



IDIOMS IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH: DIVERSITIES AND SYMMETRIES

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Abstract:

The current study deals with one of the most important topic within linguistics in general and within semantics in particular which is called idioms. This notion denotes a set of two or more orthographic words which sense cannot be deduced from the sense of the component parts. The problem of the study is that some learners face difficulties within interpretation of the idiom phenomenon. The study also aims at re-visiting the concept of "idiom" and its details in both English and Arabic. It is hypothesized that "idioms" usually more employed in Arabic than in English.

To perform its aims and confirm its hypothesis, the study adopts the following steps:

- (i) Defining the notion of "idiom" in both English and Arabic.
- (ii) Stating the structure of "idiom" in both English and Arabic.
- (iii) Coming out with a number of conclusions.

The result is that Arabic is used "idiom" more than English.

Keywords: Idiom, Words, Lexical, Identical, Grammar

1. IDIOMS IN ENGLISH

1.1 Definitions

Binza and Bosch (2012: 184) state that the term idiom has to take into consideration two features viz. its stable character and its unexpected of sense. These stable phrasal systems are typical or peculiar of the language being defined. Concerning the first feature, idioms contain words that are usually used together. Their sense is unexpected since it cannot be collected logically from its constituent parts. In this regard, Binkert (2004: 71) views that idiom is a highly specialized unit whose sense typically cannot be predicted from the sense of the words out of which it is made. Expressions like, *shoot the breeze*, *be up tight*, and *so long* are instances of idioms. In most instances, idioms are stable in usage and cannot be substituted or modified.

According to Philip (2011: 15), the concept idiom is a set of two or more orthographic words whose sense cannot be deduced from the sense of the component parts. That is,, there is a discrepancy between what the phrase as a full indicates and what its components would indicate if read compositionally. This, however, is only one of the characteristics of

idiomaticity. Regarding an idiom to show the sense that it does, it must also be established.

Brinton (2000: 100), on the other hand, illustrates that an idiom is a successive of words which operates as one unit; it is grammatically stable and semantically conventionalized. He (ibid.) exemplifies the following instances:

"spill the beans"	"saw logs"
"shoot the breeze"	
"keep tabs on"	"add fuel to the fire"
"lose one's cool"	
"steal the show"	"bite the dust"
"rock the boat"	
"take stock of"	"flog a dead horse"
"hold your horses"	

He (ibid.) adds that the meaning of the idiom is usually not expected from the sense of the isolated words; this is what linguists name "non-compositionality". For instance, one cannot count the sense of "being sick" or "feeling ill" from the senses of "*under* and *weather*". In this connection, Richard and Schmidt (2010:270) describe idiom as a unit which operates as one unit and whose sense cannot be worked out from its separate constituents. For instance, "*she washed her hands of the matter*"



indicates that she rejected to have anything more to do with the matter. They (ibid.) state that idiomatic is the degree to which speech is not merely grammatical but also native-like in use.

1.2 Types of Idioms

Cacciari and Tabossi (1993: 17) indicate that idioms can be divided into three sorts which are illustrated below:

1. Opaque idiom: refers to the relations between idioms' components and also the idiom meaning which do not seem to be apparent, but the meanings of individual words even so will constrain each interpretation and use. For the idiom kick the bucket, for instance, the semantic of the verb to kick constrain both interpretation and discourse productivity.

2. Clear idioms: in these idioms, there are one to one semantic relations between the idiom words and parts of the idioms' meaning, actually because of figurative correspondences between an idiom's words and constituents of the idiom's meaning. For the idiom break the ice, for example, the word break corresponds to the idiomatic sense of changing a mood or feeling.

3. Quasi- figurative idioms: in which the literal referent of an idiom is itself an instance of the idiomatic meaning; for example, giving up the ship is at the same time a perfect or prototypical model of the act of surrendering and a phrase that can refer to any instance of complete surrenders.

1.3 Characteristics of Idiom

According to Brinton and Akimoto (1999:113), the essential characteristic of an idiom is that the non-compositional nature of its meaning. An idiom is sometimes outlined as a phrase whose meaning is not a sum of the meaning of its constituents. Another characteristic is its syntactic fixity; within the case of kick the bucket, for instance the noun cannot be pluralized, nor changed by adjectival phrases, the word-order cannot be modified and the verb can take numerous inflected forms, but cannot be passivized. However, this fixity which these syntactic options show is relative, based on each idiom.

As a matter of truth, Yong and Peng (2007:176) affirm that idioms have the subsequent options that are:

1. An idiom is a fixed stylized phrase or sentence that is easy in form but compendious in sense.
2. An idiom is a phrase which implies something different from the meanings of the separate words from which it is shaped.
3. An idiom may be a range of words which, taken along, mean one thing totally different from the individual words of the idiom once they stand alone.

4. An idiom may be a cluster of words which, once they are used along in a very explicit combination, has a different meaning from the one they might have if you took the meaning of all the individual words within the cluster.

5. An idiom is an expression which functions as a single unit whose meaning cannot be discovered from its separate components.

6. An idiom is a term utilized in grammar and lexicography to take over with a sequence of words that is semantically and sometimes syntactically restricted, so they operate as one unit.

Bussmann (1996: 533), on the opposite hand, maintains that the term idiom can be defined as a set, multi-elemental group of words with the subsequent characteristics:

(a) The complete meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of the individual elements, e.g. to have a crush on someone ('to be loving with someone');

(b) The substitution of single constituents does not induce a scientific modification of meaning (which is not true of non-idiomatic syntagms), e.g. *to have a smash on someone;

(c) A literal reading leads to a homophonic non-idiomatic variant, to which conditions (a) and (b) no longer applies (figurative). He (ibid.) says that regularly there is a diachronic affiliation between the literal reading and also the idiomatic reading (idiomatization).

In such cases, the treatment of the idiom as an unanalyzable lexical entity is insufficient. Relying upon the theoretical preconception, sayings, figures of speech, nominal constructions, and twin formulas are all subsumed beneath idioms. On this basis, Brinton and Akimoto (1999: 7) clarify the subsequent lines:

"Of the various definitions of idiom, three criteria, both semantic and syntactic, emerge as predominant. The first is semantic opacity, the fact that the meaning of an idiom cannot be deduced from a sum of the meanings of its parts; in this sense, the meaning of an idiom is not motivated. Thus, the meaning of die cannot be produced from the sum of kick + the + bucket. Second criterion relates to the apparent morphological and transformation deficiencies of idioms, in not permitting the syntactic variability displayed in other, freer sequences of words; operations such passive (*The bucket was kicked by Sam), internal modification (*Hold yourrestless horses), and topicalization (*The bucket Sam kicked) cannot occur with the idiomatic meaning being retained. Finally, the lack of substitutability in idioms, as in have a crush on".

Some Related Concepts

1.4.1 Metonymy

Cruse (2006: 108) illustrates that the term



metonymy indicates "a variety of figurative use of language". What distinguishes metonymic uses of expressions is the relation between its figurative sense and its literal sense. Metonymy includes relation of associations. Unlike metaphor, "metonymy" does not depend on a relation of analogy or resemblance. The types of associative relations which provide metonymy are varied and many. The following are some illustrative instances (X via Y denotes that some entity X is pointed out using expressions that naturally refers to Y):

- 1) "Whole via part: I noticed several new faces tonight".
- 2) "Representing entity via Representing entity: England collapse".
- 3) "Representing entity via possessor: He's not in the phone book".
- 4) "Contained entity via Container: The kettle's boiling".
- 5) "Wood via Tree: It's made of solid oak".
- 6) "Plant via Flower: We prune the roses in March", (ibid).

1.4.2 Metaphor

Löbner (2002: 50) describes the term metaphor as "concepts, notions, models, pictures from one domain, the source domain, are derived from the description of things in another domain, the target domain". Metaphor has a capacity to create a novel idea in the concerned domain, a notion that is identical to the original notion of the source domain in which it has particular elements, although not all, of the source concepts, (ibid).

As a result, metaphor is one type of figurative language which is the most commonly and widely utilized. It is implicit comparisons in which the implied concept is contrasted with another one via similarities or likeness of attributes, features or attributes between the concerned two concepts. So, it is a figure of speech that words or expressions are usually utilized for one kind of action, object and extended to another, (Matthews, 2003:224).

1.4.3 Allegory

It refers to extending a metaphor in terms of an entire passage or speech, or representing abstract concepts via the images of acting persons ('personification'). Allegory is also described as extended metaphors: for example, "*Reverie...a musical young girl, unpredictable, tender, enigmatic, provocative, from whom I never seek an explanation of her escapades*". The allegory is usually called 'pure' when every basic term in the passage include a double importance, 'mixed' when one or more notions do not, (Bussmann, 1999: 41).

Abrams and Harpham (2012: 7) conclude that an allegory denotes a narrative in which the actions and agents in addition to the setting are devised by the addressers to make coherent meaning on the "literal," or basic, level of significance, and at the same time to interact a second, correlated order of significance. Two main types of allegory can be distinguished that are mentioned as follows:

- (1) Political and historical allegory, in which the individuals and actions that are pointed literally out their turn realized, or "allegorize," historical events and personages.
- (2) The allegory of notions, in which the literal character represents concepts and the plot allegorizes abstract doctrines. These types of allegory can either be culminated throughout a work

1.5 Idiomatic Expression vs. Collocation

Crystal (2011: 86) states that collocation is a concept that is used referring to the "habitual co-occurrence" of individual semantic items. For instance, "*auspicious*" collocates with "*occasion, event, sign, etc.*"; and "*letter*" collocates with "*alphabet, graphic, etc.*". Thus, collocations counts as a syntagmatic semantic relation. They can be linguistically predictable for "a greater or lesser extent", and this differentiates them from meaning associations, which including idiosyncratic connections.

Besides, Bussmann (1996: 200) mentions that Firth is considered as the first linguist who provides the concepts of collocation with his lexical theory. So, collocations can be semantically concerned. For Matthews (2003: 530), collocation is dealt with grammatical field in a relation between individual semantic elements; e.g., for instance, "*computer*" collocates with *hate* in *My computer hates me*".

In this regard, Meyer (2009: 223) describes collocation as "words that usually come together". For instance, the statement "*I strongly agree*" involve two words, "*strongly* and *agree*", that normally occur in this context. Other words can surely follow "*strongly*", but are less doing so than "*agree*" and others, such as "*disagree* or *dislike*". Cruse (2006:27), on his turn, illustrates that collocation is a sequence of words which is grammatical, but creates a unit in certain way. It takes place since they always come together, but usually the sequence also involves a lexical unity. For instance, "one or more of the component words can have a certain meaning which solely seems in that group, or in a specific series of concerned groups". The instances below contain collocations in this sense:

- a high wind
- high seas
- high office
- have a high opinion of.



In each of this instance, the word "*high*" carries a distinguishable particular sense, and this meaning is distinguishable from the default sense existed in, for instance, *a high wall*. Besides, Saeed (2016:438) views that collocation has two explanations:

"The first one describes expressions coming together syntactically and semantically in an acceptable way. The second explanation can be summarized as the semantic influence on terms of repeatedly coming together. For instances, "*whisper softly* rather than *whisper quietly*, or *high mountains* rather than *tall mountain*".

Consequently, Müller (2008:4) mentions that collocation usually indicates the expression of words which are often used, like, "*bitterly cold, rich imagination or closed friends*". If one hears the first term, the following one can anticipated, or at least he/she has an impression what it could be. He (ibid) adds that "in context with nouns and verbs, collocation means the syntactic relationship between the verb and the noun phrase such as to make a decision or to take a photo".

To sum up, it can be distinguished between free and bound collocation. Fischer (1998:44) comments that the elements of free collocations can be easily linked with words. Thus, the elements of collocations can be "literally". As for bound collocations, Cruse (1986: 41) mentions that the collocations, such as, "*foot the bill and curry favour*", whose components do not identical to be broken, are stated as "bound collocations".

2. IDIOMS IN ARABIC

2.1 Idioms: An Overview

Although idiomatic expressions are a widespread linguistic phenomenon which has been studied by many scholars (Al-Qassimi, 1979: 90), they did not attract the interest of European linguistic and literary scholars until the second half of the nineteenth century, a trend which was led by Russian linguists, such as, (Hussam Al-Din, 1985: 18). This resulted in the production of dictionaries of idiomatic expressions in several European languages (Husam Al-Din, 1985: 16-17).

In Arabic studies, interest in studying these linguistic structures dates back many centuries. Idiomatic expressions appeared in the Holy Qura'n and Al Hadith Al Sharif, whilst early Arabic poetry and prose texts were rich in idioms, attracting the attention of linguistic scholars at the time. Arabic has preserved a particularly large number of these idioms

with varying structures and meanings, reflecting different aspects of Arab heritage and everyday life (Al-Anbar, 2001: 1).

In this respect, Makkai (1972: 26) states that idioms are lexical clusters, semantically exocentric expressions, collocations, formulas, phrases, compound lexical units, and specialized hypermorphemes. He (ibid) identifies five definitions for idioms, and he tends towards to the fourth of these which is the ideational form in the Oxford English Dictionary: "A form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc, peculiar to a language, a peculiarity of phraseology approved by usage of language and often having a signification other than its grammatical or logical one" (1972: 23).

It is worth mentioning that the term 'proverb' has been used to express the concept of idioms by Al-Anbar (2001: 23). In this regard, Norrick (2014: 7) states that proverbs are used to profound and communicate vital meanings practically everywhere, especially in Iraq since they are widely used to explain the core of certain phenomena, code of counsel, conduct, prohibitions and offer direct orders. Besides, proverbs are permanent and fundamental element of daily speech within all communities. Since they are regarded as the result of shared experiences, the principles of one culture are always the commandments of another, (Beryl, 2017: 3).

There are thousands of proverbs in various languages and cultures around the world. For millennia, proverbs have been studied and collected as important language markers of cultural ideas and values. The first collections of proverbs go back to the third millennium BC, and they are actually recorded on "Sumerian cuneiform tablets" as identical values of behavior and everyday observation on the nature of humans. Because proverbs are always listed with no their social surroundings, their factual uses and functions, which vary from situation to situation, are not shown, (Martn, 2011:184).

However, Al-Zamakhshari (1996) use more than one term for idioms including 'metaphor', 'allegory', 'metonymy', and 'proverb'. An example of using a range of different terms to refer to idiomatic expressions can be found in Al-Jāhiz (1988:12) in his discussion of the following saying of the Prophet Muhammad:

– "الان حمل الوطيس" "Now the war has become harder".

He (ibid) comments that, because of frequent usage, this expression or saying is similar to a proverb. This expression is recognized as a proverb. Commenting on the expression (ليس جلد النمر) literally "someone wears the tiger skin". However, an example of using metaphor in relation to idiomatic expressions is Al-Tha'alibi (1994)'s investigation of



some idioms. Examples include المال رأس "capital" and عصاهم انشقت literally "their stick has split i.e. they are divided/became separated".

Al-Jurjani (1994: 85) refers to idiomatic expressions using three related terms: proverb, representation and similarity. Unlike previous scholars of rhetorics and linguistics, Al-Jurjani was clear that idiomatic expressions were a linguistic phenomenon. He comments on the idiom (رفع عقيرته، رفع صوته) "the voice became loud/raised" maintaining that it has come to be used conventionally and its meaning cannot be inferred from the meaning of its parts since there is no relation between صوت "voice" and عقيرة "foot".

2.2 Characteristics of Idiom

This section describes the properties and features of idioms, focusing on their structural and semantic aspects.

2.2.1 Structural Features

Idiomatic expressions are fixed or constant in terms of their features and order, which makes them different from normal expressions (Abdou, 2011: 20). Therefore, they cannot be changed or modified by grammatical means (Husam Al-Din, 1985: 125). However, this fixedness does not mean total immobility as in the case of proverbs, but that this element is restricted in expression.

Normally, there is inseparability between at least two elements in these expressions, meaning that they cannot be changed or substituted by other components or elements (ibid). Thus, in the following example (احمر وجهه) "His face went red i.e. He blushed due to self-consciousness or embarrassment" the juxtaposition is between the verb احمر and the subject وجهه. Other types of collocations include those between verb and object, between subject and predicate, and between prepositions and their object. Juxtapositions may occur between more than two elements, such as the collocation between verb, subject and object found in this example: وضعت الحرب أوزارها literally, "The war takes off its skirts i.e. War is over". These collocated lexical items are examples of what are referred to as fixed expressions in which the restricted elements cannot be changed or replaced. Thus, in the above mentioned idiomatic expression, the word (noun) أوزار (skirts i.e. clothes) cannot be replaced by أثقال (weights).

Similarly, in the following idiom, the verb تبرق cannot be replaced by تلمع or another verb: سارير تبرق وجهه literally, "His face is lit up, i.e. He is cheerful". The preposition في in the expression سقط في يده "He cannot help himself because he is in a mess" cannot be substituted by any other preposition. Moreover, if there are any changes, they will only

appear in a limited number of syntactic frames or constructions (Nunberg et al., 1994: 492).

This principle does not imply total immobility; rather, that a degree of flexibility is permitted in certain circumstances, allowing for the substitution of particular elements within idiomatic expressions (Al-Anbar, 2001: 2). Fraser (1970: 39) notes that idioms present different levels of frozenness, i.e. some are completely frozen requiring a fixed structure while others are amenable to transformational operations. Some of the more limited changes may involve eliminating an element from an idiom or replacing one element with another.

Thus, one noun or verb may be substituted by another noun or verb. For example, in the idiomatic expression اضل من بعيره literally, "He is more misled than his camel i.e. He lost his thread" بعيره "his camel" can be substituted by certain other lexical items e.g. جملة "he-camel" or ناقتها "she-camel". Likewise, in the idiomatic expression ارتدوا على اعقابهم "They did not achieve their goal" the verb ارتد can be replaced by other synonymous verbs e.g. رجع "to come back" or انقلب "to turn over", (Al-Anbar, 2001: 4- 5).

Prepositions, however, are unlike verbs because they are functional words which may have more than one meaning. However, when used in a specific context, a preposition can have only one meaning. Thus, when a preposition is used within the structure of an idiomatic expression, it has a specific contextual meaning and consequently, does not have the same flexibility for substitution as nouns or verbs (Al-Anbar, 2001: 6).

To summarize, in terms of frozenness, there are two types of idiomatic expressions:

- It can be a phrase, sentence or clause, is completely fixed, and usually self-contained, e.g. الاتهام أصابع "fingers of suspicion".
- Idioms can be subjected to changes and will allow transformation of certain of their elements as in (أمسك/ يمسك العصا من المتصف) "to grasp the stick by the middle i.e. to take a moderate stance".

2.2.2 Semantic Features

The idiomatic expression is a semantic unit or phrase which cannot be understood, derived, composed or predicted from the meaning of individual words or idiomatic expression components (Huber-Okraine et al., 2005: 349). Consequently, idiomatic expressions are not linked to their lexical aspect. Furthermore, there is no denotational meaning in idioms. Rather, they are recognized merely through their pragmatic significance or use (ibid).

The significance of an idiomatic expression lies exclusively in its distant figurative or metaphorical meaning, which cannot be close to the real meaning. Ortony et al. (1978: 465) refers to the importance of



the concept of metaphor in idiomatic expression and the relationship between the interpretation of meaning and metaphorical meaning. The figurative meaning of idiomatic expression includes the use of metonymy and metaphor. As an idiomatic expression is a single semantic unit or phrase, it is subject to semantic relationships, including synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy which deal with the idiomatic expression as a lexical item (Al-Anbar, 2001: 12).

Idiomatic expressions are also marked by concision in meaning, and may consist of just one or two words. MSA examples, cited by Al-Hamzawi (2000) include:

سحابة صيف literally, "summer cloud i.e. a temporary occurrence"

ابن السبيل, literally, "a passer-by in need of assistance"

نعجة literally, "a goat or ewe i.e., someone who is weak and does not understand".

Literal translation of certain idiomatic expressions may convey their metaphorical meaning, particularly when the meaning in the target language is close to that of an interpreted idiom. For example, if the idiom بين فكي الأسد is translated word-for-word as "between the two jaws of the lion i.e. He has become a prey", the listener or reader may understand that someone is surrounded by danger, without any metaphorical or figurative interpretation.

2.3 Sources of Idiomatic Expressions

New idioms in MSA may be coined daily and they may have their origins in various sources:

1. Many MSA idiomatic expressions have their origins in the Holy Qur'an, for instance, the phrase "lay down the hearing", which means to listen to something. Dawood (2003: 12) note that this idiom has its origin in the Quranic verse:

"إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَذِكْرًا لِمَن كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ"

"Indeed in that is a reminder for whoever has a heart or who listens while he is present [in mind]". (Qaf 37)

2. A second key source of idioms is Al-Hadith Al-sharif, as narrated by the Prophet Mohammad (peace upon him). Examples which have their origins in the Hadith include جناح بعوضة (mosquito's wing) used to refer to any trivial matter and رجل ذو الوجهين "the man with two faces" implying someone is a hypocrite.

3. Some idiomatic expressions are derived from poetry or classical Arabic sources (Abdou, 2011: 18). The idiomatic expression بنات العين "daughters of the eye i.e. tears", was used for the first time by a poet,

and then after a considerable period of use became an idiom. Other idioms can be traced to an utterance originally pronounced by a specific individual on a particular occasion as is the case with سبق السيف العدل too late to back off from something.

This phrase was first used by Al Harith ibn Dalim when he was told to pardon a man he had already executed. This example also illustrates the potential overlap with the domain of proverbs, an issue that will be discussed shortly.

4. Idiomatic expressions can also be borrowed from other languages with numerous idioms having been transferred to MSA via translation or cross-cultural/intercultural transfer between languages.

Two examples include, the first example: وضع النقط على الحروف literally, "put dots on letters" which is similar to the English expression to dot the i's and cross the t's, used when close attention must be paid to a task (Domyati, 2009), the second one: اذاب الثلج "to break the ice", which used widely in English and nowadays used in Arabic.

5. Expressions which originally arise in different Arabic dialects or from slang can also be transferred into MSA to be used as idiomatic expressions (Abdou, 2011: 18), for example: حبة خشم "a nose-to-nose greeting".

6. Some idiomatic expressions are borrowed from specialized linguistic fields and then enter into ordinary discourse. Examples include sport (الكارت الأحمر red card); science and medicine (غسل المخ brainwashing) and the military domain (ساعة الصفر zero hour), (Faied, 2003: 904).

CONCLUSION

The following points are worth mention:

Idioms in English

1. Idiom is a highly specialized unit whose sense typically cannot be predicted from the sense of the words out of which it is made. For examples: *shoot the breeze, be up tight, and so long.*
2. Idioms are grammatically stable and semantically conventionalized, such as, *spill the beans, saw logs and shoot the breeze.*
3. Idioms can be divided into three sorts which are illustrated below: opaque idiom, transparent idioms and quasi-figurative idioms.
4. Metonymy indicates "a variety of figurative use of language".
5. Metaphor has a capacity to create a novel idea in the concerned domain, a notion that is identical to the original notion of the source domain in which it has particular elements, although not all, of the source concepts
6. Allegory is described as extended metaphors: for example, *"Reverie...a musical young girl, unpredictable, tender, enigmatic, provocative,*



from whom I never seek an explanation of her escapades".

Idioms in Arabic

1. Idioms are lexical clusters, semantically exocentric expressions, collocations, formulas, phrases, compound lexical units, and specialized hypermorphemes.
2. The term 'proverb' has been used to express the concept of idioms. Proverbs are used to profound and communicate vital meanings practically everywhere.
3. Idiomatic expressions use three related terms: proverb, representation and similarity.
4. Properties and features of idioms focus on their structural and semantic aspects.
 - Structural features in which idiomatic expressions are fixed or constant in terms of their features and order, which makes them different from normal expressions, such as: احمر وجهه
 - Semantic features indicate that an idiomatic expression is a semantic unit or phrase which cannot be understood, derived, composed or predicted from the meaning of individual words or idiomatic expression components سحابة صيف literally, "summer cloud i.e. a temporary occurrence"
5. As for the sources of Arabic idioms, they may belong to the Holy Qur'an, Al-Ḥadīth Al-sharīf, as narrated by the Prophet Mohammad (peace upon him), the poetry or classical Arabic sources, borrowed from other languages, different Arabic dialects or from slang, specialized linguistic fields and then enter into ordinary discourse.
6. "Idioms" are frequently used in Arabic. Thus, the hypothesis of the study, that is stated earlier, is confirmed.

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