexts. Only fourteen of the 184 idioms presented (8 percent), comprising nine idioms proper of the initial-preposition subtype and the five proverbs (See S/N 16-24 and 139-143 respectively), were not contextualised in any form. However, they were not merely listed, as there were strong indications that learners would use them contextually, as evidenced by "Check the meanings…then use each in a sentence…" (JSS Book 3, p. 93) and "How might you use these proverbs?" (SSS Book 3, p. 99) It therefore follows that 92 percent of the idiomatic expressions encountered was contextualised, which is 170. Of this number, 38 were traced to their origins or sources through their occurrence in reading passages as already noted, leaving out 132 occurring in sentences. In effect, 72 percent of the idiomatic expressions was presented in linguistic context, 21 percent was presented in situational context, and eight percent was de-contextualised. So idioms were presented in linguistic context using the sentence as the basic unit. More significantly, they were presented in situational context (i.e. in the larger context of natural language texts in which they function situationally) using carefully selected passages depicting authentic fields of human endeavour. The presentation of idioms in linguistic context and situational context is in tandem with the modern language teaching principle that advocates teaching linguistic form in context for meaningfulness and relevance (Adejare, 2022). It is also in agreement with the recommendation that English textbook writers introduce idioms to learners in appropriate context to facilitate effective recognition and comprehension (Noor & Fallatah, 2010) as well as Liontas' (2017) advocacy for teaching idioms in authentic texts (cf. Zulfikorova, 2021). Since idioms have organisational and signalling functions in texts (Chang, 2006), the text-based presentation, which particularly helped to reveal the origin and source of 21 percent of the idiomatic expressions, is apt and justified. In all, a contextual approach to textbook idiom presentation stands to enhance recognisability, comprehensibility and usability among L2 learners of English idioms.

5. Conclusion

This final segment of the paper summarises the findings and highlights their implications, based on the four main parts into which the analysis was divided and in consonance with the defined objectives of the study. These are distribution of idioms in the English Project Series, typology of idioms presented, thematic focus of idiom presentation, and presentational techniques.

The 184 idiomatic expressions that constitute the study's data were borne by twenty-five units representing 23 percent of the 108-unit six-book English Project Series. Their distribution was slanted towards the SSS books, to the disadvantage of the JSS books, with an unacceptable calculated ratio of 5:1 in favour of the former. Five types of idiomatic expressions were presented in the following order: figurative forms, idioms proper, phrasal verbs, metaphors, and proverbs. Idioms proper accounted for 74 percent of the data, with phrasal verbs

representing 21.2 percent. Though both formal and informal idioms featured, only the informal subtype was explicitly identified and illustrated as "colloquial idioms". No mention of idioms manifesting both was made, but some attention was paid to syntactic variants. Each presentation had a thematic focus, identified as (a) recognition, identification and differentiation, (b) origin, source and context of occurrence, (c) meaning and comprehension, and (d) usage and application. Convergence of themes on a single presentation and multiple manifestation of the same theme in several presentational instances, were not uncommon. Eleven out of the twenty-five idiom-bearing units focused on idiom recognition, identification and differentiation as theme, which was actualised using graphological markers (e.g., italics), interrogatives, declaratives, definitions, and directives. Text-based presentation facilitated the focus on origin and source as theme, and led to the identification of ten idiom origins and sources (e.g., farming and nature) that served as contextual hosts for 21 percent of the idioms presented. So there were register-specific idioms. Every idiom-bearing unit (except two) focused on meaning and comprehension as theme. This was achieved using imperative and interrogative clauses mainly, and reinforced through dictionary use and glossary. Usage and application as thematic focus featured six times as sentence construction exercises and essay writing in the examination years of JSS 3 and SSS 3 only.

The techniques of presentation were definition and description, listing and exemplification, and questioning and directives. Definition and description has the capacity to facilitate idiom recognition and both were often fused. Three terms were defined (idioms, phrasal verbs and proverbs) and vivid descriptions of phrasal verbs and *keep*-initiated idioms were provided. Listing and exemplification was characterised by the inverted declarative clause "Here are some more idioms" occurring with little variation. With the capacity to promote permanent idiom literacy, the idioms listed and exemplified were far more intuition-sourced than text-based. In sixty-one percent of the total idiom encounter, idioms were presented straight away using questioning and directives. Giving directives was approximately 1.7 times more frequent than questioning, which focused essentially on meaning and usage, with the *do-think* questions being highly introspective and some others assisting recall, in addition. Directives specified concrete actions to be undertaken by learners in relation to recognition, comprehension, usage and application of idioms. *Choose* was dominant as a directive verb lexeme, with *discuss* and *explain* providing evidence of commitment to idiom usage in oral communication. Ninety-two percent of the idioms was presented in context, with presentation in linguistic context (sentences) and situational context (passages) accounting respectively for 72 percent and 21 percent. Only eight percent of idiom presentation was de-contextualised.

The number of idioms to which learners were formally exposed in a six-year period of secondary education relative to the estimated 10,000 in the language,

the differential weighting in the number and frequency of idioms presented between the JSS and SSS course books in favour of the latter, and the over-concentration of idioms in the School Certificate Examination year of SSS3, where 42 percent of the idioms occurred, are the major shortcomings identified. These can cause poor acquisition, leading to poor usage. Future revision of the English Project Series should consider reviewing upwards the number and variety of idioms, spreading the idioms more evenly among the books to ensure gradual but steady and systematic acquisition, and adopting techniques and activities that promote greater idiom proficiency in both oral and written communication. These would make the average L2 learner for whom the English Project Series is *the course book* a more confident and effective user of English idioms. In the meantime, teachers of English should consider adopting thematic focusing as an effective strategy for practical idiom presentation in the L2 classroom. Thematic focusing, adequately complemented with questioning and directives and other techniques, has the capacity to enhance accurate idiom recognition, achieve deeper idiom comprehension, and promote greater effectiveness in idiom usage, as this study has revealed.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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