Vivid Phrasal Idioms in L2 Arabic Classroom: Strategies and Perspectives

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Native language (L1) speakers employ a verity of idiomatic expressions that extend beyond literal meaning in their daily social interactions. However, second language (L2) learners often face considerable difficulties in comprehending idiomatic expressions, especially those that appear in authentic content such as songs, movies, and news (Larsem-Walker, 2020; Moon, 1998). Understanding and appropriate use of idiomatic expressions in a variety of social settings can significantly enhance L2 learners' communitive competence in the target language (Alfaifi, 2023, Liontas, 2018). Nevertheless, teaching practices reveal a lack of formal instruction that supports learners in deducing the meaning of L2 idioms, despite the explicit interest in the usage of idioms as expressed by learners in L2 classroom (Hunkel, 2014).

Three key models have been proposed to explain how L2 learners process idiomatic expressions, namely: the Dual Idiom Representation Model (Abel, 2003), the Literal Salience Model Cieślicka , 2006), and the Idioms Diffusion Model (IDM) (Liontas, 1999), which is adapted as the guiding farmwork for analyzing L2 learners' strategies in comprehending idioms meaning, in the current study. Likewise, various terms of idiomaticity have been proposed to describe these language units, including idiomatic expressions (Alqahtani, 2014), multiword expressions (Alshaikhi, 2018), and idioms polysemy (Owens, 2015). However, in this research, I focused exclusively on Vivid Phrasal (VP) idiom, as proposed by Liontas (1999), which evoke a powerful mental image, such as /ʔa-ʃʃaʕara-t-u llatiː qasˤʕam-at ðˤahr-a l-baʕiːr/ (literally, "the one hair that broke the camel's back", equivalently, "the straw that broke the camel's back", and figuratively, "the final action that causes significant damage").

Hence, this exploratory qualitative research aims at highlighting learners' strategies in comprehending VP idioms and reporting learners' experiences of learning VP idioms through explicit instruction in the L2 Arabic classroom. VP idioms were selected from authentic content produced by native Arabic speakers and processed by ten advanced-level Arabic L2 learners at King Saud University, in three tasks: a study-questionnaire, VP idioms reading task, and semi-structured interview. I applied thematic analysis to the participants' descriptions of their strategies and experiences in learning VP idioms. The findings indicate that L2 Arabic learners relied on context clues, guessing, recollection, and L1 to comprehend VP idiom meaning. The pedagogical implications highlight the importance of explicit idiom instruction, the integration of authentic content in L2 classroom, and the development of learners' strategies to recognize and deduce idiomatic expressions effectively.

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