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”المستجدات الحديثة في التعليم العالي في ظل التعليم الالكتروني“

17-16 كانون الاول 2020 (المجلد الثاني)

## The Effect of Context on the Comprehension of English Idioms

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### Abstract

Understanding the meaning of words is vital to communicate effectively and understand the world around us. However, the meaning of the words is not always literal and straight forward. Some words and phrases can have a completely different meaning that can only be understood through context. Context plays an important role in determining meaning in communication, (Johnson, 1974). Such context-dependent phrases are usually called ‘idioms.’

This study aims at investing the ability of college students to comprehend the meaning of idioms within and without context. It also aims at examining the brain mechanisms underlying such context-dependent comprehension processes.

Since the meaning of sentences affects and are affected by context, it is hypothesized that students will be able to guess the meaning of idioms within context better than without context.

In order to test this hypothesis, the researcher recruits a group of undergraduate students to predict the meaning of several selected idioms. These idioms are found in conversations taken from a BBC program. The results show that students were indeed able to guess the meaning of the idioms within the context much better than without it.

**Key words:** context, comprehension, idioms, collocation, meani



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## 1. Context and Meaning: Theoretical Background

### 1.1 Introduction

Different authors and communities often use the word ‘context’ for different but often interrelated and dependent notions. Context, according to linguists, often refers to the text that surrounds a certain phrase or word. Another everyday usage of ‘context’ refers to a section of the real world in which some events or the discourse take place, and is often intertwined and confused with another meaning, namely knowledge about the same thing. (Christiansen & Dahl, 2005: 100)

Meaning is the foundation of language, since people communicate principally to convey meaning. Aside from the various definitions of meaning in a dictionary, it can also be found in context. Meaning cannot be communicated without context, and context cannot be established without meaning; therefore, meaning and context depend on each other, (Williams, 2004: 107).

The meaning of a word depends on the context in which it occurs. Many English words have semantically unrelated meaning, (e.g. watch = a time piece, to look; rose = a flower, past tense of rise). Others have multiple semantically related senses (e.g., twist an ankle vs. twist the truth); and some have both (e.g.; one of the meanings of rose is the name of both a flower and a related color). Even the meaning of a seemingly unambiguous word such as a *piano* depends on the context in which it occurs: *moving a piano* brings to mind different concepts than *playing a piano* (Tabossi, 1988).

The growth of interest in how language is used in real-life situations and what people mean, is partly a reaction to Chomsky's treatment of language and the language user as abstract entities (Chomsky, 1965: 3). The actual use of language has been questioned over the years, and many



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attempts tried to answer these questions by expanding the scope of linguistics to the context in which language occurs.

As a result of the relationship between language and context, Pragmatics appeared. Linguists defined pragmatics as the study of the systematic relation of language to situation and/or context (Oller, 1970: 506; Richards et al., 1992: 284), or "the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding" (Levinson, 1983: 20).

## 1.2 Types of Context

According to Miller and Leacock (2000), context is classified into two types: (a) local context, and (b) topical context. **Local context** refers to the words that occur immediately before and after the key word. **Topical context**, on the other hand, refers to the topic of the text where the key word has been used. Dash (2005) does not agree with this view. According to him, these two contexts mentioned above are not enough for understanding the intended meaning of a word, as these contexts often fail to provide the necessary information required for the purpose. He classifies context into four broad types (Dash, 2005):

- (a) Local Context,
- (b) Sentential Context,
- (c) Topical Context, and
- (d) Global Context

Dash (2005) designs a figure for conceptual layering of context, in which the circle immediately after the key word refers to local context; the next circle refers to the sentential context, then the topical context, and finally the global context. This way of layering (figure 1) helps us to visualize how the contexts should be interpreted for understanding the actual contextual meaning of a word. Moreover, it makes us deal with the problem in a systematic manner, which leads to reducing the amount of



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errors in interpretation and understanding the contextual meaning of words in a text.

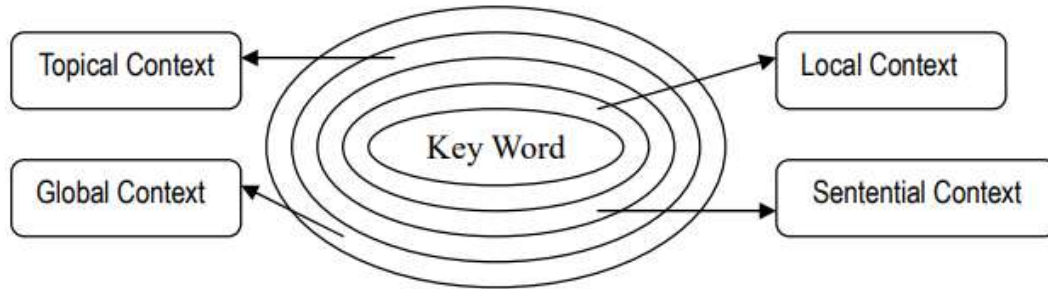


Figure 1 Conceptual layering of contexts of a word in a piece of text

### 1.3 Types of Meaning

According to Leech (1974), there are seven types of meaning:

#### 1) *Conceptual Meaning.*

Conceptual meaning is sometimes called 'denotative meaning' or 'cognitive meaning'. Larson (1984: 100) explains that denotative meaning is the meaning suggested by the word when it used alone. It is the first meaning or usage, which a word will suggest to most people when the word is said in isolation.

#### 2) *Connotative Meaning.*

Words have come to have emotive tone, the associations, and suggestiveness of the situation in which they have been a part. For example, the word “brink” denotes the meaning of “edge.” However, in phrases like “*The brink of the cliff*” or “*the brink of a disaster,*” this word suggests danger and its emotive tone is that of fear. According to Leech (1974: 40-41), connotative meanings have communicative value related to what an expression it refers to. Talking about connotation refers to “real word experience.” Connotative meaning is relatively unstable





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when compared to denotative meaning, and it plays a major role in the language of literature, of politics, of advertising, and a greeting card.

### 3) *Stylistic Meaning.*

According to Leech (1974: 15), stylistic meaning is a piece of language that conveys something about the circumstances of its use. For instance:

1. They chucked a stone at the cops, and then did a bunk with the loot.
  2. After casting a stone at the police, they absconded with the money.
- Both sentences convey the same information but with different style.

### 4) *Affective Meaning.*

Affective meaning is a kind of meaning, which affects the personal feeling of speakers, including his/her attitude to the listener, or his/her attitude to something he/she talking about. The speakers might say either (1) "I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, but I wonder if you would be so kind as to lower your voice as a little" or (2) "Will you belt up". The impression of politeness in the sentence (1) is reserved by tone of biting sarcasm; sentence (2) can be turned into a playful remark between intimates if delivered with the intonation of a mild request.

### 5) *Reflected Meaning.*

Reflected meaning involves an interconnection on the lexical level of language (the meaning) when one senses of word form's part of the speakers' response to another sense. For instance, on hearing the Church service.

### 6) *Collocative Meaning.*

Collocative meaning includes the associations of a word acquired on account of its meaning, which tend to occur in its environment. For instance, the words 'pretty' and 'handsome' share common ground in the meaning of 'good looking'. However, they can be distinguished by the



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nouns with which they occur or collocate; Pretty woman and handsome man.

#### 7) *Thematic Meaning.*

Leech (1974: 19) defines thematic meaning as the meaning that is communicated by the way the speaker or writer organizes the message, in terms of ordering, focus, and emphasis, such as:

1. Mrs. Bessie Smith donated the first prize.
2. The first prize was donated by Mrs. Bessie Smith

We can assume that the active sentence answers the question “what did Mrs. Bessie Smith donate?” while the passive sentence answers the question “who donates the first prize?” In other words (1) suggest that we know who Mrs. Bessie Smith.

#### 1.4 Idioms

There are various definitions of idioms; however, all of them share common features. Palmer (1976: 41) defines idioms as "a sequence of words whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the words themselves." Simpson (2004: 93) gives a similar definition, by saying that idioms are clusters of words whose meaning can be hardly understood from their constituent parts. The Longman dictionary of idioms describes idioms as expressions that are rather metaphorical than literal and these expressions tend to be invariable or fixed in the form, so they have some degree of lexical and syntactic fixedness, (Longman Dictionary of Idioms, 1979: viii). For example, raining cats and dogs vs. \*raining cats and hounds or \*raining dogs and cats.

Similarly, Rowe (2004: 428) asserts that idioms have an unexpected meaning different from the literal sense, and in many cases, it is difficult to be translated into another language. For example, phrases like "get



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away", "break even", and "turn into" are difficult to understand, because their meanings as expressions are different from the meanings of the individual words.

Similarly, meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of its parts (Marlies, 1995: 283). It is a figurative expression that usually can be interpreted literally, but that takes a non-literal meaning when used in a specific context (Cain et al., 2005: 66).

### 1.5 Types of Idioms

There are several types of idioms such as transparent, opaque, simile, metaphor, saying, proverbs, clichés, restricted collocation and so on.

- 1. Transparent Idioms:** According to Cacciari (1995: 46-47) transparent idioms are figurative expressions whose meanings can be easily understood. Such idioms have a very little difference between the literal meaning and the figurative meaning. Cain et al (2005: 67) explain that transparency refers to the degree of agreement between the literal and figurative meanings of an idiom.
- 2. Opaque Idioms:** In opaque idioms, the meaning of the constituents does not contribute to the overall meaning of the idioms. According to Cain et al (2005: 73) "the sense of opaque idioms, such as "to wet behind the ears" cannot be inferred from the individual words in the phrases or actions they describe".
- 3. Pairs of Words:** This type of idioms usually belongs to the transparent idioms and consists of pairs of words joined by 'and'. For example, "it was raining cats and dogs." Many of these phrases cannot be reversed, (Padalik, 2008: 9).
- 4. Idioms with "it":** This type of idioms has the pronoun "it" as a fixed part. The pronoun does not refer to a word coming before 'it' as it normally does like 'snuff it' or 'live it up', (Padalik, 2008: 11).



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5. **Allusions:** These are popular phrases and words, which have a significance in society, (Padalik, 2008: 11).
6. **Phrasal verbs:** According to Longman Dictionary of Idioms, (1979: ix,x), expressions which include a verb and one or more adverbial particles or prepositions are another representative of idioms. For example "put up with, make up etc."
7. **Sayings:** Sayings are complete sentences that have a certain meaning. They are divided into two groups: the **formal saying** "There is always a next time", and the **metaphorical saying** "A rolling stone gather no moss" (Padalik, 2008: 11).
8. **Similes:** Padalik (2008: 11) clarifies that similes represent a large number of idioms. They can either be comparing quality, condition, action, etc. with a noun "as easy as pie" or be a verbal idiom "would like a horse".
9. **Typical Conversational Phrases:** the meanings of some conversational phrases are not literal, and it may be difficult to understand such as "all right", (Padalik, 2008: 11).

## 2. The Practical Procedures: Introductory Remarks

In this section, the researcher is going to collect several conversations about idioms from the BBC website; presenting it to undergraduate students (participants); analyzing their comprehension of the meaning of the idioms in context; and finally presenting the results and their percentages.

### 2.1 Data Selection

The data comprise of 25 commonly used idioms found in conversations, collected from a BBC program called "The English We Speak". All conversations can be found in the following link:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02pc9zn/episodes/player>





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The selection of idioms is based on the ones that have the easiest and most familiar words, in order for the participants to be able to have a general idea about the meaning of the words used and not to be completely ignorant.

## 2.2 Participants

The participants selected for this study are undergraduate students from the English Department/ Ibn Al-Rushed College of Education. The overall number of participants is 200 taken from all four stages.

## 2.3 Procedures

The researcher started by giving a brief explanation about idioms and how the meaning of words could be different within context. She presented them with the idiom "a piece of cake" as an example and explained how the literal meaning of the words in isolation "something to eat" is different from treating these words as an idiom "something easy."

After that, the researcher wrote the selected idioms on the board, and asked if they can guess their meanings without context. Then she handed each student a paper containing the selected conversations, i.e. the idioms within context (found in appendix A). The students were told to read the conversations out loud and were asked about the meaning of the idioms after each conversation. The correct answer was then given to them by the researcher after they guessed the meaning. A record was kept of the students' answers about the meaning of the idioms with and without the context.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

The table below shows the number of students who guessed the meaning of the idioms with and without context.

No.	Idioms	Meaning	No. of students who guessed the meaning
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			Without context	Within context
1.	To have a soft spot	Means you have a lot of affection for them	22	97
2.	To make a song and dance (about something)	To make lots of unnecessary fuss about it	28	85
3.	A bright spark	Someone who is clever, intelligent with lots of energy.	77	129
4.	To be all downhill	Things are about to get easier, after a difficult or challenging time, we can describe the situation as being 'all downhill'.	18	79
5.	It leaves a bad taste in your mouth'	We have a negative experience and feel bad or angry about it afterwards	51	108
6.	Something to chew on	It is an informal way to say they need to think about it before making a decision.	16	73
7.	To have all your Christmases come at once	Having lots of good luck'.	42	91
8.	Waffle on	Means to talk and talk without saying anything very useful or interesting.	13	97
9.	Take the biscuit	What you have done is really surprising, annoying or sometimes just silly.	17	68
10.	Step on it	It is what you say to someone to ask them to hurry. That hurt so much.”	49	112
11.	Crunch time	Crunch time is an important or critical time when a decisive or difficult decision has to be made.	12	61
12.	My bad	A phrase that means I accept responsibility for a mistake. It is my fault.	120	183
13.	To have a good nose (for something)	Someone who is naturally good at finding and recognizing something – in my case, finding a bargain!	47	103
14.	Friends in high places	They are people you know who are powerful and in an important	89	154



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		position and are able to help you.		
15.	Let the dust settle	Wait for the situation to calm down.	53	94
16.	Nothing to shout about	It means it is nothing special. It is average or unremarkable.	39	86
17.	Bleed someone dry	To take all of the resources that another person has available.	62	121
18.	Rub it in	A person keeps mentioning something another person wants to forget.	33	87
19.	Barking up the wrong tree	You want to blame someone but you got the wrong person	26	79
20.	A taste of your own medicine	It describes someone receiving the same, treatment or unpleasant experience that they have given to someone else.	77	144
21.	Up your game	To improve.	51	102
22.	To shout it from the rooftops	We would share some information publicly so everyone knows.	42	98
23.	To put someone on the map	It means they will become famous or become more prominent	31	96
24.	So done with	You are irritated and bored by it! Often it is a task that you do not want to do.	64	107
25.	It beats me	Mean I do not know or I do not understand something.	26	85

## 2.5 Results

The percentages of the students' answers are shown in the table below:

No.	Idioms	Percentages of students' answers	
		Without context	Within context
1.	To have a soft spot	11%	48.5%
2.	To make a song and dance (about something)	14%	42.5%
3.	A bright spark	38.88%	64.5%



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4.	To be all downhill	9%	39.5%
5.	It leaves a bad taste in your mouth'	25.5%	54%
6.	Something to chew on	8%	36.5%
7.	To have all your Christmases come at once	21%	45.5%
8.	Waffle on	6.5%	48.5%
9.	Take the biscuit	8.5%	34%
10.	Step on it	24.5%	56%
11.	Crunch time	6%	30.5%
12.	My bad	60%	91.5%
13.	To have a good nose (for something)	23.5%	51.5%
14.	Friends in high places	44.5%	77%
15.	Let the dust settle	26.5%	47%
16.	Nothing to shout about	19.5%	43%
17.	Bleed someone dry	31%	60.5%
18.	Rub it in	16.5%	43.5%
19.	Barking up the wrong tree	13%	39.5%
20.	A taste of your own medicine	38.5%	72%
21.	Up your game	25.5%	51%
22.	To shout it from the rooftops	21%	49%
23.	To put someone on the map	15.5%	48%
24.	So done with	34.5%	53.5%
25.	It beats me	13%	42.5%

In general, out of 200 students. 22.1% were able to guess the meaning of idioms in isolation without context. While 50.78% were able to work out their meaning from the context. This means that the rate of students not knowing the meaning dropped from 77.9% to 49.22% after reading the idioms in conversation.





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## Conclusion and Discussion

As seen in the results, the majority of students were not able to guess the meaning of the idioms in isolation. Their guesses depended largely on the literal meaning of the words within the idioms, which in some cases was close to the actual meaning, as in "my bad." However, there seems to be a huge enhancement in their performance after reading these phrases in conversations. This reflects the importance of context in understanding the meaning, hence proving the hypothesis to be correct.

The results also show that some students follow a kind of brain mechanism to help them work out or reach the meaning. Students tend to recognize some idioms by relating them to idioms they have in their mother tongue or to familiar phrases used in their mother tongue, such as "bleed someone dry."

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## Appendix A

### *Conversation 1*

**Feifei**

Rob, didn't you know it's very rude to eat while talking?

**Rob**

Sorry! It's just... somebody left these doughnuts here and I had to eat them – I have a soft spot for doughnuts.

**Feifei**

Couldn't you wait?

**Rob**

No, sorry I can't – ooo, is that chocolate I can see in your bag – you



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couldn't spare a few chunks could you? I have a soft spot for chocolate as well.

**Feifei**

No Rob, you can't but can I assume a 'soft spot' refers to your large and soft belly you have as a result of eating too many sweet things?

**Examples**

He always had a soft spot for the woman in accounts – and guess what? Now they're getting married!

She has a soft spot for designer shoes – her cupboard is crammed with hundreds of pairs, some she's never even worn!

She's got a soft spot for her English teacher and keeps buying him presents – and she's always the first to turn up for his lessons.

*Conversation 2*

**Rob**

Feifei. why are you singing and dancing?

**Feifei**

Well, I booked a holiday in a lovely hotel with a fantastic swimming pool.

**Rob**

Right. And you're celebrating by singing and dancing? Very strange!

**Feifei**

No Rob, of course not! There's a problem - the swimming pool is closed for refurbishment and I want to cancel my holiday but the hotel won't let me.

**Rob**

Oh right. So you're singing about it?

**Feifei**

No. Neil told me to call the hotel again and make a song and dance about my reservation – so I'm practicing before I do.

**Examples**

My boyfriend makes such a song and dance about doing the housework – but to be honest, it's not that hard!

Don't make a song and dance about it – I only asked you to move seats so I could see the screen.



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I can't believe they lost your suitcase at the airport; you should make a song and dance about this and get a proper apology.

### *Conversation 3*

**Feifei**

Hey, Rob. You know we've got a 'bright spark' in our office?

**Rob**

A bright spark? Oh yes – by that you mean someone intelligent...

**Feifei**

Well...

**Rob**

Someone full of energy...

**Feifei**

I didn't exactly...

**Rob**

Someone with clever ideas. Feifei, there's no need to waste everyone's time. Just say my name! Rob is the bright spark in the office.

### **Examples**

Which bright spark suggested we go for a walk on the wettest day of the year?!

Come on, own up – who's the bright spark who turned the power off and caused everything in the freezer to melt?

Are you the bright spark who told the other team our game plan? I think you owe us an apology.

### *Conversation 4*

**Feifei**

You're looking pleased with yourself, Rob.

**Rob**

I am! I've finished all of my work.

**Feifei**

Really. All of it?

**Rob**

Yes. Scripts written, programmes recorded and edited, meetings cancelled – I think I deserve a cup of coffee... or maybe something stronger!





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**Feifei**

But it's only Wednesday and you've done all of your work! So what does that mean?

**Rob**

It means it's all downhill to the weekend.

**Examples**

Yeah! Our building plans have been approved. It's all downhill from here on.

Once I've completed this final assignment, it'll be all downhill until I get my qualification.

**Feifei**

But, Rob, I have a question.

**Rob**

Oh yes?

**Feifei**

The phrase 'to be all downhill' isn't always used in a positive situation. Sometimes it is used to describe situations that get worse. Such as...

**Example**

The film's opening scene was amazing, but it was all downhill after that - there was no story and the acting was appalling!

**Rob**

Feifei are you absolutely sure about this?

**Feifei**

Yes, it's true – and your week is definitely going to be all downhill.

**Rob**

In a bad way, I suppose?

**Feifei**

Yep. Neil's just gone off sick and you've got to do all his work now.

**Rob**

Crikey! This script for this programme has suddenly gone downhill.

**Conversation 5**

**Neil**

I'm hungry. Feifei, why did you book this studio recording session at midday? I'm starving! Do you fancy going for lunch? I've heard that new chicken restaurant just down the road is excellent!



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**Feifei**

Not sure about that.

**Neil**

Oh, have you been there before?

**Feifei**

Yes, and it left a bad taste in my mouth.

**Neil**

Oh really? So the food's bad? Everyone says it's great!

**Feifei**

Well, the food was great...

**Neil**

Eh? The food was great but it left a bad taste in your mouth? I don't understand!

**Feifei**

The bill was twice as much as it should have been!

**Examples**

I refuse to go back to that hotel. They were so rude! It **left a bad taste in my mouth.**

When my boss sent me that angry email last thing on Friday, it **left a bad taste in my mouth.**

It **left a bad taste in my mouth** when I got fined for going just one mile an hour over the speed limit!

**Conversation 6**

**Feifei**

Hey Neil, would you like to try one of my homemade cookies?

**Neil**

Well, we shouldn't really eat while we're presenting but... go on then...

**Feifei**

I made them last night and I thought I'd try them out on you! You've got a sweet tooth so I know you can't resist!

**Neil**

OK then... Mmmm.

**Feifei**

Well, what do you think?



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**Neil**

Well, they're... OK. Perhaps not the best I've ever had.

**Feifei**

Oh, so you think my cooking isn't great?

**Neil**

Let's say it's something to chew on.

**Feifei**

Right! So you're saying my homemade cookies are chewy?

**Neil**

No, I'm not. In fact they're... crunchy.

**Examples**

Our extension plans are great but we need to chew on it before we give them the go-ahead.

Hmm, it's very expensive to fly to Australia for a holiday. Let's chew on it shall we?

My boyfriend asked me to marry him and I said I'd chew on it. He didn't seem that pleased!

**Conversation 7**

**Rob**

I am so excited.

**Feifei**

Oh yeah? Why's that, Rob?

**Rob**

You know, Feifei – it's that festive time of year – presents, parties, time with the family, snow... did I mention presents?

**Feifei**

Yes, Rob. It's Christmas time.

**Rob**

Come on, Feifei – aren't you excited? Imagine if we had lots of Christmases all at the same time!

**Feifei**

Oh no, think of the cost of buying all those presents.

**Rob**

But hopefully you'd receive lots of presents too! Anyway, do you know that for some people, all their Christmases can come at once?



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**Feifei**

I don't think so!

**Rob**

OK, well, they're not really Christmases, let's see the examples.

**Examples**

Yeah! I got a pay rise and I'm off on holiday tomorrow, and I've won the lottery! It seems like all my Christmases have come at once!

The day I got married, I heard I'd passed my exams and got a promotion, so it felt like all my Christmases had come at once.

All my Christmases have come at once: my parents bought me a new car, I got a place at university and I've got a new girlfriend!

*Conversation 8*

**Rob**

Feifei, feeling hungry?

**Feifei**

Rob, it smells amazing!

**Rob**

We're having a special treat today – waffles!

**Feifei**

Rob is making waffles: those lovely, crispy little cakes with raised squares on the surface.

**Rob**

Absolutely! My favourite. But what are we going to put on them?

**Feifei**

Oh that's simple: strawberries and syrup. What about you?

**Rob**

OK, I'm not so sure. I mean, I used to always love them with honey and bananas. But they do taste amazing with melted chocolate. Or... with cream. You know, I recently tried one with peanut butter: not a good experience. I guess strawberries would be worth trying... Or mango. But only if the mangoes are fresh...

**Feifei**

Rob?

**Rob**

Yes?





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**Feifei**

Can you stop waffling on?

**Rob**

Ah, very clever. Perfect time to use that phrase! I do need to stop waffling on, don't I?

**Examples**

I think I did really badly in the interview. I wasn't sure how to answer the questions, so I just waffled on.

Meetings with Frank are frustrating. He always waffles on about unimportant things. Someone needs to have a word with him.

I used to find her blog really interesting and inspiring, but these days she just waffles on about her pet tortoise.

*Conversation 9*

**Feifei**

So Rob, help yourself to a biscuit. I know how much you love them, so I bought some for us to share today.

**Rob**

Oh right. That's very kind, Feifei, but very odd. You don't normally buy me things. Are you feeling guilty? Have you done something wrong?

**Feifei**

Of course not! Well... sort of. I hope you don't mind, but I used up all your coffee when I made drinks for the team this morning.

**Rob**

What?! You used up all my coffee and you didn't make me one? That really takes the biscuit!

**Feifei**

I haven't taken any biscuits – just your coffee.

**Examples**

I can't believe she copied my work and pretended it was her own – now that really takes the biscuit.

You're really taking the biscuit if you're expecting me to take you to the match and wait outside until it's finished!

Your plan to turn the spare bedroom into a snooker room really takes the biscuit!



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### Conversation 10

**Feifei**

We're in a bit of a rush...

**Rob**

yes yes, I've hurt my foot and we've got to get to hospital. Ouch!

**Feifei**

Ooo, it looks nasty, Rob – all red and swollen. It was a good job I was driving by when you hurt it.

**Rob**

Yes yes, thanks for the lift, Feifei. But it really is hurting, so could you step on it, please?

**Feifei**

What?

**Rob**

Step on it!

**Feifei**

Oh, OK if you say so.

**Rob**

Ow! That was painful – what did you do that for?

**Feifei**

You said 'step on it' – I thought that was an odd request, but I did.

**Examples**

Taxi! Could you take me to the station please? And could you step on it?

I'm late!

Our coach told us to step on it if we wanted to get to the match on time.

Please step on it, otherwise we're going to miss the plane.

### Conversation 11

**Rob**

It's an important day in the office today, isn't it Feifei?

**Feifei**

Err, is it?

**Rob**

Yes, it is! Remember that big project we've all been working on?

**Feifei**

Errr. A big project?



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**Rob**

Yes, well it's crunch time.

**Feifei**

Oh great – I'm starving. I'll get my crisps.

**Rob**

No, I didn't say 'lunch time'.

**Feifei**

I know. You said 'crunch time' – time to start crunching these delicious crisps. I love crisps.

**Rob**

No, no – I didn't mean it's time to crunch crisps.

**Examples**

We've reached crunch time in our relationship – I'm going to ask my boyfriend to move in with me. I wonder what he'll say?

The team are doing well but come crunch time, will they score that vital goal?

It's crunch time for us tomorrow – that's when we find out if our building plans have been approved.

*Conversation 12*

**Rob**

Oh! Hi, Feifei, you're nice and early – can't wait to get started, hey?

**Feifei**

I'm not early – you are late!

**Rob**

Late? No, no, no, no – we said we'd start at half past ten... didn't we?

**Feifei**

No – ten o'clock, Rob. Look at this text message: "Can we start earlier at ten, please?" and you replied "sure".

**Rob**

Oh! My bad!

**Feifei**

Your back? Don't start complaining about your back just to avoid apologising.



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### Examples

My bad! It was me who put my pink socks in with the white washing – oops!

My friend knocked a glass of red wine over me and all he could say was 'my bad' – I don't think he was that bothered!

It was me who lost the car keys – my bad – I'm sure they'll turn up somewhere

### Conversation 13

**Feifei**

Errr, what is that smell?

**Rob**

Smell? I can't smell anything.

**Feifei**

There is definitely a terrible smell, like mouldy cheese. What's in that bag, Rob?

**Rob**

Oh, this bag! You're right, it is cheese. Beautiful, delicious Stilton cheese in fact. Would you like some?

**Feifei**

No! So why have you got a bag of mouldy cheese?

**Rob**

Well, I stopped at the cheese shop on the way to the office and saw this cheese was half price – and you probably know, I have a good nose for a bargain.

**Feifei**

I don't think so, Rob – judging by this cheese, you have a bad nose – it smells awful!

### Examples

We need to sell more newspapers, so we need to find a reporter with a good nose for a story.

I have a good nose for learning languages and was fluent in Spanish in just a year!

My mum's got a nose for bargains and booked us all flights to Italy for just fifty pounds each.



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#### Conversation 14

**Feifei**

Rob, a question – is it right you have a friend who lives on top of a mountain?

**Rob**

Errr no.

**Feifei**

What about a friend who lives in La Paz – one of the highest cities in the world?

**Rob**

Strange question, but no.

**Feifei**

OK, how about a friend who lives at the top of a very tall tower block?

**Rob**

Definitely not. Why are you asking about my friends anyway?

**Feifei**

Well, someone in the office said you have friends in high places – and I just wondered why it was useful to know people who lived high up.

**Examples**

Wang managed to get a promotion but I'm sure it's only because he knows people in high places.

Thanks to his friends in high places, my boyfriend managed to get tickets for the sold-out rock concert. Yeah!

Despite failing her exams, Jane still managed to get a place at university – I'm sure she has friends in high places.

#### Conversation 15

**Neil**

Sorry I'm late. It's going a bit crazy out there in the office.

**Feifei**

Crazy?

**Neil**

Yes. Everybody is arguing and shouting.

**Feifei**

About what exactly?





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**Neil**

The mess in the office. The boss says it's untidy and we should clear up after ourselves. He even said that my desk was like a pigsty!

**Feifei**

Hmmm, well you'd better stay in here and keep out of the way until things have calmed down.

**Neil**

Good idea – I'll just let the dust settle.

**Feifei**

Oh, so the office is messy and dusty – is that what everyone's arguing about – the dust?

**Examples**

We've had lots of complaints about the changes but let's wait until the dust settles before we respond.

We're busy moving house at the moment but I'll give you a call when the dust settles.

Now the dust has settled after the restructuring, I think we can talk about recruitment.

**Conversation 16**

**Feifei**

Hey Neil, how was your night out at that new restaurant last night?

**Neil**

Oh, it was... OK.

**Feifei**

Just 'OK'?

**Neil**

The food was average. The service was standard.

**Feifei**

Neil, there is no pleasing you!

**Neil**

Keep your voice down Feifei. It was nothing to shout about.

**Feifei**

It was nothing to shout about? Would you normally shout about a good restaurant?



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### Examples

This year's bonus is nothing to shout about but I guess it's better than last year.

My job is nothing to shout about but at least it pays the bills.

Her clothes are nothing to shout about – brown, cotton, cheap-looking, not very fashionable!

### Conversation 17

**Neil**

And I'm... ouch... Neil.

**Feifei**

Oh, Neil, are you in pain?

**Neil**

Yeah. I cut my hand yesterday. Blood everywhere. Look at this cut!

**Feifei**

Yuk! That's horrible. So tell me how it happened.

**Neil**

Well, my shower has been leaking for ages. I'm not good at fixing things so I got this plumber in to fix it. I found his details on the internet – D. Odgy Plumbers – "Got a leak? We'll make you pay for it."

**Feifei**

Hmm. That doesn't sound like a very reputable plumber.

**Neil**

Well, he wasn't. He bled me dry!

**Feifei**

What? You mean he attacked you and that's how you cut your hand. Oh, Neil, you need to tell the police.

**Neil**

Don't panic, Feifei. He didn't touch me.

### Examples

My old car keeps breaking down. It's bleeding me dry!

John is taking legal action against the company. He wants to bleed them dry for all the pain he has suffered.

This divorce has bled me dry – I can't even afford to go on holiday now.

### Conversation 18



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**Neil**

Beautiful day today, isn't it? Blazing sunshine... it's so warm.

**Feifei**

Yes it is, and luckily for you your shift is finished after this programme, isn't it?

**Neil**

Yep! But you have to stay here till evening on the late shift. Ahhh... I'm off to the park to enjoy the sun. I'd better buy some sun cream, eh?

**Feifei**

Don't rub it in!

**Neil**

OK. See you later.

**Voice**

Two hours later.

**Feifei**

My word, Neil! What's happened to you? You look like a lobster!

**Neil**

It's very hot and sunny out there.

**Feifei**

But what about the sun cream?

**Neil**

You told me 'not to rub it in', Feifei!

**Examples**

Don't rub it in. I know you beat me at tennis but you don't have to keep mentioning the score.

Carlos got into Oxford but I didn't. That's bad enough, but he keeps rubbing it in by talking about it all the time.

**Conversation 19**

**Rob**

Hello. Errr, Feifei, you're looking a bit angry.

**Feifei**

Me, angry! I am angry.

**Rob**

Oh no, what's the problem?



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**Feifei**

I think you know Rob. Somebody told the boss that I spilt coffee over his computer yesterday – and now he's angry with me.

**Rob**

Oh no. What kind of mean and horrible person would try and get you into trouble?

**Feifei**

You and the boss were the only people left in the office last night. Hmmm?

**Rob**

Whoa – hold on Feifei. If you are implying it was me who told the boss, then you are barking up the wrong tree.

**Feifei**

Please don't make me any angrier by saying that I am like a dog!

**Examples**

If you think I have enough spare cash to pay for your holiday, then you're barking up the wrong tree.

You're barking up the wrong tree if you think I was the one who said you were leaving. It wasn't me!

You're barking up the wrong tree if you think I'm going to lend you my car. I've seen how you drive!

**Conversation 20**

**Neil**

Hey Feifei, it sounds like you might have a cold?

**Feifei**

I think I have – sore throat, blocked nose. I feel terrible. That's why I'm taking this medicine.

**Neil**

That's probably a good idea. Medicine is usually good for making you feel better but how does it taste?

**Feifei**

Well, it's supposed to taste of strawberries but to be honest it's just horrible!



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**Neil**

That's why I never take the stuff – it's disgusting. Have you heard the phrase 'a taste of your own medicine'?

**Feifei**

No. Does it mean doing something horrible or unpleasant?

**Examples**

Our boss is so rude to us but finally somebody has answered back and now he's got a taste of his own medicine.

When I meet up with my boyfriend, he's always late so this time I'm going to give him a taste of his own medicine and turn up late as well.

Deepak is always rude to the teacher but he was really offended when she gave him a taste of his own medicine and was rude back to him!

*Conversation 21*

**Neil**

Feifei, can you help me with something?

**Feifei**

Go on.

**Neil**

There's this girl I like. I want to ask her for coffee. But I don't want to seem too serious or creepy or anything. Just friendly.

**Feifei**

And you're writing her a message? OK.

**Neil**

I just can't find the words.

**Feifei**

Easy. Stick a couple of emojis on there. Much less formal!

**Neil**

You mean, like, a smiley face?

**Feifei**

Yeah, but those are so last year.

**Neil**

Maybe a love heart?

**Feifei**

Seriously? That's a bit too much. You need to up your emoji game!





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Neil

My emoji game... like an emoji of a video game... or a football?

**Examples**

I never finish novels. I need to up my reading game.

I badly need to work on my interview game before my big interview next week.

You could do with a bit more exercise, mate. You should raise your running game!

*Conversation 22*

Neil

Now Feifei, here's a question for you. If you had some news what would do?

Feifei

Hmm, I would tell someone of course.

Neil

Yes but some good news, some amazing, incredible news about yourself – like for example, I'm having a baby.

Feifei

Are you really?

Neil

Of course not – but if you had exciting news like that, how would you tell people?

Feifei

I'd use social media... tell all my friends... tell everyone in the office... I would shout about it – but not literally.

**Examples**

Congratulations for getting a first in your degree, you should go and shout it from the rooftops!

I know you won the lottery but don't shout it from the rooftops; otherwise everyone will be after your money!

We all know Ming is in love with JiYuen, he's been shouting it from the rooftops!

*Conversation 23*



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كلية التربية الاساس



ابحاث المؤتمر العلمي الدولي الرابع المشترك الثاني



الجامعة العراقية  
مركز البحوث والدراسات

”المستجدات الحديثة في التعليم العالي في ظل التعليم الالكتروني“

17-16 كانون الاول 2020 (المجلد الثاني )

**Feifei**

Neil, I wonder if you could help me. I'm trying to find something on this map.

**Neil**

Oh yes, map reading – I'm good at that. What are you trying to find?

**Feifei**

Well, I went to a gig last night and saw this new singer – he was amazing.

**Neil**

Thanks for inviting me! Anyway, what's that got to with a map?

**Feifei**

Well, afterwards everyone was talking about it and saying the gig was so good that it will 'put him on the map'. But... I just can't find him on here.

**Examples**

Her first exhibition at the Tate gallery has put her on the map as a serious modern artist. .

This great tasting food has really put this new restaurant on the map.

Hosting the Olympics has put this city on the map as a great place to come for a holiday.

*Conversation 24*

**Feifei**

Hello, I'm Feifei. All well, Neil?

**Neil**

Not great, Feifei.

**Feifei**

What's up?

**Neil**

I'm just so done with writing this report.

**Feifei**

You're done with it? You've finished?

**Neil**

I wish. The opposite. Lots more to do.

**Feifei**

So you're not done yet?

**Examples**

I need a new job. I'm so done with delivering pizza.



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I need to get to bed earlier. I'm so done with feeling like a zombie every day.

I'm so done with learning Hungarian. The grammar is so hard!

### Conversation 25

**Feifei**

Hey Rob, do you know what's going on in the office today? The boss has been shouting, Helen's crying and Neil doesn't look very happy either.

**Rob**

Beats me. Ouch. What did you do that for?

**Feifei**

You said 'beat me'.

**Rob**

No, no – I mean it beats me... ouch!

**Feifei**

You are strange Rob.

**Rob**

No Feifei. I said 'it beats me' to mean I don't know or I don't understand something.

**Feifei**

I knew that Rob – I just liked hitting you with this stick!

**Rob**

Ha! Very funny. Shall we hear some examples?

**Examples**

It beats me how Stephanie ever got that promotion.

A: Can you believe that Dave and Andrea are still married! He's always bossing her around.

B: It beats me why she stays with him.

It beats me how Jen can afford a new sports car when she only works part-time.