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INTERLANGUAGE IDIOMATICS:THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH IDIOMS BY SAUDI LEARNERS

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INTERLANGUAGE IDIOMATICS:
THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH IDIOMS BY SAUDI LEARNERS

by

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B.A., Umm Al-Qura University, 2007

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics

Department of Linguistics
in the Graduate School
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INTERLANGUAGE IDIOMATICS:
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for the Degree of

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in the field of Applied Linguistics

Approved by:

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HALAH BANJAR, for the Master of Arts degree in APPLIED LINGUISTICS, presented on FEBRUARY 27, 2014, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: INTERLANGUAGE IDIOMATICS: THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH IDIOMS BY SAUDI LEARNERS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Krassimira Charkova

Mastery of idioms in a second language is an important part of learners' lexical and cultural competence. This study provided insights into the processes that partake in interlanguage idiomatics. It also looked at the role of participants' first language in the comprehension and production of idioms in their second language.

Participants were 31 Saudi graduate students' who were learners of English. They were tested in receptive and productive knowledge of 15 English idioms of three types of idiomatic expressions: a) English idioms which have their exact equivalents in Arabic; b) English idioms which are similarly expressed in both languages, and c) English idioms which have no counterparts in Arabic.

The data were examined through statistical analysis. Results showed that identical idioms were the easiest to comprehend and produce, followed by similar idioms. Different idioms were the most difficult to comprehend and produce and showed the highest interference from the first language. In addition, a rather unexpected negative correlation was found between participants' length of stay in the US and their knowledge of English idioms.

These findings offer insightful implications for the teaching and learning of second language idioms. Most importantly language teachers and researchers should be aware that the acquisition of idioms is influenced by the similarities and differences between idioms in learners'

L1s and the target L2. This suggests that building learners' idiomatic knowledge in a second language should be done in a systematic and persistent way.

In more general terms, the study's results confirm the trends and patterns reported in previous research about the acquisition of second language idiomatic competence and its important role for the effective comprehension and production of the target language.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In second language (L2) research, there has been much less attention paid to the lexicon than to other parts of language, although this picture is quickly changing (Nation, 2001). There are numerous reasons for believing that lexis is important in second language acquisition. In fact, the lexicon may be the most important language element for learners. In general, learners of a second language need good lexical skills to produce sentences and to comprehend them.

1.1. Lexical knowledge in SLA

Second language learners are known to have difficulty with vocabulary learning since most English words have two or more meanings. Carter (1998) suggests that among the different meanings of each word, one is usually the basic or more frequent meaning, and can be termed as the *core meaning*. Schmitt (2000) pointed out that in L2 vocabulary acquisition, it seems that learners acquire the core meaning of a word before the figurative meaning. Interestingly, phrases and idioms containing the core meaning of a word seem to result in more L1 transfer than idioms with figurative meanings. Kellerman (1978) indicates that the acquisition of the phrase *break a stick* is more likely to be affected by transfer from L1 into L2 rather than an idiom with a figurative meaning, such as *break a heart*. Yet, idioms are one of the most difficult aspects of learning a language and learners are most likely to face difficulty in learning idiomatic expressions.

1.2. Different views on the definition of an idiom

Idioms constitute an important lexical component of every language. However, the concept of what an idiom is varies considerably from one scholar to another. Scholars fall into two divisions regarding the definitions of idioms: those who support a broad definition of idioms

and those in favor of a narrower definition (Liu, 2008). The broad view of idioms includes fixed phrases, clichés, formulaic speeches, proverbs, slang expressions and single polysemic words. An example of an idiom under the broad definition is the phrase *weigh a decision*, which will not qualify as an idiom under the narrower view because the meaning is rather transparent. Thus, the narrow term or the restricted concept of idioms refers to fixed or opaque expressions such as *spill the beans*.

Hockett (1958) fosters the broad definition of idioms. He defines an idiom as any part of language whose meaning cannot be deduced from its structure, including even small elements such as morphemes *-ed*, *-er*, etc. He claims that one cannot infer the meaning of these morphemes from their structure. However, the words *worked* and *bigger* cannot be considered idioms because the meaning of each word is intelligible.

Other scholars, like Katz and Postal (1963), believe that individual words, including polymorphemes such as *greenhouse* and *telephone*, should be categorized as idioms. They define the idiom as any linguistic structure whose meaning is not the compositional meaning of its component. According to Katz and Postal's definition of idiom, they divide the idioms into two types: *lexical idioms*, which consist of polymorphemic words, and *phrase idioms*, which are made up of multiple words. In simpler terms, the first type includes single words such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, whereas the second type is made of phrases, clauses, and sentences.

Makkai (1972) agrees with Katz and Postal (1963) that some polymorphemic words are idioms. However, he considers that polymorphemic words made up of at least two free morphemes, such as *blackmail*, should be considered idioms. The meaning of *blackmail*, "to threaten by coercion," is not derived from the meanings of the two morphemes *black* and *mail*, therefore it is opaque and not transparent to the learner.

Fraser (1970) employed the generative transformational approach in his study of idioms. He classified idioms on a six level scale to show the different types of idiomatic processes, including unrestricted, reconstruction extraction, permutation, insertion, adjunction, and completely frozen. For him, an idiom is “a constituent or a series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives of which it is composed” (1970, p. 22).

1.3. Related theories

Among the many second language acquisition theories, three theories have been identified as the most pertinent to the research interest of the present study, including the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), the Language Transfer Theory (LTT), and the Error Analysis Theory (EAT). All these theories have some degree of relevancy to issues related to the acquisition of idioms in a second language.

1.2.1 The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)

Contrastive analysis is a method involving parallel comparisons between two languages on all levels of grammar in order to determine how they are similar or different and thus predict possible areas of transfer from learners' L1 to a respective L2, Robinett and Schachter (1983). The origins of this method are associated with Lado (1957) and his structure-by-structure comparisons of the phonetics, morphological, syntactic, and cultural system of the native language and target language in order to discover similarities and differences between them. Fisiak (1981) defines contrastive analysis as “a subdiscipline of linguistics concerned with the comparison of two or more languages or subsystems of languages in order to determine both the differences and the similarities between them” (p. 1).

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis has three different versions. The strong version of CAH is attributed to Lado (1957). It assumes that language learning errors can be predicted based on differences between the L1 and L2. In other words, wherever two language systems differ substantially, this will definitely result in learning difficulties and transfer of L1 features to the L2. Oller and Ziahosseiny (1970) proposed a moderate version of Lado's theory. They claim that difficulties will occur when there are only slight differences between languages rather than large differences. The weak version of CAH was proposed by Wardhaugh (1970). It differs from Lado's in the fact that the analysis of learners' errors is done after the errors have occurred rather than based on predictions stemming from prior comparisons of the L1 and L2 language systems.

1.2.2 The Language Transfer Theory

The concept of transfer refers to the idea that previous learning will affect subsequent learning. In this sense, Odlin (1989) stated that LTT is closely related to CAH in that it takes into consideration the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and the first language. Gass and Selinker (1984) claim that there is interference between learners' L1 and L2 during the acquisition process of L2. Specifically, L1 influences the L2 performance in different aspects. They identify two types of transfer during L2 acquisition: positive and negative. When the patterns of both languages are similar and the learner uses the native language in order to produce the second one, positive transfer occurs. This results in a successful transfer of second language features. However, when the patterns are different, using features of the first language to produce the target language leads to negative transfer. A negative transfer results in learner errors which are called interference errors. These errors are also referred to as interlingual errors, because their origin is cross-linguistic, from the first language

to the target language. They are different from intralingual errors which originate within the second language and are developmental in nature.

It is worth mentioning that different factors affect the amount and type of interference during the process of second language acquisition. One factor is the age of the learner. Carroll (1968) believes that children are less subject to interference than adults because their native language is not strongly rooted. Another factor is the level of language ability of the learner. Taylor (1975) found evidence that there is more syntactic interference at the beginning level of acquisition than at more advanced levels. As learners know very little of the second language at the beginning stages of language acquisition, they tend to rely on the syntactic rules of their first language.

This theory will definitely be relevant to the present study, the purpose of which was to examine issues related to the acquisition of English idioms by Saudi speakers of English. Specifically, it will be used in analyzing and categorizing the errors made by the participants and in the interpretation of the results.

1.2.3 Error Analysis Theory

This type of linguistic analysis focuses on the errors learners make (Corder, 1967). Unlike CAH, Error Analysis Theory offers a broader range of potential explanations of learner errors rather than entirely relying on contrastive analysis between target learners' L1 and L2. In the framework of Error Analysis Theory, there are two main error types of errors; interlingual and intralingual (Richards, 1971). Interlingual errors occur under the interference of learners' native languages. On the other hand, intralingual errors are those errors that occur in the course of acquiring a second language and are part of the developmental process.

In error analysis theory, there are a number of steps in conducting an error analysis. The first step involves data collection, which will serve as the basis for the analysis. In the second stage, errors are identified through analysis of the data. In the next stage, errors are classified according to their type, such *errors of agreement*, etc. Fourth, errors are quantified within each error type. Finally, based on the error types, suggestions are made for remedial work that will help learners overcome these types of errors. The approach suggested by the Error Analysis Theory is considered very appropriate for the purposes of this study, which aimed to provide empirical evidence about the acquisition of English idioms by Saudi learners of English. The steps of EAT will be followed in the data analysis process with an intention to provide clear categories of learner errors and failures, as well as data-driven suggestions for possible remedial strategies that can be used in helping learners to improve their idiomatic knowledge.

So far, this chapter offered an overview of the theoretical framework of the study. The next chapter examines the empirical literature related to the research problem at the heart of the present research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of previous research related to the acquisition of idioms in a second language. Among the studies related to the problem of the current research, it was found that the majority of the studies were with second language learners of English of different first languages, including two studies with Arabic ESL learners. In fact, there was only one study with learners of Spanish as a second language. The literature review is followed by a summary of the main findings.

2.1 Studies with ESL learners of other languages

Irujo (1986) conducted a study in order to investigate if Venezuelan learners of ESL use knowledge of their native language to comprehend and produce idioms in the target language. The researcher used a quantitative method in her study, involving one-way ANOVA, t-tests, and Tukey's multiple comparison test. The participants in this study were 12 Venezuelan advanced learners of English. The instrument of the study included four types of tests: recognition, comprehension, recall, and production of idioms. The tests consisted of 45 idioms of three types (identical, similar, and different). The author made three hypotheses about the outcomes of her study: 1) positive transfer of identical idioms, 2) negative transfer of similar idioms, and 3) no evidence of transfer in the category of different idioms.

The results supported the initial hypotheses, as they showed that identical idioms were the easiest to comprehend and produce. Similar idioms were well comprehended but showed interference from Spanish, whereas different idioms were the most difficult to comprehend and produce but indicated less interference than similar idioms.

Laufer (2000) conducted a study to investigate the avoidance of L2 (English) idioms determined by the degree of similarity to their L1 (Hebrew) equivalents. The researcher used a quantitative method in the study and used repeated measures ANOVA, Duncan test, and paired t-test to analyze the collected data. Four questions were examined: 1) Do advanced learners of ESL show preference for the literal equivalents of English idioms? 2) Do some idiom types elicit a larger number of uses than other types? 3) Are some idiom types more subject to avoidance than other idiom types? 4) Does the language proficiency affect the use/avoidance of idioms?

The subjects were 56 undergraduate students whose first language was Hebrew. 39 of the students were freshmen, whereas the rest were sophomores and juniors. Two types of tests were used: elicitation task of idioms and a translation test. In the latter test, participants were asked to fill in missing expressions which were provided in Hebrew at the end of each sentence. They had the choice to translate idiomatically or non-idiomatically. The second test was given after collecting the first one. Students were given 20 idioms and asked to translate them from English into Hebrew. The tested idioms were classified into 4 types: total formal similarity, partial formal similarity, lack of formal similarity and distributional difference. The researcher concluded that idiom use was related to the proficiency level of the participants. In addition, avoidance of idioms was related to the degree of similarity between the L1 and L2. The highest level of avoidance was observed in relation to idioms of type 4, with distributional differences and idioms of type two with partial formal similarity.

Cakir (2011) examined issues related to the learning and teaching of English idioms to non-native speakers. The researcher used a quantitative method guided by two research questions: 1) Are idiomatic expressions difficult to comprehend? 2) How much can learners interpret idioms in the target language? The participants were 62 students, 32 students from first grade and

30 students from second grade, from the English language teaching department at a University in Turkey. All of the participants had taken a course on Lexical Competence, and all of them had the same proficiency level. The tests consisted of three categories of idioms: identical, similar, and different. The participants were asked to write the equivalents of the English idioms given in each test in their L1. The researcher concluded that identical idioms had the highest percentage of correct responses, followed by similar idioms, whereas different idioms were the most difficult for the subjects to interpret and comprehend.

Another study about second language idioms was conducted by Bulut and Çelik-Yazici (2004), with 18 Turkish teachers of English with a mean teaching experience of 7.1 years and ages ranging from 24 to 47 years. Only three of the participants had been to an English speaking country. Their proficiency levels in English were determined based on the KPDS test, which is a standard test in Turkey that is required in order to work for the government. Thus, they were divided into two groups based on their KPDS scores: advanced level and low-advanced level. The study included 20 frequently used English idioms of three types: 1) eight idioms used in formal standard English, 2) eight idioms used in informal contexts, and 3) four slang idioms.

The study tested three hypotheses: 1) the participants will rely on the context rather than the literal meaning of the idiom when they cannot find an equivalent in their L1, 2) the participants will comprehend the formal idioms better than the informal ones, and 3) the participants will understand the idioms that have identical counterparts in Turkish more easily than those that are different.

The subjects were given an idiom recognition test (IRT), in which they first silently read short contexts containing the idioms written on cards. Then, they were asked to verbalize their thoughts as they deduced the meanings of the idioms through a think-aloud (TA) procedure.

Their responses were recorded on a tape recorder and transcribed by the researchers. The idiom comprehension strategies that were applied by the subjects were categorized based on Cooper's (1999) model: preparatory and guessing stages. The preparatory stage included repeating or paraphrasing the idiom, discussing and analyzing the idiom, and requesting information about the idiom. The guessing stage involved guessing from the context, using the literal meaning and background knowledge, referring to a L1 idiom, and using a particular word.

The results provided evidence in support of the first hypothesis and third hypothesis. Specifically, the participants used contextual clues to interpret the idioms more often than they resorted to the literal meanings of the words in the idioms and identical idioms were comprehended better than the different ones. The second hypothesis was not supported as it was found that the type of the idiom (standard, informal, or slang) did not affect the comprehension of the idiom.

2.2 Studies with Arabic learners of ESL

Abdullah and Jackson (1998) investigated the effect of language transfer by providing L2 with idioms without context. They hypothesized that cognate idioms assist in comprehension through positive language transfer. In contrast, false cognate (similar) idioms hinder comprehension. As for idioms with pragmatic equivalents, they predicted negative language transfer. Lastly, processing idioms with no equivalents would show no evidence of either positive or negative transfer.

The subjects of their study were 120 Syrian senior university students (70 female students and 50 male students). They were studying English language and literature at Tishreen University in Syria. They came from the same social background with ages ranging between 22 and 28. Thus, the participants created a homogenous group. Participants were given three tests to

investigate their comprehension and production of English idioms. The tests consisted of two stages: a written test (comprehension and production), and a tape-recorded interview to investigate how the participants interpret the English idioms in the test. The comprehension test involved two tasks: a multiple choice task and an English-Arabic translation task. This test included 80 English idioms, of them 20 were identical in form and function to Syrian idioms, 20 were similar in form but different in function, and 20 were different in form but similar in function, and 20 were non-translatable idioms.

The researchers found that positive transfer in the processing of English idioms by Syrian learners occurs with cognate and false cognate idioms. In addition, problems of L2 idiom comprehension were associated with one of the following: 1) lack of an L1 equivalent to an L2 idiom or vice versa, 2) the attempt to paraphrase the idiom semantically, 3) the attempt to translate the idiom semantically, or 4) cultural specificity, similarity in structure with difference in function between the L2 idiom and the L1 idiom.

Aljabri (2013) investigated L2 learners' judgments of the familiarity and transparency of certain English idioms and whether their judgments were associated with their comprehension of the same idioms. The participants included 90 male students (45 from level 1 and 45 from level 4) from the English Department at Umm Al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia. All were native speakers of Arabic. The study involved 20 English idioms (10 transparent and 10 opaque) collected from published studies and several references on English idioms.

The participants completed three tasks in the following order: 1) a familiarity judgment task, 2) a comprehension task, and 3) a transparency judgment task. In the familiarity task, subjects were asked to determine how often they had encountered (read or heard) each idiom on a 5 point scale. The comprehension task involved a multiple choice test. In the transparency task,

each idiom was followed by a literal and a non-literal meaning and the participants were asked to rate how closely they believed both meanings were related using a 3 point scale.

The data was analyzed through analysis of variance. The results revealed that Level 4 students were more familiar with the target idioms and also showed a higher level of receptive knowledge on the multiple choice test than the Level 1 students. However, there were no significant differences between the two levels on the idiom transparency task.

All research reviewed so far was conducted with second language learners of English, and to this researcher's knowledge only one study (Zyzik, 2011) examined the acquisition of idioms with a sample of learners of different L1s who were studying Spanish as a second language. The data were analyzed through MANOVA. Two questions were addressed: 1) Does lexical knowledge affect the learning of figurative meanings of idioms? 2) Does idiom organization have an impact on learners' performance? The participants were 65 students in upper-division Spanish linguistics courses. All of the subjects completed three tests both prior to and after treatment: a vocabulary test (translation task), a written production test (write the idiomatic expression), and a multiple-choice recognition test (choose the idiom that fits the context). Thirty-eight Spanish idioms were selected on two criteria: thematic and verb frequency.

The researcher established that prior lexical knowledge has some facilitative effect on idiom learning. In addition, learning idioms in thematic groups did not provide a significant advantage over a more traditional grouping based on the main verb.

2.3 Summary of research findings

In summary, previous studies about the acquisition of idioms in a second language have focused on learners' errors in the production and comprehension of L2 idioms. Most of foregoing research findings have revealed that: 1) identical idioms are the easiest to comprehend

and produce; 2) similar idioms are intelligible to an extent; 3) different idioms are the most difficult to acquire. All in all, researchers have concluded that differences between learners' L1 and L2 are likely to create obstacles in the comprehension and production of idioms. Similarities between their L1 and L2 are likely to facilitate the acquisition of L2 idioms. Results have also revealed that there is a developmental trend in the acquisition of idioms which is positively correlated with learners' overall language proficiency and lexical knowledge. This review revealed that most of the research was conducted with second language learners of English. The next chapter describes and explains the methodology of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The present chapter describes the research methodology of this study, which involved a mixed design using both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. By its nature, the study was exploratory and employed a data-driven approach to find patterns and types of errors made by the participants. This chapter contains the following sections: purpose and research questions, participants, variables, instruments, procedure, coding of the data, and data analysis.

3.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The current study focuses on the acquisition of idioms by Saudi learners of English. It attempts to shed light on their receptive and productive knowledge of English idiomatic expressions in view of three types of idiomatic expressions. The first includes English idioms which have their exact equivalents in Arabic such as *curiosity killed the cat*. The second type involves English idioms which are similarly expressed in both languages. For example, the English idiom *to get up on the **wrong** side of the bed*, is different in Arabic only by one word as the literal translation from Arabic is *to get up on the **left** side of the bed*. The last type includes English idioms which lack direct counterparts in Arabic, as is the case with the idiom *kick the bucket*, which has no direct Arabic counterpart.

Specifically, the current study aimed to examine the problems that Saudi learners of English might have in view of the three types of idioms by detailed analysis of their errors in a receptive and a productive knowledge task. In addition, learners' acquisition of English idioms was viewed in relation to their length of stay in the USA in order to provide further insight into the role of the environment on the acquisition of idiomatic knowledge. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How familiar are Saudi learners with English idioms of the three types?
 - a. Idioms which have exact equivalents in Arabic
 - b. Idioms which are similarly expressed in both language
 - c. Idioms which do not have counterparts in Arabic
- 2) What are the types of errors in rendering English idioms in Arabic? Are they different for the three different types of idioms?
- 3) Is there a relationship between length of stay of in the USA and the acquisition of English idioms?

3.2 Participants

A total of 31 graduate participants (23 male and 8 female) from a similar proficiency level of English participated in the study. They were SIU admitted students who have met the minimum language requirement; 80 in TOEFL IBT and 6.5 in IELTS. They were recruited by contacting the Center for International Education and the Saudi Association at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale in order to contact Saudi students by email to volunteer and take part in the research. They were chosen from the same nationality in order to ensure that they all speak the same language, Arabic, and to ensure that they share the same cultural background. Consequently, they would be familiar with the Arabic equivalents of the idioms chosen for the study.

3.3 Variables

The dependent variable in this study was participants' knowledge of English idioms. It was deconstructed into the following subcategories in view of the two types of test tasks and also of the three types of idioms:

- 1) Total score on receptive knowledge task

- 2) Total score on productive knowledge task
- 3) Scores on receptive knowledge task for English-Arabic equivalent idioms, similar idioms, and idioms not available in Arabic
- 4) Scores on productive knowledge task for English-Arabic equivalent idioms, similar idioms, and idioms not available in Arabic

The three types of idioms (English-Arabic equivalent idioms, similar idioms, and idioms not available in Arabic) and length of stay in the US (0-6 months, 6-12 months, more than 1 year) served as the independent variables.

3.4 Instrument

As already mentioned, the idioms chosen for the study were selected on the basis of three types of idioms: a) idioms which have exact equivalents in Arabic; b) idioms which are similarly expressed in both language; and c) idioms which do not have counterparts in Arabic. In the selection of these idioms, the researcher was guided by two main criteria. First, the idioms fell into the three categories of interest to the study. Second, the idioms were frequently used by native speakers. To assure the frequency of use, a pilot survey including 30 English idioms was administered to native speakers of American English who were all college students of ages ranging between 18 and 30.

The participants in the pilot survey were asked to rate the frequency with which they use these idioms on a scale of 1= never; 2= very rare; 3= occasionally; 4= often, and 5= very often. Only idioms that were marked as used very often, often, and occasionally were included in the actual instrument, whereas those marked as never or very rarely were excluded. After the removal of the idioms marked as never or very rarely used, the list of possible idioms was reduced to fewer items than necessary for the purpose of the study. Because of this, two new

idioms were added, as they were suggested by the native speakers as commonly used. These idioms included *a time and a place for everything*, and *to kill two birds with one stone*.

The actual questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part one elicited demographic information. Part two contained two tasks, one was a multiple choice task with 9 idioms. Out of them, 3 had exact equivalents in Arabic, 3 were similar in Arabic, and 3 had no counterparts in Arabic.

The multiple choice task tested participants' receptive knowledge of the idioms. Three options were given, including the correct paraphrase of the idiom, a phrase/sentence with the literal translation, and an unrelated phrase sentence. Example 1 shows a multiple choice item which was used to test participants' receptive knowledge of an English idiom that does not have a counterpart in Arabic.

Example 1

To pull someone's leg means:

- a) To take one's leg and pull it strongly.
- b) To let someone tell a joke.
- c) To say something untrue as a joke.

Task two consisted of a production task which asked participants to provide the Arabic rendition of 6 English idioms, two for each of the three types.

3.5 Procedure

Having received the approval of the Human Subjects Committee, the researcher recruited the subjects through the Center for International Education and the Saudi Association at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. The researcher requested the list of the Saudi graduate students' email addresses from the Center for International Education. The accessible population of Saudi students were contacted by email and asked to contact the researcher if they were interested in taking part in the study. The participants who volunteered were asked to read

and sign a consent form in compliance with the Human Subjects Committee requirements at SIU. They were assured that their real identities would be kept confidential. After that, they were given 30 minutes to finish the tasks. Over a period of one month, the subjects were tested either individually or in small groups, either in the linguistics laboratory in Faner 3226 or in one of the study rooms in Morris Library at SIU.

3.6 Coding of the Data

The scores of the multiple choice task were calculated on the basis of participants' correct responses, as each correct answer was given 1 point. No penalty was given for wrong answers. Thus, a maximum score on the receptive task would amount to 9 and a minimum would have the value of 0.

The data from the productive task was coded into two categories: 1) entirely correct translation (1 point) and 2) wrong or partially wrong translation (0 points). For instance, an example of a completely wrong translation is "*supernatural thing*" for the target idiom "*out of the blue*." On the other hand, a partial error was considered the translation of "*like father, like son*" into "*to think similarly*" because the given translation partially covers the meaning of the target idiom. Overall, the maximum score on the productive task would have the value of 6 and the minimum would be 0.

3.7 Analysis of the Data

The analysis of the data was performed through the SPSS program version 20. Specifically, descriptive statistics were calculated for participants' scores in the receptive and productive tasks and also for each of the three types of idioms within each of the two tasks, including:

- 1) Total mean scores on receptive knowledge task (Possible score 9)

- 2) Total mean score on productive knowledge task (Possible score 6)
- 3) Mean Scores on the receptive knowledge task, including English-Arabic equivalent idioms (Total mean score 3), similar idioms (Total mean score 3), and idioms not available in Arabic (Total mean score 3).
- 4) Mean scores on the productive knowledge task for English-Arabic equivalent idioms (Total mean score 2), similar idioms (Total mean score 2), and idioms not available in Arabic (Total mean score 2).

The above mean scores were examined for significant differences across the two tasks, receptive and productive knowledge, and among the three types of idioms within each type of task. For this purpose, multiple dependent t-tests were performed and the alpha level of .05 was adjusted by the number of tests in order to control for Type I error. In addition, Spearman rho correlation analysis was performed between total scores on both tasks and length of stay in the US.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter provides a detailed account of the results of the present study, which aimed to examine the acquisition of English idioms by Saudi learners of English. The reader should be reminded that the data collection included two types of tasks, a receptive multiple choice task and a productive translation task, each including an equal number of three types of idioms: 1) English idioms which have no correspondence in Arabic (different), 2) English idioms that have similar counterparts in Arabic (similar), and 3) English idioms which have equivalents in Arabic. Additionally, the results were also analyzed in view of participants' length of stay in the US and their self-reported knowledge of the target English idioms.

All data was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. Additionally, the translation data was examined for patterns of errors in view of the three types of idioms and possible L1 influences. The results are presented in the order of the research questions as they were stated in the previous chapter.

4.1. Results for Research Question One

The first research question aimed to examine Saudi English learners' familiarity with the three types of idioms: a) different, b) similar, and c) identical. For this purpose, the multiple choice task data and the translation task data were analyzed separately through three dependent t-tests each, amounting to a total of 6 dependent t-tests. Each set of 3 t-tests was considered a family of tests since they were performed on the same type of data. In order to control for Type I error, the initial alpha level of .05 was reduced to .017, following the Bonferroni method of multiple comparisons.

For both the multiple choice and translation tasks, correct answers were awarded 1 point, whereas wrong answers received 0 points. For the multiple choice task, the scores for each type of idioms could range between 0 and 3, yielding a total possible score of 9 and a total minimum score of 0. For the translation task, each type of idiom received a maximum of 2 points and a minimum of 0 points, with a total possible score of 6 and a total minimum score of 0. The results of the descriptive and t-test analyses are summarized in Tables 1 through 4 below. Tables 1 and 2 present the results for the multiple choice task, while Tables 3 and 4 present the results for the translation task.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics for multiple choice task*

	N	Mean	SD	% Correct	Minimum	Maximum
Total	31	6.51	1.31	72%	3.00	8.00
Identical	31	2.71	.53	90%	1.00	3.00
Similar	31	2.29	.74	76%	.00	3.00
Different	31	1.51	.63	51%	.00	2.00

Note: % correct was calculated by dividing the group means by the total possible correct score and multiplying it by 100.

As shown in Table 1, the participants demonstrated a rather high level of receptive knowledge of the target English idioms, with a 72% rate of correct answers. With regard to the three types of idioms, the highest percentage of correctness was observed on identical idioms (90%), followed by similar idioms (76%), whereas on different idioms the percentage dropped to 51%. In order to find out whether the differences of mean scores on the three types of idioms were systematic and not due to chance, three pairwise dependent *t-tests* were conducted at $\alpha = .017$. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of the multiple *t*-test comparisons

Pairwise comparisons		Mean Difference	SD of the Difference	<i>t</i> (30)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect Size <i>d</i>
Pair 1	Different- Identical	-1.19	.75	-8.870	.000	-1.59
Pair 2	Different -Similar	-.77	.92	-4.683	.000	-0.84
Pair 3	Identical -Similar	.41	.73	3.243	.003	0.56

Note: Effect size was calculated by dividing the mean difference by the SD of the difference.

The results of the first pairwise comparison revealed that the mean difference between participants' receptive knowledge of different and identical idioms was statistically significant, $t(30) = -8.870$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.59$. In other words, participants demonstrated a significantly greater knowledge of identical idioms than of different idioms, with a high value of the effect size. The next comparison between participants' knowledge of different and similar idioms was also significant, $t(30) = -4.683$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.84$, revealing that knowledge of similar idioms was at a significantly higher level than knowledge of different idioms. The final comparison examined the difference in knowledge between identical and similar idioms. Although the *t*-value was smaller than for the previous two comparisons, the difference was still significant, $t(30) = 3.243$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.58$. This last comparison provided evidence that knowledge of identical idioms was significantly better than knowledge of similar idioms.

The next part of the analysis involved the data from the translation task. Similar to the multiple choice analysis, the translation data was also processed through descriptive statistics and three dependent *t*-tests at $\alpha = .017$. The results are summarized in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: *Descriptive statistics for translation task*

	N	Mean	SD	% Correct	Minimum	Maximum
Total	31	3.52	.96	59%	1.00	5.00
Identical	31	1.58	.50	79%	1.00	2.00
Similar	31	1.77	.50	89%	.00	2.00
Different	31	.161	.37	8%	.00	1.00

Note: % correct was calculated by dividing the group means by the total possible correct score and multiplying it by 100.

As illustrated in Table 3, participants' productive knowledge of the target English idioms reached a 59% rate of correctness. With regard to the three types of idioms, the highest percentage of correctness was observed on similar idioms (89%), followed by identical idioms (79%), whereas on different idioms the percentage dropped to 8%. In order to find out whether the differences of mean scores on the three types of idioms were systematic and not due to chance, three pairwise dependent *t*-tests were conducted at $\alpha = .017$. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: *Results of the multiple t-test comparisons*

Pairwise comparisons	Mean Difference	SD of the Difference	<i>t</i> (30)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size <i>d</i>
Pair 1 Different – Identical	-1.42	.56	-14.008	.000	-2.54
Pair 2 Different – Similar	-1.61	.62	-14.597	.000	-2.60
Pair 3 Identical – Similar	-.194	.54	-1.985	.056	-.36

Note: Effect size was calculated by dividing the mean difference by the SD of the difference.

The results of the first pairwise comparison revealed that the mean difference between participants' productive knowledge of different and identical idioms was statistically significant,

$t(30) = -14.008, p < .001, d = -2.54$. In other words, participants demonstrated a significantly greater knowledge of identical idioms than of different idioms, with a high value of the effect size. The next comparison between participants' knowledge of different and similar idioms was also significant, $t(30) = -14.597, p < .001, d = -2.6$, revealing that knowledge of similar idioms was at a significantly higher level than knowledge of different idioms. The final comparison illustrated the difference in knowledge between identical and similar idioms. Although the mean for similar idioms (Mean = 1.77) was slightly higher than the mean for identical idioms (Mean = 1.58), the difference was not statistically significant, $t(30) = -1.985, p = .056 > \alpha = .017, d = -.36$. This last comparison provided evidence that participants' productive knowledge of identical and similar idioms was at comparably high level, ranging between 89% and 79%.

4.1.1 Summary of Results for Research Question One

The statistical results of the multiple choice and translation task are summarized in Figure 1, which shows the absolute values of the effect size of all six pair-wise comparisons.

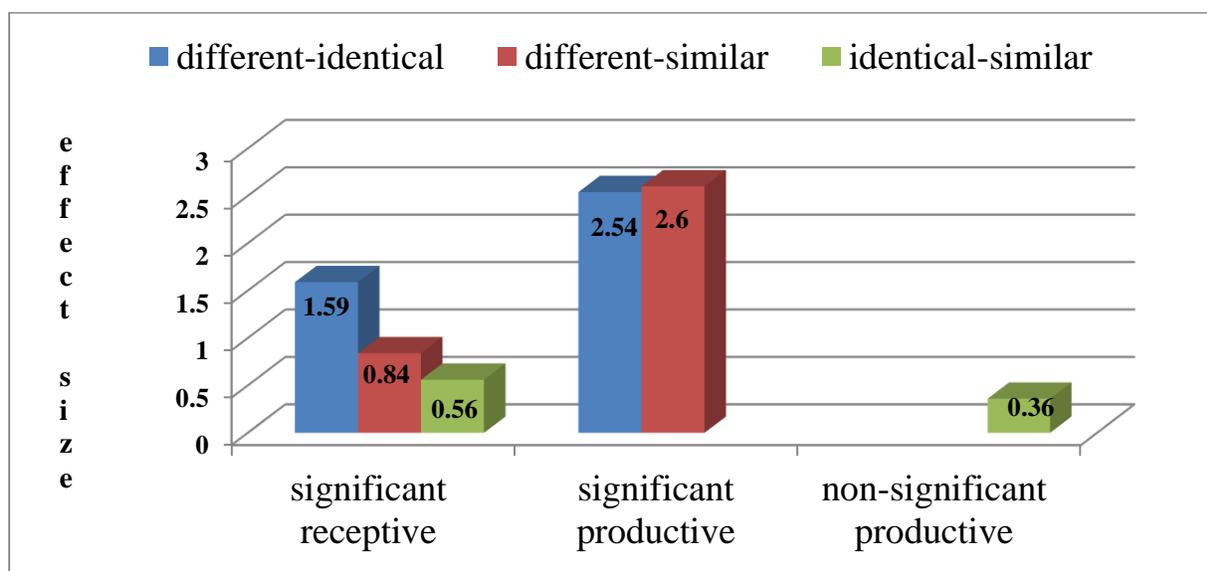


Figure 1: *Effect size values for the six pair-wise comparisons*

As shown in Figure 1, all three pair-wise comparisons on the multiple choice task were significant versus only two on the translation task. However, the effect size values of the two significant comparisons on the translation task were much higher than on the multiple choice task. This fact provides evidence that the observed differences in productive knowledge between different and identical and between different and similar idioms were of much higher magnitude than the counterpart differences in receptive knowledge. The chart also shows that the differences between identical and similar idioms were of not real practical importance because in both tasks the participants demonstrated comparably high levels of receptive and productive knowledge of these idioms.

4.2. Results for Research Question Two

The second research question aimed to provide a deeper understanding of participants' acquisition problems of the target idioms by examining the types of errors in both the multiple choice and translation tasks. Specifically, errors were identified and analyzed in view of the three categories of idioms: different, similar, and identical. The results of the multiple choice and translation tasks are summarized in Tables 5 and 6.

As already mentioned in the previous sections of this chapter, the majority of errors both in the multiple choice and translation tasks were in relation to those idioms that do not have Arabic counterparts. For the multiple choice task, a few errors involved the wrong selection of a distractor due to the presence of a synonym for a key word in the idiom. For example, for the idiom "*a piece of cake*," two participants selected the option "*a small amount of something*" presumably by associating the word "*piece*" with "*small amount*." Overall, this type of error was observed only a few times in relation to different and similar idioms. The next type of error was due to participants' selection of a distractor which provided a literal paraphrase of the idiom.

This was particularly prominent in the case of “*a deer in the headlights*,” where 12 participants selected the option “*when something becomes obvious because it is brightly lit*.” Obviously, they were making a direct association between the word *headlights* and a *brightly lit* object. There were also a number of errors where participants selected distractors that were not related to the target idiom in either way.

Table 5: *Types of errors in multiple choice task*

	Idioms	Idioms' type	Example errors	Explanations
1	A piece of cake	Different	A small amount of something (2) A part of a process (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A small amount” and “a part” are synonyms of “a piece”
2	A deer in the headlights		When something becomes obvious because it is brightly lit (12) A driver who is scared of deer crossing the road (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literal association of “headlights” with “brightly lit” objects. • Unrelated to the idiom
3	To pull someone’s leg		To cause someone to make an error (26) To take one’s leg and pull it strongly (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrelated to the idiom • Literal semantic meaning
4	To give someone the evil eye	Similar	To have eyes similar to devil’s eyes (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Evil eye” is a synonym of “devil’s eyes”
5	To get up on the wrong side of the bed		To have difficulty waking up (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrelated to the idiom
6	A time and a place for everything		Live each day and do not worry about the future (7) Think before you do something (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrelated to the idiom
7	Curiosity killed the cat	Identical	The cat is a curious animal (1) Cats lead a dangerous life (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literal semantic meaning
8	Start from scratch		To try to do impossible things (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrelated to the idiom
9	To add fuel to the fire		No errors	

The errors from the translation task were of greater relevance to this study's purpose because they were used to determine whether the participants were influenced by Arabic idioms when translating the target English idioms. Similar to the multiple-choice errors, translation errors were also identified for each of the three types of idioms, different, similar, and identical.

The errors caused by the influence of Arabic idioms were observed in relation to all three types of idioms. For instance, for the idiom "*It takes one to know one,*" one participant incorrectly rendered it as "*To eat grapes one by one.*" It can be presumed that the participant associated the repeated word "*one ... one*" in the target idiom with a completely different Arabic idiom which has the same word repeated twice. Another participant translated the same idiom as "*Something reminds me of another.*" In this case, it seems that the subject interpreted the phrase "*know one*" as "*reminds...another*" by association with a different Arabic idiom.

Another similar error occurred in translating the idiom "*Out of the blue,*" where one participant rendered it incorrectly as "*To sing out of the flock.*" It can be presumed that the participant associated the word "*out*" in the target idiom with a different Arabic idiom. In addition, two participants provided a wrong translation for the idiom "*All in the same boat*" as "*People are similar.*" Obviously, they were distracted by the synonym "*same*" in the target idiom with the word "*similar*" in a completely different Arabic idiom. As for the idiom "*To kill two birds with one stone,*" one participant was confused it with a different idiom in Arabic that also has the word "*bird,*" "*Bird in hand is better than ten in the bush.*" Similarly, for the idiom "*Over my dead body,*" one subject provided an incorrect translation influenced by the Arabic idiom "*Beating the dead is forbidden.*" It seems that the participant was associating the word "*dead*" with a different Arabic idiom.

The next type of error was related to participants' literal translation of idioms. This was mainly prominent in the idiom "*It takes one to know one,*" where 8 subjects provided the translation "*You need time to know someone.*" Not knowing the actual meaning of the target idiom, participants interpreted it according to their background knowledge and translated "*It takes one*" into "*You need time.*" It should be mentioned here that this type of error was particularly abundant in the translations of different idioms.

Another type of error was attributed to participants' wrong interpretations of some idioms based on the literal meaning of one word. In such cases, the Arabic translations reflected the literal meaning of such words. For example, for the idiom "*Out of the blue,*" two participants provided the translation "*To be in a bad mood.*" Obviously, they associated the word "*blue*" with "*bad.*"

Table 6: *Types of errors in translation task.*

	Idioms	Idioms' type	Example errors	Explanations
1	It takes one to know one	Different	To eat grapes one by one (1) Something reminds me of another (1) You need time to know someone (8) To learn from mistakes (2) To gain knowledge from experience (2) To learn something gradually (3) } Things occur for reasons (2) No pain no gain (1) }	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association with Arabic idiom • Literal semantic meaning • “know” is a synonym of “learn” and “knowledge” • Unrelated to the idiom
2	Out of the blue		Out of the sky (1) To be in a bad mood (2) To be absent-minded (1) Unable to see anything (1) Supernatural thing (1) Out of the blue scope (3) To live in another planet (1) Imaginary thing (1) To think outside the box (2) } To sing out of the flock (1) Out of reach (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literal semantic meaning • “blue” is a synonym of “bad” • Unrelated to the idiom • Association with Arabic Idiom • Unrelated to the meaning
3	All in the same boat	Similar	People are similar (2) We all have the same thoughts (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association with Arabic idiom • Unrelated to the idiom
4	Like father, like son		Close to the heart (1) To think similarly (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrelated to the idiom • “like” is a synonym of “similar”
5	To kill two birds with one stone	Identical	Bird in hand is better than ten in the bush (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association with Arabic Idiom

Table 6 continued

6	Over my dead body		<p>More than I can take (2)</p> <p>Beating the dead is forbidden (1)</p> <p>Out of my control (1) }</p> <p>I missed it! (1) }</p> <p>Over my dead body (1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “more” is a synonym of “over” • Association with Arabic idiom • Unrelated to the idiom • Literal semantic meaning
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4.3. Results for Research Question Three

The third research question aimed to investigate the relationship between the length of stay of Saudi English learners in the USA and the acquisition of English idioms. For this purpose, *Spearman rho* correlation analysis was performed between total scores on both tasks and length of stay in the US. The results of the *Spearman rho* correlation analysis are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: *Spearman rho* correlation results for length of stay in the US

Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	Total
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-.519
	N	.003
		31

As shown in Table 7, the correlation analysis revealed a medium negative correlation $r = -.519$ which was statically significant, $p = .003$. This result indicates that there is a negative relationship between length of stay in the US and knowledge of English idioms. In other words, participants who had stayed longer in the US demonstrated less knowledge of the target idioms and vice versa, participants who had stayed for a shorter period of time demonstrated more knowledge of the target idioms.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the acquisition of three types of idioms, different, similar, and identical, by Saudi learners of English. The study also set up to identify learners' problems with each of the three types of idioms through detailed analysis of their errors in a receptive and a productive knowledge task. This chapter offers a discussion of the results of the study in view of related theories and research. It also summarizes the main limitations of the study and offers recommendations for further research. The chapter ends with the main conclusions of the study.

5.1. Discussion

The first question that this research aimed to answer was whether Saudi learners' knowledge of English idioms is influenced by the presence or absence of similar idioms in Arabic, their L1. For this purpose, the participants' receptive and productive knowledge of 15 English idioms was tested through a multiple choice and a translation task, respectively.

In both tasks participants demonstrated a relatively high knowledge of the target English idioms. However, they achieved a higher percentage of correctness on the receptive knowledge task (72%) than on the productive knowledge task (59%). Regarding the three types of idioms, the results from the receptive and productive knowledge tasks were slightly different. Specifically, receptive knowledge of identical idioms (90%) was significantly better than knowledge of similar and different idioms. Knowledge of similar idioms (76%) ranked second and was significantly different than knowledge of different idioms. Knowledge of different idioms (51%) yielded the lowest level of correctness among the three types.

On the other hand, knowledge of similar idioms (89%) ranked first on the productive task, followed by identical idioms (79%) and different idioms (8%). However, it is important to mention here that the difference between productive knowledge of similar and identical idioms was not significant. In fact, the significant difference was between knowledge of different idioms and the other two types.

This finding is not surprising; it is consistent with prior research findings (e.g. Abdullah and Jackson (1998); Bulut and Çelik-Yazici (2004); Cakir (2011); Irujo 1986), where similar results were found. Particularly, identical idioms were the easiest to comprehend and produce, followed by similar idioms, whereas different idioms were the most difficult to comprehend and produce.

The fact that identical and similar idioms showed a higher rate of correct receptive and productive knowledge than different idioms can be attributed to the positive effect of participants' L1 idiomatic knowledge. These results suggest that the Saudi ESL learners in this study systematically used their L1 to understand L2 idioms. This finding can be explained in light of the Language Transfer Theory (Gass and Selinker, 1984), which claims that there is interference between learners' L1 and L2 during the acquisition process of L2. Regarding the present study, positive transfer occurred whenever the target English idioms had equivalent or similar counterparts in Arabic. Participants were able to comprehend and produce identical and similar English idioms with accuracy ranging between 76% and 90%. In contrast, different idioms produced much lower rate of accuracy in both receptive and productive knowledge, revealing the effect of negative transfer. That is, participants made errors in both in the multiple choice and translation task which were often associated with interference from Arabic, the participants' first language.

The results can also be explained based on the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis that was proposed by Lado (1957), who claimed that errors are predictable by comparing similarities and differences between L1 and L2. In the context of the current study, the similarities between Arabic and English were embedded in the category of identical idioms. These idioms were selected because they have exact equivalents in Arabic. For example the idiom “*To add fuel to the fire*” is rendered with exactly the same words in Arabic and with the same meaning. In contrast, differences between the two languages in relation to idioms were embedded in the category of different idioms. The results of the study showed support for the predictions of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis as the best receptive and productive knowledge was found in relation to identical idioms and the most difficulties were revealed regarding different idioms.

More specific evidence in support of the two second language acquisition theories discussed above, the Language Transfer Theory (Gass and Selinker, 1984) and the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Lado, 1957) was provided by a closer examination of participants’ errors in the receptive and productive tasks. Especially insightful were the errors in the productive task, which involved a translation of the target idioms into Arabic.

Among the three types of idioms, errors were mainly found in different and similar idioms with only a few errors in identical idioms. The observed problems were attributed to the following four factors: 1) participants’ wrong choice of the option containing the literal meaning of the target idiom; 2) participants’ wrong association of the meaning of the target idiom with an Arabic idiom; 3) participants’ wrong choice of a distractor option which contained a synonym of a key word in the target idiom; and 4) participants’ choice of an unrelated meaning.

These findings collaborate Abdullah and Jackson’s (1998) observations that errors related to L2 idioms were caused by participants’ attempt to paraphrase the idioms semantically or to

translate the idioms semantically. For example, for the English idiom *"To bleed one white,"* Syrian English learners interpreted it semantically as *"To have dry blood,"* which indicates that they associated the words *"bleed (and) white"* with *"dry blood"* which in the Syrian Arabic dialect has a different meaning, *"to be scared."* Likewise, similar errors were found among the Saudi participants in the current study. For instance, for the English idiom *"It takes one to know one,"* one subject interpreted it as *"Something reminds me of another."* Apparently, the participant associated the phrase *"know one"* with *"remind...another"* by association with a different Arabic idiom.

Examining the errors in both the receptive and productive tasks has provided insights into the processes involved in the comprehension and production of English idioms. Specifically, these errors suggest that Saudi participants resort to their native language in comprehending as well as producing English idioms. In the translation task, identical and similar idioms were easier to translate than different ones. This finding points at the possibility of a positive transfer from participants' L1 to their L2 (Gass & Selinker, 1984). For instance, for the idioms *"All in the same boat,"* *"Like father, like son,"* *"To kill two birds with one stone,"* and *"Over my dead body,"* most of the participants were able to render them correctly. However, there were a few errors in interpreting these idioms that can be attributed to the effect of negative transfer (Gass & Selinker, 1984). For example, for the similar idiom *"All in the same boat,"* most of the subjects translated it correctly into its Arabic equivalent *"We are all in the air together,"* yet three participants provided wrong translations *"People are similar"* and *"We all have the same thoughts."* It seems that for the first wrong interpretation, the participant associated the word *"same"* in the target idiom with the synonymous word *"similar"* in a different Arabic idiom. As for the second incorrect rendition, the participant seemed to have associated the phrase

“All...same” with “all... the same thoughts” in a different Arabic idiom. Another evidence of negative transfer was found in identical idioms, such as “*Over my dead body.*” Some participants provided wrong responses such as “*More than I can take,*” “*Out of my control*” and “*I missed it!*” by association with non-idiomatic fixed phrases in Arabic.

However, the majority of the errors were found in the data from the translation task. For example, the idioms “*It takes one to know one*” and “*Out of the blue,*” were the most challenging ones for the participants, as 21 of them provided an incorrect translation of the idiom “*It takes one to know one.*” Similar to Abdullah and Jackson’s (1998) study, a great number of the errors were caused by semantic translations triggered by different interpretations of the idiom: “*You need time to know someone,*” “*To learn from mistakes,*” “*To gain knowledge from experience,*” “*To learn something gradually*” and “*Things occur for reasons.*”

In addition, it is necessary to mention that Arabic idioms usually occur in the form of whole sentences, which consist of two or more words (Aldahesh, 2013). This explains why, in the translation task, participants rendered the target English idioms into complete Arabic sentences. This is an interesting finding which provides further evidence in support of the Language Transfer Hypothesis (Gass & Selinker, 1984), specifically about negative transfer of syntactic features found in the L1.

Hajjaj and Kharma (1989) indicated that Arab learners of English have difficulties in processing English idioms for three main reasons. First, both grammatically and semantically, idioms have special features which generally create a challenge to the foreign learners of English and not only Arab learners. In other words, it is useless to try to analyze idioms into their constituent parts, thus, learners should learn them as single items with their meanings. Second, Arabic learners of English avoid using idioms, instead preferring to use long words, usually of

Latin origin which isolate them as foreigners. Finally, even though a considerable number of English idioms have Arabic counterparts, most idioms are not restricted to language, but also related to culture. Thus, by acquiring idiomatic knowledge in a second language learners are also expanding their understanding of the culture of the native speakers.

Lastly, this study also looked at the effect of length of stay in the US on the acquisition of English idioms. The results revealed a negative correlation between participants' length of stay in the US and the acquisition of idioms. In other words, participants who had been in the US for a shorter period of time demonstrated greater knowledge of the target idioms than those who have stayed longer. This finding was rather unexpected and in contradiction to empirical and theoretical claims (Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau, 2011) about the positive effect of length of stay on building second language lexical knowledge.

There is probably more than one factor that could have led to this result. One possible reason could be attributed to the fact that the participants were all immersed in an academic environment where standard English is the norm in class interactions, whereas idiomatic English is often intentionally avoided for ease of communication and understanding. Thus, the participants who had stayed longer in this academic context might have lost some of the idiomatic language they had acquired as part of their English language classes in Saudi Arabia. Another factor that this study did not include was participants' motivation to expand their idiomatic knowledge of English, which may play a more important role than the length of exposure to the language. A third possible explanation could be the small sample size, which makes it difficult to generalize this finding to a larger population. Overall, this rather controversial finding calls for follow-up studies, which should explore the effect of length of stay in a more profound way and with larger samples.

5.2. Limitations and Recommendations

Although the results of the present research support other research findings (e.g. Abdullah and Jackson (1998); Bulut and Çelik-Yazici (2004); Cakir (2011); Irujo 1986), generalizations beyond the sample are constrained by the very small sample size. Another limitation to the generalizability of the results of this study stems from the restricted number of idioms included in the instrument. Moreover, despite the serious measures that were taken to improve the validity and reliability of the instrument, it is possible that not all idioms had the same frequency of use among native speakers. Having high frequency idioms in each of the three categories (identical, similar, and different) was one of the most challenging tasks in the preparation of this research, and it is one of the areas that future studies should carefully consider and painstakingly control.

As mentioned earlier, psychological variables such as motivation and interest in learning English idioms were not considered in the design of this study. However, as suggested by the unexpected negative correlation between length of stay and knowledge of idioms, it can be presumed that such factors play a role in the acquisition of interlanguage idiomatics, and it is recommended for future studies to add these variables to their research agendas.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the results of this study and the insights gained from the analysis of errors, several implications for the teaching and learning of idioms can be extrapolated. This section presents suggestions that will help learners to overcome certain types of errors in the comprehension and English idioms in light of Error Analysis Theory (EAT) (Corder, 1967).

Like other types of figurative language, idioms appear to embody cultural beliefs, social conventions, and norms. Yağiz and Izadpanah (2013) have observed that idioms, as a major

component of native-like communication, enable a language learner to comprehend the thoughts, emotions and views of the speakers of the target language. Therefore, by learning and knowing idioms in the target language, second language learners not only expand their lexical knowledge, but also their understanding of cultural values, wisdoms, and norms of the first language speakers of that language.

For this reason, building learners' idiomatic knowledge in a second language should be done in a systematic and persistent way. A language teacher should design a systematic plan for teaching idioms to ESL learners, taking into consideration students' age and language proficiency levels. Certainly, the more teachers use the idioms in classroom activities, the better students will master them.

Teachers may first start with identical idioms which have their exact counterparts in the learners' L1s. Gradually, they can introduce similar idioms by drawing students' attention to the differences between the L2 and L1 renditions, and making students aware of the fact that similar idioms should be memorized as chunks. This will prepare them for different idioms, which represent the biggest challenge to language learners. Students should be made aware that different idioms have no counterparts in their L1, and for this reason, they should spend more time and effort in memorizing them and their meanings.

ÇAKIR (2011) provided a number of suggestions in teaching idiomatic expressions. For example, the most frequently used idioms should be taught by providing exercises that involve inferring idiom meanings and using these expressions in meaningful contexts rather than in isolation. In addition, other strategies such as video clips, pictures, role plays, dialogues, gestures, and group works are beneficial to teach idioms.

Liu (2008) claimed that language teachers should be aware of their students' progress in grasping the idioms they are learning. In other words, teachers should apply ongoing assessment in different forms such as quizzes and observation of students' performance in class. He also suggested a number of activities for teaching idioms, including matching idioms with definitions or pictures that illustrate them, filling in blanks with appropriate idioms, using idioms in stories, storytelling or writing and other creative activities.

5.4 Conclusion

Mastery of idioms in a second language is an important part of learners' lexical and cultural competence. This study provided insights into the processes that partake in interlanguage idiomatics. First of all, language teachers and researchers should be aware that the acquisition of idioms is influenced by the similarities and differences between idioms in learners' L1s and the target L2. This study's results collaborated previous research findings (e.g. Abdullah and Jackson (1998); Bulut and Çelik-Yazici (2004); Cakir (2011); Irujo 1986) that identical idioms are the easiest to master, whereas different idioms are more difficult to acquire, resulting in more errors in comprehension and production.

Extrapolating from the errors in comprehension and production, it can be presumed that participants resort to their first language to comprehend and produce the target idioms. In view of Language Transfer Theory (Gass & Selinker, 1984), a positive transfer is observed when the target L2 idioms have identical or similar counterparts in the L1, and vice versa, a negative transfer is observed in relation to different idioms. Specifically, instances of negative transfer were observed in relation to literal semantic translations of some target idioms or errors triggered by wrong associations with unrelated Arabic idioms.

The error analysis provided support for Awwad's (1990) observation that "without a thorough knowledge of both cultures the translator or interpreter will be at a complete loss to translate idioms which carry a heavy semantic load that is culture specific" (p. 59). Obviously, developing idiomatic knowledge in a second language is one of the most challenging tasks because it involves not only lexical knowledge, but also cultural understanding and competence. This study's results indirectly suggest that the process of teaching and learning idioms can be facilitated by giving special attention to the category of L2 idioms which have no counterparts in learners' L1. In more general terms, the study's results confirm the extant body of research findings about the acquisition of interlanguage idiomatics and its importance in developing not only learners' language proficiency but also a deeper understanding of the native speakers' cultural values and belief.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Consent Form

Dear participant,

My name is Halah Banjar. I am a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. I am currently developing a research study as part of my Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics. In this study, I will investigate Saudi students' knowledge of idiomatic English. The sample will include a total number of 30 Saudi speakers of English.

If you agree to participate in my study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire which consists of 15 English idioms. The task will not take more than 30 minutes. All your responses will be confidential and anonymous. You will be asked to provide demographic information (gender, age group, level of English, etc.) about yourselves, but not your names. Your participation in the survey is VOLUNTARY. If you agree to take part in the investigation, you need to sign this form. However, if you change your mind, you may withdraw at any time without hesitation.

The people who will have access to the data will be myself and my thesis advisor, Dr. Charkova. After the study is completed, the raw data sheets will be destroyed. All possible steps will be taken to protect your identity.

For additional information, you can contact me, Halah Banjar, Project Researcher, tel.: (618) 305 5992, email: hbanjar@siu.edu or Dr. Krassimira Charkova, Research Advisor, Department of Linguistics, Faner Building 3225 SIUC, Carbondale, IL, 62901, Office tel.: (618) 453 3425, email: shakova@siu.edu.

Thank you for your precious collaboration and assistance in this research.

I have read the material above, and any question that I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Name _____

Signature _____

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail siuhsc@siu.edu

Appendix B

A Pilot Survey of Native Speakers of American English

Indicate how frequently you use these English idioms by selecting the option that most accurately describes your usage. At the end of the survey, suggest 4 or 5 other idioms that are frequently used by native speakers and are not included in this survey.

	Idioms	1 Never	2 Very rare	3 Occasionally	4 Often	5 Very often
1	A piece of cake					
2	Kick the bucket					
3	Out of the blue					
4	To sleep on it					
5	To pull someone's leg					
6	Head over heels					
7	In a nutshell					
8	To break a leg					
9	A deer in the headlights					
10	Off the top of my head					
11	All bark and no bite					
12	Blood is thicker than water					
13	Curiosity killed the cat					
14	Last but not least					
15	Over my dead body					
16	Silence is golden					
17	Start from scratch					
18	Add fuel to the fire					
19	Birds of feather flock together					
20	An eye for an eye					
21	On pins and needles					
22	Go and fly a kite					
23	A leopard can't change his spot					
24	To be under someone's thumb					
25	Fortune smiled on him					
26	Took the law into his hands					
27	To give someone the evil eye					
28	Like a bull in a china shop					
29	To make a mountain out of a molehill					
30	Get up on the wrong side of the bed					

Appendix C
Research Instrument

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your time in doing this questionnaire. I would like to inform you that this is not a test. The results will be used for the purposes of my research and not to evaluate your knowledge of the English language. Also, your answers will be completely anonymous. Please, answer every question before you submit your answers.

Thank you for your cooperation.

PART ONE

Demographic Information

1. What is your gender?
 Male Female
2. What is your age group?
 18-24 25-31 32-39
3. What is your level of education?
 Undergraduate Graduate MA Graduate PhD
4. How long have you been in the US?
 0 – 6 months 6 months – 1 year More than 1 year
5. What is your English level?
 Beginner
 Pre-intermediate
 Intermediate
 Upper-intermediate
 Advanced

PART TWO

Task One

Which of the following options contains **the correct meaning** for the phrases written in **boldface**?

1. **A piece of cake** means:
 - a) an easy task
 - b) a part of a process
 - c) a small amount of something

2. **A deer in the headlights** means:
 - a) When something becomes obvious because it is brightly lit.
 - b) When one is confused and needs to make a decision but cannot react quickly.
 - c) A driver who is scared of deer crossing the road.

3. **To pull someone's leg** means:
 - a) To take one's leg and pull it strongly.
 - b) To cause someone to make an error.
 - c) To say something untrue as a joke.

4. **Curiosity killed the cat** means:
 - a) Being curious can get you into trouble.
 - b) Cat lead dangerous life.
 - c) The cat is a curious animal.

5. **Start from scratch** means:
 - a) To start from the very beginning.
 - b) To try to do impossible things.
 - c) You do a favor for me and I will do a favor for you.

6. **To add fuel to the fire** means:
 - a) To try to stay warm.
 - b) To intensify situation.
 - c) To try to complete a task.

7. **To give someone the evil eye** means:
 - a) To have eyes similar to devil's eyes.
 - b) To need to wear glasses.
 - c) To look at someone in an angry or unpleasant way.

8. **To get up on the wrong side of the bed** means:
 - a) To be in a bad mood and easily annoyed.
 - b) To have pain on one side of the body.
 - c) To have difficulty waking up.

9. **A time and a place for everything** means:
- a) Different things are appropriate on different occasions.
 - b) Think before you do something.
 - c) Live each day and do not worry about the future.

Task Two

There are six English idioms below. Imagine that you have to translate these idioms to an Arabic friend who does not know English. How will you translate these idioms? Write the Arabic translation for each idiom in the given space.

1. Out of the blue.

2. It takes one to know one.

3. All in the same boat.

4. Like father, like son.

5. Over my dead body.

6. To kill two birds with one stone.

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SAUDI LEARNERS

Major Professor: Krassimira Charkova