Analyzing Lexical Errors in Sudanese University Students' Compositions

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Abstract:
This study aims at analyzing the types and the reasons of lexical errors committed by the Sudanese university students. A descriptive, analytic approach was used. A test was conducted to 100 students majoring English at six Sudanese universities, and related to the fist level, the second level, the third level and the fourth level. The findings of the study revealed that spelling was the commonest lexical errors committed by students followed by collocations and stylistic errors. The findings also indicated that the central reasons for these errors were due to the interference with the mother tongue.
Keywords: *errors, lexical, interference, mother tongue, collocations*

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أنواع و أسباب الأخطاء المتعلقة بالمفردات اللفظية التي ترتكب بواسطة طلاب الجامعات السودانية. حيث استخدم المنهج الوصفي –التحليلي. فقد تم اختبار 100 طالبا و طالبة يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية كتخصص رئيس في ست جامعات سودانية و ينتمون الى المستوى الأول ، و الثاني، و الثالث ، و الرابع. أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن الطلاب ارتكبوا أخطاء إملائية متكررة تليها أخطاء تراكيبية و أسلوبية. و قد كشفت الدراسة أيضا أن تداخل اللغة الأم كان من الأسباب الرئيسة لهذ الأخطاء.

كلمات مفتاحية: أخطاء، لفظي، تداخل، اللغة الأم، التراكيب اللغوية.

Overview

Error analysis is a very important area in applied linguistics and in the second and foreign language learning. Applied Linguistics, as a field, tries to address the problems and issues related to language, as well as to its learning and teaching; it also attempts to suggest solutions for these problems and issues. Error analysis provides a deep insight for the understanding of the process of language learning. Attempts for better understanding the process of language acquisition and learning have already been made for a long time (Richards, 1971, 1974; James, 1989, 1998; Norrish, 1983). Results of these studies were applied in the second and foreign language teaching and learning. It was assumed that (Corder, 1967, 1971 & 1974) the learners learn the second and foreign language in the same way, to some extent, as the children

acquire their first language. While acquiring their first language, children also make a lot of errors and mistakes. Therefore, central objectives of the current study are to examine the lexical errors committed by the Sudanese university students. Thus, two hypotheses are suggested:

1- Spelling and collocation are expected to be the commonest lexical errors committed by the Sudanese university students.

2- Interference with the mother tongue is expected to be the major cause of lexical errors committed by the Sudanese university students.

Literature Review

Error Analysis can be defined as the examination of errors committed by learners in both the spoken and written medium. There has been an increased interest in this area of applied

linguistics as learners' errors continue to get the attention of linguists, researchers and teachers world-wide. A satisfactory definition of error is given by Angelis (1975) who claims that an'' error in written English is "any form or construction which deviates in any way from that considered to be acceptable for standard, written academic English". Corder (1973) identifies three categories of learner errors: pre-systematic, Systematic and post-systematic. Learners commit pre-systematic errors while they are not yet certain about a particular item and are still trying to understand. Systematic errors are regular. In the systematic stage, the learner forms incorrect hypotheses and is unable to correct his errors. The post-systematic stage sees the learner producing correct forms, but he does not apply the rules he has learnt consistently. This could be due to inattention or lapse of memory.

Global and Local Errors

A distinction is made between errors from the perspective of communicative effect. Some errors hinder successful communication while others do not. Burt and Kiparsky (1972) differentiate between errors as regards their comprehensibility. There are errors which hinder communication and cause misunderstanding in their interpretation and those which do not affect communication. Global errors "affect overall sentence organization significantly" and therefore "hinder communication" (Burt, Dulay and Krashen, 1982:191). Burt and Kiparsky have labelled this category of errors "global" because of the broad syntactic scope of these errors.

Error vs Mistake

An error is "a systematic deviation". As a result of not having learnt a linguistic item, a learner "consistently 'gets it wrong'" (Norrish, 1983:7). One example given by him is using the infinitive with "to" after the verb "must" as in * "I must to go to the shops". Supposing that the learner knows the verbs "wish to", "want to", "have to" and "need to"; by analogy the learner then produces *"must to". Unless he comes to know of the correct form, he will continue to produce the erroneous form systematically. A mistake is an inconsistent deviation. For example, after being made aware that the modal verb "must" does not behave like some of the other modal verbs which can have an infinitive with "to" after them, the learner may produce the acceptable form "he must go" as well as the erroneous form "he must to go". He uses both forms quite inconsistently, sometimes getting it right and sometimes making a mistake and using the wrong form.

Overtly Erroneous and Covertly Erroneous Sentences

Corder (1981:42) draws a distinction between overtly erroneous and covertly erroneous sentences. The former are superficially erroneous ones while the latter are apparently acceptable ones, but only so by chance, or because they are inappropriate in some way. Corder gives an example of a covertly erroneous sentence from a German learner of English who said: You mustn't wear a hat at the party. Her utterance was perfectly acceptable syntactically. But what she aid was not appropriate because hats were not forbidden at the party. What she intended to say was You don't need to wear a hat. An example he gives of an overtly erroneous sentence is *I am waiting for the bus since thirty minutes. We could quite rightly interpret this as I am waiting for the bus for thirty minutes. An overtly erroneous sentence exposes the error in it. An overt error can be described as a "public error" while a covert error is a "secret error" (Cohen 1990:61).

Procedures for Error Analysis

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An analysis of errors follows certain procedures. In research there are six well-defined stages: 1) data collection, 2) error identification, 3) error classification, 4) error description, 5) error explanation and 6) pedagogical application. It is worth mentioning that researchers such as Corder (1982) and Schmitt (2006) (have classified errors into three types:

1- interlingual (transfer) errors: caused by the interference of L1.

2- intralingual (overgeneralization) errors: originating within the structure of L2 .

3- development errors : which resemble the errors made by children learning their L1.

In the current study, lexical errors will be analyzed in terms of formal errors and lexical semantic errors. Formal errors are subcategorized into: (1) incorrect choice of suffixes, prefixes and false friends), (2) borrowing and coinage, and (3) spelling errors. Semantic errors, on the other hand, are subcategorized into (1) confusion of sense relations, (2) collocations, (3) connotation errors, and (4) stylistic errors. Several researchers have attempted to analyze the types and causes of lexical errors encountering the students. For instance, Al-Jabri 1(1998) analyzed the lexical errors in written English of 110 Saudi students. He used a test; the findings showed that interference with L1 was the primary reason for lexical errors. Findings also indicated that students committed errors such as misspelling and malformation. Additionally, LIach (2007) analyzed the lexical errors committed by the Spanish students. She used a cloze test. Findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between the number of lexical errors in students' compositions and their proficiency level. Nadia Al-sahabi, et al (2009) analyzed the lexical errors in the compositions of Saudi university students. She analyzed 96 samples of the students' test exam. Findings revealed that the students' lexical semantic errors were more than their formal errors. Mahmoud (2005) investigated the lexical errors of Arab EFL students' lexical errors. He analyzed 49 essays produced by Arabic speaking university students majoring in English. Findings indicated that the students committed errors at the colocation levels. The findings also indicated that the main cause of committing errors was the negative transfer from Arabic.

Research Methodology Adopted

In the current study, a quantitative research design was adopted. That is, the quantitative data were collected via a test.

Research Tools

In the present study, a test was used. The selection of this instrument stemmed from the research questions.

The Test

With regard to the present study, a test was designed. The participants were asked to write a paragraph on each of the following topics:

- Water
- The Advantages and Disadvantages of Mobiles
- Festivals around the World
- My Summer Holiday.

Population and Sampling

The population is a complete set of elements (persons or things) that possess some common characteristics defined by the sampling criteria established by the researcher. The population of this study was composed of the EFL learner majoring English at faculties of arts and languages at the Sudanese universities, Khartoum. Concerning the students, they were the students who were in the first, the second, the third and fourth levels. Their ages ranged

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from 18 to 21. Most of them were native speakers of Arabic. Very few of them were second language English speakers (Nigerians). Some of them had received their primary and secondary education in some of the Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Oman. It could be added that some students lived in Khartoum whereas the vast majority of them came from the regions. That is, the students had a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds. With regard to the choice of the aforementioned subjects, it was determined by some factors. For instance, the students were in a position (English learners) which might help in providing deep insights into   analyzing and evaluating their lexical and syntactic errors.

Sampling

Sampling is a process of selecting a few from a bigger group. Creswell (2009) claims that sample designs are divided into two types: probability (random) and non-probability. Kothari (2004) claims that while non-probability sampling involves deliberate selection of items, the probability sampling does not. It is worth mentioning that both probability and non-

probability sampling are further categorized to include multiple types of samples. In the current study, a non-probability sampling technique was adopted. This technique is projected in using convenience sampling which is a subcategory of non-probability sampling. This type of sampling has been selected because it appears ideal for testing entire population, for its inexpensiveness, fastness and availability. In addition, convenient sampling is useful for detecting relationships among different phenomena.

 In the current study, the students chosen for sampling consisted of six universities: Khartoum University, Sudan University of Science and Technology and Al-Mughtaribeen University, Bahry University, Al-Neelain University and Omdurman Islamic University. Regarding the participants of the test, 20 students were selected from Khartoum University, 20 from Sudan University of Science and Technology, 20 from Al-Mughtaribeen University, 20 from Bahry University, 20 from Omdurman Islamic University and anthor 20 from Al-Neelain University. Coding of the participants is shown in the following table:

Table (3.2): Participants in the Test

University	Faculty	Number of students
Khartoum University	Arts	20
Bahry University	Education	20
Al-Neelain University	Arts	20
University of Sudan of Science and Technology	Languages	20
Omdurman Islamic University	Arts	20
Al-Mughtaribeen University	Languages	20

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

After finishing piloting the test, the researcher began collecting data in December 2017. It took

place at the Department of Arts and Languages related to the aforementioned universities. Prior

to data collection process, a short meeting was held with all Heads of English Departments in which the purpose of the study and the process of data collection were explained. During this meeting, permission for data collection was granted to the researcher. Similar short meetings were held with the staff teaching and students in which they were enlightened about the purpose of the study and the need for their participation and assistance. Upon granting the participants' willingness, data collection began the following day.Firstly, the test was administered. Before handing out the test, the students were told that there was no wrong and right answer to the statements, and that they should respond as honestly and accurately as possible, and that their responses would remain confidential. Furthermore, the students were provided with an example of how to respond to the questions in the test. 100 students from the six Sudanese universities took the test. The researcher was present when the students were taking the test in order to answer any question or clarify any item that they might not understand or might find ambiguous. It took 30 minutes. After collecting all the scripts, they were marked and then the number of lexical errors was categorized and statistically analyzed.

Results Obtained from Test Analysis

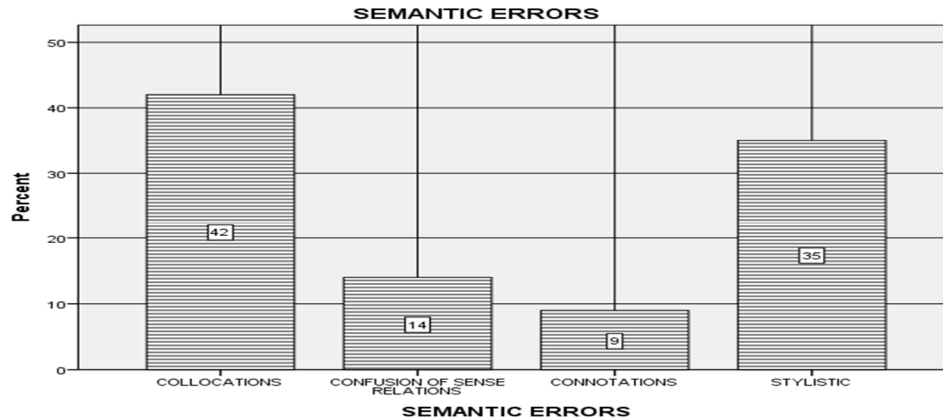**Figure 1: The types of lexical errors committed by Sudanese EFL university students**
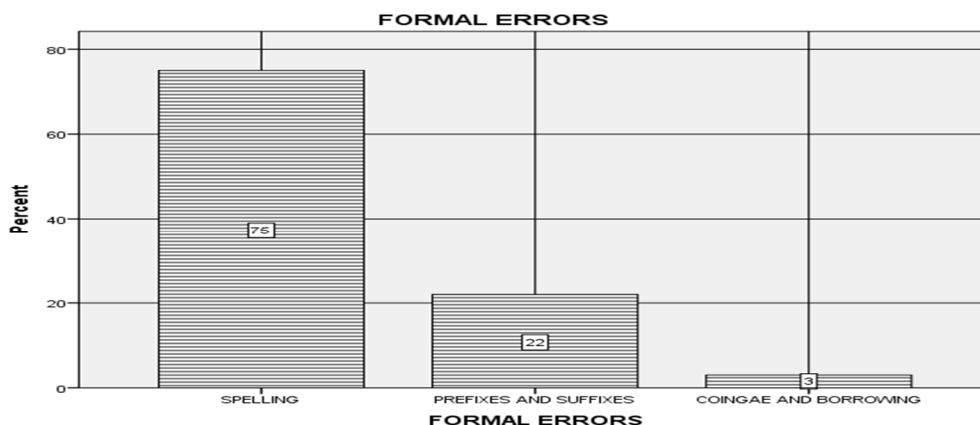
The above figure shows the formal lexical errors made by the Sudanese university students. It is clear that the students' spelling errors are ranked first with the percentage of 75. However, the errors regarding affixation are ranked second with the percentage of 22 and the coinage and borrowing errors are

Figure 2: Lexical semantic errors

ranked third with only 3%. This result indicates that the spelling has become a major challenging to the students. It could also be noticed that affixation is embedded in spelling. That is, when adding suffixed, it is often needed to change the spelling of a word.

The figure above shows the types of errors committed by Sudanese university students in the field of semantics. It is clear that the vast majority of the students have committed errors concerning collocation with a percentage 42%. Stylistic is ranked second with a percentage of 35. On the other hand, the analysis shows that 14% of the students' errors are due to the confusion of sense relations, and 9% of their errors are attributed to connotational reasons.

Discussion and Verification of Study Hypotheses

The current study aims at analyzing the lexical errors regarding the Sudanese university students' compositions. Two hypotheses have been suggested:

1- Spelling and collocation are expected to be the commonest lexical errors committed by the Sudanese university students.

2- Interference with the mother tongue is expected to be the major cause of lexical errors committed by the Sudanese university students.

The analysis was conducted from two perspectives: the formal errors and the semantic errors. 100 students were asked to write a paragraph. With regard to the formal errors (spelling, affixation, borrowing, coinage), the analyses of the test have shown that the students;

spelling errors are ranked first followed by affixation and coinage and borrowing. Thus, it could be inferred that these errors are due to language transfer and interference with L1. This result is congruent with the results of Al-Jabri 1(1998) and Shalabi, N., et al (2009).

With regard to the semantic domain, the analyses have indicated that the students' collocational knowledge is weak. Additionally, they are incapable of using the most appropriate style. Regarding the connotation and confusion of sense relations, the results have indicated that the students' performance in these two categories is to some extent moderate. It is worth mentioning that the range of errors committed by students in lexical semantic are higher than their range of formal errors. This result indicates that the students' little knowledge about language use. This phenomenon could be attributed to the interference with L1 which is considered the primary reason for errors. These results are congruent with the results of Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000), Kharma (1981).

Conclusion

This study aims at analyzing the lexical errors committed by the Sudanese university students when writing the composition. The findings of

the study suggest the crucial role played by L1 towards the acquisitions of the vocabulary of L2, and the way the students produce and choose lexical items in their writings. Thus, a considerable focus should be given to writing from qualitative and quantitative perspectives.

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