Yarmouk University
Faculty of Arts
Department of English Language & Literature

Task Influence on the Acquisition of Lexis
(A Case Study from Jordanian Universities)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics to the Department of English Language and
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by

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Yarmouk University, 1984

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Abstract

This study examines some lexical errors made by senior English specialists at the Department of English at Yarmouk university. In specific, it intends to:

(a) Identify and contrast lexical errors made by seniors of English in their responses to a highly controlled translation task and an intuitive lexical judgement task.

(b) Classify the identified errors in terms of frequency, type and other possible causes.

(c) Verify the findings of previous studies which used a task similar to ones used here and provide evidence as to whether lexical errors are task-oriented or not.

(d) Suggest certain techniques that may facilitate the acquisition of lexis by Jordanian learners of English.

The sample of the study consists of 100 Yarmouk University students in the English Department during the first semester in 1994. All the subjects are fourth-year English majors. They are required to set for one -session task, which consists of 185 English sentences. The first task e.g (controlled translation task) consists of 85 English sentences with a blank in each sentence and the subjects
are asked to give the appropriate English equivalent to the Arabic item given at the end of each sentence. Data collected and errors analyzed. Analysis shows that 32% of the subjects' responses are incorrect. Major error types found in the data are synonymity, literal translation, similar forms and collocation. The frequency of each type is then calculated, where the incorrect responses due to synonymity, blank, literal translation and similar forms are found to be the most frequent types (34.1%, 20.4%, 16.6% and 8%) respectively.

As for the possible causes of errors, it is found that 66.6% of the total number of errors are due to L1 interference. Whereas 11.4% are thought to be L2 errors and 22.2% are induced by avoidance (blank) and errors of multiple causes.

Regarding the second task (e.g. Intuitive lexical judgement task), it consists of 100 English sentences and the subjects are asked to:

(a) Identify sentences containing lexical errors.
(b) Underline the lexical error.
(c) Supply the most appropriate correct answer.

The subjects are told in advance that each sentence includes only one lexical error. The results show that:

(a) The total number of incorrect identification is 1369 which comprises the percentage of 34.2%.
(b) The incorrect underlining percentage is 52.1%
(c) The inappropriate suppletion percentage is 67.1%.

By comparing and contrasting the results of the two tasks, the data show that the subject's performance on the second task is rather poor and that their errors, especially, in their responses to the second and third steps (e.g. underlining and suppletion), have been quite many.

Such results have to encourage researchers, especially, applied linguists, educationalists, school teachers and university lecturers to modify their techniques and approaches to produce new tasks to capture all possible lexical errors made by Jordanian students.