



***LEXICAL ERRORS IN COMPOSITION
WRITING BY 2nd YEAR IRAQI EFL LEARNERS
AT AL- NISOUR UNIVERSITY COLLEGE***

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Abstract

Among the various types of errors in written compositions, lexical errors possess the highest number of errors occurring in learners' written compositions. In line with this background, this a qualitative study was designed to identify and categorize the lexical errors committed by 2nd year Iraqi EFL learners at Al- Nisour University College in composition writing. The study also seeks to examine their possible causes and implications for teaching practice. The elicitation technique was applied. A Corpus of 40 second-year Iraqi students' academic writing was accessed and examined to identify the main lexical writing errors following James's Model (1998) which was later modified by Hemchua and Schmitt (2006). The lexical errors were classified into categories, and some suggestions were given. It is hoped that the results could provide some guidance for both Iraqi EFL learners and teachers in terms of reducing errors in composition writing and facilitating smoother communication.

Keywords: *Lexical errors; Error analysis*

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing area of study among many educators, EFL teachers, linguists, and researchers interested in the analysis of errors made by foreign language learners while learning a second or foreign language. According to Ringbom (1987: 69), error analysis is 'an important key to a better understanding of the processes underlying L2- learning'. The significance of error analysis, as elaborates by Corder (1967: 167), seems to lie on the fact that learners' errors are a good source of feedback which can be of great help to the teacher, the researcher and the learner as well. First, to the teacher, errors explain what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language' far towards to the goal and consequently what remains for him to learn. They help teachers know students' difficulties in learning that language. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired and what teaching strategies or procedures, materials, and syllabi the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly, to the language learner, making errors functions as a device he uses in order to learn by avoiding committing the errors.

2. Error analysis

Error Analysis is a branch of Applied Linguistics emerged in the sixties to address that learner errors do not only occur because of their mother tongue but also they reflected some universal strategies which focused on the creative aspects of language learning. (Shrestha, 1979: 1). Richards (1971: 1) states that "the field of error analysis may be defined as dealing with the differences between the way people learning to speak a language and the way adult native speakers of the language use the language". Teachers and researchers provided evidence that "a great number of student errors cannot possibly be traced to their native language" (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982: 140). "There were many kinds of errors besides those due to interlingual interference that could neither be predicted nor explained by contrastive analysis" (Sridhar, 1980: 223).

In order to analyze the learners' errors, it is important to distinguish between a 'mistake' and an 'error'. According to Brown (2007: 257), these two distinctions are technically very different phenomena. "A

mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a slip”, while an error refers to “idiosyncrasies in the interlanguage of the learner that are a direct manifestation of a system within which a learner is operating at that time... Put in another way, an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner”. The forerunner of EA, Corder (1981: 10) makes an important distinction between "errors" and "mistakes. Mistakes or lapses committed by native speakers and second language learners are ‘failures to utilize the known system correctly such as memory limitations (e.g., mistakes in the sequence of tenses and agreement in long sentences), spelling pronunciations, fatigue, emotional strain, etc. They are typically random and are readily corrected by the learner when his attention is drawn to them. Everybody makes mistakes in both native and second language situations. Errors, on the other hand, are systematic and occur unconsciously by breaking the rules of the target language as a result of faulty learning. A language learner, therefore, does not recognize them. These errors are often habitual and systematic in the second language situation. As Richards et al (1992) put it, error is:

(...) the use of a linguistic item (e. g. a word, a grammatical item, a SPEECH ACT, etc) in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning (95).

Linguistically, Ringbom (1987: 71) explains that an error 'offends against the norm of the language... '. A norm can mainly be related to the 'acceptability' and 'appropriateness' of interlanguage utterances as produced by the foreign language learner (Corder, 1973: 272). From the linguistic point of view, errors are no longer considered as undesirable forms; rather, they are indeed regarded as an essential part of the language learning process. In other words, errors can be considered as beneficial for the learner because they provide an understanding of the underlying processes of second language acquisition.

Learners almost unavoidable produce various types of errors in the written compositions. Corder, 1981: 36) suggests three categories in which errors can occur. These are:

- Graphical or Phonological errors
- Lexical errors
- Syntactical errors.

2.1 Lexical Errors

Generally “lexical error” as Llach (2011: 71) puts it:

A lexical error is the wrong word use of a lexical item in a particular context in comparison with what a native speaker of similar characteristics as the L2 learner (age, educational level, professional and social status) would have produced in the same circumstances. Lexical errors can also be defined as a breach in a lexical norm of the language, which is normally observed by native speakers.

Some linguists explain “lexical error” as meaning “all errors that are not grammatically fit” Others view “lexical error” as a superordinate term for classes of errors such as word formation, collocation, form/semantic confusion and wrong word choice (Llach, 2011: 73). Thus, defining exactly what lexical errors are and how they can be classified is problematic and complex.

Although lexical errors are the most frequently occurring category of errors in written English according to empirical evidence, research in lexical errors receives limited attention. This may be attributable to the fact that they are complicated. Moreover, the error categorization frameworks used in some previous studies have addressed only a relatively limited number of lexical error categories. Hence, this study is an attempt to gain more insight into the various types of lexical errors and their sources.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Objectives of The Study

The objectives of the study include the following:

1. To investigate the types of errors made by Iraqi EFL learners in their writing compositions
2. To analyze those errors committed in their writing skills.

3. To find out the main sources of these errors made by the learners

3.2 Research Questions

In order to conduct the study the following research questions were raised:

1. What are the typical lexical errors types found in the second year Iraqi EFL learners' writing?
2. What are the main sources of these errors made by the learners?

3.3 Significance of the Study

1. It is expected that the present study is to be of value to linguists, students of linguistics and many others who are actually concerned with the teaching/learning process especially teachers and learners of English.
2. It can help the learners to know their mistakes and reducing their errors in composition writing which will facilitate the process of learning the L2.

3.4 Sample of the Study

The participants were 40 Iraqi EFL learners at Al- Nisour University College. They had been taught EFL for approximately ten years. The reason for selecting this particular group of students stems from the fact that those are the only B.A students available at the time of conducting this research. The participants were similar in age, ranging from 19 to 20 years old, but factors such as sex and age were not controlled in this study.

3.5 Instruments and Data Collection

Thirty- two written compositions were used as the instrument of the study to obtain real language from the participants. Subjects were allotted 60 minutes to complete their essays. Although there were no minimum time constraints, they were instructed to write 3-4 paragraph essays. The students were not allowed to use any kind of dictionaries or other supplementary materials while writing their essays. The composition task was to write a descriptive essay. They were free to choose one of the 3 topics given below:

A. Topic One: There are many ways to find a job: newspaper advertisements, Internet job search websites, and personal

recommendations. What do you think is the best way to find a job? Give reasons or examples to support your opinion.

B. Topic Two: Please describe a kind of food that you like/dislike. Describe its characteristics, and explain the reasons why you like/dislike it.

C. Topic Three: Life now is better than it was 100 years ago. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

3.6 Data analysis

In order to determine what types of lexical errors were made by the participants, their compositions were read and corrected at least twice by the two researchers. Subsequently, they worked together to identify and analyze the specific lexical errors in the writings. Lexical errors were identified, counted, interpreted and categorized into the error framework described below. The lexical errors were classified into 10 sub-categories under two main categories: formal and semantic features. Repeated lexical errors within the same compositions were not counted more than once. Some errors proved rather difficult to classify with confidence, as they could be plausibly placed into more than one category. Moreover, sometimes it is difficult to decide whether errors were lexical or syntactic in nature. In contrast to syntactic errors, which involve more than word structure, morphological errors are confined to word structure and therefore cannot be ignored when lexical errors are discussed. In this study, however, only derivational affix errors (for example, prefixes and suffixes) were included.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Categories of Lexical Errors

Classification of lexical errors is made according to James's Model (1998) which was later modified by Hemchua and Schmitt (2006). The taxonomy is divided into two main types of errors, formal and semantic. Based on this model of taxonomies some of the errors presented into on tables. The following figure provides the classification of lexical errors based on James (1998).

i. Formal Errors

1. Formal misselection

1.1. Suffix and Prefix type

1.2 the vowel and the consonant-based type

2. Misformations

2.1. Borrowing (L1 words)

2.2. Coinage (inventing based on L1)

3. Distortion of Meaning

3.1 Omission

3.2 Overinclusion

3.3 Misselection

3.4 Misordering

ii. Semantic errors

1. Confusion of sense relations

1.1 Inappropriate co-hyponyms

1.2 Near synonyms

1.3 Translation from L1

2. Collocation errors

2.1 Grammatical Collocation

2.2 Lexical Collocation

Figure (1): Lexical Error Taxonomy (Adapted from Hemchua & Schmidt, 2006 and James, 1998)

4.1.1 Formal Errors

Formal Errors are sub-divided by Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) into three divisions: formal misselection; misformations and distortion of meaning. The formal misselection category then contains two subcategories: misselection of suffixes and prefixes and vowel and consonant-based type. The misformations category consists of three subcategories: borrowing and coinage. The distortion of the meaning category consists of four subcategories: omission, overinclusion, misselection, and misordering. The analysis of the data yielded to the formal errors categories of lexical errors is explained below.

4.1.1.1 Formal Misselections

The group of errors classified under this category is those erroneous items mistakenly selected between word form and pronunciation close to the word. James (1998) has classified formal misselection

errors into misselection of a prefix and suffix, vowel and consonant-based type and false friends, however, the errors identified in our study fall into the former two categories.

4.1.1.1.1 The Suffix and the Prefix Errors

The suffix and prefix are “a minimal unit of meaning or grammatical function” (Yule, 2006: 63; Aronoff and Fudeman, forthcoming: 2).

- i. The suffix type. They have the same root but different suffixes (for example, considerable/considerate, competition/competitiveness).
- ii. The prefix type. They have the same root but different prefixes (for example, reserve/preserve, consumption/resumption/assumption). (Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006: 9).

4.1.1.1.2 The Vowel and Consonant-based Type

- i. The vowel-based type: seat/set, manual/menial.
- ii. The consonant-based type: save/safe, three/tree (Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006: 9).

The followings are extracted from the writings by the participants:

Error Type	Examples	Correction
The Suffix and prefix type	1. In the <u>bast</u> , people are not <u>worry</u> about how they can get money to insure the future. (suffix)	-In the past, people were not <i>worried</i> about how to get money to ensure their future.
	2. I do yo like a caking (suffix)	- I do like baking a cake
	3. The people <u>inhappy</u> in the past.	The people were <i>unhappy</i> in the past.
The vowel and Consonant-based Type	4. T.V in the <u>bast</u> was whiet and blake (Consonant-based type).	T.V. in the <i>past</i> was white and black.
	5. I am like <u>chouc latte</u> (vowel-based type).	I like <i>chocolate</i> .

Table (1): The Examples of Formal Errors (Formal Misselections)

The examples above illustrate formal misselections errors in some learners’ compositions as can be seen in Table (1). Examples (1) and

(2) show how suffixes have been wrongly chosen. For instance, the learner in the first example seems to formulate his/she word 'worry' on the analogy of other adjectives ending in " 'y' such as 'happy', 'sunny'. 'funny' and so forth. Similarly, in the second example, the learner seems to be forming his 'coined' word 'caking' by generalizing the rule of forming some nouns in English by the addition of 'ing' to the verb infinitives (e. g. speaking, writing, typing, etc.). In fact, this category includes a considerable number of words where letters are misselected such as *interesting (interested)*, *advice (advise)*, *simple (simpler)*, *be do (doing)*. Here the learners fail to select the appropriate suffix to form the correct word to express themselves in such contexts. Thus, this misselection renders such sentences semantically erroneous. In other words, the learners overgeneralize the use of a suffix to more than one stem and this actually happens when learners are in the process of internalizing the lexicon of L2, i.e. English. These errors can, therefore, be said to constitute an intralingual deviation. In example (3), the learner uses the prefix 'in-' and adds it to the adjective 'happy' instead of 'un-'. The wrongly used prefix, namely, 'un-' renders the sentence semantically deviant. This error can, therefore, be similarly classed as intralingual.

The voiceless bilabial plosive consonant /p/ has no counterpart in Arabic. Some Arab learners of English, therefore, almost always replace this sound by its voiced version /b/ because they are almost similar to each other. For example 'past' /pa:st/ → *bast* /ba:st/. The fourth example can explain this tendency. This error may thus be considered interlingual. In fact, this category includes a considerable number of errors of such kind as in *fich (fish)*, *dringing (drinking)*, *spank (spinach)*, and *delites (delicious)*.

Example (5) is a vowel error where the word 'chocolate' /'tʃɒk(ə)lət/ is written as it is pronounced by the learner (chouc_latte). This error can be explained in the same way. Unlike English that has many vowels, Arabic has only three short and long vowels, which makes it difficult for Arabic learners to recognize the subtle differences between the vowels. Other examples from the learners' errors which fall under this category are *borager (burger)*, and *saindoech (sandwich)*. This type of error is usually caused by many factors

including first language transfer, second language system, exposure to English, and language proficiency.

4.1.1.2 Misformations

Misformation refers to the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure. According to James (1998: 149), formal misformations are errors that can be created by the learner from the resources of the target language or in the mother tongue. He adds that these words “can originate in the MT or be created by the learner from the sources of the TL itself.” The formal misformations errors identified in our study fall into two categories, viz. borrowing and coinage.

Error Type	Examples	Correction
Borrowing	6. I make <u>nakhlat</u> sugar and egg and <u>tahen</u> .	I <i>mix</i> the sugar, eggs and <i>flour</i> .
Coinage	7. In resturant so international with <u>sused</u> with vagetabl.	The international restaurant has a tasty vegetable <i>soup</i> .

Table (2): The Examples of Formal Errors (Misformations)

4.1.1.2.1 Borrowing

Borrowing is the first language words used in the target language without any change, for example, I shoot him with gun in kopf <In German kopf = head> (Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006: 9). In other words, borrowing is a strategy used by L2 learners when they feel unable to find the exact word and/or phrase in L2 to use in an L2 utterance as exemplified in the following sentences. The Arabic word, ‘*Nakhlet*’ means ‘mix’ is used in example (6) because the learner lacks the word ‘mix’ in his/her English repertoire. Similarly, the Arabic word ‘*Tahin*’, in the same sentence (i.e. example (6)), has been borrowed from Arabic instead of using the bracketed words, namely, ‘flour’). Other examples of this category include a considerable number of errors of such kind as in *t'am* (*taste*), *shaklaho* (*its shape*) and *raihataho* (*its smell*). An explanation of this use could be the lack of such English words in the learners’ repertoire and hence, what the learner does is just borrow Arabic words, instead. In other words, this error occurred since the students did not have adequate lexical knowledge of English. They directly adopt

those words from their mother tongue without any effort to change it to the English. Thus, James (1998: 149-150) describes such a tendency stating that such errors originate in L1 of the learners. He adds that such errors are a result of “those [words] created for TL from MT resources.

4.1.1.2.2 Coinage

Coinage errors are committed when the learner 'coins' or invents a totally new word which does not exist in the target language following a certain existent rule on word formation. The coined words can be of Arabic or English origin. The word ‘susred’ in sentence (7) is a typical example of this class of errors. Here the learner invents a new word ‘susred’, which is a derived noun from the English noun ‘soup’. Such errors reflect the very low level of the learners’ proficiency in English.

4.1.1.3 Distortion of Meaning

The errors which are involved in this category do not exist in the L2. They are considered the type of errors that are committed by the learners due to the misapplication of the target language without L1 interference or misspelling. James (1998: 150) classifies distortions into five types: (omission, overinclusion, misselection, misordering, and blending).

Error Type	Examples	Correction
Omission	8. ketchup and cheese and <u>delicious</u> taste. 9. I am like to eat at <u>restrants.</u>	-The ketchup and cheese make the pizza tasting <i>delicious</i> . - I like to eat at restaurants.
Overinclusion	10. In our days we <u>visitting</u> a lot of countrys.	Nowadays, we are <i>visiting</i> a lot of countries.
Misselection	11. It is not <u>hialthe</u> but i Loved.	It is not <i>healthy</i> but I love it.
Misordering	12. in the restrent and pizza <u>whtie</u> coup of tea in the morning.	I order pizza and a cup of tea in the morning. (<i>white</i> makes no sense in this sentence)

Table (3): The Examples of Formal Errors (Distortion of Meaning)

4.1.1.3.1 Omission

According to Cook (1997: 474), omission is classified as one of the spelling errors committed by students who have a gap or lack in their knowledge of the second language. It is defined as the deletions of some letters. Hemchua and & Schmitt (2006: 10) give the word ‘intresting <interesting>’ as an example of this category. Errors of this category are detected especially when learners commit spelling errors by omitting one or more letters from a word and such omission results in semantically deviant utterances. This category includes the largest number of errors committed in this study. The following examples demonstrate the issue in question.

In the above examples, the words ‘delicious’ and ‘restaurants’, in examples (8) and (9) have been spelt incorrectly by omitting one or more letters from them. The omission of letters errors varies between omitting vowel and consonant letters. In the above examples, for instance, the vowel letters ‘au’ are omitted from the word ‘restaurants’. These errors were probably influenced by the students’ poor English level and vocabulary learning beliefs as well as strategy preference. Other examples of this category taken from the learners’ compositions are *oreng* (*orange*), *vanilea* (*vanilla*), *Exapoul* (*example*), *delicous* (*delicious*).

4.1.1.3.2 Overinclusion

It is defined by Cook (1997: 474) as insertion or adding extra letters. It is the opposite of omission; here the students add the inexistent item that should not be appeared in the correct word as example (10) illustrates. In example (10), the learner overgeneralizes the doubling rule when a verb ends in a consonant preceded by a vowel, the last consonant sometimes must be doubled before adding the –ed or –ing endings as in ‘cut’ ‘cutting’. Here, the learner overgeneralizes this rule to the verb ‘visit’ and thus doubles the letter ‘t’. This type of errors is committed by students who have difficulties in spelling. Other examples illustrate this issue are *borager* (*burger*), *peaper* (*pepper*), *sealt* (*salt*), and *dallashas* (*delicious*). In fact, these errors could be seen as a result of overgeneralizing an existing rule in L2. Thus they will be classified as intralingual errors reflect the incorrect generalization of the rules within the target language.

4.1.1.3.3 Misselections

Errors in this category are classified as one of the spelling errors committed by students. Cook (1997: 474) explains that misselections are committed when the learner selects an incorrect letter for a correct one. In example (11), for instance, the learner writes the adjective 'healthy' /'heɪ.lθi/ as 'hailthe' /'heil.θ/ where he/she replaces the sound /e/ with /ei/ and omits the sound /i/ when using the silent [e] at the end of the word. Such errors are due to phonological system. Raimes (1985: 247) suggests that such misspellings errors occur because unskilled L2 writers “concentrate on the challenge of finding the right words and sentences to express their meaning instead of editing.” Thus, these errors result in some words which are non-existent in L2 and hence, leading to semantically deviant sentences. The only source of such errors is L2, i.e. English. More examples illustrate this issue are *kake* (*cake*), *saindoech* (*sandwich*), *moath* (*mouth*), *turki* (*turkey*), *think* (*thing*), *kitchep* (*ketchup*), *onien* (*onion*), *chkin*, *vanilea* (*vanilla*), *bascait* (*biscuit*), *Jasst* (*just*), *becous* (*because*), *incloding* (*including*), *katchap* (*ketchup*), *lees* (*less*), *hialthe* (*healthy*), *race- rice*, *dallashas* (*delicious*), *Suas* (*sauce*). The correct spellings of the words intended are bracketed against each one.

4.1.1.3.4 Misorderings

Cook (1997: 474) points out that misorderings are reversing the position of letters. Also, it is known as transpositions in spelling errors. In sentence (11), for instance, the learner reverses the place of letter [t] with the letter [i] *whtie* <white>. This error is possibly influenced by their poor English level. In addition, James (1998: 150) emphasizes that such errors are a result of intralingual caused by the developmental strategies the learners are undergone. In fact, this category includes a considerable number of words where letters are misordered such as *tow* (*two*), *because* (*because*), *frist* (*first*) and *biulding* (*building*).

4.1.2 Semantic Errors

Hemchua and & Schmitt (2006) classify semantic errors into two types:

4.1.2.1 Confusion of Sense Relations

In this category, errors occur when the learners select inappropriate words to convey the intended meaning in the TL. They do not understand the different meanings of an English word and its usage in different contexts. Confusion of sense relations divided into three categories: inappropriate co-hyponyms, near synonyms and translation from L1.

Error Type	Examples	Correction
Inappropriate co-hyponyms	13. The <u>girls</u> in past could not do anything want.	Those days, <i>women</i> could not do whatever they want.
Near synonyms	14. People couldn't <u>enter</u> universities in the past. 15. We can <u>see</u> the T. V.	-In the past, people could not <i>get into</i> universities. - We can <i>watch</i> T.V.
Translation from L1	16. helped each other in <u>difficult and happy</u> time	They helped each other <i>through thick and thin</i> .

Table (4): The Examples of Semantics Errors (Confusion of Sense Relations)

4.1.2.1.1 Inappropriate co-hyponyms

Errors in table (4) exhibit semantically erroneous utterances due to the learners' confusion in the use of the correct lexical item. Hyponymy corresponds to inclusion of meaning: a hyponym "include[s] the meaning of a more general word", called "superordinate" (Saeed, 1997: 68). Here the learners have a problem in differentiating the relation of inclusion in some lexical items, from the use of some words which are carried more specific term rather than a general one or the inappropriate use of co-hyponyms. In example (13), for instance, the learner used a less general lexical item (a hyponym, 'girl') instead of its superordinate 'women'. Such error results from the confusion between 'women' and 'girl' as they belong to the lexical field of 'gender'. The restrictions at the L1 semantic level reflects the learner's semantic competence when writing in English. Hence, such lexical errors result from their L1 interference and inadequate acquisition of such terms and their uses in the

learners' developmental semantic competence in the learning process.

4.1.2.1.2 Near Synonyms

Near synonyms is a sense of the relation between words which have the same meanings (Crystal, 2003: 450). In the occurrences of semantic errors, some of the students seem to have a problem in differentiating the use of some words which are close in meaning but they are different in their use in a certain context. As Griffiths (2006: 28-39) states that there is a difference in style, in geographical distribution, in formality, in vulgarity, in the attitude of the speaker, in collocation, in connotation, and possibly some other ways. Examples (14) and (15) exemplify the issue in question. The words 'enter' and 'go/ get into' are different though they have the same meaning. Thus the intended meaning was not expressed by the synonym used. Moreover, in Arabic, 'see' and 'watch' have only one Arabic equivalent to express their meaning of 'ya'raa'. Here the learner thinks that he/she would use the words in the set of synonyms in an interchangeable way. The same thing can be said about the rest of other examples fall into this category as 'past' and 'history', 'hear' and 'listen'. Thus such errors are of an interlingual nature, i.e. they are of L1 source.

4.1.2.1.3 Translation From L1

Errors in this category are committed when the Arabic-speaking learners directly translate a word, phrase and/or a sentence from Arabic into English to convey what they want to say in L2 by using the literal translation in L1 (Tarone, 1981: 62; Arabskis, 1979: 32-3). Such errors are exemplified in the following:

* Helped each other in a difficult and happy time.

The underlined expression "in difficult and happy time" is correct in Arabic, but incorrect in English. What the learner did here is actually formulated his/her sentence in Arabic, translate it and then transfer it into English. Thus, these semantic errors are, accordingly, classified as interlingual errors i.e. the source of which is L1, viz. Arabic.

4.1.2.2 Collocation Errors

Different scholars as Becker (1975), Martin (1984), Richards (1992) and Nation (1990) think that collocation errors depend on the

learner's knowledge of the second language which involves the learning of complete collocational chunks of language as well the learning of vocabulary and words. This kind of taxonomy is divided into two types: 'grammatical collocation' and 'lexical collocation' (Benson: 1985, 61).

Error Type	Examples	Correction
Grammatical Collocation	17. That is <u>suitable with</u> our life.	- That is suitable for our life.
Lexical Collocation	18. We now can <u>gather money</u> online. 19. They <u>work deeply</u> .	- Nowadays, we can make money online. - They work hard.

Table (5): The Examples of Semantics Errors (Collocation Errors)

4.1.2.2.1 Grammatical Collocation

Grammatical collocations consist of a noun, or an adjective or a verb, plus a particle (a preposition, an adverb or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive, a gerund, or clause) (ibid: 61). The followings are the examples: 'aim at', 'agree with', 'extend to', 'good at', 'depend on/upon' etc. Carter (1987, 56) points out that the grammatical collocation of a word is a complex network of different sorts of grammatical associations with other items that determine the place this word occupies in certain language constructions. Such errors are exemplified in the following:

In example (17), prepositions that occur together with 'suitable' are *as, for, and to*. The sentence, 'It is suitable for us' is acceptable instead of 'suitable with'. In other words, in English, 'suitable' does not normally accompanied by the preposition 'with'. The learner does not seem to be familiar with the grammatical collocation of the adjective 'suitable', which makes him resort to transfer. Thus, the learner is transferring into English the Arabic use of 'suitable' together with 'with'. Such error seems to originate in the learner's mother tongue. Thus it can be categorized as interlingual.

4.1.2.2.2 Lexical collocation

Lexical collocation is used to refer to the relations between two or more content words that 'naturally' appear together in the sentence. Benson (1985: 62-65) shows that this kind of collocation is different

from grammatical collocations which contains two equal lexical components rather than a subordinate element. He divides the lexical collection into three parts:

- i. adjective + noun combinations such as 'heavy traffic'
- ii. noun + verb combinations such as 'blood circulates/flows', and
- iii. verb + noun combinations such as 'set an alarm clock'.

The errors grouped under this category are those made in the wrong choice of words accompanying other words in the language. In example (18), for instance, the learner seems to translate literally the Arabic expression normally occurring in this context. In English, 'gather' and 'money' do not normally collocate. The learner seems to be transferring the above expression from Arabic where 'gather money' (yajma: l-meal) is an acceptable collocation. Similarly, 'deep' does not normally collocates with 'work', as example (19) shows. In English, it is 'hard' rather than 'deep' which normally collocates with 'work' in the above example. Falling back upon the Arabic use of these words, the learner fails to perceive this difference of collocation. This error can, therefore, be described as interlingual.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implication

To conclude the above research, formal and semantic errors committed by Iraqi EFL learners are classified into several categories and subcategories. Generally speaking, the formal errors are classified into three divisions, viz. misselection, misformation, and distortion of meaning, each of these categories has been classified into further categories and subcategories. Semantic errors are classified into three major categories, viz. confusion of sense relations, collocation errors, and connotation, each of these categories also has been classified into further categories and subcategories. According to the data of this study, the most common lexical errors found in the learners' writings are formal errors. The underlying sources for most lexical errors in our study can be traced back to the role of mother tongue/native language interference (interlingual) and inadequate acquisition of the target language (intralingual). In the above analysis, the phonological interference shows that the students tend to spell words according to their pronunciation in their first language as in choosing between /p/ vs.

/b/, the word /bast/ for/past/. It has also been found that the literal translation of Arabic as in the case of collocation errors, grammatical collocation, and applying Arabic rules to English are due to first language interference and the poor English level of the learners' proficiency. In addition, L2 based errors are obvious as in the case of misordering, overinclusion in distortion due to spelling formal misselection. In order to reduce and overcome these errors, learners, on the base of knowing the difference between English and Arabic and the specific rules of English language, should increase language input in various ways. In the meantime, through speaking and writing, learners should try to consolidate vocabulary knowledge and gradually improve their vocabulary skills. Moreover, we suggest teachers should try to enhance the students' phonemic awareness and concentrate on teaching the skill of writing to help learners in eliminating the number of lexical errors found in their written compositions. Writing errors can reflect strategies that language learners use and indicate the process of acquiring the target language. Consequently, these would provide language teachers with practical aspects in order to develop methodology as well as materials for remedial teaching.

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