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THE STRATEGIES USED BY LECTURERS IN TEACHING  
TRANSLATION OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

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**Abstract:**

It is known that the lexicon of a particular language is much more than a list of individual words. The English language is full of somewhat formulaic language, especially established idiomatic expressions. Considering everyday situations in which such expressions are used and the significant role that they play in communication, there has been increasing awareness of these expressions in second language teaching and learning. It is therefore very important for lecturers to create strategies to make these expressions more understandable and memorable to their students as possible. This study investigates teaching strategies used by lecturers in teaching translation of idiomatic expressions to translation students and to what extent are these strategies effective. The researchers conducted informal open-ended interviews with experts in the field of translation that analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study revealed that lecturers employ several different strategies in teaching translation of idiomatic expressions to improve students' comprehension, which are authentic materials from real life, teaching within context, using L1 to comprehend L2 expressions, pictures, exercises, and activities, and dialogues and role play. In addition, the lecturers consider these strategies effective and useful in teaching figurative expressions. In light of these findings, the researcher recommends that idiomatic language should be taught inside classrooms before encountering the real English world, and it is the lecturers' role to raise students' awareness of these expressions and explore strategies that can improve students' comprehension and production of these expressions. The study offers pedagogical suggestions on using multimodal strategies to teaching translation of English idiomatic expressions.

**Keywords:**

EFL Learners; Figurative Language; Idiomatic Expressions; Teaching Strategies; Translation

**Introduction**

Idiomatic expressions are an important component of the English language and a key to native-like fluency. The acquisition of these expressions is one of the most outstanding challenges (Belousova, 2015). Accordingly, such expressions should attain a primary concern in language teaching and learning (Khonbi and Sadeghi, 2017). Knowledge of idioms is essential to non-native speakers' understanding of the language that native speakers truly use (Burke, 1998). It is evident that using formulaic language is a sign of language proficiency and enables effective communication. Therefore, understanding and using idiomatic language are both necessary when communicating with native speakers who frequently use these expressions in everyday situations. Another important point of idiomatic expressions acquisition is that these figurative expressions make the language more vibrant and colourful. One cannot engage fully in the English language without having the ability to understand these cultural-specific expressions, and therefore they should be given special attention in language teaching.

The English language is known for being a language of idiomaticity. Carter (1987) defines idioms as restricted collocations that cannot be understood from the literal meaning of the individual words that make them up. Similarly, Huizenga (2000) presents an idiom as a group of words having a meaning different from the meaning of its individual constituents. For instance, the idiomatic expression "pain in the neck" is composed of a number of words (pain / in / the / neck) whose individual meanings do not contribute to the meaning of the expression as a whole; no clear semantic relationship with the figurative meaning of the expression which is an annoying or tedious person or thing. Thus, translating these frozen chunks is considered problematic and to some extent complicated for translation students as they have to translate both meaning and culture. This is attributed to the fact that most of these expressions have their own philosophical, historical, socio-cultural, and even political origin, which cannot be understood properly without context (Sadeghi et al., 2010).

Every culture has developed its own idiomatic expressions in which they occupy a prominent place in its language. Therefore, these expressions incorporate specific cultural and linguistic knowledge (Kovecses and Szabco, 1996). They are coined based on cultural experiences and have cultural implications and associations which make them the most peculiar part of language, and thus the hardest component to be translated. D'Angelo (1984) is of the view that idioms are a source of confusion to learning of language and so they occupy a special place in the teaching of language. Accordingly, no teacher or translator can ignore idioms if a natural use of language is an aim (Fernando, 1996).

Many researchers have acknowledged the importance of teaching figurative language since there is a positive relationship between idiomatic expressions acquisition and communicative competence. This is why innovation and creativity are becoming increasingly important when teaching them. These expressions are considered to be one of the hardest chunks and, at the same time, the most interesting of English vocabulary. In fact, lecturers have a great responsibility to develop educational situations to expose their students to English idioms and provide them with enough opportunities to practice these expressions inside and outside the

classroom (Orfan, 2020). Generally, teaching idiomatic language can lead to improvements in students' receptive and productive skills in several contexts, and teaching materials should include these expressions (Hinkel, 2017). Students do need to be exposed to these figurative expressions to acquire them for language comprehension and production.

### Literature Review

Idiomatic expressions are used frequently in everyday situations in both written and spoken language, and students must definitely encounter them in their daily life, and so need to be addressed efficiently by lecturers. They are common in conversations, print (magazines and journals), and media (movies, radio, and TV) (Lundblom and Woods, 2012). Lately, the attention has shifted from teaching individual words to teaching whole chunks of language, since they are more natural and thus more important in language learning and teaching (Ababneh, 2016). Therefore, at the same time, lecturers need to promote the real use of such expressions in more realistic and natural ways. If non-native speakers do not understand them well, they will never be able to integrate them with the vocabulary term. According to Burke (1998), there is absolutely no method a non-native speaker of English could fully comprehend an American film, news broadcast, TV show, or even a typical dialogue without help; because the English language is loaded with idioms and thus teaching these expressions is undeniably important. By the way, understanding idiomatic language involves going beyond their literal sense; word-by-word comprehension strategy, to integrate figurative meaning.

The teaching of idiomatic expressions is basically different in traditional and modern approaches. Traditional teaching techniques focus on rote learning and memorization, as learners must memorize the idioms provided and defined by teachers (Chen and Lei, 2013). According to numerous scholars, the traditional approach is outdated and time-consuming. Instead, modern approaches have been proposed to substitute the traditional method of teaching idiomatic expressions, such as the cognitive linguistic approach which is often considered the most effective technique in teaching idioms (Cieslicka, 2015). In this approach, the meaning of idiomatic expressions is motivated; these expressions could be analyzed and the real meaning arises from our general knowledge of the world which is existed in our cognitive system (Kövecses, 2012; Langlotz, 2006).

For EFL learners, idiomatic expressions remain a source of perplexity, which is attributed always to a lack of awareness of the figurative usage of these expressions. Strategies used in teaching them are continuously changed and revived to follow ongoing changes in our instructional system (SelvaRaj and Hua, 2019). So, researchers have proposed different strategies to approach and comprehend them. D'Angelo (1984) highlighted the best ways to teach idioms. Firstly, the teacher can define and explain an expression meaning and its origin. Secondly, students can be given different opportunities to use it in the classroom. Thirdly, the new knowledge needs to be employed outside of school.

Zarei (2020) conducted a study to compare the probable effect of four ways of teaching EFL learners' comprehension and production of English idioms, which are visualization, storytelling, game, and lexical awareness techniques. The researcher found that the differences among the four ways in terms of idioms comprehension were not statistically significant. However, the four ways were differentially effective on idioms production. Also, he found that storytelling is quite an effective and easy method to use for students, and teachers can make the classroom atmosphere more exciting by telling stories through pictures. Furthermore,

Suhodolli (2019a) investigated the role of context in teaching English idioms. The findings revealed that context is the most important tool in teaching idioms as it brings students as close as possible to the native-like environment. The researcher showed that context plays a great role in students' comprehension of idioms.

Behtash et al. (2018) examined the effect of audio-visual context and written context on learners' idiom comprehension. The researchers found that audio-visual context was more effective and beneficial for learning L2 idioms than written context. Also, they concluded that audio-visual presentation improved the idiomatic comprehension of the participants. Their findings pinpoint important suggestions for idiom teaching and learning. Also, Iranmanesh and Darani (2018) examined the effect of movies on learning English idiomatic expressions among EFL learners. Their findings show that movies had significant effects on teaching English idiomatic expressions and improve students' English knowledge. The researchers recommended that teachers and syllabus designers can include movies as an effective and interesting method in teaching vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.

Asri and Rochmawati (2017) investigated types of innovative teaching strategies that can be used when teaching English idiomatic expressions. The researchers found that teachers can use several strategies, such as using idioms in essay writing, using authentic materials, creating conversations, using exercises of problem-solving, and making idiom posters. Similarly, Neissari et al. (2017) conducted a study in which they examined the efficacy of humorous idiom video clips on the achievement of EFL learners and found that this method do facilitate EFL learners' idioms achievement and learners show a positive attitude toward their application in the classroom.

Khonbi and Sadeghi (2017) investigated teaching idioms in four modes (role-plays, short movie clip, sentence uses, and definitions) had on students' idiomatic competence, and they found that the use of the four modes positively impacts students' idiomatic knowledge. Likewise, Freyn and Gross (2017) recommended using multimodal approaches in teaching English idioms, such as YouTube videos, digital artistic collage interpretations, and role-plays. Mehrpour and Mansourzadeh (2017) explored the effect of teaching idiomatic expressions through short stories and pictures strategies on students' comprehension. Their study also attempted to identify which strategy (short stories or pictures) is more effective in comprehension of such expressions. The researchers found that teaching through both short stories and pictures was effective in the comprehension of idiomatic expressions, and the students learned the expressions via these strategies in the same way.

The lack of a clear methodology in teaching English idiomatic expressions makes them a stumbling chunk for EFL students, and thus teaching and learning of them would be a hard task indeed. Creating an English-speaking environment in the classroom is of great importance that helps students to understand and learn such expressions. These cultural expressions can be taught in creative ways that go beyond memorization or sightless guessing. Thus, lecturers need to employ effective and flexible strategies in teaching idiomatic expressions and educate their students about them.

### **Objectives Of The Study**

This study aims to explore the strategies used by lecturers in teaching translation of idiomatic expressions, and to what extent are the used strategies effective.

### **Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following two questions:

1. What are the strategies used by lecturers in teaching translation of idiomatic expressions?
2. To what extent are the used strategies effective?

### **Research Methodology**

The present study followed a qualitative approach wherein the research type is exploratory research. Eight English lecturers are purposively selected to be the participants of this study. They are teaching at four Jordanian universities; Yarmouk University, Jordan University, Al-Balqa' Applied University, and Jarash Private University. All the participants have a PhD degree in translation, and have more than ten years of experience in teaching translation. The lecturers were asked to answer two open-ended questions in the interview related to the strategies used by them in teaching translation of idiomatic expressions, and to what extent are the strategies effective. The collected data were analyzed and classified using thematic analysis.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

For better analysis, thematic content analysis was used to analyze data, which is the most commonly used qualitative approach in analyzing interviews. This type of analysis provides flexibility in interpreting data and grouping them into broad themes. Accordingly, six themes that emerged from the lecturers' responses have been presented and discussed below.

#### ***Using Authentic Materials From Real Life***

Authentic materials present real-life examples of everyday language and provide information about the target culture. They serve as a reminder to learners and motivate them. In language teaching, authentic resources are called authentic because they include more realistic and natural examples of language use than those available in textbooks since they are created for real communication. These resources reflect the real-world language, such as TV programs, movies, radio, newspapers, magazines, articles, advertisements, songs, and brochures. These materials promote students with motivation and interest in language learning and result in improving communicative competence. Therefore, lecturers should encourage their students to explore authentic materials in the second language because they could greatly benefit from this kind of exposure, and even find these out for themselves. Considering that these materials help students to understand and use particular expressions relevant to particular situations, and thus improving their knowledge of the idiomatic language. Lecturers can introduce authentic English materials into their classes to expose students to the language as it is spoken.

The findings revealed that lecturers have positive attitudes toward using authentic materials in teaching translation of idiomatic expressions. All lecturers (1-8) supported strongly using authentic materials for exposing students to the real English language and developing their communicative skills as well as confidence in real situations. They suggested many authentic resources used to draw students' attention to idiomatic expressions, such as news reports, magazines, newspapers, brochures, short stories, TV shows, documentaries, songs, movies,

food menus, and websites that list idiomatic expressions' definitions and example sentences. Also, lecturers emphasized the effectiveness of this strategy in teaching translation of idiomatic expressions. In other words, students should practice the language of that world in the classroom, and incorporating authentic resources helps them to acquire good communicative competence. The great thing is that authentic materials are everywhere, which makes them easy to find and simple to practice. So, lecturers must encourage students to explore authentic materials around by themselves since they could greatly benefit from this kind of exposure.

Kovács (2017) emphasized the selection and use of authentic materials in the classroom, such as television shows, news broadcasts, movies, websites or printed materials; for teaching culture-specific elements as idioms. This finding is also consistent with Neissari et al. (2017) who found that humorous idiom video clips do facilitate EFL learners' idioms achievement and learners show a positive attitude toward their application in the classroom. The finding is, furthermore, in line with Iranmanesh and Darani (2018) in those movies had significant effects on teaching English idiomatic expressions and improve students' English knowledge.

### **Teaching Within Context**

Teaching within context is considered to be an effective teaching strategy and students should take advantage of contextual clues to guess the meanings of idiomatic expressions, especially the opaque ones. Idiomatic expressions presented in context are easier for students to understand rather than those presented in isolation, and therefore teaching them should always occur in a linguistically supportive context. In this regard, all lecturers (1-8) revealed that teaching idiomatic expressions should take place in a rich context. They confirmed that this strategy trains students to focus on the contextual clues since these expressions are comprehended with the context in which they are used. According to them, this strategy involves increasing the ability that the expressions will be remembered. In this strategy, lecturers explained that some idiomatic expressions should be presented in a suggestive context and they encourage and ask students to infer the meaning of unfamiliar expressions. Then, they ask students recall expressions that have been presented in the context. This technique would be very useful and effective and results in correct interpretation according to them.

This result is consistent with Cooper (1999) who explored the comprehension strategies used by L2 learners when trying to translate the meanings of English idioms and found that the most commonly used strategy was guessing from context. One can say that lecturers should focus more on developing students' guessing strategy as it can help them for achieving of meaning. Also, this finding agrees with a study conducted by Alhaysony (2017) who emphasized the importance of teaching and learning idioms within context, and teachers should equip students with appropriate skills to use the context in guessing the figurative meaning of idioms. The finding is also consistent with Alias (2017) who recommended that teachers must be aware of guessing strategy in comprehending idioms and educate their students about it. The finding is, furthermore, in line with those of Al Hassan (2019) and Suhodolli (2019a) in that using context is an effective approach in teaching idiomatic expressions.

### ***Using L1 To Comprehend L2 Idiomatic Expressions***

As a matter of fact, not all idiomatic expressions are equally difficult for students to master. An important factor that affects L2 expressions comprehension is cross-language overlap, which is the degree to which L2 expressions correspond to L1 expressions. To decode the

meanings of L2 idioms, students consider both the literal meaning of expressions components and their similarities to figurative expressions in L1 (Pimenova, 2014).

According to lecturers 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8, in an attempt to understand the meanings of L2 expressions, students can compare both literal meanings of expressions components and their relations to expressions in their native language. Lecturers consider this strategy an effective way of teaching translation of idiomatic expressions. Indeed, cultural knowledge of both the SL and TL is an important factor since there is a positive transfer in terms of identical and similar expressions. Positive transfer occurs when the L1 can be used to produce expressions in the L2 because the forms and patterns from the L1 are identical or similar to the ones in the L2, and this brings about correct L2 expressions. The more semantic similarity between languages, the more comprehensible and translatable expressions will be. Therefore, expressions that are identical in both the SL and TL will be the easiest to comprehend and produce. Such identical and similar expressions between cultures reflect universal shared bodily experiences.

This finding is compatible with the finding of Pimenova (2014) who recommended a task where students are asked to write two or three idioms that have both the same meaning and structure in their native language and English, also two or three idioms that have the same meanings but different lexical constituents, or vice versa. Accordingly, a comparison of L1 and L2 idiomatic expressions is a beneficial strategy for raising students' awareness about the cross-linguistic variation of figurative expressions in L1 and L2. Similarly, this finding is supported by a study conducted by Alhaysony (2017) who found that teachers should try to highlight connections between the learners' first and target languages, because they rely on their first-hand knowledge and experience of idioms anyway when trying to understand idioms in a foreign language.

### ***Using Pictures***

One important feature of language education is the retention of previously learned materials; the ability of students to recall or remember things after a while. Idiomatic expressions can be taught based on amazing and colourful pictures. This indicates that teaching such expressions can be interesting and fun. When students find pleasure and joy in what they learn, they undoubtedly want to know more about it and thus perform better. It can be said that using pictures in teaching figurative expressions is a creative and effective mnemonic strategy, especially if the pictures are memorable and humorous. In this respect, lecturers 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 remarked that pictures have an important effect on students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions where the lecturers show the students a picture associated with an idiomatic expression. Then, students being asked to guess the expression signified in the picture. They added using pictures can improve students' ability to recall and remember figurative expressions.

This finding is in parallel with Fotovatnia and Khaki (2012) who conducted a study in which the role and pedagogical implications of pictorial cues in teaching and learning idiomatic expressions were emphasized. Besides, this finding is also supported by Suhodolli (2019b) who stated that the use of pictures is one way of teaching idioms. The finding is also consistent with Mehrpour and Mansourzadeh (2017) who conducted a study to investigate the effect of teaching idiomatic expressions through pictures and short stories, and found that teaching such

expressions through both short stories and pictures was effective in comprehension of idiomatic expressions.

### ***Using Exercises And Activities***

Idiomatic expressions can be taught in many ways, giving students different written exercises might help them to comprehend these figurative expressions, such as filling in blanks with a suitable idiom, matching idioms to their definitions, circle the correct meaning, using idioms in essay writing, multiple-choice tasks, and many more. This strategy is interesting and can be very effective for teaching translation of idiomatic expressions and increasing students' comprehension. In fact, teaching these figurative expressions through exercises is definitely a convincing way, and students might enjoy and benefit from these activities.

Five of the lecturers (1, 2, 4, 6, and 8) proposed that exercises are useful for students when teaching figurative language, and help them to understand and expand their knowledge of these expressions. Lecturers suggested different exercises that can be given in form of a worksheet, such as gap-filling, using idiomatic expressions to answer given questions, writing sentences or a short paragraph, and matching questions to possible responses. Lecturers stressed the importance and effectiveness of exercises in enhancing different language skills including translation of idiomatic expressions. This finding is in the same line with Asri and Rochmawati (2017) who found that teachers may use several strategies in teaching idiomatic expressions, and using exercises are one of them.

### ***Dialogues And Role Play***

One activity that can draw students' attention to idiomatic expressions is to teach them through role-playing. It is a common strategy for communicative use of language where students take on the roles to perform in front of the class. In other words, students need to conceptualize a situation and create a conversation using selected idiomatic expressions. It is therefore an effective teaching strategy that can help students learn expressions in context and express themselves.

Lecturers 1, 3, 4, and 6 revealed that for increasing students' understanding and practising of idiomatic expressions, dialogues and role-playing can be used. They added, dialogues offer situations for students to practise idiomatic expressions within the conversation, and it is an effective method and it works in teaching translation of such expressions. Interestingly, these expressions can be presented in a way that students use them in action instead of just memorizing. Consequently, the students find the opportunity to practice such expressions in a natural environment; in dialogues which they compose. The dialogues supposed to be rich in idiomatic expressions, which provide students with opportunities to practice the oral skill before facing the real English world. Besides, dialogues and role-playing can make it easier for learners to keep in mind the dialogue that they created while practising with the group. This strategy also makes students enjoy the experience of learning idiomatic expressions in the company of their colleagues.

Role-playing has different advantages in promoting naturalness and creativity for better retention and recall of figurative expressions. This finding is in line with Moslehi and Rahimy (2018) who found that there is a positive relationship between role-play through dialogues and knowledge of English idioms. Similarly, Afshar and Esmaili (2017) concluded that dialogues including idioms offer students opportunities to perform and practice the oral skill before

encountering the real English world. Likewise, Freyn and Gross (2017) recommended using a multimodal approach to teaching English idioms, among them is role play. The finding is, furthermore, in line with those of Khonbi and Sadeghi (2017) in that among the different teaching modes in idioms, the most beneficial was role play.

### Conclusion

The study problem is largely related to the absence of a specific strategy and methodology to teach EFL students about English idiomatic expressions. This problem has broadly made English idiomatic expressions an arduous task for EFL students to comprehend. Thus, the study highlights strategies to be used by lecturers toward teaching translation of idiomatic expressions.

Considering the pervasiveness of idiomatic expressions in everyday communication and their perplexing nature for students, idiomatic language may be introduced inside the classroom so that students can begin to employ them successfully in natural settings. Since idiomatic language involves cultural and linguistic features that are challenging to students, it is however the responsibility of lecturers to explore the best strategies that will make their students becomes motivated and interested in learning the idiomatic language.

The study revealed that lecturers employ different strategies in teaching translation of idiomatic expressions, which are using authentic materials from real life, teaching within context, using L1 to comprehend L2 idiomatic expressions, using pictures, using exercises and activities, and dialogues and role play. The study also discovered that using several strategies to teach such expressions could be effective and beneficial to students. These strategies can evoke awareness among students and help them to understand the nature of these figurative expressions in general.

Toward improving students' receptive and productive skills, idiomatic language comprehension is essential. EFL students need authentic materials including news reports, magazines, brochures, short stories, TV shows, documentaries, songs, movies, food menus, and websites to improve communication skills and understand idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic expressions can as well be taught using amazing and colourful pictures. Exercises and activities are other suitable strategies for making idiomatic expressions interesting for EFL students. In fact, dialogues and role-playing can effectively increase students' understanding and practising of idiomatic expressions. Hence, all these afore-stated strategies enable students to enjoy learning idiomatic expressions. Therefore, the study contributes toward providing strategies that could facilitate teaching translation of idiomatic expressions.

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