

A Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach to Understanding English and Arabic Idioms of Emotions

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Abstract

The present study investigates the conceptual metaphor-based approach to idiomatic expressions of emotions in English and Arabic. Through examining idioms related to emotions such as anger, happiness, and sadness, the study explores metaphorical language structures within each language, as well as how these metaphors affect bilingual learners. The study also explores the impact of L1 (native language) transfer on idiom interpretation in the TL (target language). For these reasons, we conducted a mixed approach addressing 42 correspondents. The results show that when idioms are presented within a framework based on their underlying conceptual metaphors, they can be better understood and remembered than without any conceptual framework context. The study also explores how cultural context influences idioms of emotions and how being conscious of conceptual metaphors can help in second-language learning. Among the four categories of idioms studied, the highest success rate is Shared Metaphorical Concepts at 86.2%, indicating that a universal or general metaphor across languages greatly helps L2 learners in understanding and interpreting. The lowest score is English Idioms with No Arabic Equivalent Metaphors at 57.1%, which suggests that metaphor remains the main challenge for learners. In addition, the findings show that the conceptual metaphor-based approach is a more effective pedagogical method for teaching idioms in EFL contexts, since it increases one's awareness of idioms and bridges the linguistic and cultural gap between English and Arabic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Idioms are indispensable components of any language, and they reflect the cognitive, cultural, and conceptual frameworks of its speakers. Emotional idioms, in English as well as Arabic, carry connotations that are beyond the literal metaphorical structures. Emotions such as anger, happiness, and sadness are common, yet they are shaped and presented differently in various cultures (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2000). For instance, the metaphorical use of “anger” in idioms such as “boiling with anger” or “a heart of stone,” which perceives “anger” as “heat” and “heart” as “lack of empathy,” illustrates how such metaphorical mappings can influence our expression of emotions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is one theory that proposes that metaphors are rooted in thought and central to human experience. Metaphors are not only linguistic but fundamental

to thinking and emotions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In English, we are familiar with such metaphors. For example, metaphors such as ANGER IS HEAT are common, as seen in idioms like "fanning the flames of anger" or "boiling with anger," both of which conceptualize anger as heat. Hence, metaphor is universal in all cultural groups, but its linguistic rendering and expressive use differ according to cultural aspects.

Learning idiomatic phrases in a second language (L2) can be difficult because second language learners (L1) often use their native language (L1) to decipher idioms in the target language (L2). According to Irujo (1986), L1 transfer can either help people understand each other when the idioms are similar or make them confused if there is no direct counterpart. This research paper examines the impact of first-language transfer on the comprehension of idioms in Arabic and English. It shows specifically the ways in which one language's familiarity with metaphorical structures might help or block comprehension in another.

To improve idiom understanding and remembering, the CM approach categorizes idioms according to their shared conceptual metaphors. As a result, the metaphorical meanings of idioms are better understood by students using CMT rather than more conventional approaches like rote memorization (Boers, 2000). Admittedly, Kövecses and Szabó (1996) and Beréndi et al. (2008) found that categorizing idioms according to common metaphors improves memory and comprehension. For example, the English idioms "fanning the flames of anger" and "boiling with anger," which both derive from the concept ANGER IS HEAT, are more easily understood when introduced in conjunction with one another.

Many emotional metaphors in Arabic are similar to those in English. For instance, the Arabic idiomatic expression "غضب يغلي في داخله" (meaning "ghadab yaghli fi dākhlīhi") conveys "anger is boiling inside," reflecting the idea that anger is like heat or, in English, "boiling with anger." Moreover, similar to the English phrase "a heart of stone," another example in Arabic is "قلبه مثل الحجر" ("qalbuḥ mithl al-ḥajar"), which means "his heart is like stone." In both cases, the metaphor of hardness denotes a lack of empathy. The Arabic phrase "الدم يغلي" (meaning "the blood is boiling") is an example of the increased use of physical imagery in Arabic idioms, which frequently employ the use of bodily parts to convey emotions.

The purpose of this research is to analyze how well the CM approach helps in comprehending and remembering Arabic and English idioms related to emotions. It examines the effects on the bilinguals' comprehension and memorization of idioms when they are grouped according to common conceptual metaphors. Further, the research will look at the function of L1 transfer, specifically how bilinguals' prior knowledge of their native language helps or blocks their ability to grasp emotional idioms in English. Gass (1979) pointed out that the level of idiom similarity between languages determines whether L1 transfer aids or hinders understanding.

Although there are certain common metaphors that are used differently in various languages, such as ANGER IS FIRE ("boiling with anger" or "fanning the flames of anger") and HAPPINESS IS LIGHT ("beaming with joy"), these metaphors are often realized differently across languages. Hence, understanding these metaphors is crucial for effective bilingual idiom comprehension and usage. The results will shed light on how to better grasp and use idiomatic expressions using conceptual metaphors and how to improve second language learning generally. To this end, our study seeks to explore if there are any remarkable differences in interpretation accuracy among the four idiom categories. Also, it investigates how comprehension accuracy differs between idioms with metaphorical equivalents and those

without any direct equivalents.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

According to CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), it has been shown that the organization of abstract domains, more specifically for emotional experiences in terms of language usage, is constructed and specified via metaphorical mappings. In such a framework, metaphor operates at the level of cognition, influencing the mental representation and communicative rendition of non-embodied ideas by anchoring them in sensorimotor and perceptual experiences. The metaphor "anger is heat" recurrently materializes in both English and Arabic linguistic data. In English, this mapping generates expressions such as "boiling with anger," "seething with rage," and "hot under the collar," all of which frame anger as a thermodynamic accumulation that risks rupture. Parallel constructions in Arabic are observable in "الغضب يغلي" (al-ghadab yaghli, "anger boils") and "غضب يشتعل" (ghadab yashta'il, "anger ignites"), which likewise encode the emotional in terms of surging and combusive heat. Al-Haq & Al-Sharif (2008) describe the occurrence of the metaphor in both linguistic varieties and note that this trajectory can withstand transplantation to culturally heterogeneous land. Derki (2022) suggests that this metaphor plays a predominant explanatory and discursive role in [Modern Standard Arabic], in parallel to its functional centrality in English. Albufalasa and Vorobeva (2020) generalize the comparison further by recognizing the same metaphorical network in Russian, suggesting a cross-linguistic, if not universal, cognitive model of 'the experience of writing system praying' as 'anger.'

Metaphorical language goes beyond vocabulary; it participates in the structuring of emotional cognition itself (Kövecses, 2000). The conceptual metaphor HAPPINESS IS LIGHT is present in both English and Arabic, manifestly so in the relevant idiomatic expressions. English examples such as "walking on sunshine" or "a bright future" invoke light as the source of pleasant affect, while Arabic idioms such as "وجهه مشرق" (wajhuhu mushriq), literally "his face is shining," convey the same alignment of happiness with luminous properties.

Metaphor sets—clusters of idioms that prototype a single conceptual metaphor—serve as heuristics in the language classroom. The metaphor ANGER IS HEAT, for example, is realized through the English "blowing your top" and the Arabic "غليان الدم" (ghalyān al-dam), or "boiling blood." Acknowledgement of such metaphoric sets allows learners to map a conceptual space of anger across typologically different languages.

Teaching frameworks with the inclusion of CMT contribute to substantial pedagogical advantages. Learners internalize figurative meaning more efficiently through a conceptual map than through rote memorization (Boers, 2000). The figurative idioms "blow your top" and "غليان الدم" (ghalyān al-dam) thus achieve relative transparency when presented as instantiations of the underlying, nationally unsuspected metaphor ANGER IS HEAT.

2.2. Emotions in Language: Cross-Cultural Differences and Similarities

Emotions are a universal part of human life, but their linguistic coding is highly determined by culture. Although both English and Arabic use rich metaphorical systems to represent emotions, expressions are colored more in one than the other by cultural, social, and historical filters; here, we have found intriguing correspondences as well as significant discrepancies.

One of these examples is the conceptualization of what anger is. The metaphor "ANGER IS HEAT" is commonly found in both English and Arabic. However, its realization diverges. English tends to portray it as a force like a highly pressurized liquid or an explosive one,

especially in idiomatic expressions such as “boiling with anger,” “flipping your lid,” and “blowing off steam,” where the notion of outward release is paramount. Arabic, however, tends to represent it more as a fire banked deep inside oneself, such as “غضب يشتعل” (ghadab yashta’il—anger ignites) or “جمرة في الصدر” (jamrah fi as-sadr—ember in the chest). This mirrors a cultural emphasis on experiencing the emotion of anger as an internal, lingering phenomenon located in the heart, and, for example, expressed in “غضب في قلبه” (ghadab fi qalbihi—rage/anger in his heart) (Lakoff & Kövecses, 1987; Kövecses, 2005).

Human languages often link HAPPINESS with LIGHT and HEIGHT, as seen in English idioms like “on cloud nine,” “walking on air,” and “beaming with joy.” These expressions consistently convey a sense of weightless optimism. Arabic captures this feeling with phrases such as “يشرق وجهه” (yushriqu wajhuhu—his face becomes effulgent) or “فرح يغمر قلبه” (farah yaghmaru qalbahu—joy pools in his heart). The Arabic terms, however, frequently have a broader sense of inner radiance and the quality of being blessed (barakah), or morally pure and luminous from within, more than mere external expression (Kövecses, 2000; Al-Khalil, 2011).

Grief also offers another cross-cultural parallel in the metaphors of DARKNESS and, significantly, WEIGHT. English uses SADNESS IS DOWN in expressions such as “feeling down,” “weighed down by sorrow,” and “heavy-hearted.” Arabic has a potent mirror with “قلبه مثقل” (qalbuhi muthaqal—his heart is heavy) as well as “الحزن يثقله” (al-huznu yuthqiluhu—the grief weighs him down). Their mutual concern with weight signifies a universal bodily condition. The Arabic notion, in contrast, may be able to link the emotional load to social or familial responsibilities as a result of its collectivist cultural aspect (Wierzbicka, 1999; Maalej, 2004).

Fear experience shows how a common physiological state (coldness) is linguistically represented. Both languages employ the metaphor FEAR IS COLD: English with “a cold sweat” or “a chill of fear,” and Arabic more literally with “برد في عروقه” (cold in his veins). They differ on what comes next. English idioms often refer to the desire to flee or sidestep the danger: running scared, frozen in fear. Arabic terms, however, can stress the internal (especially upon its paralyzing function) nature of fear with “تجمد دمه” (“tajammada damuh”—his blood froze), highlighting the provoked physical paralysis more than a desire to flee (Kövecses, 2010; Yu, 1998).

The expression of love and other basic emotions would similarly reveal this interdependence between reflexive processes. In English, love is described as a JOURNEY (“we’re at a crossroads”), UNITY (“we are one”), or a PHYSICAL FORCE (“there was a spark”). The overwhelming theme in Arabic love poetry and prose is visceral, felt deeply in the heart and liver (“يا كبدي”—ya kabidi—oh my liver), with a focus on depth of attachment and suffering. Words such as “حب يلفح القلب” (hubb yalfahu al-qalb, “love that scorches the heart, bridge the realms of emotion and physical affliction, illustrating a tradition where love is inseparable from yearning and poignant beauty. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Fakhri, 2018).

In short, emotions in English and Arabic (as with all languages) are metaphorically rooted in shared experiences, but their linguistic packaging is culture-specific. English tends to emphasize outside expression, action, and the single psychological state. In Arabic, which shares many underlying metaphors with English, the emphasis is often on the inner, somatic experience of affect as part of a deeper spirituality, morality, or sociality. This comparative examination highlights that emotional language is not simply a reflection of feeling but instead a cultural product, where the difference in words allows us to view through different lenses.

2.3.Previous Studies on Idioms in English and Arabic

The cross-linguistic study of idioms has been considerably developed by employing Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which argues that abstract concepts such as emotions are systematically formed in terms of more concrete, physical experiences. This study highlights that, although the metaphorical basis of emotions is likely to be cross-cultural, they are encoded in culturally specific idioms, which have implications for language acquisition and translation.

A fundamental point in the SL literature is that of cross-linguistic concept transfer. Irujo (1986) points out that L2 idiom comprehension is, in fact, strongly related to whether the corresponding conceptual metaphor exists or does not exist in the foreign language learner's first language. This distinction is clear in English and Arabic. For instance, the common metaphor ANGER IS HEAT helps in understanding both the English expression “boiling with anger” and the Arabic expression “غضب يشتعل” (ghadab yashta’il) as well. In contrast, idioms that draw on culture-bound schemas, like the English “kick the bucket” (which relies on a historical image of suicide by hanging) or the Arabic “طلع من دهييه لدايه” (ṭala‘ min dahiyyah li dāhiyyah—to go from one disaster to a worse one), present significant obstacles because there is no conceptual equivalence for them (Boers & Demecheleer, 2001, p. 912; Littlemore, 2011).

Studies on emotion idioms always show that they serve as storehouses of cultural values. Research has found that Arabic emotional expressions are often internalized, related to central concepts involving the heart (qalb) and both moral fortitude and patience (ṣabr). For example, expressions such as “غضب في قلبه” (ghadab fī qalbi—he felt ghadab in his heart) or “قلبه مثقل” (qalbuḥu mutthakal—his heart heavy [with emotion]) indicate a proclivity to focus on the long-term affective state of an individual. In English, by comparison, such trains of meaning tend to externalize more the physiological dynamism of these relations, with a stress on visible expression and release, as in “blowing off steam,” “jumping for joy,” or “being down in the dumps” (Kövecses, 2005; Yu, 1998). This divergence mirrors larger cultural attitudes toward the expression and suppression of emotion.

The pedagogical implications of this conceptual approach are substantial. Expanding on CMT, scholars have researched the effect of metaphor awareness in language learning empirically. Research has shown that instruction of the conceptual metaphors themselves (e.g., categorizing idioms like “a heart of stone,” “cold-hearted,” and “hard-hearted” under the conceptual metaphor A LACK OF AFFECTION IS COLD/HARD MATERIAL) gives language learners a conceptual framework for better understanding, retention, and recall. It involves a more interpretive approach to idiomatic meaning, by which learners can use the idiom's known source meaning to guess at (or prompt) the meaning of less familiar idioms with a similar conceptual base (Boers, 2000; Beréndi et al., 2008). Its strength is its ability to emphasize cross-linguistic parallels and contrasts.

To sum up, idiomatic expressions found in English and Arabic could be analyzed with reference to embodied universal experiences as played against culture-specific conceptualizations. The use of Conceptual Metaphor Theory both provides a strong theoretical framework for these contrasts and similarities and, at the same time, is a beneficial pedagogical technique. By shedding light on the metaphors that underpin idiomatic language, learners can better interpret the complex world of figurative language in a second (foreign) tongue, transforming their experience from merely receiving random sequences into understanding an ordered and reasoned body.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

A mixed-methods approach is employed in this study to investigate idioms related to emotions in English and Arabic, with particular emphasis on the conceptual metaphors that they instantiate. Through both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this study subverts the idiomatic expressions to emotion mapping and explores how metaphorical representations are grounded in L1 and L2. This approach will shed light on the cultural factors that affect the conceptualization and understanding of idioms and provide a comprehensive understanding of the metaphorical representation of emotions in the two languages.

The qualitative analysis refers to the recognition and classification of English and Arabic emotional idioms on the basis of their conceptual metaphors. There are four types of idioms:

1- Shared Metaphorical Concepts: Idioms that have "anger" as common figurative language in the source and target languages, for example, "blow your top" / "غليان الدم" (ghalayan al-dam).

2- English Idioms with No Arabic Equivalent Metaphors: Idioms such as [bite the bullet], which means urging oneself or someone else to do something that is painful but necessary and through having courage, and which doesn't have any direct equivalents in Arabic.

3- Idioms with Shared Meaning but Different Imagery: Idioms with the same meanings but different imagery, such as (kill two birds with one stone.)

4- Arabic Idioms with English Metaphor Equivalents: Arabic idioms that you can find a harder equivalent for in English, such as "اشتعل غضباً" (ishtāla ghadaban)—"boiling with rage."

These idioms are examined with respect to the emotions they express—anger, joy, and fear—as well as their metaphorical grounds. The qualitative approach is used as a method of analysis to classify idioms and see the metaphorical mappings that mirror the way emotions are conceptualized in English versus Arabic.

The quantitative part involved a questionnaire that was distributed to 42 participants (9 females and 33 males), all bilingual in English and Arabic. The questionnaire measures participants' understanding and interpretation of emotional idioms in the four categories as described above. The goal is to determine how well the idioms and their meanings can be recognized and grasped by speakers of each language and whether or not common metaphors help explain how an idiom gets its figurative meaning.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The participants of the current study are 42 bilingual speakers (age range: 18 – more than 44) of both English and Arabic, who belong to two groups: native speakers of Arabic (n=28) and other L1s (n=14). They are then assigned to interpret 20 idioms belonging to four categories: 1- Shared Metaphorical Concepts, 2- English Idioms With No Arabic Equivalent, 3- Idioms With Shared Meaning But Different Imagery, and 4- Arabic Idioms with English Metaphor Equivalents. Participants indicate on a 1-5 scale how confident they are (1 = Not Confident, 5 = Extremely Confident). Correct responses are the ones that identify both the idiomatic sense and the metaphorical concept.

Participants rate their level of understanding for each idiom on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 to 5), where "1" means "completely misunderstood" and "5" means "completely understood." This provides a measure of the ease of interpretability for each type of idiom. The answers are

processed to extract the pattern of understanding, and this information is related to the shared metaphors and cultural meaning of the idioms.

Specifically, the paper investigates how cross-linguistically shared metaphors (e.g., ANGER IS FIRE) are understood in comparison to culture-specific idioms or those that lack direct counterparts between languages. The research also investigates whether idioms of one language are clearer to speakers of the other language, depending on whether they have a conceptual metaphor in common.

4. SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

4.1. Results

1- Shared Metaphorical Concepts

This group of idioms focuses on those that express similar semantic domains using shared metaphors. For instance, the phrase “on cloud nine” in English and its Arabic equivalent "يحلق من السعادة" (it literally means "flying in happiness") both represent happiness through a vertical transportation metaphor, in which the direction of UP is used to indicate an emotional high. The experimental data showed that this class had the highest performance, and the success rate was 86.2%. This high level of accuracy indicates that the existence of a common, cross-linguistic conceptual metaphor greatly aids in understanding and interpreting for L2 learners. The fact that Arabic L1 speakers performed significantly better (90.7%) than did non-Arabic-L1 individuals (76.4%) additionally emphasizes the benefit of native language familiarity with the metaphorical concept upon which they are being tested.

2- English Idioms with No Arabic Equivalent Metaphors

This group includes idiomatic expressions that lack a direct equivalent in Arabic, including “Bite the bullet” and “Kick the bucket.” Without any metaphorical mapping, these idioms would have been relatively opaque and probably could only be understood by analyzing the text in context and drawing contextual inference from new relations between concepts. Consequently, it was this group that observed the lowest general success rate of 57.1%, verifying that conceptual difficulty is the primary issue here. The significant difference in performance between two groups, such as Arabic L1 (63.6%) and Other L1 speakers (43.6%), demonstrates that while there may not be a direct correlation, more advanced learners of English are likely, at the same time, drawing upon stronger automatic translation skills possibly tied to L1 background in this cohort.

3- Shared Meaning, Different Imagery

In this category, we provided idioms that had different metaphorical images but expressed similar ideas, e.g., “Blow your top” in English (indicating an explosion where pressure is increased) and the Arabic —عندما ينفذ صبره— “His patience runs out.” This performance of the participants reflects a more or less common semantic core, which explains the comprehension rate of 67.1% as reflected in the graph score. However, the different surface forms and metaphorical vehicles add another layer of complexity, so performance in this range lags behind that found in Category 1. The difference in the success rate between L1 Speak Arabic (73.9%) versus Other 53.6% suggests that when people are familiar with the culture's ideal

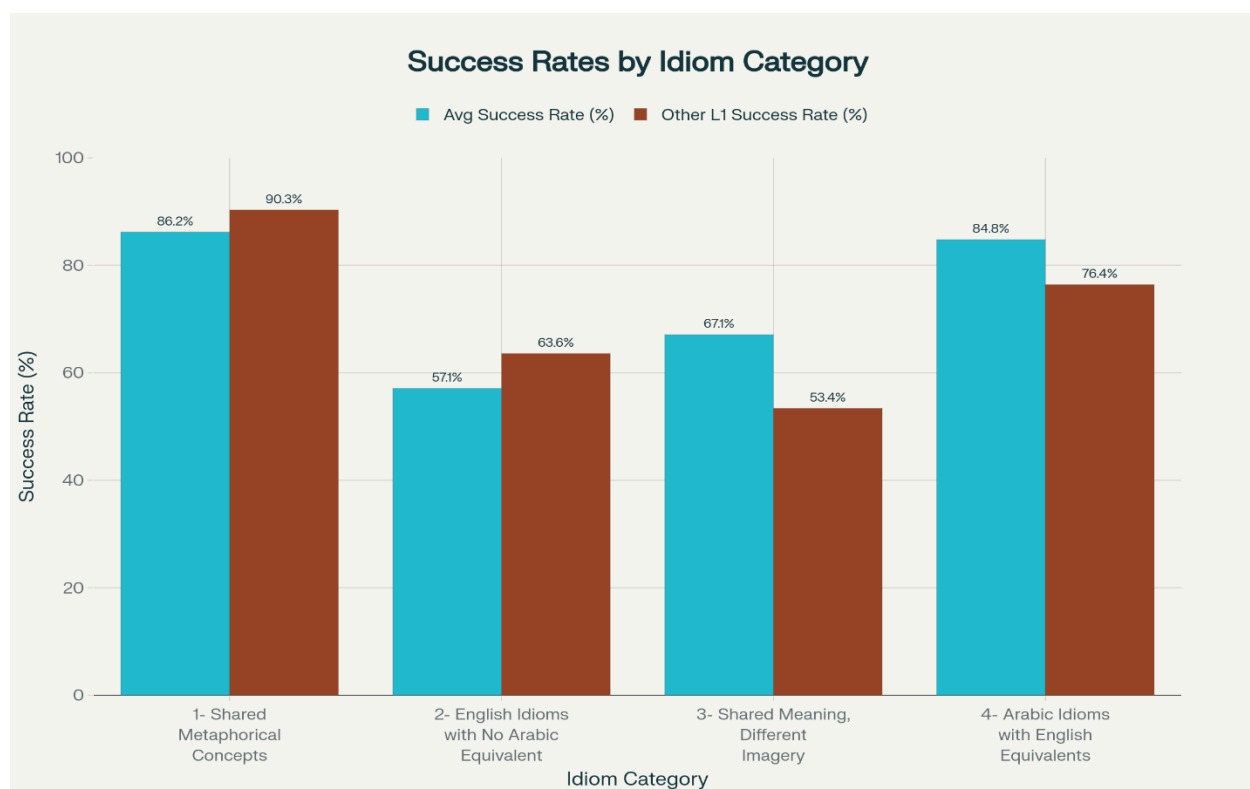
imagery, they may be more effectively mapping and accepting an alternative expression for a well-known concept.

4- Arabic Idioms with English Equivalents

This category included idioms that are unique to Arabic but have forms of functional and metaphorical equivalents in English, e.g., “اشتعل غضبا” (He ignited with anger), matching “Boiling with rage.” The empirical data shows a higher level of pragmatic equivalence and an overall success rate of 84.8%, which surpasses only Category 1. This suggests that, when meaning can be construed in terms of a familiar metaphor imported from the L2 (English) into an L1 (Arabic) linguistic form, understanding is relatively successful. It is not surprising that native Arabic L1 speakers scored the highest (88.6%), but that Other L1 speakers scored so well (76.4%) shows that the linguistic distance of participants can be widened by transparency to evoke a shared, metaphorical experience (e.g., anger is heat).

4.2. Discussion

Graph 1 below shows a clear distribution of the four categories of idioms and their success rates with regard to the 42 correspondents in the questionnaire.



Graph 1

A crucial aspect of our study was to determine and classify the types of errors on the part of participants for all four idiom categories. An analysis of the responses by the 42 participants provides strong evidence for the three error type categories: 1- Literal Translations, 2- Cultural Mismatches and 3- Partial Understandings.

Literal translations were the most common and overt category of errors, in which individuals understood the idiom according to its surface (i.e., word-for-word) translation, rather than its figurative meaning. This mistake was most often found in the section of English Idioms with

no Arabic Equivalent Metaphors (e.g., 'Bite the bullet,' 'Spill the beans,' and 'Kick the bucket'). For instance:

"Bite the bullet" was often rendered word-for-word into Arabic as "عض على رصاصة" ('adda 'ala rasasa) "bite on a bullet", by some participants, without its idiomatic significance of experiencing an unpleasant but unavoidable ordeal.

In many cases, "kick the bucket" was interpreted physically, such as by one subject who defined it as 'aghdaba shakhsan' ("to anger a person") or 'rakala dalwu alma' ("kick the water bucket"), rather than as a metaphor for death.

Cultural mismatches struck when participants used a metaphor that was inappropriate in the cultural context or truthfully created an image not corresponding to the meaning of the idiom. This was especially evident in the category of "idioms with shared meaning but different imagery," where meaning was often understood, but specific cultural images were not.

For "throw in the towel," a frequent mistake was cultural. Many of the participants got this one right, if not the boxing part. However, where no metaphor was provided, one participant explained it as "رمى منشفة" 'Rama minshafa'—throw a towel" in the context of house cleaning, and another as "استسلم" (Istaslama—surrendered) without any bodily metaphoric imagery.

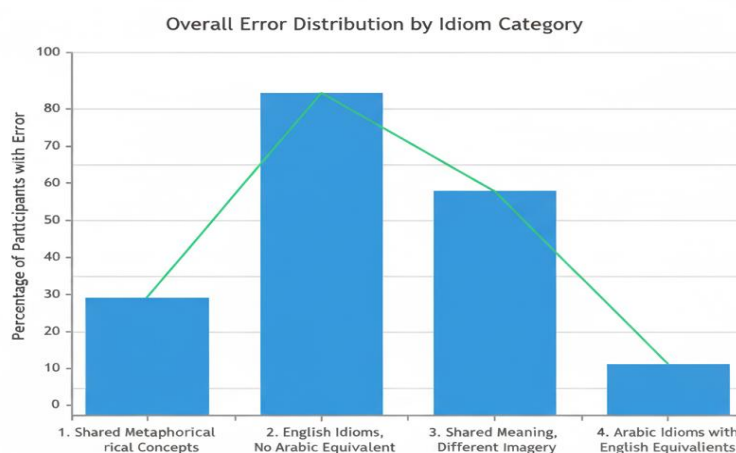
Likewise, for "under the weather," there were some participants who gave literal meanings such as "تحت السحاب" (tahta al-sahab—under the clouds), instead of a figurative one about being unwell.

Partial Understandings represent the subtlest error. Here, participants correctly identified the overall emotional or circumstantial meaning of the idiom (e.g., about being happy/angry/easy), but were unable to accurately identify or explain the idiomatic metaphorical vehicle. It was more frequent in the category "Shared Metaphorical Concepts" (CMs) and for conceptualizations that share the same source domain motivation (e.g., ANGER IS HEAT/A PRESSURED CONTAINER) but have varied ways of expressing it.

At the "on cloud nine" point, the majority of participants almost universally agreed that it made them feel really very happy (e.g., "يشعر بسعادة شديدة"—'yush'aru bis-surūri al-shadīd—feels intense happiness). However, a lot did not identify the metaphor of elevation and being on high ground, or gave wrong metaphors or none at all.

For "A piece of cake," the denotation of something being "very easy" was also identified nearly 100 percent of the time. Nevertheless, the metaphorical explanation never quite came across, or some variation would be off: "Cake represents life's rewards" was a memorable line, but surely not correct, and "Simplicity is key like water," which had an understanding, if not a grip on the meaning, since drinking a pleasant dessert has simply nothing to do with effortlessness.

Graph 2 below shows the overall error distribution by idiom category.



Graph 2

In light of the findings, one can detect a hierarchy of difficulty in idioms for Arabic speakers. The most significant difficulties were encountered in the idioms without Arabic equivalents category (Category 2), with an impressive 88% of participants making mistakes, mainly severe literal translation errors (74%). This pattern was followed by idioms with the same meaning but different cultural imagery (Category 3) that deceived 60 percent of participants due to a mismatched culture. Idioms based on shared metaphorical concepts (Category 1), in contrast, were incorrect only 30% of the time; it was possible to interpret these mistakes as incomplete misunderstandings. Last, the Arabic idiomatic expressions (Category 4) reconfirmed the competence of participants, with an understanding rate that reached almost perfection and only an error rate of 12%. This development of idiom comprehension indicates that the presence of a shared conceptual or cultural foundation is a crucial factor in successful idiom comprehension.

The results show that cross-linguistic conceptual metaphors help understand and interpret emotional idioms with an 86.2% success rate of English idioms with shared metaphorical concepts in Arabic and an 84.8% success rate of Arabic idioms with English equivalents. This comparison highlights both the extensive involvement of embodied schemas and the more inner and spiritual focus expressed in Arabic emotion descriptions. The high accuracy of 86.2% for shared metaphorical idioms supports the idea that common conceptual mappings play a major role in helping L2 learners process affective language. In contrast, the Arabic–English pragmatic equivalent rate of 84.8%, though still impressive, falls slightly behind English due to idiomatic and cultural differences in Arabic. These expressions often evoke physical sensations and metaphysical thoughts, using somatic symbolism that is less common in English. As a result, learners face additional interpretive challenges when working with Arabic emotion idioms. Teaching methods should include explicit instruction on the embodied and spiritual roots of Arabic emotional expressions to reduce misunderstandings and improve pragmatic knowledge.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study raise a few pedagogical implications for teaching idiomatic expressions. Most notably, idioms that emerge from shared metaphorical domains in English and Arabic could be given more significance in the curriculum because they have a low degree of cognitive load. Teaching can be performed by explicit exercises comprising metaphor pedagogical sequences that make conceptual mappings prominent. In addition to this procedure, systematic contrastive analysis will contribute to making learners aware of and recognize differences in the use of metaphorical conceptualizations as used through a language in question, thus reducing the risk for cultural misunderstandings.

Secondly, idiomatic expressions with idiosyncratic metaphorical content—such as “English Idioms with No Arabic Equivalent”—are preferably taught using abstraction-focused, scaffolding-framed instruction. These mappings, designed to be used with visual mapping programs, can help students see the process through which conventional metaphors become structurally opaque and therefore difficult to retain in memory, and significantly reduce their reliance on rote memorization while also deepening their conceptual understanding.

6. CONCLUSION

Our findings give useful implications regarding the processing of idiomatic expressions in bilinguals, indicating that their comprehension is highly affected by the cross-linguistic metaphorical system shared between English and Arabic. If a phrase has the same figurative sense or metaphor-embedded meaning in both languages, bilinguals will find it easier to understand. Indeed, the two languages are compatible in accordance with conceptual metaphors, so that idiomatic meaning is more natural and intelligible. On the other hand, idioms that do not have a direct analogue or are based on opposite metaphors in the two languages are more difficult. These idioms are more effortful to process because the bilingual has to compensate for the absence of this conceptual space in his/her familiar language and make it up by either using context or some other cognitive processes.

The implications of these results are two-fold. Firstly, they emphasize the need for metaphorical motivation and cultural context in interpreting idiomatic language. Metaphors are not only linguistic constructions but also deep cultural references. It is therefore the case that idiomatic expressions provide windows for cross-cultural comparisons concerning how individuals conceive abstract concepts. Second, there are also pedagogical implications regarding language teaching. For bilinguals who are studying English (as a foreign language) and Arabic, curricula should focus on idioms that possess transparent metaphorical meanings across the two languages so they are easier to comprehend and acquire. Furthermore, the study programs should reflect on cultural disparities and build bridges by pointing out how unique each language is in describing some concepts.

Moving forward, research should consider using more sensitive methods to investigate this cognitive exertion in a more detailed manner. Methods such as eye tracking may reveal the temporal processes and cognitive demands that bilinguals experience when processing idioms containing contradictory metaphoric terms. In addition, future research needs to include a broader sample of bilinguals with varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds in order to be able to explore how these effects might differ across various language pairs and cultures.

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