Investigating the Iraqi EFL Students' Ability to Recognize the Meaning of English Idioms at College Level

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1. 1 Introduction

     The acquisition of idioms has been a neglected variable in the EFL environment. Learner's poor competence of English idioms can be attributed to the fact that the study of lexis in general and idioms in particular was relegated to a minor position in contrast to syntax which received a paramount attention. Three assumptions can be ascribed to the neglect of idioms. Firstly, language was generally conceived as a dichotomy of grammar 'rules' on the one hand and 'lists' of individual words on the other hand, and multiword expressions such as idioms did not fit into this dichotomy Secondly, figurative expressions were thought to be merely ornamental, a way of dressing up messages in a colourful way. Consequently, they were considered to be relevant only to very advanced students, who could use idioms as the icing on their linguistic cake. Thirdly, it was generally assumed that the meaning of idioms was absolutely unpredictable and could not be taught in any systematic or insightful way. The only available option for students to master idioms was to ' memorise them blindly.

     Alnaser(2010: 439) state that some idioms do not have ready-made equivalents because of their cultural input as in the case of ***down the hatch*** (used when drinking alcohol and meaning "cheers"). This idiom will puzzle the Arabs when

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they try to catch the meaning in Arabic, because it does not exist in the Arab culture. However, there are occasions in which an idiom is shared in English and Arabic, like *play with fire*. In this case, the idiom is not only shared in the two languages, but also in the form and content.

Anyhow, native speakers of English use idiomatic expressions naturally and unconsciously. They are heard and read everywhere: from political debates to everyday conversations. Thus, a good mastery of idioms is a significant symbol of a person's command of the language. Scott (1964: 489) rightly notes that learning English as a second language does not mean having knowledge of its sounds, its words, and the permissible sequences in which those sounds and words can occur but how to communicate effectively and conveying the message.

1. 2Definition

Traditionally, Katz(1973: 357) argues that idioms have been characterized as linguistic expressions whose meaning cannot be derived from the syntactically driven composition of their constituent meanings. Idioms are culturally specific, which means that they may express a sense that doesn't occur in another language. Cowie and Mackin, (1975: 6) state that idioms should not be broken up into their elements because they are sometimes referred to as a "fixed expression". Crystal (1980: 179) defines it as "A term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic viewpoint, the meaning of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the 'idiomatic' expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts, e. g. *It's*

raining cats and dogs. Baker (1992: 63), on the other hand, considers idioms and fixed expression as two different categories under the multi-word units; she refers to them as ―frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form, and in the case of idioms, often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components. Baker (1992: 68) stresses that an idiom may have the same sense in another language but its connotation is different for example*, to sing a different tune*ʻ means in English to say or do something that contradicts what has been said or done before.

Within the literature, Gazdar et al. (1985: 327) assure that traditional wisdom dictates that an idiom is by definition a constituent or series of constituents where interpretation is not a compositional function of the interpretation of its parts. They also add that some constraints on idiom usage, which include the inability to change word order or structure and the inability to delete, substitute or add words.

Longman Idioms Dictionary (1998) defines an idiom as: " a sequence of words which has a different meaning as a group from the meaning it would have if you understand each word separately

To sum up, an idiom may be defined as a combination of two or more words that are usually structurally fixed and semantically opaque, and function as a single unit of meaning. It is an established form, one that has been accepted by traditional usage and forms an essential part of the general vocabulary.

1. 3 Classifications of Idioms

Simply**,** the classification of idioms is partly subjective and may differ to a certain extent depending on who is doing the classifying. It may help to clarify exactly what an idiom is, and distinguish an idiom from a non-idiom.

1. 3. 2 Transparent and Opaque Idioms

Some idioms have one literal and one figurative meaning whereas other idioms may have a variety of possible meanings. Mueller and Gibbs (1987: 63) observe that all idioms are not alike and identified four types: (a) idioms that have a distinct literal and figurative interpretation (e. g*. , kick the bucket*), (b) idioms with no well-specified literal meaning (e. g. , *stir up trouble*), (c) idioms with meanings that are isomorphic in both the literal and figurative sense (e. g. , *rock the boat*), and (d) idioms with two or more figurative meanings.

The terms "transparent" and "opaque" are used to make semantic distinctions for different types of idioms. The transparency of an idiom relates to the degree to which the literal meaning corresponds to the figurative meaning. Gibbs (1987: 72) assures that an idiom is considered to be opaque if it lacks congruity between the words used in the phrase and the figurative meaning. For example, transparency is evident in the idiom, *cry over spilled milk*, because it indicates the probable literal reaction that one might have if a full glass of milk was accidentally knocked over and the contents spewed all over one's clothes and prepared food on a plate. The figurative meaning, of moving on and not getting upset or dwelling on a past unchangeable event, is similar to the literal meaning. One would simply clean up the spillage, pour another glass of milk, get another plate of food, and proceed with enjoyment of the meal. By contrast, idioms such as *spill the beans, gets under my skin, come apart at the seams, and chip off the old block* are classified as opaque because the words used in the phrases bear no interpretable relationship to the intended figurative meaning (Nippotd, 1991).

1. 3. 3 Frozen and Flexible Idioms

Fraser (1970: 42) develops an idiom hierarchically based on the number of syntactic transformations that exemplary idiomatic phrases could tolerate without a loss of figurative meaning. The terms "frozen" and "flexible" are used to make syntactic distinctions for idiom types. Fraser (Ibid: 42) adds that frozen idioms are defined as those for which the intended nonliteral meaning would be lost if the relationship of the words in the phrase was changed (e. g. , from a simple, active, affirmative, declarative form to a passive construction). For example, the literal use of *kick the bucket* retains an acceptable meaning, whether used in an active or passive form; but the figurative meaning ("to die") would be lost in the passive form, the bucket was kicked by. In contrast, Gibbs(1987: 569) shows that flexible idioms retain figurative meaning despite the interchanged use of words from the same semantic class or changes in verb tense and negation such as *crack the ice, break the ice, breaking the ice, broke the ice, didn't break the ice*.

Despite the categories developed for distinguishing idioms by type, Gibbs (1987: 30) concludes that there are no well-defined classification procedures. Dimensional concepts such as transparent-opaque and flexible-frozen are at opposite ends of a continuum and judgments regarding these qualities of idioms are subject to an individual's own perceptions.

1. 4 Characteristics of Idioms

As was mentioned earlier, an idiom is a kind of lexical unit in which the whole meaning of the expression is not apparent from the meanings of its components. Fraser (1970: 42) states that non-compositionality has often been interpreted as a characteristic of idioms being dead, that is, their meanings being arbitrary rather than figurative. Baker (1992: 63) identifies the grammatical and syntactic restrictions of

idioms. For her, a speaker or writer cannot normally do any of the following with an idiom:

a. Addition: Adding any word to an idiomatic expression would alter its meaning, or remove its idiomatic sense. Thus, adding the adverb "very" to the adjective "red" in "red herring" *(*very red herring*)* affects the figurativeness of its meaning completely.

b. Deletion: Deleting any element would spoil the meaning of the idiom. The adjective *"sweet "*and the article *"the"* from the expressions *"have a sweet tooth"* and *"Spill the beans"* would change totally their meanings. Hence, *(*have a tooth*)* and *(*Spill beans*)* have no idiomatic sense.

c. Substitution: Idioms accept no replacement of words even if those words are   synonyms. For example, *"the long and short of it"* means the basic facts of a situation. The adjective "long" cannot be substituted by another adjective, like *"tall"*, despite they have nearly the same meaning.

d. Modification: Any changing in the grammatical structure of an idiom leads to the destruction of the idiom's meaning. For instance, the expression (**stock and barrel lock*) is no more idiomatic because of the altered order of the items in the expression *"lock, stock and barrel"* completely.

e. Comparative: Adding the comparative form "er" to the adjective "hot" in the expression "*be in hot water*" changes the conventional sense of the idiom which has the meaning of "**be in trouble**".

f. Passive: The passive form "some beans were spilled" has a different meaning from its active form "they spilled the beans" meaning "they reveal a surprise".

All these restrictions should be taken into consideration since they affect the degree of idiomacity of lexical items, and they may remove their main feature of figurativeness. Beside these features mentioned by Baker,

1. 5 Familiarity and frequency

Larsen-Freeman (2002: 186) sates that frequency and familiarity can be assumed to be linked to each other. The more frequent a word or expression, the more familiar it is likely to be. Frequency of occurrence, in its turn, is significant in language acquisition. With idioms, the frequency/familiarity interdependence may, however, prove slightly problematic since even the most frequent idioms are not very common by comparison with the most commonly used single words. Moreover, Nippold and Taylor (1995: 431) state that the assessment of familiarity is based on individual subjects' estimates, which can vary vastly. It can in fact be rather difficult to try to grade expressions according to their familiarity. Naturally, some expressions may be easily ranked as unfamiliar or highly familiar, but between those opposite poles it may become difficult to assess an idiom's familiarity.

Schweigert and Moates (1988: 281) state that, quite reasonably, familiar idioms are easier to comprehend than less familiar ones. When it comes to children and adolescents, who tend to interpret idiomatic expressions literally, particularly in early childhood, familiar idioms, presumably memorised, are more easily perceived as figurative. Familiar idioms used with their figurative meaning took less time to comprehend than familiar idioms used with their literal meaning. This again suggests that idioms were perceived as wholes, and that their figurative meanings were accessed first. When the interpretation does not fit the context, then a literal interpretation is sought. Therefore, they concluded that familiarity might lead to attempts to interpret idioms figuratively. Nippold et al. (1996: 442) suggest that the degree of familiarity is increasingly important with age where most non native speakers rely on familiarity in comprehending idioms to a great extent.

1. 6 The Role of context

There has been a lot of debate about the role the linguistic context plays in the recognition and comprehension of lexical items, ; single words, idioms, phrases, sayings etc. Nippold and Martin (1989: 59)for instance, state that context does assist in working out the meaning as far as children's comprehension of idioms is concerned. Naturally, Gernsbacher and Robertson (1999: 1619) maintain that context may help the addressee to select the intended meaning from several possibilities but that is not always the case. Levorato (1993: 113-115) also investigated the role of familiarity compared to the role of context. She noticed that familiarity increases the effect of context. Within literal contexts unfamiliar idioms are understood literally more often than familiar idioms. Thus, familiarity does have an effect even with context since it is easier for learners to understand familiar idioms when they can associate the figurative meaning to some occasion they have already encountered.

Schweigert and Moates (1988), however, argue that context length did not assist very well in distinguishing literal and figurative meanings but familiarity seemed to have been more significant. McGlone et. al. (1994: 167-190) highlight the significance of context type: a specific context biased to figurative interpretation assisted the informants in their study more than did a more general context. The effect of a specific context was noticed also with variants of idioms. According to Gibbs (1980: 149), however, context does not play a very significant a role in the interpretation of idioms as is often claimed, rather the contrary. If there is no preceding context idioms are still more often interpreted figuratively than literally. Gibbs (Ibid, 150) ascribes this to the unconventionality of literal interpretations (ibid, 150): in real life, the actual situations or events described in idioms literally

occur very rarely or are unlikely to occur at all. Bahador Sadeghi, Hossein Vahid Dastjerdi and Saeed Ketabi (2010: 87) indicate that context plays an important role in the construction of idiomatic meaning and Identical and Different idioms in both context and non-context treatments, compared with those of similar idioms, enjoy the main effects in this regard.

2. 1 Literature Review

One of the first studies on the comprehension of idioms was Bobrow and Bell's (1973). They claimed that there are two distinct processing models, one for idiomatic and another for literal sentences. They based their hypothesis on Quillian's (1968 as cited in Bobrow and Bell 1973: 343) notion that idioms seem to be processed as a single word whereas literal expressions involve the processing of the meaning of each word in order to understand the whole expression. After that Bobrow and Bell's (1973) claims have been criticized and rejected. Swinney and Cutler (1979: 526) call Bobrow and Bell's model for idiom comprehension "the idiom list hypothesis" and strongly criticise it. They think that it is not unexpected that people choose the appropriate meaning in a biased context. However, they do not consider it evidence for two separate processing systems. Swinney and Cutler's (1979: 525) own model is labeled "the lexical representation hypothesis" which means that idioms are stored in the lexicon the same way as other words.

Later, Gibbs. (e. g. 1980, 1985, 1992) has had a major influence in the field of idiom comprehension studies. His work has been very important and ground breaking. In one of his earlier studies Gibbs (1980: 149) argues that the question of idiom comprehension is more about the conventionality of expressions than their literacy or metaphoricity. He (1980: 149-155) studied how conventional and unconventional uses of idioms are understood and remembered. The target

sentences were introduced with idiomatic, literal or no context and reaction times were measured. The idioms in this study had both literal as well as idiomatic meaning. The participants needed more time to comprehend the literal meanings of idioms than idiomatic meanings.

Cacciari and Tabossi (1988: 668-669) consider both Swinney and Cutler's " (1979)lexical representation hypothesis" as well as Gibbs' (1980, 1986) earlier views on idiom comprehension ambiguous. They (1988: 678) present an alternative hypothesis since their results did not support either of the prior theories. They measured the participants' mean reaction times to target words and standard deviations for lexical decisions. The target words were associated with the meaning of idiom, the last word in the string of words or an unrelated word, i. e. idiom, literal and control target. Cacciari and Tabossi (1988: 677) discovered that there was a difference with predictable and unpredictable idioms. In the case of predictable idioms the appearance of the last word of the string activated only the idiomatic meaning whereas with unpredictable idioms only the literal meaning was motivated until later when both meanings were realized.

Flores d'Arcais' (1993: 97) main findings were that unfamiliar idioms require additional processing whereas highly familiar idioms are understood easily. He (1993: 97) also found out that even though familiar idiomatic phrases should be recognized only after a few words, they are processed like any other linguistic strings. The input is processed through a full syntactic analysis. This finding is consistent with Cacciari and Tabossi's (1988) hypothesis. Tabossi and Zardon (1993: 153-154) also came to the conclusion that the notion of key has a significant part in determining the idiomatic meaning. Their findings also argue with the view that idioms would be processed as long words

80

since the meaning of an idiom is activated only after sufficient input and not right after emergence of it.

2. 2 Teaching and Learning Idioms

Recently, there has been awareness of the critical role of vocabulary in second language (L2) learning and teaching. Within this broad area of academic inquiry, there is also general consensus that the vocabulary of a given language is much more than a list of individual words. Erman and Warren(2000) argue that a speaker's mental dictionary (i. e. lexicon)also contains a wide range of multiword units such as phrasal verbs ("put up with) social routines ("take care"), collocations ("plastic surgery"), and idioms ("bite the bullet"). There is a good reason for focusing on multiword units: research suggests that a large proportion of language—perhaps as high as 50 percent—is composed of such sequences.

2. 3 Problems in Teaching Idioms

Richards, et al, (1992: 172). Clarify that some idioms are not so well known and seem difficult to understand through the sentences. In this case, they should be handled carefully by the language teacher and help the students understand what they mean by supplying meaningful contexts. One of the best ways of keeping the idioms and proverbs in mind is to memorize them. Any expression that must be memorized will constitute a single lexical entry, no matter how many morphemes the expression contains. It is a fact that language is a means of communication for human beings. People who need to have social interaction should share the same language, beliefs, values etc. , in a given society. It can be stated that when learning a foreign language, mastering only linguistic features of FL probably does not ensure true spoken and written communication.

2. 4 Factors possibly affecting Learning English Idioms

As far as teaching and learning of idioms is concerned, Zyzik (2009: 4) considers some insights related to this area just as follows:

2. 4. 1 Equivalence to the learners'native language

Not all idioms will be equally difficult for learners to master. Laufer (2000: 186) states that the degree of similarity between a given idiom in the L2 and its equivalece in the learner's native language is an important variable. Idioms that are identical in both languages will be easiest to learn. On the other hand, idioms that are only partially similar will likely cause errors. also reminds that there are some idioms in one language that can only be expressed literally in another.

2. 4. 2 The Linguistic Context

Contextual clues are useful to learners in comprehending unknown idioms. Cooper (1999: 233)explored that guessing from context was the most successful strategy, leading to correct interpretation in 57 percent of the cases

2. 4. 3 The Origin of idioms

Teaching idioms based on their underlying themes or literal origins is a potentially useful approach. w outlines that a teaching students the origin of figurative idioms will help them in idioms' recognition. For example, the idiom *"to be waiting in the wings",* which means to be ready to be used or employed instead of someone or something else, derives from the literal context of actors waiting in the wings of the theatre before appearing on stage

3. 1 Research Questions

The present research addresses the following questions:

1. Do familiarity and equivalence have an effect on Iraqi EFL students ?
2. Does context have an effect on the   recognition of English idioms?
3. Does the amount of vocabularies students have have an affect on recognizing English idioms r ?

3. 2 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that (1) context slightly affects the process of recognizing English idioms   to an extent (2) familiarity and equivalence of idioms affect recognition to a great extent. The students' general knowledge of idioms of both English and Arabic idioms is not   encouraging to recognize the meaning of idioms.

3. 3 Method

Participants

Thirty 4th year Iraqi EFL students (male and female) from the Department of English, College of Arts, University of Mosul had been chosen randomly participated in the test. None of them had participated in a similar test before. Being of the same age, taking the same English courses assuming that they had knowledge of English language more than juniors. made them the target of this study.

Material

Idioms used in the test are half literal and half non-literal. They are also equivalent and non equivalent. Most of the non equivalent idioms were taken the free dictionary and from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English. The items were   chosen according to the classification of idioms (transparency and opacity) to measure the students ability to recognize the English idioms in this respect. The idioms in the

questionnaire were not arranged systematically but intentionally randomly.

The Test

The test was of two parts. The first part consisted of 30 out of context idioms. Each one is followed by four choices where only one answer is correct. Half of these idioms have Arabic equivalents. The other part included the same 30 idioms used in the previous part but this time within context where students have to figure out the exact meaning from the context. Participants were instructed about the test in general. Only certain idioms are going to be tackled in the analysis not all of them.

Scoring Scheme

Responses were classified into two categories: "correct" and "incorrect " answers. A response was categorized as a "correct "answers when the participants provided the correct idiomatic meaning of the given idiom. All other incorrect responses and the ones left unanswered were categorized as " incorrect ". The time devoted for this test was an 75 minutes.

Results

$\chi^2 = 6.38$	Transparent Idioms		
	Correct Answers	Percentages%	Context
	371	77. 333	Out of Context
	390	86. 666	Within Context
$\chi^2 = 16.56$	Opaque Idioms		
	Correct Answers	Percentages %	Context
	371	77. 333	Out of Context
	390	86. 666	Within Context

Chi-square test is used to compare observed data. We compare the χ^2 value with a tabulated three degree of freedom. . Our calculated χ^2 exceeds the tabulated χ^2 value (7. 82) for P = 0. 05. Assessment of transparent idioms within context and out of it the for familiar idioms revealed that there is no significant difference statistically(($\chi^2 = 6. 38$) although the correct answers with idioms within context scored high in number than out of it . Concerning opaque idioms out of context and within it, the results show that there is statistically significant difference between the idioms within context ($\chi^2 = 16. 56$).

Table (1) Transparent Idioms out of context

Idioms	Correct answers
1. between two fires	30
2. to wash one's hand of something	0
3. out of sight out of mind	22
4. to Kill two birds with the same stone	28
5. get the green light	30
6. on the black list	26
7. to bite the hand that feeds you	21
8. keep one's word.	30
9. to twist one's arm	19
10.haste make waste	18
11.play with fire	30
12.to turn a blind eye to	18
13.lend me your ear	30
14.the lion's share	16
15.to read between the lines	30
Total	371
Percentage	77. 333

Table (2) Transparent idioms within context

Idioms	Correct answer
1. between two fires	30
2. to wash one's hand of something	5
3. out of sight out of mind	25
4. to Kill two birds with the same stone	30
5. get the green light	30
6. on the black list	28
7. to bite the hand that feeds you	26
8. keep one's word.	30
9. to twist one's arm	24
10.haste make waste	24
11.play with fire	30
12.to turn a blind eye to	25
13.lend me your ear	30
14.the lion's share	23
15.to read between the lines	30
Total	390
Percentage	86. 666

Table. (3) The χ^2 results of Transparent idioms

χ^2	Correct Answers	Percentages	Context
$\chi^2 = 6.38$	371	77. 333	Out of Context
	390	86. 666	Within Context

Table (4) Opaque idioms out of context

Idioms	Correct answers
1. to take a stab at	8
2. to ring a bell	5
3. drop in the bucket	17
4. to be on the same page	6
5. to touch out on something	13
6. to cut someone off	19
7. keep tabs on	4
8. off the wall	8
9. odds and ends	2
10.shift gears	3
11.train of thought	15
12.a piece of cake	23
13.it is raining cats and dogs	20
14.carry coal to Newcastle	2
15.to dig one's own grave	5
Total	150

Percentage	33. 333

Table (5) Opaque idioms within context

Idioms	Correct answers
1. to take a stab at	17
2. to ring a bell	14
3. drop in the bucket	23
4. on pins and needles	18
5. run of the mill	19
6. to cut someone off	25
7. keep tabs on	17
8. off the wall	15
9. odds and ends	18
10.shift gears	22
11.train of thought	24
12.a piece of cake	28
13.it is raining cats and dogs	27
14.carry coal to Newcastle	18
15.to dig one's own grave	20
Total	305
Percentage	67. 777

Table (6) The χ2 results of opaque idioms

χ^2	Correct Answers	Percentages	Context
$\chi^2 = 6.\ 38$	371	77. 333	Out of Context

	390	86. 666	Within Context

3. 4 Discussion

The main finding which concerns the recognition of idioms by the Iraqi EFL students in the absence of context is as follows: students' performance was less with idioms that are not familiar or have no equivalent in Arabic. Their performance with the equivalent idioms, although out of context, was much better   as shown in Table (1)Their answers were mostly correct and they do not spend much time processing the meaning of the idioms. It can be said here that with the equivalent idioms, students do not think literally of the meaning of idioms because most of them are aware of the availability of such idiom in Arabic. For example in idiom *play with fire*, all the students answer it correctly because it is available in Arabic and its literal meaning is similar to its figurative one.

Regarding recognizing idioms within context,   the results clearly show that the context plays a facilitative role in the process of recognition. It increases the likelihood of idioms to be recognized but it does not guarantee this. So it has been seen clearly that students did answer correctly the English idioms that have Arabic equivalents. But, as far as the idiom *to wash one's hand of something* most of the students fail to recognize the meaning of this idiom although it has an equivalent idiom in Arabic similar in terms of from to colloquial Arabic**"اغسل ايدك منه** " which means *it is useless and has no benefits*. This idiom has a different meaning in English *"to end one's relation"*.

The opaque idioms shown in Table(4) and Table (5) have a different story. These idioms work on the following logical equation, the more the idioms are opaque the more

90

difficult and unfamiliar they are ". Within these idioms, the context relatively help but there is no doubt that such kinds of idioms should be learned within and out of context. So taking into consideration the following idiom to *cut someone off*. Here most of the students depended heavily on the context especially on the phrase " in the middle of the sentence". But the context with the following idioms does help much *to ring a bell*. Most of the students concerning this idiom fail to recognize and catch the exact meaning of it. Simply because it is not familiar to them and it has no equivalent in Arabic. Their answers show that they depended heavily on word to word recognition. So we can say that when a student faced with an idiom whether within context or out of it and s/he is not familiar with or has not come across, s/he would adopt word to word recognition strategy. However, idioms might be recognized literally and metaphorically depending on their familiarity and the degree of their idiomatic meaning. In other words, the more transparent the idioms are, the more familiar and easy to recognize. The current discussion   generally supports   the hypotheses set, the role of context and the familiarity of idioms.

Conclusion

Idioms always cause a lot of problems to learners of a foreign language. Students usually find difficulties in recognizing an expression as idiomatic or not, and then understanding its exact meaning. This is mainly due to the fact that idiomatic expressions carry a metaphorical sense that makes the comprehension of an idiom difficult if not impossible. In other words, the meaning of an idiom cannot be deduced from the meaning of its constituent parts. In addition, the source and the target cultures have a great influence on the comprehensibility as well as the translatability.

One feature that characterizes all idioms is that it should be learned and used as a single unit of language in order to end

up with a meaningful expression meaning. As it has been seen, students stick to word for word way of recognition because they think that the use of other ways may change the words of the idiom and hence, changes its meaning. But word to word is not always appropriate. In other words, in case of transparent, it may help students to infer the meaning of the idiomatic expression through the meaning of its parts. But, for opaque, it is impossible to do so, because taking into consideration the meaning of the idiom individual parts may totally be a matter of confusion.

We can conclude that anyone who has tried to learn to speak a second language, sooner or later, realizes that idioms are a stumbling block. So, learning idioms is therefore extremely important for achieving command of authentic language. Due to this, helping learners to gain mastery over this important aspect of the target language needs to be based on an understanding of how learners comprehend idioms, and how instructional materials and teaching techniques are presented.

Our findings show that (1) familiarity affected the responses of the students when no context was provided. . (2) Context was important in idiom comprehension because not all idioms have been recognized correctly within context but one should not forget that context has its own role. The results show that students of English really find considerable difficulties in recognizing English idioms. Also, the students familiarity with English as well as with Arabic idioms is somehow low and their ability to interpret unfamiliar idioms is limited. The students' proficiency in both English and Arabic idioms is not encouraging due to their exposure to idioms during their life. Anyhow, the instructor can demonstrate that using a variety of comprehension strategies, such as using context clues and thinking about the literal meaning of the expression can lead to a correct interpretation. Thus, under the

guidance of the instructor, the student can rehearse a heuristic approach to idiom comprehension.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following-:

1. Teaching English idioms seriously and the way of processing them.
2. Paying attention for cultural background of the English idioms
3. Encouraging the students to write essays and paragraphs containing idioms and discussing the errors committed in the recognition of idioms with students to let the students be acquainted with their errors immediately after use. Such thing will improve the students' recognition.
4. Giving more attention for English idioms and their equivalence in Arabic in the course of translation.
5. Teaching how to deal with the context to understand the sentence or the context so as to carry out the translation accurately.
   Encouraging the students to consult with other people

Suggestios For Further Research

The researcher suggests the following-:

1. Carrying out researches on comparative studies between English and Arabic idioms regarding their origin.
2. Carrying out researches about other variables such as compositionality and non compositionality of idioms
3. Carrying out researches about the degree of idioms frozenness

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Investigating the Iraqi EFL Students' Ability to Recognize the Meaning of English Idioms at College Level

Muayad Tahseen Yousif

دراسة قابلية الطلبة العراقيين المتخصصين في اللغة الانكليزية في المستوى الجامعي على تحديد معنى التعابير الاصطلاحية

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الملخـــــص

تتنـاول الدراسـة الحاليـة التعـابير الاصطلاحية و فهمها من قبل الطلبـة العراقيين ، تهدف هذه الدراسة على الوقوف على الصعوبة التي يواجهها الطلبة قي إدراك وفهم هذه التعابير داخل السياق اللغوي وخارجـه. الأسئلة المقترحـة للإجابـة عنهـا في هذا البحـث هـي مـا دور السياق في إدراك هـذه التعـابير الاصطلاحية وكذلك التعابير المتكافئة في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية لمساعدة غير الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية على إدراك وفهم معنى هذه التعابير . للوصول إلى هذا الفهم ، تم إجراء اختبار من جزئين علـى ثلاثين طالبا من المرحلة الرابعة للعام الدراسي 2010−2009 ذكورا وإناثا وبشكل عشوائي. ضم الاختبار الأول 30 من التعابير ليس ضمن السياق اللغوي ، (15 متشابه من حيث الصيغة والمعنى   و15 تعبير غير ذلك). قدمت على شكل اختبار الخيارات المتعددة لإدراك وفهـم التعبيـر الاصـطلاحي. أمـا الجـزء الآخـر يشـمل التعـابير نفسـها الاصطلاحية التي استخدمت في الاختبـار الأول ولكن ضـمن سياقها اللغوي لمعرفة معناهـا مـن خـلال ذلـك السياق. وأظهرت النتـائج أن الطـلاب الإدراك الصحيح للتعابير الاصطلاحية الإنجليزية أعلـى مـع مـا يكافؤها مـن التعابير الاصطلاحية العربيـة ومنخفضة مـع التعابير الاصطلاحية التي لا يوجد مـا يكافئها من تعابير اصطلاحية عربية. أظهرت النتائج أن السياق اللغوي يساعد الطلبـة في إدراك وفهـم معنى التعابير الاصطلاحية ولكن إلـى حد مـا، بينمـا التعـابير الاصـطلاحية الأكثـر ألفـة للعـرب هـي أكثـر إدراكـا و فهمـا. الأسباب

المحتملة لمثل هذه النتائج هي ندرة استخدام هذه التعابير ضمن ما يدرس من مواد مما يسبب تجنب الطلبة استخدام هذه التعابير ، و عدم وجود خلفية معرفية للتعابير الاصطلاحية في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية. يقترح البحث بعض الحلول التي ربما تساعد الطلبة على إدراك وفهم التعابير الاصطلاحية الانكليزية.