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# Creating an Advanced English–Arabic Dictionary of Idioms

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## What are idioms?

- An **idiom** (Latin: *idioma*, "special property") is a combination of words that has a figurative meaning, due to its common usage. An idiom's figurative meaning is separate from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which it is made.
- There are estimated to be at least **25,000** idiomatic expressions in the modern English language.



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## Unique Challenges

- English language is rapidly evolving and continually adding new vocabulary and developing new idioms.
- Every day English language acquire and/or develop an idiomatic expression (TV shows, sports, politics, commercials,...etc.)
- It struck me the overwhelming number of English idioms and the underwhelming number of English – Arabic volumes dedicated to this topic. (Last published English – Arabic idioms dictionary was in 1983 in Beirut, Lebanon – out of print!)



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## Unique Challenges *continued*

- Arabic linguists and dictionary developers for reasons varying from time consumption, workload, locale challenges, and funding did not focus on this subject. Any new effort to develop a modern advanced English – Arabic dictionary in this field will literally start from scratch.
- Arabic language unique diglossia makes the case more complicated. On one hand, there is a need to find a formal (foshā) equivalent for each English idiom. On the other hand, this equivalent needs to be easily understood by the average Arabic speaker. (Idioms by definition are used in every day life in English language, and Arabic needs to follow suit) – The case for “**wind chill**”



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## Unique Challenges *continued*

- Idioms are the most likely part of the speech to be misunderstood by native speakers. Immigrants are most likely to be ESL, and this adds a significant layer of difficulty when trying to decipher the meaning of an idiom. This is one of the hardest tasks that interpreters and translators face.
- Quiz: How will you interpret “Ah...it looks like you went under the weather. Is this why you came to see me today?”, “Don’t worry. I’ll take care of you....I won’t strike out!”, “Believe me...this is the best solution for your problem....directly from the horse’s mouth”



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## The Search

- A great place to start in order to establish an initial baseline of previous works with no overhead cost cost at all is the google scholar at: <http://scholar.google.com>
- Once you gain an idea of what is out there, you will need to do a more rigorous academic search. It will allow you to search exclusive academic journals and volumes.
- Bibliographies should be your best friends throughout the entire project. They open a treasure trove of cross-referencing, validation of publication dates, authors' names, selection of key words for further search,...etc.



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## The Search *continued*

- Search Amazon website at <http://www.amazon.com> (or other major online book sale portals) for comparable for-sale or out-of-print volumes. Even though this primitive online search can not, on its own merits, be reliable enough to establish a good knowledge of what is out there, it will provide you with a great advice on how other volumes are structured, type set, categorization, key word search, black & white or in-color, font selection, and ultimately.....price!
- Overseas bookstores and websites are also of great value. This step is often time consuming, costly, and you need to be lucky! (most books and volumes in Third World are not registered with the Library of Congress, do not have ISBN or EAN, and are out-of-print)



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## The Journey

- Initial Collecting: It started with collecting idioms and expressions for my personal use (2-year period (2009 – 2010) & 500 entries “**Personal Glossary**”)
- Categorizing: Because of the complexity of current entries, I needed to categorize entries alphabetically. Then, I split the work into Idioms & Common Expressions “non-standard idioms”.



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## The Journey *Continued*

- Professional Compiling: In early 2011, I decided to pursue this volume on a professional basis. I consulted more than 20 English (in-print & online) resources in order to compile as many and as extensive as possible idioms and expressions. (12,000 entries by end of 2011)
- Refining: Through 2012, I refined, deleted, re-grouped, and annexed entries. (2,500 by end of 2012)



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## The Journey *continued*

- Writing: As of January 3<sup>rd</sup>. 2013, I dedicated more than 100 hours per week for the writing process. (Through mid April 2013)
- Special tasks: For *formality Vs. informality*, I decided on using “S” for Slang and “V” for vulgar. For *locale*, I decided on using *Am, Au, Br, Nz*, and *Sa* when applicable.

Locale assignment proved to be the most challenging and time consuming because of the intertwined nature of utilization and the propagation of online searching that does not recognize locales.



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## The Journey *continued*

- Reviewing: English entries were reviewed twice by a retired linguistics professor at the U of M. Arabic translation was reviewed by two ATA certified translators.
- Copyrighting: I filed for copyright protection at [www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov)
- Publishing: I purchased a bar code and ISBN and contacted Amazon CreateSpace to be my publisher. (Estimated publication date was set by the end of is 2013)
- Reconsidering: I delayed publishing and chose to have my volume vetted by an Arabic linguistics professors in Jordan. (Estimated publication date is set by the March 2014)



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## Special Considerations

- **Affordability:** Volume needs to be affordable and priced right for interpreters, translators, and college students (target) customers)
- **Portability:** Volume needs to be neither insufficiently small (less than 100 pages) nor excessively large (more than 300 pages)
- **Format (soft cover Vs. hard cover):** Volume needs to be printed in one format or the other. Each has its pros and cons.
- **Marketing:** Your website, an association or organization website, book stores, or direct sale
- **Mode of delivery (new!):** In-print, e-book, or pod cast
- **Publishing:** Regular publishing Vs. on demand
- **Copy right infringement:** Selling overseas or availing the volume for any form of download open Pandora's box of legal challenges.



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# ARE YOU READY?



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# Questions?

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