

The role of context of situation In interpreting the meaning Of some idiomatic expressions

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المخلص

يُسلط البحث الحالي الضوء على دور سياق الحال في تأويل معنى عددٍ من التعبيرات الاصطلاحية. فعند دراسة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية، اتَّضحَ جلياً أن التعبير الاصطلاحي يحمل في طياته نوعين من المعنى إذا ما تمَّ نطقهما في سياقاتٍ مُختلفة. إذ أن سياقاً ما قد يؤدي بالتعبير الاصطلاحي إلى معناه الحرفي، مما يُفقدُ المعنى الاصطلاحي الخاص به. وهذا ما تمَّ برهنته في هذه الدراسة. فيما ثُبِتَ أنَّ سياقاً آخر قد يؤدي إلى معنى تداولي يُحافظ على اصطلاحية التعبير. على أية حال، فإن تداولية بعض التعبيرات الاصطلاحية تُكون ظاهرة للعيان تماماً إذا ما تمَّ نطقها في سياقاتٍ مُناسبة. وبعد دراسة الجوانب الحرفية وغير الحرفية للتعبيرات، قمنا باقتراح ترجمات عربية لها.

Abstract

The present paper seeks to shed light on the role of context of situation in interpreting the meaning of some idiomatic expressions. It is observed clearly that an idiomatic expression poses two kinds of meaning if it is uttered in different situations. This paper proves that one situation leads to the literal meaning of the idiomatic expression, which makes the idiomatic expression lose its idiomaticity. It also proves that another situation leads to the pragmatic meaning of the idiomaticity. However, the pragmaticity of some idiomatic expressions completely exists if the idiomatic expressions are uttered in their appropriate situations. After explaining the literal and non-literal aspects of the expressions, we proposed Arabic renditions for them.

1. Introduction

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The present paper is entirely furnished to examine the role of context of situation in interpreting the meaning of some idiomatic expressions that are used in daily situations in English. The problem with such expressions is that they have double meaning; one is literal which needs a given situation, while another is metaphorical, i.e. real but should be put in its real situation. Therefore, the paper seeks to determine which one is literal and which is metaphorical. The paper postulates that the context of situation is the determiner of what is literal and what is metaphorical. Besides, in terms of semantics, the paper postulates that the literal meaning indicates the literal meaning of the idiomatic expression. In terms of pragmatics, on the other hand, the paper postulates that the pragmatic meaning indicates the intended (i.e. metaphorical) meaning of the idiomatic expression.

This being the case, the researcher is supposed to create situations as well as to suggest characters from his own. The paper assumes that capturing the intended (metaphorical) meaning requires resorts to pragmatics for pragmatics is considered as the language in use. In addition to this, pragmatics deals with the extralinguistic level of language, part of the extralinguistic factors is the context of situation,

which is the focus of the paper. The data have been taken from Ba'albaki (1969).

2. Context

The term "context" is defined by Crystal (1991: 71) as "a general term used in linguistics and phonetics to refer to specific parts of an utterance (or text) near or adjacent to a unit which is the focus of attention." The occurrence of a unit (e.g. a sound or word) is partially or wholly determined by its context which is specified in terms of the unit's relation, i.e. the other features with which it combines into a sequence.

The everyday sense of the term "context" is related to the specification of the unit's relations particularly and when someone puts a word in a context in order to clarify the intended meaning of that word. Thus, providing a context in this way is referred to as contextualization. On the other hand, Mey (1993:39) views context as more than a matter of reference and understanding what things are about. Moreover, context is also what gives the speaker's utterances their deeper meaning. There are, of course, different kinds of context that should be taken into consideration. One kind is best described as 'linguistic context' (also known as co-text. The co-text of a word is the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence.

Thus, the co-text has a strong effect on what the hearers think the word means. The word 'bank', for example, has more than one meaning, which, in its turn, leads to raise the following question:

How do the hearers usually know which meaning is intended in a particular sentence? Of course, someone can do so on the basis of the linguistic context. If the word 'bank' is used in a sentence together with words like steep or overgrown, the meaning is clear that the speaker means to refer to "a small land". Contrarily, if the word 'bank' is used in the following context "Jack has to get to the bank to cash a check". Hence, the linguistic context shows that the word 'bank' refers to the financial institute 'bank'.

To know what words mean on the basis of another element of context is described as physical context. For example, if someone sees the word BANK on the wall of a building in a city, the physical location will influence that person's interpretation. Accordingly, making people understand what they read and hear is tied to the time and place in which they encounter linguistic expressions.

2. 1. Context of Situation

The term "context of situation" is associated with two scholars, the anthropologist Malinowski and the linguist Firth. Both are concerned with stating meaning in terms of the context in which language is used. Malinowski's postulation that context is an indication of meaning invokes 'secondary context' that has no immediately observable status and can be objectively defined in terms of concepts and thoughts.

Accordingly, Malinowski's context of situation is a part of the social process, which can be considered an ordered series of actual observable events. Unlike Malinowski, Firth views context of situation

as part of the linguist's apparatus in the same way as are the grammatical categories that he uses, (Palmer, 1981: 51ff).

The term 'situation' is used in the sense of the compound term 'situational context'. In its broadest sense, situational context includes the total non-linguistic background to a text or utterance, including the immediate situation in which it is used, and the awareness by the speaker and hearer of what has been said earlier, and of any relevant external beliefs or presuppositions, (Crystal, 1991: 71). Malinowski sees meaning, as far as the context of situation is concerned, as a multiple phenomenon, whereas various facets are relatable partly to features of the external world, and partly to the different levels of linguistic analysis such as grammar and semantics. Whereas, context of situation refers to the whole set of external world features which are considered to be relevant in the analysis of utterance at these levels, (ibid: 73).

2.2. Context in Relation to Pragmatics

It can be clearly noted that context is one of the most important factors in pragmatics in the sense that Levinson (1983: 24) defines pragmatics as "the study of the role that the context plays in speaker-utterance meaning". In the same respect, Levinson views pragmatics and its relation with context as "the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate".

Pragmatically speaking, the context is of paramount importance in assigning a proper value to such phenomena as presuppositions and implicatures, including both types of implicature, conventional and conversational. In the case of conversational implicature, the situation of

setting is important in deciding the intended meaning. Thus, in a particular situation involving a question, an utterance (i.e., answer) should be adequate to the situation of that question. For instance, if David asks Jack:

What time is it?

it makes perfectly a good sense to answer:

The bus just went by.

given a particular constellation of contextual factors, including the fact that there is only one bus a day which passes by Jack's house at 7:45 every morning, (Mey, 1993: 40), the context and the situation pragmatically made Jack understand David's question and answer it adequately. In the same respect, Mey (ibid. 61) enhances the importance of the relation between context and pragmatics stating that "context is the decisive factor in all of pragmatics".

2.3. Speech Acts

The study of speech acts is totally related to pragmatics. Speech-act theory analyzes the role of an utterance in relation to the behaviour of the speaker and the hearer in interpersonal communication (Crystal, 1991: 285). It describes the linguistic conventions or procedures which govern all speech situations. These conventions define the social roles which speakers and hearers assume for a particular speech act, and upon which the validity of that act depends. Knowledge of these conventions is part of the linguistic competence which speakers share and which they bring to the production and interpretation of all utterances, reality or fiction.

The aim of the speech act theory is that when someone uses language, (s)he performs certain actions. Traditionally, philosophers have distinguished between actions and speaking.

Finch (2000: 180) points out that speaking about something is quite different from doing it. Austin (1962: 114), however, states that utterances can be regarded as events in a similar way to other actions. Austin lists three types of acts which utterances can be said to perform: (1) a locutionary act, (2) an illocutionary act, and (3) a perlocutionary act. A locutionary act refers to the act of saying something that makes sense in the language. In other words, it follows the grammatical rules of language. An illocutionary act is the action intended by the speaker. In other words, it is the act performed through the communication force of an utterance (Yule, 1996:48).

The perlocutionary act follows the illocutionary act. It refers to the creation of an utterance without intending it to have an effect (Ibid.). The illocutionary act, however, is the most important act which best fits this study because it is concerned with the intended meaning of the situation.

3. Meaning

The word 'meaning' and its corresponding verb 'to mean' are among the eminently discussable terms in English. Semanticists have often seemed to spend an immoderate amount of time puzzling out the meanings of meaning as a supposedly necessary preliminary to the study of 'meaning'. The Meaning of Meaning, containing a list of as many as twenty-two definitions of the word meaning, takes into consideration non-theoretical and/ or theoretical starting points. However, by presenting this list, they try

to arrive at the conclusion that confusion and misunderstanding come about because of lack of agreement about such a basic term 'meaning', (Leech, 1974: 1).

Semantics is the technical term used to refer to the study of meaning but since meaning is a part of language, semantics is a part of linguistics. 'Meaning' covers a variety of aspects of language, and there is no general agreement about the nature of meaning, what aspects of it may properly be included in semantics, or the way in which it should be described, (Palmer, 1981: 1).

Aitchison (1987: 84) states that the study of meaning is normally referred to as 'semantics' derived from the Greek noun 'sema' which means sign or signal, and the verb 'semaino' signal or mean. A linguist who studies meaning should try to understand why certain words and constructions can be combined together in a semantically acceptable way, while others cannot. Aitchison (85) postulates that it is clear that the question of meaning is to a large extent connected with the meaning of individual words or more accurately lexical items.

3.1. Semantic Meaning vs. Pragmatic Meaning

Semantics and pragmatics are the study of meaning communicated through language. Linguists who work on these branches of linguistics are interested in the ways in which words acquire meaning, and the processes by which native users of a language are able to give stable interpretations to word strings. Semantics is concerned with meaning as a product of the

linguistic system. It focuses on decontextualized meaning as opposed to pragmatics which focuses on contextualized meaning (Finch, 2000: 145). Accordingly, the main difference between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning is that the former is derived from the internal relationships between linguistic items, whereas the latter is determined by the external relationships between the linguistic items, the language users, and the situations these items are used in. Graždar (1979: 7) points out that "under the classical definitions of these two components; semantics deals with the relation between expressions and what they denote, whereas pragmatics deals with the relations between expressions, i.e. their denotation and use."

Semantic meaning answers the question of "what does **X** mean?" by saying, for instance, that "donkey" means "ass", while pragmatic meaning answers the question of "what do you mean by **X**?" by saying that when Miss. Trotwood said, "Janet! Donkeys!" she meant that Janet was to drive the donkeys off the lawn (Leech, 1981: 320).

4. Figurative Language

Figurative language is a departure from what users comprehend as the standard meaning of words, or the standard order of words in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. Such figures are described as poetic 'ornaments' integrated to the functioning of language, and indispensable not only to poetry, but also to all modes of discourse, (Abrams, 1993: 66)

Figurative language is a kind of writing which embodies one or more of the various figures of speech. It is the result of the writer's deliberate

departure from the usual word usage to gain strength and freshness of expression. The most common figures of speech are: antithesis, apostrophe, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, metonymy, personification, simile and synecdoche. Ortony (1979: 38), on the other hand, contends that figurative language introduces new creative ways and unpredictable situations of perceiving the world and involves conceptual ideas which are different from those of literary interpretation. Accordingly, figurative language is the language of imagination which does not literally mean what it says.

4.1. Idiomatic Expressions

An idiom is defined by Cruse (1986: 6) "as an expression whose inferred meaning cannot be predicated from the meaning of the words". From a semantic perspective, although an idiom is semantically like a single word it does not function like one (Palmer, 1981: 80). Idioms involve collocations of a special kind. Let us consider, for example, "kick the bucket", "fly off the handle" and "spill the beans and red herring". In fact, there is not only the collocation of 'kick' and the bucket, but also the fact that the meaning of the resultant combination is opaque. This means that it is not related to the meaning of the individual but sometimes the idiomatic expression is near to the meaning of a single word as in 'kick the bucket' which equals 'die' (ibid.).

Fromkin and Rodman (1989: 236) state that "knowing a language includes knowing the morphemes, simple words, compound words, and their meanings". In addition, it means knowing fixed phrases, consisting of

more than one word, with meanings that cannot be inferred from the meanings of the individual words. Such expressions are called idioms. Idioms are similar in structure to ordinary phrases except that they tend to be frozen in form and do not readily enter into other combinations or allow the word order to change. Apparently, Palmer (1981: 80) agrees with Fromkin and Rodman's point of view in stating that "an idiom in English is what is usually called the ' phrasal verb', the combination of verb plus adverb of kind 'make up', 'give in', and 'put down'." The meaning of these combinations cannot be predicted from the individual verbs and adverbs, and in many cases there is a single verb with the same or very close meaning such as "invent", "yield" and "quell."

On the other hand, Baker (1992: 65) assumes that the main problems that the idiomatic and fixed expressions (i.e. proverbs) pose in translation or are related to two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly; and difficulties involved in rendering the various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression conveys into the target language. These difficulties are much more pronounced in the case of idioms than they are in the case of fixed expressions.

5. Analysis of Idiomatic Expressions

(1) “Full of beans”

Literal Meaning

The expression 'full of beans' idiomatically means 'fine' or in 'a good health' (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 93). Literally, saying that "this sack is full of

beans" means that the sack is full of a kind of vegetables, which are beans. "Full" means that the beans arriving to the top of the sack. Thus, to say, in the above situation "the sack is full of beans" does not mean that the sack has such an attribute. However, this expression should be accounted for literally not idiomatically. Literal meaning can, thus, be rendered as: 'مملؤه بالفاصوليا'

Pragmatic Meaning

In the following situation to say to someone who has already come out from hospital and recovered: How are you, Jack? Well, I am full of beans. Actually, Jack, by using this idiomatic expression in this situation, means that he is fine or in good health. Therefore, pragmatically, the illocutionary act (the pragmatic meaning), i.e. the intended meaning of this expression is "fine". Pragmatic meaning may be translated as: 'بخير'

(2) "To give somebody the boot"

Literal Meaning

Idiomatically, this expression means that "someone is dismissed from his work" (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 119). In the following situation, the above expression entirely means "to give the shoes to someone." The shoes which the human beings take them on by their feet. Suppose that Jack wanted to put on his boot to go to his work but he did not find it. Then he asks his family to look for it. His father finds it and sends it with his little brother Jack telling him "give him the boot". Then Jack does this, and comes to his father saying "I gave him the boot" which means "I gave him the shoes". Here, the expression can be rendered as: 'أعطيتُهُ الحذاء'

Pragmatic Meaning

David works as a clerk in the post office. Then, he is dismissed from his work for being absent all the time. In the morning, his friend Jack comes to work but as late as 11 o'clock a.m. he does not find his friend David. Therefore, Jack asks another clerk where David is. The clerk answers: "the manager gave him the boot". Hence, the speaker pragmatically means that the manager fired him because the illocutionary act (the pragmatic meaning) of the idiomatic expression "to give him the boot" in this context of situation, is that David is dismissed from his job. Now, the idiomatic expression can be translated as: طُرِدَ من الوظيفة.

(3) “Castles in Spain”

Literal Meaning

The idiomatic expression "castles in Spain" metaphorically means "dreams or hopes never achieved" (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 158). If the above idiomatic expression is put in the following context of situation:

A- *I have seen castles in Spain.*

B- *Well, very nice.*

The hearer (B) definitely understands that the above statement 'I have seen castles in Spain' means "high arid great palaces which the speaker (A) has seen in Spain. Consequently, this is the case if it is taken from a literary point of view. Here, the expression can be rendered as: رأيتُ قصوراً في أسبانيا.

Pragmatic Meaning

Idiomatically, if someone says, "Is seeing a ghost a dream?" The hearer will absolutely ensure that "these are castles in Spain" which means that this is a dream or hope that will never be achieved. This, in return, pragmatically indicates that this speech is false, i.e. untrue. Moreover, the illocutionary act (the pragmatic meaning) of the expression is "a dream never achieved". Here, the idiomatic expression can be translated as: 'آمال لن تتحقق أبداً'

(4) “Hot air”

Literal Meaning

Idiomatically, this expression "hot air" means "nonsense" (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 173). Hence, if this expression is uttered in a situation where two friends are talking about the weather saying:

A-*This is hot air.*

B-*Yes, it is.*

The meaning here is literal because the speaker (A) talks about the weather outdoors which is really hot. Therefore, in this context of situation, the above expression no longer functions as an idiomatic expression. Rather it functions literally. It is rendered as: 'هواء حار'

Pragmatic Meaning

If two locutors are talking about a certain subject, one of them says, for instance, "I saw the nymphs in the red sea", and the other locutor says, "This is hot air" because it is nonsense or unbelievable to see nymphs (marine creatures) in the sea. In addition, nymphs are part of mystical stories, i.e. they do not exist. Accordingly, the locutor does not intend to talk about the weather by using the above expression; rather he intends to say that this is nonsense. Thus, the pragmatic meaning is "nonsense", which is translated as: 'هراء'

(5) “A piece of cake”

(AL-Mawrid Dictionary, 1969: 193)

Literal Meaning

At a birthday party, one person wants to give his friend a piece of cake saying to him: "Have another piece of cake". The taker certainly gets the idea that the speaker (the giver) wants to give him a piece of cake which is a kind of pastry for eating. It is literally translated as: 'قطعة كيك'

Pragmatic Meaning

In another situation, it is taken for granted that two locutors may talk about an equation in mathematics, for example:

Jack: *Can you solve this equation?*

David: *Surely, this is a piece of cake.*

Here, in fact, David, by using the above idiomatic expression, pragmatically, means that solving this mathematical equation is very

easy, namely idiomatically it is a piece of cake. On the other hand, this proves that such duality of meaning in different situations should be tackled in pragmatics for it is defined by Levinson (1983: 6) as "language in usage". So the pragmatic meaning of the above expression in this situation is "very easy", which can be translated into: 'أنه سهل جداً'

(6) “Ones cup of tea”

(AL - Mawrid Dictionary, 1969: 239)

Literal Meaning

A group of friends were sitting together and having tea, two of them went outside, then they came back inside, both misled which cup is related to each one knowing that both cups have the same forms. Mick, for example, asks Larry Is this your cup of tea? Larry answers no, this is not my cup of tea. Accordingly, this refers to the literal function of this idiomatic expression not the idiomatic or metaphorical one. It is translated as: 'كأس من الشاي'

Pragmatic Meaning

In the situation of a classroom, the teacher, for example, may talk about a subject in history precisely about Second World War. After that the students tell the teacher, "Sir, this is not our cup of tea." Our cup of tea is First World War but not the second. However, the intention of the speakers, in this context of situation, is to say this that is not our subject but they do not refer to cups of tea, and this is shown by the context of situation. Therefore, the pragmatic meaning of the above expression in this

situation is 'this is not the subject being talked about'. It is rendered as: هذا
ليس موضوع حديثنا

(7) **"To bring grist to the mill"**

Literal Meaning

Idiomatically, this expression "to bring grist to the mill" means implicitly that it brings benefit to someone (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 401). However, literally, if the hand-keeper of the mill comes to it and asks "Where are the other workers?" The workers existing there would say that they went to the storage room to bring grist to the mill. Consequently, in this context of situation, the above expression means that the workers went to bring wheat to the mill. The word "grist" semantically means wheat, a kind of crops which is grinded in the mill. So, literally, this expression can be rendered as: جَلَبَ حبوب الحنطة إلى المطحنة

Pragmatic Meaning

Metaphorically, the above expression means "to bring benefit to someone. To say, for instance, to someone that this shop brings grist to the mill to me. By using this idiomatic expression in this context of situation, implicitly the speaker intends to say that this shop brings benefit to him. Pragmatically, the illocutionary act which represents the intended meaning of the speaker is that this idiomatic expression means "bringing benefit". In terms of the pragmatic meaning the above expression in this situation means 'bringing benefit'. Thus, pragmatically, this idiomatic expression can be translated as: يُغود (على المرء) بريح

(8) “Give me a hand”

Literal Meaning

The above idiomatic expression means "help me" (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 411). Literally, the expression means "give me your arm (hand) to pull someone out". In the following situation in the horse-riding situation, if the rider of the horse wants, for example, his friend to ride over the horse he would say, "Give me a hand". In fact, by uttering this expression in this context of situation, the speaker means "give me your arm in order to make that person ride over the horse. Thus, this expression is translated, literally, as: ‘أعطني يدك’

Pragmatic Meaning

If someone wants to carry a heavy box and he is unable to do so, he would ask his brother who is close to him, "Give me a hand". Accordingly, the speaker, by uttering this expression in this context of situation, means "help me" but he never means give me your arm, i.e. "your hand". Therefore, this expression is used here idiomatically and should be interpreted idiomatically in order to fit the context of situation. The pragmatic meaning of the above expression in this situation is "help me". Here, pragmatically, this expression may be translated as: ‘ساعدني’

(9) “Kicked the bucket”

Literal Meaning

First, the above expression idiomatically means "someone died"(Baalbaki, M., 1969: 502). In the kitchen situation, for example, someone may say, "John kicked the bucket." Certainly, the listener would entirely understand that John kicked the pot and might break it because the situation of a kitchen gave a hint that the bucket was hit. In addition, it is known that the kitchen contains such tools. Thus, this expression "kicked the bucket" is interpreted literally because the context of situation makes it clear that the bucket was hit. So, literally, this expression is rendered as: رَفَسَ الدُّلْوُ

Pragmatic Meaning

On the other hand, if someone suddenly passes in front of the graveyard and sees a multitude of people standing inside it, doing rituals to bury someone. This person asks "What is going on here?" Someone answers that John kicked the bucket. Absolutely, this idiomatic expression "kicked the bucket", in this context of situation, means that John died. Consequently, it is safe to say that the pragmatic meaning of the above expression in this situation is that 'John died'. Thus, this expression may be translated, pragmatically, as: مَاتَ

(10) “There is a screw loose somewhere”

Literal Meaning

Idiomatically, this expression means that there is something wrong or there is a problem (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 540). Of course, literally, this expression means that there is a screw lost, i.e. the same meaning can

be conducted from the structure and the lexical terms. Let's examine the following locution:

A- *Have you fixed the radio?*

B- *Yes, but there is a screw loose somewhere.*

A- *All right, look for it somewhere or replace it by another screw.*

The listener to this locution surely contends that the fixer of the radio lost a screw. Therefore, literally, the speaker (B) intends to say that he lost a screw. Hence, this context of this expression can be rendered, literally, as: 'هناك مسمار لولبي سائب في مكان ما'

Pragmatic Meaning

In a classroom situation a student comes to the blackboard to solve a given mathematical equation. Then, the teacher discovers that the result of the equation is wrong, therefore, the teacher indirectly says, "There is a screw loose somewhere". Since the equation is not a radio or something which requires screws, the intention of the teacher is to say that there is something wrong in the application of the rules of the equation. This expression, therefore, pragmatically, may be translated as: 'هناك خلل ما في مكان ما'

(11) **“Good offices”**

Literal Meaning

The idiomatic expression "good offices" means that someone has good deeds through his dealing with people (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 620). For example, the students talk about the offices of their teachers saying that our teachers have good offices which have oriental decorations and designs. Therefore, semantically, or literally, "good offices" in this context of situation means explicitly good rooms in which teachers sit. Hence, such literal context of situation should be translated as: مكاتب جيدة

Pragmatic Meaning

In another context of situation, the students talk about their teachers saying that our teachers have good offices in teaching us very well and giving us good remarks, In fact, in this situation, the idiomatic expression 'good offices' means 'good deeds'/ 'good dealing'. Thus, the illocutionary act (the pragmatic meaning) of this idiomatic expression is 'good deeds' observed through the dealing of the teachers with their students. This idiomatic expression may be rendered as: مساع حميدة

(12) **“Over there”**

Literal Meaning

Idiomatically, the expression "over there" means "in Europe" (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 644). In a situation where two friends separated from each other and went to a place in vicinity, someone might come to

ask Mick "Where is Jack?" In fact, Jack stands over there. So Mick answers, "He is over there." The expression "over there" which idiomatically means in Europe no longer means in Europe in this context of situation. Instead, it means standing there. So the semantic meaning of the above expression in this situation is conducted from the literal interpretation of the strings of the words, and may be rendered as: 'هناك'

Pragmatic Meaning

In another situation, if someone asks Mick, "I hasn't seen Jack since 1999". Mick answers, "Well, he went over there." Thus, the listener understands that Mick means that Jack went to Europe and now he is in Europe. Therefore, the expression "over there" is used here deictically not literally. Such a context of situation may be translated, pragmatically, as: 'في أوروبا'

(13) "Scratch his/ her back"

Literal Meaning

"Scratch my back" as an idiom means "help me" (Baalbaki, M., 1969: 821). However, in a certain situation a father may ask his son to scratch his back, then the father turns his back to his son to start scratching it. Hence, this expression is interpreted literally which means to graze the back. Here, such expression can be rendered literally as: 'كُكْ ظهري'

Pragmatic Meaning

In another situation, a mother at home in the kitchen is preparing the lunch, and needs her daughter's help who is standing close to her, because she wants to do other things, she may ask her daughter to scratch her back. In fact, in this situation the speaker (the mother) intends to say "help me" by using the idiomatic expression: "scratch my back". Therefore, this expression should be interpreted idiomatically not literally because the context of situation only accepts the pragmatic meaning which is "help me". Now, the context of this idiomatic expression may be rendered as: 'ساعني'

(14) "He lost his shirt"

(AL-Mawrid Dictionary, 1969: 847)

Literal Meaning

Literally, in a situation of two teams play football. After they finish, they put their shirts on after they took their sport clothes off. Suddenly, Mick asked David, "Why did not Jack take his sport clothes off? David replied, "He lost his shirt". Accordingly, from a semantic point of view, the expression "lost his shirt" explicitly means lost his clothes. So, from this point of view, this expression can be rendered as: 'فَقَدَ قَمِيصَهُ'

Pragmatic Meaning

In another situation, when someone said that Jack had a competition in a horse race but he lost his shirt. Thus, in this context of situation, the illocutionary act (the pragmatic meaning) of the speaker is that Jack lost his money. Accordingly, the word "shirt" does not refer to

a kind of clothes; rather it refers to money. Idiomatically, "the expression he lost his shirt" implicitly means that this person lost all his money. Right here, such a context of situation may be translated as: 'فَقَدَ كُلَّ نَقْدِهِ'

(15) "Broad shoulders"

(Ghazala, H. 1995)

Literal Meaning

If someone says "leave everything to him. He had broad shoulders." The hearer may understand it in a certain situation that the shoulders of the person spoken about are wide. For instance, If someone says: "Who carries this heavy bag?" the hearer would replay: "Leave it to John, he has broad shoulders and he can carry it easily." In this situation, the expression would be rendered as: 'منكبان عريضان'

Pragmatic Meaning

In another situation in which someone is looking for a person to do certain works for him. The hearer may say "Leave everything to Tom. He has broad shoulders." In this situation the expression would be translated as something like: 'في مُستوى المسؤولية'

(16) "Sitting ducks"

(Ghazala, H. 1995)

Literal Meaning

When someone says to his friend "Look at those sitting ducks", then the hearer would understand the noun phrase "those sitting ducks" as "those birds named ducks which are sitting". Here, the 'sitting ducks' will be translated as: 'بطات جالسات'

Pragmatic Meaning

If there are some soldiers fighting in a battle. They, however, do not hide behind anything. In such a situation, those soldiers may be referred to as 'sitting ducks', which can be rendered as: 'فريسة سهلة/لقمة سائغة'

(17) "To flog a dead horse"

(Ghazala, H. 1995)

Literal Meaning

In a situation where someone sees a person who is holding a whip and flogging a horse which is not alive, the literal meaning of this clause consists of the meaning of the individual words forming the expression. Hence, the expression 'flogging a dead horse' can be rendered as: 'يجاد حصاناً ميتاً'

Pragmatic Meaning

In another situation where there is a person who always misbehaves himself, and people around him lose any ray of hope to make him behave himself, then any other person who tries to change the behavior of what person would be referred to as "He is flogging a dead horse by asking him to behave himself". Here, the idiomatic

expression 'flogging a dead horse' would be translated as: 'انك تنفخ في قربة' 'مقطوعة بسؤالك له أن يتأدب'

Conclusion

The investigation of the role of context of situation in interpreting the meaning of some idiomatic expressions shows that the context of situation is a decisive factor in determining the appropriate meaning of the given idiomatic expression. Moreover, it is proved that the idiomatic expression frequently bears a pragmatic meaning, i.e. intended meaning which depends on the context of situation, in addition to its literal meaning which deals with the semantic meaning of words.

It is found that the context of situation is crucial in deciding whether a certain idiomatic expression should be interpreted semantically or pragmatically. Consequently, the appropriate interpreting of the idiomatic expression, has a bearing on translation. The appropriate translation of the idiomatic expressions comes from its appropriate interpretation.

To sum up, idiomatic expressions are fixed, special phrases which need extra care from the translators, particularly fresh ones. Generally speaking, direct translation is dangerous, and translators must look carefully at the context, and check the idiom in a good English-English and/ or English-Arabic dictionary.

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