



## Analyzing VOA's YouTube videos for effective idiom learning in ELT: A content-based approach

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### Abstract

Idiom mastery is a crucial component of English language learning, particularly for enhancing communicative competence and cross-cultural understanding among EFL learners. Despite its importance, idiom learning often faces challenges due to the nonliteral and culturally embedded nature of idioms, as well as insufficient exposure and pedagogical focus in traditional classrooms. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing the types of idioms and their multimodal presentation in VOA's English in a Minute video series, a digital platform designed to teach idioms through short, engaging videos. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach, the study examined ten videos to classify idioms based on Abel's (2003) transparency typology (transparent, semi-transparent, opaque) and to evaluate the multimodal strategies used to support comprehension. The findings revealed that semi-transparent idioms dominated the series (50%), followed by opaque (30%) and transparent idioms (20%), indicating a strategic balance between cognitive challenge and accessibility. The videos consistently employed literal visuals, contextual dialogues, explicit narration, and textual reinforcement to clarify idiomatic meanings, aligning with Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1986) and principles of content-based instruction (Brinton et al., 2003). While the series effectively aids comprehension through its structured and engaging format, its brevity and limited cultural depth suggest the need for supplementary instructional support. The study highlights the potential of multimodal digital tools in idiom learning and recommends their integration into broader pedagogical frameworks to enhance both receptive and productive language skills.

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## INTRODUCTION

Idiom mastery is an important component in English language learning, especially in an effort to build the communicative competence of foreign language learners. Idioms are lexical expressions whose meanings cannot always be derived from their literal components, yet are frequently used in spoken and written discourse. In daily communication, idioms add nuances of meaning, enliven expressions, and convey ideas in a more compact and expressive way (Liu & Zhang, 2022). Therefore, the ability to understand and use idioms appropriately not only improves language fluency, but also strengthens learners' competitiveness in cross-cultural interactions. This makes idioms essential not just for native-like proficiency, but also for comprehending cultural subtleties and participating in authentic communication.

However, learning idioms in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often presents various challenges. One of the main difficulties lies in the idiomatic nature itself, which is nonliteral and often culturally embedded, requiring sufficient pragmatic and cultural knowledge (Cooper, 1999). EFL learners are generally not sufficiently exposed to idioms in authentic contexts—either due to limited interaction with native speakers or the lack of focus on idioms in existing learning materials. In many classrooms, idioms are treated as supplementary content and taught without a consistent or communicative pedagogical strategy, making it difficult for learners to grasp their meaning or usage fully. Consequently, learners may memorize idioms without understanding their pragmatic use, resulting in poor retention and limited application in real-life situations.

In actual classroom practice, idioms are frequently marginalized within the curriculum. Instructional emphasis tends to fall on grammar, pronunciation, and basic vocabulary, with idioms considered either too advanced or too culturally nuanced to address explicitly. As a result, idioms are often inserted as peripheral material, rarely taught with adequate due to time constraints, insufficient training, or a perception that idioms are irrelevant to test-oriented learning (Huang et al., 2022). Without a planned and meaningful instructional approach, learners are left with passive recognition of idioms, rather than active, functional command, depth or context (Liontas, 2017). Textbooks, too, generally treat idioms as isolated phrases, lacking contextual examples or cultural explanation. This insufficient treatment leaves both teachers and students underprepared. Many instructors lack confidence or practical strategies for teaching idioms, often

Given these persistent limitations in traditional classroom settings, researchers and educators have begun exploring alternative approaches to enhance idiom learning—particularly those that offer greater contextualization and learner engagement. Recent studies by Kusumarasyati (2021), show that short, visual-based media can improve students' idiom retention and motivation, especially when idioms are embedded in multimodal narratives. One such promising alternative is the use of digital platforms. In response to these instructional challenges, digital platforms have emerged as promising alternatives. The rise of multimedia technology has transformed how learners and educators access language resources. YouTube, as one of the most widely accessed video-sharing platforms, offers a wide variety of authentic and engaging content for EFL learners (Peters et al., 2023; Sari & Wahyudi, 2020). One example is the English in a Minute video series produced by Voice of America (VOA), a U.S. government-funded broadcaster that provides news and educational content in over 40 languages (Voice of America, 2015). VOA's mission includes disseminating accurate and culturally accessible content for international audiences, including English language learners. This series features short videos—each under 60 seconds—that explain one idiom through contextualized usage, spoken narration, and visual cues. The content is accessible and authentic, often featuring native speakers acting out idiomatic expressions in real-life scenarios, allowing viewers to observe idioms in action rather than in abstract isolation.

To better understand the instructional strengths of this video series, it is necessary to examine the pedagogical principles that underlie its design. The pedagogical potential of English in a Minute lies in its combination of contextual meaning and multimodal delivery. From a teaching perspective, the series aligns with the principles of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), where language learning is embedded in meaningful content, allowing students to absorb linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural elements simultaneously (Brinton et al., 2003). This approach promotes more naturalistic learning, where language is acquired through exposure to real communicative events. Rather than isolating idioms as vocabulary items, the videos integrate them into realistic dialogues and scenarios, enhancing learners' ability to infer meaning and usage. CBI also supports long-term language

development by connecting form and function, rather than treating language as a set of disconnected grammatical rules.

In addition to content-based learning, the effectiveness of this video format is further supported by Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1986), which posits that learners retain information better when verbal explanations are paired with visual elements. Through gestures, facial expressions, intonation, images, and on-screen text, *English in a Minute* offers multiple channels of input that reinforce idiomatic meaning and support cognitive processing. This multimodal format allows learners to engage with idioms more actively, aiding both comprehension and recall. When visual and auditory inputs work in tandem, learners can build richer mental representations of idiomatic expressions, increasing their likelihood of understanding and applying the idioms appropriately. This process also supports learners with diverse cognitive preferences—some may grasp meaning better through sound, others through imagery.

However, there remains a significant gap in current research regarding the analysis of idiom learning through short-form multimodal videos like *English in a Minute*, particularly in terms of the types of idioms selected and the multimodal strategies used to support EFL learners' comprehension. Despite the growing recognition of digital media in language education, few studies have specifically examined the idiomatic content and multimodal strategies used in short instructional videos like *English in a Minute*. While a growing number of studies have explored idioms in literary texts, films, or language corpora (Belousova, 2015; Vongpumivitch et al., 2023; Hajiyeve, 2024; Cucchiari et al., 2022; Anjarini & Hatmanto, 2021), there is limited research that examines how idiomatic expressions are structured and presented in short, educational video content, particularly in resources widely used in EFL classrooms such as VOA's *English in a Minute*. Moreover, existing studies tend to emphasize learners' perceptions or outcomes, without analyzing the multimodal delivery—such as visuals, gestures, or narration—that shapes idiom comprehension. Addressing this gap is essential, as understanding both the types of idioms used and the way they are presented can inform more effective instructional practices for vocabulary learning.

To address these gaps, the study aims to identify the types of idiomatic expressions featured in the *English in a Minute* videos and to explore how the series presents these idioms in ways that enhance understanding for EFL learners. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: What types of idiomatic expressions are featured in VOA's *English in a Minute* videos, and how are idioms presented in VOA's *English in a Minute* videos to support EFL learners' understanding?

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to investigate the types of idiomatic expressions and the ways they are presented in ten episodes of *English in a Minute*, a video series produced by Voice of America (VOA) and publicly available on its official YouTube channel. This method was selected for its capacity to examine both verbal and non-verbal elements in authentic media and to interpret how these multimodal features support learners' understanding of idioms in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. As noted by Krippendorff (2013), content analysis provides a reliable and replicable means of examining communication within its natural context. Schreier (2012) also highlights its flexibility in handling educational and multimedia content, which aligns well with the study's focus on audiovisual materials designed for EFL learners.

The dataset consisted of ten purposively selected episodes from the *English in a Minute* series. The selection was based on the following criteria: (1) each video features a single idiom, (2) the video duration ranges from 50 to 70 seconds, (3) the video includes verbal narration, visual elements, and written text as part of its idiom presentation, and (4) the videos were published within the same time frame to ensure consistency in production style. Selection focused on content that introduced commonly used idioms in everyday conversation, making it relevant for EFL learning contexts. Each of the ten videos analyzed presents one idiom. All videos are publicly available on VOA's official YouTube channel and freely accessible.

The data collection process involved manual transcription of all verbal element in the videos, including dialogues, explanatory narration, and on-screen written text. In addition, the researcher documented visual elements such as character gestures, literal illustrations of idioms, facial expressions, and the use of text as part of the multimodal strategy. The transcription process was carried out carefully to ensure accurate documentation of both linguistic and visual features. The data were then organized into an analytical table consisting of seven key elements: idiom, meaning,

literal visuals, gestures, intonation, narrative context, and multimodal support for idiom comprehension.

Data analysis proceeded in two main stages. In the first stage, the official VOA English in a Minute transcripts were compiled and carefully reviewed to identify any instances of idiomatic expressions. All idioms were extracted and recorded in a spreadsheet for systematic tracking. Each idiom was then categorized according to Abel's (2003) typology—transparent, semi-transparent, or opaque—based on the degree to which its figurative meaning could be inferred from its lexical components. For example, "hold your horses" was categorized as transparent because its literal meaning (physically hold horses) aligns closely with its figurative sense of waiting or being patient. In contrast, "dish it out but can't take it" was classified as opaque because its literal meaning (serving food) bears no direct relation to the figurative sense of criticizing others but being unable to accept criticism. This classification process helped determine the potential level of difficulty each idiom might pose for EFL learners, and all classifications were cross-checked to ensure consistency.

In the second stage, a multimodal analysis was conducted to examine how visual, auditory, and textual elements in the videos contributed to idiom comprehension. Each idiom occurrence was analyzed for literal or figurative visual elements, such as images, animations, or gestures; auditory features, including dialogue, intonation, and stress patterns; and textual support, such as on-screen captions and highlighted idiomatic text. For instance, in "dish it out but can't take it," the video shows food being served from a pan onto a plate, visually representing the literal meaning of "dish out," followed by a sarcastic exchange between friends that reinforces the figurative sense. The narrator's explicit explanation and the on-screen display of the idiom in bold further support comprehension. These elements were then synthesized to assess how different modes interacted to facilitate understanding, following the Multimedia Learning Theory (Mayer, 2009) and the Principles of Multimodal Input (Tomlinson, 2013).

To ensure trustworthiness and analytical rigor, the annotation process was conducted systematically and reviewed across all videos for consistency. Each idiom and its related multimodal features were coded with close attention to recurring patterns in presentation strategies. Since the data were obtained from public domain materials and did not involve human participants, no ethical clearance was required. Transparency and replicability were maintained through detailed documentation and archiving of transcripts and coding tables. Overall, this method provided a comprehensive framework to explore the pedagogical potential of short-form video content in teaching idioms to EFL learners.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings obtained from a qualitative content analysis of ten videos from VOA's English in a Minute series. The analysis focuses on two main research questions: (1) What types of idiomatic expressions are featured in the selected videos? and (2) How are these idioms presented to support EFL learners' understanding? The findings are organized thematically, following Abel's (2003) typology of idioms and incorporating a multimodal analysis framework to examine how gestures, visuals, narrative structure, and verbal explanations contribute to meaning making. The results are then discussed in relation to relevant pedagogical theories, such as Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1986), Multimedia Learning Theory (Mayer, 2009), and principles of content-based instruction (Brinton et al., 2003) to evaluate the potential impact of such media in EFL context.

### Types of Idiomatic Expressions Featured in VOA's English in a Minute Videos

This section presents the findings related to the types of idiomatic expressions featured in ten selected episodes of the English in a Minute series produced by Voice of America (VOA). The idioms were identified and classified using a transparency typology, which divides idioms into three categories: transparent, semi-transparent, and opaque (Abel, 2003). This framework is particularly relevant to second language acquisition, as it reflects the degree of inferential effort required by learners to interpret idiomatic meaning. The analysis focused on both the semantic transparency and contextual cues of each idiom. While multimodal elements were present in the videos, the emphasis in this section lies in the linguistic classification of idioms, with a focus on the relation between literal components and figurative meanings. Table 1 presents an updated overview of the idioms,

now including their idiomatic meanings and explanations of how literal and figurative associations are manifested.

Table 1. Distribution of Idioms Based on Semantic Transparency (Abel, 2003)

No. of VOA's video	Idiom	Transparency Type	Idiomatic Meaning	Literal-Idiomatic Association Explanation
1	hold your horses	Transparent	Wait or be patient	Literal meaning (“physically hold horses”) aligns closely with the figurative sense of asking someone to wait.
2	feel it in my bones	Semi-transparent	Intuitively sense something	While metaphorical, there is a bodily-emotional logic (bones as seat of instinct) that supports comprehension.
3	on the ball	Semi-transparent	Alert, quick, or efficient	“Being on a ball” metaphorically implies balance, readiness, and control—partially inferable from context.
4	break the news	Semi-transparent	Deliver bad or upsetting information	“Break” as “announcing” or “revealing” is metaphorical but traceable through usage context.
5	dish it out but can't take it	Opaque	Can criticize others but not accept criticism	No literal clue; “dish out” as in “serving food” does not predict the idiomatic sense.
6	head and shoulders above	Semi-transparent	Clearly better than others	Spatial metaphor (“higher = superior”) is logical but not directly literal.
7	strike a chord	Semi-transparent	Cause an emotional reaction or sense of connection	“Chord” literally refers to music, metaphorically tied to emotional resonance—partially inferable.
8	stuck in a rut	Opaque	Trapped in dull or repetitive routine	“Rut” (a groove in a dirt road) provides no clear clue to the meaning of stagnation in life.
9	pie in the sky	Opaque	Unrealistic or unlikely hope	No logical connection between “pie” or “sky” and the idea of false hope.
10	no brainer	Transparent	An obvious or easy decision	Literal expression (“needs no brain”) directly aligns with its figurative meaning.

The table above demonstrates that semi-transparent idioms dominate the dataset (5 out of 10), followed by opaque idioms (3 out of 10), and finally transparent idioms (2 out of 10). This distribution suggests a pedagogical tendency to include expressions that strike a balance between familiarity and cognitive engagement—neither fully predictable nor entirely obscure. To better understand these categories, the following subsections elaborate on the characteristics of each idiom type.

### *Semi-transparent*

Semi-transparent idioms exhibit a partial connection between their literal and figurative meanings. According to Abel (2003), these idioms allow learners to infer meaning through metaphorical reasoning or contextual clues, although the interpretation is not immediately obvious. In the dataset, five idioms fell into this category: “feel it in my bones”, “on the ball”, “break the news”, “head and shoulders above”, and “strike a chord”. Each of these idioms demonstrates a metaphorical logic that learners may access with appropriate contextual support. For example, “feel it in my bones” conveys

an intuitive sense of something, drawing on the bodily metaphor that bones can sense instinctively. “On the ball” implies alertness and readiness, suggested by the metaphor of someone balanced and attentive. “Break the news” uses the verb ‘break’ metaphorically to indicate revealing information, often of a serious or upsetting nature. “Head and shoulders above” employ a spatial metaphor indicating superiority, while “strike a chord” links music to emotional resonance, symbolizing a sense of connection or relatability.

These idioms are commonly used in real-life communication and may have been chosen deliberately for their instructional value. According to Boers et al., (2007), semi-transparent idioms foster associative learning and enhance retention. Liu (2022) further argues that this idiom type bridges literal and figurative processing, making them cognitively stimulating yet accessible to EFL learners.

### *Transparent*

Transparent idioms are expressions whose meanings are closely aligned with their literal wording, making them easier for learners to understand without complex metaphorical reasoning. In this dataset, only two idioms fall under this category: “hold your horses” and “no brainer”. Both idioms maintain a direct link between their components and their intended meaning—“hold your horses” implies waiting or being patient, visualized through the act of restraining animals, while “no brainer” conveys the idea of something being so simple that it requires no thought.

Although they appeared less frequently, transparent idioms hold significant pedagogical value, especially for novice EFL learners. According to Tomlinson (2013), such idioms reduce cognitive overload and offer accessible starting points for grasping figurative language. Their clarity helps learners build confidence and familiarity with idiomatic forms before progressing to more opaque or abstract expressions.

### *Opaque*

Opaque idioms are expressions whose figurative meanings cannot be inferred from their literal components, making them the most difficult for EFL learners to grasp. In this dataset, three idioms fall into this category: “dish it out but can’t take it”, “pie in the sky”, and “stuck in a rut”. These idioms demonstrate little to no semantic transparency. “Dish it out but can’t take it” means someone can criticize others but cannot accept criticism themselves—an interpretation not supported by its literal reference to serving food. “Pie in the sky” metaphorically denotes an unrealistic or unattainable hope, with no literal clue pointing toward that meaning. “Stuck in a rut” refers to being trapped in a dull or repetitive routine, yet its literal reference to a ‘rut’ (a groove in a road) does not readily suggest a stagnant life situation.

Due to their cultural specificity and lack of intuitive meaning, opaque idioms require direct instruction and contextual explanation. As highlighted by Heredia & Cieřlicka (2015), learners need repeated exposure, explicit teaching, and cultural grounding to internalize such expressions effectively. This type of idiom often poses the greatest challenge in idiom learning but also presents opportunities to deepen learners’ cross-cultural and pragmatic competence.

The three categories of idioms show clear variation in terms of how easily their meanings can be comprehended by learners. This difference in semantic transparency reflects the varying degrees of cognitive effort required to understand idioms in authentic English usage. In the context of English in a Minute, this also illustrates the idiomatic complexity that EFL learners are exposed to through digital media. These categories not only differ in frequency of appearance but also in the level of inferential reasoning demanded from learners. To provide a clearer visual representation of this distribution, the proportions of each idiom type in the dataset are illustrated in the following chart.

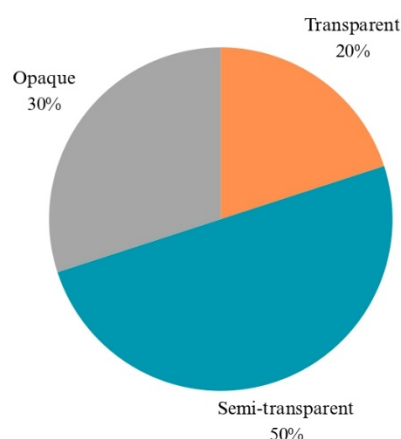


Figure 1. Proportion of Idiom by Transparency Type

As shown in Figure 1, semi-transparent idioms dominate the entire series analyzed. This dominance indicates a deliberate content arrangement strategy designed to maintain a balance between affordances and idiomatic richness. Meanwhile, the presence of transparent and opaque idioms in equal proportions reflects the series' attempt to introduce learners to a spectrum of figurative expressions—from the easily understood to the more abstract and cognitively challenging.

Analysis of the ten English in a Minute videos shows that each video generally focuses on one main idiom that is explicitly presented and explained through narrative context or situational examples. There is no repetition of idioms between videos, so there are a total of ten unique idioms in the dataset. In terms of themes, the idioms selected tend to relate to everyday situations, emotional states or social activities, such as “hold your horses”, “on the ball” and “stuck in a rut”. This pattern reflects the editorial tendency to choose idioms that are familiar yet still communicatively useful in the context of EFL learners' real lives. The balanced frequency between the types of idioms also shows the authors' effort to introduce idiomatic variations in a short but meaningful video format.

Overall, the findings presented in this section address research question 1 by showing that semi-transparent idioms are the most frequently featured in the English in a Minute series, followed by opaque and transparent idioms. This distribution reflects varying levels of interpretive difficulty for EFL learners, with each category offering different cognitive and pedagogical challenges in idiomatic comprehension.

### Multimodal Presentation Strategies of Idioms

This findings section describes how idioms are presented in VOA's English in a Minute videos to support the comprehension of idioms by English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Based on observations of the ten videos analyzed, a consistent presentation pattern was found, incorporating various multimodal elements to clarify the meaning of idioms. The most prominent elements include literal visual presentation, dialog-based narrative context, explicit explanation by the narrator, and additional support in the form of gesture, intonation, and visual text.

Each video presents the idioms in a short duration, averaging one minute, but follows a consistent pattern of narrative structure. The structure generally begins with the introduction of the idiom through a visually literal illustration, then continues with the use of the idiom in contextual dialog, and ends with an explicit explanation of the idiomatic meaning from the narrator. This scheme is found in almost all of the videos analyzed, for example, in “Dish It Out but Can't Take It”, “Pie in the Sky”, and “No Brainer”. The presence of this structured sequence suggests that VOA tries to organize the presentation of idioms systematically so that it is easy to follow for viewers from various backgrounds, including EFL learners. This aligns with the findings of Cooper (1999), who observed that presenting idioms gradually—from form to function—can facilitate acquisition for second language learners.

Literal visuals are used at the beginning of the video to concretely show the literal meaning of the idiom. For example, in the “Pie in the Sky” video, the initial scene shows a literal image of a

piece of pie flying in the sky. While in “Hold Your Horses”, the visual shows several people riding horses and interprets horses as strong and large animals in a literal sense. This element provides an initial context that is visually accessible, although it does not directly explain the idiomatic meaning. The literal visual serves as a narrative entry point before transitioning to a more complex idiomatic context.

After the visual presentation, the idiom is acted out in the form of a dialog between two characters placed in an everyday situation. For example, in “Break the News”, two characters have a dialog in the context of a conversation between friends about important news. Idioms are used naturally in sentences, giving implicit clues about their meaning. The situations chosen are generally familiar: lunch, office conversations, casual chats, or everyday events. Dialogue serves to move the idiom from the literal to the idiomatic context, as well as showing the potential use of the idiom in real life. According to Boers (2021), comprehension of idioms by EFL learners improves when idioms are presented in natural and interactive situational contexts, as this stimulates more authentic semantic and pragmatic associations.

After the dialog, the narrator gives an explicit explanation of the idiom in plain English. This explanation usually consists of one to two sentences describing the meaning of the idiom in direct and functional language. For example, at the end of the “Break the News” video, the narrator says,

*“To ‘break the news’ means to tell someone bad news—something that will make them upset or sad. Breaking the news can be a hard thing to do, and so can hearing about it.”*

This format was found to be consistent across all videos observed. The narrator's delivery tends to be neutral, brief, and informative, without too much additional explanation. This makes it clear that the idioms previously used in the dialog contain nonliteral meanings that can be easily identified.

In addition to verbal narration, the English in a Minute videos utilize other multimodal elements such as gestures, facial expressions, voice intonation, visual text and sound effects to reinforce the meaning of the idioms. For example, in the “On the Ball” video, a character who is considered to be “on the ball” shows an enthusiastic gesture, upright posture, and confident voice. Other characters show contrasting gestures. Additional sound effects, such as dramatic sounds or comic effects, are also added to mark punchlines or shifts in meaning. Idiom texts often appear on screen in bold, uppercase, or contrasting colors, reinforcing readability and visual appeal. The use of this combination of communication channels supports the principles of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009), where learning is more effective when verbal information is accompanied by coherent visual and auditive elements.

The findings show that all videos follow a uniform and predictable structure. This consistent format not only facilitates visual and narrative navigation for viewers, but also builds cognitive expectations that support comprehension. According to Mayer (2009), structured and predictable multimedia input helps reduce extraneous cognitive load, allowing learners to focus on essential content. As illustrated in the flowchart below:

Idiom → Visual Literal → Contextual Dialogue → Narrator Explanation → Idiomatic

Figure 2. Common Presentation Pattern in English in a Minute Videos

Learners are able to recognize this recurring sequence and anticipate the information that follows. For instance, in all analyzed videos, the idiom is consistently presented in textual form at the end, offering a visual reinforcement of the idiomatic expression that has just been explained. This multimodal reinforcement is consistent with Tomlinson's (2013) argument that effective instructional materials should present language in rich, meaningful, and repeated ways to promote internalization.

In support of this pattern, Table 2 below summarizes the idiom presentation features across the ten analyzed videos:

Table 2. Multimodal Presentation of Idioms in English in a Minute Videos

No	Video Title	Visual Literal Description	Contextual Dialogue	Explicit Narration	Idiomatic Text	Gesture/Intonation
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1	Dish It Out but Can't Take It	Putting food from a pan onto a plate; ending with someone being ignored	Sarcastic exchange between friends	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Pie in the Sky	Image of a pie and the sky	Conversation about doubtful dreams	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	On the Ball	Illustration of a person playing with a large exercise ball	Dialogue on fast and productive work	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Hold Your Horses	Illustration of a person riding a horse; described as "big and strong"	Dialogue showing impatience	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	I Can Feel It in My Bones	Diagram of the human body and skeletal structure	Suspicion about neighbor's activity	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Strike a Chord	Visual of musical instruments and chords	Conversation about personal inspiration	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	No Brainer	Visual of a person thinking with an empty brain	Dialogue about an obvious conclusion	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Stuck in a Rut	Illustration of a car wheel stuck in a muddy rut	Conversation about routine and boredom	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Break the News	Visual of someone reading a newspaper	Delivering bad news about a trip	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Head and Shoulders Above	Narrator highlights head and shoulders as body parts	Dialogue comparing pizza quality	Yes	Yes	Yes

As shown in Table 2, all multimodal elements are consistently present across the ten videos, indicating that the presentation of idioms is neither random nor purely comedic, but rather systematically designed. This consistency suggests an intentional pedagogical structure that integrates verbal and non-verbal modes to enhance meaning-making.

While this section does not directly evaluate effectiveness, observable patterns suggest that the combination of multimodal features contributes significantly to the clarity of idiom presentation. The integration of visual narration, repeated idiom forms, and the use of both textual and auditory cues strengthens the association between the idiom's form and its intended meaning. For instance, the video *Head and Shoulders Above* illustrates the idiom in two different usage contexts within a brief duration, providing exposure to varied situational meanings that may broaden learners' conceptual understanding. These findings reaffirm that these multimodal components—especially visual literalization, contextual dialogue, and explicit narration—are systematically embedded across the videos to facilitate idiom comprehension among EFL learners.

## Discussion

From the analysis of the *English in a Minute* videos, two key themes emerged: the predominance of certain idiom types and the structured multimodal strategies used to present them. The findings demonstrate that the series consistently features a range of idioms—dominated by semi-transparent expressions—and presents them using a structured, multimodal format. These patterns suggest a purposeful design that aligns closely with both Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1986) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI), highlighting the pedagogical potential of audiovisual media in facilitating idiom acquisition for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This perspective remains highly relevant as affirmed by recent studies showing that video-based multimodal resources enhance idiom comprehension and retention (Sari, 2023).

The predominance of semi-transparent idioms in the dataset (five out of ten) carries important pedagogical implications. Semi-transparent idioms possess partial semantic overlap between their

literal and figurative meanings, allowing learners to infer meaning through metaphorical reasoning supported by context. Their cognitive accessibility makes them ideal for instructional purposes, as supported by Boers et al., (2007), who argue that such idioms stimulate associative learning while remaining challenging enough to encourage deeper processing. These findings are echoed in recent research by Wu et al., (2021), who demonstrated that learners interacting with visually-supported idioms in multimodal contexts performed significantly better in understanding figurative meaning—particularly for semi-transparent idioms—due to the enhanced inferencing cues provided through animation and dialogue.

Transparent idioms, though fewer in number, also serve a valuable role—especially for novice learners—as they reduce interpretive ambiguity and provide a concrete starting point for understanding figurative expressions (Tomlinson, 2013). In contrast, the inclusion of opaque idioms introduces cognitive complexity and cultural nuance, exposing learners to expressions whose meanings cannot be inferred from their literal parts. While these idioms may pose challenges, they offer opportunities to expand learners' cultural literacy and pragmatic awareness. This concern is further highlighted by Mekheimer (2025), who found that EFL teachers often report greater difficulty teaching culturally opaque idioms due to students' limited exposure and background knowledge, emphasizing the need for culturally enriched and visually contextualized input to support idiomatic comprehension.

The variation in idiom types underscores the need for instructional strategies that support learners at different stages of idiomatic competence. Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986) provides a valuable lens through which to interpret the presentation of these idioms: the combination of verbal (narration, dialogue) and non-verbal (visuals, gestures, text) elements enables learners to encode meaning through multiple cognitive channels. For instance, videos such as "Pie in the Sky" and "No Brainer" begin with a literal visualization of the idiom before transitioning to a narrative context and concluding with an explicit explanation. This structure mirrors the dual-channel processing mechanism, allowing learners to anchor abstract idiomatic meanings in concrete visual representations, which enhances retention and facilitates retrieval.

In line with Mayer's (2009) Multimedia Learning principles, the videos reduce extraneous cognitive load by adhering to a consistent and predictable sequence: idiom introduction, visual literalization, situational dialogue, and narrator explanation. This format supports cognitive processing by creating a scaffolded sequence of input, guiding learners from unfamiliar forms to comprehensible meanings. The predictability of this structure also builds expectation patterns that can aid in faster recognition and understanding of new idioms encountered in future contexts.

From the perspective of Content-Based Instruction, English in a Minute exemplifies how language instruction can be embedded within meaningful content. Rather than teaching idioms as isolated lexical items, each video situates the idiom within a socially and culturally relevant scenario. This contextualized approach aligns with updated CBI principles, which emphasize the integration of content and language through cognitively engaging and authentic material (Coyle et al., 2010). The videos incorporate everyday themes—such as impatience, routine, or emotional reaction—which makes the idioms relatable and more likely to be retained by learners. Additionally, the multimodal design (narrative, gesture, facial expression) reflects Gen Z's preference for "learning through viewing," a pattern validated by recent studies on YouTube-based language acquisition. This format, with its concise duration and visual-rich delivery, supports both linguistic and paralinguistic comprehension of idiomatic expressions. This aligns with the findings of Teng (2022), which indicate that multimedia input, particularly video-enhanced materials, can enhance both comprehension and vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts by engaging multiple sensory channels simultaneously.

These insights into content design and multimodal support lead to broader considerations for classroom application. Building on these findings, several pedagogical implications emerge for EFL instruction. Rather than focusing solely on idioms with fixed meanings or cultural specificity, educators are encouraged to select expressions that balance interpretive challenge with contextual accessibility. The structured use of multimodal elements—such as literal visuals, dialogic context, and narration—not only supports comprehension but also reflects best practices from both Dual Coding Theory and Content-Based frameworks. Instructional materials that integrate these strategies can enhance learners' idiom recognition, retention, and application in real-life contexts. Furthermore, embedding idiomatic expressions in short, thematic video segments offers a replicable model for engaging, communicative, and culturally grounded language learning.

Drawing on a comprehensive synthesis of idiom research, Boers (2021) highlights that learners grasp idioms more effectively when they are presented in meaningful, contextualized interactions that mirror authentic language use. Similarly, Tomlinson (2013) argues that effective language materials should be rich, repeated, and meaningful—criteria that are met by the multimodal, one-minute format of the English in a Minute series. The inclusion of textual reinforcement (e.g., idioms appearing on screen in bold or uppercase), sound effects, and expressive body language contributes to the overall salience and memorability of each idiom.

Taken together, the data suggest that English in a Minute offers more than just entertainment; it is a pedagogically robust resource that combines linguistic depth with multimodal accessibility. The idioms selected reflect varying levels of inferential difficulty, while the structured and multimodal presentation ensures that learners are supported through each stage of comprehension. Through the lens of Paivio's Dual Coding Theory and Content-Based Instruction, the series can be seen as a model of how idioms—often perceived as one of the most difficult aspects of English for EFL learners—can be made accessible, engaging, and meaningful through well-designed digital media. The combination of cognitive engagement, contextualization, and multimodal reinforcement affirms the potential of short, scripted videos as powerful tools for idiom learning in modern language classrooms.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of VOA's English in a Minute videos reveals important insights into how idiomatic expressions are selected and delivered to support EFL learners' comprehension. Grounded in Dual Coding Theory and Content-Based Instruction, the study found that the series adopts a systematic and multimodal approach to idiom learning, combining literal visuals, contextualized dialogues, explicit narration, and textual reinforcement. The prevalence of semi-transparent idioms in the videos suggests a deliberate effort to balance cognitive challenge and learner accessibility, making the content both pedagogically effective and cognitively engaging.

One of the strengths of the video series lies in its consistent narrative structure and multimodal integration, which allow learners to process idiomatic meaning through both verbal and visual input. These features not only enhance comprehension but also create a predictable learning environment that facilitates retention. However, the brevity of the videos and the lack of deeper cultural context may limit learners' ability to internalize idiomatic usage in authentic situations.

This study is not without limitations. The analysis was restricted to ten videos from a single series, which may not represent the full range of idiom learning available across other platforms. Furthermore, the study relied solely on content analysis and did not include data from actual learners, limiting conclusions about the effectiveness of the instructional strategies. The idiom classification, though based on a solid theoretical framework, also involved a degree of subjectivity. These limitations indicate the need for further research involving learner feedback and a broader dataset.

From a pedagogical perspective, English in a Minute holds promise as a supplementary tool in EFL classrooms. Teachers can adapt the videos into pre-viewing and post-viewing activities, promote learner-created idiom skits, or incorporate the content into project-based learning. The inclusion of semi-transparent and opaque idioms, when properly scaffolded, can further enrich vocabulary learning. For the future research may examine how learners from different backgrounds respond to multimodal idiom learning, particularly in terms of retention and productive use. Expanding the dataset and comparing similar video-based resources could also yield insights into best practices for teaching figurative language in digital learning environments.

In conclusion, English in a Minute exemplifies the potential of short-form, multimodal content to support idiom learning in EFL contexts. Its strategic use of visuals, narrative consistency, and instructional clarity make it a valuable resource when integrated thoughtfully into broader, interaction-oriented teaching designs.

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