



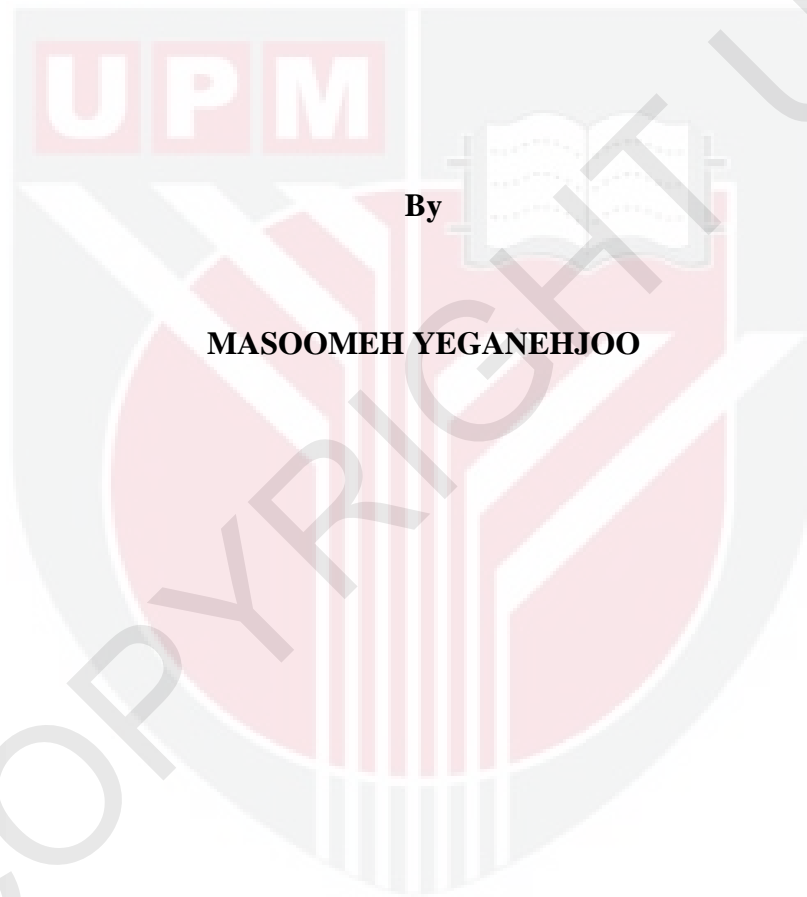
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***REPRESENTATION IN THE PRODUCTION OF ENGLISH
IDIOMS BY PROFICIENT IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS***

MASOOMEH YEGANEHJOO

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**REPRESENTATION IN THE PRODUCTION OF ENGLISH IDIOMS BY
PROFICIENT IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS**



By

MASOOMEH YEGANEHJOO

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**REPRESENTATION IN THE PRODUCTION OF ENGLISH IDIOMS BY
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Chair: Yap Ngee Thai, PhD

Faculty: Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication

A natural and native-like communication involves identification of and access to a vast body of idiomatic expressions in a language. These expressions are used effortlessly among native speakers, but their use has created many difficulties for second and foreign language learners. Studying how idiomatic expressions are represented in the EFL (English as foreign language) learners' mental lexicon reflects difficulty EFL learners have in acquiring and using them. Ample research has investigated the representation and processes involved in idiom comprehension in L1 (first language) contexts, but only limited studies have explored the production of idiomatic expressions in an EFL context. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate: firstly how English idiomatic expressions are represented in and accessed from the proficient EFL learner's mental lexicon during the

course of speech production, and secondly, the impact of idiom decomposability and cross linguistic similarities on idiom representation and production in an EFL context.

Three cross-modal priming experiments were conducted to investigate the research questions of the study. In the first experiment, the assumptions of the superlemma theory, i.e., the unitary and compositional representations of English idioms in EFL speech production were examined by measuring the response latencies of 31 adult proficient Iranian EFL learners during the production of English idioms. The second experiment investigated the influence of idiom decomposability on representation and production of English idioms in a different group of 30 competent Iranian EFL learners. Another group of 27 proficient Iranian EFL learners participated in the third experiment to explore how or whether cross-linguistic similarities affect the representation of English idiomatic expressions during speech production. Three different lists of idioms were selected to correspond to each research question of the study in particular. The participants had to recall a previously memorized list of items using a cue (a visual prompt). Audio prime words were employed simultaneously to observe the unconscious effect of the variables of the study on the EFL learners' response latencies (reaction times) when producing the phrases.

The results of these experiments support firstly, the hybrid representation of idiomatic expressions in the EFL learners' mental lexicon that is idioms have their own lexical entry which links to the simple lemmas composing the idiom; hence, faster production of English idioms compared to their literal counterpart phrases was observed by the

proficient Iranian EFL learners. Secondly, the findings suggest that the non-decomposable idioms have the benefit of being produced faster compared to the decomposable idioms due to the higher activation of their unitary representation in the EFL learners' mental lexicon. Thirdly, L1 transfer is stronger at the lexical level than at the conceptual level for English idiom production. In other words, the concrete lexical units related to the L1 (Persian language here) and L2 (English language here) make stronger links between the two mental lexicons of the Iranian EFL learners inducing a faster production of the English idioms compared to the abstract shared figurative meaning. The overall findings of this study may provide not only a better understanding of the cognitive processes involved in idiom representation in EFL learners' mental lexicon, but also a better view of idiom production and factors influencing it in EFL learning and acquisition.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**REPRESENTASI DI DALAM PENGHASILAN SIMPULAN BAHASA OLEH
PELAJAR MAHIR IRAN YANG MEMPELAJARI BAHASA INGGERIS
SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING**

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Komunikasi bercirikan semulajadi dan seakan-akan natif atau asal melibatkan usaha mengenal pasti dan akses serta capaian kepada himpunan simpulan bahasa “idiomatic expression” yang luas di dalam sesuatu bahasa. Simpulan bahasa ini digunakan secara bersahaja di kalangan pengguna asal, Namun penggunaannya banyak menyebabkan kekalutan dan kesukaran bagi pelajar bahasa kedua dan pelajar asing untuk memahami dan menggunakannya. Kajian bagaimana simpulan bahasa direpresentasikan di dalam leksikon mental pelajar bahasa asing (EFL) menggambarkan kesukaran yang dialami pelajar di dalam mempelajari dan menggunakan simpulan bahasa tersebut. Kajian yang mencukupi telah dijalankan bagi mengkaji representasi dan proses yang terlibat di dalam pemahaman simpulan bahasa, tetapi hanya untuk kajian yang terhad berkenaan produksi

dan penghasilan simpulan bahasa di dalam konteks bahasa kedua atau bahasa asing. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti: pertamanya, bagaimana simpulan bahasa bagi Bahasa Inggeris direpresentasikan di dalam serta akses atau capaian dari leksikon mental pelajar bahasa asing yang mahir, semasa berlakunya penghasilan pertuturan, dan keduanya, kesan atau impak kebolehan simpulan bahasa “idiom decomposability” dan persamaan persilangan linguistic ke atas representasi simpulan bahasa dan penghasilan pertuturan di dalam konteks bahasa kedua.

Tiga model-bersilang eksperimen “priming” dijalankan bagi mengkaji soalan kajian. Di dalam eksperimen pertama, assumsi tentang teori “superlemma”, iaitu kesatuan dan komposisi representasi simpulan bahasa bagi Bahasa Inggeris di dalam penghasilan pertuturan pelajar bahasa asing (EFL) diperiksa untuk mengukur respons latensi/tersembunyi di kalangan 31 orang pelajar bahasa asing berbangsa Iran yang mahir semasa penghasilan pertuturan menggunakan simpulan bahasa di dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Eksperimen kedua menyelidik tentang pengaruh kebolehan “idiom decomposability” ke atas representasi dan penghasilan pertuturan simpulan bahasa di dalam Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan 30 pelajar bahasa asing berbangsa Iran yang cekap. Manakala 27 pelajar bahasa asing berbangsa yang mahir terlibat di dalam eksperimen ketiga bagi merungkai bagaimana atau sama ada persamaan linguistik-silang memberi kesan ke atas representasi simpulan bahasa di dalam Bahasa Inggeris semasa penghasilan pertuturan. Tiga senarai simpulan bahasa dipilih untuk memberi respons kepada setiap soalan kajian secara khususnya. Peserta kajian diperlukan untuk mengimbas kembali beberapa senarai item terdahulu menggunakan “cue” (satu bentuk prompting visual).

Perkataan “audio prime” digunakan secara berturutan untuk memerhatikan kesan tidak sedar ke atas pemboleh ubah kajian ke atas jangkamasa latensi (bilangan reaksi) ketika penghasilan pertuturan frasa-frasa tersebut.

Dapatan kajian eksperimen yang dijalankan menyokong pertamanya, hybrid representasi simpulan bahasa di dalam leksikon mental pelajar bahasa asing, mendokong cadangan bahawa simpulan bahasa mempunyai kemasukan/entri leksikon yang tersendiri yang menghubungkan kepada lemma mudah pembentukan simpulan bahasa tersebut; dengan itu, penghasilan pertuturan simpulan bahasa yang lebih pantas berbanding makna literal frasa berkaitan “literal counterpart phrases” dapat diperhatikan ke atas pelajar bahasa asing berbangsa Iran yang mahir. Keduanya, dapatan mencadangkan bahawa simpulan bahasa tidak boleh nyah “non-decomposable” mempunyai kelebihan dihasilkan dengan lebih pantas berbanding simpulan bahasa boleh-nyah “decomposable” disebabkan oleh aktivasi yang lebih tinggi di dalam kesatuan representasi di dalam leksikon mental pelajar bahasa asing. Ketiganya, pemindahan bahasa pertama lebih kuat dan jelas pada tahap leksikel berbanding tahap konseptual penghasilan simpulan bahasa bahasa kedua. Dalam lain perkataan, item leksikel serupa konkrit yang dikongsi antara bahasa pertama (bahasa Parsi) dan bahasa kedua (Bahasa Inggeris) menjadikan hubungan kaitan lebih kuat antara dua leksikon mental pelajar bahasa asing berbangsa Iran meningkatkan penghasilan pertuturan simpulan bahasa bahasa kedua yang lebih pantas berbanding makna figuratif sama yang abstrak dituturkan dalam bahasa pertama. Dapatan keseluruhan kajian ini dapat menyediakan bukan hanya pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang proses kognitif yang terlibat di dalam representasi simpulan bahasa di dalam leksikon mental pelajar

bahasa asing, tetapi juga pandangan yang lebih baik ke atas penghasilan simpulan bahasa serta faktor mempengaruhi di dalam pembelajaran dan penguasaan bahasa kedua dan bahasa asing.



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APPROVAL

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on December, 6th, 2013 to conduct the final examination of Masoomeh Yeganehjoo on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Representation in the production of English idioms by proficient Iranian EFL learners” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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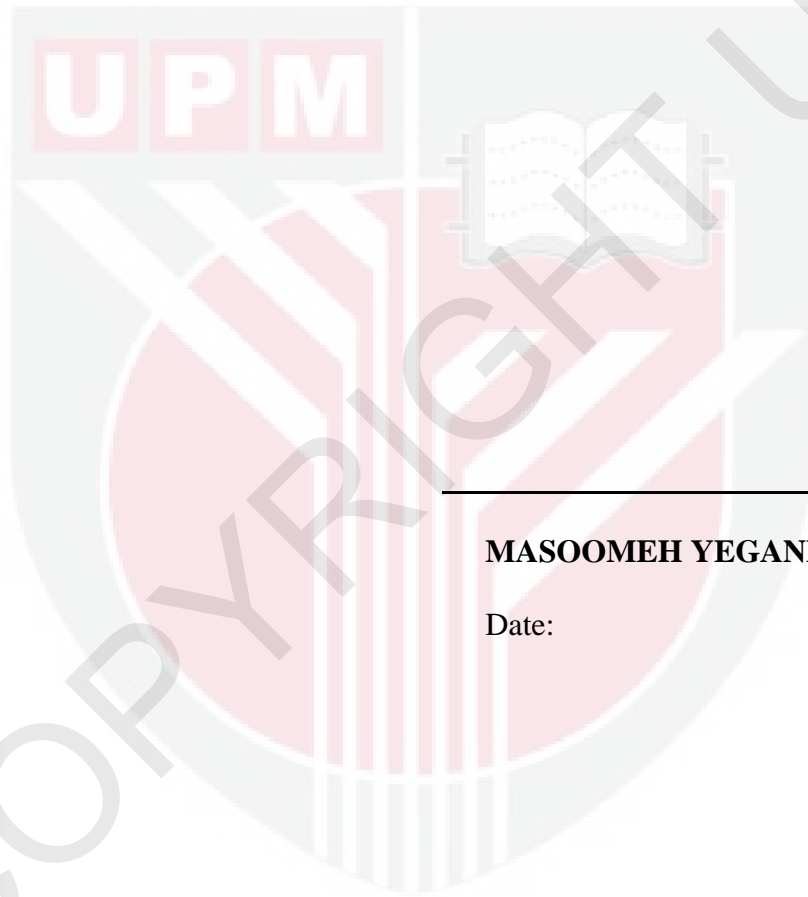
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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is on my original work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or other institutions.



MASOOMEH YEGANEHJOO

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