Investigating Cross-Linguistic Influence on EFL Students' Comprehension and Production of L2 Idioms

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Abstract

Cross-linguistic influence (CLI) plays a pivotal role in second language acquisition, particularly in the acquisition, comprehension, and production of idiomatic expressions. This study aimed at investigating the influence of cross-linguistic similarities and differences on the receptive and productive knowledge of idioms among Arab EFL students. A total of 32 Arabic-speaking, college-level EFL students were introduced to 60 idioms categorized into three groups (1) L1-L2 Same idioms; (2) L1-L2 Different idioms; and (3) L2 Only idioms. The participants were pre- and post-tested to examine the influence of cross-linguistic variations on their receptive and productive knowledge of idiomatic expressions. Two separate one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures were conducted to find out whether there were any significant differences among the participants in the comprehension and production of the three types of idioms. The two ANOVA analyses yielded statistically significant differences between the three idiom groups regarding the participants' receptive and productive knowledge. These results suggest that participants exhibited significantly greater comprehension and production with L1-L2 Same idioms but faced more challenges with L1-L2 Different idioms. Additionally, participants demonstrated significantly more comprehension and production with L2 Only idioms than with L1-L2 Different idioms. These findings can have practical implications for EFL learners, teachers, and materials developers, and theoretical implications for EFL researchers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The comprehension, and production of idioms have recently gained more attention in second language acquisition (SLA) research for several reasons. On the one hand, idioms are pervasive in native-speaker daily discourse; on the other hand, an EFL learner's native-like proficiency is equated with idiomatic competence. Due to the complex nature of idiomatic expressions and the difficulties encountered by both native and non-native speakers in their idiom comprehension and production, a host of studies attempted to examine the different variables that would contribute to idiom processing such as: *familiarity* (the frequency with which an idiom occurs in a language), *transparency* (the relative correspondence of an idiom's literal and figurative meanings), *compositionality* (the level to which the meanings of an idiom's constituent parts contribute to its overall meaning), *literality* (the degree to which an idiom has a potential literal interpretation), *predictability* (the probability of completing an incomplete phrase idiomatically), *cross-linguistic variations* (the degree of similarities/differences between L1 and L2 idioms), and *contextualization* (placing the idiomatic phrase in a meaningful language sequence) (Cronk et al., 1993; Irujo, 1986; Libben & Titone, 2008; Liontas, 2002; Nippold & Taylor,1995; Titone & Connine, 1994).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

To date, there is no consensus in second language (L2) literature over when, where, how, and to what extent the first language (L1) influences the acquisition, interpretation, comprehension, and production of L2 idiomatic expressions. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate cross-linguistic influence (CLI) on the comprehension (receptive knowledge) and production (productive knowledge) of idiomatic expressions among Arab EFL students by comparing the influence of the similarities and/or differences between learners' L1 and L2 idioms on facilitating or impeding their L2 receptive and productive knowledge of idiomatic expressions.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Attempting to bridge the existing research gap, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

• Does the degree of cross-linguistic idiom variations (*L1-L2 Same, L1-L2 Different, & L2 Only*) influence the participants' comprehension of the target idioms? Are there any statistical significant differences among the students in their receptive knowledge of idioms based on L1-L2 idiom similarities/differences?

• Does the degree of cross-linguistic idiom variations (*L1-L2 Same, L1-L2 Different, & L2 Only*) influence the participants' production of the target idioms? Are there any statistical significant differences among the students in their productive knowledge of idioms based on L1-L2 idiom similarities/differences?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance as it investigates the influence of cross-linguistic variations on EFL students' receptive and productive knowledge of idiomatic expressions. This study adds to the body of SLA literature on idiom acquisition by providing empirical evidence about cross-linguistic influence on the comprehension and production of idioms among Arab EFL students. The findings of this study might provide significant implications for EFL learners, teachers, and syllabus designers. EFL learners' comprehension and production of L2 idioms can be facilitated by understanding the influence of L1 on L2 and the degree to which such language transfer can positively or negatively affect their receptive and productive knowledge. Understanding the effect of cross-linguistic variations of L1-L2 idiom comprehension and production can also encourage EFL teachers to provide their learners with more learning opportunities and conditions by alternating their idiom teaching methods. Including EFL books and syllabi with a variety of idiom types might also assist learners' acquisition of idiomatic expressions as well as raise teachers' awareness of the significant role of cross-linguistic variations in L2 idiom learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Idiomatic Expressions

In the literature of second language acquisition, various definitions have been proposed for idiomatic expressions (idioms). Larson (1984) defined an idiomatic expression as "a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words" (p.20). Likewise, Richards & Schmidt (1990) viewed an idiom as an expression that acts as a single item and has a meaning which cannot be inferred from its individual parts. Marlies (1995) also emphasized that an idiom is "an expression whose overall figurative meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of its parts" (p. 283). For example, the phrase '*bite the dust*' has nothing to do with '*biting*' or '*dust*', but its idiomatic and figurative connotation means '*to die*'. Despite the numerous definitions proposed for idioms, most researchers seem to agree that the term '*idiom*' is not precisely defined (Nunberg et al., 1994), ill-defined (Liontas,1999), very general (Grant & Bauers, 2004), difficult and controversial (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1993).

Idioms fall under the category of figurative/formulaic language which includes other expressions (i.e., proverbs, metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and slang). In general, formulaic expressions share three prominent characteristics. First, they maintain a certain level of structural consistency, using the same syntactic structure and often relying on specific lexical items. This means that the arrangement of words and phrases within these expressions tends to follow a fixed pattern. Second, they have established meanings that are widely recognized and understood within a given language or culture. These meanings are often conventional and may convey common wisdom, cultural references, or metaphorical interpretations. The figurative nature of formulaic expressions allows them to communicate complex ideas or concepts in a concise and memorable manner. Third, they have a pragmatic function in which they are used to achieve specific communicative goals, such as expressing politeness, emphasizing a point, or creating a sense of familiarity. They serve as linguistic tools that facilitate conveying and understanding the nuances of social and cultural contexts by providing speakers with a means to navigate and express themselves appropriately within specific social, cultural, or professional settings (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005; Liontas, 1999; Ridout & Witting, 1969; Van Lancker Sidtis, 2011).

However, it is important to distinguish between idiomatic expressions and proverbial expressions as each type has its own distinct characteristics and purpose in language usage. The distinction between idioms and proverbs can be examined from syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic perspectives. Proverbs are distinct from idioms in that they form complete propositional statements. Unlike idioms, which are typically short phrases with

figurative meanings, proverbs convey a complete thought or idea within a single sentence. They often express general truths, advice, or moral lessons. Contrary to idioms, proverbial expressions appear to operate based on similar principles across different languages, with certain syntactic structures commonly found in proverbs that transcend linguistic boundaries. In addition, idioms generally lack a generalizing function. They are often specific and context-dependent, conveying figurative meanings that may not be applicable in all situations. On the other hand, proverbs are characterized by their generalizing nature. They express universal truths, wisdom, or moral lessons that apply broadly to various contexts and situations. Furthermore, idioms typically lack explicit illocutionary force, which refers to the intended speech act or force of an utterance. They tend to be more descriptive or expressive in nature, conveying a particular meaning or vivid imagery. In contrast, proverbs often have illocutionary force, meaning they carry an inherent directive or recommendatory aspect. Proverbs provide guidance, advice, or recommendations based on accepted propositions, reflecting their role in offering wisdom or moral lessons. Moreover, idioms are highly dependent on discourse and context. Their meaning and interpretation often rely on the surrounding linguistic and situational context. Idioms may make use of deictic elements, such as pronouns or temporal references, to convey their intended meaning within a specific discourse. Proverbs, on the other hand, are more discourse-independent. They are formulated as general statements that can be applied in different contexts, even though they may refer to specific situations. Proverbs often avoid using deictic elements, allowing them to be more universally applicable and easily understood across various contexts (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005; Liontas, 1999; Ridout & Witting, 1969; Van Lancker Sidtis, 2011).

2.2 Cross-linguistic Influence on Idiomatic Expressions

The influence of L1 on L2 has been the foci of attention and the focus of much debate in the SLA literature. This influence has been extensively investigated by different approaches and described by various terminologies such as language transfer, interlanguage, interference, avoidance, contrastive analysis, error analysis, language borrowing, language codeswitching, language mixing, mother tongue/native language influence (Jarvis & Odlin, 2000; Kellerman, 1983; Lado, 1957; Odlin, 1989; Schachter and Rutherford, 1979; Selinker, 1972; Richards, 1971; Ringbom, 1987; Taylor, 1975). However, recent SLA research has widely adopted the term *cross-linguistic influence* (CLI) as it overlaps with, and sometimes encompasses, various terms that describe the relationship between a native language (NL) and a target language (TL) and most precisely, the impact of NL/L1 on TL/ L2. CLI is a language phenomenon that describes the

influence of a person's knowledge of one language on the comprehension, production, and development of another language (De Angelis, 2007; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Odlin (1989) described CLI as "the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired" (p. 27). In the same vein, Ellis (1994) noted that CLI often incorporates L1 features into L2 knowledge systems and indicated that no learning theory can dismiss the action of transfer from L1 to L2. It should be noted that CLI is not an "all or nothing" phenomenon (Selinker, 1992, p. 12) and it is not "simply interference" (Odlin, 1989, p. 26); however, it affects all linguistic subsystems such as phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and even rhetoric and orthography (Odlin, 1989).

Since idiomatic expressions constitute a large proportion of language discourse, it is indisputable to argue that L2 learners use their L1 idiom knowledge to comprehend and produce L2 idioms. L1-L2 comparisons can show students which idioms are transferable from their first language and which idioms are untransferable and likely to cause interference (Irujo, 1986). Motivating cross-linguistic comparisons at different levels of language processing enhances the process of idiom learning by facilitating learners' comprehension, production, and retention of idiomatic expressions (Buckingham 2006). However, CLI is constrained by a variety of linguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic factors (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008), which make language transfer have either a positive (facilitating) effect or a negative (inhibiting) influence. *Positive transfer* occurs when the native language and the target language have common structures in terms of phonology, morphology, and syntax, which, in turn, enhances the process of L2 acquisition. On the other hand, *negative transfer* (*interference*) occurs when transfer from L1 to L2 leads to either *underproduction* (avoidance of using some words or structures in L2), *overproduction* (redundant use of words or structures), *production errors* (substitutions, calques, and alternations), and *misinterpretation* (misunderstanding L2 messages) (Odlin, 1989), which, in turn, impedes the process of L2 acquisition.

2.3 Taxonomies of Idiomatic Expressions

Due to their diversity and complexity, English idiomatic expressions were considerably examined from different syntactic and semantic dimensions. A variety of taxonomies were proposed to account for the syntactic complexity and semantic ambiguity of idioms (Fernando, 1996; Fusté-Herrmann, 2008; Irujo, 1986; Liontas, 1999; Nippold & Taylor, 1995; Türker, 2016a).

One of the earliest idiom classifications, as proposed by Irujo (1986), was based on L1-L2 idiom similarity/ difference dimensions in which idioms were categorized into three groups: *identical*, *similar*, and *different*.

Identical idioms share the same form and meaning in L1 and L2. *Similar* idioms share some elements in form but the meaning is different in L1 and L2. *Different* idioms have a completely different form, but share a similar meaning in L1 and L2. Irujo (1986) found that *identical* idioms were comprehended and produced easily due to L1 positive transfer. *Similar* idioms were comprehended smoothly but exhibited interference from L1 (negative transfer) in the production stage. *Different* idioms were the hardest to comprehend and produce, but did not exhibit any interference.

Based on idiom lexical variations, Fernando (1996) hypothesized an idiom taxonomy which included three categories: *pure* idioms (*opaque*), *semi*-idioms (*semi-transparent*), and *literal idioms* (*transparent*). Pure idioms (*opaque*) are those idioms whose meanings are figurative and can never be derived from their individual literal words. For example, the idiom '*spill the beans*' has a figurative meaning (i.e., to reveal a secret) which is completely different from the literal meanings of either, '*spill*' or '*beans*'. Semi-idioms (*semi-transparent*) are idioms that have some literal elements which facilitate the prediction of their figurative meanings. For example, '*foot the bill*' (i.e., pay). The word '*foot*' is used idiomatically, whereas the word '*bill*' is used literally. Literal idioms (*transparent*) are those idioms which have literal meanings and are easy to understand. For example, the figurative meaning of the idiom '*to see the light*' (i.e., to understand) can be easily interpreted from its literal constituents.

Another taxonomy, suggested by Liontas (1999), was established on a conceptual-semantic image (CSI) distance. The CSI distance described "how close or how distant a target-language idiom is from its equivalent native-language idiom both conceptually (i.e., in terms of the picture it evokes) and semantically (i.e., in terms of the literal meanings of its words)" (Liontas, 1999, p. 78). The CSI consisted of three classes of idioms: *lexical-level* (LL), *semi-lexical level* (SLL), and *post-lexical level* (PLL). *Lexical-Level* (LL) idioms are L2 idioms which reveal a one-to-one lexical and pictorial match with L1 idioms. *Semi-Lexical Level* (SLL) idioms are L2 idioms that have a large extent of lexical and pictorial match with L1 idiom, but may or may not use all the same individual words as L1 idioms and may differ by only a few or even just one word for which at least one or more lexical items will have to be inferred. *Post-lexical Level* (PLL) are L2 idioms that do not match L1 idioms either lexically or pictorially. Liontas (1999) asserted that L2 learners recognize LL idioms instantaneously as transfer of knowledge from L2 to LI and vice versa is strongly expected; therefore, there is no need for contextual support to help L2 learners interpret such idioms. Although recognition of SLL idioms would still be possible, it would still require additional processing effort due to the added inferencing; thus L2 learners may need some contextual support to assist them interpret such idioms. Since PLL idioms lack

any lexical or pictorial match and involve some semantic hindrance or ambiguity, L2 learners will have to largely depend on contextual and pragmatic clues in order to interpret such idioms. Liontas (1999) emphasized that the level of difference and/or difficulty encountered by L2 learners will be directly related to the degree of semantic/image distance between L1 and L2 idioms; the greater the distance between L1 and L2 idioms, the more challenging will be the recognition of L2 idiom.

A theoretical taxonomy, anticipated by Nippold & Taylor (1995), was constructed on idiom familiarity and transparency paradigms. *Familiarity* is a measure of how frequently the idiom occurs in the language. In terms of familiarity, idioms are viewed as high-familiarity idioms when they are used very often in the language. On the other hand, they are noticed as low-familiarity idioms which is used rarely in the language. *Transparency* is a measure of how closely related the literal and figurative meanings of the idiom are. In terms of transparency, idioms are considered as *transparent* when their literal and figurative meanings are related closely. However, idioms are regarded as *opaque* when the literal and figurative meanings are unrelated. Nippold & Taylor (1995) concluded that high-familiar idioms are easier to comprehend than low-familiar idioms and that transparent idioms are easier to understand than opaque idioms. Fusté-Herrmann (2008) extended Nippold & Taylor's (1995) transparency and familiarity paradigms and divided idioms into four categories: *familiar transparent*, *familiar opaque*, *unfamiliar transparent*, and *unfamiliar opaque*. *Familiar transparent* idioms are those that are frequently used, and their figurative meaning can be predicted by their literal meaning since there is a more direct relationship between their literal and figurative meanings. *Familiar opaque* idioms are those that are commonly used, but their figurative meaning cannot be easily interpreted by their literal meaning since there is less direct relationship between their literal and figurative meanings. *Unfamiliar transparent* idioms are those that are not commonly used, but their figurative meaning can be simply comprehended by their literal meaning since there is a more direct relationship between their literal and figurative meanings. *Unfamiliar opaque* idioms are those that are not commonly used, and their figurative meaning cannot be simply understood by their literal meaning since there is no direct relationship between their literal and figurative meanings (Fusté-Herrmann, 2008).

Expanding on prior taxonomies, Türker (2016a) introduced a classification emphasizing shared similarities and differences between L1 and L2 idioms, encompassing three types: Same L1-L2, Different L1-L2, and L2 Only. Same L1–L2 idioms share identical linguistic form and figurative meaning. Different L1–L2 idioms share identical linguistic form but differ in figurative meaning. L2 Only idioms exist solely in L2, lacking counterparts in L1. Türker (2016a) anticipated that L2 learners,

when presented with rich contextual information, would be less inclined to rely on L1 knowledge to grasp L2 idioms. Consequently, learners were expected to exhibit superior performance in production, interpretation, and comprehension tasks for Different L1–L2 and L2 Only idioms compared to Same L1–L2 idioms when provided with supportive context.

For the scope of the current study, the participants' L1 is Arabic and their L2 is English. Therefore, three types of idiomatic expressions were identified:

• *L1–L2 Same* idioms which are identical in linguistic form and figurative meaning in L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English). For example, the idiomatic expressions: "He is *an open book,*" "He has *a loose tongue,*" exist in both Arabic and English exhibiting the same linguistic form and figurative meaning.

• *L1–L2 Different* idioms which are different in linguistic form but identical in figurative meaning in L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English). For instance, the English idiomatic expressions "He *added insult to injury,*" and "He is stuck *between a rock and a hard place,*" are presented in Arabic with different linguistic forms keeping the same figurative meaning as in: "He *added more water to the mud*" and "He is stuck *between a hammer and an anvil*".

• *L2 Only* idioms which occur only in L2 (English) and have no equivalents in L1 (Arabic). For example, the English idiomatic expressions "The celebration included music, food, fireworks - *the whole enchilada*," and "He is *singing a different tune*," do not exist in Arabic because both the linguistic form and conceptual metaphor are absent in L1 (Arabic) and are L2 culture-specific (English).

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design
The present study used a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test research design to investigate cross-linguistic influence (CLI) on the comprehension and production of idiomatic expressions among Arab EFL students. CLI was anticipated through three idiom types: *L1-L2 Same*, *L1-L2 Different*, & *L2 Only*.

3.2 Participants
The total participants in this study were 32 college-level EFL students at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. All the participants were Arabic-speaking EFL students. The participants were homogeneous at the intermediate proficiency level based on the University Placement Test.

3.3 Instruments & Procedures
3.3.1 Pre-Test
A pre-test was conducted to determine the participants' prior idiomatic knowledge of the target idioms. The pre-

test included three idiom types which were selected based on cross-linguistic idiom variations (*L1-L2 Same, L1-L2 Different, & L2 Only*). Based on the pre-test results, some idioms were removed and replaced by unknown idioms to be included on the post-tests.

3.3.2 Post-Tests
Two post-tests were administered to measure the participants' receptive and productive knowledge of selected idiomatic expressions. The post-tests consisted of the same three idiom types which were used in the pre-test. The first post-test was conducted to assess the participants' comprehension (receptive knowledge) of the target idioms. It included multiple-choice items with three choices per idiom in which students were asked to choose the correct interpretation of the idiom. An example is presented below:

The idiomatic expression 'a piece of cake' means:
a. a slice of cake
b. an easy task
c. a small portion of something

The second post-test was conducted to assess the participants' production (productive knowledge) of the target idioms. It included fill-in-the-blank items in which students were required to supply the missing idiom. The participants were provided with three clues that may help them avoid the use of alternative expressions: a one word prompt (between brackets) which is part of the idiomatic expression, the meaning of the idiom, and an indication of the number of words in the missing idiomatic expression. An example is presented below:

Some people say that meeting new people is ... ..., but I don't think it's that easy.
• Clue 1: (a piece)
• Clue 2: easy
• Clue 3: 4 words

3.3.4 Validity & Reliability
The instruments' validity was established by three EFL colleagues. The instruments were also pilot tested on another sample of the same population to ensure their reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients of the two instruments: pre-test ($\alpha = .89$) and post-test ($\alpha = .91$) indicated a high internal consistency.

3.3.5 Procedure
A total of 60 idioms were presented to the participants over 30 sessions (2 idioms per session) throughout a 15-week semester. The 60 selected idioms for this study were categorized into three types: 20 *L1-L2 Same* idioms, 20 *L1-L2 Different* idioms, and 20 *L2 Only* idioms.

3.4 Data Collection
The collected data was coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Means and standard deviations were computed to identify the mean scores of the types of idioms. Two separate one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures were

conducted to find out whether there were any significant differences among the participants in the comprehension and production of the three types of idioms. The first ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were any statistical significant differences among the students in their receptive knowledge of idioms based on cross-linguistic variations (*L1-L2 Same, L1-L2 Different, & L2 Only*) in order to find out whether the degree of L1–L2 idiom similarities/differences influenced the participants' comprehension of the target idioms. The second ANOVA was computed to examine whether there were any statistical significant differences among the students in their productive knowledge of idioms based on cross-linguistic variations (*L1-L2 Same, L1-L2 Different, & L2 Only*) in order to find out whether the degree of L1-L2 idiom similarities/differences influenced the participants' production of the target idioms. A post hoc comparison, using Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD), was computed to find out where the statistically significant differences occurred among the participants and to identify which idiom type had the most effect on students' comprehension and production of the target idioms. The significance level in all statistical analyses was set at $p < .05$.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Cross-linguistic Influence on the Comprehension of L2 Idiomatic Expressions

To answer the first research question, descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted on the first post-test scores. The results (Table 1) showed that the mean score of *L1-L2 Same* idioms ($M = 15.05$) was the highest, followed by *L2 Only* idioms ($M = 13.20$), while *L1-L2 Different* idioms had the lowest mean score ($M = 10.15$). To further examine the difference among the participants, ANOVA was computed and the results (Table 2) yielded statistically significant differences between the three idiom groups: ($F_{(2,57)} = 59.8085$, $p = .000$). To find out where the statistically significant differences occurred among the three idiom groups, a post hoc comparison, using Tukey's HSD, was conducted. The results of Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons (Table 3) showed that the mean value of idiom comprehension (receptive knowledge) was significantly different between *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L1-L2 Different* idioms ($p = 0.000$, 95% C.I. = 3.811, 5.988), between *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms ($p = 0.000$, 95% C.I. = 0.761, 2.938), and between *L1-L2 Different* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms ($p = 0.000$, 95% C.I. = 1.961, 4.138). In other words, the participants demonstrated significantly greater receptive knowledge with *L1-L2 Same* idioms than with *L1-L2 Different* idioms, with a high value of mean difference (MD = 4.90). The participants also significantly performed better with *L1-L2 Same* idioms than with *L2*

Only idioms, with a small value of mean difference (MD = 1.80). In addition, the participants significantly had a better performance with *L2 Only* idioms than with *L1-L2 Different* idioms, with a high value of mean difference (MD = 3.05). These comparisons provided evidence that the participants' receptive knowledge of *L1-L2 Same* idioms was significantly better than their comprehension of *L1-L2 Different* and *L2 Only* idioms.

Table 1
Descriptive Results of Receptive Knowledge of Idioms

Idiom Condition	N	M	SD
L1-L2 Same	60	15.05	2.87
L1-L2 Different	60	10.15	2.08
L2 Only	60	13.20	2.49
Total	60	12.80	2.48

Table 2
ANOVA Results of Receptive Knowledge of Idioms

Group	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	244.9	2	122.45	59.8085	.0000
Within Groups	116.7	57	2.0474		
Total	361.6	59			

Table 3
Tukey's HSD Post Hoc Test Results of Receptive Knowledge of Idioms

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
L1-L2 Same	L1-L2 Different	4.90*	0.32	.000
	L2 Only	1.85*	0.32	.000
L1-L2 Different	L1-L2 Same	-4.90*	0.32	.000
	L2 Only	-3.05*	0.32	.000
L2 Only	L1-L2 Same	-1.85*	0.32	.000
	L1-L2 Different	3.05*	0.32	.000

4.2 Cross-linguistic Influence on the Production of L2 Idiomatic Expressions

To answer the second research question, descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted on the second post-test scores. The results (Table 3) indicated that the mean score of *L1-L2 Same* idioms ($M = 13.80$) was the highest, followed by *L2 Only* idioms ($M = 12.50$), whereas *L1-L2 Different* idioms had the lowest mean score ($M = 8.35$). To further inspect the difference among the participants, ANOVA was performed and the results (Table 5) yielded statistically significant differences between the three idiom groups: ($F_{(2,57)} = 67.3285$, $p = .000$). To find out where the statistically significant differences occurred among the three idiom groups, a post hoc comparison, using Tukey's HSD, was performed. The results of Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons (Table 6) revealed that the mean value of idiom production (productive knowledge) was significantly different between *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L1-L2 Different* idioms ($p = 0.000$, 95% C.I. = 4.227,

6.572), between *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms (p = 0.000, 95% C.I. = 0.077, 2.422), and between *L1-L2 Different* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms (p = 0.000, 95% C.I. = 2.977, 5.322). In sum, the participants seemed to have significantly greater productive knowledge with *L1-L2 Same* idioms than with *L1-L2 Different* idioms, with a high value of mean difference (MD = 5.40). The participants also significantly demonstrated better with *L1-L2 Same* idioms than with *L2 Only* idioms, with a small value of mean difference (MD = 1.30). Again, the participants significantly showed a better performance with *L2 Only* idioms than with *L1-L2 Different* idioms, with a high value of mean difference (MD = 4.15). These comparisons confirmed that the participants' productive knowledge of *L1-L2 Similar* idioms was significantly better than their production of *L1-L2 Different* and *L2 Only* idioms.

Table 4
Descriptive Results of Productive Knowledge of Idioms

Idiom Condition	N	M	SD
L1-L2 Same	60	13.80	2.42
L1-L2 Different	60	8.35	1.98
L2 Only	60	12.50	2.07
Total	60	11.55	2.48

Table 5
ANOVA Results of Productive Knowledge of Idioms

Group	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	319.63	2	159.816	67.3285	.0000
Within Groups	135.3	57	2.3737		
Total	454.9334	59			

Table 6
Tukey's HSD Post Hoc Test Results of Productive Knowledge of Idioms

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
L 1 - L 2 Same	L1-L2 Different	5.40*	0.34	.000
	L2 Only	1.30*	0.34	.000
L 1 - L 2 Different	L1-L2 Same	-5.40*	0.34	.000
	L2 Only	-4.15*	0.34	.000
L2 Only	L1-L2 Same	-1.30*	0.34	.000
	L1-L2 Different	4.15*	0.34	.000

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of cross-linguistic variations (*L1-L2 Same, L1-L2 Different, & L2 Only*) on the receptive and productive knowledge of idiomatic expressions among Arab EFL students. In order to answer the research questions, the study first investigated whether L1-L2 idiom similarities/differences influenced the participants' comprehension and production of the target idioms by comparing the effect of three idiom types (*L1-L2 Same, L1-L2 Different, & L2 Only*).

Based on the results of the first research question, an overall statistically significant difference was found between the three idiom groups regarding the participants' receptive knowledge of the target idioms. The analysis further revealed statistically significant differences between *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L1-L2 Different* idioms, between *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms, and between *L1-L2 Different* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms. This indicated that the participants had significantly greater receptive knowledge with *L1-L2 Same* idioms, but they had significantly more difficulty with *L1-L2 Different* idioms. It also showed that the participants had significantly more comprehension with *L2 Only* idioms than with *L1-L2 Different* idioms. Although the difference among the participants between their comprehension of *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms was very small, it was statistically significant. It was concluded that cross-linguistic idiom variations had a significant effect on the participants' comprehension (receptive knowledge) of idiomatic expressions.

According to the results of the second research question, an overall statistically significant difference was also observed between the three idiom groups concerning the participants' productive knowledge of the target idioms. The analysis further showed statistically significant differences between *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L1-L2 Different* idioms, between *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms, and between *L1-L2 Different* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms. This revealed that the participants had significantly greater productive knowledge with *L1-L2 Same* idioms, but they had significantly more difficulty with *L1-L2 Different* idioms. It also showed that the participants had significantly more production with *L2 Only* idioms than with *L1-L2 Different* idioms. Again, the difference among the participants between their production of *L1-L2 Same* idioms and *L2 Only* idioms was very small; nevertheless, it was statistically significant. It was confirmed that cross-linguistic idiom variations had a significant effect on the participants' production (productive knowledge) of idiomatic expressions.

The results of this study are consistent with Irujo (1986) who found that *identical* and *similar* English-Spanish idioms were easier to learn than *different* idioms by Spanish-speaking EFL learners. However, Irujo (1986) also concluded that *similar* idioms caused some interference or negative transfer from L1 to L2 while *different* idioms did not cause as much interference. The findings of the current study are also in accordance with Liontas (2002) who found that the degree of similarity between target and domain idiom significantly influenced transfer of idiomatic knowledge. In line with the results of the current study, Türker (2016a) explored the interaction of the L1 effect and the effect of supportive context in the

L2 input, and employed three idiom types that differed in terms of shared similarities in first and second languages (*Same L1–L2, Different L1–L2, and L2 Only*), and three task types (a production, an interpretation and a meaning task). While the participants' scores, on the pre-test, were the highest for *Same L1–L2* type idioms in all tasks, the participants' scores, on the post-test, were the highest for *L2 Only* type idioms in all tasks. The analysis of the post-test scores found significant main effects of idiom types and of tasks, indicating a strong treatment effect. Therefore, the study argued that the influence of cross-linguistic similarity could be reduced by providing supportive context, and that learners can learn L2 idioms, regardless of degree of L1–L2 similarity, when instructional input includes enough context. In another related study, Türker (2016b) stipulated that in cases where the L1 and L2 share similarities in terms of conceptual knowledge and metaphorical expressions, learners will better comprehend the L2 figurative expressions than in cases where the L1 and L2 share no such similarities. The results of the current study echo those obtained by Zarei (2013) who examined the impact of three idiom types (*identical*, *similar*, and *different*) on EFL learners' comprehension and production and indicated that *identical* and *similar* idioms were easier to comprehend and produce that *different* idioms. The findings of this study are analogous with Vasiljevic (2011), who reported a positive L1 effect on learning conceptual metaphor in L2 idioms, and with Yoshikawa's (2008) who concluded that the degree of difficulty of idiomatic expressions is affected by the degree of similarity between L1 and L2. The findings of this study are in line with Abdullah & Jackson (1998) who examined the comprehension and production of four types of English idioms (cognate idioms, false cognate idioms, idioms with pragmatic equivalents, and idioms with no equivalents) by advanced Arab EFL learners. Their study yielded a positive language transfer in the comprehension of cognate idioms and a negative language transfer when processing false cognates (idioms which were identical in form but different in meaning), and they concluded that the degree of L1–L2 similarity does not necessarily help in the process of L2 idiom comprehension or production.

6. CONCLUSION

The current study was conducted in an attempt to investigate the influence of cross-linguistic variations (L1-L2 Same, L1-L2 Different, & L2 Only) on the receptive and productive knowledge of idiomatic expressions among Arab EFL students. The results of the current study proved that the similarities between their L1 and L2 facilitated the participants' comprehension and production of the target idioms. The findings of this study

also confirmed that the dissimilarities between L1 and L2 hindered the learners' receptive and productive knowledge of the target idioms.

One of the conclusions that could be drawn from the findings of this study is the crucial role of CLI in acquiring idiomatic expressions and enhancing idiomatic competence among EFL learners. Irujo (1986) questioned the claims that interference (negative transfer) does not play a very important role in SLA as empirical research approves L1 influence on L2 at different levels of language processing. Another conclusion that could be grasped from the findings of the current study is that L2 idiom types may have different effects on L2 learners. Idiom types can either facilitate or hinder students' comprehension and production. A special attention, therefore, should be paid to the cross-linguistic similarity and/or difference between L1-L2 idiomatic expressions when introducing them in classroom settings and materials. A final conclusion of this study is that idiomatic expressions are of interest to many people across languages because they are so rooted in cultures and may have equivalents in other languages that reflect the same figurative message whether in form and meaning (*L1-L2 Same* idioms) or in meaning with a different form (*L1-L2 Different* idioms) or even with no equivalent in the native language (*L2 Only* idioms)

The findings of this study may have significant implications for EFL teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers. Classroom activities may incorporate idiomatic expressions in authentic situations that reflect the history, culture, and heritage of the target language and encourage students to delve into L2 culture through idiomaticity and figurative language. Cross-linguistic comparison of L1-L2 idioms may be encouraged rather than avoided so that learners become aware of the similarities/differences between the native language and the target language, move smoothly from the literal to the figurative meaning, and have a deep understanding of and appreciation for the metaphoric meaning of L2 idiom if it does not exist in L1. Students should know how to utilize positive transfer and avoid negative transfer (interference) by providing them with enough opportunities to use idioms in contextualized situations. Comparing literal and figurative meanings of idioms can help students transfer from the literal meaning to the nonliteral meaning.

Future studies may investigate the impact of different independent variables such as idiom learning strategies, idiom types, and proficiency levels on Arab EFL students' comprehension and production of idiomatic expressions. Further research may also be carried out with the inclusion of female students as the current study was limited to male students. It is worth noting that the results of this study should not be overgeneralized as its scope was limited to Arabic-speaking EFL participants studying at a public university in Saudi Arabia.

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