

## **Lexical Errors of EFL Learners**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper intends to draw out differences between mistakes and errors. The researcher focuses mainly on lexical errors which are done by students due to carelessness in writing a text, not knowing correct spelling of words and inappropriate uses of vocabularies. Aforementioned problems are chronic setbacks for foreign language learners. As lexical errors are trouble making for new language learners, the researcher carries out a survey on different types of words. It is conducted on English department students of a university. It is found after the data analysis that students' negligence and incompetency of teachers are two main problems behind the lexical troubles of students. Finally, he puts some recommendations to overcome this debacle. In terms of the teachers' efficacy, it is recommended that teaching style of new teachers should be scrutinized, and their teachings are supposed to be monitored by senior teachers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Lexical errors, Linguistic, EFL learners, mother tongue interference*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

This study is on the students who learn English language as a second language and who faces problem in studying this language. They make errors in following skills: speaking, writing and reading. They face problems especially at the beginning of their academic study from the elementary level. They face difficulties with this language as it is not their mother tongue. In 1964, Pimsleur and his colleagues were the first to question why some students performed well in other classes but did not perform well in FL (Foreign language) class (Banks (2008): 7). Regarding this issue in 1971 linkage's studies proposed that students' problems in FL classes were not due to lack of motivation, effort or anxiety, but rather a learning disability similar to dyslexia. He proposed that students' learning disabilities had to be addressed through specific educational measures in the classroom (Banks (2008): 8).

#### **Problem Statement:**

The researcher observes some constraints which students face in learning English as a foreign language, most importantly the lexical errors. Lexical error means the inappropriate use of words and spelling mistakes. These lexical errors can affect the students in their learning of English language. The researcher aims to identify, classify and analyze these lexical blunders committed by students. Moreover, he also recommends some solutions to overcome this difficulty.

#### **Aims and Objectives of the Research:**

In this study, there are two aims:

1. This study is concentrated around identifying, classifying and analyzing of lexical errors committed by students.
2. Providing recommendations to the teachers and learners to avoid those errors.

#### **Significance of the Research:**

This research allows students to understand the complex nature of the foreign language through systematic and extensive investigation. The study will be useful for students, teachers and course designers to reduce the lexical errors following different techniques.

#### **Basic Assumptions:**

- 1.5.1. Mother tongue interference in learning the foreign language is not the main source of lexical error.
- 1.5.2. Unqualified teachers, inadequate teaching techniques in addition to student's carelessness may contribute to repetition of some sorts of errors.

**Scope of the Research:**

The scope of the research are the students of third and fourth levels, Department of English Language, College of Arts and Humanities, University of Bahri.

**Data Collection:**

The researcher will collect data from students randomly. A common test will be conducted by choosing 20 students from each level.

**Research Methodology:**

Descriptive and analytical methods are applied to do the research because a survey has been conducted to collect the data to understand the students' problems.

**Definitions of Terms:**

**Language:** English language.

**Students:** Third and fourth year English department students of College of Arts and Humanities, University of Bahri.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

**2.1. Introduction:**

Lexical errors are common problems in learning a foreign language. It is different from the word mistake; mistake has connection with carelessness. On the other hand, in terms of learning a language, errors can be overcome by following rules and more practices.

**2.2 Definition of terms studying lexical errors:**

**2.2.1 Meaning:** According to the Oxford Dictionary meaning means "intend to convey or refer to a particular thing".

**2.2.2 Synonym:** The definition of Synonym in Oxford Dictionary is "a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language, for example shut is a synonym of close".

**2.2.3 Lexical:** Related to the words or vocabulary of language special as distinguished from its grammatical and syntactical aspect.

**2.2.4 Errors:** It has many meanings; according to the Oxford Dictionary it means "a mistake" or "the state or condition of being wrong in conduct or judgment".

**2.2.5 Lexical errors:** Connected with the meaning of a word. For example, students have used inappropriate word in places that are not in the right place.

**2.3. The Concept of Errors:**

It is the general tendency of human being to make errors. In case of learning a new language, it happens frequently. That means, errors are not only significant but are necessary part of language learning process. Regarding this issue Klassen (1991:10) says that errors are forms or structures that are unacceptable because of their inappropriate use. Errors refer to those features of the learner's utterances which differ from those of native speakers.

There is an important difference between errors and mistakes. Mistakes are deviate due to performance factor such as a memory limitation. They are readily corrected by the learner when his/her attention draws to them. While errors are systematic and consist of deviation, characteristic of learners' linguistic system at a given stage of learning; mistakes are just lapses which are a systematic inconsistent and infrequent.

There are errors which occur due to memory lapses, tiredness, exhaustion, strange motion, inattentiveness... etc. These types of errors do not reflect a defect in the learner's knowledge of his/her native language. On the other hand, there are dissimilarities between those errors which are created in the aforementioned circumstances and those which are linked with the inadequate up-to-date knowledge of learners about a language.

Systematic intralingua errors involve overgeneralization and ignorance of restriction of rules. Interlingua errors are made by the interference of learner's mother tongue. Both types reflect the learner's competence at a particular stage.

There are also disparities between errors of performance and errors of competence. Errors of competence are the result of the application of rules by second language learners which do not comprehend the

second language norm. While errors of performance is the outcome of mistakes in language use and manifested by repeated false starts and constant slip of tongue.

#### **2.4. Sources of Errors:**

Errors fall into two groups: predicted and unpredicted. Both groups of errors are normal to learners. Faulty teaching process, inappropriate teaching materials and incorrect learning process are responsible for both categories of errors.

Other sources of making errors are interlingua and intralingua switching. Firstly, interlingua problem is caused by mingling of structure of first language and second language. On the other hand, interlingua problem depends on linguistic differences between first language and second language, and traditionally are interpreted as interference problem.

Translation (word by word) is an idiomatic expression in learning first language beside overgeneralization. In the present time it has become a tendency of students to rely on translation rather than focusing on improving language efficiency.

#### **2.5. Views to Word Errors:**

For many years making errors was a derogatory problem in learning process. Teachers deal with them as bad habits which are heavily being penalized by teachers. They are not interested whether students' errors are being corrected or not. However, currently a new direction toward students' errors emerges; teachers, scholars and linguists welcome them. They consider errors as an integral part in the process of learning a foreign language because through identification, classification and correction of these errors, students can improve their language efficacy.

It is evidenced that native speakers also make errors while they develop their language system. That means errors should not be viewed as a problem rather as a normal issue in language learning process. There are different approaches toward errors analysis: a contrastive analysis and non-contrastive analysis.

#### **2.6. Contrastive Analysis:**

Contrastive analysis is an old method which deals with errors. It is defined as "a systematic comparison of specific characteristic of two or more languages". The task of comparison is the prediction of errors which determine what the learners learn, how they learn and what the teacher what to teach.

One can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty by comparing system of language and culture to be learnt with nature language and culture of students. The scholars of contrastive linguistics assume that, while learning foreign languages, the learner return to his mother tongue language.

#### **2.7. Lexical Restrictions:**

Lexical restrictions deal with the co-occurrence of lexical items. They rule out the incompatibility of pairs of words e.g. he drives scooter. In this example there is no compatibility between drive and scooter, the word scooter is usually associated with ride. Learners need to observe semantic properties of individual word. They should also know how to string such words together in order to produce a meaningful language. This entails that awareness of semantic functions of the words in isolation has no value, unless the complex and varies types of relations that exist between words are considered. Such a relation, according to Willkins (1972), determines the semantic structure of language. The learner should know secondary meanings or connections of a word and other words associated with, beside its semantic values.

Learners often find it difficult to select the appropriate words to convey a particular message. There are two categories of errors committed by learners in this field: errors that occur due to confusion of relation and collocation errors. Confusion of relation leads to the following types of errors:

- a. Using general terms when more specific one is needed.
- b. Using two specific terms e.g. the colonels, officer's line in the castle.
- c. Using the wrong one from a set of near synonyms, e.g. A regretful, penitent, contrite criminal or sinner.

With prospect to collocation errors, it is mentioned that learners fail to select the appropriate word that keep company with one particular word.

#### **2.8. Grammatical Restrictions:**

Grammatical restrictions determine the accuracy of items in grammatical context. Learners in their vocabulary learning should pay more attention to the syntactic values of lexical items. So, the learning of vocabulary as it is often called errors, is not just a question of learning semantic properties of items and also their syntactic properties. It is important to use these items according to correct grammatical classes. On the other hand, learners most of the times fail to observe restriction of articles usage. They often find it difficult to decide when to use “a” or “the” in noun phrase. This is what leads them to produce sentence as: There is the man at the door. The use of articles in a noun phrase depends on referent awareness and quantity considerations. Awareness of referent can be established either through linguistic or environmental means.

### **2.9. Causes of Errors of Rule Restriction:**

Foreign language learners are often confronted with the task of selecting the appropriate lexical items when they are engaged in any writing process. The difficulties that they encounter are: how to select correct words, how to make substituting one word for another and how to assign this word to their grammatical structure. For this reason, one of the most useful aides is a dictionary; it provides learners with synonyms for the words they look for. However, the most dangerous thing is that the foreign learners are able to use dictionary in discriminated way. He or she either needs to translate from his first language or to avoid using double words. From the above discussion, it is clear that the failure to observe grammatical and lexical restrictions may lead to the interference of first language.

With respect to the learners’ mother tongue interferences, learners attempt to translate certain lexical items from their first language. The result may be the inappropriate use of a word. With respect to avoidance learners often try to avoid using difficult words or structures. That is, they use word or structure familiar with their mother tongue.

On the other hand, analogy seems to be a major factor in the misuse of preposition with one type of verb. An attempt by analogy is to use the same preposition with similar verb. The learners search for patterns and regularity in the target language in attempt to reduce the learning load by formulating rules. But the learners fail to observe the restrictions of the rule he or she is testing. This occurs due to his or her limited exposure to the target language and his/her insufficient data from which he/she derives more complex rules.

Teaching techniques can also contribute to errors learners commit in the field of rules of restrictions. For example, with respect to the article usage, generalization is applied, for example, “a” is to be used before singular countable noun, but it should not be used in front of abstract nouns. Course designers and teachers think that by adapting such techniques, they can facilitate the learners by grouping the rules of the new system. But, introducing materials in this way leads learners to express difficulties in their learning and find it not easy to observe the exceptions that are found in a certain area.

### **2.10. Significance of Learning System:**

The system of language learning is much richer in linguistic, pedagogic and social significance. All levels of pragmatic classroom experience, error analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching, and determines priorities for future effort. This is not to suggest that we expect syllabus design to familiarize itself exclusively around "error based" progression or gradation, since as we have seen, the number of variables likely to affect the learners’ performance is too great to be summarized in any one formula or approach.

Planned achievement levels at given stages in a language course however should include expectation of particular varieties of language use. Close study of learners’ English will provide the sort of data on which realistic predictions about learning and teaching can be based. Expecting learners’ to pass directly to native speakers competence in the new language, more linguistic goal may be set for particular learning situations based on generalizations derived from observation of others performance under similar circumstances. Teacher Training manuals should familiarize future teacher with varieties of language which learner may be expected, and indeed encouraged, to produce at a given stage of learning. These will not correspond directly with the well-formed sentence in the course book, drill or dialogue.

Study of learners’ learning system also has place in linguistic theory. For example, the result of errors analysis studies cited above indicate that theories of contrastive analysis cannot explain the numerous replacements for the target sounds. As Nababan (1971) pointed out, discussing the replacements for English sound /Ø/ð/ made by Javanese and Indonesian speakers, it is not clear why people with the same linguistic background should make substitution of /s/, /t/ and /f/. He states that this is more interesting as /f/ is not found in Javanese and Indonesian; it only has a light functional load but is found in the same words in free variation with /p/ and /t/. He comments that the substitution of /s/ seems to be more commonly made by younger learners.

There are some constraints which work behind the language deficiency. Firstly, age plays a big role because strategies of language acquisition differ from adults to children. Secondly, phoneticians have shown

that in sound discrimination, the second and third formant transitions from a fricative into the vowel are important cues in identifying place of articulation - Rudegair (1970) working with the first – grade native speakers of English, found that this subject made significantly more errors contrasts /f/ versus /Ø/ and /v/ versus /t/ in the context of a front vowel as opposite to back vowel. The longer transition length to the back vowel seems to provide a better cue for the correct discrimination of the fricative.

In summary, language learning systems of learners should be viewed as understanding of a language in general and more human approach to language teaching.

### III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

#### 3.1. Introduction:

In this part, the researcher wants to explain the methodology that is applied in this study. Moreover, the researcher wants to review and analyze the errors which are committed by students and know more about general errors which are made by students.

#### 3.2. Methodology:

Following methods are applied for the article:

Firstly, the researcher conducted a common test for students who are at level three and four. They are students of Department of English language, College of Arts and Humanities of University of Bahri. The researcher chose 40 students from each level. The test is made by the researcher himself.

Secondly, the researcher explained to all students the aims and objectives of the common test in writing. He used samples from each class.

#### 3.3. Discussion and Analysis:

The values of this study are appearing in the finding of the test answers that was done by students. Five tables are used focusing on different areas of learners' problems. These five tables are divided into two parts. Part one: deals with the errors of students which are made by students when answering questions. Part two: concerns with the errors of students which are made by them when writing a composition.

##### 3.3.1. Table 1: Grammatical Errors “conjunctions”:

The first table is about grammatical errors. The researcher chose 40 students; among them 26 students are male and 14 are female. They are between 20 to 25 years. They study English language at university level. This table concerns with connecting sentences and other elements to write sentences grammatically correct. Students are supposed to apply conjunction in sentences perfectly. The students in their answers made errors.

Regarding the first question 42.5% students made errors; that means the students in connecting two independent clauses or simple sentences, they made errors in choosing words or conjunctions. This happens because of the carelessness of students as it is simple to connect simple sentences together. Concerning second question, the percentage of wrong and right answers are respectively 30 and 70. That means the students who made errors do not understand the use of “too”. It might happen because of their carelessness or less use of “too” in writing. For the third question, 22 students provide right answer and 18 students give wrong answer. The students who give wrong answer, they ignore the use of conjunctions. It raises question about the quality of teachers who supervises students' assignments.

Question	Right		Wrong		Total	
	Fig.	%	Fig.	%	Fig.	%
1- I told him not to come ..... he came Any way.	21	47.5	19	42.5	40	100
2- Most people we met, tried to help us, they were very friendly .....	30	70	10	30	40	100
3- Take this photo ..... you can remember me.	22	55	18	45	40	100
4- Sam left school ..... he joined police.	20	50	20	50	40	100
5- The food is usually very good ..... it is one of the cheapest restaurants in the town.	11	27	29	73	40	100

**Table 1: Grammatical Errors “conjunctions”**

As for the Fourth question, there is a balance between wrong answers and right answers. That means the students who made errors are carelessness students as it is the easiest question in the test. So, the students

who are specialized in English language should know about using this conjunction. In relation to the fifth question, 27% of students answer right and 73% students make mistakes. Most of the students give wrong answer here.

In the question, errors are made by misunderstanding of using conjunctions. It raises a question about the qualification of teachers.

Connecting simple sentences and independent clauses are very simple if the students go through adequate practices.

### 3.3.2. Table 2: Grammatical Errors "articles":

This table is concerned with grammatical errors; these errors occur due to unsuitable application of articles in the sentence. Concerning to the first question, 45% students give right answers in contrast to 55% perform wrongly. This means that, students who made errors in this question which is not difficult, because the use of the article "a" is simple. In this question, all students made error and that means the teachers do not explain to

Question	Right		Wrong		Total	
	Fig.	%	Fig.	%	Fig.	%
1- What is wrong with you? Have you got ..... headache.	18	45	22	55	40	100
2- I know a lot of people. Most of them are ..... students.	0	0	40	100	40	100
3- Would you like to be ..... actor.	22	55	18	45	40	100
4- There is ..... huge traffic this morning.	22	55	18	45	40	100
5- Nuba mountains are ..... highest mountains in Sudan.	30	75	10	25	40	100

**Table 2: Grammatical Errors "articles"**

them the place that the learners do not use articles. Regarding the third question, 55% and 45% students perform wrongly. There are errors made by students. That means students are not able to know the using of indefinite articles so that is one of their carelessness. In fourth question, out of 55% students give right answer, and wrong answers are given by 45% students. This means the students who made errors mixed two kinds of articles. So, this is one of students' carelessness and misunderstanding of English language. In terms of the fifth question, the right answers are provided by 30 students (75%) and the wrong answers are given by 10 (25%). So, it can be said that they are well cultured about using definite articles. Therefore, the students who made errors, it is normal to have them because there are many factors that made them using wrong answer.

### 3.3.3 Table 3: Grammatical Errors in Writing:

This table is concerned with the errors that are made when students write composition. The researcher tested students to write a text on childhood. When they write this composition, they made many errors. First area of error is using tenses. In this field, 80% of students (32 students in number) make errors. That means students are less skilled in writing. They use many tenses in one paragraph without mentioning them. Unqualified teachers are also responsible for the errors of students.

Area of errors	Right		Wrong		Total	
	Fig.	%	Fig.	%	Fig.	%
Tenses	18	20	32	80	40	100
Sentence structures	18	20	32	80	40	100
Preposition	27	68	13	32	40	100
Pronouns	33	77.5	7	22	40	100
Articles	37	92.5	3	7.5	40	100
Conjunctions	37	92.5	3	7.5	40	100
Plural form	36	90	4	10	40	100

**Table 3: Grammatical Errors in Writing**

The second field is about sentence structure; it differs from the first field. In this field, the students made errors to use elements of a sentence. Here also aforementioned number of students that means 80% students makes errors. Sometimes they use two verbs in one sentence and some of them use a sentence without predicator or subject. These errors are related to students' carelessness and their teachers. The third area is about using preposition in a sentence. In this field, 32% students provide wrong answer. Here it is seen that some

students in the place of “on” and “of” put “off”. In this case there are many sorts of errors made by many learners.

The fourth area is on using pronouns in a sentence. 7 students (22%) made errors in using pronouns. Their errors change the meaning of sentences. Students’ carelessness and unqualified teachers are accountable for these errors. This is a very crucial error as nouns and pronouns are basic elements in writing sentence.

Fifth area of error is using articles and sixth one is on using conjunctions in writing sentences. In both fields 75% students make errors. These errors come from less practice of writing texts. Students’ carelessness is part of these errors. The last field is about plural form. Here 4 students mean 10% students make errors in applying plural forms of nouns.

In this table, errors in tenses, sentence structure, pronouns and prepositions are related to the interfering of mother tongue, because the first language of all students is Arabic. So, Arabic language is different from English language in above mentioned fields.

### 3.3.4. Table 4: Linguistic Errors:

This table is concerned with the linguistics errors of students. For this one, the researcher chose 40 students; among them 26 are males and 14 are females. 20 of them are from third level and the rest of them are from level four. Their ages are between 20 - 25 years.

Area of errors	Right		Wrong		Total	
	Fig.	%	Fig.	%	Fig.	%
1- Capitalization	31	58	17	42	40	100
2- Spelling mistakes	16	15	34	85	40	100
3- Out of topic	34	83	6	17	40	100
4- Punctuations	7	18	33	82	40	100
5- Writing	8	20	32	80	40	100

**Table 4: Linguistic Errors**

The statistics of this table is on linguistics errors that made by students in their writing text. The first area of error is capitalization. There are 45% (17 students) made errors in capitalization. Some of them begin a text or paragraph without capital letter and some of them use capital letter in the middle of the word. In this case, the skillfulness plays an important role to clarify the text. These errors are related to the carelessness of both teachers and students.

The second area is on spelling mistake. Here 85% means 34 students misspelled words. Spelling mistakes is a significant factor in English language learning. Writing practice is the best way to avoid this error. Thus, this error is related to the students hardworking.

The third areas of making errors are out of the topic given. To increase writing efficiency of students, teacher should be aware of their students and to force them to write more and more, to improve their efficiency to write on any topic. Here the teacher’s role is vital.

The fourth area of error is punctuation. There are 82% equal to 33 students made errors in their writing who do not use punctuation correctly in their texts. Any text that they write without using punctuation becomes unclear to understand. So, these errors are connected with the less practice of writing in English.

The last area of errors is linguistic errors in writing a text. There are 32 students (80%) make errors in writing. That means student write texts without following steps of writing a paragraph. Some of them write personal information like C.V. All these kinds make interruption to understand the written texts. So, these errors are related to both students and their teachers.

### 3.3.4 Table 5: Semantic Errors:

This table is concerned with semantic errors. The first area of semantics is vocabulary where 65% equal to 26 students made errors that means students use word in place of another word, and those words are either synonymy or hyponymy. Those students have

Area of errors	Right		Wrong		Total	
	Fig.	%	Fig.	%	Fig.	%

1- Vocabulary	14	35%	26	65%	40	100
2- Using Arabic word	30	75%	10	25%	40	100
3- Less than ten lines	8	20%	32	80%	40	100

Table 5: Semantic Errors

an idea to write but they have no idea to use suitable words in their writing. They used words which have no relation with the meaning of a sentence or a text. Teachers are responsible for this inefficacy of students. The second area deals with the use of Arabic word in their writing. There are 25% equal to 10 students made errors by using Arabic words in the place of English words.

When students are writing a text and they do not apply aptitude to choose or to write something in English, that means those students have not got ability to use concrete vocabulary to write fully coherent and meaningful sentences. So, they try to use Arabic word when they face difficulty in writing which is related to the interlingua or interference of mother tongue in writing something in English.

The last one is about writing less than ten lines. There are 80% equals to 32 students, write less than ten lines. Writing less than ten lines means students have no ability to write competently. They know less number of vocabulary or interference of mother tongue language happens constantly. These errors are related to student's carelessness and unprofessional teachers.

#### IV. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

##### 4.1. Summary:

There is an important distinction between errors and mistakes. Mistakes are divided due to performance factors such as memory limitation. The learners can overcome those mistakes by paying attention.

Lexical errors are the most important element in learning a language. Its significance is shown by the fact that every foreign language learner makes errors. On the other hand, making errors are necessary part of even mother tongue learning process. So, error is a term used to refer to those features of the learner utterances which differ from those of any native speaker.

Learning error is important for the learners who learn foreign language. They should study the meaning of words, distinction between grammatical, syntactical aspects and the nature of a lexicon.

While errors are systematized and connected with the characteristics of the learners' linguistic system; at a given stage of learning, mistakes are just lapses which are systematic inconsistent and infrequent. That means errors are divided into two parts: systematic and unsystematic; any one of these divisions have its result. Moreover, there are distinctions between the errors of performance and the errors of competence. Besides, there are many sources of making errors; those are intralingua and Interlingua. These are two different approaches to view errors.

Alongside above-mentioned issues, student carelessness, first language or mother tongue interference, transaction word by word in idiomatic expressions, over generalization of two languages and other issues introduce errors. Also, there is an indirect source that effect students in their learning and influence them to make errors. That source is incompetent teachers or new teachers (those who are new in the field of teaching) who cannot explain to student how to write good paragraph, using good skills to write and avoid general mistakes. On the other hand, student themselves have their roles in making errors. That is less writing, reading and speaking practice; these skills lead them to make errors.

##### 4.2 Recommendations:

Based on the findings and results, the researcher provides the following recommendations:

1. Further research studies concerned with the English language teaching of all teachers in universities, colleges and secondary schools shall be done.
2. English language proficiency of universities and secondary school teachers is essential.
3. New teachers in English departments at university level shall be under supervision of senior teachers in the departments.
4. For developing skills, the researcher recommends practicing English language and using it in seminars, writing assignments and reading a lot of books to develop their knowledge of English language.
5. The aims of teaching English language at universities and secondary schools shall be clear to both teachers and learners.
6. Establishing special library for students and teachers to encourage reading English books.
7. Deploying information technology center in learning English language for students or other learners might play a significant role.

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