

Investigating Iraqi EFL University Learner's Dilemma of Translating Idiomatic Expressions (An Applied Linguistic Study)

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Summary:

The current study is an applied linguistic investigation of equivalence above word level. It identifies the difficulties and challenges of non-equivalence posed in translating idiomatic expressions into Arabic language and vice-versa. In addition, this study identifies the method used by Iraqi EFL college students to produce the precise and suitable equivalent in the target language. The main aim of this study is to investigate the sort of difficulties that EFL college students face in translating idiomatic expressions, and proposing logical solutions for such difficulties. An eclectic methodology will be utilized to achieve the research objectives, analyzing various idiomatic expressions. The current study emphasizes the need for pedagogical and linguistic reforms in EFL college translation courses and developing in translator training programs, particularly the integration of discursive awareness of the precise meaning of idiomatic expressions. Through a qualitative analysis of 100 EFL college student-translated samples, the study will investigate the students' in question challenges and difficulties of translating idiomatic expressions.

Introduction

Translation of idiomatic expressions is a challenge for EFL college students because they are not aware of the difficulties they encounter, and they always resort to literal or non-sense translations due to a lack of deep competence about translation procedures that might help them. Many studies have found out the difficulties EFL college learners experience when attempting to translate idioms into other languages, especially Arabic. The current study is based on an analytical investigatory methodology which will highlight the different challenges EFL college students encounter when dealing with translation idiomatic expressions into Arabic.

Idiomatic expression is a term used in grammar and lexicology to mean a sequence of words that are semantically and also syntactically constrained,

consequently, they linguistically work as a single unit (Crystal, 1983: 231). This sequence of words is viewed as one class of figurative expressions which occur in all expressions which cannot be realized literally and which work as a unit semantically (Beekman and Callow, 1967: 18). Furthermore, the words which constitute an idiomatic expression are also viewed as "part of mastering any language, and they are a natural section of everyday discourse because they represent cultural and linguistic boundaries and enabling communication between different human cultures" (Howwar, 2016: 5). Idiomatic expressions are culture-bound expressions and most of them are related to culture, and this causes their comprehension and translation a serious problem for EFL learners (Ibid: 15). Baker (1994: 45) emphasized that the major challenges of translating idioms are related to two main aspects: the ability to identify and to translate an idiomatic expression appropriately, as well as the complications in translating several facets of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression carries into the target language. According to Mollanazar (2006: 24), the first step in mentally processing idioms is to identify them. Therefore, the first step for EFL students to translate an idiom appropriately is identifying it well. In the same vein, Nida (1965: 18) sustains that "the role of translator is to facilitate the transfer of the message, meaning, and cultural components from one language into another and establish an equivalent response to the receivers".

Notwithstanding the development in the field of translation, translating idiomatic expressions is still viewed as a big challenge for translators as well as for EFL students (Howwar, 2016: 68). Idiomatic expressions are very difficult to acquire and learn because they cannot be translated literally (Mcpartland, 1983: 68). EFL learners have to present the meaning of an idiom over and above the words that forming it. Translator's knowledge of the idioms meaning and the translation strategies used for them are very needed. They usually enable translators and students to overcome the difficulties that might be faced by when they translate such idioms.

Therefore, finding equivalents to the idiomatic expressions is a very difficult assignment for students because they require deep competence in manipulating idioms (Baker, 1994: 29). Since there are many differences between English and Arabic cultures, idiomatic expressions cannot be translated literally because their translation would be inaccurate. Thus, EFL students should be aware of the correct meaning of those idiomatic expressions and know the intended meaning of such

expressions. This designates that translating English idiomatic expressions into Arabic is a challenging assignment for EFL students.

It is very necessary to get strategies and approaches to help and support EFL students in overcoming such serious problems and difficulties in translating idiomatic expressions. Baker (1994: 89) presented two major prominent difficulties that EFL learners usually encounter when translating idiomatic expressions. The first difficulty is lacking idioms equivalents in the target language. The second one is that the existence of idioms which have similar form but different meaning in two different languages might be a source of difficulty in translation. The difference between English and Arabic also could be one of the influences that absolutely cause problems in translating idiomatic expressions because Arabic is a Semitic language that is quite different from English which is an-Indo-European language. This highly weakens or hinders effective recognition and acquisition of meaning. Nevertheless, if EFL students have a strong foundation in both cultures and languages, they will be able to acquire the intended and implied meaning of idiomatic expressions. Since translating idiomatic expressions is a difficult assignment for EFL learners.

Problem of Study

Translating idioms is considered as one of the most difficult scientific works that cause a serious dilemma for translators and EFL learners as well.. In this regard, the major problem is understanding the idiom, and distinguishing idiomatic from non-idiomatic usage. In addition, the meaning of the idiom is considered as the main leading cause to failure in achieving the appropriate and precise translation of a particular idiom. This certainly confuse EFL learners and translators and lead them to produce weak or wrong translations.

Idiomatic expressions are very difficult to translate because of their language-cultural character. When adopting translation approaches, idiomatic expressions must first be recognized, comprehended, and evaluated. Also, when translating a text, EFL college students must be able to identify the idiomatic expressions that appear in it. Furthermore, EFL college students' abilities to distinguish between the literal and the figurative meanings of an idiom are crucial in the field of idiom translation. Consequently, good mastery of the two languages is highly required to correctly understand and use idioms. In this respect, two important phases must be taken into consideration:

1. Linguistic Differences

Besides being competent in the original language, EFL college students must be able to deal effectively with the target language. Using natural target language idiomatic expressions is crucial, since performing so emphasizes that EFL college students can create fluid and dynamic target language writing while also preserving the original text's stylistic qualities (Larson, 1985: 245). The final challenge is to come with a translation that carries the same meaning in the target language.

2. Cultural Differences

It is well-known that culture and translation are among the most influential variables in human communication. It is broadly believed that culture affects discourse in various ways. This is why EFL college students' primary aim is to ensure that the original language and the target language should be culturally equivalent to avoid misunderstanding between the two different language.

Significance of Study

The present study focuses on the importance of precise and accurate translation of idioms. Translation is one of the vital language skills, which is very crucial to be learned by translators and students in the relevant field of knowledge because are eager to be professional translators in the future. Malkjaer (2011: 123) argues that translation is a type of language activity that is achieved by a translator at conveying meaning in a text from one language to another language. Language is a human system of communication that is used in a particular speech community. Since language has literal and figurative meanings, most EFL learners and translators as well should learn the basic skills of translation one of which is the skills of translating idioms.

Aims of the Study

The current study attempts to investigate the difficulties that Iraqi EFL university students encounter in translating texts that include idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic at Al-Muthanna University. This study also attempts to identify the strategies that Iraqi EFL college students employ when responding and handling such difficulties. Consequently, the current study attempts to achieve the following aims:

1. Presenting a theoretical and practical framework for translating idiomatic expressions used by EFL learners.
2. Helping Iraqi EFL learners develop linguistic skills in translating idiomatic expressions.

3. Finding out the type difficulty that EFL learners face while translating idiomatic expressions
4. Identifying precise strategies and suggesting solutions for avoiding the difficulties that EFL learners face while translating idiomatic expressions.

2. Literature Review

In this section of the study, two aspects are explained, the first one is theoretical background, and the second one is previous studies.

2.1 Definition of Translation

Many scholars have defined translation from different perspectives. According to Nida (1965: 89), "translation is the production in the target language of the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first to meaning and then to style". Worded differently, Newmark (1998: 8) contends that translation is "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text". Learners can acquire new knowledge when they are exposed to the idea, insights, and views that another language presents to understand the figurative meaning of its idioms and other expressions of various kinds.

2.2 Definition of Idiom

Idioms, as a fundamental section of everyday English, encompass a very abroad extent of circumstances that are appropriate for the usage of these phrases, from informal explanations and discussions with friends to more official or legal forms of meetings and written correspondences. When words are employed together in a way that varies a lot in meaning, it is identified an idiom (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 246). In the same vein, Carter (1987: 23) defines idioms as "peculiar combinations with constrained forms and meanings that cannot be derived from the literal meanings of the words which make them up". This refers to that learning and using an idiom are performed all at once. As a general statement, the meaning of an idiom is metaphorical and cannot be divided into fundamental parts.

2. Previous Studies

Many research works are carried out in the field of translating idiomatic expressions from one language into another language. The following previous studies emphasized that FFL college students face serious difficulties in translating idiomatic expressions into Arabic; weak transfer plays a vital role in the translation of idiomatic expressions along with poor and weak abilities and understanding of

various usage of Idiomaticity:

2.1 Littlemore (2004)'s Study

This study investigated the impact of cultural variations on the understanding of metaphors when they are translated. During a short course at a British academic institution, he (ibid.) worked on finding out how Bangladeshi college students recognize metaphors used by their instructors. In this study, questionnaires developed by Hofstede (1981) were given to the Bangladeshi EFL college students and their British professors in order to discover areas of differences between their cultures. The findings of this study showed that the types of misinterpretations that the Bangladeshi EFL college students made varied very much according to their cultural backgrounds.

2.2 Abdel-Fattah and Zughul (2004)'s Study

The study attempted to find out the extent to which EFL college students can correctly use and explain the meaning of English collocations. EFL university learners were given a two-form translation test including (16) Arabic collocations. The first test assigned contained an English translation in multiple-choice form, whereas the second test required the participant to complete a free translation assignment. The results of this study revealed that Arab EFL college learners at all levels encountered difficulty in interpreting English collocations, which are culturally-specific expressions.

2.3 Al-Dahesh (2009)'s Study

This study investigated the difficulties that Arab professional translators and Arab EFL university translation students encounter when they translating idiomatic English phrasal verbs into Arabic. He (ibid.) made several suggestions for professional translators, lexicographers, and educators. Translation tests were carried out to discover the types of errors which may occur and the potential dangers in the translation process. The results of this study showed that dealing with the phenomena of idiomatic phrasal verbs might reveal many difficulties. The inability to create functional-pragmatic counterparts for such verbs is the most significant element of these difficulties. The study in question also revealed that the employment of paraphrasing, and the use of Arabic regional dialects and accents are the major reasons for the incorrect translation, and for failure to create accurate and precise functional-pragmatic equivalents of the English idiomatic phrasal verbs.

2.4 Badawi (2009)'s Study

This study investigated the ability of Saudi EFL university instructors to translate cultural expressions and to recognize the most frequently used strategies. The results of the study revealed that university instructors' performance is very weak, as indicated by their grades on the cultural-based translation test. Their general knowledge of translation strategy is extremely restricted, and the way of translation used is literal.

3. Strategies Employed in Processing, Comprehending and Translating Idiomatic Expressions

The following are some of the strategies used in translating idioms:

1. Newmark (1988)'s Strategies

According to Newmark (1988), translators must ensure that their translations are both comprehensible and natural, with appropriate syntax, idioms, and vocabulary. The idioms, styles, and registers are all part of a person's natural language use. Newmark (1988) distinguishes between translating idioms and translating idiomatic expressions. He (ibid) argues that there are two aspects of translation: Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation. Semantic translation is to perceive the meaning of a word or phrase as accurately as possible, considering the semantic and syntactic structures of the target language. The second form of translation, identified as communicative translation, aims to create an impression on its audience that is as close to the original audience.

2. Ghazala (2008)'s Strategies

Ghazala (2008)'s strategies adopt the following:

1. **Free Translation:** This translation is for genres encompassing literature, politics, journalism, and culture. Hassan Ghazala's free translation does not demand translation of certain specifics, but rather emphasizes on expressing the overall message (Ghazala, 2008: 26).

2. **Literal Translation:** Translation in Arab countries, Ghazala (2008: 26) contends that literal translation is used not only by inexperienced translators but also by professional translators.

3. Baker (1992)'s Strategies

Baker (1992: 78-9) recommended the following approaches:

1. **Translation by a More Specific Term Approach:** In this approach, an idiom in the target language has a lexical and semantic equivalent in the original language.

2. **Translation by Cultural Substitution Approach:** Employing an idiom that has a similar meaning but differs in form is also acceptable. The target language may have

an idiomatic expression with a similar meaning to the source language, but with different lexical components.

3. Translation by a Loan Word Approach: This is the most predominant approach of translating idioms when a match cannot be found out in the target language, or when it appears unsuitable to employ idiomatic language in the target language due to stylistic differences between the two different languages' preferences. The exclusion of translations like single words, and idioms may be deleted entirely from the target language. Here, the idiom does not have a direct equivalent in the target language due to the difficulty of conveying the meaning in another way or for stylistic reasons.

Problem of the Study

Iraqi EFL college students have problems in understanding English idiomatic expressions appropriately. This is due to the fact that these idiomatic expressions are greatly interactive items that are loaded with deeper and extra meanings. In fact, people do not use idioms arbitrarily or without motivation, but they use them with the deep intention of communicating more than what is said or written. That is to say, there is a considerable difference between the literal meaning and the idiomatic meaning of the idiomatic expressions. Cooper (1999: 325) contends that English idioms are difficult for native speakers of English, and then they would cause many problems for EFL / ESL learners. Notwithstanding idiomatic expressions are of great importance in English, they are rarely found in curriculum of English Departments in the Iraqi public and private universities and colleges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Nature of Idioms

Baker (1994: 87) defined idioms as "frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and frequently carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their discrete elements". In fact, idiomatic expressions are very familiar and inherent in human language. A very significant part of the native language everyday linguistic repertoires is established by idioms and idiom-like constructions. Additionally, the knowledge level of idioms serves as an important demonstration of the foreign / second language (FL/SL) proficiency. In the same vein, native-like language requires a good mastery of idioms (Liu, 2008: 132).

2.2 Idioms and Idiomaticity

Carter (1987, cited in Meryem, 2009: 15) identifies idioms as "special combinations with restricted forms and meanings that cannot be inferred from the

literal meanings of the words which make them up". In order to comprehend idioms, the distinction between idioms and Idiomaticity should be illuminated. Fernando (1996: 46) argues that idioms and Idiomaticity are closely related to each other, but they are not identical concepts. According to Fernando (1996: 46), 'Idiomaticity' refers to how native speakers of a particular language successfully connect words, or units of language, in a native-like manner, for example, word combinations, such as "catch a bus" and "strong coffee", designate Idiomaticity, but they are not idioms because they are unrestricted in their variants: "catch a tram", "black coffee". These variations are idiomatic expressions exemplifying Idiomaticity, but they are not idioms.

3. Idiom Processing and Comprehension

Based on the large body of research on idiom processing and comprehension in the first language, there is an absence of research on how idioms are processed in the foreign / second language (FL/SL). Various studies attempt to identify a distinctive system for processing and comprehending idioms in the foreign / second language (FL/SL). They centralize, rather, on strategies non-native speakers employ to comprehend idioms (Cieslicka, 2006: 210).

The foreign language idiom processing does not entirely resemble any of the well-known models in the native language idiom processing and comprehension. In this regard, FL/SL learners use a variety of strategies applying a heuristic model of idiom processing and comprehension (Zhang, 2009: 20).

4. The Heuristic Model Idiom Processing and Comprehension

According to Coryell (2012: 45), the heuristic model of idiom processing and comprehension was first developed by Cooper (1999). In teaching, heuristic model of idiom processing and comprehension suggests that learners are encouraged to learn, discover, understand, or solve problems on their own by experimenting, by examining possible answers or solutions, or through trial and error (Cooper, 1999: 320). As an procedure, heuristic means that an idiom is interpreted by discovery and experimentation in a trial-and-error, (rule-of-thumb manner) rather than adopting a strategic or systematic manner identified by a scientific approach.

5. Main Strategies Used in FL/SL Idiom Processing and Comprehension

The heuristic model of idiom processing and comprehension proposes that FL/SL learners have the ability to infer the meaning of idiomatic expressions through the use of an interpretive approach in which they do experience different strategies (Coryell, 2012: 36).

Cooper (1999) utilizes the think-aloud research method to explore the type of strategies FL/SL learners use in the comprehension of uncommon idiomatic expressions. The findings of Cooper (1999)'s study show that many different strategies have been employed to understand idioms. In this regard, He (ibid.) categorizes these strategies into two classifications: "Preparatory Strategies" and "Guessing Strategies". The first classification encompasses three strategies: "paraphrasing strategy", "requesting information and discussing strategy", and "analysing strategy". Whereas the second classification implies four strategies: "guessing from context", "employing the literal meaning", "employing background knowledge", and "referring to native language idioms to understand FL/SL idioms."

The current study employed and modified Cooper (1999)'s second classification of strategies which indicates that the guessing strategies are the ones that lead to the correct responses more than the other strategies.

5.1 Contextual Information Strategy

Contextual information provides signs to deduce the meaning of uncommon or unknown words. In fact, this is clearly an effective strategy that helps FL/SL learners in vocabulary acquisition. Hereafter, such contextual signs have a considerable influence on the comprehension of FL/SL idiomatic expressions, particularly in comprehending those idioms whose meanings cannot be deduced from the individual words (Rohani, 2012: 67).

In this strategy, FL/SL learners discuss the situation in which the idiom is embedded and clearly create reference to the situation to deduce the meaning of the idiomatic expression (Cooper, 1999: 303). According to Cooper (1999), this strategy of employing contextual information in comprehending idiomatic expressions is not only the most frequent used strategy; it is also the most influential one in terms of helping FL/SL learners in arriving at the correct meaning of idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, Cooper (1999) found out that this strategy is always considered as the first strategy used in heuristic model. He (ibid.) concluded that FL/SL learners usually will not attempt to use other strategies until they realise that the strategy of using contextual information fails to help them arrive at a meaningful interpretation of the unknown idiomatic expression.

5.2 Literal Meaning Strategy

Cooper (1999: 340) mentions that in order to employ this strategy, EF/SL learners should have good knowledge about the metaphorical aspect of idioms and focusing on the literal meaning of the idiomatic expressions as a key to the figurative

meaning. This is in line with learning theories of the first language processing that suggest that idioms are motivated by metaphorical connections between literal and figurative meanings (Coryell, 2012: 68) as he (ibid.) explains how a subject was able to interpret "burn the candle on both ends" by understanding that "wax would melt more quickly if burned on both sides" and making a metaphorical connection to "working too hard".

5.3 Learner's Background Knowledge Strategy

The use of pragmatic knowledge or the knowledge of the world in general is specifically important in dealing with figurative FL/SL idioms. FL/SL learners depend on such knowledge to discuss and explain idiomatic expressions. FL/SL learners, for instance, may remember that they have learned the idiom in a language lecture or they have heard it for the first time on TV or in a song or that they might have heard their colleagues using the idiom (Cooper, 1999: 257).

Leung (2008: 311) indicates that when interpreting the meaning of an idiom expression, FL/SL learners should first understand its literal meaning. In working on the literal meaning of an idiomatic expression within a particular context, FL/SL learners will find that the literal meaning does not make sense, and then move on to re-interpret the idiomatic expression using pragmatic knowledge, attempting to finding the idiom's intended meaning.

The use of pragmatic knowledge is frequently extended to metaphorical connotation. Such an extension of the use of pragmatic knowledge was proposed by Abdullah and Jackson (1998) as they determined that in processing idioms that were different in form but similar in meaning and function to the first language (L1) idioms, second language (L2) learners completely depended on pragmatic knowledge and metaphorical connotation. For instance, with the idiom "to give someone the cold shoulder", the subjects deduced that the word "cold" could be metaphorically associated to "unwelcoming" because "cold" meant the opposite of "warm" (Leung, 2008: 98).

5.4 First Language (L1) Linguistic Knowledge Strategy

Most of previous studies on FL/SL idiom processing has been concerned with transfer. That is to say, the influence of the first language (L1) idioms or pragmatic similarity on FL/SL learner's comprehension of idioms. When attempting to perceiving or discovering the meaning of FL/SL idioms, non-native language learners may remember expressions in their native languages that are identical or similar enough to the FL/SL idioms. Such expressions can support their interpretation

(Cooper, 1999: 320). Yet, FL/SL learners' dependence on their own native language in FL/SL idioms processing may assist or obstruct their comprehension of FL/SL idioms. That is to say, the transferring process from the native language (L1) idioms to FL/SL idioms can be a positive one which assists comprehending or a negative one which obstructs comprehending (Leung, 2008: 87). In this regard, the extent of the effect of the native language (L1) varies a lot according to whether the FL/SL (L2) idiom has comparable counterpart in the native language (L1), and if there is a counterpart, to what extent the native language (L1) resembles or differs from that in FL/SL (L2) (Coryell, 2012: 67).

Irujo (1986: 356) argues that there is a positive transfer from the native language (L1) to FL/SL (L2) in terms of (L1-L2)-identity and similarity. That is to say, the use of the native language (L1) may support FL/SL learners in their understanding of FL/SL (L2) idioms which are identical or similar to the native language (L1) idioms. Abdullah and Jackson (1998, cited in Leung, 2008: 89)'s findings are in line with Irujo's in the sense that there is positive transfer from the native language (L1) to FL/SL (L2) given that the counterparts are identical in form and meaning.

Furthermore, there is also negative transfer in idioms which are identical in form but different in meaning. Mahmoud (2002: 8) presents some cases of negative transfer, in which the error could be attributed to the fact that a completely different form is used in Arabic to express the same meaning of the English idiom, as showed in Table (1):

Idiom	Meaning in English	Meaning in Arabic
head over heels	completely (in love)	upside-down
red-faced	embarrassed	ferocious
stretch one's legs	take a walk	lie down
pull one's leg	something untrue	let him talk

Table (1): Negative Transfer

5.5 Mental Imagery Strategy

Pimenova (2011: 97) defines mental imagery as "seeing a set of mental pictures or images in a person's mind while figuring out the meaning of idiomatic expressions. That is to say, learners make use of their imagination to understand the idiom's meanings visually. Little attention has been paid to the part of this strategy in the process of comprehending figurative language. Though, in some theoretical frameworks, imagery is considered as an important element in finding out the

figurative meaning of idioms (Janyan & Andonova, 2000: 543). Gibbs & O'Brien (1999, cited in Janyan & Andonova, 2000: 543) argue that children and non-native speakers of a language who do not have enough experience in that language may create mental images as a way of comprehending idioms.

Kövecses (2010: 342) contends that an idiom is not only an expression that has a meaning that is somehow special in relation to the meanings of its establishing elements, but it arises from our more general knowledge of the world embodied in our conceptual system. According to Kazemi, Araghi, and Bahramy (2013: 78), mental images that FL/SI learners make in order to comprehend unfamiliar idioms are structured by their conceptual system that has a metaphoric foundation, that is to say, learners know what the idioms actually mean because of the influence that conceptual metaphors have on their mental images. Therefore, this conceptual system provides a motivating relationship between an idiom and its figurative meaning. Because of this motivating relationship, the meanings of idioms are not seen as arbitrary and, therefore, can be better grasped by FL/SI learners. Janyan & Andonova (2000: 547) indicate that although this strategy can assist in discovering the meanings of idioms, the influence of this strategy is particularly noticeable in the processing of idioms.

5.6 (a) Key Word (s) Strategy

Knowing a given word or words in FL/SI unknown idiom can assist in discovering its meaning. This strategy is adapted from Rohani (2012). According to Rohani (2012: 231), FL/SI learners may choose a particular word within a certain idiom as a key to its figurative meaning, the key word is selected by learners because it is known. For instance, learners succeed to comprehend the idiom "to be up to creek without a paddle" because they recognize what "paddle" means so "without paddle" gives an idea that you have a particular problem (Gibbs, 1999: 320). He (ibid.) argues that the idea that certain words in an idiomatic expression are the basic key in defining the figurative meaning of these idiomatic expressions. In fact, what

constitutes the key word in an idiomatic expression is an empirical case; FL/SL learners process an idiom in a literal way until a key word causes some type of figurative processing.

Therefore, from the theoretical background, the current study attempts to shed light on the reasons why EFL college students encounter difficulties with idiomatic expressions. This can be achieved through finding out the reasons behind the mistakes committed by the subjects of the study as well as the translation strategies adopted.

3. Research Methodology

The current study follows a quantitative analysis to investigate Iraqi EFL college students' dilemma of translating idiomatic expressions. The population of the current study encompasses the fourth year students at Al –Muthanna University, Faculty of Education for Human Sciences, Department of English for the academic year (2025-2026). Because the population of the this study is limited, they are considered as a sample of the present study. The sample of the study in question consists of (5) male students and (5) female students.

One of the essential requirements of this study is to construct a test. In this regard, a test has been prepared by the researcher containing multiple questions based on translating idiomatic expressions English into Arabic, which are mostly used and which may cause a serious problem to EFL college learners. The items of the test has been dependent on related literature, putting into consideration the level of the students and the content of the test. To achieve the reliability of the test, the items of the test are given to (3) experts to examine the degree of difficulty and practicality of the test and time allotted. In this respect, some test items were modified according to findings of the pilot administration of the test.

4. Results and Discussions

The EFL college learners in question sit for a test so that their linguistic abilities in translating idiomatic expressions show the difficulties that they encounter when translating such idioms.

Strategy	Strategy No.	Different Strategies Frequencies	Parentage
Key Word (s)	6	5	0.12%
Contextual information	1	13	0.30%
First Language (L1) Linguistic Knowledge	4	4	0.10%
Learner's Background Knowledge	3	17	0.43%
Mental Imagery	5	4	0.10%
Literal Meaning	2	3	0.8%

Table (1): Different Strategies Frequencies Employed by the Subjects of the Questionnaire

The current study has revealed that EFL college students employ a heuristic model in solving the linguistic problems of finding the meaning of idiomatic expressions. According to Cooper (1999: 320), this heuristic model is distinguished from any well-known first language (L1) idiom handling models because although these linguistic models sufficiently define and describe some of the specific strategies, they are very restricted in scope to account for the strategies employed by foreign or second language (L2) students in predicting the meaning of idioms. Concerning the strategies employed in the current study, the results emphasize that there is statistically significance difference in relations of the used strategies in the strategies questionnaire. Table (1) clearly shows that strategy number (3), "previous knowledge" has achieved the highest percentage which is (0.43%). The strategy number (1), namely employing contextual information to predict the meaning of unknown or unfamiliar idioms took the second parentage (0.30%). Moving to the strategy number (6), namely using (a) key word (s) to achieve the meaning of idioms, registered the third parentage (0.12%). Two strategies (4) and (5) achieved similar percentages (0.10%) and (0.10%) respectively. Finally, the strategy number (2), namely using the idiom's literal meaning to achieve the meaning of idioms received (0.8%). The question raised here is why the two strategies: (3) "Previous knowledge"

and (1) "Contextual Information" gained the highest levels in the strategies questionnaire.

Strategy (3), "Learner's Background Knowledge", received (0.43%) because after teaching the subjects of the study how to discover and understand the meaning of idioms by experimenting and evaluating possible answers through a trial and error way, the subjects in questions have become able to make use of whatever background knowledge they possess about idioms, such as pragmatic and real situations knowledge. As for pragmatic knowledge, the learners have been enabled to distinguish different functions that are very important in inferring the meaning of idioms.

Strategy (1), "Contextual Information", gained (0.30%), the subjects of the study have become able to discuss the situation in which the idioms have been embedded and clearly made reference to the meaning of the idiomatic expression. For example, when the subjects in question have been asked about the basis of choosing this strategy in finding out the meaning of the idiom "*let the cat out of the bag*" in: "By mistake", Pam let the cat out of the bag when she revealed the surprise", some students answered that they have not heard this idiomatic expression before, so they could not understand its meaning immediately. Then they interpreted the situation in which the idiomatic expression was embedded and obviously made reference to its meaning. This was achieved by examining the words appearing before and after the idiomatic expression: *mistake*, *revealed*, and *surprise*. By substituting these words with their synonyms, i.e. error, uncover or unveil and something unknown, the idiomatic expression may mean "revealing a secret by mistake".

Concerning strategy (6), which received (0.12%), has achieved the third extent of the strategies employed by the subjects of the stud. In this strategy, the subjects in questions have paid attention to the idiom's elements as the source of figuring out its meaning. Here, the subjects of the study concentrated on one or more of the idiom elements as a way to figure out its meaning; such key words have been chosen by the subjects because they have been familial with them. The following example clearly illustrates the application of this strategy, when the researcher asked the subjects of the study why they selected this strategy to figure out the meaning of the

idiomatic expression, "***Have a mountain to climb***" in: After a bad start to the season, the team has a mountain to climb if they want to win the match", some of the subjects in question stated that they had not encountered this idiomatic expression before. However, they have been able to figure out its meaning as they read it concentrating on the words "mountain" and "climb", the meanings of these words made the subjects of the study think that this idiom might mean "facing a very hard mission". As illustrated in Table (1), strategies (1) and (3) proceed this strategy in their frequency of use. This may be attributed to the fact that not all idioms contain familiar words. Furthermore, most of the idioms employed in this study were extremely figurative in their nature and culturally specific which caused the EFL college students in questions to depend more on the other strategies. That is to say, employing contextual information and employing their background knowledge to figure out the meaning of idioms.

Concerning strategy number (4), First Language (L1) Linguistic Knowledge, achieves (0.10%), the findings of the test revealed that idioms with identical or similar first language (L1) equivalents are more easily understood than those which do not have first language (L1) equivalents. For instance, when the researcher asked the participants about the foundation of choosing this strategy in finding out or guessing the meaning of the idiom "***To put the cart before the horse***" in: "You're eating your dessert first! You've ***put the cart before the horse***", some of the EFL learners in question stated that they had not encountered the idiom before, but when they started to deduce its meaning they remembered an Arabic idiom "**حضر**" **المعلف قبل الحصان** (meaning: He prepared the feeding before getting the horse", and attempted to connect this Arabic meaning with the English idiomatic expression "***to put the cart before the horse***". In fact, the importance of this strategy in deducing the meaning of idiomatic expressions may be discussed as follows: when learners encounter some idiomatic expressions they may translate them into their native language and attempt to perceive identical or similar idiomatic expressions in their native language.

In regard to strategy number (5), Mental Imagery, receives (0.10%), the findings showed that the EFL learners who participated in the test of this study have not paid

enough attention to this strategy. This may be attributed to the fact that this strategy is particularly significant in the processing of transparent idiomatic expressions, while the idioms employed in the current study are basically semi-opaque. Consequently, the literal meaning of such idiomatic expressions does not generally lead to its figurative meaning, thus, no mental image could be produced.

When investigating strategy number (2), Literal Meaning, which achieves only 0.8%, the results reveal that the EFL learners in question are less likely to depend on this strategy when trying to understand the assigned idiomatic expressions because the students at hand must have some scientific extent of metaphorical knowledge in order to connect the literal and the figurative meaning of an idiom. Mantyla (2004: cited in Bjornson, 2010: 20) indicates that if non-native speakers are familiar with the metaphorical nature of idioms, they will often use the literal meaning to assist them in understanding idioms.

Al-Hassan (2009: 120) argues that some of the guessing strategies may be centralized on inductive or deductive reasoning. For example, idiom keyword and literal meaning strategies are based on deductive reasoning, whereas contextual information is based on deductive reasoning. According to Rohani (2012: 191) contends that background knowledge and mental image strategies are considered as respondent based strategies, while linguistic knowledge is the first language (L1) based strategy. The results achieved from the current study concerning strategies (1, 3, 4, and 6) are very much harmony with the findings of many previous studies that greatly emphasized the importance of these strategies to foreign or second language (L2) students in comprehending the meaning of unfamiliar idioms.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions have been arrived at:

1. EFL college learners reveal a weak performance in the idioms familiarity questionnaire; this may be attributed to the absence of idioms subject in the university curriculum of the Departments of English in Iraq.
2. Iraqi EFL learners adopt different idiom deducing strategies. This is an obvious indication of their different learning ways. Inductive and deductive reasoning causes different idiom strategies.

3. The results of the present research show that the using background knowledge strategy (0.43%) to understand unfamiliar idioms has achieved the highest level.
4. The results of the current study add to our knowledge of how Iraqi EFL university students process English unfamiliar idioms when they encounter these idiomatic expressions.
5. Foreign language idiomatic expressions are not always difficult to comprehend or understand, some effective deducing idiom strategies can be useful in inferring the meaning of unfamiliar idioms.

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تقضي معضلات الطلبة العراقيين الدراسين اللغة الإنجليزية لغة اجنبية في ترجمة التعبيرات
المصطلحية (دراسة لغوية تطبيقية)

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الكلمات المفتاحية: تحسنات لغوية ، تحليل نوعي ، تعبيرات مصطلحية

الملخص:

إن الدراسة الحالية هي بحث لغوي تطبيقي في المفردة المكافئة على مستوى الكلمة. و تشخص هذه الدراسة الصعوبات و التحديات في المفردة الغير مكافئة و التي تفرض على ترجمة التعبيرات المصطلحية الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية و بالعكس. و بالإضافة الى ذلك، فأن هذه الدراسة تشخص الطريقة التي يستخدمها الطلبة العراقيين الدراسين اللغة الإنجليزية لغة اجنبية في انتاج المفردة المكافئة الدقيقة و المناسبة في اللغة المقصودة. إن الهدف الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة هو البحث في نوع الصعوبات التي تواجه الطلبة العراقيين الدراسين اللغة الإنجليزية لغة اجنبية في ترجمة التعبيرات المصطلحية، و اقتراح حلول منطقية لهذه الصعوبات. و سوف يتم استخدام منهجية بحثية انتقائية لتحقيق اهداف هذه الدراسة، و تحليل تعبيرات مصطلحية متنوعة.

إن الدراسة الحالية تؤكد الحاجة الى تحسينات في كورسات الترجمة لطلبة المستوى الجامعي الدراسين اللغة الإنجليزية لغة اجنبية، و تطوير برامج تدريب المترجمين، و تحديد اكامل المعرفة المنطقية للمعنى الدقيق للتعبيرات المصطلحية . و من خلال تحليل نوعي لعينات ترجمة ينتجها (100) من طلبة المستوى الجامعي الدراسين اللغة الإنجليزية لغة اجنبية. فأن الدراسة سوف تتقصي التحديات و الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلبة المستهدفين.