LEXICAL CHOICE: INVESTIGATING LEXICAL LEARNING STRATEGIES OF ARABIC-SPEAKING LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

By

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ABSTRACT


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This study of vocabulary acquisition was designed to address two central questions:

1) Is theoreticians' hypothesis that overgeneralization and lexical transfer are major lexical learning strategies employed by L2 learners in dealing with categories which have been classified as collocation, metaphor, idioms, synonyms and relational opposites sound?

2) Do Arab learners of English adopt further strategies in handling the categories under investigation?

For these purposes, the researcher developed a vocabulary test consisting of 100 items cued to extract vocabulary items related to the strategies hypothesized to have been basic causes of errors among L2 learners. The design of the test, also, allowed to explore if further procedures were used by
Arab learners of English. The items of the test were
distributed equally among the problematic categories.

The sample of the study consisted of 200 Arabic speaking
students majoring in English at Yarmouk University of Jordan.
Twenty one were in their second year, a hundred and thirteen in
the third year and sixty seven in the fourth year. English
majors were chosen because their performance could be more
significant than that of other Arab learners of English.

The test was divided equally into two parts, one part for
one session. To maintain representativeness, entire sections
were tested. Two hundred answer sheets of the study were
selected on the basis of completing the maximum number of test
items.

The learners’ responses to the test items were scored as
erroneous or errorless. Imprecise vocabulary items were
analysed as to the strategy followed by respondents in
producing each word. Isolated strategies included:
overgeneralization (subclassifies to: approximation, use of
synonyms, use of generic terms and use of converse terms),
lexical transfer (subcategorizes to: literal translation and
derivation transfer), avoidance, paraphrase, word-coinage, use
of similar forms and language-switching.

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The influence of each tactic on lexical selection was displayed in a table which included numbers and percentages. Literal translation was the most predominant strategy and accounted for 24.6% of the total number of errors. The least followed procedure was derivation transfer and caused 0.1% of the total number of errors.

The study deemed researchers' claims that over-generalization and lexical transfer are major processes in lexical choice credible. Strategies related to these operations were the cause of the highest number of errors, respectively. Over-generalization affected all the investigated categories and lexical transfer influenced them except for relational opposites.

The students' level of performance was judged as unsatisfactory especially with the fact that they are English specialists, and a high percentage of them are seniors. A large number of daily life vocabulary were misused by these learners and various types of errors were produced by them.

In the light of these facts, a number of recommendations are suggested by the writer. Course-plan designers in the English Department at Yarmouk University of Jordan, who are partially held responsible for the downgrading of vocabulary in the department, are recommended to revise the plan and introduce courses which improve learners' level in
communicative English and equip them with an appropriate vocabulary reservoir. Moreover, students are advised to learn vocabulary in context and expose themselves to different varieties of the target language. Also, researchers can contribute to decreasing lexical errors among L2 learners by stressing research in vocabulary fields which have not ceased being challenging for these learners.