

# **Hawlyat Al-Montada**

**A Refereed Quarterly Peer - Reviewed Jurnal  
for Academic Promotion**

**No.52 - September - 2022**

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## **Episode Hypothesis and its Impact on the Students' translation of Idiomatic Expressions in selected short stories**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper aims at highlighting the vital function of the “episodic Hypothesis” in comprehending and translating idiomatic expressions particularly when they are episodically organized in a text. It also shows that written texts that are episodically structured are able to be handled and recalled by students than those non-episodically. The paper, also, offers ideas as to how students can comprehend a text particularly when they deal with a text episodically organized. To achieve the aim, Oller’s (1983) model has

been adopted. The participants of the study were 80 undergraduate students (40 males and 40 females), their ages ranged between (23-26) years. They were randomly chosen from the third year, department of translation, college of arts at university of Basra of the academic year (2021-2022) as the sample group who took two tests. In the pre-test, the students were provided with decontextualized idiomatic expressions. Then they were asked to translate these idioms as isolated expressions. For the post test, the idiomatic expressions were given to the

students within connected texts of two short stories. Data analysis and the results of statistical procedures indicated that there was a significant difference in the comprehending and translating the idiomatic expressions of the students who dealt with the text episodically. The study concluded that the episodic hypothesis works well in comprehending and translating the idiomatic expressions particularly when they are episodically organized in texts like short stories.

*Keywords:* Episode, hypothesis, short story, idiomatic expressions, text

### فرضية ترابط الأحداث و أثرها على ترجمة الطلاب للتعبير الاصطلاحية في قصص قصيرة مختارة

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#### المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى إبراز الوظيفة الحيوية لـ «فرضية ترابط الأحداث» في فهم وترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية خاصة عندما يتم تنظيمها في سياق النص. كما توضح هذه الدراسة أيضاً أن أشكال الخطاب الشفوية أو المكتوبة، إذا تم

تنظيمها بشكل مترابط في سياق النص، يمكن تخزينها واستعادتها بسهولة أكبر من الأشكال غير الواردة في السياق. تقدم الورقة أيضاً أفكاراً حول كيفية فهم الطلاب للنص. ولتحقيق هذه الغاية، تم تبني نموذج أولر (١٩٨٣) في هذه الدراسة. كان المشاركون في الدراسة ٨٠ طالباً جامعياً (٤٠ ذكراً و ٤٠ إناثاً) تراوحت أعمارهم بين (٢٣-٢٦) عاماً. لقد تم اختيار العينة عشوائياً من المرحلة الثالثة في قسم الترجمة، كلية الآداب بجامعة البصرة للعام الدراسي (٢٠٢١-٢٠٢٢) ليكونوا عينة الدراسة الذين خضعوا لاختبارين. في الاختبار الأول، تم تزويد الطلاب بتعبيرات اصطلاحية غير سياقية، ثم طُلب منهم ترجمة هذه التعبيرات الاصطلاحية التي وردت منفصلة عن السياق. أما فيما يتعلق بالاختبار الثاني، فقد تم تقديم التعبيرات الاصطلاحية للطلاب ضمن نصوص تتألف من قصتين قصيرتين. أظهر تحليل البيانات ونتائج الإجراءات الإحصائية إلى وجود فرق كبير في استيعاب وترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية للطلاب الذين تعاملوا مع النص ضمن سياق. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن فرضية ترابط الأحداث تلعب دوراً فعالاً في فهم وترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية لاسيما عندما تكون هذه التعبيرات مترابطة ضمن سياق في نصوص مثل قصص قصيرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فرضية ترابط الأحداث، قصص قصيرة، التعبيرات الاصطلاحية، النص

## 1. Introduction

Recent years have seen an enormous growth of interest in the role of episodic hypothesis in English language teaching (Brown, 2000). Much of the available research has been done on the chronological arrangement of narratives and in ordinary reports of event sequences. (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Carrel, 1987; 1988; Chen & Graves, 1995; Chen & Oller, 2003). Although using episode hypothesis in language teaching has been received so many studies throughout its history, there is still room to explore its vital role in comprehending idiomatic expressions particularly when they are used episodically in connected speech. This paper aims at exploring how students can comprehend idiomatic expressions within connected speech such as short stories and how that lead them translating these stories accurately more than when they are used non-episodically.

The issue of how students acquire and learn a foreign language has always piqued global interest in English language teaching (Graddol, 2006). This paper will review the findings

of various studies that discuss the episodic hypothesis and its significance in the instruction of English language, and the crucial role it plays in understanding and translating idiomatic expressions, especially when they are used episodically in connected discourse such as short stories. The arguments outlined in this study have the potential to assist language teachers in developing acceptable teaching materials and functionalizing them during the translation process. The following research questions are raised by this research:

1. What are the role and the function of episodic hypothesis in comprehending idiomatic expressions?
2. How does the use of episodic hypothesis affect the way we adopt in translating idiomatic expressions?
3. To what extent can we say that episodic hypothesis play a vital role in teaching English language?

## 1.2. Theoretical Background

An episode, according to the New Oxford Dictionary of English (1996, p. 620), is “an event or a series of events that occur in a sequential order, Oller

(1983, p. 12) in his "the Episode Hypothesis" assumes that a language learning material will reach its optimal effect if "it is structured episodically". Brown (2001, p. 240) explains the reason or the importance of organizing the language material in such a process saying that a learning language will be presented "in interest-provoking episode rather than in a disconnected series of sentences". In other words, if a language learning material is to appeal to learners, it is best to be presented in "interest-provoking episode" because it stands a good chance of intriguing learning. When language is real, natural, entire, sensible, interesting, important, and part of a real event, according to Goodman (1986), it is easy. Language, on the other hand, is difficult when it is unnatural, fragmented, meaningless, boring and uninteresting, irrelevant to the learner, out of context, and inaccessible. The significance of episodic organization evolves as learners gain experience. The entire language philosophy is also supported by Freeman and Freeman (1992), who stated that language learning should progress from whole to part. A writing

that is logically arranged and meaningfully connected can be easily understood, Oller (1993). Carrel (1984) also discovered that text structure affects comprehension. Furthermore, stating content based on episodic theory is not a good idea, Oller (1983, p. 44) shows that "texts (oral or written forms of discourse) which are more episodically organized can be stored and recalled more easily than less episodically organized material". Adults and children, native speakers and second language learners, tend to recall events consecutively in chronological order (Boltz, 1992). In other words, giving learners connected sentences with a logical framework and a story line, rather than disconnected, randomly structured phrases, makes it easier for them to learn a language. Although it has been argued many times that vocabulary and language may be taught in context, Oller takes it a step further and says that context i.e.,» is insufficient in and of itself. The most crucial thing is that the dialogue or text has a logical structure and conclusion (Oller and et al,



2005, pp. 126-132). The student can more readily follow the story line step by step and memorize its structure since logic encourages them and they do not have to rely exclusively on recollection (Oller and et al, 2005, pp. 126-132). Thus, when the text is connected logically, that will encourage motivated to” the learners to be continue reading and to become more involved in content than in the language” (Brown, 1994, p. 227). As a result of raising the students’ curiosity, they will want to know what will happen next, and what will happen at the end of the story, for example. As a result, students will have an easier time remembering words, idioms, and grammatical forms. Brown (1994, p. 365) emphasizes the importance of related text in the manifestation of understanding and the expansion of students’ vocabulary. He (1994) says that “the best internalization of vocabulary comes from encounters (comprehension and productions) with words within the context of «surrounding discourse. As a result of following such a strategy, students may connect the vocabulary items with a particular circumstance if they

are used in this way. and they will be able to recall and apply them more effectively than if they simply learned a single word with a corresponding meaning. In addition to vocabulary items, grammatical competence can also be improved. Oller’s episode hypothesis underlines the critical function of connected speech in increasing learners’ motivation and making it easier for them to retain and recall the material (Hirvela, 1996, p.128).

### **Idiomatic Expressions and .1.3 the Episodic Hypothesis**

According to Webster’s Dictionary (2001), an idiom is an expression whose meaning cannot be predicted from usual meanings of its constituent element. “An idiom is a group of words which, as a whole, has a different meaning from the meaning of the individual words it contains p.393). Hence, the meaning of)» the idiomatic expression cannot be understood unless using these expressions in context. As a result, an idiom should be acquired and utilized as a unified unit of language rather than being broken down into its individual parts. In certain situations, users should not make linguistic alterations

such as adding or removing words, swapping a word for another, or changing the order of words, hence fixed statements are frequently referred to as idioms. In certain dictionaries, slant lines and brackets are used to indicate alternative terminology and words that might be eliminated (Shalti

(and Huda, 2000). Because the figurative meanings of English idioms cannot be predicted from an analysis of their individual word meanings, it is difficult for English native speakers, let alone EFL learners, to master them (Buchwald, 2000, p. 104). Teachers must give their students with a rich connected context in order for them to be able to increase their knowledge of a text, which will assist them improve their interpretation of idiomatic terms (Strassman and O'connell, 2007, p. 332).

Brown (2001) emphasizes the importance of a connected context for EFL learners to acquire language in relevant circumstances rather of Memorization and drilling can be used to learn single words. It is vital for EFL teachers to give rich background for their students since contextual information is extremely beneficial in assisting

students' comprehending of English idiomatic expressions. Thus, adding English idioms within episodic text may aid EFL learners in better understanding and remembering them, allowing them to accurately translate them within related speech. To accomplish this goal, selected stories were utilized to teach idioms and bring learners' attention to the meaning of these idioms in the context of the story.

## 2. The Literature Review

There have been a significant number of studies concentrating on learners who are employing various ways to help them improve their language skills. Carry (1998) aimed to study a multi-sensory method to improving ESL learners' English language skills, among other things. He (1998) employed contextualized storytelling, which is a multi-sensory strategy that incorporates both verbal and nonverbal communication in the storytelling process. Visual aids, heavy props, good prosodic delivery, rich body language, and related referents for vocabulary items are all used in this procedure. According to Carry's (1998) study, this strategy has a positive impact on ESL learners' speaking

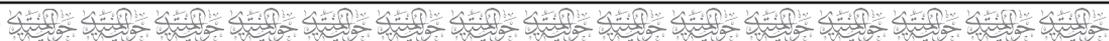


comprehension and recall of oral tales. This study aimed to improve speaking skills through episodic story-telling.

Drawing on episodic hypothesis, Foroutan, Noordin, and Gani (2013) studied the extent to which the influence of email dialogue journal writing led to improved writing performance. The study's technique involved two types of participants: experimental and control. The study's results showed that learners in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group not just in terms of overall writing but also in terms of language use. Ahmedian (2014) dealt with the influence of collaborative discourse on ESL learners' vocabulary acquisition and retention based on the same reasoning. The study had 64 people in order to achieve the goal. The participants were split into two groups: collaborative and individual. The study's findings demonstrated that the collaborative technique had significant immediate and delayed effects on the collaborative group's vocabulary learning and retention. In general, some researchers have concentrated on vocabulary

learning, such as Barbadian and Moezzy (2011), who looked into vocabulary acquisition. The study's approach comprised 60 EFL learners as participants. The participants were placed into two groups: control and experimental groups. A list of 30 terms was taught to the participants in two different methods. The participants in the experimental group were given three tasks to complete. The control group, on the other hand, was given tasks such as defining and memorizing vocabulary items. The experimental group's post-test scores were much higher than those of the control group, according to the study's findings. The results of the study, according to the two researchers, showed that individuals in the experimental group showed a substantial difference from those in the control group.

A recent study by Dabbagh (2017) lends support to evaluate the impact of dialogue journal writing on writing performance and its various sub-components, such as content, organization, vocabulary, and language use. The study's approach involved 84 EFL participants. The participants were



split into two groups at random. The experimental group is the first, while the control group is the second. Students in the control group simply participated in the descriptive writing pre- and post-tests, whereas students in the experimental group were required to write three journals per week for around six months between the pre- and post-tests. The study's findings revealed that there is a substantial difference in overall writing performance between the experimental and control groups. The present paper intended to add to the existing body of the above studies by trying to tackle some of the unsettled issues in debates reviewed above. In this paper, the researcher has tried to tackle the function of episodic hypothesis in comprehending the idiomatic expressions by students particularly when these expressions used in connected discourse such as short stories and how, in turn, help student translate these texts from English into Arabic or vice versa.

### **Methodology .۳**

The researcher administered two tests: a pre-test and a post-test to measure students' capacity to comprehend idiomatic terms

based on the episodic hypothesis. The objective was to see how important connected discourse can be in terms of idiomatic expression comprehension and interpretation.

Idiomatic expressions were presented to the students as isolated ones to translate in the pre-test. The students were then asked to translate these idioms based on their understanding of the idiomatic expressions in question one. There was no context provided or given for these idiomatic expressions. The pre-test took place on December 7th, 2021, and the post-test took place a week later, on December 14th, 2021.

### **۳.۱ Participants**

Participants of this paper were 3<sup>rd</sup> year students majoring in translation department at University of Basra, College of Arts. They were all native speakers of Arabic, ranging from twenty one –twenty six of age. A total number of 80 students (40 males and 40 females) randomly were selected as the sample group for the test. They are randomly chosen from the third year in the department mentioned previously. Two tests (pre-test and post-test)



were administrated.

### 3.2 Procedures

On December 7th, 2021, the pre-test was administered. The aim of the pre-test was to see how well students understood idiomatic expressions and how well they could translate them when they were used as isolated expressions without context. The participants were randomized into two groups at random in order to ensure a better test administration. The sheet with the question was distributed at the same time. The students were given free time to begin answering the question so that they could feel at ease. Furthermore, when students realize that they will be taking an exam, they often feel anxious and fearful. As a result, in order to acquire better results from the trials, the researcher needed to reduce the amount of tension that the participants would have felt in such situations. The participants were then put at ease by a polite conversation in which they were told that what they were about to accomplish was being built for particular research purposes and had nothing to do with any other kind of evaluative judgments.

Concerning the post-test, the participants were provided with

a sheet of a question included idiomatic expressions within connected texts of two short stories. The students were asked to translate these idiomatic expressions according to the .context

### Results and Discussion .4

To serve such a function for linked topics design, the test findings are treated to a statistical treatment of T- test. It is a parametric test that assumes the variables in the population from which the samples were chosen are normally distributed. The T-test is recognized as one of the most powerful parametric tests that makes a huge number of assumptions about the nature of the experimental data, which is why it was chosen. In addition, the T-requirements, test's such as the method of scoring and the type of measurement used, are provided in the data.

The learners' responses in the pre-test and post-test were examined separately for each topic. Both tests' results were verified and evaluated to illustrate the differences in the procedures and strategies used in each test. The findings of the two tests were then subjected to statistical treatment

of both pre-test and post-test for related subjects design in order to determine if the observed differences between the two tests were significant or not in terms of probability

#### Analysis of the Results of .4.1 the Test

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error deviation
Pre-test	40	14.30	8.973	1.673
Post-test	40	-1.42	6.803	1.142
P	0.004			

**Table (1): The participants of Total Marks on the Two Tests**

Table (1) shows the majority of the students in the pre-test are quite bad, and their comprehension is really low. As a result of their misinterpretation of idiomatic terms as individual ones, a large proportion of individuals failed the test or produced unacceptable results.

We can observe that the students' levels of success and failure in the post-test are completely different from those in the pre-test. This result demonstrates the importance of related text in understanding

The participants' scores in the two tests (pre-test and post-test) are shown in Table (1). The mean and standard deviation for each test are listed in the table below.

idiomatic expressions within a connected discourse.

Table (1) shows that the pre-test mean value is (14.30) and the post-test mean value is (14.30) and that of post-test is (-1.42). When the scores are submitted to the statistical treatment of the T-test, the distinction between the two tests can be very significant since the P value is (0.004), which is significantly lower than the statisticians' agreed-upon standard. That is, they both agreed that the difference is very



significant, with a P value of 0.01.

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error deviation
Pre-test	40	13.998	4.76855	8.3345
Post-test	40	19.6667	8.803	14.22514
P	0.003			

**Table (2): The Mean, Standard Deviation and the P value of pre-test and Post-test of Question (1)**

Table (2) indicates the correct answer to question (1) in both tests (pre-test and post-test) out of ( 20 marks). The table also shows that participants' responses to such a question, which depicts the understanding of idiomatic expressions as isolated ones in the pre-test and within a connected text in the post-test, differ significantly. However, the pre-test mean value for this question is (13.998) and the post-test mean value is (19.6668).

The participants' ability to comprehend idiomatic expressions shows a wide range of variation. The majority of the participants in the pre-test were

unable to provide an acceptable translation for these idiomatic expressions. On the other hand, all of the participants supplied acceptable translation in the post-test, with the exception of six who failed to produce an acceptable translation. In general, the table reveals that the individuals in the post-test produced significantly improved responses than they did in the pre-test. This means that the distinction between the two tests the pre-test and a post-test ones can be extremely significant, with a P value of less than (0.0003).

Table (3): The mean, standard deviation and the p value of the two tests of the Question

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error deviation
Pre-test	40	17.2213	11.881	1.551
Post-test	40	25.883300	5.3399	1.221
P	0.0001			

**Table (3): The mean, standard deviation and the p value of pre-test and post-test of Question (2)**

Table (3) shows the participants' results when it comes to translate the whole idiomatic expressions within the short stories as connected discourse. The discrepancies between the tests become highly significant when the results are subjected to the statistical treatment of t-test because the level of significance is high (0.0001). This means that the difference is significantly below the threshold at which it is considered a highly significant. Table (3) exhibited a considerable variation between the two tests. The mean and standard deviation of both tests, as seen in the table above, are extremely distinct. According to this, adopting the episode hypothesis method in the classroom promotes students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, adopting this method makes the

students be able to translate them within connected discourse better than as isolated disconnected texts.

### 5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the participants' responses in the post-test were completely different from those in the pre-test. This means that when idiomatic expressions were being used individually, students would be unable to understand them. On the other hand, the students' grasp of idiomatic expressions within connected text was high.

In terms of the relationship between the results of the two tests, the majority of students demonstrated their incapacity to understand and translate these idiomatic expressions when they were utilized individually, as evidenced by the pre-test. In contrast, it was observed that, as in the post-test, most students



produced better translation when engaging with these idiomatic expressions episodically in connected texts.

The findings of paper show that the episodic hypothesis plays a vital role in understanding idiomatic expressions and can motivate students to cope with idiomatic expressions within the connected text, encouraging them to better control and then translate them. As a result, students will then be able to translate them from English into Arabic or vice versa when these idiomatic expressions are found in different texts. Furthermore, adopting episodic hypothesis will encourage students to increase their vocabulary items as well as enhancing their linguistic repertoire.

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### Appendix 1 the Test

#### The pre-test

Q.I. According to your interpretation, try to translate these isolated idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic:

1. button your lip  
.....
2. a bowl of cherries.....
3. butter flies in your stomach.....
4. war stories.....
5. chewed the fat call it a day.....
6. once in a blue moon.....
7. blood is thicker than water.....
8. dog day of summer.....
9. going in circles.....
10. behind the eight ball.....
11. cat got your tongue.....
12. Pink slip.....
13. all ears.....
14. monkey business.....
15. long-toothed.....
16. burn the midnight

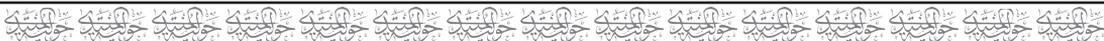


- oil.....
- 17. Saved it for a rainy day.....
- 18. as quiet as mouse.....
- 19. hearts in their mouths.....
- 20. ants in your pants.....
- 21. pink slip.....
- 22. touch and go.....

**The post-test**

II. According to the context in which these idiomatic expressions occur, give your translate for them in the following short stories.

**See appendix (2)**



## Appendix 2: Short Stories with idioms

### 1. Tumbler City

By Erin H.

(( »Hello? What? **Button your lip**, Kid. Don't be calling me no more. Why, back in my day we didn't do prank calls. As a matter of fact we didn't have telephones back then. None of this prank calling. You must think your life is a **bowl of cherries**. Well, if you heard some of **my war stories** you would get **butterflies in your stomach**. You must be **the black sheep of the family**; you have to pull pranks on your elders to feel important. Well, your barking up the wrong tree, little one"... the old man went on and on. The sad thing is he could have **saved it for a rainy day**. Lean hung up the phone when he said something about not having phones when he was young.

Lean tried calling the old man again but it was busy, he figured he was still talking to himself, so she just called Summer. They **chewed the fat** until almost three in the morning and finally Bee said that they should **call it a day**. Some say that **blood is thicker than water** but Bridge and Lean are way closer than they are with their families. **Once in a blue moon** they get mad at each other but they always are friends minutes after. A couple minutes later Lean tried the old man's phone number again. It was still busy.

»Hey, Lena, " Bee said one Friday afternoon.

Yeah," Lena said. She was bored on this **dog day of summer** and being bored always made her tire.

»Are you gonna play at the finals?« She was always asking this and it was kind of getting old.

»Yes, I told you.«))

### 2. The Horror of the Boys' Bathroom

By Josh J.

((I watched Chris as he ran out of the boys' bathroom in horror. I asked him what was wrong and he said, "THE HORROR OF THE BOYS BATHROOM!" I had heard of the horror of the boys bathroom before, but I never thought it was true. I decided to investigate. I went into the boys' bathroom and the lights were out. So I got a flashlight and looked around. Then I saw it, a hole in the floor. I went and

asked the custodian for a ladder and I brought the ladder into the boys bathroom and climbed into the hole and found that under the school was a haunted house. All over there was ghosts, vampires, ghouls, bats, and other monsters searched the place and after a while I noticed that I was **going in circles**. I knew that if I didn't get home for dinner I would be **behind the eight ball**. So I searched and I finally found the way out.

Right away I went to the principal and he asked me, "Where have you been?"

I said, "It's a long story."

He said, "I'm **all ears**." So I told him about the haunted house. He told me to take him there so I did. But as soon as he saw the haunted house, he ran out screaming, "THE HORROR OF THE BOYS BATHROOM!" The principal couldn't talk after what he had seen, until another student said, "What's the matter, **cat got your tongue?**"

"I was just **scared to death**."

"Well what happened, I'm **all ears**."

Let's just say the horror of the boys' bathroom is real. I need to stop this **monkey business**; I need to give that haunted house the **pink slip**. I can't have boys running out of the bathroom with their **hearts in their mouths**. At least we have more than one boys' bathroom here. Let's board up that boys bathroom and **keep it under our hats**. That haunted house is **long-toothed**. How can we **keep this under our hat**, as everybody knows **little pitchers have big ears**. You look like you have **ants in your pants**. Well, **keep your fingers** crossed and hopefully that won't happen.

We tried to give the haunted house the **pink slip** many times, but it just wouldn't take it. We could just demolish it, but that would destroy the school. It will be **touch and go** till we figure something out.

The haunted house was never dealt with--we just boarded up the floor, and we never heard the HORROR OF THE BOYS BATHROOM again.))

