

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

Received: 22/1/2020

Accepted: 12/5/2020

Published: 2020

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

University of Al-Mustansiriyah – College of Political Sciences

International Relations Department

Faiza_ali608@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT:

Idioms can be considered part of everyday language and languages are full of colour –related idioms and expressions which refer to ideas that lie beyond the literal extensions of dictionary meaning .This study aims at investigating difficulties encountered by EFL learners in learning the communicative force of idiomatic expressions with special reference to colour idiomatic expressions. The researcher has been adopted a pragmatic approach for her analysis Two instruments have been used for collecting data; namely ,recognition and production test given to the fourth year students of English /Al- Mustansiriya University /college of Arts /department of English. The sample consists of 40 students. The results showed that students get confused in using colour idiomatic expressions, and face problems in figuring out the communicative force of these expressions. Moreover, it is found that the majority of errors committed by the participants through the production test are due to the fact that Iraqi EFL learners unacquainted with such idioms. Additionally, it is observed that Iraqi EFL learners have committed fewer errors in the recognition test due to the fact that they have somehow pragmatic competence and background knowledge regarding these idioms. Consequently, Iraqi EFL students should be recommended to develop their language skills give much more awareness, attention and practice to idiomatic expressions.

Keywords: colour idiomatic expressions, communicative force, culture – specific matter .

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

1. Introduction

Language is the most powerful means of communication and interaction that is created by human beings to maintain social and cultural relationships. Idioms can be regarded as an integral part of every language in that they are the essence of any language and the most problematic issue. Iraqi EFL learners and teachers should pay them great attention and they need to improve their proficiency in English to communicate with native speakers of English who have different cultures, beliefs and habits; therefore colour stands for a kind of non-verbal communication and each colour has many aspects and vary depending on culture and circumstances.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study aims at :

1. Surveying and defining the idiomatic expressions. Pragmatics, speech act theory.
2. Exploring the reasons of how the students of English get confused in using colour idiomatic expressions.
3. Investigating and analyzing the communicative force of colour idiomatic expressions selected from English colloquial utterances.

3. Questions of the Study

The study sets out to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent can Iraqi EFL learners understand the communicative force of colour idiomatic expressions?
2. To what extent can Iraqi EFL get confused when they use colour idiomatic expressions?

4. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from its attempt to bring up new insight into issue pertaining to the investigation of difficulties facing Iraqi EFL learners in learning the communicative force of colour idiomatic expressions. Moreover, it examines for the first time in university four year students who experienced the difficulties of learning colour idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, it will help the students to avoid these difficulties. So it is hoped that the results arrive at the future will help the curriculum developers to take the right position with regard to teaching these idioms.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Idioms: Definitions and Classifications

Larson (1984: 20) defines an idiom as "a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words". In Longman dictionary of English idioms (Longman Group Ltd, 1998:193) idioms are

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

referred to as "a fixed group of words with a special different meaning from the meaning of the separate words". Similarly, Newmark (1988:104) considers idiom 'extended metaphor and having main functions: pragmatic and referential.'

According to Gualala (2006:20) an idiom is a fixed phrase whose form is usually unchangeable, and whose meaning is always the same, inflexible, metaphorical and indirect. For example, when a person is described as being "green with envy", it means that this person is very jealous.

Idioms can be grouped into five categories of colloquialisms, proverbs, slang, allusions and phrasal verbs.

5.2 Types of idioms

Idioms can be grouped into five categories.

a. Colloquial Language

Colloquial language is regarded as suitable for casual or familiar writing as well as colloquial expressions are used in everyday language (i.e. dialogues and /or conversations). For instance, if a person laughs so much, he is described as being died of laughter. (Mezmas, 2009: 33)

b. Proverbs

Proverbs are special, fixed and unchanged phrases which have fixed meaning. Besides, proverbs are short, pithy saying that illustrate traditional truth or pieces of advice which are based on common sense or experience. Consider the following example: (Actions speak louder than words) meaning that what you do is more important than what you say (Crystal, 2003:134).

c. Slang Expressions

Slang expressions are used between persons who belong to the same social class and who are familiar with each other very. Furthermore , slang expressions are very informal language that are used by specific group of people and these expressions are not a part of standard vocabulary or language , and they are commonly used in speech rather than in writing , for example , the slang word (cool) is used by many teenagers to mean (great) or (fantastic) (Ibid:135)

d. Allusions

Allusions can be defined as a figure of speech that makes an indirect reference to a person, place, thing or ideas of literary, historical, cultural or political importance. For example, (you are a regular Einstein) is an illusion to a historical figure (Ghazala , 2006: 233)

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

e. Phrasal verbs

In English a phrasal verb is a verb that is composed of a principle verb together with an adverb or preposition .A phrasal verb most often has a sense which is different from the main verb. It can be transitive or intransitive. For instance, the phrasal verb (call off) means (to cancel something) (Praninskas,1975:188)

6. Pragmatic

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics which studies how utterances communicate meaning in context .Pragmatics is the study of meaning in situation or in context .It is a medium when we examine how people convey different illocutionary forces with the use of language .In pragmatics, we focus on a spoken language, conversation or how people speak or express their desires when they communicate with others (Crystal, 2003:374).

6.1 Speech Act Theory

Speech act is a term suggested by Austin (1962:60) and widely used in Linguistics. It refers to a theory which analyzes the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of speakers and hearers in interpersonal communication. It is a communicative activity, i.e., a locutionary act that is defined with reference to the intentions of speakers during speaking (the illocutionary force of their utterances).

Speech act is a part of pragmatics that studies about utterances as action performance via utterances (Yule, 1996:47)

According to Fromkin et al (2006:233) , in speech act theory, words do not merely say something , but they do something. An action is performed by means of language. Different types of actions are performed by means of language .Thus, the performance and the type of speech act depend on the intention and attitude of the speaker and the effect that it has on the hearer. Speech act theory explains the use of language in relation to the context.

6.2 Classification of Speech Act Theory

Cutting (2008 :213) states that “the speech acts theory is basically concerned with how interlocutors (speakers and listeners) understand one another in spite of the possibility of their saying what they do not mean ,and meaning what they do not say”. Finch (2002:113) as cited in Austin (1962) ,holds that this theory falls into three classes: locutionary, illocutionary ,and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is the of utterance of certain noises, the utterances of certain words and construction. Locutionary act is the basic act of utterance, or producing a meaningful linguistic expressions. Illocutionary

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

act is the real action which is performed by the act of utterance .One forms an utterance with some kind of function in mind .This communicative force of an utterance is known as illocutionary force and the perlocutionary act is the effect of speaker's utterance on the hearer. To sum up , classification of speech act theory can be illustrated by the diagram (1) below:

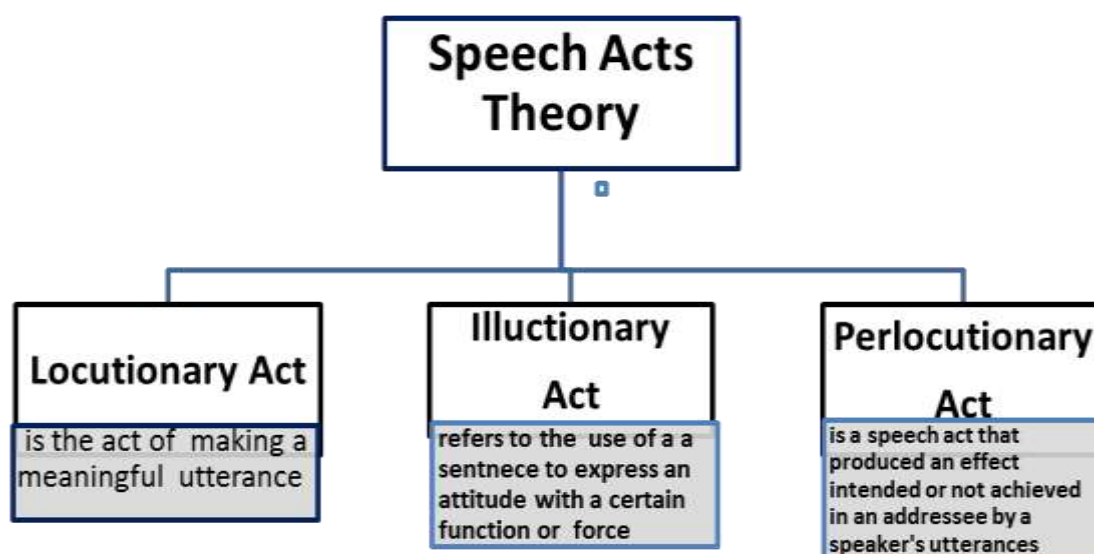


Diagram (1) illustrates speech acts classification

Finch (2002, p.113) as cited in Austin (1962)

6.3 Searle's Classification of Illocutionary Acts

There have been several approaches for classifying speech acts including Austin's, Searle's, Vendler's classification, etc. However, the basic model that is adopted in this study is Searle's classification. Searle (1979) suggests that speech acts consist of five general classes to classify the functions of illocutionary of speech acts; these are as follows:

- a. Assertives are speech acts in which the speaker asserts a proposition to be true or false, using such verbs as affirm, believe, conclude, describe, report, deny, classify, etc.
e.g. Donald Trump is the president of the United States of America (It is an affirmation)
- b. Commissives are those acts in which the words commit the speakers to a future action, using such verbs as promise, offer, threaten, refuse, undertake , swear , vow , pledge deceive and manipulate .
e. g. I will help you in your job.(It is a promise)

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

c. Expressives are those speech acts in which the speaker expresses an attitude to or about state of affairs, using such verbs as apologize, appreciate, congratulate, regret, thank, welcome, hate, ...etc.

e.g. I apologize for being late. (It is an apology)

d. Directives are those speech acts in which the speaker tries to make the hearer do something, with verbs such as ask, beg, challenge, command, invite, insist, request, etc.

e.g. Could you please pass the salt? (It is a request)

e. Declaratives are those speech acts in which the speaker aims to change the world via his/her utterance with verbs such as declare, fire, dismiss, pronounce, make, ...etc.

e.g. The priest pronounced you husband and wife. (It is an act of marriage)

7. Research Methodology and Data Collection

7.1 Participants

The study includes (40) Iraqi undergraduate learners of the department of English /college of Arts /department of English / Al-Mustansiriya University. They are chosen randomly and they are selected from fourth grade during the academic year (2018-2019).

7.2 The Collected Data

The data used for this study consists of ten colour idiomatic expressions which are selected from Ayto's Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms (2010: 31-90). These colour idiomatic expressions are: *black sheep, blue films, green with envy, gray matter, red tape, as white as a sheet, born in the purple, squeeze an orange, a yellow bellied, in the pink*. Accordingly, these expressions have been employed because they are the most commonly used in everyday English language as well as they represent the colours of solar spectrum.

7.3 Procedures

The researcher adopts Searle's (1979) model of speech act theory to investigate the communicative force of colour idiomatic expressions through using analytical-pragmatic approach.

7.4 Tools

The tools used in this study can be summarized as follows:

The first tool the researcher used is production test which is designed to measure Iraqi EFL learners' productive language skill through performances which allow participants demonstrate the kinds of language skills. This test consists of (10) items of multiple choice question type. The students are given (20) minutes to respond to this test (See appendix A).

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

The second tool the researcher used is recognition test that is designed to measure EFL learners' ability to recognize and understand the communicative force of these expressions by using their linguistic and pragmatic competence.

This test consists of (10) items of filling the blanks type .The time specified for their test is (10) minutes (See appendix B).

8. The Speech Act Analysis

The data are gathered and analyzed according to students' responses received for each test administrated to the participants and according to Searle's (1979) model of speech acts. Ten colour idiomatic expressions have been selected from Ayto's Oxford dictionary of English idioms. They are labeled (1-10)

Data (1)

Locutionary act: My oldest brother was the black sheep in our family.

The illocutionary act of the 'black sheep' is an "assertive act" in that the speaker describes his brother as being a loser or a failing person .

Prelocutionary effect reflects the idea of disappointment and hopelessness.

Data (2)

Locutionary act: Watching blue film is a bad and immoral habit.

The illocutionary act of the 'blue film' is a "directive act" in which the speaker insists that watching a pornographic film is a disgraceful and immoral habit.

Perlocutionary effect refers to negative and disgraceful act.

Data (3)

Locutionary act: The man was green with envy when he heard that my cousin would be going to London .

The illocutionary act of 'green with envy' is an "assertive act" in which the speaker describes the man as grudger or envious.

Perlocutionary effect indicates vindictive and destructive behaviour.

Data (4)

Locutionary act: I wish that my friend would use his gray matter when he is making his plans.

Illocutionary act of 'gray matter' is a "directive act" in which the speaker wish his friend to be very intelligent and smart man.

Perlocutionary effect implies positive and confident consequence.

Data (5)

Locutionary act: We have to go through endless red tape to get a residence permit.

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

Illocutionary act of 'red tape' is an "expressive act" in which the speaker dislike the dull routine of formalities in governmental departments.

Perlocutionary effect refers to the boring and monotonous mood.

Data (6)

Locutionary act : She went as white as a sheet when she heard the news.

The illocutionary force of 'as white as a sheet' is an "expressive act in which the speaker feels that she is out of sort, shocked and disappointed .

Perlocutionary effect refers to disappointing and frustrating effect.

Data (7)

Locutionary act: What a sweet little princess born in the purple!

Illocutionary act of 'born in the purple' is an "assertive act" in which the speaker wonders and astonishes that the little princess lives in a reigning family or privileged class. Perlocutionary effect implies a state of great comfort leisure and enjoyment.

Data (8)

Locutionary act: This business is like squeezing an orange.

The illocutionary act of 'squeezing an orange' is an "assertive act" that describes those people who became very profiteering and opportunist.

Perlocutionary effect indicates deceptive and manipulation

Data (9)

Locutionary act :Bill is a yellow –bellied man , do not send him on such an assignment

The illocutionary act of yellow –bellied man is an "assertive act" that describes Bill as being shy , timid and coward.

Perlocutionary effect suggests disappointment and failure.

Data (10)

Locutionary act: The man recovered completely from his illness and has been in the pink .

The illocutionary act of 'in the pink' is "assertive act" describing that the man became very healthy.

Perlocutionary effect indicates that there is a determination and hopefulness.

Consequently, concerning the production test, it is observed that most participants could not produce or write correct idioms of colour in well-formed sentences. This can be due to the fact that idioms are culture – specific matter that need much more care and awareness and it is difficult for participants to arrive at both abstract and contextual meaning .More specifically , participants failed to produce items (1,3,6,7,8,10) except these items (2,4,5,9) where participants are able to produce them correctly.

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

The subjects' responses in the production test are shown in table (8.1) below:

Item No.	Correct Responses No.	Incorrect Responses No.
1.	5	35
2.	35	5
3.	7	33
4.	35	5
5.	32	8
6.	5	35
7.	2	38
8.	3	37
9.	32	8
10	4	36
Total	160	245

As to the recognition test , it is found that the participants have committed less errors in choosing the correct answers . To put it another way , most participants have chosen the correct responses of idioms of colour for items (1,2 ,4 ,6, 9,10) which indicate their pragmatic competence .

Table (8-2) illustrates the subjects' responses in the recognition test

Item No.	Correct Responses No.	Incorrect Responses No.
1.	32	8
2.	36	4
3.	3	37
4.	36	4
5.	2	38
6.	35	5
7.	9	31
8.	4	36
9.	37	3
10	35	5
Total	229	171

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

9. Findings and Discussions

The speech act types identified in this course of the current analysis are meant to investigate the illocutionary force of colour idiomatic expressions. It is found that Iraqi EFL learners have identified three out of five categories of Searle's (1979) speech acts. The main colour idiomatic expressions that are widely used are assertives with a total percentage of 60%, while 20% of the colour idiomatic expressions are directives, 20% of the colour idiomatic expressions are expressives, 0% of the colour idiomatic expressions are commissives and 0% of the colour idiomatic expressions are declaratives. Table (9.1) shows the distribution of speech act types with its frequencies and percentage.

Distribution of Frequencies and Percentage of Speech Acts

SN.	Speech Act Types	Frequencies	Percentages
1.	Assertives	6	60%
2.	Directives	2	20%
3.	Expressive	2	20%
4.	Comssives	0	0%
5.	Declaratives	0	0%
Total No. of speech acts		10	100

Conclusion:

In the light of the above findings, the following points have been concluded:

1. Iraqi EFL learners get confused in investigating and using the illocutionary force on the colour idiomatic expressions since these words are informal in nature and have cultural bound origin.

1. Iraqi EFL learners face difficulties in figuring out the illocutionary force due to the fact that they are ignorant of the use and meaning of both colour idiomatic expressions together with their intended meaning.

2. Identifying the illocutionary forces of colour idiomatic expressions requires analyzing five subclasses according to Searle's classification of speech acts namely, assertives, commissives, directives, expressives and declaratives. Therefore, this process needs much more attention, awareness and practice.

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

3. It is found that assertive acts have been widely used by those learners since they involve the speaker's assertions to be true or false.
4. It is found that the expressive and directive acts have also been widely used through investigating the illocutionary force of colour idiomatic expressions since they involve speaker's commitment to a future course of action by using future verbs.
5. It is concluded that investigating the illocutionary force of these idioms entail background knowledge, awareness and insight by the researcher due to the colloquial sense of these idioms.
6. It is appeared that the participants' responses in both recognition and production tests reinforce the belief that the illocutionary force of the colour idiomatic expressions are problematic and difficult to be recognized and produced.
7. The majority of errors committed by the participants are found in production test due to the fact that Iraqi EFL learners are not familiar with producing such idioms.

Recommendations:

In the light of the results of the present study, the following recommendations have been presented:

1. Iraqi EFL students should be recommended to develop their language skills and to give much more attention to idiomatic expressions.
2. They should use these idiomatic expressions in real communication.
3. Teachers should raise students' awareness about the importance of these idioms.
4. Students should be encouraged by teachers so as to use internet and communicate with English native speakers.

References:

- Austine, J.L. (1962) *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University
- Ayto, J. (2010) *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms*. Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D.C. (2003) *A Dictionary of Phonetics and Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

-
-
- Cutting, J. (2008) *Pragmatics and Discussion*. London: Routledge
- Finch, J. (2000) *Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics*. Oxford: OUP
- Fromkin, V. and R. Rodman (2000) *An Introduction to Language*. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Ghazala, H. (2006) *Translation as Problems and Solutions*. 7th ed. Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat Al-Hilal.
- Larson, M.L. (2002) *Meaning - Based Translation*. London and New York, University press of America.
- Longman Dictionary of Idioms*. Author(s): Pearson Education Limited (2002) UK. Longman.
- Mezmaz, M. (2009) *Problems of idioms in Translation*. Algeria: Mentouri University Constantine.
- Newmark, P. (1988) *A Textbook of Translation*. London: prentice Hall.
- Praninskas, J. (1975) *Rapid Review of English Grammar*. Chicago: Prentice Hall.
- Seidle, J. (2004) *English Idioms*. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- Yule, G. (2006) *The Study of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University press.

Appendix (A)

(Recognition Test)

Choose the correct meaning of the colour idiomatic expressions (written in italics):

1. My oldest brother was the *black sheep* in our family.
a. Animal b. lazy c. successful d. loser
2. Youngsters should not watch *blue films*.
a. Horror films b. social c. educational d. sexual
3. My neighbor was *green with envy*.
a. Sad b. happy c. envious d. angry
4. Many people do not like the *red tape* of governmental departments.

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

-
-
- a. commands b. dull routine c. requests d. rumors
5. Paula imagines Hollywood with *rose coloured glasses*.
a. unrealistic b. Colourful c. awful d. beautiful
6. When my mother heard the news, she became *as white as a sheet*.
a. happy b. white c. sick d. interested
7. Princess Diana was born *in the purple*.
a. in England b. in Winter c. in Summer d. in Royal family
8. My business is just like *squeezing an orange*.
a. very tough b. interesting c. boring d. profiteering
9. My boss is a *yellow-bellied man*.
a. Bold b. timid c. thin d. friendly
10. When my father went to London, he became *in the pink*.
a. tired b. healthy c. sad d. bored

Appendix (B) (Production Test)

Complete the following colour idiomatic expressions:

1. Every family has ----- member.
2. I was ----- envy when I heard the news.
3. My father is a wise man who always uses his -----.
4. I do not like ----- in our governmental department
5. My grandfather recovered from his illness and became -----.

Investigating Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Learning the Communicative Force of English Colour Idiomatic Expressions

Instructor: Faiza Qanbar Ali

6. I like brave people and I do not like -----.
7. My uncle made a big fortune so his business is like -----.
8. Queen Elizabeth was born -----.
9. My grand mom becomes ----- and we take her to the hospital.
10. Watching a ----- is a bad habit.

التحقق من القوة التواصلية للتعبير الاصطلاحية الدالة على الالوان في اللغة الانكليزية
المدرس فائزة قنبر علي
الجامعة المستنصرية /كلية العلوم السياسية /قسم العلاقات الدولية

مستخلص البحث:

يمكن اعتبار التعبير الاصطلاحية جزء من لغتنا اليومية المتداولة ولذلك فان اللغة مليئة بالتعبير الاصطلاحية الدالة على الالوان والتي تشير الى الافكار التي تقبع خلف الامتدادات الحرفية للمعنى الفاموسي ولذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة للتحقق من الصعوبات يواجهها طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في الجامعة المستنصرية /كلية الآداب /قسم اللغة الانكليزية عند تعلمهم للقوة التواصلية للتعبير الاصطلاحية الدالة على الالوان ولقد استخدم الباحث المنهج التحليلي التداولي في هذه الدراسة واستخدم اداتين لجمع البيانات. الاداة الاولى هي اختبار التعرف والاداة الثانية هي اختبار الانتاج حيث تتكون عينة الاختبار من 40 طالب وطالبة . وقد اظهرت النتائج بان الطلبة كانوا مرتبكين في استخدام التعبير الاصطلاحية الدالة على الالوان في كلا الاختبارين .اضافة الى ذلك فقد وجد بان اغلبية الاخطاء التي ارتكبها المشاركون هي بسبب كونهم غير معتادين على انتاج مثل هذه التعبير الاصطلاحية .فضلا عن ذلك فقد لوحظ بان المتعلمين قد ارتكبوا اخطاء قليلة في اختبار التعرف وذلك لكونهم يمتلكون جدارة تداولية بخصوص هذه التعبير وبالنتيجة يوصي الباحث المتعلمين لتطوير مهاراتهم اللغوي عن طريق الممارسة والمعرفة والاهتمام.

الكلمات المفتاحية : تعابير اصطلاحية الدالة على الالوان ، القوة التواصلية ، المظاهر المرتبطة بالثقافة