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A study entitled**

**“Idioms from Colours: meaning, structure, types, and their role  
and importance in teaching and improving English language for  
non -specialist”**

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## المخلص

تتألف هذه الدراسة من جزئين: الجزء النظري أو التحليلي والجزء العملي أو التطبيقي. بالنسبة للجزء الأول فهو يحل بشكل عام ما يعرف بـ " المصطلح أو المصطلحات التعبيرية". تم تعريف المصطلح أستناداً الى نظريات ووجهات نظر مختلفة لتحديده بشكل واضح إضافة الى أنواعه وبناءه وفقاً لمعايير ومقاييس متعددة كما تم بيان العلاقة التي تربط هذا التعبير مع ظواهر لغوية أخرى. لقد تم أيضاً كل ما يتعلق بالمصطلح لغرض اعطاء صورة كاملة عنه بشكل مبسط من جهة ومن جهة أخرى لتهيئة الدراسة لتأخذ مجراها الى الجزء الثاني حيث أقتصرت الدراسة بالتركيز بشكل دقيق على فئة واحدة من المصطلحات والتي يعرف بـ "المصطلحات المأخوذة من اللوان". السبب في اختيار هذه الفئة يرجع الى عدم تطرق الدراسات اللغوية اليها بشكل جيد لايضاحها وتعريفها وخاصةً في العراق إضافة الى أن تلك الفئة تشكل المحور الاساسي للجزء الثاني من الدراسة. يجسد هذا الجزء هدف الدراسة والذي يؤكد على أهمية ودور المصطلحات التعبيرية المأخوذة من اللوان في تدريس وتطوير اللغة الانكليزية في مستويات مختلفة كالمعنى والقواعد والمفردات والسياق واستخدام اللغة . أن تحقيق الهدف تم عن طريق اجراء اختباران هما اختبار قبلي وأختبار بعدي والذي تم تنفيذهما على عينة البحث التي تتألف من ٤٢ طالب من طلاب الدراسة الاولى . إضافة الى الأختبارين تم اعطاء محاضرة ذات علاقة بموضوع الدراسة وهو المصطلحات التعبيرية المأخوذة من اللوان . تم معالجة نتائج الاختبارين احصائياً كما تم اجراء مقارنة فيما بينهما لغرض الوقوف على التغيير الحاصل لطلاب العينة في المستويات اللغوية أنفة الذكر . من ضمن النتائج التي تم الوصول اليها هي الدور الفعال والأيجابي الذي تلعبه المصطلحات التعبيرية المأخوذة من اللوان في تعليم اللغة الانكليزية للطلاب الراغبين بتعلمها ولاسيما العراقيين.

## Abstract

This study consists of two parts, theoretical part and practical one. The former probes the term “idiom or idiomatic expressions” in general. First, the definition according to different points of view and theories, its types and constructions in according with different standards and criteria, and the relation between this term and other linguistic phenomena were given. This analysis has been done to give a simple and full image about it, moreover, to pave the road to the rest of the topic. Having narrowed the topic, the study has concentrated on one category of idioms, namely idioms from colour, to be studied in details. This category has been chosen because it was not clarified and defined by worthwhile linguistic studies at least in Iraq as well as this topic represents the core of the second part of this study. The practical side embodies the main objective of the research that is the importance and the role of idioms of colours in teaching and improving English language at different levels: semantic, syntactic, vocabulary, contextual and pragmatic. This objective has been sought after by applying two tests, pre-test and post-tests to which the sample of the research was subjected. The sample includes 42 undergraduate students. A lecture related to the topic, idioms from colours, has been given to the students of the sample. The results of the two tests were treated statically and a comparison between the two results to identify the change in aforementioned levels of language, was made. One thing among many findings of this study can be said briefly here is that the idioms from colours play an effective and positive role in teaching English language to Iraqi students.

***Keywords: (idioms definition, phrase, literal meaning, pure idioms and semi idioms, literal idioms, idioms from colours)***

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## **1. Introduction**

This study focuses on the phrasal level as probing the phenomena called “idioms and idiomatic phrases and expressions”. What is an idiom? That is a rather tricky question, because there is no single definition of idiom and there are no hard and fast rules that would conveniently and unexceptionably describe it. For this reason, the study is narrowed down to shed light on one category of idioms, namely, Idioms from colours, this happens after producing general information regarding definition of idiom according to different points of views, common semantic and constructional features, different divisions and types, and other aspects pertaining to idioms all to draw clearly the image of this topic.

Then the study moves towards the chosen category, idioms from colours.

The aim of the study is not to give an exact number of idioms from colours rather to focus on the meaning and usage of this category, therefore, a list of colours, which is based on Newton classification for the spectrum, was created. The relation between colours -significance meaning and idioms meaning was studied in details.

The most important part of this study is the practical side. It deals with the usage and the role of idioms from colour (as a category of idioms) that plays in teaching and improving English language. To achieve this goal, a sample was chosen, a lecture about idioms was delivered, and two tests were done. Lastly, the results were statistically analyzed to present the findings.

The study has tried to present answers for two major questions, first: give a clear image about idioms in general and idioms from colours in special, second: what is the role of idioms categorized by idioms from colours in teaching and developing English language for non-specialist?

## **1.2-Review of literature**

Idioms are an integral part of every language and every culture. Some opinions express an idea that idioms represent the core of a language or as a gate to foreign cultures. Many scholars and linguists have studied linguistically idioms as they provide interesting material for their study .The term *Idiom* is defined in different ways, below is some of these definitions:-

An idiom is a phrase where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words, which can make idioms hard for ESL (English as second language) students and learners to understand. (Cowie, 1996)

Also Idiom is defined as a common word or phrase with a culturally understood meaning that differs from what its composite words' denotations would suggest. For example, an English speaker would understand the phrase "kick the bucket" to mean "to die" – as well as to actually kick a bucket. Furthermore, they would understand when each meaning is being used in context. An idiom is not to be confused with other figures of speech such as a metaphor, which invokes an image by use of implicit comparisons (e.g., "the man of steel" ); a simile, which invokes an image by use of explicit comparisons (e.g., "faster than a speeding bullet"); and hyperbole, which exaggerates an image beyond truthfulness (e.g., like "missed by a mile" ). Idioms are also not to be confused with proverbs, which are simple sayings that express a truth based on common sense or practical experience. (Smith, 1925)

Some explanations consider idiom as a phraseological unit as it described by Glaser (Hullen, Schulze 1988: 265)" a group of words whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meaning of the constituent words" , and close to that description it is said to be " a linguistic usage that is grammatical and natural to native speakers of a language".

From the special vocabulary point of view, Idiom can be defined as "a characteristic vocabulary or usage of a specific human group or subject", while it refers to the notion of style when it is defined as" a characteristic style of an individual, school, period, etc."

Finally, Fernando (1966: 1, 3, 60) defines *idiom* as “conventionalized multiword expressions, often but not always non-literal and as a multiword expression functioning as a single semantic unit”.

### **1.3- Common Features of Idiom**

The idiom has these typical features as it is used for more semantically and formally fixed expressions:

- 1- Idiom has culturally understood meaning. For instance, an English speaker would understand the phrase "out of the blue" to mean "surprisingly" due to such meaning is common in his/her culture; similarly, it is hard for ESL learner to understand the meaning of idioms.
- 2- Meaning of idiom cannot be seen in isolation from the context in which an idiom is used and approved by the usage. (Smith, 1925)
- 3- Regarding their meaning, idioms always transgress the laws of grammar and/or logic.
- 4- Idioms' meaning always is indistinct and imprecise due to its attachment with preposition, for example “we act on the spur of the moment, but at a moment's notice”. For the same reason, idiom meaning varies from age to age, class to class, country to country, In America they speak of getting on or off a train, in England of getting in or out of it. (Smith, 1925)
- 5- Multi- part character,
- 6- Certain degree of semantic opacity and fixedness,
- 7- Ready-made reproduction,
- 8- Functional unity, etc.

### **1.4- Common construction of idiom**

Idioms are limited in their size, however, they are multipart expressions, and their expansions are not allowed to be large. The most typical construction of English idioms are the verb + participle(s) constructions (*e.g. pull over, call in*) and the semi-clause (*e.g. walk the dogs, smell a rat, etc.*) However, there are also other types of constructions – adjective + noun (*e.g. bear market*), preposition + adjective (*e.g. in brief*), etc. (Fernando 1966, 40-42)

### **1.5 Idioms and Idiomaticity**

Having defined and described idioms in details necessary to describe also the term *idiomaticity*. Idiomaticity is one of several typical features of idiom that expresses the semantic property of it. According to (Hullen, Schulze1988: 271), the level of

idiomaticity is viewed according to the semantic relationship between constituents with transferred *idiomatic* meaning and constituents having a literal meaning.

### **1.6 Idioms and Transformations**

It is usually impossible or restricted to change the positions of lexemes within the idioms. This restriction is an important feature which distinguishes idioms from non-idioms that are allowed to replace its constituents. In other words, the idiom will be stronger as word unit in a case there is no replacing or changing of its constituents. Fernando (1966:43-53) states that the variations can concern inflectional and not derivational changes (number, tense) or the replacement of an article.

***There are two types of transformations within the idioms:***

- 1-Additions – are not normally permitted within an idiom; however can be used to make the message more precise,
- 2- Permutations – the possibility of rearranging the words of an idiom which is typical for non-idiomatic expressions varies from idiom to idiom.

### **1.7. Idioms and translation**

Since An **idiom** is a phrase where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words, and it transgresses either the laws of grammar or the laws of logic, since both culture and context plays major role in the meaning of an idiom, so if we try to translate an idiom into a foreign language, must be rendered in some equivalent phrase, not in a word-for word translation.

### **1.8 Different Divisions of Idioms**

Idioms can be divided according to the various aspects – their origin (fairy tales, legends, books or movies), usage, transparency, meaning, etc. Due to the fact that idioms are an integral part of our everyday speech, their constituents can contain parts of body, animals, colours, flowers, numbers, events, etc. The idioms can be divided according to their meaning into many categories:-

- **Animals** – *angry as bull, bear market, big fish, etc.*
- **Body** – *break a leg, get teeth into, go to your head, keep your head etc.*
- **Colours** – *in black and white, green with envy, in the red, red tape, etc.*
- **Food** – *apples for apples, as cool as cucumber, big cheese, etc.*
- **Men & women** – *man Friday, man of straw, man of means, etc.*
- **Music** – *blow your own horn, call the tune, and all that jazz, etc.*
- **Nature** – *across the pond, break the ice, many moons ago, etc.*
- **Numbers** – *all sixes, six feet under, take forty winks, etc.*

- **Flowers** – *demon weed, last straw, olive branch, etc.*
- **Profession** – *bean counter, teacher's pet, busman's holiday, etc.*
- **Time** – *call it a day, crunch time, nick of time, etc.*

*Fernando (1966, 35-36) presented another division of idioms concerning the literal or non-literal meaning of their constituents, these are:-*

1. Pure idioms – a type of conventionalized, non-literal multiword expressions (*Spill the beans which has nothing to do with beans, a non-literal meaning is imposed on the idiom as a whole: commit an indiscretion*),
2. Semi-idioms – has one or more literal constituents and at least one with a non-literal meaning, usually special to that co-occurrence relation and no other (*drop has the meaning overuse only when it co-occurs with names*),
3. Literal idioms – meet the salient criterion for idioms: invariance or restricted variation; they are, however, less semantically complex than pure and semi-idioms (*on foot; tall, dark and handsome; on the contrary; a merry Christmas, etc.*).

**1.9. Interpersonal idioms**, they are presented in the following points:

- A resource for expressing interactions – their beginnings (*greetings – Christmas and New Year greetings, birthday greetings*), middles (*the development of the exchange*), and endings (*farewells*),
- A resource for showing conviviality (*condolence, sympathy, congratulations*), and conflict.
- Interpersonal idioms also characterize the nature of the message.

### **1.9.1 Features of Interpersonal collocations and common expressions**

1. Interpersonal idiomatic expressions are marked for interaction in terms of you, I, and me, *e.g. Believe (you) me, Let me tell you, I wouldn't worry, You're kidding/joking, mind you, Are you deaf? Has the cat got your tongue?, etc.*
2. They are discourse-oriented expressions, *e.g. the question is...., a good question, That's true, as I said before, thank you/thanks a lot, etc.*
3. They contribute to structuring talk so that a coherent organization is distinguishable in different sorts of talk, *e.g. Hi, how are you?, Who's next, Have you heard this one?, To change the subject, by the way, See you later, etc.*

### **1.10 Strategies used for interactional in idioms**

1. Greetings and farewells: *good morning, how are you? See you later, etc.*
2. Directives: *let's face it, tell you what, say no more, etc.*
3. Agreement: *that's true; you're telling me, say no more, etc.*

4. Feelers: *what do you think?, how do you feel?, etc.*
5. Rejections: *you're kidding/ joking; I wasn't born yesterday, etc.*

### **1.11 The message characterization**

1. Newsworthiness: *guess what; what do you know; what, you ask? Etc.*
2. Sincerity: *quite seriously, believe you/me, as a matter of fact, etc.*
3. Calls for brevity: *cut the cackle; get to the point, etc.*
4. Uncertainty: *I daresay, mind you, etc.*

### **1.12 Relational expressions**, They are of two types:-

1. Expressions which establish conjunctive connections (Addition, Concession, Condition, Reason, and Result, etc.) within or between sentences, as well as connections between portions of a discourse directing the addressee to its structural organization, that is, its beginning, body, and conclusion.
2. Expressions which sequence events in ways that are chronologically appropriate to the situation presented via the discourse. Such expressions may also signal, at the same time, the time frame in which events take place.

#### **1.12.1 Features of Relational idioms**

- They ensure the cohesion, and can therefore aid the coherence of discourse,
- They make explicit the semantic unity of a discourse,
- They are mainly connectives and do not have the attribute of expressiveness and emotiveness.

#### **1.12.2 Types of Relational idiomatic expressions**

##### 1. Causative

Reason-Result – *and so, so that, as a result, on the grounds, in order that/to, no wonder, etc.*

Condition – *in case, etc.*

Consequence – *on condition that, come what may, be that as it may, in that case, etc.*

##### 2. Coupling

- Coupling- *not only ... but also, as well as, together/along with, etc.*

- Addition – *in addition, what is more, not only but, etc.*

3. Adversative Concession - *on the contrary, far from, at the same time, no matter what, in spite of, etc.*

##### 4. Evaluative

- Un favorable – *(even) worse, as if that weren't/wasn't enough, after all, etc.*

- Favorable – *better still, etc.*

5. Exemplification – *for example, for instance, that is, in other words, etc.*

6. Scope – *on the whole, to some extent, the extent to which, so far, in so far as, all in all, by and large, etc.*

7. Signposting – *said before, as we shall see, in the first place, from beginning to end, from start to finish, as a whole, etc.*

8. Comparison: *on the one hand...on the other, etc.*

9. Sequencing or chaining information

- Sequencing meta-discourse information, *e.g. in the first place, last but not least, etc.*

- Sequencing temporal information, *e.g. one day, a long time ago, up to now, at that time, once upon a time, etc.*

## Previous studies on Idioms from colours

### 2.1 Choice of colour terms

In order to narrow down the subject of the study and to legitimate our choice of colour words (idioms) for the analysis, a list of colours to be focused on was created. The study does not aim at giving an exact number of idioms from colours rather to focus on the meaning and usage of this category. However, such list is rather extensive and includes expressions that are not colours in the real sense, therefore, only common colours are studied. There was an attempt to limit the list methodically by excluding certain groups of words (those that do not describe a colour property by themselves, such as “dark” and “deep”; compound words, such as “blood-red” and “sky-blue”; words ending in -ish, such as “blackish” and “bluish”; the study only looks at the problem from a more technical point of view – wavelength. Newton was the first to divide the continuous spectrum into seven divisions: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet (“Colour”). Indigo, a colour between blue and violet, is not usually recognized as a separate division by modern colour scientists, therefore, it was excluded from the list. Nevertheless, three grey scale colours: White, Grey, and Black were added for their common important usage. Thus, the idiomatic expressions were those, which included one or more words from the following list:

- 1- Black,
- 2- Blue,
- 3- Green,

- 4- Grey/Gray,
- 5- Orange,
- 6- Red,
- 7- Violet,
- 8- White, and
- 9- Yellow.

The terms are all used frequently and it is, therefore, anticipated that idiomatic expressions would not be difficult to find.

## **2.2 Process of collection and narrowing the lists**

The current research includes the relevant expressions in general English dictionaries from well-known and renowned publishers: Macmillan, Collins Cobuild, Oxford and Cambridge. Names of plants and animals were excluded completely from the analysis because they are not idiomatic. So were the trademarks and brand names (“Yellow Pages”, “Greyhound Bus”, and “Bluetooth”). Expressions denoting special events or situations in the US and UK, which are closely related to the culture (e.g. “Orange Bowl”, and “Orange Prize”) as well as names of food and meals (“Black Forrest gateau”, “black bun” etc.) were not included either.

## **2.3 Colours in language**

### **2.3.1 Colours and emotions**

Anders Steinvall (2002:348-389) conducted a very interesting research on colours and emotions in English. Using the Bank of English corpus, his investigation tells “which colour categories are salient from the viewpoint of emotions and *vice versa*”. Based on his results, Steinvall states that “English speakers maintain a system of preference by which they link colours and emotions. The most frequent collocation of black in Steinvall’s sample is sadness depending on the fact that “black is the colour of death and mourning in European and American cultures, and this should be reflected in language”. Grey is also associated with sadness and Steinvall believes that the link is metaphoric of weather. White is strongly associated with anger and fear, and the connection is motivated by facial colour. Red is represented in many categories, but the most frequent is the collocation with anger. Steinvall suggests that facial colour and heat are the motivation here. Both yellow and orange collocate most with joy. Green is associated with anger category, precisely with envy and jealousy. What Steinvall highlights as striking, is the collocation of blue with joy, not only with sadness. Nevertheless, he suggests, that the results may be distorted here, because blue’s association with melancholy and sadness is so strong, that the word for the emotion is usually completely left out.

### 2.3.2 Semiotics of colours

Since the cultural background is shared to a certain extent and the languages have common origins, Vaňková's (2007: 441-443) work findings, which are based on Czech rather than English, are applicable to other languages as well, especially the European ones. She summarizes how people interpret colours: We always perceive the "colourful" as positive: colourfulness is associated with light, beauty, life, wealth, good luck, joy, diversity of full life. The non-colourful – characterized often as "colourless", grey, black-and-white; and pale when a human being is concerned – represents the other extreme: gloom, ugliness, a poor spiritual and physical life, the oppressive weight of everyday life, poverty, sadness, boredom, lethargy, disgust, and monotony. Further in the text, Vaňková clarifies that "the *physically* non-colourful (achromatic!) colours black, white and grey are in the position of non-colours also in language". Flavell (2000: 30) provides a short essay on the meaning of black and white colour in idioms. He notes that "in some areas of life, in art or the church for instance, black symbolizes evil" (e.g. *as black as the devil, as black as hell*). Besides evil and wrong-doing, black colour is also associated with illegality and law-breaking (e.g. *black market, black economy, blackmail*). "Evil and illegality obviously bring moral censure and disgrace. Not surprisingly then there are plenty of phrases expressing this idea" (e.g. *to blackball, a blackleg, the black sheep of the family*). Congruently with Steinvall, Flavell also mentions the association of black with death in most cultures and he believes that "this probably explains the gloomy connotations of the word in relation to human feelings" (be *in a black humour/mood, paint things in black colours*). Some idioms "suggest anger and threat" (e.g. *give somebody a black look*).

On the other hand, "white has the power to turn something bad into something good. Lying, witches and magic all have negative associations, yet add the positive word *white* and they are rendered harmless, even beneficial: *a white lie, a white witch* and *white magic*." Although there are some negative expressions, where white colour is used, they are very sparse (e.g. *white-livered, show the white feather*). Flavell (2000:30) summarizes that "it is generally true to say that in English black indicates bad whilst white indicates good". Green is the colour of plants and vegetative life. According to Vaňková (2007: 448), "if green is used in connection with a human being, it always has a negative connotation. In relation to the human body, green always means illness, even closeness of death and decay." Although yellow is a joyful colour, the colour of sun and flowers, it also signals change for the worse: [yellow] is associated not only with old age, but also with illness – usually a more serious and longer illness and even death. Another

important field connected with a complexion changed to yellow is negative emotions – jealousy, envy and hatred. (Vankova 2007: 449)

Vaňková explains this association of yellow with negative emotions (which Steinvall connects rather with the green colour) by the fact, that yellow is etymologically related to green. Moreover, yellow and green are very close to each other on the colour spectrum. Blue is the most typical cold colour, “colour suggesting the sky, air, cold, emotional distance and spirituality”. It can be connected with suffering from cold or lack of air, but it also refers to bruises (*to be black and blue*). Vaňková summarizes the meaning of blue as follows: In association with the human body, blue also connotes physical discomfort, and, even more strongly than green, danger to life. In general, we can say that it is an extreme pole of paleness, even an attribute of death. ( Vankova 2007: 449)

**2.4 Below is the meaning of the colours in our list separately with some examples to support their meaning.**

#### **2.4.1 Black**

Black colour is not used to convey positive meanings. There are some neutral phrases, which do not suggest any negative evaluation or connotation, such as *put something down in black and white* or the adjective *black-tie*, but these are rather scarce and they are mostly related to the colour of described objects, i.e. the motivation of the phrase is quite clear. Most of the phrases with black colour are associated with disapproval (*black sheep of the family, black look*), sadness and gloom (*black mood*), illegality (*black economy, blackmail*) and evil (*black deeds, black as hell*).

#### **2.4.2 Blue**

Blue is the colour of sky, in connection to human being it suggests physical discomfort and sadness, melancholy and even depression. Several related expressions are indeed connected with the sky and its blue colour: *out of the blue* (the most frequent one), *out of a clear blue sky*, *(like) a bolt out of the blue* and *a bolt from the blue*. All of these have the same meaning – suddenly, without warning, unexpectedly – and their motivation is rather obvious: no one expects a thunderstorm, when there are no clouds in the sky. The only phrase denoting sadness is the expression *to get/have the blues*. Dictionaries commonly list these feelings as another meaning of the word blue: for example, the Macmillan dictionary defines the polysemous adjective “blue” as

1. a colour of “the sky on a clear sunny day” and 2. an informal expression meaning “feeling rather sad” ( Vankova 2007:140), and so does also the online Cambridge Dictionary, to name but a few.

### **2.4.3 Green**

As far as the meaning of the phrases which contain the word green is concerned, there are two expressions that clearly support Steinvall's claim(?????) about green's association with anger in general, jealousy and envy specifically. These are *green with envy* and *the green-eyed monster*. One expression – *green around/about/at the gills* – fits Vaňková's claim(2007:111) that in connection with human beings, green means illness or death. The remaining expressions in the group are not related to feelings or emotions and have positive connotations: e.g. *the rub of the green* (i.e. good luck) and *give/get the green light*. Several idioms refer to the green colour of plants (*greener pastures, the grass is always greener on the other side, green as grass*).

### **2.4.4. Grey/Gray**

Except for the phrase *gray matter*, where the colour may be attributed simply to the colour of neurons and brain in general, the other expressions suggest that the situation or entity that they connote is somewhat shady, illegal or immoral. *Grey area* is a situation, where the rules are unclear and it is difficult or impossible to say what is right and what is wrong. *Grey eminence* is a figure, which stays in the background and is almost invisible, but which has immense power and influence when decisions are made. Also, such persons may be associated with intrigues and plots. The last of these expressions is *grey market*; it is defined as a business of buying and selling, which is not illegal, but is considered morally wrong. With this colour, both spellings were checked. “gray” is used in the American variety and “grey” in the British variety of English.

### **2.4.5. Orange**

Several expressions with orange colour were found; however, only one proved to be a pure idiom: *(all) Lombard street to China orange*. The remaining expressions collected during the preliminary search in dictionaries were excluded. The idiom *(all) Lombard street to China orange* is described as old-fashioned, but no information was found as to when it was coined. This idiom is not so common, which probably means that the phrase is either very old or not spread and used enough. The admittance of this phrase into the group of colour idioms would be questionable anyway, as it refers to the citrus fruit, not the colour as such.

### **2.4.6 Red**

Although people certainly associate love, affection and passion with the red (and pink) colour, red is by far most frequently connected with anger, according to

Steinvall's findings (Steinvall 2002,79). In the sample gathered for the purpose of this paper, only *see red* and *red rag to a bull* fit the anger category. Red also serves to describe embarrassment, like in the verbal expression *go red*. There were also several adjectival phrases with similar meaning, which were based on the person's facial colour. These adjectives are very closely related: *beetroot red* is derived from *red as a beetroot*, *beet red* from *red as a beet*. It does not seem to be any connection between the other expressions that would make it possible to categorize them and ascribe the red colour a specific meaning. The nominal phrase *red ink* and adverbials *in/out of the red* refer, obviously, to the colour used by financial institutions on statements and reports. In a similar way, *red carpet treatment* is motivated by the red colour of the carpet that is traditionally rolled out for VIP guests and famous or important persons at certain events and places, such as presidential visits or popular film festivals. It may be argued, that the phrase *red in tooth and claw* is usually used in apposition to the word "nature" (i.e. *nature, red in tooth and claw*). An interesting pattern is *red ink*. While it referred to economy – to the unpleasant situation of being in debt – in the newspaper section, in fiction genre the instances of *red ink* were often simple descriptions of the colour (e.g. "I mumbled, hands stained with red ink."). The verbal idiom *go red* may not be absolutely precise, because sometimes, this phrase is not referring to the colour of someone's face turning red because of embarrassment, but to the changing colour of the leaves in autumn or the colour of the sky during the sunset.

#### **2.4.7 Violet**

For this colour, only one idiomatic expression seems to exist in English: the nominal phrase *shrinking violet*. According to Answers.com, this expression was coined sometime in the early 1900s. In the TIME, it appears in the 1930s for the first time. The phrase is classified as informal in various sources and is much more common in newspapers and magazines, while only one occurrence falls into the academic category.

#### **2.4.8 White**

according to Flavell ( Flavell 2000:30) , in English, white indicates good and it has generally positive connotations .That is an interesting note, but it cannot be taken as a rule that would help language learners understand idiomatic phrases containing the word *white*. There are expressions (considering the size of the material) which were rather negative. There is, undoubtedly, hardly anything positive about being

*whitelivered*, *bleeding someone white*, or behaving like *a whited sepulchre*. And if you had a *white elephant* or experienced several *white nights* in a row, you would not find it pleasant either. Moreover, quite in opposition to Flavell's claim, Steinvall associates

white with anger and fear, when emotions and feelings come into play (e.g. *whiteknucled*) or the above mentioned *white-livered*).

The phrase *white night* was the name of a character in the fiction. At first sight, the expression *the white man's burden*, which is defined by Cowie as "the former concept of the European's duty to advance civilization, education, trade, public health, etc in underdeveloped parts of the world", seems to be American.

#### **2.4.9 Yellow**

Yellow colour was not represented in idiomatic phrases very often. Only a few were accepted as idioms. In fact, there were only four separate idioms, all of them belonging to the nominal class: *yellow journalism*, the semantically related *yellow press*, *Yellow Peril* and *yellow-belly*. The last phrase had also derived adjectival versions, one with hyphen and one without hyphen. Connection of yellow with a certain meaning is hard to prove. Steinvall and Vaňková link yellow colour with joy, but also with jealousy, envy, and hatred. Besides these emotional states, it is also associated with old age and long-term illness. Neither of them connects yellow with fear, which is the only emotion traceable in (*yellow-belly*). The expression *Yellow Peril* (fear that the Chinese and/or Japanese nations will overrun the world) is apparently motivated by the colour of complexion of Chinese and Japanese people. The phrase *yellow journalism* is a term used for colourful, sensational reporting, supplemented in newspapers with "banner headlines, coloured comics, and copious illustrations". The expression "was coined in the 1890s to describe the tactics employed in furious competition between two New York City newspapers, the *World* and the *Journal*".

### **Results of data analysis**

#### **3- Methodology**

Due to the importance of connecting the theory with the practice, this study extends the theoretical boundaries into the practical ones by including this applied section.

##### **3.1 Research sample**

The study is limited to 40 students, both male and female, of the first year of Computer Science department (data security and multi-media branches). This sample

is non-specialist ESL's learners. It is characterized by homogeneity in age (19 old), major (computer science), and education (first year). Such features will be in favor of the study as the results will be confirmative.

### **Instruments**

#### **3.2 The place**

The test was applied in English Language Center, University of Technology.

#### **3.3 The time**

Because the test has three phases, it was applied in three times, three days, and within three weeks. The three dates were March 18, March 25 and April 1 of 2014.

#### **3.4. Validity and Reliability of the test**

To confirm its validity and reliability, both pretest and posttest were introduced to number of experts in language and language Methodology. A copy of experts' approval is attached herewith.

**3.5 The nature of the test** .The test is about idioms from colours. A number of idioms from colours were carefully chosen and given to the sample. This test tried to measure the ability of the students semantically (understand the meaning of the idiom), syntactically (idiom's usage in a sentence), contextually (the effect of linguistic and social context on an idiom).the questions of the test are multi choices, fill in blanks, and sentence composition. The mark of the test is out of 100. The test was carried out in three phases which are: pre-teaching test, teaching, post teaching test.

#### **3.6 Statistic measurement**

The following equation was used to treat the results statistically.

$$\frac{\text{Partial number of students}}{\text{Total number of students}} \times 100$$

#### **3.7 The execution**

As mentioned above the test was carried out in three times, three days, within three weeks, and about two hours per day. On the first day of the first week, the pre- test was executed unexpectedly. The question papers were given to the students and only general information about the test was explained. Then the students were asked to answer the questions within two-hour period. Finally the answer sheets were collected and corrected to get the results. On the second day of the second week a comprehensive lecture

regarding idioms in general and idioms from colours was delivered. All sides of the topic in the lecture were dealt with, for example not limited to, the definition of the idiom, its composition, different examples about idioms from colours with their meanings, using idioms in different sentences, the relation of idioms and context, etc. The topic was discussed fully to provide the sample with a complete knowledge thereof to be prepared well for the last phase of the test. On the last day, questions about idioms from colours were handed over to the students to be answered. The idioms from colours used in post-test are partial different from those used in the pretest. Such important point about the post-test is employed to confirm the credibility of the test.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

Regarding the pre-test results, 64% of the sample failed; only 36% of the sample passed, no student got outstanding, one student with very good and two students with good grades.

Such results signals important fact that the sample has no clue about the topic, moreover, by studying their answers, the students tried to interpret idioms literally and depending on the meaning of components of them, such interpretation is misleading and conflict to the correct meaning. Two important facts, which can be mentioned about the second day, are the lecture was both enjoyable and smooth and the students show a positive interest to learn the topic. Regarding the post test results, 80% of the sample passed, only 20% failed with marks close to pass, one student got outstanding, six with very good grades, six good grades, ten got 65 and seven students got 60. Clearly such results stand in complete contrast to the pre-test ones. Such results can be justifiably attributed to: firstly the lecture that was delivered, secondly, the mechanism of inferring the correct meaning of the idiom that he/she studied or not, thirdly, the strong interest of learning that the students show about the topic which can be at least described as enjoyable. The results of both tests were included in tables and represented in charts which are included in the following pages.

### Pre and Post Test (pass)

No.	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1.	15	75
2.	15	60
3.	45	40
4.	40	80
5.	10	90
6.	45	65
7.	55	80
8.	50	70
9.	45	60
10.	60	60
11.	45	65
12.	Zero	55
13.	40	65
14.	30	85
15.	25	85
16.	15	65
17.	40	45
18.	25	65
19.	30	75
20.	50	40
21.	35	55
22.	15	65
23.	60	85
24.	65	65
25.	55	70
26.	20	65
27.	50	80
28.	45	60
29.	50	75
30.	45	70
31.	65	65
32.	55	60
33.	55	55
34.	40	60
35.	25	60
36.	35	65
37.	30	40
38.	35	40
39.	70	45

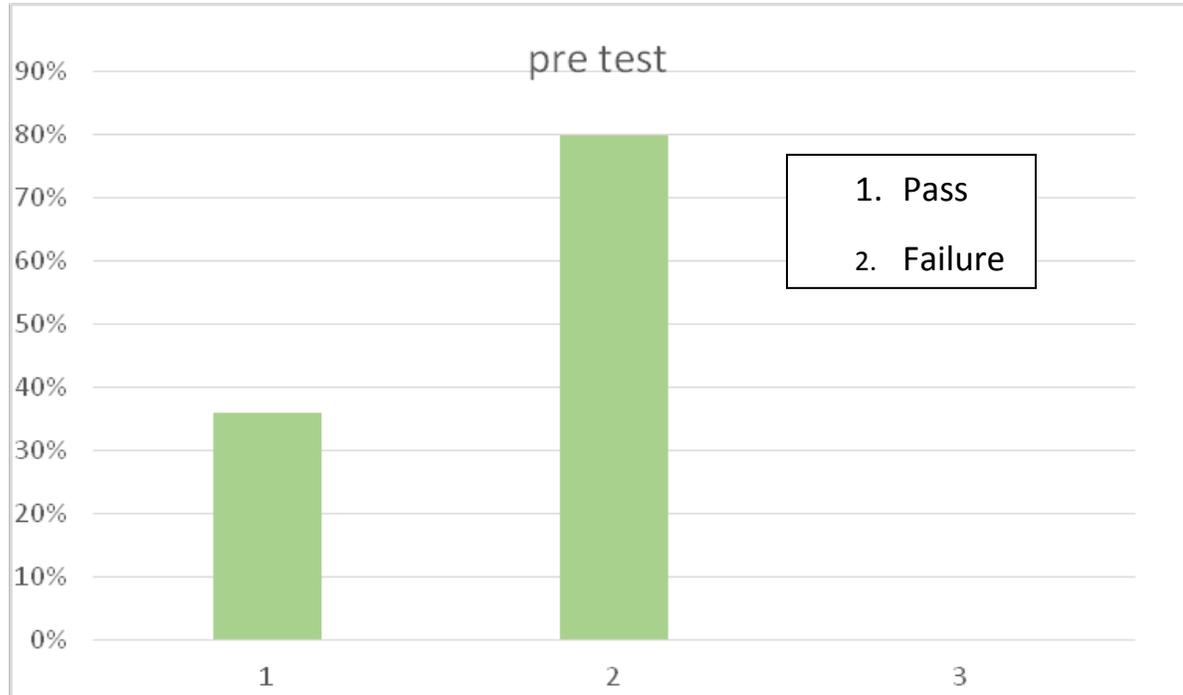
40.	40	35
41.	70	40
42.	85	45
Total: 42	15	33

Pre and Post Test (failure)

No.	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1.	15	75
2.	15	60
3.	45	40
4.	40	80
5.	10	90
6.	45	65
7.	55	80
8.	50	70
9.	45	60
10.	60	60
11.	45	65
12.	Zero	55
13.	40	65
14.	30	85
15.	25	85
16.	15	65
17.	40	45
18.	25	65
19.	30	75
20.	50	40
21.	35	55
22.	15	65
23.	60	85
24.	65	65
25.	55	70
26.	20	65
27.	50	80
28.	45	60
29.	50	75
30.	45	70
31.	65	65
32.	55	60
33.	55	55
34.	40	60
35.	25	60
36.	35	65
37.	30	40
38.	35	40
39.	70	45

40.	40	35
41.	70	40
42.	85	45
Total: 42	27	9

**Chart of results-prtest**



**Chart of results-post test**



### **3.7 Findings**

1- There is a clear evidence that shows the student lack of knowledge towards idioms from colours and idioms in general. The knowledge they got after the lecture of teaching idioms as the students start to distinguish the meaning of words as an idiom and non idiomatic meaning (literal meaning of words).

2- Idioms from colours are important tool in teaching students English language at different levels, namely, semantic, vocabulary, syntactic, and even communicative skills. Its lesson encourages teaching and improves the four skills of the language in integrated manner. The improvement in post-test results confirms this fact.

3- The process of teaching idioms from colours is interesting and enjoyable the thing that will simplify a lot in the process of teaching. This can be seen through the effective participation and the student motive towards learning during the lecture.

4- The students start to understand the importance of the context and its major role in the process of learning the language.

5-Two important abilities of students regarding idioms were built up after they got trained on them; these are “producing and using” abilities.

6- Whatever applicable to idioms from colours is applicable to idioms in general because the former is inseparable part of the latter.

### 3.8 Suggestions and recommendations

1- Include the topic of idioms and idioms from colours as part of syllabus and curriculum of English.

2-Encourage teachers to teach idioms and even to use idioms in teaching other topics.

3- Motivate the students to study and use idioms from colours and idioms in general because this topic enriches their language in its two channels, written and spoken.

### Conclusion

Since the effective role of idioms and idioms from colours in English language, this study has descriptively explained them according to different points of view which can be summarized as “a common word or phrase with a culturally understood meaning that differs from what its composite words' denotations would suggest”. Idiom has number of features which can be briefly categorized as its transgresses to rules of grammar and logic, attached to context, non-literal and fixed meaning, multi parts conventionalized expressions and others. The most typical constructions of English idiom are the verb + participle(s), the semi-clause, adjective + noun, and preposition + adjective. There is no ready-made classification for idioms because there are different standards and criteria, however, the study has presented the most well known classes and types. Regarding the translation of idioms, they must be rendered in some equivalent phrase, not in a word-for word translation which is misleading. All the previous aspects give a full image about idiom and that represents the first aim of the study.

As a category of idioms, idioms from colours were probed intensively. Newton classification which includes seven colours plus two is adopted as standard in our study. Each colour signifies a certain meaning that is employed in an idiom, for example black indicates evil or bad. In addition to that, each colour of the list has other denotations that are explained in this study.

Idioms from colours have a great importance and play effective role in teaching and improving English language. Such importance and role is a result of the practical and applied part of this study as it has gone beyond the theoretical part. This part which deals with the usage and the role of idioms in ESL represents the other aim of the study. A sample of 41 students was chosen for the two tests, pretest and post-test, and the lecture about idioms. The findings of the study are summarized in student's lack of knowledge of idioms, process of teaching idioms develops the skills of the language whether spoken or written and it is enjoyable and interesting.

To sum up, idioms and idioms from colours are important topics need to be focused on and included in the syllabus of teaching English language in non English contraries.

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### Annex (I)

#### Pretest Question Sample

**Name..... score.....**

Assessing Students abilities in understanding the meanings of idioms from colors

Have you ever received test about Idioms from Colors?

- Yes
- No

*We appreciate your response. We are seeking to know your understanding of idioms from colors. Thank you for agreeing to take this survey. The survey is being done by L.Mayada R. and A.L. Yaghdan R. . The purpose of the survey is to collect data .*

All of the answers you provide in this survey will be kept confidential. No identifying information will be provided to the department of Computer Science. The survey data will be reported in a summary only and will not identify any individual person.

This survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. Try this quiz to check your understanding of English idioms from colors.

**Q1/ Read the following passage carefully, then find the meaning of the words written in bold.**

### **In the Red**

The letter came **out of the blue!** I wasn't expecting it. But there it was **in black and white**, signed by the bank manager. I had no money in my checking account. I was **in the red**.

I couldn't believe it. So I went to see the manager. We looked at the problem together. The bank had made a mistake. It had put ten dollars into my account instead of one thousand dollars!

Because it was the bank's mistake, there was no delay reopening my account. The manager cut through all **the red tape**. Now I had money in my account. And I had **the green light** to write checks again.

**In the red=**

**In black and white=**

**In the red=**

**The red tape=**

**the green light=**

**Q2/ Many idioms are based on color and colors. Test your knowledge of English idioms with the questions below.**

**1. a white lie**

Jack asked me how he looked after his operation, so I told a white lie and said

- a. he looked great
- b. he looked terrible
- c. I'd gone blind and I couldn't see him

**2. give the green light**

If we're given the green light by the local council, we'll

- a. start building our factory
- b. have to build it somewhere else
- c. have to do an environmental impact study

**3. red light district**

They went to the red light district in order to

- a. buy lighting supplies
- b. meet prostitutes
- c. have the tail-lights on their car repaired

**4. red tape**

The red tape makes getting government approval take

- a. a long time
- b. a short time
- c. a good time

### **5. see red**

We were playing a game of cards when Marty suddenly saw red. He said it was because

- a. he got some great cards
- b. he only got hearts and diamonds
- c. he saw Harry cheating

### **6. see through rose-coloured glasses | rose-colored glasses**

If someone sees through rose-coloured glasses, they don't see

- a. the unpleasant side of things
- b. the funny side of things
- c. the bright side of life

### **7. show your true colours | show your true colors**

We always thought Barry was a weak and cowardly guy, but he showed his true colours when he

- a. bought a big black motorbike
- b. started drinking whisky and rye
- c. saved a kid from a bear attack

### **8. with flying colours | colors**

Tony took his driving test again today, and passed with flying colours so

- a. he'll have to take it again/
- b. he still can't get his licence
- c. he can get his licence at last

**9. yellow journalism**

Jerry gets angry when he sees yellow journalism. He says journalists who write it are

- a. misleading their readers
- b. informing their readers
- c. educating their readers

**10. yellow-bellied**

The other kids called Jack a yellow-bellied snake because he

- a. told the teacher who cheated
- b. wouldn't say who cheated
- c. didn't know who cheated

**Annex (II)**

**Post- test question Sample**

**Name:**..... **score** .....

**Q1/ Choose the most appropriate answer.**

1. She is feeling..... because her boyfriend didn't call her yesterday.

- blue
- green
- red
- white

2. How many little..... lies do we tell every day?

- blue
- green
- red
- white

3. Her father and mother saw..... when they found out that their daughter was dating that guy.

blue  green  red  white

4. Lena and Nick will be..... with envy when they see my new car!

blue  green  red  white

5. That expensive gift turned out to be a..... elephant. We didn't have any use for it, and we couldn't sell it either.

blue  green  red  white

6. I tried to talk him out of it. Actually, I talked to him till I was..... in the face, but he didn't change his mind.

blue  green  red  white

7. They have to sell their property because their business has been in the.... for six years.

blue  green  red  white

8. Her flower garden is fantastic. She loves gardening and has a.... thumb.

blue  green  red  white

9. The idea came to him right out of the ..... when he was making coffee in the kitchen.

blue  green  red  white

10. There was so much bureaucratic..... tape that we did not get the required papers in time.

blue  green  red  white

**Q3/ Choose the correct color idiom from the table to fill the space in each sentence. You may need to make some changes to the idioms to put them in the sentences correctly.(10only)**

see red	browned off
green with envy	out of the blue
rose colored spectacles	in the red
tickled pink	get the green light
black sheep of the family	have green fingers
caught red handed	
blue-eyed boy	

1. We had been getting along fine for years, then  she tells me she wants a divorce. I have never been so surprised in all my life.
2. I cannot afford to go on that holiday anymore. My bank account is  and my bank manager isn't the most flexible of people.
3. Police have found the town's infamous statue vandal. He was  spraying paint on the statue of the town founder, Marshall Higgins, at about 2am last night.
4. Howard is always considered the  but he has never actually done much wrong. I think his sister is worse!
5. I, on the other hand, have always been considered the  and my mother thinks I can't do wrong!
6. When the man continued to smoke in the restaurant which is very much non-smoking, I  and said something to him. He stopped immediately!
7. We got five numbers on the lottery last night and won \$5000! Wayne is absolutely , saying we can get the new car now instead of waiting for next year.

8. We told our neighbours about it this morning and I think they were a bit jealous. Mrs. Riley, in particular, was !

9. When we arrived at this house, it was a jungle in the garden but Peter has always  and had it looking like the gardens of a palace within six months.

10. The final details of the proposal have been worked out and we just need  from the bank before we can begin.

11. It rained for the whole week and we were stuck in our cabin the whole time doing crosswords! I was really !

12. The reason she fails to plan for the worst case scenario is that she has always been too optimistic and never sees the possibility of the negative happening through those  she wears.

We, undersigned, have taken knowledge of question paper of pre-test and post- test which is being made and submitted to us by L. Mayada R. Eesa and A.L. Yaghdan R. Mahdi , consequently, we certify their validity and reliability to be used as test for measuring student skills in language regarding the topic of the study " idioms from colours".

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