

Investigating the Impact of Lexico-Semantic Errors in EFL Iraqi University Students' Performance in Essay Writing Skill

¹Ban Hassan Jasim; ²Hawraa Hassan Oraibi

Abstract

The present study deals with "lexico-semantic errors". Such errors actually occur within second language learning. The problem of the study is that EFL Iraqi learners encounter some difficulties with semantic relations. It is aimed at re-visiting the concepts of "lexico-semantic errors" and their types as well as measuring EFL Iraqi learners' "lexico-semantic errors" through their writing. To achieve such aims, the following procedures will be adopted:

- 1. Defining concepts of writing, non-native speaker and "lexico-semantic errors".*
- 2. Presenting the basic types of "lexico-semantic errors".*
- 3. Following James (1998)' model.*
- 3. The main points are outlined.*

It is hypothesized that there is wrong choice of collocation belonging to the translation from Arabic to English. Additionally, "lexico-semantic errors" are caused by transferring some ideas from first language acquisition. As for the steps being adopted, As far as the data analysis, it is limited to (20) students of the EFL Iraqi learners who are fourth-year students/ Department of English/College of Education for Humanities/ University of Thi Qar for the academic year 2020-2021. The finding is that students fail to use accurate lexemes through writing their essays.

1. Introduction

¹University of Thi-Qar/ College of Education for Humanities/ Department of English,
Email: m.ban.hassan.jasim@utq.edu.iq; m.hassanoraibi1@gmail.com

The aim of the current paper is to present the "lexico-semantic errors" that resulted in mother tongue of EFL Iraqilearners. Such errors indicate the semantic features of lexical items, as elaborated in following instances:

*Iran is my mother country.

* my father learned me the Koran, (Keshavarz, 2011: 88).

"Lexico-semantic errors" can be confusion of sense relations and collocational errors. Such errors will be investigated via measuring the writing skill of EFL Iraqilearners. That is to say, it will be analyze the essays that are proposed by the concerned learners to show whether they are aware or not of "lexico-semantic errors".

The present study is divided into two sections. The first section explicates "lexico-semantic errors", their types as well as illustrates the concept of writing, error and the distinction between error and mistakes. The second section deals with methodology that is, in its turn, explained the procedures to measure the level of students' awareness of the concerned errors.

2. Literature Review

In this section, it will be highlighted on concepts of error, writing, non-native speaker, "lexico-semantic errors" and their types. It also focuses on the difference between error and mistake.

1.2.1 Concept of Error

Crystal (2011: 173) defines "error" as a term which is utilized in the domain of psycholinguistics denoting mistakes in disorder or spontaneous speaking that is resulted from brain. Besides, Tavakoli (2012: 117) notices that the concept of error points out the usage of linguistic items in ways which a native or fluent speaker of a language regards as showing incomplete or wrong learning.

According to Richard and Schmidt (2010: 201), incomplete awareness actually leads to errors, and mistakes made by learners when writing is caused by absence of overwork, attention, carelessness, or certain other aspects of performance. On this occasion, Richards (1973: 177) adds that mistakes can be viewed as the results of lack performance of language because of certain factors like carelessness and overwork on the part of students. Learners' knowledge of the accurate linguistic forms and self-correct themselves is based on their linguistic awareness.

Furthermore, Corder (1973: 125) suggests that the research of error regards as part of the analysis of the language learning process. It provides learners with a complete linguistic development of learners and may give them observations as to the

learning operation. As a result, Akmajian, et al. (2010: 426) provide patterns of error that can be summarized as follows:

1. Word errors exist within phrases and words from the same syntactic categories, i.e. verb, noun, etc.
2. Sound alternation errors exist between phrases and do not regard syntactic categories.
3. Morpheme alternation errors can be of both kinds. If they exist between phrases, so the morphemes belong to words of the same category. If words exist within phrases, so the morphemes hardly belong to words of the same categories.
4. Alternation errors for morphemes, words, and sounds can be restricted basically to main (content, open) categories, like, verb, noun, and adjective.
5. Shift errors can be restricted basically to minor (function, closed) categories.
6. Alternation errors are either meaning-related or form-related.

1.2.2 Non-Native Speaker

Mariño (2019:33) suggests that a "non-native speaker" refers to a person who utilize and realize a foreign language. Besides, Richard and Schmidt (2010: 134) mention that the language use of non-native speakers are not their first language acquisition. To sum up, Medgyes (1992: 67) outlines that "non-native speakers" have their greater capacities when teaching learners certain second language by virtue of:

- Educating learning techniques effectively.
- Supplying learners with an adequate knowledge of the target language.
- Predicting learners' needs when performing the concerned language.

1.2.3 Concept of Writing

Taylor (2009:96) states that the normal role of an introduction within "academic writing" is to inform the readers what justifies the writers in raising it and what issues are being raised. In other words, writing considers as part of media to gain information that is happened to the readers.

Omaggio (2001: 281) describes the learning process to write in a foreign language as a continuum of performances that extend from the more formal or mechanical forms of 'writing down', on the one hand, to the more complex acts of constituting on the other hand. Thus, writing improves first in terms of skill-getting performances that emphasize on interpreting the ways the language works (i.e., its syntax, grammar, cohesive devices, and lexicon) to skill-utilizing activities by which students engage in communication and expression (Rivers as cited in Omaggio Hadley, 2001, 281).

2.3.4 Concept of Lexico-Semantic Errors

Yang and X. (2001: 27) mention that "lexico-semantic errors" involve far more reaching outcomes with reference to communication than "syntactic-semantic errors" since the former are dealt with lexical fields or sense referent while the latter are basically restricted to the language structure. Besides, Lennon (1991:182) defines such errors as violations of the rules of lexical system specific to English language.

Additionally, McCarthy (1995: 334) states that some linguists attribute "lexico-semantic errors" to damage of the semantic element of the language processing pattern. Other argue that "lexico-semantic errors" belong to damage at other degree of processing or representation, as in, damage at the degree of the orthographic or phonological output lexicon.

2.3.4.1 Types of Lexico-Semantic Errors

James (1998: 151) classifies "lexico-semantic errors" into two types which are explained as follows:

2.3.4.1.1 Confusion of Sense Relations

First of all, Lyons (1981:152) describes "sense-relation" as a lexeme which is associated with other lexemes that are related to them in meaning and that a single lexeme is concerned with the outside world. Such lexeme is related in terms of denotation. Besides, James (1998: 151) mentions that lexicologists illustrate vocabulary in relation to lexical patterns, reflecting the sense relations that are existed between words.

James (1998: 151) adds that "lexico-semantic errors" are related to semantic fields. There exists a considerable neurolinguistic proof suggesting that individuals store words within cognitive lexicon with reference to such semantic-relations. It is thus reasonable to attempt categorizing "lexis" errors in relation to these systems. The basic types of error can be illustrated as follows:

1. Employing a more general concept where more specific ones are needed (superonym for hyponym). The consequence belongs to an under specification of the sense, for instance:

- "The flowers had a special *smell (perfume)".

(b) Employing so specific a term (hyponym for superonym), for instance:

- "The *colonels (officers) live in the castle".

(c) Employing the less suitable of two co-hyponyms, like:

- "To *exterminate (eradicate) dialects".

(d) Employing the wrong term from a group of near-synonyms, like:

- "a *regretful (penitent) criminal", (ibid).

2.3.4.1.2 Collocational Errors

Saeed (2016:438) views that collocation includes two explanations. The first clarification describes expressions coming together semantically in and syntactically acceptable ways. The second one can be outlined as the lexical impacts on terms of frequently coming together. For instances, "*high mountains* rather than *tall mountain* or *whisper softly* rather than *whisper quietly*".

In this regard, James (1998: 153) affirms "collocation error" either to interlingual or intralingual. Transfer of L1 "collocations" leads to interlingual error type. One can notice how realization of the adjectives long/high fascinates the unsuspecting students into postulating they similarly collocate in both the FL and L1. He (ibid: 153) adds that learners' assumptions of complete one-to-one equivalence stated on the ground of a realized partial equivalence may induce these collocation violations. Moreover, Channell (1981:115) views that the wrong choice of collocation can exist as an outcome translation from Arabic into English and to the relying on mono-lingual dictionaries which reveal a single word synonym with no instances or explanations.

It is worth mentioning that Cowie (2009:50) explicates that the range of choice is more tightly determined. Despite some collocations are easily understood since the literal meaning of a single word in each case, a feature is specified choice in one or both forms. For instances, "*heavy rain, light rain* and *light exercise, *heavy exercise*". The existence of both *heavy and light* in collocation with "*rain*" is to be expected.

For Palmer (1976: 97), there are three kinds of "collocational restrictions" can be differentiated that are mentioned as follows:

- Certain collocations are based fully on the meaning of the unit, like, the difference "*green cow*".
- Certain collocations are relied on extend-a word that can be utilized with a complete set of words that involve certain semantic features in common.
- Some determinations are collocational in the strictest meaning, involving neither range nor sense, like, "*addled with eggs and brains*".

2.4 Distinction between Error and Mistake

It is worth mentioning to make a difference between the two concepts *errors and mistakes*. In this regard, James (1998:83) distinguishes between them in that an

error can be considered as an observable deviation from the adult grammar of native speakers who reflect the learners' competence whereas mistake denotes a performance error which is either a slip or random guess where it is a failure employing a well-known pattern correctly. The nature of errors is not subjected to correction by the speakers themselves. Rather, mistakes are probable when the deviation is pointed out the speakers, (ibid).

Finally, Richards (1973: 177) indicates that the core difference between mistakes and errors is that mistakes are attributed to poor performance because of certain factors like carelessness and fatigue on the part of a learner. A learners has the awareness of the correct linguistic forms and they have the capacity self-correct by themselves on the ground of their linguistic consciousness. According to the accurate analysis, one must be so clear about the recognition of errors. They make semantically and ungrammatical incorrect sentences in so earlier level of their acquisition and later on. Second language learners go through same operation when learning any language, (ibid).

2.1 Methodology

The current section deals with the practical procedures that are explained the steps to measure the level of students' difficulties of the concerned errors. Nevertheless, James (1998)'s model is adopted in this study.

2.2 Description Test

The test is heavily depended on the production one. The EFL Iraqi learners are required to write essays following the academic strategies.

2.3 The Population

The EFL Iraqi learners who have subjected the test in the present study are fourth-year students/Department of English/ College of Education for Humanities / University of Thi Qar. The sample is about (20) learners, for the academic year 2020-2021. They are non- native speakers and they are in the same age. Such sample is selected since they regard master a huge number of vocabulary due to their spending a whole four years in learning English. Additionally, students are divided into two group. Each group consists of (10) students participating to write one essay for each group.

2.4 Instrument

A quantitative method is employed in the current study. Williams (2011: 14) states that such method denotes measuring and analyzing variables to reach certain outcomes. A quantitative method includes utilizing and analyzing numeral data via using certain statistical procedures to reach certain responses to the concerned test.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

In order to making a study instrument more consistent and appropriately designed, it is useful to perform the two indispensable preconditions of reliability and validity. Concerning validity of a test, Heaton (1974: 78) maintains that it is the extent to which it measures what it is supposed measuring and nothing else. Tests should be as valid as their instructors make them. The test must aim to provide a true measure of the particular skill which it is intended to measure. As for reliability, it should do with stability of marks for the same learners. If their scores are stable, the test will be reliable; if they tend to fluctuate with no clear reason, it will be unreliable, (Harmer, 2001: 90).

3.6 Final Administration

The final version of the test was carried out by utilizing online educational programs such as Telegram and Zoom on 20 of July 2021 on (20) students selected randomly from the 4th year students/ Department of English/ College of Education for Humanities /University of Thi Qar. The EFL Iraqi learners took only (45) minutes to write their essays. Additionally, they have been inform not to write down their names avoiding any possible embarrassment.

3.7 Analysis of Data and Discussion

After subjecting learners to the test, the researcher got the results as presented in the following tables:

Table (1)
Frequency of Types of "Lexico-Semantic Errors for the First Essay

NO. of Item	Sense Relations	Collocation
1	take	in the
2	lastly	pretty friends
3	holiday	sea margin
4	-	tall mountain
5	-	broad rivers
Total	3	5
Percentages	0, 3%	0, 5%

Table (2)

Frequency of Types of "Lexico-Semantic Errors for the Second Essay

NO. of Item	Sense Relation	Collocation
1	next	receive along
2	ordered	school train
3	conveyed	much of games
4	to	-
Total	4	3
Percentages	0, 4%	0, 3%

From the preceding tables, it has been observed that the number of the sense relation errors, in table (1), are (3) which rates (0, 3%). This percentage is lower than the number of collocational errors which are (5) that rates (0, 5%). Concerning table (2), the number of the sense relation errors are (4) which rates (0, 4%). This percentage is higher than the number of collocational errors which are (3) that rates (0, 3%).

3.8 Results

It has been observed that EFL Iraqi students have no capacity to response the concerned question that are presented by the instructor. Their results reflect that they have no any awareness towards "lexico-semantic errors". Such result may belong to many reasons. One of these reasons is that EFL Iraqi students do not study well. They do not focus on vocabulary of English language, as a second language, where some of them confuse between their mother tongue and the target language. Another reason is that some instructors follow traditional approaches through teaching. It is suggested that learners should be more careful towards their curriculums. Besides, instructors should also follow modern methods for the purpose of improving the scientific level of school Iraqi students as well as emphasizing good references, such as, Saeed (2016) and Lyons (1981).

Conclusion

The following points are concluded:

1. An error can be considered as an observable deviation from the adult grammar of native speakers who reflect the learners' competence whereas mistake denotes a performance error which is either a slip or random guess where it is a failure employing a well-known pattern correctly.

2. Writing considers as part of media to gain information that is happened to the readers.

3. "Non-native speaker" refers to a person who utilize and realize a foreign language.

4. "Lexico-semantic errors" are violations of the rules of lexical system specific to English language. Such errors are classified into two types:

1. "Sense-relation" as a lexeme which is associated with other lexemes that are related to them in meaning and that a single lexeme is concerned with the outside world. Such lexeme is related in terms of denotation.

2. "Collocation error" can be either to interlingual or intralingual. Transfer of L1 "collocations" leads to interlingual error type.

3. Concerning the practical side, it has been observed that students fail to use accurate lexemes through writing their essays. That is, the use of some collocation and sense relation lexemes are not manipulated in the right way. Thus, the hypothesis of the present study is verified.

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