

LEXICAL ERRORS IN NEWS ITEM TEXTS WRITTEN BY ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract

Words construct the building blocks of language. If they are well chosen, a writer can easily deliver his/her intended meanings. In the contrary, when they are inappropriately selected, they will bring about confusion for the readers. Therefore, it is important for language teachers to examine the students mastery in choosing words to write. This paper aims at identifying lexical errors in news item texts written by students of English Education Department. The finding showed that semantic errors were more frequent than formal errors. The semantic errors made up 58.62% of the total errors. Meanwhile, formal errors were as many as 41.38%. The result of the study can be used as considerations for the teaching of vocabulary for English Departments students.

Keywords: *lexis, errors, news item text*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is the first aspect that learners acquire from a new language. As they learn more, they know more words. Having wide range of words benefit them. They can listen, speak, and write better. In the contrary, a limited vocabulary hinders successful communication. Nation (2001) states that there is close relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language. Vocabulary knowledge makes language use possible and language use improves vocabulary knowledge.

The study of words covers several terms namely polysemy, antonyms, synonyms, superonym, hyponym, etc. Polysemy is when the same collection of sounds and letters can have many different meanings (Harmer, 2001:18). For example when we use the word *table*. You can eat off a *table*, or you can *table* a motion at a seminar. You can summarise information in a *table* too. Superonym is word that is more general than another given word. Meanwhile, hyponym is word that indicates a more specific meaning than another related word. Thus, *kiwi, jackfruit, salak, and durian* are all hyponyms of *fruit*.

To master those mentioned things, learners need to make an effort. Those who fail to use the required words will make lexical errors. These lexical errors are very likely to hinder communication. Of course they are less tolerated by readers as compared to syntactic errors (Carter, 1998). Lexical knowledge is one of the most important factors in a academic success (Verhallen and Schoonen, 1989). Research has shown that lexical errors are the most common errors in written English (Lennon, 1991). They influence the quality of academic writing (Engber, 1995). The problem probably appears because lexical selection has mainly of content words, which convey the intended message (Hemchua and Schmitt, 2006).

Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) examined 20 compositions written by Thai students at a university in Bangkok. They found out that semantic errors had higher percentage (63.22%) than formal errors (36.78%). The students had difficulties in semantics, especially near synonyms and preposition partners. They argue that vocabulary learning strategies can be effective and should be introduced into the classroom so that the students can find their own ways to cope with problems. For university students from intermediate level onwards, students can be trained to use dictionaries effectively. This result is in line with a research conducted by Shalaby et al. (2009). They analyzed 96 writing samples written by female students in a prep-year program at Taibah University in Al Madinah Al Munawwarrah, Saudi

Arabia. The result showed that the semantic errors had much higher frequency (60,45%). Meanwhile, the formal lexical errors were 39.55%. The study suggests that teacher should refer back to students' L1 in foreign language classes where students share the same native language instead of letting students to make their own comparisons and associations with their native language. Also, students should be trained in how to effectively use an English monolingual dictionary and a thesaurus. Meanwhile, different finding was offered by Andre and Jurianto (2015). They examined 39narrativewritingsofthetenthgradestudentsofSMA Negeri 9 Surabaya. According to the data of their study, formal errors became the highest frequent errors found in the students' narrativewritings. Besides, the result of this study on the production of formal error provides an important issue where most of the students seem to have a serious problem in determining the correct form of lexical items.

This study aims at examining the error types of Purworejo Muhammadiyah University students. The research questions are:

1. What are types of lexical errors found in news item texts written by English Department students?
2. Which errors are more frequent to occur?

METHODS

Participants

The participants were 23 students of English Department Students of Purworejo Muhammadiyah University. They consist of 6 male students and 17 female students. Their age was similar, around 19 to 20 years old. They took Genre-Based Writing class. In this class, students were required to write several genre texts including recount, description, procedure, news item, etc.

Procedure

The instrument used in this study was writing test. Students were asked to report a *Ramadhan* event in the form of news item text. The minimum length was 300 words. They could consult dictionary. The text was then uploaded on their own blogs.

To analyze the data, the researcher used the lexical error classification proposed by Hemchua and Schmitt (2006). There are two main types: formal errors and semantic errors.

Formal errors

There are three types of formal errors: (1) formal misselection, (2) misformations, and (3) distortions.

1. Formal misselection

- 1.1 The suffix type (they have the same root but different suffixes)

For example: *preference/preferable*

- 1.2 The prefix type (they have the same root but different prefixes)

For examples: *reserve/preserve*

- 1.3 The vowel-based type

For example: *creature/crature*

- 1.4 The consonant-based type

For example: *save/safe*

2. Misformations

These are words that do not exist in the target language. The source of errors is from the learner's mother tongue.

- 2.1 Borrowing (words from mother tongue used in the target language)

For example:

We have to respect kyai (Indonesian word meaning priest)

2.2 Coinage (inventing a word from mother tongue)

For example: *I like walking walking (in Indonesian means jalan-jalan)*

2.3 Calque (translation of a word or a phrase from mother tongue words)

For example: *They are members of rock cadet (in Indonesian means karang taruna)*

3. Distortions

These words also do not exist in the L2. However, the errors are the result of misapplication of the target language without L1 interference.

3.1 Omission

For example: *intresting/interesting*

3.2 Overinclusion

For example: *writting/writing*

3.3 Misselection

For example: *delitouse/delicious*

3.4 Misordering

For example: *shcool/school*

3.5 Blending

For example: *travell (travel + travelled)*

Semantic Errors

1. Confusion of sense relations

1.1 Using a superonym for a hyponym (a more general term is used where a specific one is needed)

For example: *We have modern equipment (appliances) in our house.*

1.2 Using hyponym for a superonym (an overly specific term is used)

For example: *The colonels (officers) live in the castle.*

1.3 Using inappropriate co-hyponyms

For example: *I think the city has good communication (transportation).*

1.4 Using a wrong near synonyms

For example: *a regretful (penitent) sinner.*

2. Collocation errors

Collocation is a word or phrase that is commonly used together with another word or phrase and sounds natural and correct for native speakers. Inappropriate collocation may not be fully wrong but rather strange.

2.1 Semantically determined word selection

For example: *The dish is ripe (ready to serve).*

2.2 Statistically weighted preferences

For example: *An army has suffered big (heavy) losses.*

2.3 Arbitrary combination and irreversible binomials

For example: *hike-hitch (hitch-hike)*

3. Connotation errors

Connotation is the emotional implications and associations that a word may carry. The connotation of a word can be positive, negative, or neutral.

For example: *He has juvenile appearance (look childish)/He has youthful appearance (look young).*

4. Stylistic errors

4.1 Verbosity (the quality of using more words than needed)

For example: *They will gather together in a hall/They will gather in a hall.*

4.2 Underspecification (the meaning is unclear)

For example: *They provided tools to knit and can be carried to go home.*

By using this lexical errors taxonomy, the researchers examined the students' texts on their blogs. Words indicated as errors were highlighted. Then, these errors were classified based on the taxonomy. The frequency of errors are also calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of errors found in students' news item texts

Formal Errors

There were three sub-types of formal errors:

1. Formal misselection

1.1 Suffix type

There were as many as 21 errors. These are the examples:

a) *This organization has intensively gathering.*

b) *The audience can learn more about the religious.*

In the first example the student used *intensively* instead of *intensive*. Meanwhile the second example showed that student chose wrong suffix. It should be a noun rather than an adjective.

1.2 Vowel-based type

The frequency of this error was 5. These are the examples:

a) *during the rice*

b) *mounthly meeting*

The first example showed that student wrote wrong vowel. It should be *race*. In the second example the student added extra vowel *u* in the word *monthly*.

1.3 Consonant-based type

There were 2 errors under this category. They are:

a) *to safe young generation*

b) *liye guidelines*

The first example should be *save* and the second one should be *life*.

2. Misformations

2.1 Borrowing

There were 4 errors here. The examples are:

a) *They have to keep ketauhidan.*

b) *The examples given by nabi.*

In the example a) the student found it difficult to translate the word *ketauhidan* into English. That is why Indonesian word was chosen. The word should be written as *oneness of God*. In the example b) student also had no idea to express the word *nabi* in the target language. It should be written as *prophet*.

2.2 Calque

There were 14 errors. These are the examples:

a) *His presence was enough to give colorin the competition.*

b) *when it entered the sahoor time*

In the first example the student wanted to say *Kehadirannya cukup memberi warna dalam kompetisi itu*. In English it should be *His presence could enliven the competition*.

In the second example the student simply translated the phrase *ketika memasuki* to be *when it entered* without considering the context. The clause should be *when it was time for sahoor* instead.

3. Distortions

3.1 Omission

There were 2 errors found for this category. They are:

a) *participans*

b) *itended*

In the example a) the letter *t* was missing. Meanwhile, in the example b) the letter *n* was absent.

Semantic Errors

1. Confusion of sense relations

1.1 Near synonyms

There were 12 errors. Here are the examples:

a) *The participants studied knitting.*

b) *She said about the history of the organization..*

In the example a) the student failed to use correct word. The word *study* can mean being a student or enrolling at an institution whereas the context does not require that meaning. The correct choice should be *learn* which means acquiring or gaining knowledge or skills. The same case applies to example b). The word *said* is inappropriate in this context. Instead, the student should write *She talked about the history of the organization.*

2. Collocation errors

2.1 Semantic word selection

There were 41 errors under this category. The examples are:

a) *The Chairman of Central Java Legislative*

b) *He officiated the title.*

In the first example the student used inappropriate word. The correct choice of word is *parliament*. The word that best suits the second example is *the competition*.

3. Stylistic Errors

3.1 Verbosity

There were 2 errors. They were:

a) *Then the next event that is praying Maghrib.*

b) *At the third of the night*

The phrase written by the student was ineffective. To simplify the phrase, the better choice is *the next event* for the first example and *at third night* for the second example.

3.2 Underspecification

There were 13 errors found in the texts. Here are the examples:

a) *This agenda be intended to make everyone income money.*

b) *when closing the participant feel less*

These two examples were confusing since the meaning was unclear and might bring about misunderstanding for the readers.

More frequently occurring errors

The following table shows the frequency of the errors found in the news item texts.

Table 1
Errors Frequency Found in the News Item Text

Formal Errors	Freq.	Semantic Errors	Freq.
1. Suffix type	21	1. Near synonyms	12
2. Vowel-based type	5	2. Semantic word selection	41
3. Consonant-based type	2	3. Verbosity	2
4. Borrowing	4	4. Underspecification	13
5. Calque	14		
6. Omission	2		
Total	48	Total	68
Percentage	41.38%	Percentage	58.62%

Of 116 errors, the frequency of formal errors was 48 or 41.38%. As many as 21 errors occurred in suffix type. This indicates that students found it problematic to choose the correct part of speech. Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002) argued that the main cause of this is the lack of knowledge of words in a word family. Students may have understood the meaning and the spelling of a word, but they have poor mastery of grammatical patterns. This results in failure to use the correct derivative in a particular context. Another frequent error was calque. Lack of reading or listening may cause these errors. Limited exposure of English resources prevents students from imitating appropriate expressions commonly used by native speakers. As a result, they end up by taking their L1 phrases and then literally translate them word-for-word into L2.

Meanwhile, the frequency of semantic errors was 68 or 58.62%. Thus, it can be concluded that semantic errors occurred more frequently in the news item text written by English Education Department students of Purworejo Muhammadiyah University. Semantic word selection was the most common error in this study, followed by underspecification type. Semantic knowledge poses more difficulties for students. This covers various word knowledge facets. Schmitt (2000: 17-18) argued that word knowledge is a challenging element that learners are not likely to master until later in the acquisition process. It can be concluded that students had mastered the formal aspects of the words but they could not apply semantic knowledge yet.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the students had greater difficulties in semantics. Sonaiya (1991) points out that semantics errors are because of overgeneralization and the failure of distinctive awareness. Teaching the knowledge of related lexical items differences are, therefore, suggested to be carried out by English teachers. Meanwhile, under formal error category, errors in using the suffix are worth noticing. Jiang (2000) argues that morphological knowledge is not automatic. Students' awareness should always be raised. The finding of this study also showed that students had lack of vocabulary in their lexicon. It is important to distinguish the differences between mother tongue and target language. The coverage includes knowledge on polysemy, cultural differences, phonology, etc. Using the monolingual English dictionary is also recommended. This kind of dictionary offers things like knowledge of synonyms, hyponyms, etc.

Brewster et al., (1992) propose some techniques in teaching vocabulary: a) using objects (the use of realia, visual aids, and demonstration); b) drawing (objects are drawn on the whiteboard or on flashcards); c) using illustration and pictures (posters, flashcards, wall charts, magazine pictures, board drawings, stick figures and photographs); d) contrast (contrasting a word with its opposite); e) enumeration (a collection of items that is a complete, ordered listing of all of the items in that collection); f) mime, expressions and gestures; g) guessing from context (text and non-textual context); h) eliciting (simply giving students a list of words to learn); i) translation (when dealing with incidental vocabulary, checking students' comprehension and pointing out similarities or differences between first and second language, when these potentially cause errors).

Besides those techniques, some vocabulary teaching strategies are available. Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) point out that teachers can use the following strategies: a) guessing from context; b) using word parts and mnemonic techniques to remember words and c) using vocabulary cards to remember L1-L2 word pairs. Similarly, Murcia (2001) offers three strategies. First is guessing meaning from context because a context is rich enough to give adequate clues to guess the word's meaning. Second is mnemonic devices in the form of keyword technique. Wherever students hear the target word, they are reminded of the keyword. Third is vocabulary notebooks as memory aids in independent learning.

In short, teachers should consider some aspects in teaching vocabulary. Before giving vocabulary items to students, teachers are obliged to see the type of the vocabulary, the students' level and characteristics, and also the effectiveness of the techniques for the learners (Alqahtani, 2015). Another important note is that teachers have to make sure that the vocabulary teaching is fun and meaningful for students so the new vocabulary item they get in the classroom can stay longer in their lexicons.

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