

A Study of Idioms in Relation to Language Universals

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### Abstract

In this thesis, I examine how language universals reveal information about the relationship between culture and language. To further understand this connection, I conduct a survey with non-native English speakers. I present universal idioms and ask each participant to write down an equivalent idiom in English, translated from their native language. I examine which expressions are cross-cultural, noticing which languages express the figurative speech in ways different from English and other languages. I identify the varieties of expressions of universal ideas, specifically in relation to the culture of each language. I also address the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis through my research, agreeing that language affects society. Through my research and experiment, I examine how universal human experiences are conveyed based on culture.

### A Study of Idioms in Relation to Language Universals

In a world where over 6,000 languages are spoken, the variety between languages is worth examining (Kövecses, 2010). The differences and similarities between languages can enlighten the topic of language—a universal tool that people in all parts of the earth utilize. Each language is tied to the culture of its speakers. In this combination of language and culture, there is controversy: is culture embedded in language, or is language embedded in culture? Culture seems to affect language, but language also seems to influence culture to exist in a particular way. It is important to study languages and cultures in order to obtain an accurate view of people across the globe without having biases or false understanding of their lives. By seeing the value that culture has upon language, people can be motivated to study culture—especially as an accompaniment to language studies.

Culture can provide directions for how to express an idea, but culture does not create that idea. In other words, culture explains how to convey an idea, but not what the idea is. We know that from culture to culture, there are shared human experiences that are expressed through language. These experiences lead to the same idea expressed in different ways in different cultures. Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir were supporters of the view that language influences culture and thus created the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. The two men hypothesized that language is strongly influential in shaping culture (Hussein, 2012). The research provided in this thesis examines differences and similarities in expressions of universal ideas. This research is based upon the idea that all people share common experiences that create universal meaning.

### **Language Universals**

The phenomenon that this research addresses is universal experiences that are expressed in various languages through figurative speech, which includes idioms. Research shows that there are common concepts that many languages acknowledge—referred to as near-universal metaphors (Kövecses, 2010). However, these are shown through different expressions of speech—especially metaphors and idioms. Examples of near-universal ideas will be provided further into this discussion. Idioms are one particular type of figurative language that provides information about language universals and the different expressions used to convey the meaning. According to Bortfield (2003), idioms are “fixed phrases that mean something other than what a literal interpretation of their individual words would indicate” (p. 217). An example of an idiom is “It’s raining cats and dogs,” which means that it is raining hard. The expression is not literal, but rather conveys an idea through an image. The fascinating aspect of figurative language is that the meaning cannot be discovered by parsing out these non-literal expressions of speech word-by-word. The meaning is contextual, rather than literal, and we must examine culture in order to discover what these expressions mean.

In the examination of language universals, figurative speech plays an important role. This is because universal or near-universal ideas, while conveying the same idea across languages, use varying expressions of speech to do so. Idioms often require an examination of the cultural and historical background in order to understand the meaning, which is often shared between other cultures in a variety of expressions.

As Kövesces (2010) shows in his article “Metaphor, Language, and Culture,” three main views explain near-universal metaphors. First, near-universal metaphors could be a miracle with no logical reason behind them. Perhaps similar concepts arose in different languages by chance, and the study of near-universal metaphors will lead to no conclusive explanation. Second, near-universal metaphors could exist due to languages borrowing words from each other in the past. This is a logical idea, as the existence of the thousands of languages in the world today can be mapped as having descended from common languages. Lastly is the view that people in all cultures share a universal bias for certain metaphors. This view is based on the idea that people in all cultures share elementary human experiences and that these common experiences create universal meaning. This study will look at metaphors in light of this view. The frequent occurrence of idioms conveying the same idea provides a basis for this view.

### **Relationship of Culture and Language**

Before proceeding, the role of culture must be explained as related to language. Culture explains how people make sense of daily experiences. People take in experiences through the lens of culture. Both language and culture have the same goal—meaning making (Kövesces, 2010). Culture expresses meaning through a variety of ways such as art, dance, music, ceremonies, names, and narratives. Language expresses meaning through the words that give verbalization to the experiences that humans share. The importance of both aspects is undeniable; each component of the relationship is important and should be examined.

Language is closely tied with culture; language is an instrument to express the culture and environment of the speaker (Yagiz & Izadpanah, 2013). Without culture, language has fewer channels through which it can express meaning. While language needs culture, culture also is dependent upon language. According to Han S. J. Verneer, language is an intrinsic part of culture (Liu, 2012). Language not only preserves and transmits culture, but it is also a vessel of cultural change (Liu, Yin, & Zhang, 2014). Language can communicate political, social, and cultural ideas within a community and provide a method of explaining the reasoning behind the ideas, leading to potential change. Without the use of language to convey meaning and transmit ideas, cultural changes would be limited to non-linguistic ideas. Because a culture without language is not true reality, cultural studies should be closely tied with language studies.

### **Second Language Learning**

The practice of learning a second language demonstrates the close connection between language and culture. From here forward, the terms L1 and L2 will be used. A speaker's native language is referred to as an L1. A language that a person speaks in addition to his or her native language is referred to as an L2. Research shows that successful language learning requires that the L2 learner study the various forms of the L2 and also how to use the forms correctly in various situations in a way that conveys appropriate meaning (Yagiz & Izadpanah, 2013). A learner of an L2 does not become proficient by simply learning the lexicon of the L2 and translating word-by-word. Rather, the L2 learner must take in social cues and self-analyze in order to know how to properly interact in a conversation (Byram, 2012). The L2 learner must be able to reflect on

pragmatics and convey meaning between the cultures of the L1 and L2, in addition to possessing knowledge of the L2. The speaker must acknowledge the embedded culture in both the L1 and the L2 (Liddicoat, 2014). The example of an L2 learner shows that language is composed of more than linguistics; language requires cultural understanding in order to speak and comprehend the meaning of the language (Byram, 2012). Culture and language are inseparable, especially in the case of idioms and metaphors, as this paper will later examine.

### **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis**

In the study of the connection between language and culture, one of the main theories is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis—also called the theory of linguistic relativity. The “strong” version of this hypothesis claims that language determines people’s thoughts, while the “weak” version claims that linguistic categories influence the cognitive behavior of a speaker. Both the strong and weak version claim that the way speakers of a language think is affected by their language (Perlovsky, 2009). Sapir (1929) summarizes the ideas of the hypothesis: “Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society” (p. 207). In short, Sapir argues that language has great control over a society and the people within it. This view also signifies that language is a tool to direct speakers’ attention to specific attributes of the real world.

Rather than language being both a chisel for the world and a mirror of the world, Sapir emphasized that language plays a pivotal role in the formation of the world as seen



by each language group. The strong version of the hypothesis claims that language drives how people see and interact with the world. The idea of language affecting language speakers' thoughts about reality has no small impact, because it would mean that language affects how speakers perceive daily life, special contexts and ideational tradition (Lucy, 1997).

Some examples of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis include studies with New Mexico's Hopi people and with speakers of Setswana regarding color boundaries. Whorf, as a fire-prevention engineer, found particular interest in the way that Hopi speakers and English speakers demonstrate language differences in regards to every day living expressions and vocabulary. One particular difference that he found between Hopi speakers and English speakers is their perception of 'empty' and 'full.' He observed that English speakers would smoke near the 'empty' gas drums, which in reality were full of gas vapor—thus creating a dangerous situation. On the other hand, the Hopi people did not smoke by the vapor-filled gas drums. The English speakers were unaware of the potentially hazardous situation that they were creating because the English languages measures the terms 'empty' and 'full' by the standard of liquid, while the Hopi did not limit their measurement to liquid (Hussein, 2012, p. 644). Truly differing interpretations of vocabulary can lead to contrasting actions.

Furthermore, the Setswana language spoken in Botswana offers another example of the influence of language on cognitive and cultural differences. In one study by Davies et al, speakers of Setswana and English were given 65 colors and asked to categorize them into groups of similar members. The speakers of Setswana, interestingly, used a

single term to categorize all blue and green colors. While the experiment showed that the results were similar between both groups of languages, the Setswana speakers grouped blue and green colors together more often than English speakers did (Corbett, et. al, 1998).

Such a categorization of placing blue and green in the same group occurs because there is only one term used to describe both blue and green; therefore, the Setswana speakers perceive both colors as members of the same category. The conclusion of their study was that universal color categories exist, but the perceptions of color category boundaries can be slightly different between cultures. Additionally, Kay and Berrin (1969) hypothesized that there is a universal structure for color grouping. Within this universal structure, however, the exact distinctions between each color grouping vary between cultures (Corbett, et. al, 1998). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis acknowledges the universal concepts agreed upon between cultures, but identifies the differences and examines the motivation behind them.

Critics of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis question whether the relationship between language and thinking is causal or simply correlational. While the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis gained ground in the early and mid 1900s, it has become less accepted since the 1970s (Corbett, et. al, 1998). However, new research shows that language and cognition are related (Perlovsky, 2009). While the strong version is criticized and not commonly accepted, a moderate version of the hypothesis still causes questioning about the impact that language has on thought categories.

### **Examples of Language Universals**

The study of differences within and exceptions to near-language universals renders helpful content regarding the relation between language and its accompanying culture. Yet, there are further ways to study the connection between language and culture. While there are many near-universal meanings expressed across languages, these meanings express themselves in various ways. The same meaning may be conveyed in many different ways in many different languages. This is a key point in the relationship between language universals and idioms. Through contrasting the differences in figurative expressions and then recognizing the similarities in the expressions, much information can be gained about cultural similarities and differences as expressed through language. When a common idea is expressed differently between languages, the explanation for the different expressions generally is dependent upon the culture of the language.

Many meanings are found near-universally and are demonstrated in similar figures of speech. One of these expressions has to do with happiness. According to Dobrovolskij and Piirainen (2006) in their article titled “Cultural Knowledge and Idioms,” the idea of “being extremely happy due to something good happening” is found in many languages (p. 33). In English, the expressions “be on cloud nine” and “be in seventh heaven” are used. The Lithuanian expression is “be in the ninth heaven.” In German, the expressions “be on cloud seven” and “be in the seventh heaven” are used (Dobrovolskij & Piirainen, 2006, p. 33). Each of these expressions conveys the meaning involving the idea that happiness relates to going up. These languages each show a

similar idea expressed in a similar expression. This is one common finding in the study of metaphors—the same idea expressed in similar ways cross-linguistically.

While the same universal meaning “happiness going up” is expressed in each of the mentioned metaphors, each language uses a differing expression based on cultural background. The universal concept “happiness goes up” is based on common physical experiences that occur cross-culturally (Kövecses, 2010, p. 749). For example, happiness leads to physical, vertical movement such as jumping up and down and even smiling—when the mouth literally moves up in the corners (Kövecses, 2010). The same human experience is expressed in the same way.

There are variations in the metaphors, however, even though they all have the same general meaning. Some of these expressions include references to clouds and heaven, which incorporate religious association (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2006). The number used in the expression is different between the languages, resulting from differences in cultural values and history. For example, Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen note that the number nine was important in North-European culture. In North-Germanic mythology, there were nine worlds. Nine days and nights meant a time of legal importance (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2006). In Lithuania, nine was an important number in rituals, such as baking during Devintines—a ceremony for the dead that took place nine days after death. It was also significant of the nine-headed dragon named Devyngalvs (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2006). As these variations show, historical and cultural backgrounds can bring important meaning to simple expressions or concepts.

Interestingly, a reference to going up can refer to meanings other than happiness. For example, while the German phrase “spring to the ceiling” means “to suddenly become happy,” the German phrase “go to the ceiling” means “to suddenly become angry” (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006, p. 31). English also contains a similar seemingly contradictory problem. “Hit the ceiling,” “flip your lid” and “blow your stack” all convey the meaning “to suddenly become angry” (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006, p. 31). The metaphor alone—relating to going up—is not enough to convey the meaning behind the expression; rather, the metaphor relies on behavioral context to create the meaning (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006). Meaning and context together create each metaphor.

Another example of how language and cultural context can produce a unique variation of a universal concept is the topic of anger. A concept that is prevalent across many languages is the idea that “anger is the heat of a fluid in a container” (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006, p. 29). This expression is derived from physiology. It is a common physical experience for the body to become heated and blood pressure to rise when a person is angry. According to the American Heart Association, anger can cause stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol to be released in preparation for the fight or flight mechanism. The heart begins to beat faster and the blood vessels become constricted (“Stress and Blood Pressure”). Because of the similar physical experience shared cross-culturally, an expression has arisen that reflects this. Interestingly, the Chinese tend to focus on anger as a pressure, while English speakers focus on anger as heat (Kövecses, 2010). The Chinese have focused on a different physiological aspect of

anger than English speakers, and their metaphors reflect this. While the same physical experience of anger is familiar to both languages, this does not mean that each language conveys the experience in the same way.

The idea of ancient humoral pathology stems from Hippocrates, and this system of beliefs about the body has played a role in impacting the way that the universal idea of “anger is the heat of fluid in a container” is expressed (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006, p. 29). In ancient humoral pathology, there were four fluid humors: yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm. Each of these fluids played a part in regulating the processes of the body. They also determined the temperaments (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006). Even though ancient humoral pathology is not used in modern day studies of medicine, it has nonetheless shaped expressions of speech during the time when it had many followers. Because of its prior influence, humoral pathology still plays a role in speech today. Through understanding the history of medicine in ancient times, the meaning behind the idioms becomes clearer. As this metaphor shows, even failed science can form the basis for expressing similar human experiences (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to understand the cultural background and history of each language in order to understand non-transparent idioms.

The meaning of “anger is the heat of fluid in a container” finds its roots in the similar physiological experiences that people share cross-culturally (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006, p. 29). German, Italian, Upper Sorbian and Estonian all have expressions that relate to bile. German, as well as Upper Sorbian, uses the expressions “bile flows over” or “gall flows over.” Italian uses the expression “to have an outpouring of bile.”

The Estonian expression is “bile strikes the head” (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006, p. 29). All of these expressions mean “to become very angry.” With an understanding of the ancient beliefs of the cultures in which these languages are spoken, such as humoral pathology, these phrases can be properly understood. The same universal experience—anger—is expressed in idioms that refer to a universal physical part of the body—bile.

### **Difficulties in Examining Metaphors**

Examining metaphors and the meanings that they express does not come without challenges. Some universal meanings are conveyed in similar metaphors across languages. In other circumstances, similar metaphors express opposite meaning. Both similarities and differences in meaning and metaphors can often be understood when viewed through the lens of the culture at hand. Idioms can be very hard to understand because they are not simply parsed into individual parts; rather, they must each be examined as a whole, in the way that all figurative language is examined (Liu, 2012, p. 2359).

One difficulty in examining idioms is that the same meaning may render similar non-equivalent meanings in different languages. In English, the phrase “go through the roof” is used. Dutch uses “go through the wallpaper” and “then the house becomes too small.” Finnish uses “to jump up the walls” and German uses “to climb up the walls” (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006, p. 32). While expressed in different ways, each of these expressions has the common picture of a room with boundaries, and anger leading to crossing boundaries (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2006). Although this concept is found in each of the above expressions, culture can account for the differences in the

expressions that are used. The same universal concept is expressed in similar general expressions with small differences.

Some metaphors are difficult to interpret because lexically they appear similar, but contain extremely different meanings. Several phrases in English and Chinese demonstrate the confusion that can arise when the same metaphor conveys different ideas in various languages. In English, the phrase “hair stands on end” means “fear,” but in Chinese means “anger.” In English, the phrase “to pull one’s leg” means “to joke,” but in Chinese means “to hold someone back.” In English, “to eat one’s words” means “to admit a mistake,” but in Chinese means “break a promise.” In English, “a walking skeleton” means “a skinny person,” but in Chinese means “a boring person” (Liu, 2012, p. 2361). Each of these four expressions demonstrates the confusion that can arise when the same idiom conveys different meaning between languages. Thus, identifying the meaning and background of an idiom is essential to understanding it.

When examining a near-universal concept that is expressed in differing expressions across languages, culture-specific ideas are often responsible for the figurative expressions used to convey the same ideas (Kövecses, 2010). For example, Hungary and the United States use different phrases about life. Hungarians use a phrase that means “Life is a war” or “Life is a compromise.” English speakers from the United States use idioms that convey the idea, “Life is a precious possession” (Kövecses, 2010, p. 752). Hungary has faced over a thousand years of war and conflict with the Germans and Slavics (Kövecses, 2010). Thus, it is logical that Hungarian history seems to cast a gloomier view on life. These two languages have differing views on life that can be



understood by acknowledging each language's background and history. Though the mentioned idioms and figurative expressions are transparent in meaning, the full meaning behind the differing human experiences and expressions is only fully understood through a cultural understanding.

History and culture also give meaning to some metaphors that would otherwise be incomprehensible. For example, there is an idiom in Chinese that says, "Dong Shi imitates a frown" or "Dong Shi imitates Xi Shi" (Liu, 2012, p. 2358). Without a cultural background of China, a non-Chinese speaker would have no idea what this phrase refers to. The meaning is found in Chinese history. Xi Shi, one of four beautiful ancient women, was important during the end of Spring and Autumn in the Ancient State of Yue. Xi Shi frowned and showed sexualized frailty and suffering. Dong Shi was ugly and attempted to copy Xi Shi's frown. Thus, the story behind the metaphor expresses "an empty attempt to imitate another and reveals self-weakness." While this concept could be affirmed across many cultures, the idiom in which it is conveyed requires further explanation. As this example shows, some idioms rely heavily on historical knowledge for their meaning.

Important concepts in studying idioms are: universality of experiences, transparency, and differing and similar expressions of ideas. The research should provide insight into which potential near-universal experiences are cross-linguistic and expressed in idioms, whether similar or different. Some figurative expressions may be very transparent, where the listener can understand the idea that is being conveyed, even if he or she has never heard the expression before. Other expressions may be non-transparent, meaning that the expression does not offer meaning without being examined. However,

the meaning of the expression can logically be inferred. Lastly, some expressions may be difficult to understand without an explanation of cultural or historical meaning from the language and cannot be understood without explanation based on history, culture or other factors. After identifying the transparency of an idiom, the manifestation of the idea should be examined. In this study, idioms and their accompanying meanings are examined to find the importance of culture's role in expressing language universals.

### **Research Experiment**

Because idioms are inseparable from the culture behind them, studying languages and the idioms within them can reveal much information about the relationship between language and culture. To begin the research, twenty-five English expressions—both idioms and figures of speech—were chosen. The idioms are common idioms in the English language with potentially universal concepts behind them. Then, a survey was made with the list of 25 English explanations of the idioms. Participants read each of the English expressions and their corresponding meanings. Then, participants attempted to find any expressions that conveyed the same meaning as each of the 25 English explanations. Participants were instructed not to directly translate the English meaning into their native languages. Rather, participants were told to find an expression in their native language that expressed an equivalent concept. The participants then translated each expression from their native language into English. If the native language did not have an expression to convey the meaning, the participant simply left the answer blank. Some participants received a physical copy of the survey. Other participants received an

electronic version of the survey and filled it out electronically. All participants received the same questions. Below is a list of the meanings in English that students were given.

Meaning:

1. Completing an action at the present time can help avoid future trouble
2. Solve two problems with one solution
3. Costs a lot
4. Perform an action too quickly
5. Suddenly
6. It's your turn
7. Looking for the answer in the wrong place
8. Avoid talking about something specific
9. A great invention
10. The full extent; the whole thing
11. Have something happen to you that you tried to do to others
12. Be skeptical of something
13. To use someone else's idea and take credit *or* take the attention from someone else
14. Be undecided or uncommitted
15. Agree about something
16. That's easy
17. Does not happen often
18. Very abundant and easy to access
19. Very happy
20. Being curious can get you in trouble
21. Don't make plans based on what has not yet happened
22. Feel sick
23. An action requires more than one person
24. Tell a secret
25. Agree to do more than one can accomplish

*Figure 1. Idiom survey*

The 13 participants were mostly college-aged students studying in the United States. Participants were from various areas and countries of the world. The languages represented are as follows: Vietnamese, Korean, Portuguese, Thai, Nepali, Spanish, Arabic, German, and Chinese. There were 3 Chinese speakers, 2 Arabic speakers, 2

Korean speakers, and 1 speaker from each remaining language. The participants were all between the ages of 18 and 45. There were 6 female and 7 male participants.

### **Results**

Most of the expressions revealed variations of data, dependent on differing cultures. Some of the listed ideas were not matched with any idioms in the participants' native languages. The most informative results were the differing idioms used to express the same idea. There were 13 participants and 325 possible idioms that could be given to express the 25 meanings. Of the 325 possible answers, 222 were given and 103 possible idioms were left blank.

The general ideas found in the experiment are as follows. The survey results provide evidence for language universals. Each of the 25 ideas was found expressed in many of the nine other languages. The fact that the languages have idioms to represent each of the ideas shows that the 25 ideas are close to universal and of some significance in the cultures of each language where there was a correlating idiom for the meaning.

The results fell into three general categories in relation to English: similar idea and similar expression, similar idea and different expression, and no equivalent expression for the idea. The idioms that conveyed ideas in a similar expression pointed to commonalities between cultures. The idioms that conveyed the ideas with differing expressions often pointed to a variation between cultures. In some cases, the participants listed an idiom that is also found in English, though it was not the particular idiom listed in the survey. Lastly, some ideas had no equivalent expressions. This could be due to factors mentioned above or a non-existence of an idiom to convey the idea.

Expression	Chinese 1	Chinese 2	Chinese 3	Portuguese	Spanish	German
1	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD
2	SS	SS	SS	SD	SS	SD
3	SD	SD	NE	SD	SS	SD
4	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD
5	SD	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD
6	NE	SD	NE	NE	SS	SD
7	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD
8	SD	SD	SD	SD	SS	SD
9	SD	SD	NE	NE	SD	SD
10	SD	SD	NE	NE	NE	SD
11	SD	SD	NE	SD	SS	SD
12	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD
13	SD	SD	NE	NE	SD	SD
14	SD	SD	NE	NE	SD	SD
15	SD	SD	NE	SS	SD	SD
16	SD	SD	NE	SD	NE	SD
17	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD
18	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD
19	SD	SD	SD	NE	NE	SS
20	SS	SD	SS	SS	SS	SD
21	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
22	SD	SD	NE	NE	SD	SD
23	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD
24	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD
25	SD	NE	SD	NE	SD	SD

Figure 2. Overall Survey Results 1-6

Arabic 1	Arabic 2	Korean 1	Korean 2	Vietnamese	Thai	Nepali
SD	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD	NE
SS	SS	SS	SD	SD	SS	SS
SD	NE	NE	SD	SD	NE	SD
SD	NE	SD	SD	NE	SD	NE
SD	NE	SD	SD	NE	SD	NE
SD	SS	SD	SD	NE	NE	SD
SD	NE	SD	SD	NE	NE	NE
SD	NE	SD	SD	SD	SD	NE
SD	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE
SD	NE	SD	NE	NE	NE	NE
SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD	SD
SD	SD	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD
SD	NE	SD	SD	SD	NE	SD
SD	NE	SD	NE	NE	SD	NE
SD	NE	SD	NE	NE	NE	NE
SS	NE	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
SD	NE	SD	SD	NE	NE	NE
SD	NE	SD	NE	NE	NE	NE
SD	NE	SD	NE	SS	NE	NE
SD	NE	SD	NE	SD	NE	SD
SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	NE	SD
SD	NE	SD	NE	NE	NE	NE
SD	SD	SD	NE	SD	SD	SD
SD	NE	SD	NE	NE	NE	SD
SD	NE	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD

Figure 3. Overall Survey Results 7-13

The experiment also pointed at the importance of culture in conveying the experiences of people. As mentioned above, the 25 concepts from the survey were found in many of the languages. However, the languages had many differing idioms to convey the same ideas. In many cases, culture was responsible for providing an image or method of conveying the idea. The result of this is idioms that vary in expressing the same idea.

This language study did not come without limitations. The survey was given to participants in English. The level of English proficiency of the participants varied; some participants had difficulty understanding the expressions. Translating the expressions from their native languages into English was also difficult. Many participants also had challenges identifying corresponding expressions from their language. The survey required them to simply brainstorm and remember the expressions. Even if the participant's language had an expression to convey the idea, the survey was dependent on the ability of the speaker to remember the idiom or figure of speech during the survey. One aspect that was mentioned above yet was not addressed in the survey is similar expressions that have different meanings. In order to research that concept, a different experiment would need to be conducted. One last limitation that I will mention is the narrow group of participants. Most of them were students at the same university, thus not providing a very accurate representation of the general population. Having addressed the limitations, I will examine the general results. Having addressed the general ideas and limitations of the study, I examine and discuss the results in detail.

### **Discussion**

#### **Meaning 1 “Completing an action at the present time can help avoid future trouble”**

The idea, expressed in English with the idiom, “A stitch in time saves nine,” yielded interesting results in Korean and Chinese. Both languages contain metaphors that rely on agriculture. For example, the Korean expression is, “What can be stopped up with a short-handed hoe must be done with a shovel later.” One of the Chinese expressions says, “If you don’t repair the small hole, you will suffer on big hole.” Chinese and Korean idioms both points to manual labor.

#### **Meaning 2 “Solve two problems with one solution”**

The second idea, expressed in English with the idiom, “Kill two birds with one stone,” yielded similar idioms from almost all participants. Excepting German, the idioms all referred to hunting mammals. In Germany, hunting is indeed a popular sport, yet involves a great amount of legislation (Fabisch, 2011, n.p.). Interestingly, the German expression used to convey this idea is related to flies and a trap. The overall principle was the same across each of the idioms for this idea—catching something alive.

#### **Meaning 3 “Costs a lot”**

This meaning, shown in English as, “Costs an arm and a leg,” is of particular interest in Vietnamese and Korean. The Vietnamese expression refers to violence through the phrase, “throat-slitting.” The Korean idiom emphasizes drugs and marijuana.



**Meaning 4 “Perform an action too quickly”**

The English idiom for this meaning is, “Jump the gun.” The expressions used to convey this meaning particularly stand out in Arabic and Thai with an emphasis on violence. In Arabic, the idiom refers to a rocket. In Thai, the expression refers to a knife.

**Meaning 5 “Suddenly”**

The English expression for this idea is, “At the drop of a hat.” Both Korean and Thai contained idioms that referred to the eye. The Korean phrase is, “In a blink of an eye,” and the Thai phrase is, “In matter of eye flash.” English also has idioms that use the eye to refer to something happening suddenly. The Chinese idiom, “God doesn’t notice, Ghost doesn’t know,” was unique in its description of lack of perception from spiritual forces.

**Meaning 6 “It’s your turn”**

The idiom in English that is used to show this concept is, “The ball is in your court.” In Arabic, the idiom refers to driving, pointing to a common experience or task. In Korean, the idiom uses the idea of dancing.

**Meaning 7 “Looking for the answer in the wrong place”**

In English, the idiom to convey this meaning is “Barking up the wrong tree.” The idiom in Chinese points to manual labor. The expression points to asking an iron maker to repair a house—an unfitting job for an iron maker. This expression reveals manual labor.

**Meaning 8 “Avoiding talking about something specific”**

To refer to this concept in English, the idiom “Beat around the bush” is used. Korean referred to touching the rim. This reference to sports shows an exposure to sports within Korean culture. The Thai idiom is “Rabbit with three legs,” relating to nature and potentially hunting.

**Meaning 9 “A great invention”**

The English idiom for this idea is, “Best thing since sliced bread.” The example used in the English idiom points to a common household food, rather than something unique. In German, the idiom is, “That’s the yolk from the egg.” Spanish has an expression similar to another idiom in English: “Best thing after the wheel was created.” Each of these expressions refer to a great invention as something better than a common item used in daily life.

**Meaning 10 “The full extent” or “The whole thing”**

In English, the idiom, “The whole nine yards” conveys this meaning. In Arabic, the expression is violent. The phrase “the killing level” is used. The previous reference to a rocket and the current reference to killing emphasize a familiarity with violence.

**Meaning 11 “Have something happen to you that you tried to do to others”**

The English expression of this idea is, “Taste your own medicine.” Chinese, Arabic, and Spanish all refer to similar expressions of this idea, relating to drinking and eating. The Thai expression refers to karma—a key concept in Buddhism. According to Pew Research, Buddhism is the belief of over 90% of Thailand’s population, so this

expression is not surprising (“Global Religious Landscape”). The cultural element of religion plays a part in the formation of idiomatic expressions, as this example shows.

### **Meaning 12 “To be skeptical of something”**

The expression in English is shown in the idiom, “Take it with a grain of salt.” The idioms used to convey this meaning across languages vary in interesting ways. The German idiom refers to feeling for a fake tooth. This reference points to a somewhat wealthy culture. The Korean expression involves a street pharmacy, which relates to a prior Korean idiom involving marijuana and drugs. The Arabic phrase involves prioritizing safety over danger. Interestingly, several of the idioms in Arabic have referred to violence.

### **Meaning 13 “To use someone else’s idea and take credit” or “take the attention from someone else”**

This meaning is conveyed in extremely different idioms. The English idiom is, “Steal someone’s thunder.” The Nepali expression refers to manual labor. The Arabic expression refers to a chicken thief, the Korean expression refers to a bear whose owner takes credit for his tricks, and the Chinese expression refers to the dove utilizing the magpie’s nest.

### **Meaning 14 “Be undecided or uncommitted”**

The English idiom for this idea is, “Riding the fence.” The German idiom is, “Stick your head in the sand.” Interestingly, this idiom is used in English to convey the idea of being oblivious to what is occurring around someone. We see that the same expression can convey two differing ideas in two languages, as mentioned previously. The Thai idiom makes a reference to fishing with one’s hands—“Use two hands to catch

two fish.” In this expression, we see a difference in methods of fishing between cultures. The concept is transparent in English, but the cultural experience expressing this idea is not a common one.

#### **Meaning 15 “Agree about something”**

The idioms used to convey the idea place an emphasis on the body. The English idiom is “See eye to eye.” In Portuguese, the idiom is “eye to eye.” In Korean, the idiom is “heart to heart.” In Chinese, the expression says, “head is nodding, heart is admiring.”

#### **Meaning 16 “That’s easy”**

The figurative expressions to convey the idea express variety, but almost all expression refer to food. The English idiom is “That’s a piece of cake.” The foods vary from soup to banana to porridge to papaya and sugar. The differences in choice of food in the expression point to the diet differences between cultures.

#### **Meaning 17 “Does not happen very often”**

The English idiom that expresses this concept is “Once in a blue moon.” In Chinese, the expression refers to a dragon. The Chinese idiom points to this important element of Chinese culture. The Korean idiom refers to farming—again referencing manual labor. The German idiom refers to jubilee—a biblical concept.

#### **Meaning 18 “Very abundant and easy to access”**

In English, the idiom “A dime a dozen” conveys this idea. This idiom incorporates two cultural elements—units of money and units of measurement. Many of the participants did not provide idioms to convey this idea. The German expression referred to sand at the sea, which is a comprehensible image to people who have seen the

sea before. However, to speakers who live in areas secluded from the shore, this concept may be difficult to understand.

### **Meaning 19 “Very happy”**

This idea in English is often referred to as “On cloud nine.” Vietnamese and German also referred to clouds in the idioms that they expressed. This relates to the universal idea of happiness going up, as mentioned previously. One of the Chinese idioms referred to “Dancing with hands and feet.” This idiom paints an image in the listener’s mind of total involvement in happiness.

### **Meaning 20 “Being curious can get you in trouble”**

In English, the phrase “Curiosity killed the cat” exemplifies this idea. The expressions used to convey this concept include a correlation between cats, curiosity and harm in English, Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic, and German. This commonality points to a universal understanding of the characteristics of cats.

### **Meaning 21 “Don’t make plans based on what has not yet happened”**

The English idiom for this meaning is “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch,” similar to the German idiom “Don’t worry about unlaidd eggs.” In Arabic and Portuguese, the idea is expressed through a reference to modes of transportation. In Nepali, the expression refers to not buying things for a child before he is born.

### **Meaning 22 “Feel sick”**

The English idiom “Feel under the weather” refers to this idea. None of the provided idioms were very culturally unique.

**Meaning 23 “An action requires more than one person”**

This concept is expressed similarly in many languages. The English idiom is “It takes two to tango.” Nepali, Chinese, Korean and Arabic all refer to the act of clapping requiring two hands. This is a universal physical experience. The Arabic expression “It needs the boys” points to the importance of males. The Thai idiom involves water and a boat and a tiger and a forest.

**Meaning 24 “Tell a secret”**

This concept is expressed in English as “Let the cat out of the bag.” In Nepali, the idiom refers to leaking water—an image that many people will quickly understand, depending on how they access water.

**Meaning 25 “To do more than one can accomplish”**

This idea is expressed violently in Korean, as the pattern has shown. The phrase, “Ripping one’s legs apart” conveys the idea graphically.

Each of the above differences and similarities in idioms convey the variations between cultures. The same experiences and meanings are shared between cultures, but each culture has particular aspects and characteristics that it uses to express human experiences.

<b>11. Have something happen to you that you tried to do to others</b>	
<b>Name/Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	Earth is round
Portuguese	Don't do to others what you would not want them to do to you
Chinese	Eat you own fruit (result)
Korean	Reap what you sow
Vietnamese	The man's cane hit his own back
Arabic	It was an accedient [sic] goal
German	To pay back with the same coin
Korean	-
Chinese	Eye to eye
Arabic	Drink from the same cup
Thai	Karma got you
Spanish	Taste your own medicine
Chinese	-
English	Taste your own medicine

*Figure 4. Idiom survey question 11*

<b>16. That's easy</b>	
<b>Name/Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	It's a snap of the finger
Portuguese	It's like papaya and sugar
Chinese	A piece of dish
Korean	Eating a lukewarm soup
Vietnamese	As easy as eating porridge
Arabic	Piece of cake
German	It's a child's play
Korean	Eating a cold soup
Chinese	Small plate of vegetable
Arabic	-
Thai	Easy as eating a banana
Spanish	-
Chinese	-
English	That's a piece of cake

*Figure 5. Idiom survey question 16*

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this research was to examine language in order to know if there is support for language universals. Specifically, the research addresses how universal ideas express themselves and if the results provide evidence for common human experiences expressed through culture. Human beings share many basic experiences simply as a result of being human. We have bodies, emotions, memories, and many more aspects that are common to humans. These shared human experiences provide a basis for universal meanings expressed in language.

Because languages reflect common human experiences, there are many expressions that convey the same ideas across a broad scope of languages. Language and culture are closely tied together, as culture provides a channel for language to express specific ideas. As the experiment shows, each language can convey language universals differently, based on the culture of the language. Some languages share idiomatic expressions with the same meaning, pointing to cultural similarities. With other meanings, the idioms are expressed differently, often because of cultural differences. Idioms are based upon what each culture values and emphasizes, as the expressions of meaning show.

In relation to the connection between culture and language, this study did not specifically address whether or not the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is valid. The main belief of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is that language affects how people perceive the world. In idiomatic expressions that reflect meanings, cultural values are expressed. As the people of a language verbalize their stances and values through speech, they begin to view



culture and society through the language lens that they have created. If they view life with phrases that are positive, as does the English expression “Life is a precious possession,” people will likely perceive the world in a more positive manner. However, the Hungarian expression “Life is a war” could cause speakers to perceive life in a gloomy manner, rather than in a positive manner. Language does affect how speakers perceive the world, even if it does not dictate how people live.

The influence of culture upon language as seen in idioms points to the amount of knowledge that accompanies figurative speech. More research about idioms and specific cultures would be beneficial in continuing to understand why certain cultural expressions are used. This study has provided support for language universals based upon shared human experience, as understood by and communicated through idioms that are dependent on culture.

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## Appendix

### Idioms Survey

#### Comprehensive Results

<b>1. Completing an action at the present time can help avoid future trouble</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	If you don't repair the small hole, you will suffer on big hole
Korean 1	What can be stopped up with a short-handed hoe must be done with a shovel later
Vietnamese	Today's works shouldn't be left for tomorrow
Arabic 1	Do not move today's work to tomorrow
German	Finished now saves for later
Korean 2	Fixing the hut
Chinese 2	Kill one warn hundreds
Arabic 2	Don't leave today's work for tomorrow
Thai	Face trouble now and relax later
Chinese 3	If people don't look forward, they are going to have trouble pretty soon
Spanish	God helps he who wakes up early
English	A stitch in time saves nine

<b>2. Solve two problems with one solution</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	One arrow, two birds
Portuguese	Kill two rabbits with one swing
Chinese 1	One stone can kill two birds
Korean 1	Kill two birds with one stone
Vietnamese	Hit two targets with one arrow
Arabic 1	Kill two birds in one stone
German	To catch two flies with one trap
Korean 2	Catch two rabbits with one stone
Chinese 2	One stone two birds
Arabic 2	Hit two birds with one stone
Thai	Killing 2 birds with 1 bullet
Chinese 3	One stone kills two birds
Spanish	Kill two birds with one shoot

English	Kill two birds with one stone
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3. Costs a lot	
Language	Expression
Nepali	Price of gold
Portuguese	The eye of the face
Chinese 1	What you cannot pay off what you lost
Korean 1	-
Vietnamese	Throat slitting expensive
Arabic 1	The price is fire
German	Advice is expensive there
Korean 2	Expensive as marijuana
Chinese 2	Priceless treasure
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Spanish	It costs an eye of your face
Chinese 3	-
English	Costs an arm and a leg

4. Perform an action too quickly	
Language	Expression
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Goes by betwee [sic] a winkle
Korean 1	Take off shoes before seeing the river
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	Like rocket
German	To do something neck over head
Korean 2	Fry a bean in a lightning
Chinese 2	Straight come straight go
Arabic 2	-
Thai	Slowly you'll get a good knife
Chinese 3	You can't eat the hot tofu if you're in a hurry
Spanish	I am going slow, because I am going fast
English	Jump the gun

5. Suddenly	
Language	Expression
Nepali	-
Portuguese	Of nothing
Chinese 1	Suddenly happened and don't have time to react

Korean 1	Like a lightning
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	Suddenly
German	In zero point nothing
Korean 2	In a blink of an eye
Chinese 2	Unexpected attack
Arabic 2	-
Thai	In matter of eye flash
Spanish	-
Chinese 3	God doesn't notice, Ghost doesn't know
English	At the drop of a hat

<b>6.It's your turn</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	Every dog has its day
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	It's your turn
Korean 1	Stand at a crossroad
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	You are driving
German	Now show me what you can do
Korean 2	Do your dance
Chinese 2	Wind water turn
Arabic 2	The ball is in your playground
Thai	-
Spanish	The ball is in your side of the field
Chinese 3	-
English	The ball is in your court

<b>7. Looking for the answer in the wrong place</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Need repair house but asked iron maker
Korean 1	Lean on wrong leg
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	Looking wrongly
German	To be on the wood way
Korean 2	East entrance West answer
Chinese 2	Waste a bunch and all for nothing
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-

Chinese 3	Hanging goat's head, selling dog's meat
Spanish	A chicken will eat its own eggs, even when it gets its beak burned
English	Barking up the wrong tree

<b>8. Avoid talking about something specific</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	Rolling around it
Chinese 1	Attack by innuendo
Korean 1	Touch the rim
Vietnamese	Change the subject
Arabic 1	Without details
German	To talk around hot porridge
Korean 2	Catching clouds
Chinese 2	Turning a corner wiping angle
Arabic 2	-
Thai	Rabit [sic] with 3 leg
Chinese 3	Look around, speak about somebody else
Spanish	Beat around the bush
English	Beat around the bush

<b>9. A great invention</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	The whole world knows your name
Korean 1	-
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	Awesome
German	That's the yolk from the egg
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	One great discovery
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Spanish	Best thing after the wheel was created
Chinese 3	-
English	A great invention

<b>10. The full extent/the whole thing</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-



Chinese 1	Everythig [sic] you can think, they have it
Korean 1	Work hard and sweat blood
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	The killing level
German	No half things
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	From head to tail
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Spanish	-
Chinese 3	-
English	The whole nine yards

<b>11. Have something happen to you that you tried to do to others</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	Earth is round
Portuguese	Don't do to others what you would not want them to do to you
Chinese 1	Eat you own fruit (result)
Korean 1	Reap what you sow
Vietnamese	The man's cane hit his own back
Arabic 1	It was an accedient [sic] goal
German	To pay back with the same coin
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Eye to eye
Arabic 2	Drink from the same cup
Thai	Karma got you
Spanish	Taste your own medicine
Chinese 3	-
English	Taste your own medicine

<b>12. Be skeptical of something</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	Letting the fish in your hand go and looking for fishes in the pond
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Half believe, half-doubt
Korean 1	Don't take the face value as serious
Vietnamese	Half believe, half suspect
Arabic 1	Digging deper [sic]
German	To feel somebody's tooth
Korean 2	Attitude of a person who is dealing with a

	street pharmacist
Chinese 2	Half believed half suspected
Arabic 2	Staying safe comes before danger
Thai	-
Chinese 3	Half believe, half curious
Spanish	Works are love and not words
English	Take it with a grain of salt

**13. To use someone else's idea and take credit *or* take the attention from someone else**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	John does the work and Beer eats the corn
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Hurt others and benefit yourself
Korean 1	Racketeering others
Vietnamese	Rob the revolution
Arabic 1	The chicken thief [sic]
German	To take the wind out of the sail
Korean 2	The bear does the trick, and the owner gets the money
Chinese 2	Dove stays in magpie's nest
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Spanish	Falling the dead, falling the cry out
Chinese 3	-
English	Steal someone's thunder

**14. Be undecided or uncommitted**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Hesitantly to going to the next step
Korean 1	Can't go to downward or upward
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	The lost one
German	To stick your head in the sand
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Skeptical indefinite
Arabic 2	-
Thai	Use 2 hands to catch 2 fish
Spanish	From the saying to the doing there is a long distance
Chinese 3	-

English	Riding the fence
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<b>15. Agree about something</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	See eye to eye
Korean 1	Heart to heart
Chinese 1	Head is nodding, heart is admire
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	It's a goal
German	To be of one opinion
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Deep but correct
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Spanish	-
Chinese 3	-
English	See eye to eye

<b>16. That's easy</b>	
<b>Name/Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Noah/Nepali	It's a snap of the finger
Stephanie/Portuguese	It's like papaya and sugar
Shisi/Chinese	A piece of dish
Jihyae/Korean	Eating a lukewarm soup
My/Vietnamese	As easy as eating porridge
Hasam/Arabic	Piece of cake
Anouk/ German	It's a child's play
Jun/Korean	Eating a cold soup
I-Chun/Chinese	Small plate of vegetable
Seba/Arabic	-
Rocky/Thai	Easy as eating [sic] a banana
Mario/Spanish	-
Peter/Chinese	-
English	That's a piece of cake

<b>17. Does not happen often</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	The father of a phonix [sic], and the scale of a dragon
Korean 1	Like a sprout grows during a drought

Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	Once in the centure [sic]
German	Once every jubilee
Korean 2	Once in a thousand years
Chinese 2	Long long one time
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Chinese 3	Sun rises from the west
Spanish	One in a million
English	Once in a blue moon

<b>18. Very abundant and easy to access</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Easy as you flip hand
Korean 1	Piled up
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	Easy to reach
German	The are so many as much as sand is at the sea
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Light and easy to hold
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Chinese 3	A cow carries a leaf
Spanish	In a open chest, even the just will sin
English	A dime a dozen

<b>19. Very happy</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	A flower bloomed in your heart
Korean 1	Getting the big and nice meal on your party
Vietnamese	As happy as being on cloud
Arabic 1	He will die because of the happenes [sic]
German	To hover on cloud seven
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Happy in the moment
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Spanish	-

Chinese 3	Dancing with hands and feet
English	On cloud nine

<b>20. Being curious can get you in trouble</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	Trying to eat the whole hand when all you get is a finger
Portuguese	Curiosity killed the cat
Chinese 1	Curious can kill a cat
Korean 1	Not knowing can be a medicine
Vietnamese	Knowing too much makes one grow old
Arabic 1	Curiosity [sic] kills
German	Curious cats will burn their paws
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Mediocre self-interference
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Chinese 3	Curious can kill the cats
Spanish	Curiosity killed the cat
English	Curiosity killed the cat

<b>21. Don't make plans based on what has not yet happened</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	You don't know when you will have a son but you start to buy stuffs for him
Portuguese	Don't put the chariot before the horse
Chinese 1	Think too much before you do it
Korean 1	Don't drink kimchi soup first
Vietnamese	If you talk about it first, you can't walk over it
Arabic 1	Don't count on this
German	Don't worry about unlaidd eggs
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	False prophet
Arabic 2	Don't put the wagon before the horse
Thai	-
Chinese 3	A blind guy rides on a horse
Spanish	Do not sign victory prematurely
English	Don't count your chickens before they hatch

<b>22. Feel sick</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	-
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Have breath [sic] but no strength
Korean 1	Heavy head
Vietnamese	-
Arabic 1	Feel like crap
German	To be on top of the dam
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Water and land not match
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Spanish	I feel squashed
Chinese 3	-
English	Feel under the weather

<b>23. An action requires more than one person</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	You cannot clap with a single hand
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Can't clap with one hand
Korean 1	Two palms make sound
Vietnamese	One tree can make nothing; three trees join together can make a mountain
Arabic 1	It needs the boys
German	There are always two to a fight
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Three people become one tiger
Arabic 2	One hand cannot clap
Thai	Water depends on boat and tiger depend on forest
Chinese 3	Only two chopsticks can help you to eat
Spanish	Let's throw it a cow
English	It takes two to tango

<b>24. Tell a secret</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	To let the water leak
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Say the truth
Korean 1	Your back is exposed
Vietnamese	-

Arabic 1	Tell the worth money fact
German	To talk out of the sewing box
Korean 2	-
Chinese 2	Secret not to announce
Arabic 2	-
Thai	-
Chinese 3	Show me the cards
Spanish	One that puts the finger
English	Let the cat out of the bag

<b>25. Agree to do more than one can accomplish</b>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Expression</b>
Nepali	Roaring thunder does not rain
Portuguese	-
Chinese 1	Eat off from your bowl, and stales at the pot
Korean 1	Ripping one's legs apart
Vietnamese	Greed leads to misery
Arabic 1	To eat more than the limits
German	Your eyes are bigger than your stomach
Korean 2	Has a wide collar on a shirt
Chinese 2	-
Arabic 2	-
Thai	Cutting vetiver grass to roof the forest , push a rice pounder up the hill
Spanish	He who embraces too much, has a weak group
Chinese 3	-
English	Bite off more than you can chew