

دراسة تجريبية للتفسير التداولي المغلوط  
لأمثلة العدالة، لدى الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين  
للغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية

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قسم اللغة الانكليزية

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يتناول البحث الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلبة العراقيون الدارسون اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية، في تفسير أمثلة العدالة تداوليا. يتضمن البحث شرحاً نظرياً لمفهوم الأمثلة وتحليلها نحويًا و دلاليًا و تداوليا. وللتحقق من فرضيات البحث أجرى الباحث اختبارًا على عينة من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في جامعة بغداد - كلية التربية ابن رشد - قسم اللغة الانكليزية للعام الدراسي ٢٠١٠ / ٢٠١١ حيث أعطوا مجموعة من أمثال العدالة لغرض تفسيرها (يكون تفسيرها على أوراق الاختبار التي طبعت عليها). أظهرت النتائج التي تم تحليلها أن الطلبة يشرحون الأمثال بصورة غير ملائمة تداوليا. و يُعزى هذا الإخفاق التداولي بصورة رئيسة الى قلة المعرفة التداولية للامثال وأهميتها في التواصل اللغوي. كما ان الإخفاق التداولي، كان نتيجة للتأثير السلبي لنقل المفهوم الثقافي التداولي من اللغة الام (العربية) الى اللغة الهدف (الانكليزية). ووجد ايضا ان نسبة من الإخفاق كانت نتيجة قلة المعرفة الدلالية لكلمات الأمثلة المراد تفسيرها، وبنسبة محدودة، جدًا، وجد أن بعض الطلبة يفتقدون كليًا المعرفة اللغوية في شرح الامثال.

# **An Empirical Study of Pragmatic Misinterpretation of Proverbs of Justice by Iraqi EFL Learners.**

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## **Abstract**

This paper sets out to investigate Iraqi EFL learners' failure and difficulty in interpreting proverbs of justice pragmatically. It starts with theoretical presentation of proverbs as tackled and discussed by linguists and those interested in studying the importance of proverbs in language use. This includes mainly a theoretical analysis of proverbs syntactically, semantically and pragmatically illustrating the general meanings of the proverbs cited in this paper. Then, a test on EFL learners is administered to verify the assumptions of the paper. The test, represented by a group of proverbs (specifically proverbs of justice) written on papers and given to learners for the purpose of interpreting them, is applied to Fourth year stage/ Department of English/ College of Education (IbnRushd)/ University of Baghdad for the academic year 2010-2011. The responses of the learners are then analyzed aiming at clarifying the factors which lead to misinterpret them. The responses show that learners greatly misinterpret proverbs of justice mainly due to lack of pragmatic knowledge. They are also misinterpreted due to certain linguistic factors including lack of semantic knowledge and, in certain cases, total lack of linguistic knowledge. All such attributes lead to misinterpreting such kind of proverbs which are important aspect of language in general and significant means of expressive communication in particular.

## **1. Introduction**

Proverbs, in general, are short sayings in a common and recognized usage. They are specific kinds of linguistic forms and one means of communication. By using proverbs, language would be more effective as they economize the use of language. But it is definitely insufficient to know the meaning of the proverb unless learners know what it means in a given in a given social situation. Thus, the meaning of the proverb, in most cases, seems to be pragmatic as it is determined by many situational factors. However, Iraqi EFL learners may misunderstand or misinterpret proverbs due to pragmatic unawareness. They may not realize that communication is not just an event and may ignore, when trying to interpret proverbs, the fact that it is functional; purposive means of interaction and is designed to cause an effect on the speakers and hearers (Cakir, 2006: 137).

In other words, Iraqi EFL learners need to understand the purpose of communication. In case of understanding proverbs, it is a prerequisite aspect to develop a pragmatic awareness of what purpose of a communicative act is (e.g. if the proverb pragmatically conveys advice, motivation warning and so n) and how to achieve that purpose through linguistic forms (ibid). Additionally, lack of semantic knowledge represented by the inability to know the meanings of certain lexical items or misinterpreting them leads to failure in understanding the proverbs. Such lack may result into deviation from the actual or intended interpretation of the proverbs as, for example, when interpreting a proverb as being an advice whereas it is to be interpreted as warning. In other cases, learners are seen to be hugely influenced by their own culture. So they negatively transfer the meaning of the proverbs in accordance with their culture and the result is a non-native interpretation (inappropriateness in cross cultural communication).

## **2. Definitions of Proverbs**

Many attempts have been made to give precise and comprehensive definitions of the term 'proverb', yet no one of them can be said to have the most precise or most comprehensive description as referred to by Taylor (quoted by Moon, 1997: 2). According to Whiting (1983: 80), a proverb is:

*An expression which owing its birth to the people, testifies its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth- that is, a truism- in homely language, often adorned, however, with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short but need not be; it is usually true but need not be. Some have both literal and figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have one of the two.*

Focusing on the social and didactic functions of proverbs, Cakir (2006: 138) affirms that proverbs deal with issues which border on the value, norms, institutions and artifacts of a society across the whole range of the peoples' experiences. Proverbs might also be considered as self contained sayings in the sense that their grammatical units cannot be replaced. Such a view gives more detailed explanation concerning the definition of proverb in a way that entirely depends on the determination of the characteristics of any proverb. Furthermore, proverbs are displayed as pithy which are concise but expressed well and full of meaning

(Norricks, 1985: 31ff). In general, proverbs are viewed as sufficient and memorable statements that mostly contain advices as in:

Ex (1) First thrive and then wive. Warning or Advice

Ex (2) Marry in haste and repent at leisure. Advice

Yusuf and Methangwane (2003: 408) define proverbs as “relatively short expressions, which are usually associated with wisdom and used to perform a variety of social functions”. Like other proverbs, proverbs of justice are well known ones which have communicative functions and which mainly deal with issues of equality among the different classes of people, calling for right, the threat of punishing wrongdoers and the like. In general, they might be classified as an advice or warn; they warn people of the consequences of bad actions and encouraging people to search justice. They usually contain metaphors and include lexical items related to fairness, justice and equality as can be clearly noticed in the following proverbs:

Ex (3) A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.

Ex (4) To spare the ravenous leopard is an act of injustice to the sheep.

Ex (5) If it is thought that justice is with us, it will give birth to courage.

Ex (6) Justice diminishes evil by diminishing fear. ([www.developingteachers.com](http://www.developingteachers.com))

To sum up, proverbs are numerous and they extend for decades expressing mainly events and showing the experiences of humans. Though they are even various in structure and style, they contain unique expressions showing that they are the essence of human intellectuality.

Most importantly they are used in language as part of the communicative competence which speakers usually have.

### **3. Functions of Proverbs**

In terms of functions, proverbs have been observed to occur in all occasions when language is used for communication either as part or as tool. They are used in oratory, counseling, judging, embellishing, speeches and enriching conversations (Finnegan, 1994: 36). These functions can be explained explicitly by stating the fact that a proverb is both functional means of communication and also a very artistic performance itself. Many types of proverbs have identified among which are: legal, medical and social proverbs. Among other types of proverbs is the proverb of justice which has certain communicative functions when used in language; they are used in interactions, conversations and other types of daily communications. In fact, there are many proverbs which deal with social values (the values of justice in society, among people or in the relation between one and another).

Such proverbs call for goodness, equality and justice to be fulfilled in any society. They motivate, warn or advice people to seek justice and rightness. So the use of this kind of proverbs is very important since proverbs of justice emphasize and call for rightness and justice to be set in any society and to judge others fairly. They contain themes like fighting poverty, getting rid of tyranny, the bad consequences of ignoring or losing justice and counterpart in benevolence for the believer (Baily, 1971). The following are some of the proverbs of justice with their interpretations:

Ex (7) *A good conscience is a soft pillow*: You can sleep well when you have nothing to feel guilty about. If you are fair with others your life will be good. This is an invitation to be honest and just with oneself and with others. Ex (8) *Justice delayed justice denied*: If justice (law) is applied too late, there would be no justice at all.

Law must be applied when it is required without any hesitation or delaying so as to make justice prevail. In communication, this is to be taken when, for example, there is a crime and it takes too long time to judge it.

Ex (9) *However long the night, dawn will break*: Evilness, tyranny and the like never last. Justice will be achieved. In certain communicative event, this is to be considered anticipation for people who are unfair especially those who hold high positions. Ex (10) *An eye for an eye*: this proverb, which is a biblical one, refers to attributive justice where it is seen in societies that do not apply rules or laws. It motivates people who were hurt to take vengeful retribution against those who caused them pain and made them suffer since the application of law to set justice is absent. Again, it is also used in various communicative events in cases when one gets hurt and the other motivates him to take an action by saying this particular proverb. ([www.leranenglishtoday.com](http://www.leranenglishtoday.com))

#### **4. Linguistic Analysis of Proverbs**

Semiotic analysis has influenced scholarships of theoretical analysis to a large extent. Cram (1999) states that a proverb is to be taken as a lexical element which is mainly a syntactic string of words. Those words are learned and reused as a single unit with a fixed internal and external structure. However, linguists of various schools have investigated the language, grammar, structure, syntax and form of proverbs making a new field of inquiry called phraseology. The field that is concerned with the study of issues related to proverbs as known as ‘paremiology’ (Miles, 2001).

##### **4.1 Syntactic Analysis**

Syntactically, paremiologists tried to describe the syntactic features of proverbs. Talyor (1975: 15), for example, expounds that proverbs must be “complete grammatical sentences”. This syntactic analysis which indicates that a proverb is mainly made up of noun phrase and verb phrase can be clearly applied to most of the proverbs of justice as in:

Ex (11) Justice knows no friendship

NP      VP

Ex (12) Nature is the true law

NP      VP

Some proverbs may not have a complete grammatical unit. This type of structure is illustrated by Mieder (1999: 7) who affirms that a proverb is commonly thought of as “a phrase, saying, sentence, statement, or expression of folk”. This view is supported by Quirk et al (1985: 843) who assert that proverbs like: *Man proposes, God disposes* and *Without justice there can be no rules, without just rules there is anarchy*, show an aphoristic sentence structure. This means that there is a balance between two constructions, and, as a result, they are to be considered grammatically anomalous (ibid).

It can be clearly noticed that there is no certain syntactic treatment that can precisely describe or linguistically analyze proverbs as a whole; each type is allocated to certain group of proverbs. In case of proverbs of justice, the following syntactic structures can be noted:

A- complete grammatical unit as in: *Equality breeds no war.*

B-Two phrases clauses joined by a marker as in: *there is one law for the rich and another for the poor.*

C- Aphoristic sentence structure of two equivalent structures as in: *without justice the weak are defenseless, without mercy justice is a robot.*  
(www.poemsforfree.com)

#### **4.2 Semantic Analysis of Proverbs of Justice**

A proverb can be thought of as polysemantic unit as literal meaning in addition to figurative (or metaphorical) one. The figurative meaning (what may be called 'abstract') is often manipulated to suit the particular situations in which a certain proverb is inserted (Norrick, 1985:1-2). To explain this point the following proverb can be considered:

Ex (13) *Fair exchange is no robbery.*

This proverb is said to have a literal meaning; its meaning is literally derived from the meaning of its components, it does not need further interpretation to know that "it is not a crime to have a fair exchange". Thus, it is totally literal in the sense that the lexical items are clearly related to the idea that is conveyed. While in the proverb:

Ex (14) *Do as you would be done*

The literal meaning would not be applicable since the lexical items are not to be interpreted literally (what to do?) but they are to be interpreted figuratively where do means 'deal with others' or 'treat others'. This proverb is then to be interpreted figuratively as "treat others justly as you like to be treated so" (Lutfi, 2005: 108). \Another semantic feature of proverbs of justice is that they usually contain words, phrases or constructions that are opposite in meaning but in fact they do not make the proverbs contracting themselves, the contrast is only apparent as in: *Though the sword of justice be sharp, it will not slain the innocent* where sword is in contrast with not slain. In general, proverbs of justice, semantically, have literal and figurative meaning and the latter dominates their interpretation (ibid: 35).

#### **5. Pragmatic Analysis of Proverbs of Justice**

Proverbs appear to be simple when heard, used or read but in fact they aim at a very effective mode of communication in interpersonal relationships in political discourse, mass media and so on. It can be noticed that proverbs are used by people to add expressiveness and effectiveness to their utterances and writings ([www.whitedrums.com](http://www.whitedrums.com)). The proverb: *Different strokes for different folks*, stands as an American proverb par excellence. Instead of telling people what to do or what not to do, it conveys liberating message of letting people follow their own ambitions. So people are governed at least in part by ethical and social norms expressed in the common-sense of proverbs (ibid). The importance of pragmatics in recent theories of communicative competence must not be underestimated.

Pragmatic constraints on language production and interpretation (including the use and interpretation of proverbs) maybe loosely thought of as the effect of context on strings of linguistic effects. This is why it is sometimes difficult to lean pragmatic conventions resulting from distinction between forms and functions (Brown, 1994: 230).

Pragmatically, proverbs are used for communicative purposes and pragmatic reasoning is needed so that they can be understood (this is totally true when trying to interpret proverbs of justice). The following are proverbs of justice with their interpretation:

Ex (15) *Behind the cloud the sun is shining*

This proverb can be said in the actual use of language although there may be no clouds at all in the sky. Depending on the situation (or more specifically on the social situation) it can be interpreted, pragmatically, as conveying the idea of fighting slavery and how finally people must be equal in rights treatment and the like. This proverb is cited by one of the American presidents (Eisenhower) who sought justice among people. Apparently, he used this proverb as a social tool for calling for justice expressing his hopes of the rise of justice and equality (Mieder, 2004: 183).

Ex (15) Judge not, that ye be not judged

Pragmatically, it is a warning to anyone who judges others or has an authority to do so to be fair because one day he might be judged by others. So it is an invitation to be fair and a call for taking care of others while judging them (Mathew, vii: 1-2). So when interpreting proverbs of justice pragmatically, there are two sides, direct and indirect interpretations and, mostly, it is the situation which determines which one is intended and thus their use in certain communicative situation should be interpreted as what ideas they tend to convey so as to get the best interpretation. What is really significant in this respect is the fact that proverbs are speech acts because they are contextualized in the context of everyday communication performing the same function in principle similar to that of the utterance (Kirkman, 2001: 2). In general, they are to be taken as indirect and direct speech acts as they are used to mean more than they say on the literal level.

This illustration is, to a large extent, proper when applied to proverbs of justice. Although they are to be interpreted indirectly, they include both direct and indirect speech act of warn, advice or call for applying justice (Norick, 1985: 6-7). To illustrate, the following proverb of justice can be considered:

Ex (16) *Who refuses to submit to justice must not complain of oppressions*

Pragmatically, this proverb involves the direct speech act of warning. Anyone who does not follow rules or apply laws will be punished which he shouldn't complain of.

This proverb, according to the communicative event in which it is proper to occur, is warning against anyone who thinks or even tries to think of violating rules, so it is an urge for people not to do so since if they do they will be punished.

Ex (17) *Give the devil his due*

This proverb calls people to be just and fair-minded, even to the one who does not deserve much or who is unfriendly or unfair; we should punish a person according to his wrongdoings. It is usually said for the purpose of making one (or a group of people) to be just even with those who are bad; to punish them according to what they did not as one desires.

The indirect speech act of this proverb is advising and may be warning people to react to an unfair action in a way that is not extreme but equal to the bad action being done.

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## **6. Test Description**

The test of the present paper is set to investigate the pragmatic difficulties Iraqi EFL learners may face while attempting at interpreting proverbs of justice. Thus, the test would examine presupposed aims of the paper; there are specific pragmatic factors which make it difficult to learners to interpret proverbs of justice in addition to other linguistic factors, mainly, lack of semantic knowledge which also leads to misinterpreting them.

Firstly, the sample of the paper has included forty Iraqi EFL learners (Fourth Year Students / English Department at the College of Education/ IbnRushd/ University of Baghdad) for the academic year 2010- 2011. The reason behind selecting fourth year students is that they are supposed to have a sufficient linguistic and literature knowledge; they were in continuous exposure to many textbooks in linguistics and literature which definitely included various types of sayings, wisdoms and proverbs with their interpretations and meanings. The items of the test included ten proverbs of justice which the learners were supposed to interpret in detail. They are mainly taken from a list of proverbs presented by Chu (2007) and from "Saying Quiz: Justice" (appendix 1), and they were revised many times by the researcher in order to set a proper test for them (for example some proverbs included old and difficult words so they were not included). The other important thing is that the test should be valid and reliable; in this respect, Tyler (1963: 28) defines validity as "the most important consideration in the construction and use of the test".

In order to enhance the validity of the items of the test, they have been given to a jury to make comments, observations, modifications or any other remarks. The members of the jury were:

1. Dr. Riyadh Khalil. Professor. College of Languages.
2. Dr. Nidham Sheet. Assistant Professor. College of Arts.
3. Dr. Abbas Lutfi. Assistant Professor. College of Education/ IbnRushd

As far as reliability is concerned, the test is considered reliable when it has the characteristic of producing the same results consistently on different occasions while the conditions of the test remain the same (Madsen, 1983). To assure the reliability of the test, the researcher corrected the responses of the learners, given in papers, twice after reading and checking them accurately and efficiently. Learners were instructed that they have ten minutes to explain what each one means and explains it in details.

The process of conducting the test was made in one of the classes of the Department of English of the same college. The criterion of correcting the responses has been prepared by the researcher and supervised by the statistical expert Dr. Safa Tariq.

It has been agreed a brief interpretation of the proverb that touches on the intended meaning (or the general meaning) is to be considered true even if there are certain grammatical or spelling mistakes. While the proverb away from its intended or general meaning is to be considered false interpretation.

## **7. Results and Analysis**

This section would be entirely devoted for a detailed explanation and analysis of the responses of the Iraqi EFL learners. The followed procedure of the analysis would be according to the difficulty or failure which learners have faced starting from the pragmatic aspects that includes failure of pragmatic awareness of the actual use of proverbs and the negative transfer of L1 cultural norms.

Lack of semantic knowledge and other minor linguistic factors would be also discussed as they contribute in improper interpretation

### **7.1 Pragmatic Misinterpretation**

As mentioned in the theoretical background, pragmatic interpretation of proverbs of justice, being part of communicative interaction in any communicative event, needs both knowledge of the context of the situation (social situation) and the communicative function in which the proverb is possibly cited. This requires knowledge of the cultural norms of the target language and understanding the fact that when a proverb is said, it has certain communicative function to convey; certain speech act is conveyed through such proverbs.

In addition, the data analysis showed that learners tend to resort to their L1 cultural norms while attempting at interpreting such proverbs and, consequently, they interpreted proverbs represent L1 cultural negative transfers. This is because they are pragmatically unaware of the fact that interpreting the proverb of a language needs the norms of the target language and not that of the L1. Not taking into consideration these factors or not realizing the importance of such factors in the interpretations of proverbs, lead to improper interpretations of them. In fact, many of the responses of the learners showed that they lack such knowledge and, hence, failed to interpret them properly. In the first rank, they were unable to attach the proverb to its intended meaning because they did not recognize or ignored the social situation in which those proverbs are produced. In other words, they misinterpreted the proverbs as they weren't able to relate them to their situational purposes and explained them as mere statements or pieces of information. By doing so, the produced interpretations were pragmatically different or not related at all to the intended ones. The following are some of the responses made by Iraqi EFL learners while trying to interpret the proverbs of justice (which are all showed in appendix 1) accompanied with objective linguistic justifications for why such misinterpretations occurred (all responses were objectively cited regardless of the linguistic insufficiencies):

Proverb 1: Equality breeds no war.

Response: "this means that judgment represent peace. In peace we will avoid war".

Apparently, the learner couldn't relate the proverb to its context (or couldn't recognize that such relation do exist) and thus interpreted the proverb as being a call for peace and how to avoid war. The possible pragmatic explanation for such improper interpretation is that the learner intended to present a piece of information concerned with the idea of peace and war. "represent peace" and "avoid war" represent the pragmatic deviation that the learner produced while trying to interpret this proverb. The learner didn't recognize that it has certain speech indirect speech act; the call for equality among all classes of people will never lead to struggles or wars and therefore it is an indirect advice to give rights and privileges to all people regardless of their class or identity.

Response: "we all know that the war is killing the innocent and destroy the thought of people".

The learner has taken the word 'war' for his pragmatic interpretation and related it to the rest of the items of the proverb in a way that reflects his total ignorance of the function of such proverb in any communicative interaction. The learner expressed the idea of criticizing war: "war is killing" and "destroy the thought of people" clearly reflect his/her insufficient pragmatic competence as far as the explanation of this proverb is concerned.

Proverb 7: Ignorance of the law is no excuse.

Response "people that do a lot of mistakes in their life, the best place for these people is the prison".

The learner has thought of the proverb, as his interpretation shows, literally without paying any attention to the pragmatic value or the communicative function that it is intended to convey. The learner talked about the idea of sending bad people to prison if they do bad things which is mere piece of information that do not match the intended meaning of the proverb: anyone who violates rules doesn't have the right to justify his action even if he/ she doesn't

know that such laws exist. So it is an indirect speech act of warning but the produced interpretation is a general fact about the destiny of those who violate rules or do bad things.

Response: "it means that if anyone knows the true should be told when we asked and didn't hide it"

Regardless of the linguistic insufficiencies, this interpretation is clearly not related to the message the proverb intends to convey (its communicative function). The learner expressed the idea of telling the truth and not hiding it through: 'should be told' and 'didn't hide it' which is clearly an idea or message different from the idea or the general meaning that this proverb conveys. The pragmatic misinterpretation of the proverb is, hence, to tell the truth whereas it is actually a warning against violating the rules.

The following table illustrates the number of pragmatic misinterpretation due to the ignorance of the communicative function of the proverbs:

**Table 1: Pragmatic Misinterpretation of Proverbs of Justice due to Ignorance of Their Communicative Functions**

Number of Proverb	Occurrences of Pragmatic Misinterpretation
1	20
2	3
3	9
4	9
5	2
6	5
7	15
8	3
9	6
10	8
Total	80

Another pragmatic factor that led to misinterpretation is the influence of the cultural norms of the learners' native language which was clear in certain responses. This could be explained by stating that they are unaware of the norms of the target language and, therefore, resorted to such interpretive strategy or they didn't realize the importance of such pragmatic factor to arrive at proper interpretation. In both cases, the produced interpretations were mere reflection of the culture and condition of the learners' mother tongue. The following responses explain the influence of such factor:

Proverb 2: Justice delayed is justice denied

Response "if a country ruled by a dictator, people have the right to fight against this unfair government although they live in peace but this peace is not enough".

Pragmatically speaking, this interpretation seems to be a reflection of the condition of the social situation of the learner not of the situation in which the proverb is said nor the message that this proverb intends to convey in certain communicative event.

The idea of a dictator and fighting the unfair government is by no means away from the message that this prove attempts to convey or the speech act it contains; delaying justice or the application of law will lead to the waste of justice and therefore, people should immediately apply rules so as to keep justice.

Response: "it means that if we know justice we must be speaking and trying to convey this subject to society and doesn't stay in quit"

This type of interpretation is totally a reflection of L1 cultural negative transfer especially when the learner produced "convey this subject to the society". The learner violated the interpretation as he/ she focused on the idea of conveying justice to the society and never came

across the idea (the indirect speech act) of warning which the proverb intends to convey. Pragmatically, the learner didn't think at all of the function of the proverb properly; instead he resorted to his L1 cultural norms which is so evident through "must not stay quit" where the word 'quit' refers to a state of emotional thinking as far as conveying justice to people is concerned.

Proverb 4: A fox should not be on the jury at a goose's trail

Response: "the government should be fair with all classes of people and put God between its eyes"

The pragmatic interpretation of "put God between its eyes" is entirely a direct translation of the L1 cultural norms into the target language but this type might be considered a severe negative transfer which indicates that the learner was completely thinking in his/her own social (cultural) situation found in their L1.

Response: "nobody is able to change the decision of the jury by money"

The idea of bribery is evident in this interpretation through "...by money" and this led to pragmatic deviation of the proverb where the learner completely resorted to the pragmatic interpretation found in his/ her L1 cultural norms and ignored (or didn't realize) the social situation and the communicative function of the proverb where it intends to convey the meaning that a murderer should not be a member in the jury against his own victim. (it is an indirect warning).

The following table illustrates the occurrences of pragmatic misinterpretation because of the influence of this factor:

**Table 2: Pragmatic Misinterpretation of Proverbs of Justice due to L1 Cultural Negative Transfer**

Number of Proverb	Occurrences of Pragmatic Misinterpretation
1	5
2	13
3	12
4	17
5	2
6	3
7	6
8	5
9	5
10	7
Total	75

With some responses, learners showed entire lack of understanding the proverb and the produced interpretation were not related at all to the given proverbs, moreover, they were interpretations of other issues. This might be attributed to the fact that learners didn't understand the items of the proverbs and couldn't relate the items of the proverb to each other. Seemingly, they relied on one idea expressed in single word in interpreting the proverbs as in the following examples:

### **7.2 Pragmatic Misinterpretation due to lack of Semantic Knowledge**

The data analysis showed that some of the proverbs were misinterpreted due to lack of semantic knowledge. Such lack resulted into non-actual interpretation of the given proverbs and it might be explained on the basis that learners didn't know certain lexical items so they

ignored them and relied on the rest of the lexical items or they replaced the meanings of certain lexical items with ones which were improper as in the following examples of responses:

Proverb 1: Equality breeds no war.

Response: "of course that between people know everything about knowledge and available between them very good teaching they will live breeds"

The confusion of the lexical item is seemingly the word 'breeds' as the learner mentioned "will live breeds" where 'live' and 'breeds' never match in any context. Such confusion or lack of knowledge led to improper interpretation that tackled the idea of teaching and knowledge which entirely irrelevant to the general meaning of the proverb.

Proverb 3: Justice knows no friend ship

Response: "justice must be cover all the qualities not only friendship".

The learner related the lexical items of this proverb improperly where he interpreted the idea that justice must include qualities other than friendship; justice contains friendship and other qualities. The semantic inappropriateness is clearly between relating the verb 'knows' and the words preceding and following it. Consequently, the proverbs was interpreted in a way which is totally different form the intended one.

Proverb 5: Who refuses to submit to justice must not complain of oppression.

Response: "it means that we must be submit to justice and we must bear oppression"

It can be clearly noticed that the word "complain" was understood improperly by the learner who attached the meaning of 'bear' to it. Such semantic inappropriateness led to pragmatic misinterpretation of the entire proverb.

Proverb 6: Fair exchange is no robbery.

Response: "if someone wants to help the poor man without anything this not robbery and the poor man is not thief and the other person will be helpful".

The idea of helping poor is definitely not related to this proverb which presents the idea that trading or bargaining which the two parts are satisfied is not a robbery since it is an honest action that does not violate the rules of anyone. The learner seemed to rely on the word 'robbery' as the basis of his/her interpretation and he/she didn't understand what the word "exchange" means, and consequently interpreted the proverb as a moral lesson of helping others .

The following table illustrates the number of pragmatic misinterpretation due to this factor:

**Table 1: Pragmatic Misinterpretation of Proverbs of Justice due to Lack of Semantic Knowledge**

Number of Proverb	Occurrences of Pragmatic Misinterpretation
1	5
2	2
3	2
4	3
5	2
6	5
7	1
8	3
9	3
10	2
Total	28

### **Conclusion**

Iraqi EFL learners face great difficulty when trying to interpret proverbs in general and proverbs of justice in particular and this is evidently shown in the data analysis of the responses they made while trying to interpret the proverbs of justice given to them. The difficulty or misinterpretation is mainly attributed to pragmatic factors; their pragmatic knowledge is insufficient or they are unaware of the importance of such knowledge in any communicative event or interaction. More illustratively, the pragmatic misinterpretation can be thought of as a result of their linguistic inability to attach the given proverb to its functional value for which it is uttered and the social context in which it is occurred. Consequently the interpretations were mere explanations of statements or pieces of information ignoring the fact that proverbs convey certain speech acts as advice and warn. The other pragmatic misinterpretation is concerned with the L1 cultural negative transfers where learners thought of the proverbs on the basis of the pragmatic knowledge (cultural norms) of their mother tongue. The interpretations were, thus, a translation from L1 into the target language. In certain cases, lack of semantic knowledge led to pragmatic misinterpretation of proverbs where learners didn't understand the meanings of certain lexical items or attached them to improper meanings. In both cases, the interpretations didn't match at all the general meanings of the proverbs. The percentages of misinterpretations were as in the following:

1. Pragmatic misinterpretation due to ignoring functions of proverbs: 16%
2. Pragmatic misinterpretation due to L1 cultural negative transfers: 23%
3. Pragmatic misinterpretation due to total lack of understanding proverbs: 1%
4. Pragmatic misinterpretation due to lack of semantic knowledge: 6%

On the basis of such results, a crucial question is to be posited:

Why do text writers and syllabus designers often neglect proverbs which are considered an effective aspect in the teaching and using of language?

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## **Appendix 1**

### **The Test**

Explain briefly the following proverbs of Justice:

1. Equality breeds no war.
2. Justice delayed is justice denied.
3. Justice knows no friendship.
4. A fox should not be on the jury at a goose's trail.
5. Who refuses to submit to justice must not complain of oppression.
6. Fair exchange is no robbery.
7. Ignorance of law is no excuse.
8. Though the sword of justice be sharp, it will not slay the innocent.
9. A just war is better than unjust peace.
10. Nature is the true law.