

Research Article

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Difficulties That Facing EFL learners Of Second and Third Year of English Department at Omar Al-mukhtar University in Translating Idiomatic Expressions

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Received:
20/05/2024

Accepted:
20/06/2024

Publish online:
30/06/2024

Abstract: Translation is the process of converting an original text written from the source language to a text written in the other language, so translation is a transfer of civilization, culture and thought. Translating idiomatic expressions is a difficult and complex process that requires the student not only to control the languages transmitted to them, but also to have a cultural sense in both languages. This research revolves around the difficulties facing by libyan learners at Omar Al-mukhtar university in translating idiomatic expressions. The aim of the study is to investigate the type of difficulty that students face while translating expressions and trying to propose solutions that may help in reduce these difficulties. The mixed method of the study necessitated the use of a descriptive approach to describe the phenomenon under investigation and a statistical program SPSS used to describe and evaluate the data collected from the questionnaire. The results show that Libyan students face challenges in translating idiomatic expressions from English to Arabic, as evidenced by the varied responses in the observation test. Also, Literal translations indicate a lack of understanding of idiomatic meanings and cultural context. The study concludes with recommendations and suggestions to help students overcome the challenges they face in translating idiomatic expressions.

Keywords: EFL, difficulties, idiomatic expressions.

المخلص: الترجمة هي عملية تحويل النص الأصلي المكتوب من اللغة المصدر إلى نص مكتوب بلغة أخرى، وبالتالي فإن الترجمة هي نقل للحضارة والثقافة والفكر. تعتبر ترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية عملية صعبة ومعقدة تتطلب من الطالب ليس فقط التحكم في اللغات المنقولة إليهم، ولكن أيضاً أن يكون له حس ثقافي في كلتا اللغتين. يدور هذا البحث حول الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب الليبيون في جامعة عمر المختار في ترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية. يهدف البحث إلى استقصاء نوع الصعوبة التي يواجهها الطلاب أثناء ترجمة التعبيرات ومحاولة اقتراح حلول قد تساعد في تقليل هذه الصعوبات. تتطلب الطريقة المختلطة للدراسة استخدام نهج وصفي لوصف الظاهرة قيد التحقيق، وتم استخدام برنامج إحصائي لوصف وتقييم البيانات التي تم جمعها من الاستبيان. وتظهر النتائج أن الطلاب الليبيين يواجهون تحديات في ترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية من الإنجليزية إلى العربية، كما يتضح من الاستجابات المتنوعة في اختبار الملاحظة. وتشير الترجمات الحرفية إلى عدم فهم معاني التعبيرات الاصطلاحية والسياق الثقافي. وتختتم الدراسة بتوصيات واقتراحات لمساعدة الطلاب على التغلب على التحديات التي يواجهونها في ترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الصعوبات، التعبيرات الاصطلاحية.



1.Introduction

Language is a communication system used by a particular community of speakers. It has a literal and a figurative meaning, the literal language means exactly what it says, while figurative language differs from literal one, we don't say exactly what we mean, such meanings characterize concepts such as idioms. Understanding English idioms is important because they require a deeper familiarity of the English language to comprehend what someone means when they use them in a conversation. They are also considered "as part of mastering any language, and they are a prominent natural part of everyday discourse because they reflect cultural and linguistic boundaries and enabling communication between different cultures" (Hawwar (2013)). In the process of translating idiomatic expressions, the problems of translation may occur, as mentioned by Wright (2002, p10), translating idiom is considered to be difficult since idiom cannot be translated as word for word. Idiomatic expressions still pose serious challenges for translators and EFL. In this research the investigation will focus on what difficulties EFL face in translating idioms, suggest solutions and develop strategies that can help or avoid these difficulties. Idiomatic translation problems are best investigated using mixed methods, The methods help to identify EFL learners problems when translating idioms and improves results and using of questionnaire and observation for a sample of students in second and third year in English department at Omar Al Mukhtar University.

1.1 Research questions

1- What are the difficulties that Libyan students encounter in translating idiomatic expressions from English to Arabic?

1.2 Statement of the problem

This study which is conducted in Omar Al Mukhtar University, was to explore the difficulties encountered by Libyan EFL learners in translating idiomatic expressions and the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. Therefore, there is a need to find ways and strategies to help students to overcome these difficulties. These problems usually lead to a poor translation. Several studies shed light the difficulties that students encounter in translating idioms. These studies found that students have poor competence of different idioms. Since students are unaware of the strategies to use in translating idioms, this study sheds light on these difficulties and raises students' awareness of these difficulties and hopefully aims to overcome them.

1.3 Aims of the study

The purpose of the study is

- 1-To explore the difficulties facing by Libyan students in translating idiomatic expressions from English to Arabic.
- 2- To identify the strategies that students use to overcome such challenges.

1.4 Significance

We hope that the results of the study will provide students with some insight into the challenges they face when translating idioms, and that as students become familiar with these difficulties to overcome in translating idioms, their awareness of these difficulties will increase

1.5 Scope and limitations of the study

This study is limited to investigating the difficulties that facing EFL Learners at Omar AL-mukhtar University. Moreover, the study will be conducted at Omar AL-Mukhtar University, Libya during the academic year 2023-2024.

2. Literature Review

Various terms for the idioms are used in the literature such as complex unit, fixed expression, and fixed phrase, (Everaert et al., 2014). There is a wide range of idioms definitions in the literature. According to Larson (1984, p. 20) an idiom is “a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words.” Alexander (1987, p. 178) defined an idiom as “multi-word units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatic rule of use. According to Van de Voort and Vonk (1995) defined an idiom as “an expression whose overall figurative meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of its parts.”. Such a definition is similar to that of Moon (2006), who considered an idiom to be a fixed sequence of words that has a meaning beyond that of its constituent parts. According to Mitsis (2004), an idiom is as a continuum of nonliteral expressions that starts with usual collocations, continues with stable or fixed collocations and metaphorical collocations, and ends with idioms of absolute abstract meaning. Idioms are a phrase or saying that is commonly used in in everyday English to express certain ideas or opinions, they are viewed as one class of figurative expressions that occur in all expressions which can't be understood literally and which functions as a unit semantically (Beekman and Callow (1974).

3. Methodology

The approach conducted in this study to answer the research questions and to investigate the difficulties that EFL learners face in translating idiomatic expressions is a descriptive method. We presented research findings using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. It involved EFL learners majoring in English in the second and third year at Omar Al Mukhtar university.

3.1 Participants

The study focused on EFL students majoring in English in Libya. A purposive random sample of 60 students from Omar Al Mukhtar University were chosen to complete the questionnaire and answer the observation questions. Also, we used the observation, and students' answers have been analyzed using figures.

4. Data Collection Tool

The study presented research findings using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. We utilized two equipment to collect data: We used questionnaire, which is based on the 5likert scale and the participants will be requested to select the choice that better describes the degree of their agreement on the questionnaire statements ;1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. strongly disagree 4. disagree 5. undetermined. Moreover; the SPSS will be used for performing the required statistical process. Also we created a test for EFL students to identify main obstacles in interpreting idiomatic idioms. The test contained ten idiomatic idioms.

4.1 Data Analysis

The data of this study analyzes by using the statistical package for social science SPSS software. The analysis of this data will base on the descriptive analysis. All these items will be applied in order to fulfill the objectives of this study.

5. Findings and Discussions

The first question of this study is: What difficulties do Libyan students face in translating idiomatic expressions from English to Arabic?

Table (1.4) below shows the performance results of Libyan students in the English translation test. Each statement was discussed separately to show the type of difficulties they faced. It is clear that statements 1, 3 and 10 received the highest scores in providing incorrect answers. While statements 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 recorded the highest correct answers.

1- She was under the weather to have to pullout of the championship.

In translating this idiom, Table (1) indicates that (26%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- She felt unwell and was unable to attend the concert.

While (45%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique, such as:

- She was looking forward to winning the tournament, but she was unable to continue.

However, 20% of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- She was preparing for the tournament hard to win the award.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, the term means "that she was so ill or unwell that she had to withdraw from the tournament". According to the Oxford Dictionary of idioms, the expression "under the weather" is commonly used to refer to feeling ill or tired. When we say someone is "under the weather," we mean they are not in a good health. So, the sentence simply means that her poor health condition forced her to withdraw from the tournament.

2_Remember! The show must go on! good luck and break a leg.

As shown in Table (1), this example is translated correctly (100%) only by giving an equivalent example in the target language, such as:

- Remember that the performance must go on! I wish you luck and break your leg.

Therefore, the full meaning of the sentence according to the Oxford Dictionary of idioms is to encourage one to continue performing or working without stopping, wishing the person good luck and success in his or her task.

3_ Now that Dina had let the cat out of the bag.

In translating this idiom, Table (1) indicates that (33.3%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- Now that Mary has revealed the secret.

While (6.7%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique, such as:

- Now that Dina has finished preparing dinner.

However, (53.3%) of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- Now that Dina has had lunch.

Also, 6.7% of the sample did not provide no answer.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, this term means “that Dina has revealed a secret or revealed a truth that had been hidden”.

4- I’d love to buy a car, but it cost an arm and a leg.

In translating this idiom, Table (1) indicates that (83.3%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- I want to travel to Europe, but the costs are very high.

While (6.7%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique, such as:

- I want to learn a new language, but I don't have enough time.

However, (10.0%) of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- I want to buy a car, and I have already done so.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, the idiom, “I’d love to buy a car, but it cost an arm and a leg.” means that a person would like to own a new car, but feels that it is too expensive for him. Expresses the desire to purchase while acknowledging the financial challenges you may face in achieving this goal.

5- You’ve spotted the flaw, Sally. You hit the nail on the head.

In translating this idiom, Table (1) indicates that (40.0%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- O Muhammad, I discovered the truth. You put the phrase on top of it.

While (13.3%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique, such as: Sally, I caught the mistake. You were dealing with the truth in a completely direct way.

However, (20.0%) of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- Sally, I caught the mistake. You were pouring water into the sand.

Also, 26.7% of the sample did not provide no answer.

The example "I discovered the flaw, Sally. I was hitting the truth right on the head" means that the person speaking has discovered a flaw or flaw, and shows this flaw as important and extremely serious. The example also shows the dissatisfaction or annoyance of the person who discovered the error.

6- I have an exam tomorrow, so I'll be burning the middle night oil.

In translating this idiom, Table (1) indicates that (70.0%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- I have an assignment tomorrow, so I will make an extra effort to complete it.

While (10.0%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique such as:

- I have an important meeting tomorrow, so I'll stay up to make sure everything is ready.

However, (20.0%) of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- I have a meeting tomorrow, so I'll relax and get an early sleep.

The example "I have an exam tomorrow, so I will burn the midnight oil" means that the person has an important exam the next day, and therefore he intends to stay up and work hard until late into the night to prepare for this exam

7- I never said that training him would be a piece of cake.

In translating this idiom, **Table (1) indicates that** (86.7%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- I never said running a business would be easy.

While (3.3%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique, such as:

- I never said the project would be done quickly.

However, (3.3%) of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- I never said it would be easy to start life over.

Also, 6.7% of the sample did not provide no answer.

The example "I never said training him would be easy" means that the person speaking may not have expected or believed training would be easy. This example shows reticence or doubt about the ability to complete the training easily.

8- Keep your chin up, we're not lost yet.

In translating this idiom, Table (1) indicates that (56.7%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- Keep trying, failure is not the end of the road yet.

While (10.0%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique such as:

- Don't lose hope, we have a lot of opportunities to take advantage of.

However, (33.3%) of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- Jump from the roof, there is no danger.

The example “Lift your chin, we are not lost yet” means that the person must remain optimistic and trust in the ability to overcome challenges despite the difficulties he may face, and not give up or lose hope, as there is still a chance to achieve success.

9- Please, don't turn a blind eye to what is happening.

In translating this idiom, Table (1) indicates that (70.0%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- Please, do not lose interest in what is happening.

While (13.3%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique, such as:

- Please, do not ignore my request.

However, (13.3%) of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- Please, do not ask for help

Also, 3.3% of the sample did not provide any answer.

The example “**Please do not turn a blind eye to what is happening**” means that the person being addressed is asked not to ignore or ignore current affairs or the current situation. This example expresses the need to be aware and concerned about surrounding matters and not ignore them.

10- Some people take on an allotment and bite off more than they can chew.

In translating this idiom, Table (1) indicates that (23.3%) of the sample provided a correct translation using its equivalent in the Arabic language, such as:

- Some people take on more than they can handle.

While (23.3%) of them provided acceptable answers using the paraphrasing technique, such as:

- Some people go the extra mile to achieve their goals.

However, (33.3%) of the sample gave incorrect answers by translating them literally, such as:

- Some people take allowances and expect to get more without effort.

Also, 20.0% of the sample did not provide no answer.

The example “Some people take allotment and bite off more than they can chew” means that some people go overboard and take on more than they can absorb or handle effectively.

How do Libyan students perceive learning terms in English?

According to participants’ perceptions, what problems, if any, do Libyan English major students face when learning terminology?

Table (2.4) shows the distribution of responses to different statements related to the importance of learning English expressions. The analysis shows that the second statement (“Idioms are important because they reflect and represent culture”) received the highest agreement at 70.0%, demonstrating the importance of culture in language learning. While the seventh statement (“expressions are easy to use”) received the lowest percentage of agreement at 13.3%. It is noted that responses vary widely with regard to agreement with the various expressions, indicating a diversity of views among participants on the importance of English expressions.

Let's look at each statement individually:

1- “ I think it is important to teach English idioms in English lessons”.

Agree: 43.3%, Strongly agree: 50.0%.

Participants generally agreed on the importance of teaching English idioms, with strong agreement with this statement.

The result of the strong agreement and widespread opinion of the importance of teaching English idioms in English lessons indicates a widespread recognition of the importance of these aspects in the development of language skills. This result highlights the necessity of including lessons on English expressions as an essential part of the English language learning curricula, which contributes to improving the level of language understanding and communication skills among students.

2- “Idioms are important because they reflect and represent culture”.

Agree: 70.0%, Strongly agree: 20.0%.

These results show that culture is an important part of language and that idioms largely reflect this culture.

The high agreement rate for this statement, and especially the strong agreement rate, shows that participants see great importance for expressions in reflecting and representing culture. This re-

flects the recognition that linguistic expressions are not just tools for communication, but also a mirror that reflects the values, beliefs and cultural identities of speakers.

3- “I think it is important to encourage EFL students to learn terminology for effective communication”.

Agree: 53.3%, strongly agree: 40.0%.

Here there is an emphasis on the importance of learning terminology to communicate effectively.

The high agreement rate for this statement indicates recognition of the importance of learning terminology in improving the effectiveness of English communication. This reflects the recognition that domain-specific terminology plays a crucial role in understanding concepts and communicating effectively in English language communities.

4- “I believe that learning English idioms is an important part of the English learning experience”.

Undecided: 63.3%, Agree: 33.3%, Strongly agree: 40.0%.

Here there is a diversity of opinions on the importance of idioms in language learning, with some participants strongly favoring agreement.

A high percentage of indeterminacy appears in the responses to this statement, indicating variation in participants' opinions regarding the importance of learning English idioms in the language learning process. However, the strongly high percentage of agreement indicates that there is a group of participants who see learning idioms as an essential and important part of the English language learning experience.

5- “Knowing English idioms is important for me to understand reading texts better”.

Agree: 50.0%, Strongly agree: 43.3%.

These results show the importance of idioms in understanding written texts.

The survey results show that most participants believe that knowledge of English expressions plays an important role in understanding written texts, with a high percentage of agreement and strong agreement confirming this point. This reflects the recognition that English idioms make it easier to understand complex meanings and concepts in texts, which helps improve individuals' reading and comprehension skills .

6- Knowing English idioms is important for me to understand listening texts better”.

Agree: 53.3%, strongly agree: 40.0%.

These results also reflect the importance of idioms in understanding listening texts. The high rates of agreement with this statement indicate that most participants see the importance of English expressions in understanding listening texts.

7- “Idioms are easy to use”.

Strongly disagree: 30.0%, Disagree: 26.7%.

This statement shows a clear lack of agreement between participants regarding the ease of use of expressions.

Yes, these results show differing views among participants about the ease of using English expressions. While some participants find the expressions easy to use, others disagree and think they are not to the same extent. These variations could reflect participants' personal experiences with the use of expressions, as some may find some expressions easy to understand and use, while others find some expressions more complex.

8- I am good at using expressions”.

Disagree: 40.0%, undecided: 23.3%.

This result shows variation in the skill of using expressions among participants.

The survey results reveal a clear discrepancy in the level of participants' confidence in their skill in using English expressions. While some participants disagree that they are completely fluent in using expressions, others indicate that their opinions in this regard are not clearly defined.

The results shown in Table (3.4) confirm the importance of including the teaching of idioms and terminology in the English language teaching curricula in an integrated manner, with a focus on cultural background, context, and effective teaching, in order to improve students' ability to understand and use expressions in a correct and effective manner. Improving these aspects can make expressions less difficult and easier to learn and use in everyday and professional communication.

1- “Idioms are difficult because they contain unfamiliar words”.

Agree 43.3% (frequency = 13), strongly agree 53.3% (frequency = 16).

These results show that the majority of participants find difficulty in idiomatic expressions due to unfamiliar words, with 96.6% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with this view. This indicates that new and unknown vocabulary poses a major challenge in understanding expressions, which underscores the need to enhance vocabulary teaching and provide clear and appropriate contexts for it in English lessons.

2- “The idioms are difficult because they have no equivalent in my native language”.

Agree 46.7% (frequency = 14), strongly agree 46.7% (frequency = 14). The majority of participants (93.4%) find English expressions difficult because there are no equivalents in their mother tongue.

3- Idioms are difficult to understand because there is no cultural background behind them”.

Agree: 53.3% (frequency = 16), strongly agree 30.0% (frequency = 9).
The results indicate that the majority (83.3%) find that a lack of cultural background makes understanding idioms difficult.

4- Lack of experience with terminology makes it difficult to understand”.

Agree 53.3% (frequency = 16), strongly agree 33.3% (frequency = 10).
The results show that 86.6% of participants believe that lack of experience with terminology makes it difficult to understand.

5- “Idioms are difficult when there is no context”.

Agree 70.0% (frequency = 21), strongly agree 23.3% (frequency = 7).
93.3% of participants agree that expressions are difficult in the absence of appropriate context.

6- “Idioms are difficult if they are not taught well in English lessons”.

Agree 60.0% (frequency = 18), strongly agree 33.3% (frequency = 10).
The results show that 93.3% of participants believe that expressions are difficult if they are not taught well.

7- Idioms are difficult because the cultural courses I took were not effective”.

Agree 23.3% (frequency = 7), strongly agree 50.0% (frequency = 15).

For the statement **“Using expressions when giving oral presentations in English will make my speech more natural and effective,”** 63.3% of participants agree that they always or sometimes agree with this statement, suggesting that frequent use of expressions may facilitate communication and make speech more natural and effective.

For the statement “I predict the meanings of expressions:”

%83.3 of participants sometimes or always agreed with this statement, indicating that they felt confident in their ability to understand the meanings of expressions in general.

For the statement “I learn terms through group discussion:”

%60 of participants indicate that they always learn terminology through group discussion, which shows the importance of discussion in learning new terminology.

For the statement “I learn phrases by rote:”

The majority appear to rely on strategies other than memorization, with the overall percentage of those who always or sometimes rely on memorization being less.

For the statement “I learn terms through flashcards:”

It appears that the vast majority (63.3%) do not rely on flashcards as the main means of learning terms, which shows the diversity of learning strategies among participants.

In general, the table shows that learning strategies vary between individuals, and there is a preference for certain strategies over others.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Addressing the challenges faced by Libyan students in translating idiomatic expressions and enhancing their understanding of English terms requires comprehensive strategies that integrate cultural context, effective teaching methods, and diverse learning opportunities. By doing so, educators can better support students in mastering idiomatic expressions and terminology, ultimately improving their language proficiency and communication skills. Based on the results and discussions provided, several conclusions and recommendations can be drawn:

1- Difficulties in Translating Idiomatic Expressions:

- Libyan students face challenges in translating idiomatic expressions from English to Arabic, as evidenced by the varied responses in the translation test.
- Literal translations indicate a lack of understanding of idiomatic meanings and cultural context.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Encourage students to consult reputable dictionaries and online resources for idiom meanings.

- Provide cultural context and explanations to aid comprehension.
- Incorporate more exposure to idiomatic expressions in English language learning curricula.

2- Perceptions of Learning English Terms:

- Participants recognize the importance of idioms in reflecting culture, understanding texts, and effective communication.
- There is a diversity of opinions regarding the ease of using expressions.
- Recommendations:
 - Integrate cultural content into language learning programs to enhance cultural awareness.
 - Develop strategies for teaching terminology to improve communication skills.
 - Provide multiple learning opportunities and diverse content to cater to varying opinions and learning styles.

3- Challenges in Learning Idioms:

- Participants find idioms difficult due to unfamiliar vocabulary, lack of equivalents in their native language, and absence of cultural background and context.
- Recommendations:
 - Enhance vocabulary teaching with clear contexts and examples.
 - Provide cultural background information to aid understanding.
 - Ensure effective teaching of idioms in language lessons.

4- Learning Strategies:

- Participants employ diverse learning strategies, with preferences for group discussions and predicting meanings rather than rote memorization or flashcards.
- Recommendations:
 - Encourage collaborative learning through group discussions.
 - Foster critical thinking skills for predicting meanings.

Provide varied learning materials and activities to accommodate different learning preference.

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