Discourse Functions of Idioms in English and Yemeni Arabic: A Comparative Study

Mohammed Sho'ee Mohammed Damom[1],*, Fawwaz Mohammed Ahmed An-Nashef [2]

[1]Department of English, Faculty of Education-Abs, Hajjah University, Hajjah, Yemen.

[2]Department of English, Faculty of Arts & Humanities - Sana'a University, Sana'a, Yemen.

*Corresponding author: **f.annashef@su.edu.ye**

Keywords

1. Discourse
2. idioms
3. conversation
4. Yemeni Arabic

Abstract:

This study investigates the discoursal functions of English and Yemeni-Arabic idioms common in oral interactions and storytelling, providing a descriptive account of the data to highlight any cross-linguistic similarities and differences between these functions. Results reveal that many idioms in the two languages in question have similar discourse functions and patterns (praise, criticism, description, etc.). People of the two cultures tend to employ similar strategies to convey their reactions (e.g. silence, laugh, annoyance) towards idioms, and all this seems to be influenced both by the type of relationship between the interaction participants (familiarity vs. unfamiliarity) and by the type of the context of situation (formal vs. informal). As for the use of idioms in the codas of stories or casual conversations, the two cultures both employ them in more or less the same way using either observation-comment or event-evaluation clustering. Some English idioms and Yemeni-Arabic ones differ in terms of some of their component words, and others are quite similar. One of the remarkable distinctions between the English and Yemeni-Arabic idioms is the use of animal names and the intended connotations behind that use.

وظائف الخطاب للعبارات الاصطلاحية في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية اليمنية: دراسة مقارنة

محمد شوعي محمد دموم[1]،* , **فواز محمد أحمد الناشف**[2]

[1]قسم اللغة الانجليزية ، كلية التربية -عبس- جامعة حجة ، اليمن.

[2]قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية ـ جامعة صنعاء ، صنعاء ، اليمن.

*المؤلف: f.annashef@su.edu.ye

الكلمات المفتاحية

٢. التعابير الاصطلاحية	١. الخطاب
٤. العربية اليمنية	٣. المحادثة

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف وظائف الخطاب للتعابير الاصطلاحية (idioms) في اللغتين اليمنية والإنجليزية في سياق المحادثات العفوية وسرد القصص، وذلك للكشف عن أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين وظائف هذه التعابير في اللغتين على مستوى الخطاب. وتقدم الدراسة وصفًا تحليليًا خلص إلى عدة استنتاجات. حيث تبيّن أن التعابير الاصطلاحية تؤدي وظائف خطابية متشابهة في اللغتين، وتتبع أنماطًا مشتركة مثل (المدح، النقد، الوصف، وغيرها). كما أظهر الأشخاص من الثقافتين استخدامهم استراتيجيات مماثلة للتفاعل مع هذه التعابير ، مثل (عدم الرد، الضحك، الانزعاج، وغيرها)، وكان هذا التأثر مرتبطًا بدرجة الألفة أو عدم الألفة بين المتحدثين، وكذلك بطبيعة السياق سواء كان رسميًا أو غير رسمي.

وفيما يتعلق باستخدام التعابير الاصطلاحية في خاتمة القصص أو المحادثات اليومية العادية، تظهر الدراسة أن كلتا الثقافتين تستخدمانها بنفس الأسلوب من خلال الجمع بين (الملاحظة/التعليق) أو (الحدث/التقييم). كما أن بعض الألفاظ المستخدمة في التعابير الاصطلاحية الإنجليزية لا يوجد لها ما يقابلها في اللغة العربية اليمنية، في حين يتم التعبير عن بعضها الآخر من خلال تعابير مشابهة أو قريبة من حيث المعنى. ومن الفروقات اللافتة بين التعابير الاصطلاحية في اللغتين هو استخدام أسماء الحيوانات والدلالات المقصودة من هذا الاستخدام.

Introduction:

An idiom is usually defined as a multi-word unit of language that is to a greater or lesser degree a fixed expression that is semantically and pragmatically opaque and specialized in that its sense is not the sum total of its component words taken individually. Such idiomatic expressions are so common in everyday communication that most native speakers do not even realize that they are using them. The idiom, then, has a set of functions to do whenever or wherever it is used. Much work exists on the form and usage of idioms, especially in English. However, to our best knowledge, little, if any, has been done from a comparative perspective on idiomatic expressions in English and the varieties of Arabic. The present study, therefore, is an attempt to examine idioms in English and Yemeni Arabic. To this end, the study builds on Strassler's (1982) ideas about the functions of English idioms to find out to what extent those functions are also applicable to idiomatic expressions in Yemeni Arabic.

Although idioms are used in both speech and writing, Strassler (1982) shows that they are much less frequent in English written discourse. This is the reason why the present paper is restricted to selecting idioms from spoken interactions. It is assumed here that idioms have crucial interactive functions at discourse level and thus they play a vital role in our everyday interactions. To be more precise, idioms are used widely in our daily encounters because they tend to be more concise and persuasive than other lexical items and are often capable of conveying the speaker's intent or emphasis. Furthermore, not only does giving more attention to the study of idioms contribute to linguistic theory in general; it can also play a vital role in research on such areas as applied linguistics and conversational analysis.

2. Statement of the Study

As mentioned earlier, this paper aims to investigate the discoursal functions of Yemeni-Arabic and English idioms common in casual conversations and storytelling, highlighting their cross-linguistic similarities and differences. Special attention is given to the "ordinary talk," that is, communication with family members and friends, rather than the "institution talk," that is, communication with or among professionals in institutional contexts, such as teacher/student and patient/doctor interactions. The reason behind our focusing on ordinary talks is simply due to the fact that they tend to contain a higher frequency of idiomatic expressions and reflect naturalness and colloquiality more than institutional talks do. Additionally, as Deborah (2001) put it, there has been a tendency to treat "ordinary talk" as more fundamental. These 'ordinary talks' are investigated here to explore the potential universality in the discourse functions of idioms across languages, with reference to the influence of certain socio-cultural factors (e.g. age, sex, social distance). In short, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How are idioms in Yemeni Arabic and English utilized in casual conversations and storytelling, and what patterns (e.g., praise, criticism, description) do they typically reflect?
2. What roles do contextual factors – such as familiarity between participants, formality of the setting, and listener reactions – play in the use and interpretation of idioms?

3. Literature Review

Numerous studies have investigated idiomatic expressions from various perspectives, such as their syntactic structure, semantic peculiarities, and pragmatic functions. Makkai (1972), for example, identifies two major types of idioms: **idioms of encoding**, that is, phrases containing unique elements (e.g. kit in kit and kin, meaning relations and friends) that are incapable of appearing in other discoursal environments and hence non-ambiguous; and **idioms of decoding**, that is, those expressions whose individual component items are capable of occurring with literal meanings (e.g. hot potato, meaning an embarrassing issue). Strassler (1982) provides an interesting discussion of English idioms from a pragmatic perspective and thus represents a pioneer work

on the functions of idiomatic expressions. Strassler classified idiomatic expressions into three categories: **first person**, **second person**, and **third person**. He found that third person idioms constitute the most common type, since they tend to be neutral and unrestricted in the sense that, unless prevented by difference in the speakers' social statuses, they can be used by almost all language users. Similarly, he observed that first person idioms are often open to all language users, but they are usually avoided as they have what he called a "self-abasement effect". As far as the second person idioms are concerned, they are the most restricted of all types, as their use is only appropriate among peers.

Fernando (1996) has made a remarkable contribution to the study of multiword expressions, classifying them in terms of idiomaticity into three subclasses: **pure idioms**, **semi-idioms**, and **literal idioms**. In the context of translation, Enani (1996) confirmed that idioms present one of the most difficult problems hindering the process of literal translation. According to Enani, idioms fall into three main categories: **pure idioms**, **semi-idioms**, and **habitual idioms**. He observed that pure idioms do not exist in Arabic since it is a language that tends to be characterized by logic, consistency and stability. Semi-idioms, according to him, are closely related in structural terms to pure idioms but each semi-idiom has a word that refers implicitly to the overall meaning of the idiom. As for habitual collocations, they refer to the co-occurrence of the two or more words which gain stability and familiarity due to their high frequency of use by language users. McCarthy (1998) attempted to shed light on some natural spoken contexts of use for idioms to examine their discoursal functions. Verdonik and Kačič (2012) analyzed Christian expressions in spoken discourse from a pragmatic perspective. The study concluded that these expressions are often used in a content-free manner as pragmatic expressions, much more than in their direct literal meanings. Five groups were identified: attitude markers, content markers, discourse markers, metaphorical usages, and greeting phrases.

In the context of language learning, Alkarazoun (2015) investigated the English-idioms errors made by Jordanian EFL undergraduates. She examined the students' potential strengths and weaknesses in acquiring idiomatic expressions. The results showed that students obtained high scores on idiomatic items made up of noun and adjective phrases as well as those idioms related to special categories like food. Shaheed, Abbar, and Hussein (2022) conducted a study that focused on the semantics of idioms and some learning problems that EFL students seem to face within interpretation of the idiom phenomenon. The study also aimed at re-visiting the concept of idiom in both English and Arabic and concluded that idioms occur more frequently in Arabic discourses than they do in English discourses.

4. Methodology of Research

This study uses a corpus of casual interactions among Yemenis across the sections of society. The interactions used as the primary source of the study data as well as their locations were not preplanned, they were spur-of-the-moment conversations that took place in social encounters. It was impossible for the researchers, therefore, to work together and collect the data in the form of audio recordings. Instead, each individual researcher worked on his own, keeping a notebook and pen around and jotting down idiomatic expressions that featured in any interaction the researcher was part of or just listened to. Contextual factors were noted down as meticulously as possible, including the type of the social encounter where the idiom was used, the age of and relationship between the interactants, and any other contextual factor deemed crucial for determining the appropriate use of the idiomatic expression(s) featuring in that particular encounter. It took us, the researchers, three months to collect the amount of data we believe to be sufficient for the purposes of the present study. After that, a thorough analysis was carried out of the corpus data, and the

idiomatic expressions found and their functions were compared to those in English.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This section presents a thorough analysis and discussion of the data collected for the purpose of the present study, with special attention being given to the patterns (e.g. praise, criticism, description) that the idioms found in the corpus take, the role of contextual variables (age, sex, social distance, power status, topic, setting), and the strategies that speakers may employ to manifest their reactions towards idioms (e.g. silence, laughter, irritation, etc.).

5.1 Idioms in Everyday Conversations

In our everyday speech, idiomatic expressions are so common that most speakers often use them unconsciously. Such lexical items can be used to perform a variety of functions. Below is analysis and discussion of some exchanges taken from the study corpus.

Example 1:

Contextual information: Khalid (Speaker 1) is a 30-plus MA student; he just arrives to join some friends of his in one of their casual meetings. Immediately, he asks why Waleed, another friend of his, is not present.

< S 01 > وينه وليد يا جماعه

< S 02 > ليش **احنا ما ملينا العين** والا ايش   (**We are not up to the standard or what**?)

<S 03 > **الله المستعان**   (with a gentle smile, **Shame on you!**)

<S 01 > **ما عليكم زود** بس اقصد انه ما بيغيب (**You are the best.**)

As can be noticed from this example, three idiomatic expressions are used in this very short exchange. The first two are by two of Khalid's friends in reply to his question about their common friend Waleed's absence: namely, **ليش احنا ما ملينا العين** (we are not up to the standard) and **الله المستعان** (Shame on you!). These two idioms are often used to blame or criticize someone for some action or behavior

that is considered inappropriate or offensive for some reason. In the exchange cited above, Khalid reacted to these blame-invoking idioms, using an idiomatic expression (i.e. **ما عليكم وزد**) which, in this context, functions as an apology for any misunderstanding created by his question; and then he adds some clarification (i.e. **أقصد أنه ما بيغيب**) for what he really meant by his question. It was observed that, although Khalid's friends used idioms to blame him for his noticing their mutual friend's absence but not their presence, they did not seem to be serious or have really been offended; similarly, despite his apologetic reaction to those idioms, Khalid did not seem to have apologized seriously. Thus, one can say that the blame-inducing function that is normally performed by Khalid's friends' idioms on the one hand and the apologetic function that is normally fulfilled by Khalid's idiom on the other hand has been suppressed temporarily, and thus giving way to a secondary function of showing some kind of intimacy and solidarity among the interactants. This suppression of one function and the activation of another one of the idiomatic expressions appears to be controlled by certain contextual facts, such as the fact that the interaction is taking place among close friends in a casual social encounter.

Comparing the functions of the idiomatic expressions used in the above-mentioned exchange and dictated by certain contextual factors to those of some English idioms identified by Strassler (1982) suggests the existence of some sort of universality regarding communicative functions of idiomatic expressions across languages.

Another idiomatic expression often occurring in Yemeni Arabic is the one illustrated in the following example.

Example 2:

A group of students sitting together and Ali (20+ undergraduate student) looks sad and absent-minded. Khalid addresses him saying: **يا عم افرجها يا عم**   (**Come On! Don't be sad.**)

Khalid addresses Ali, using the expression "**يا عم**". If taken out of context, this lexical item can

be taken literally as 'uncle!', a vocative phrase that is typically used by a speaker to address his or her actual uncle. Given the contextual facts, however, it is clear that the literal sense of this expression has been suppressed; so is consequently its vocative function. That is, Khalid is talking to his sad friend Ali, trying to cheer him up, and thus the literal sense of the phrase "يا عم" should be superseded by, as it were, its idiomatic 'twin'. Another reason why the idiomatic sense of this phrase should be given precedence over the literal one comes from its untranslatability into English, that is, the fact that a literal translation of it into English as 'Uncle!' would render the translated version nonsensical. So, only by depending on its context of use, and then resorting to a functional translation, can the idiomatic meaning of 'يا عم افرجها يا عم' be rendered into English as 'Come on, don't be sad!' or 'Come on, buddy! Cheer up!', with the latter rendition appearing to be a little better in that, by using the informal address 'buddy', it takes into account the informality of the tenor of the original.

Another case of idioms used to perform certain functions can be illustrated by the following example, where two idiomatic expressions are exploited by one of the interactants to criticize rather than praise what he considers an unacceptable act of a classmate of his.

Example 3:

(Naji, a 23+ undergraduate student, complains to his classmates about another classmate's behavior, using two idioms to criticize that behavior)

< S 01 > سلمت عليه مرتين ولا سمعني يا اخي
/ya ʕkhi shaif nafsuh/, "**He is full of it**"

(S 02) بالله عليك

< S 01 > ايوه عامل زحمة والخط فاضي /ʕamil
zahhmah walkhatt fadhi/ "**He is showing off**"

The first speaker (i.e. Naji) is addressing himself to his classmates and telling them about another classmate's non-reaction to his greeting twice, a behavior Naji finds it unacceptable. Naji used two idioms to express his protest against and intolerance of that classmate's behavior; he uses the form of the third person pronoun to refer to the classmate. Naji uttered the first idiom **يا اخي شايف نفسه** (He is full of it), and after his interlocutor's short exclamatory he shot out the idiomatic expression **عامل زحمة والخط فاضي** (He is showing off). Note that Naji explicitly stated the reason behind his agitation and criticism before firing those disparaging remarks. More precisely, Naji prefaced the first idiom by **سلمت عليه مرتين ولا سمعني** (I greeted him twice but got no reply from him). It seems that the use of the second idiom almost immediately after the first one is intended either to intensify the speaker's criticism or to clarify the intended meaning of the first one. The speaker thinks that it is not tolerable to show off and to ignore others, especially when they are your mates. That is why the speaker tried to demean or, at least to be accurate, to criticize such a bad behavior. We can infer that the factors of age and familiarity between the participants can enable someone to feel free to criticize without being embarrassed.

Another usage of idiomatic expressions is the clustering of an observation and a comment. The following extract can illustrate this point.

Example 4

(Khalid, a 28+ new MA student, addresses Hamid, a 33+ PhD scholar, asking him if he has made a phone call to make sure whether his (Hamid's) name is on the payroll or not.)

<S 01> ما اتصلت لا تعرف اسمك بين كشف
الراتب او ماشي؟

<S 02> لا ما اتصلت **"يا خبر بفلوس بكرة ببلاش"**
(No I didn't. **Never pay for anything that will be free of charge tomorrow**.)

The two participants involved in this interaction are discussing a certain topic of

interest to both of them. Khalid provides an observation through his question ما اتصلت لا تعرف اسمك بين كشف الراتب او ماشي (Did you call up to check whether your name was on the payroll or not?). Hamid's utterance contains two elements: an answer to the question plus a comment in the form of an idiomatic expression that clarifies he was not in a hurry to know the news about his salary.

This observation/comment cluster is available in both English and Arabic and it does this function in the same way in both languages. Strassler (1982) argued that this process of clustering between observation and comment is more likely to occur when a speaker is saying something about a third person or about an object or non-human entity, rather than about the speaker him-/herself or the listener(s). Example 5 below is one of the good extracts that can be cited to illustrate this type of clustering in English.

Example 5:

(The speakers are exchanging views about political dominance by the Conservative Party in Devon, in the south-west of Britain).

< S 01> But living down here in Devon there is no way.

< S 02> We are disenfranchised completely.

< S 03> You know there is such an enormous Conservative majority I mean today I had to ring up one of the local councilors he is **as thick as two short planks**.

In the above-mentioned exchange, we have a factual observation, followed by an evaluative comment. This pattern is a recurring feature in the use of idioms in English.

The following extract shows that Yemeni speakers use some proverbs that can be cited as a case of coupling between a comment and observation. It also illustrates the role of some socio-cultural factors in the use of idioms:

Example 6:

(Mariam, a 26+ housewife, is telling off her 3-year-old daughter who is playing with her sister's stuffs)

<S 01>   مالش تكسري حق أختش   (Why did you break your sister's toys?)

خلاص غاب القط العب يا فار   (When the cat's away the mice will play.)

ليش تلعبي بحق اختش؟   (Why are you playing with your sister's toys?)

Mariam's utterances are a combination of an observation **مالش تكسري حق اختش** (why did you destroy your sister's toys?) and a comment **خلاص غاب القط العب يافار** (when the cat's away the mice will play). This proverbial expression is used by Mariam to allude to one of her daughter's exploiting the absence of the other daughter to play with the latter's personal stuffs. The use of the proverb here, again, shows the significant role that proverbs play in our everyday interactions; that is, proverbs are known for their capability of expressing our intentions in a smart and terse manner.

When the small daughter continued turning her sister's belongings upside down, her mother used this proverbial expression to tell her off. This seems to confirm the notion that proverbial expression are often used by adult people only, since adults need to show some kind of wisdom. What is also inferred from the above-mentioned extract is related to the type of relationship between the participants, that is, the mother being granted more power as is reflected in the use of the idiomatic expression as well as the interrogative sentence ليش تلعبي بحق اختش؟ (why are you playing with your sister's stuff?). It is interesting to note that an interrogative sentence rather than an imperative one is used by the mother to order her daughter to stop playing with her sister's belongings, which is in support of the belief that being indirect in giving orders is one feature of the women's language.

The following extract (Example 7) below adds one more support to the use of proverbs by the

Yemeni speakers to couple between a comment and observation. This example shows the literal meaning and the idiomatic meaning of the proverbs used in the daily conversations.

Example 7:

(Mujahid, a 41+ PhD graduate, comes along with his son Majid (an 8+, second grade pupil) to visit Hamid (a 29+, MA student). Hamid welcomes his visitors saying:

<S 01> هلا ومرحبا؛ ما شا الله هذا ابنك؟

<S 02> ايه هذا ابني ماجد؛ هذا آخر العنقود   (Yes, this is my son Majid, the last birth.)

<S01>يا ماجد ابوك بيقول انك آخر العنقود؛ليش يا بطل؟

<S 03>يا باه ايش يعني آخر العنقود؟ (What do you mean by the last birth, dad?)

The literal meaning of this idiom is "the last in the bunch [of grapes]", but its function as an idiomatic expression is to express a sense of endearment towards the youngest child who normally receives more attention and care than the rest of his/her older siblings. Comparing the two meanings (literal and idiomatic), we can come back to what has been mentioned in English about the wide gap between the meaning of the free form and that of idiom and to say that this feature may prove its universality, at least in the case of Arabic and English. The above-mentioned extract also assures the idea that the boy did not understand what the meaning of the idiom was. That is why he asks his father Hamid saying **يا باه ايش يعني آخرالعنقود؟** (What do you mean by . . ?). Thus, the factor of age comes again to play its role in regard to the use of idioms in Arabic.

Like in English, in Yemeni Arabic idioms can be used to perform the function of greeting. In general, greetings are typical forms of politeness and part of the discoursal protocol of a discourse community. In Yemeni culture, if you fail to say greetings in their appropriate frame, you would be judged as immature with the socio-cultural rituals that the community would rather preserve. In the following

situation, one of the current researchers attends with two Yemeni people who are sitting together. This extract shows how conversations are often initiated when people meet.

Example 8:

(Hamdan, a 32+, PhD researcher, visits Nashwan, a 31+, MA student. Hamdan greets Nashwan)

< S 01> السلام عليكم يا خبره   (Hi, dear friends.)

< S02> وعليكم السلام   (Good afternoon.)

<S01> وريحهم   (Have a nice time.)

<S02> الا وهو بينهم   (You too.)

< S01> كيف كلا وحاله؟   (How is everybody?)

< S02> سلم حاله   (We are fine, wish you same.)

What is important here is that the two guys used many idiomatic greetings except the first one **السلام عليكم** which is very common. Both the two speakers are mature enough to use and understand those idiomatic expressions mentioned in the extract, particularly **وريحهم** (Have a nice time), **كيف كلا وحاله** (How is everybody?), and **سلم حاله** (We are fine, wish you same). This situation is in support of what was assumed by Emery (2000) who investigated the formulaic expressions of greetings in Oman. He showed that such expressions are gender- and age-based. Traditional vernacular forms of greetings, according to him, are preserved by adult people, and he showed also that they come in the form of adjacency pairs with a strong social focus on an appropriate response. This can be attributed to the influence of the Islamic values found in the saying of the Prophet Mohammed (Peace and Prayers Be Upon Him) when He says: **إذا حييتم بتحية فحيوا بأحسن منها أو ردوها.**

On the other hand, Goffman (1971) examined various functions of greetings in the English language and identified a wide range of functions of greetings, such as "politeness, presence validation (for self and others).

Goffman also found that greetings in English are used to show pleasure in the company of the others and when performed between strangers, there is an element of guarantee for safe passage (Goffman, 1971, p.74).

In Yemeni Arabic, idioms can also be used to convey an offensive sense. As in English, there are many expressions that are very useful and colorful but which should not be uttered when one is in polite company. Look at the extract below:

Example 9:

(Naji, a 31+, MA student, addresses Waleed, a 28+ undergraduate student, pointing to him in front of a group of their mutual friends)

< S 01 > هذا **ابن أمه** هذا   (looks like his mother)

< S 02> ابن امي صحيح بس أرجل منك   (That's true, yet braver than you)

Clearly, the two interactants are exchanging insults, with the first speaker using an idiomatic expression to convey his intention. This expression can also have a literal meaning, but given the contextual facts, the addressee correctly understands the speaker's intended meaning, that is, the idiomatic sense denoting a women-like character as a result of upbringing.

Such offensive idioms can sometimes be used in a joking manner, especially in interactions among close friends. Generally, people across cultures and communities like to laugh and enjoy being in company of people with a sense of humor. Self-deprecating humor usually goes over well. However, one has to be cautious when using deprecating remarks to tease others, as the addressee(s) may take the teasing remark amiss or simply be in no good mood. A case in point is the use of the Yemeni-Arabic epithet دحباشي (Dihbashi) in the following exchange:

Example 10:

(Sultan, a 40+ trader, jokingly addresses Saleh, a 20+ undergraduate student)

<S 01> اهلاً يا **دحباشي**   (You are welcome, **Dihbashi**)

هل هذي تحية؟ المجلس لك اذن <S 02>

The word دحباشي (Dihhbashi) is often used to depict someone who is deemed "uncivilized". In fact, it is commonly used by those Yemenis who have a bad impression about the Yemeni reunification in 1990, and therefore they use this term to refer to the residents of the northern part of Yemen. In the above interaction, the speaker uses this word to address a much younger man who felt offended and left immediately. A plausible explanation for his reaction might be due to the age difference or the type of relationship, because this term, though offensive, is often used by close friends to address each other, particularly by those who are from the southern part of Yemen to address those from the northern part, and it causes no offence whatsoever since it is used for fun and intimate laughter.

In English, on the other hand, Strassler (1982) shows that idioms are openly avoided to be used face to face to save face and avoid abasement. Moreover, on the level of general behaviors of communicating with others, until you know a person very well, avoid discussing religion, politics or other controversial subjects (abortion, racism, sexism). Also, you should refrain from asking women if they are married. If a woman volunteers this information, however, you may ask a few polite questions about her husband and/or children. This will lead us to conclude that the American society practice more individuality and privacy than the Yemeni society.

There is another category of idioms used to describe and evaluate some states of affairs. The corpus of the current study contains many examples of this category. These include the idioms introduced in 11, 12, and 13 below.

Example 11:

(Faheem, a 38+ surgeon, addresses Waleed, a 23+ undergraduate student)

< S 01 > اليوم فزنا للمرة الرابعة   (We won for the fourth time today.)

< S 02> **قل ما شاء الله**   (**Praise the Lord**)

Waleed uses the idiom "قل ما شاء الله" (**Praise the Lord**) to tell Faheem not be too excited about their victory because such excitement may result in an unexpected mishap. This is derived from our belief that if someone over-expresses his or her excitement and happiness about something great but does not "praise the Lord", a bad thing may happen and prevent any happy end. Such superstitious thinking is also common in any English-speaking country where people "Praise the Lord" when they say something very exciting. One may say "Today we are going for a nice picnic, the day is pretty sunny". The speaker then praises the Lord because of being afraid that it may rain on that same day. That is why such an idiom seems to have more or less the same connotation and function in the two languages.

Example 12:

(Faheem, a 38+ surgeon, addresses Waleed, a 23+ undergraduate student)

> < S 01> ايش راح تسوي العملية والا لا   (Are you going for the operation choice?)

> < S 02> اكيد لانها **مسألة حياة او موت** "Definitely. It is a matter of life or death.)

Waleed here uses the idiom **مسألة حياة او موت** (it is a matter of life or death) to reply with an evaluation of the critical situation he is talking about. This generalized idiom used here might also be used in English in the same way and with the same function.

Example 13:

(Wael, a 40+ farmer, addresses Najeeb, a 23+ undergraduate student)

> < S 01> خليك على الحاصل وبس   (Just stick to what you have.)

> < S 02> اكيد **عصفور باليد ولا عشرة على الشجرة** (Yes. A bird in hand is better than ten in the tree.)

Speaker 2 uses the idiom **عصفور باليد ولا عشرة فوق الشجرة** (a bird in hand is better than ten in

the tree) to offer an evaluation of the situation he is talking about. He means that he has no other choice better than the choice to go for. This idiom has its English counterpart A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, which differs in some of its component words but has the same function fulfilled by the Yemeni Arabic idiom.

5.2 Idioms in Storytelling

The purpose of telling a story is often for the readership to learn some moral or to shed light on some good and bad traits of mankind that can be found in the real world. The introduction should set a context that will help readers realize the importance and relevancy of the moral to their lives. However, the conclusion of the story should be carefully thought of and worded to leave a lasting impression on the audience. It should highlight that lesson and its significance for the audience as human beings.

Example 14:

(Ali, a 22+ undergraduate student, is telling a story to Mohammed, a 21+ undergraduate student)

> < S 01> ما خفت منهم وتحديتهم كلهم (I was not afraid and I challenged them all.)

> < S 02> **ليش انت عنتر زمانك!** (Why, are you today's Antar?)

> < S 01> (laughs and continues telling the story)

The speaker is telling a story that happened to him with two of his rivals who tried to threaten him. The listener replied using a funny comment as a coda for this story saying **ليش انت عنتر زمانك** (Do you think that you are as brave as Antar?). He invokes the name of Antar, a legendary warrior who lived in the pre-Islamic era and was known for his strength and courage, and thus has become a symbol of bravery. Going back to the intended meaning of this metaphorical expression, it seems that it functions as a humorous comment that adds some fun and keeps the act of storytelling

ongoing. In fact, if we take its context-free meaning, it will lead us to say that the hearer does not believe what the speaker says and then he replies using this idiom. However, it is very important to know something about the context of the situation to know that this idiom is interpreted within the typical functions of commentary idioms.

Being more interested in the reaction on the part of Ali, the main speaker who receives this idiomatic expression, one could see that he did not take offense or feel embarrassed as a result of the sarcastic idiomatic expression in front of his company. Instead, he laughed and continued telling his story. As in English, it is usually found that the types of idioms used in cases similar to this case are clichés, proverbs, and sayings of various kinds.

In English, in everyday stories, idioms often occur in the coda, which is, according to Labov, "a bridge between the story and the real world of the teller and the listeners". Consider example 15 below.

Example 15:

(End of a story by speaker <S 02> of how a job opportunity she took represented a big step in her career)

> <S 01> Still that is the way it all started for you.
>
> <S 02>That is right.
>
> <S 03>The big break wasn't it.

The important point here is that it is the role of the listener to evaluate the events of the story and then to use idioms in his or her evaluation. This is what appears to have happened in the case of the extract in Example 14. It is worth mentioning, however, that the listener should avoid abasing the speaker unless they are deemed buddies.

It can be concluded, then, that Yemeni-Arabic and English idioms as used in the codas of stories are to a great extent similar. The two cultures tend to use idiomatic expressions in the codas for the same purpose, and both use the same system of

connection between the events and evaluation. Below are more examples showing similarities between the two languages in terms of usage of idioms:

- In English, we find the idiomatic expression **It's the same old story**, which is used to refer to a bad situation which has occurred many times before; e.g., It's the same old story - the women do all the work and the men just sit around talking. Almost the same expression is used by the Yemeni-Arabic speakers, namely هذي نفس القصة اللي بنسمعها دائما, which is used to close their comment on a story.

- Similarly, the Yemeni-Arabic expression لكن هذيك قصة ثانية and its English counterpart **But that's another story** are used after the speaker has mentioned something in passing and do not want to elaborate it at that time. Examples: 1) Alex, meanwhile, was falling madly in love with Nicky, but that's another story; 2) Funnily enough, we bumped into each other again in Amsterdam, but that's another story.

- The (informal) English phrase **end of story** is often used to indicate that the opinion you have just offered about something is correct and that there is no other possible way of thinking about it; e.g., If you don't have the money, you don't spend it. End of story. In Yemeni Arabic, the idiomatic expression وهذي نهاية القصة is used to perform the same discourse function fulfilled by the English phrase mentioned in the preceding sentence.

- In English, the phrase **a sob story** is a sad story related by someone to make their listeners feel sympathy for them; e.g., She told me some sob story about not having enough money to go and see her father who was ill. It worths mentioning that those similar phrases used in the two languages under comparison here appear to be clichés used to close or to evaluate a part of or the whole story being told and their use

in such a way prove at least to some extent that there is a universality in certain collocational expressions.

Contrastively, Yemeni idioms as used in the codas of stories show many differences than those in English. Some differences show a degree of non-equivalence in certain collocations.

- Since language is part of culture, it is inevitably influenced by socio-cultural factors such as tradition, behavior, dress, food, etc. It can be argued that in terms of translation, an Arabic discourse texture which stands poles apart from English will yield unusual collocations of words and we mean by collocations the co-occurrence of words in specific utterances. Many examples in English are used, including **Bread and butter**, **Bed and breakfast**, and **Thick and thin.** These common collocations are used in English to portray English customs and ways of life. If they are translated literally into Arabic, they would come across as meaningless utterances. In Yemeni Arabic, on the other hand, there are different collocations that can probably do the same job. These include idioms such as **سمن على عسل**, which literally means 'butter and honey', **أبا عن جد**, which means 'a tradition deeply rooted in history and culture', **عيش وملح**, which literally means 'bread and salt', and finally the phrase **طويل واهبل** , which means 'tall and crazy'.

This means that a minority of idioms are the translation of foreign idioms. These are more difficult to analyze because one needs to know not only the language of the source but also the foreign language into which the transliteration was made, which may or may not be the same. Some differences show a non-equivalence in some specific terminology. One of the most interesting points that the researchers were concerned about was the use of animals and birds' names in English idioms. A group of English idioms were chosen to illustrate this comparison to see what is similar and what is not in the use of idioms containing these names.

This comparison is briefly illustrated in the following:

In English, the phrase **to smell a rat** is used to mean that there is something suspicious. Consider this in the following excerpt from one of the casual conversations. **Didn't you close it before we went shopping?** I **smell a rat**. In Arabic, the form **أشم (رائحة) خيانة** is used when you want to convey a similar message of inconvenience.

The second example is shown in the use of the term **fishy**. When the security guard saw a light in the store after closing hours, it seemed to him that there was something **fishy** going on. He called the central office and explained to his superior that he thought something **strange and suspicious** was occurring. The researchers could find no idiomatic expression in Yemeni Arabic that can match this English term. This suggests that it is a language-specific expression.

In English also, a structure like to let the cat out of the bag is used to say that a secret or news items has been disclosed to other people who are not supposed to know about it. In the Yemeni Arabic, the same sense can be transmitted with the idiomatic expression فلان أخرج الصغار من البيضة .

In English, the native speakers say Straight from the horse's mouth to say that one was told the news firsthand, that is, by the person about whom the news is. In Yemeni Arabic, this form is not used but there is another phrase which has the same syntactic form but whose meaning and context is completely different. For example, the expression شوف كيف ينتزع الانسان رزقه من فم الأسد is used to say how difficult it is to earn money and feed yourself. You realize now that the two messages in the two languages are completely different. Referring to the above-mentioned comparison, it can be argued that the two languages use terminology associated with animals and birds differently, at least at the level of vocabulary, even when they may convey the same message.

6. Conclusion

Idiomatic expressions have well-established functions in every language and every culture.

With reference to the data collected for the purpose of this research paper, it can be argued that almost the same functions are fulfilled by idioms in both Yemeni Arabic and English, at least at the level of the two functions investigated in the present study – the evaluative function in codas and the commentary function in casual conversations. The findings of the study indicate that the use of idioms is often influenced by a range of socio-cultural factors, such as: the setting, the relationships among participants (formal/informal), the topic, and the age of the interlocutors, and so on. It is interesting to point out to the fact that, in both cultures there are some idioms that can be used as a sign of intimacy and solidarity among the interactants. At the same time, the use of idioms reflects a high degree of informality at the interpersonal level between the speaker and listener(s). Some differences do exist, however, between the two languages under scrutiny on the level of both vocabulary and clause forms. Such differences seem to be attributable to socio-cultural values and perspectives through which each speech community looks at things. But this does not completely preclude the existence of some universality between the discoursal functions of certain idioms, especially those tending to occur in codas and casual conversations.

References

[1] Alkarazoun, G. A. (2015). English Idioms Errors Made by Jordanian EFL Undergraduate Students. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 54-71.

[2] Deborah, C. (2001). Working with Spoken Discourse. London: Sage

[3] Emery, N. J. (2000). The eyes have it: the neuroethology, function and evolution of social gaze. Neuroscience & biobehavioral reviews, 24(6), 581-604.

[4] Enani, M. (1996). The Art of Translation, Cairo: Egyptian International Publishing

[5] Company-Longman.

[6] Fernando, C. (1996). Idioms And Idiomaticity, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[7] Goffman, E. (1971). Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order, New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers.

[8] Makkai, A. (1972). Idioms Structure in English, The Hage: Monton.

[9] McCarthy, M. (1998). Spoken Language and Applied Linguistics, Cambridge: Cambridge

[10] University Press.

[11] Shaheed, H., Abbar, N., & Hussein, W. (2022). Idioms in Arabic and English: Diversities And Symmetries. World Bulletin of Social Sciences (WBSS). Available Online at: https://www.scholarexpress.net Vol. 10, May,2022

[12] Strassler, J. (1982). Idioms in English: A Pragmatic Analysis, Tubingen: Verlag.

[13] Verdonik, D., & Kačič, Z. (2012). Pragmatic functions of Christian expressions in spoken discourse. Linguistica, 52(1), 267-281.

[14] Appendix (1): Transliteration Conventions Used

[15] Symbols represent some Arabic letters which have no equivalent in English. (? = ء) ('aa = آ)

[16] (dh =ض) (tt =ط)

(ع = ?) (ح= hh)**Some punctuation abbreviations that represent the transcription conventions and bbreviated symbols used in the fragments being analysed:THE SYMBOL**	EPLANATION
" "	Quotation mark used for direct meaning or literal translation
< >	Dialogue Expression
{}	Narrative expression
@	Body sign language
S	Speaker
01/02/03	Number of turn-taking between the participants
----	A line used to underline the idioms mentioned
( )	Used to bracket the contextual information of the text
+	A symbol used to represent the age of the participants

Appendix (2)

1) Idioms used to praise or criticize others:

A List of Functionally Classified Yemeni Idioms used in the Study

Idioms used to praise or criticize others		
Arabic form of Idiom	**Transliterated Form**	**Gloss**
شايف نفسه	"shaif nafsuh"	He is showing off[1]
عامل زحمه والخط فاضي	"Amil zahmah walkhatt fadhi"	He is showing off
ما ملينا العين والا ايش	"Ma malaina ?l-al?in walla eish"	we are not up to the standard!
صح لسانك	"Sahh lisanak"	Great! or well Done!
عفارم عليك	"?farim ?laik"	Great! or well Done!
ما عليك زود	"Ma ?laik zoud"	You are the best of mine/ you are spotless
Idioms used to describe people or situations		
ابن حلال	"ibn hhalal"	Son of a good doing
ابن حرام	"ibn hharam"	Son of a wrongdoing

---

[1] Translations of expressions throughout the text are kept as accurate as possible to serve the purpose of meaning and help bring out the contrastive purpose of this study

شابع حياه	"Shabʕ ʔdunia"	He is fed up
عنتر زمانك	"ʕntar zamanak"	As brave as Antar
ابن امه	"ibn umuh"	Son of his mother
Idioms used to describe and evaluate a state of affairs		
امسك الخشب	"duqa ʔl-khashab"	Knock on the wood/ Praise the Lord
كأنك يا زيد ما غزيت	"kanak ya zaid ma ghazait"	It was in vain
مسالة حياة او موت	"masʔlat hayah ʔw maut"	a matter either to live or to die
عصفور باليد ولا عشرة على الشجرة	"ʕsfur bilyad wala ʕshra ʕla ʕshajarah"	A bird in hand not ten on the bunch
تعيش وتشوف	"teʕish we tshuf"	The more you live the more you see