

Ihya Al-Arabiyah; Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Arab

P-ISSN: 2442-8353 | E- ISSN: 2685-2209

**CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF *AL-IBĀRĀT AL-ISTILĀHIYYAH*
ARABIC–ENGLISH–FRENCH–INDONESIAN: A SEMANTIC STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This study originates from the issue of differences in idiomatic meanings across languages, which often create difficulties in understanding and translating non-literal expressions. Idioms in Arabic, English, French, and Indonesian are rooted in distinct cultural backgrounds and metaphorical frameworks; therefore, they require comparative analysis. This study aims to compare five Arabic idioms found in the book **Al-‘Ibārāt Al-Iṣṭilāḥiyyah fī Al-Lughah Al-‘Arabiyyah Al-Mu’āṣirah Tsalātsi Lughāt** by Mamdouh Khassara and colleagues, along with their semantic equivalents in English and French, as well as to identify their closest idiomatic equivalents in Indonesian. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method through a library-based study. Data were collected by examining all idiomatic entries in the book, identifying the forms and meanings of the Arabic–English–French idioms, and subsequently searching for the most equivalent idiomatic expressions in Indonesian. The findings reveal differences in metaphorical patterns: Arabic is predominantly characterized by cultural and grammatical metaphors, English and French tend to employ visual metaphors, while Indonesian mainly utilizes emotional and everyday-life metaphors. These findings affirm that idioms are strongly influenced by the culture of their speakers.

Keywords: *Al-Ibārāt Al-Iṣṭilāḥiyyah, Comparative Analysis, Semantic Studies*



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Introduction

Idiomatic expressions, or *al-ibārāt al-iṣṭilāḥiyyah*, constitute one of the forms of expressive and semantic richness in the Arabic language. Speakers of any language possess various ways to convey feelings or describe events in a manner that can be easily understood by others. One common way is through the use of special expressions, which are known as idioms. (Vula & Tyfekã, 2024) In the context of Arabic linguistics, idiomatic meaning often presents its own challenges because such expressions cannot be understood directly from the literal meanings of their individual words. (Munawarah & Zulkiflih, 2021)(Sodik et al., 2022) Rather, they form a distinctive and unified meaning. (Karim Zaki Hisyamuddin in (Tawfik, 2024) In other words, an idiom is a type of expression whose meaning differs from the combined literal meanings of the elements that compose it. (Al-Khulī, 2000, p. 125) For example, the expression *إِنْفَتَحَ بَابُ السَّمَاءِ* (*infataḥa bāb as-samā'*), which literally means "the gate of the sky has opened," actually signifies that good fortune has arrived. Such expressions are used in language to convey ideas and meanings indirectly and are often linked to particular cultural or social contexts. (Tawfik, 2024)

The constituent elements of Arabic idioms are generally derived from vocabulary that is familiar and widely used within Arabic-speaking communities. This illustrates that idioms are inherently intertwined with the cultural background of their speakers. El-Bathal asserts that culture reflects the conceptual frameworks and modes of life upheld by a linguistic community, each of which develops a distinct outlook on the surrounding reality. The selection of particular lexical items in idiomatic expressions thus embodies cultural values and conveys connotative meanings specific to that community.(Oktariza & Efendi, 2024) Accordingly, idioms typically employ vocabulary associated with the environment in which the language emerges and develops. Language, in its essence, is not merely an assemblage of lexical units; rather, it constitutes a symbolic system through which meanings are constructed, shaped by the social, cultural, and historical experiences of a society. (Fatikhin, 2022, p. 1) In linguistic scholarship, idioms *al-'ibārāt al-istiṣlāḥiyyah* represent a particularly noteworthy phenomenon, as their meanings cannot be inferred exclusively from their constituent lexical components. (Lahiani, 2024) Arabic, English, French, and Indonesian each possess distinct linguistic traditions and conceptual systems. (R.U. et al., 2025, p. 23) Arabic is characterized by its *balāghah* and classical metaphorical structures; English and French by Western traditions shaped through the evolution of

literacy and modern philosophical discourse; and Indonesian by its multiethnic and multicultural influences. These divergences render idioms a substantial challenge in both language learning and translation. (Hanim, 2022, p. 35) Consequently, contrastive analysis becomes fundamental for identifying semantic correspondences and disparities among idioms across languages, thereby elucidating the ways in which cultural differences shape linguistic forms. (Khasanah & Baehaqie, 2020, p. 135)

This study will conduct an in-depth analysis of *al-ibarāt al-istiṣlāḥiyyah* in the four languages through a semantic approach, utilising contrastive analysis to reveal structural and semantic similarities and differences. (Fajariyah, 2022) Various studies on idioms have been conducted with different focuses, but all of them point to the importance of cross-linguistic semantic analysis. Fikriyah (2022) examined Arabic–Indonesian idioms and found that structure, cultural metaphors, and pragmatic context greatly influence the differences in meaning between the two languages. Nursalam (2022) added that the translation of Arabic–Indonesian idioms often results in meaning deviations due to differences in idiomaticity and the lack of direct semantic equivalents.

Meanwhile, Sulaiman et al., through a study of English–Indonesian body idioms, emphasised that the concept of body metaphors is universal but their idiomatic meanings are highly dependent on culture. Krisandini & Sutrisno's (2022) study of idioms in Harry Potter also showed that translators must use strategies such as paraphrasing, idiom equivalence, or cultural substitution to preserve the semantic effect of the source text. More recent international research, such as the article *Recreating Relevance: Translated Arabic Idioms Through a Relevance Theory Lens*, (Lahiani, 2024) highlights how Arabic idioms are translated through the principle of relevance, emphasising the importance of cognitive context in interpreting cross-linguistic idioms. However, these studies are still limited to two languages at a time, leaving room for new research in the form of a contrastive analysis of Arabic–English–French–Indonesian idioms in an integrated semantic study.

Based on the urgency and gaps in research, this study entitled 'Contrastive Analysis of Arabic–English–French–Indonesian Idioms: A Semantic Study' aims to compare idioms in four languages and analyse their differences and similarities. This research is expected to broaden the academic discourse on cross-linguistic idioms, increase the cultural sensitivity of learners and translators, and provide a theoretical basis for further research.

Research Method

The research methodology used in this study is descriptive qualitative with a library research approach. (Sugiono, 2017) The focus of this research is the analysis of idioms found in the compilation book titled *Al-'Ibārāt Al-Iṣṭilāḥiyyah Fī Al-Lughati Al-'Arabiyyah Al-Mu'āṣirah Tsalāsti Lughāt: 'Arabī-Injīlīzī-Faransī*, authored by Mamdouh Khassara et al, as the primary data source. This book was used as the main corpus because it explicitly presents a list of cross-language idioms whose meanings can be traced. Data collection was carried out through several systematic steps. First, the researcher applied the observation method by reading all idiom entries in the book thoroughly to understand the structure of the idioms and the context of their use. Second, all Arabic, English, and French idioms were identified and recorded based on their linguistic form and potential idiomatic meaning.

Third, the researcher searched for and determined the idiomatic equivalents in Indonesian. Fourth, the data was classified based on semantic categories, including literal meaning, idiomatic meaning, and cross-language equivalence relationships. The results of the analysis were presented descriptively, displaying a mapping of Arabic–English–French–Indonesian idioms and explanations of their idiomatic meanings.

Results and Discussion

Linguistically, the word 'ibarah (العبرة) means an expression or statement used to convey a specific meaning. Meanwhile, *Istilahiyah* (اصطلاحية) comes from the word *ṣulḥ*, which means 'agreement'. Therefore, in terms of terminology, *Ibarah Al Istilahiyah* can be interpreted as an expression that has a specific meaning based on an agreement among speakers of the language, not only based on its literal meaning. (Mandzur, 1119, p. 42) The position of *nahwu* and *sharaf* in Arabic language learning is very important because errors in pronunciation or changes in *harakat* can significantly alter the meaning of a phrase or sentence. (Fitryani et al., 2024) This is in line with the findings of Suja et al. (2025), who stated that morphology and syntax play a major role in determining meaning, as both regulate word structure and *i'rab* at the end of words. (Suja et al., 2025)

Attention to grammatical structure is fundamental to understanding the precise meaning of a linguistic construction. In the context of *dalalah* (the science of meaning), *ibarah al Istilahiyah* refers to expressions whose meaning has shifted from the original (literal) meaning to a conventional or idiomatic meaning, but which are commonly understood in the language community. (Nurdin, Haddade, & Santalia,

2022; Yusron, 2021) For example, the expression شَدَّ الحِزَامَ literally means 'to tighten one's belt', but its istilahiyyah meaning is 'to prepare oneself earnestly', such as when one faces a major challenge or difficult task. (Al-Qahir, 1990, p. 15)

This kind of change in meaning shows that language not only serves to convey messages, but also describes the culture and thinking habits of its speakers. (Antoni & Fadlilah, 2022; Yusuf, 2023) Arabic, in particular, has many idioms that originate from the social, cultural, and religious values of its society. (Muttaqin & Alpansori, 2021) Therefore, understanding ibarah al Istilahiyyah is important so that we do not misinterpret the true meaning of a text. (Adnan et al., 2021)(Rahman & Safa, 2020)

For example, in everyday conversation, Arabs may say كَسَرَ الجَلِيدَ, which literally means 'breaking the ice'. However, in terms of meaning, it means 'breaking the ice' or 'eliminating awkwardness' in a meeting. From this, it can be seen that ibarah al Istilahiyyah helps speakers of the language to express meaning in a subtle, beautiful, and culturally rich way. (Al-'Alim, 2005, p. 33) In 'Ilmu al-Dalalah, the discussion of meaning is central to the entire study. Linguists distinguish three main types of meaning: haqiqi, majazi and istilahi .

- a. Haqiqi Meaning (المعنى الحقيقي) Haqiqi meaning is the original or basic meaning of a word (Thayyibah & Susiawati, 2025), as it was originally used without change. For example, the word عَيْنَ means 'eye', which is the human organ of sight. If someone says رأيت بعيني (I saw with my eyes), then the meaning of 'ain here is haqiqi. (Yunus, 1990, p. 214)
- b. Majazi Meaning (المعنى المجازي) Majazi meaning is a meaning that has shifted from its original meaning to another meaning due to a certain relationship, such as similarity or closeness. (Nuha & Musyafaah, 2022) For example, the phrase 'Fulanun Thawilul Yadi Fil Khairi' literally means 'his hands are long,' but figuratively means "generous" or 'helpful.' Figurative language makes language more beautiful and flexible in conveying feelings and ideas. (Yaşar, 2020)
- c. Terminological Meaning (المعنى الاصطلاحي) Terminological meaning arises when a word is used in a specific context with a new meaning that is agreed upon by a group. For example, the expression انْفَتَحَ بَابُ السَّمَاءِ (infataḥa bāb as-samā'), which literally means 'the door of the sky has opened.' However, the actual meaning is different from the literal meaning, because this expression is used to express that good fortune has arrived.

The relationship between these three meanings is very close. Usually, a word begins with a haqiqi meaning, then is used in a majazi sense, and finally becomes istilahi after being used continuously and accepted by the general public. This process explains

how *ibarah al Istilahiyah* is formed from a literal meaning to a socially established meaning. (Al-Shafi'i, 2007, p. 54)

Based on the background of the study, this research specifically focuses on the analysis of five selected idiomatic expressions (*al-ibārāt al-iṣṭilāḥiyyah*). These expressions are sourced from the compilation book *Al-‘Ibārāt Al-Iṣṭilāḥiyyah Fī Al-Lughati Al-‘Arabiyyah Al-Mu‘āṣirah Tsalāsti Lughāt* by Mamdouh Khasarah *et al.*"(Khasārah *et al.*, n.d.) "The selection of these five expressions is based on their frequency of use. The analysis will elaborate on each *ibārat al-iṣṭilāḥiyyah* within the context of four languages: Arabic, English, French, and Indonesian. The analysis of the selected data will be explained as follows:

A. عين الرضى

The idiom *عين الرضى* literally means ‘the eye of acceptance’. In the context of Arabic language, this expression is used to indicate a perspective based on acceptance and positive assessment of an object or individual. The metaphorical use of ‘eyes’ as a reflection of inner condition reflects the linguistic and cultural tendency in Arabic to associate vision with attitude of the heart. This explanation forms the basis for understanding the idiomatic meanings that will be compared in the following table.

Language	Idiom Form	Literal Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Semantic Note
Arabic	عين الرضى	Eye of acceptance / eye of approval	to view with acceptance, to approve, to see positively	Uses the metaphor of ‘eyes’ as an instrument of inner judgement, typical of Arab culture, which often links sight with the attitude of the heart (العين مرآة القلب).
English	to view in afavorable light	to see in a favourable light	to judge positively, to appreciate, to like	Uses the metaphor ‘light’ as a symbol of good judgement. English tends to

				use light-based visual metaphors rather than body parts.
French	voir d'un bon œil	to view with a favourable eye	to approve, to view positively	This idiom is very close to Arabic because it uses the metaphor 'good eye' and the concept of 'eye' as an indicator of acceptance.
Indonesia	menerima dengan lapang dada	to accept with an open heart	to accept sincerely, not to refuse, to view positively	Does not use the metaphor 'eye', but uses the metaphor 'open heart' as a symbol of readiness, generosity, and acceptance. The meaning is most emotionally equivalent.

B. فوق القانون

The expression فوق القانون means 'above the law' and is used to describe a person or party who is considered to be beyond the reach of the applicable rules. In this idiom, the vertical space metaphor 'above' describes the superiority of position or power that makes the law seem unable to reach them. This explanation is intended as a conceptual basis before the table presenting a comparison of the meanings of the idiom.

Language	Idiom Form	Literal Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Semantic Note
Arabic	فوق القانون	<i>above the law</i>	a person to whom the law does not apply	Uses the vertical spatial metaphor 'above' to indicate a position higher than the legal system, so that the law does not reach them.
English	above the law	above the law	a person who is immune to the law or places themselves	it Similar to Arabic, uses the metaphor 'above' to indicate superiority over the rules. This idiom is common in legal and political contexts.
French	audessus de la loi	above the law	not subject to the law, beyond the reach of the law	The structure and metaphor are identical to Arabic and English. 'Au-dessus' also contains the concept of verticality, which signifies power or legal privilege
Indonesia	kebal hukum	(not literal) 'immune to the law'	hukum tidak berlaku padanya, tidak tersentuh hukum	the law does not apply to them, untouched by the law Indonesian does not use the 'above-below' metaphor, but rather the 'immune' (immunity) metaphor, like a body immune to disease → the law has no effect. Most idiomatic and natural.

C. فرصة ذهبية

The idiom فرصة ذهبية literally means 'golden opportunity'. In Arabic tradition, gold is understood as a symbol of high value, scarcity, and honour, so this idiom refers to a very valuable and rare opportunity. This explanation serves to provide an initial overview of the idiomatic meaning before a comparative mapping is carried out in the following table.

Language	Idiom Form	Literal Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Semantic Note
Arabic	فرصة ذهبية	golden opportunity	a very valuable and rare opportunity	Uses the metaphor of gold (الذهب) as a symbol of high value and rarity. In Arab culture, gold is often used as a symbol of honour and great opportunity.
English	golden opportunity	golden opportunity	the best opportunity that rarely occurs	Both use the metaphor of gold. English often uses valuable material elements to describe the importance of a moment.
French	occasion en or	golden opportunity	an extraordinary opportunity that should not be wasted	The metaphor of gold is also used. The use of 'en or' follows the French language pattern of placing high value on opportunities.
Indonesia	kesempatan emas	an opportunity of great value	a highly valuable and rare opportunity	The idiom is directly identical to Arabic and English. Indonesian also uses the metaphor of gold as a symbol of high value and opportunities that are difficult to repeat.

D. فِكْرٍ مَرَّتَيْنِ

The expression فِكْرٍ مَرَّتَيْنِ means 'think twice' and is used in Arabic as a form of exhortation for someone to reconsider before making a decision. The use of the number 'two' in this idiom is not literal, but serves to emphasise the importance of

caution. This brief explanation serves as an introduction to the table that outlines the equivalent idiomatic meanings.

Language	Idiom Form	Literal Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Semantic Note
Arabic	فكر مرتين	think twice	reconsider, do not act rashly	Emphasises the process of rethinking, indicating extra caution before acting.
English	to think twice	think twice	consider carefully before deciding	A common idiom in English that emphasises rethinking, often used in the context of caution or a careful attitude.
French	réfléchir à deux fois	think twice	to reconsider seriously	Similar to English, it uses the number 'two' to describe the intensity of deeper thinking.
Indonesia	pikir-pikir dulu / pertimbangkan dua kali	to think twice	think twice consider carefully, do not act rashly	Indonesian does not always use the metaphor 'twice', but the closest equivalent is 'pikir-pikir dulu' (think first), while the

literal form is still understandable.

E. في خبر كان

The idiom في خبر كان is a distinctive expression in Arabic that indicates that something has been lost, is no longer valid, or remains only in the memory of the past. This term originates from the grammatical concept of khabar kāna, which relates to events in the past tense. This explanation is provided as background information before the reader enters the table that outlines the meaning of the idiom in various languages.

Language	Idiom Form	Literal Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Semantic Note
Arabic	في خبر كان	<i>in the news 'kāna' / in past news</i>	disappeared, vanished, became obsolete, no longer	Valid Based on syntactic play: 'khabar kāna' functions for something that happened in the past → metaphor that the idiom object 'returns to the past'.
English	to disappear / to vanish / to be outdated	disappear / vanish / become obsolete	lost, no longer functional	English uses direct, non-idiomatic terms. More descriptive than metaphorical.
French	disparaître / devenir caduc	to disappear / to become obsolete	to disappear or become invalid	Same as English: does not use linguistic play, but rather literal-conceptual word choice.
Indonesia	tinggal kenangan / hilang tak berbekas	—	disappear, no longer applicable, forgotten	Uses the metaphor 'memory' as something that has been in the past. Closest to the temporal aspect of the

Arabic idiom (كان =
past tense).

From the entire discussion, it appears that idioms are not merely ornamental linguistic units, but rather representations of the cultural perspectives and experiences of speakers manifested in metaphorical expressions. A contrastive analysis of Arabic, English, French, and Indonesian idioms shows how each language constructs meaning associations through different symbols that are nevertheless rooted in interrelated universal cognitive concepts.

The differences in metaphors and idiomatic structures in each language emphasise that idioms function as bridges between language and culture, so that understanding them requires not only linguistic accuracy but also sensitivity to the social context in which they were born. Therefore, this discussion illustrates that mastery of cross-language idioms must be placed as a competency that integrates semantic, cultural, and contextual interpretation aspects. This comprehensive understanding forms the basis for accurate meaning and serves as the foundation for the conclusions presented in the next section.

Conclusion

This study shows that *al-ibārāt al-iṣṭilāḥiyyah* in Arabic, English, French, and Indonesian are linguistic phenomena that cannot be understood through a lexical approach alone. Idioms form meaning through the relationship between *haqiqi*, *majazi*, and *istilahi* meanings, and this shift in meaning occurs as a result of cultural conventions and collective usage among speakers. These findings reinforce the opinion of experts that idioms always present meanings that differ from the literal meanings of their constituent elements and represent the social experiences and cultural values of their speakers.

A contrastive analysis of five idioms *‘ayn ar-riḍā*, *fawqa al-qānūn*, *furṣah dhahabiyyah*, *fakkir marratayn*, and *fī khabar kāna* shows that there are universal semantic relations as well as significant cultural differences. The idiom *‘ayn ar-riḍā* shows how Arabic connects the ‘eye’ with inner conditions, while English and French favour light-based visual metaphors. The idiom *fawqa al-qānūn* shows similarities in vertical metaphors in Arabic, English, and French, while Indonesian chooses the bodily metaphor ‘immune to the law’. In *furṣah dhahabiyyah*, the four languages show metaphorical harmony through the use of the element ‘gold’ as a symbol of value and scarcity, confirming the existence of valuable material metaphors as a cross-cultural concept. The similarity in idiomatic structure in *fakkir marratayn*, *think twice*, and

réfléchir à deux fois shows a cognitive consensus on the concept of caution. As for *fi khabar kāna*, it shows the uniqueness of Arabic idioms based on grammatical structure, which have no idiomatic equivalents in English and French, but find close temporal metaphors in Indonesian.

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