

## *The Effects of the Frequency of Lexical Errors on the Quality of EFL Learners' Writing Through Email Communication*

**Dr. Ahmed Hasan Seifeddin**

Professor of Curriculum and Instruction  
(TEFL). Faculty of Education at Shibeen  
El Koum - El Monofya University

**Dr. Hanan Gamal Mohamed Ebedy**

Lecturer of Curriculum and Instruction  
(TEFL). AL-Ma'aref High Institute for Languages and  
Translation

### **Abstract**

*This study seeks to investigate the effects of the frequency of lexical errors on the assessment of compositions written by the primary school learners, and factors that cause lexical errors in their writing in English through email communication. The data, 182 compositions, were gathered from 51 sixth grade learners during the second semester of 2015. The results revealed that the students had the greatest problem with formal mis-selection of words in lexical error category. The results showed that the type of writing prompt seemed to have an effect on the frequency of occurrence of lexical errors. Participants made more mistakes on interlingual/transfer errors than on intralingual/developmental errors. Learners also had intralingual errors due to the overgeneralizations and partial exposure to the target language. In addition, learners also included internet linguistic features in their writing. A low negative correlation was found between the holistic scores and the frequency of lexical errors. The results also provided evidence that as the frequency of lexical errors decreases the quality of the compositions relatively seems to increase. Some implications are drawn this study. Teachers can include these errors in the teaching, and they should provide a context where fluent and accurate language use should be modeled to learners.*

### **Introduction**

English learners' errors should be analyzed carefully because these errors show the process of learning a language. The learners' errors are very important providing insight into

how far a learner has progressed in acquiring a language and showing how much more the learner needs to learn. There is a general consensus among researchers on the crucial role of lexis in language learning and teaching. Lexical knowledge in second language is fundamental to the development of second language proficiency. The end of Primary education represent important milestones in the learners' foreign language (FL) acquisition process. The FL proficiency achieved at the end of this educational stage establishes an important benchmark worth describing. Lexical errors are very interesting from this point of view, because they provide researchers with insightful information that help determine the evolution of the lexical profile of learners at this stage. Furthermore, lexical errors might also help in discriminating among proficiency levels.

According to Verspoor et al. (2012), it has been frequently attested that lexical measures change as proficiency increases. They found that the lexicon of the learners changes subtly and slowly across proficiency levels, developing towards more sophistication, accuracy, and fluency. The role of errors in learners' writings is not as straightforward, though. It seems reasonable to think that as learners grow older and their knowledge of the L2 progresses, they will perform better, or in any case differently, than low(er) proficient peers. Thus, different proficiency levels may have varying impacts and consequences in L2 acquisition. Verspoor et al. (2012) believe that it has been proved that, although all learners make errors, the more advanced learner makes fewer errors. However, some other studies (Torras & Celaya, 2001; Cenoz, 2003; and García Lecumberri & Gallardo, 2003) show that there is a qualitative change rather than a quantitative one, and that error tallies do not decrease when considered globally. The amount and the type of errors produced vary with age and proficiency (e.g. Celaya & Torras, 2001; and Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2003). It is our intention here to address this issue in the particular case of lexical errors.

Traditionally, writing is defined as the paper-based modality; however, many writings today are happening through

computer-based medium. Today's learners use computers as a tool to learning, and teachers have to adopt the use of technology to teach. Many studies (Kim, 2011; Li & Zhu, 2013; and Vurdien, 2013) have employed computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the language learning in the different contexts. CMC can be either synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous communication is often referred to as real-time communication (e.g., chat, Messenger). Asynchronous CMC refers to communication is not real time. Both of users have to wait and receive the message in a delayed time. For example, email is the most popular form of asynchronous CMC. Many foreign language studies have included the use of email to develop writing skills (Levy, 1997; and Chaffee-Sorace, 1999).

However, lexis is one of the major problems that confront EFL learners and due to their 'anemic vocabulary, they are unable to communicate their ideas as clearly as they would like to. Also, they are unable to grasp the ideas transmitted to them. Moreover, writing ability is hampered by EFL learners' limited vocabulary. Therefore, This study continues to use the benefits of email in English as a foreign language (EFL) context in order to conduct an error analysis on EFL learners' writings. This study is significant because it includes the error study in a new learning context. The study would provide a clear linguistic feature analysis via email for educators and researchers. The study presented here intends to describe the lexical error profiles of learners at the end of the primary educational stage.

### **Statement of the problem**

Sixth grade learners have difficulty mainly in the production of accurate and acceptable sentences in their writing. Further there is a tendency among some learners and teachers that argues these written errors play a crucial role in writing assessment in that the percentage of errors may be a predictor of writing quality. Moreover, students do not have enough chances to practice writing via e-mail communication and free interaction. Guided by previous controversial findings regarding error decrease as proficiency increases and through the need to

establish benchmarks for the end of primary educational stage, this study posed the following research questions:

1. What types of lexical errors are frequently found in the compositions written by the target group?
2. What factors cause these errors in the learners' writing samples?
3. Was there a relationship between lexical choices in written English and holistic score of the quality of sample writings?

## **Background**

In the process of learning English as a foreign language, making errors is something inevitable; nevertheless, mistakes constitute a source of learning if they are corrected appropriately. According to Thornbury (1999), errors can be classified into three different types taking into account lexicon, grammar, and discourse. Lexical errors are defined as mistakes at the word level, and they include, for example, choosing the wrong word for the meaning the students want to express (*I made my homework* instead of *I did my homework*) (p.114). The nature of lexical error development is not straightforward. Different trends can be observed: some errors decrease with FL proficiency, some increase temporarily, while others show instability and then finally end up disappearing, and other errors fossilize, that is, they become permanent in learners' interlanguage. As FL language knowledge increases, the learner incorporates new words, new aspects of already known words, and/or new morphosyntactic norms. Linguistic competence becomes more stable and relationships among linguistic components strengthen. As a consequence, some (lexical) errors disappear, but some other become more pervasive.

Vocabulary is one of the basic components of language when communication is regarded and it is also a central part of language learning. The development of lexical knowledge is considered by both researchers and teachers to be central to the acquisition of a second or foreign language (Read & Chapelle, 2001). Liach (2005a:

46) states that “language learning starts up with vocabulary, words are the first linguistic items acquired by the learner (in first and second language acquisition) ... and no language acquisition at all can take place without the acquisition of lexis”. Relevant research literature suggests a strong relationship between vocabulary acquisition and lexical errors which are generally considered a vital aspect of the acquisition process (Llach, 2007a). Lexical errors not only play a relevant role in the second language vocabulary acquisition process, but they also are among the most numerous type of errors in learners’ performance. Therefore, providing observable learner language data, lexical errors are an important source of information about L2 vocabulary acquisition (Llach, 2007b). Shin (2002: 1) states that “the study of learner errors has been a part of language pedagogy for a long time. Language instructors are constantly concerned about the errors made by their students and with the ways they can improve language teaching”.

Lexical errors’ reduction with time and proficiency is a perception that is not always sustained by empirical evidence. Examination of the interlanguage of very advanced learners has suggests that even they produce many errors, especially of the lexical type (Ambroso, 2000). Moreover, the perennial presence, even in very advanced learners’ production, of fossilized errors (see e.g. Olsen, 1999) refutes the universality of the claim: *the more proficient, the more accurate*. The increasingly more complex and sophisticated production of more proficient learners (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2003; and Ruiz de Zarobe, 2005) can help account for the apparently counterintuitive result that as proficiency increases errors do not decrease. Several studies have described and compared the errors in the production of advanced learners and of lower proficient learners. They have reached different conclusions. For instance, Hawkey & Barker (2004) and also Grant and Ginther (2000: 141) concluded that the number of word choice errors decreased as proficiency level increased.

Verspoor et al. (2012) suggest that lexical changes and organization occur at advanced levels. Specifically, they state that

general error production does not help discriminate among proficiency levels, and that only L1 transfer errors show significant decrease. There has been ample research in this line. Younger and low proficiency learners resort to their L1 more frequently than more proficient and older learners, especially with regards to use of borrowings (Celaya & Torras, 2001; Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2003; and Wang, 2003). Nonetheless, Cenoz (2003) showed that the oldest learners transfer most from their L1, and Sanz (2000) found out that the more proficient the learners are, the more they transfer. Inconclusive findings abound thus in this area of research. Also, Lexical errors categories may distinguish among proficiency levels. Furthermore, they can serve as lexical profilers for age and stage-ends. Foster-Cohen (2001 in Lakshmanan 2005: 104) talks about the sliding window effect to unveil L2 acquisition developmental stages by looking into what learners can or cannot do. As has been advocated somewhere else (Grant and Ginther 2000: 143) by coding errors of various types, it could be possible to examine how lexical knowledge develops. And thus, use them to discriminate among proficiency levels or FL acquisition stages.

It is an indisputable fact that the teacher plays a crucial role in the learning /teaching process. Sullivan (2001) believes that foreign language teachers are fundamentally different from other teachers in that they are attempting to teach a second language using that very language as the medium of instruction. Since "the medium is the message," unique challenges arise for English language teachers and learners. Studies of lexical errors have been conducted on learners of English and other languages from various language backgrounds. Szymanka (2002) discusses lexical problems areas in the language of Polish advanced speakers of English. She presented two samples of data drawn from PELCRA learner corpus, representing two groups of students at different proficiency levels. The results show that collocation errors are among the most widely represented error categories in both groups. She suggested that the theory of the bilingual lexicon has to incorporate the collocation restrictions among L1 and L2 lexical items to a larger extent than it has been

proposed so far. Also, Woodall (2002) conducted a study on using the first language while writing in a second language on 28 adult participants (9 L2 Japanese, 11 L2 English, and 8 L2 Spanish) to observe how language switching was affected by L2 proficiency. The results suggest that less proficient L2 learners switched to their L1 more frequently than more advanced learners.

Lexical errors are thought to be important composition assessment criteria and quality predictors. Research has proved their influence on writing evaluation to some extent, although results are still too scarce to be conclusive (Engber, 1995). It is difficult to establish objective measures of writing quality and evaluation criteria. Compositions are also one of the most difficult L2 tasks to assess, since subjectivity is here present at its highest. teachers rely on their own intuition of what to mark as bad (or good) writing. Lexical errors play an important part in this decision, but also more personal aspects like the agreement on the ideas expounded, the linking of the topic, or his very relationship to the learner, whether they “like” him/her or not can also influence the score. Different authors and teachers use different assessment rates and criteria, and there are, definitely, many of them (Crusan, 2002; and Jarvis et al., 2003).

Crusan (2002) found out that most American universities evaluate their students writing skills by means of indirect measures, above all multiple choice tests. Laufer & Nation (1995) also comment on how several lexical measures affect the judgments of quality in writing. This disparity of evaluation criteria, together with the fact that writing assessment has an important impact on placement decisions and final grades in composition classes do not benefit the language learner, who is left in the outmost ignorance of what to base his practice of writing skills on. Chen (2004) studied 710 Hong Kong Chinese ESL students. There are 5 types of error found. This study found out that students used the syntactic transfer from Chinese to English. Therefore, it caused the run-on sentence and incomplete ideas. Also, Alhaysony (2012) examined written samples of 100

first-year female Arabic-speaking EFL students in the University of Ha'il. The findings showed that students made a considerable number of errors in their use of articles, especially, the lexical errors. This study had a mixed finding because these errors included interlingual and intralingual transfer.

Researchers and practitioners (Warschauer, 1997; Gonzales-Bueno, 1998; Beauvios, 1998; El-Hindi, 1998; and Bollati, 2002) have noted several benefits of using e-mail communication in language classrooms. They state that e-mail can promote real and natural communication. Through e-mail, students are able to communicate with native speakers or other English learners worldwide. This provides authentic context for communication. Besides, e-mail also facilitates independent learning which is essential in second language (L2) writing. Furthermore, e-mail stimulates students' interest in communicating as they feel they have an authentic audience who will respond to their writing. Over a network, using e-mail and sharing files, students have the chance to collaborate and work together with other classmates, peers, and teachers. Networking electronically can help learners create, analyze, and produce information and ideas more easily and efficiently.

The following studies informs this study to use email as the medium to observe students' writing. Many benefits were found to support the language learning through email. For example, language learning occurred through constant communication, so Cooper and Selfe (1990) found that the email can generate more communication. Similarly, Pratt and Sullivan (1994) also found that the use of email increased the oral communication. Based on these two studies, namely, learners had more output in using the target language. In addition, learning a second/foreign language could be very stressful for students. Students' affective filter would be very high if they were asked to use the language face to face. Thus, Kern (1995) and Sullivan (1993) found that students felt less anxious when they joined the online discussion. For example, students were allowed to have more time before they write. They can draft their writing in an asynchronous manner. However, the face-to-face communication generated a lot of



emotional stress. For example, Hoffman (1996) stated that the anonymous or non-face to face interaction can serve as a face-saving (p.55). Namely, language users will not feel embarrassed when produced the wrong usage of language.

Trenchs (2011) used electronic mail as a medium of instruction to improve students' writing in Spanish as a second language. Three students engaged in e-mail transmission with her. Results revealed that these students were self-motivated to use Spanish in a new and creative way in meaningful and authentic texts. Karchmer (2009) investigated thirteen K-12 teachers' reports of how the internet influenced literacy and literacy instruction in their classrooms. The teachers, including ten women and three men, represented eleven different states in the USA and were considered exemplary at using technology by their colleagues. Findings revealed that these teachers noticed an increase in their students' motivation to write. They also noticed that e-mail had a great influence on the progress of their students' writing. the study conducted by Warschauer (1996), this study found that students who joined in the email writing group improved their writing skills.

Huang (2006) analyzed 34 Taiwanese English majors' writing errors based on a web-based writing program. This study found that 55% errors are on the usage. Namely, subject-verb is the main area EFL students need to study. In addition, students noted that the communication is more authentic thought email. They can reach different audiences and received feedbacks and comments from their email pen-pals. Furthermore, Shang (2007) explored the effects of using e-mail on EFL writing performance in aspects of syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy and lexical density. The subjects for this study were forty non-traditional EFL students enrolled in an intermediate reading class at a university in Taiwan. Findings from students' self-reports revealed that e-mail writing improved students' foreign language learning and developed their attitudes towards English. Thus, it is very important to identify and remedy lexical errors in foreign language learners' compositions because those errors appear to be one of the main

causes of communication problems (Llach, 2005b). Therefore, this study continues to use email as the medium to examine the EFL learners' lexical errors. However, these studies did not analyze errors of language produced in computer-mediated contexts; therefore, this study would like to explore lexical errors through asynchronous email writing by EFL learners.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study was, therefore, four-fold:

1. to identify and examine the most frequent types of lexical errors in a sample of the learners' writings.
2. to investigate factors cause lexical errors in the learners' writing.
3. to investigate the relationship between lexical accuracy and the holistic quality of learners' writing based on a rubric.
4. to assess the value of incorporating e-mail communication for the enhancement of the learners' writing performance.

### **Definition of terms**

#### **- Lexical Error**

A lexical error is a deviation in form and/or meaning of a target language lexical word (Hsiao-ping & Esther, 2014). In this study, 'lexical error' was used as a superordinate term including errors of wrong word choice, errors of literal translation, errors of omission or incompleteness, misspelling, errors of redundancy, errors of collocation and errors of word formation.

#### **- Interlingual Errors**

Those attributed to the native language. There are interlingual errors when the learner's L1 habits (patterns, systems or rules) interfere or prevent him/her, to some extent, from acquiring the rules and patterns of a second language (Woodall, 2002)

#### **- Intralingual Errors**

Those due to the language being learned, independent of the native language. According to Wang (2003) they are "items

produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language.. The learner in this case, tries to "drive the rules behind the data to which he/ she has been exposed, and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the target language" (Wang, 2003, p. 352).

### **- Writing Prompt**

It is a statement formed to make students deeply think about a topic and motivate them to produce better writing.

### **Significance of the Study**

In a broader perspective, this study scrutinized the relationships among lexical accuracy and the quality of second language writing. The findings of this study can be of importance to foreign and second language researchers, curricula developers and English teachers and can provide them with crucial proof of how a foreign language is acquired by a specific group of language learners. It can also show that the current state of the L2 learners' knowledge, and their most important problems with lexical usage in writing in a second language through asynchronous email. The study might be helpful for EFL learners, as it would shed light on the different uses of writing via e-mail communication and its benefits for them. In a narrower perspective, this study can also shed light on understanding what types of lexical errors sixth grade learners make and in accordance with these common errors, what kind of remedies English instructors can take. The researcher believes that this study may inspire other researchers to investigate in this topic and perhaps eventually to design more appropriate and efficient writing materials and courses for learners of English at the primary stage.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The participants for this study consisted of (51) sixth grade learners chosen at random from Abbas Zaher primary school in Damietta during the 2014 - 2015 academic year.

learners were similar in age, ranging from 11 to 12 years old. They have developed a certain language proficiency in using English. Therefore, they were able to produce data for analysis.

### **Instruments**

The current study was designed to investigate the students' use of lexicons of English and to evaluate their writing proficiency. The researcher, to attain this aim, participants were required to write four letters for four weeks through email during the second semester of 2015. The students were required to write at least 50-75 words in English for each of the writing prompt. The writing prompts (see Appendix A).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

To collect the data, participants were administrated a writing assignment that involved letter writing. They were required to write a letter assigned by the researcher weekly for four weeks. They were required to write through email. Their writing samples were collected and analyzed to check various errors and numbers and ratios were counted. During all the writing periods, the researcher was encouraged her learners to write on their own and she refused to answer the questions pertinent to syntactical features and word choices, or to make any suggestions or give guidance about the format and organization of the learner compositions.

### **Data Analysis**

After data collection, the following steps were followed. First, each letter was examined word and word and sentence by sentence. I generated the coding categories based on all writing samples. Second, I counted the number of errors and converted it into percentage to examine the occurrence. After that, I will categorize what factors cause these errors based on the distinctions between intralingual and interlingual errors. Intelligible errors will be labeled and discussed. The data were presented and clustered into common units of meaning or themes.

## Results and Discussion

The results of the study presented are based on the three research questions posed.

### The first question

To answer this question, 182 compositions were examined sentence-by-sentence to identify any lexical errors. At first, errors were identified and labeled. Then, the lexical errors were classified into 13 subcategories under two main categories: formal and semantic features. Table (1) shows 13 lexical error categories, frequencies, percentages and rank order of errors found in 182 sample learner writings. Of the 13 types of lexical errors identified, the formal mis-selection of words was the most problematic error category in the data. These errors were found the highest percentage of occurrence (27.5 %). This can be seen in the rank order, for which misselection lexical errors ranked first. The second and third most frequent errors were related to borrowing and near synonyms, both of which included approximately 16.5% and 13.6% errors, respectively. Errors related to calque and vowel-based type also occurred frequently (8.2% and 7.4%), followed closely by coinage error category (6.6%). To test the first question the following table (1) illustrates the results.

*Table (1): Categories, Frequencies, and Percentages of Lexical Errors for the 182 Compositions*

Lexical Error Types	Frequency	Percentage	Rank Order
Mis-selection	87	27.5	1
Borrowing	52	16.5	2
Near Synonyms	43	13.6	3
Calque	26	8.2	4
Vowel-based Type	23	7.4	5
Coinage	21	6.6	6
Over-inclusion	15	4.7	7
Consonant-based Type	13	4.1	8
Arbitrary Combinations	11	3.5	9
Verbosity	11	3.5	9
Mis-ordering	7	2.2	11
Suffix Type	4	1.3	12
Semantic Word Selection	3	0.9	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>316 Errors</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Of all the 316 lexical errors found in sample compositions for this study, 87 were mis-selection errors which accounted for 27.5 percent of the total lexical errors (see Table 1). Most of the errors in this category were related to using distorted words.

*The wether was very bad (weather)*  
*I usually breakfast and diring tea (drink)*

It can be claimed from the above sample sentences that the students used some words that also do not exist in English. However, these mis-selection errors may occur due to the incorrect application of certain English words and not the influence of the Arabic language.

*I like chat with my strange friends on the web (foreign)*  
*Then, I wash my teeth (brush)*

The second most common lexical error type was the direct use of L1 words in target language, which is also known as borrowing errors. There were 52 borrowing errors, representing the 16.5 percent of the total errors. Here are some examples of errors of this type:

*I am a very fun person. (pleasant/joyful)*  
*My marks have decreased a little. (declined)*

From the above sentences, it can be claimed that the source of these errors was the students' first language, namely Arabic. As James (1998) stated, in these examples mother language words were used in the target language with no perception of any need to tailor them to the new host language. In addition, students tended to use the L1 words to fill the expressional vacancy in the L2 that seemed to be caused by cross culture differences. Even though the errors in examples 5 and 6 above are considered to be interlingual errors, they can also perhaps be traced to students' insufficient learning of the target language.

Another problematic area detected in this study was near synonym errors, accounting for 13.6 percent of the total lexical errors. The analysis of the 1se errors reveals that near synonym errors seem to have several causes. For instance, in example 3 above, it is obvious that the intended meaning of 'foreign' was

not clearly expressed by the near synonym 'strange'. The cause of this error can also be called divergent polysemy. The mis-application of the target language or incomplete learning can be argued as a cause of this assumed synonym error.

The fourth most common error type in the study was related to the use of calques. There were 26 calque-related errors, accounting for 8.2 percent of the total errors. Here are some examples of these errors:

*I swam in the sea and if need to add it was funny (so to speak)  
I and my little cousin went to the childpark (playground)*

In the sentences above, the target language words or phrases were created basing on the literal translation of the L2 words or phrases. The creation of calque usually involves a word-for-word translation. Further, the translation seem to keep both the form and the meaning of the L1 words which is, however, against the L2 forms. It seems evident that *the source of the calque errors is the mother language*. Thus, they should be considered as interlingual errors.

Vowel-based type errors ranked fifth, just below those of calque in the present study. There were 23 errors of this type, accounting for 7.4 percent of the total lexical errors in the study. This category of errors dealt with the students' unsuccessful attempt to make a choice of pairs (or triplets) of words that look and sound similar. The following sentences are quoted from the sample compositions to illustrate the errors of vowel-based type:

*I go to bead 9:00...(bed)  
Than, we and my cousins went to the aqua parks (then)*

Although the words are similar in pronunciation and form, to some extent, they are totally different in meaning. The correct words and their substitutes used in the above sentences are all target language words: bed/ bead, and then/than. So, the influence of the mother language is not evident here. Thus, it can be claimed that the learners were experiencing a performance problem in selecting the correct target item. This type of error is

called intralingual error which may be caused by incomplete learning or misapplication of the learners' language learning.

### The second question

Table (2) presents the result of factors causing the learners' errors. The lexical errors, 46% was found in the intralingual errors, and 54% was found in the interlingual errors.

*Table (2): Causes of Errors*

Lexical Error Types	Frequency	Intralingual/ development errors	Intralingual/ development errors (%)	Interlingual / transfer errors	Interlingual/ transfer errors (%)
Mis-selection					
Borrowing		38			44.8
Near Synonyms	87	21	43.7	39	36.5
Calque	52	28	40.4	19	76.7
Vowel-based	43	9	65.1	33	80.8
Type	26	5	34.6	21	69.6
Coinage	23	13	21.7	16	38
Over-inclusion	21	7	61.9	8	73.3
Consonant- based Type	15	4	46.6	11	46.2
Arbitrary	13	3	30.8	6	27.3
Combinations	11	7	27.3	3	54.5
Verbosity	11	5	63.6	6	57.1
Mis-ordering	7	3	71.4	4	50
Suffix Type	4	2	75	2	66.6
Semantic Word Selection	3				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>54</b>

the participants have difficulty in word choice in the verb phrase and prepositional phrases. Semantically, the wrong word choices in their writing mislead the readers. In addition, some participants wrote very little, and this might be explained by their limited vocabulary. They could not think of appropriate words and phrases to express their ideas. Some students' writing samples were very short because they did not have too much exposure in English writing. The lack of fluency in writing also increased the difficulty to comprehend students' writing samples.

In this study, learners made interlingual/transfer error from their first language to English. There are several explanations for the interlingual transfer in sentence structure,



vocabulary use, and word choices. First, these participants' literacy skills in the first language affect heavily on their English learning. Second, the English teacher used Arabic as the instructional language to teach second language. Therefore, the model of fluency in speaking and writing was absent. The lack of fluency input could lead learners' error from Arabic to English.

### The third question

182 writing samples were analyzed in terms of the occurrence of lexical errors and each sample was holistically scored by using a holistic rubric (See Appendix B). The relationship between the holistic scores of 182 writing samples and the frequency of lexical errors found per sample was examined. In the first step, mean and standard deviation scores of these two variables were calculated using SPSS. As shown in Table (3), the mean for lexical errors was 2.67 (SD= 1.794). It is also shown in the table that the mean of holistic scores in the study was 4.23 (SD= 0.837).

**Table (3): Descriptive statistic for the frequency of lexical errors and the holistic scores**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Frequency of Lexical Errors	182	2.67	1.794
Holistic Scores	182	4.23	0.837

In the next step, a Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the holistic scores of the 182 writing samples and the frequency of lexical errors found per sample as shown in Table (4). A negative correlation between the holistic scores and the frequency of lexical error was found ( $r=-0.493$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

**Table (4): Correlation between frequency of lexical error types and the holistic scores**

		Frequency of Lexical Errors	Holistic Scores
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	Frequency of Lexical Errors Holistic Scores	1 -0.493	-0.493 1

Lexical errors play a crucial role in writing assessment in that the percentage of lexical errors may be a predictor of writing quality. Some studies, even though the results are too diverse to

generalize, have been conducted that the influence of lexical errors on writing assessment (Engber, 1995; Llach 2005a, 2007a, 2007b). So, in this study, to investigate whether the percentage of lexical errors is a good indicator of overall quality of learner composition, a non-directional Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted. On the basis of a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, a low negative correlation ( $r = -0.493$ ) was found in the present study between the holistic scores and the frequency of lexical errors. From this result, it can be concluded that the holistic scores of the quality of the compositions of the learners may be independent from the frequency of lexical errors.

### **Conclusion**

This study found that learners' L1 has caused negative transfer on word and sentence levels. Namely, relying on the mother tongue is the main strategy used by the learners when they compose the essay in English. However, this study would like to highlight that these errors have positive indications for language teachers and researchers. For teaching purposes, teachers need to design activities for areas needed for improvement. Teachers should keep in mind that overemphasis on errors can frustrate learners' motivation. Teachers could use these errors in class and revise the teaching activities. For learners, we should allow learners to learn when they are ready. In the classroom, teachers should be able to provide corrective feedbacks in a non-threatening way in order to raise learners' awareness to correct themselves. Teachers also should be able to model the complete sentence and lexical use in order to provide learners more exposure in using English. Moreover, This study contributes to the scant literature noted for email interaction in a foreign language (Murray, 2000). Further, it has contributed to advance research in two respects; firstly, it moves research from use of conversational and traditional written data to examination of a computer-mediated corpus and, secondly, in using emails as data, the focus of enquiry goes beyond the limits of the turn and

of speech acts theory often found in this field ( Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010).

### **Implications**

Making errors are a normal language developmental process, so students' errors are great sources for improving teaching and learning. Teachers should not label students based on their errors in writing. Namely, students' effort of trying should be praised, and teachers should encourage students to engage writing for different purposes in order to language in the different contexts. Even though the learners in the present study had been studying English for many years, they still had problems with forming simple, error-free sentences. Most of the letters written by these particular students included numerous lexical errors. As the results of this study showed that the learners seemed to have had difficulty in spelling of the words and choosing correct lexical item among a set of synonyms. For example, most of the mis-selection errors occurred due to the failure of the learners to realize the corresponding patterns between sounds and letters in English, and also perhaps because of a lack of experience by the learners with reading and writing words in English. Thus, EFL teachers should pay attention to spelling problems. They might ask their students to read newspapers, short stories, and short novels as to acquire familiarity with the English word structures.

As a solution to near-synonym problems, teachers may ask their learners use monolingual dictionaries of synonyms and may also encourage them to use corpora to raise learners awareness of collocations. It might even be useful for learners to recite and read aloud in English the most common collocations and phrasal verbs in order to get accustomed to the words pairs that they usually go together in English. Furthermore, EFL instructors might teach lexical items in context with numerous examples and try to warn the learner not to transfer culturally-related concepts from their native language into target language or vice versa. EFL teachers should also realize that focusing on lexical items alone will not guarantee an improvement of English

language writing quality. For this reason, writing instruction should perhaps address broader areas including organization, development of ideas, voice and style, and written conventions. Students might also be taught to gain awareness of the possible differences between first language writing patterns (e.g., the organization of the ideas) and target language writing patterns.

This study would suggest teachers should prepare students to use English in real-life settings. Namely classroom activities should be embedded to authentic audience and materials. This finding would imply the model of using fluent English for EFL students in this study. Teaching can include authentic materials, such as newspapers, magazines, websites, and published reading materials in teaching. For the future teachers and students, we believe that that the encouragement; positive corrective feedback, authentic target language input, interactive teaching and learning activated the students' motivation and awareness can facilitate language development. Finally, teachers should believe in the usefulness of the different technological activities in the syllabus. They should believe that such activities build students' personalities and confidence, which in turn help them to be better communicators of the language outside the class.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Based on the findings of this study, future research should focus on the following areas.

1. This study investigated the quality of writing in terms of only one variable, lexical errors. It would be interesting to add other variables to this type of research. Therefore, future studies are needed to research how other elements of writing, such as coherence, cohesion, planning, organization might also play a role in the quality of learners' letters.
2. This study could be improved upon by being replicated with students of different levels and also with a more diverse composition sample. A study with different levels of writing proficiency may support the claims of the

present study and might give a broader picture of the influence of errors on the quality of the learner writing.

3. Remedial courses should be conducted for those learners in all language skills and special attention should be given to lexical choice and English grammar.
4. Some points for further research may include the following: using techniques like individual and cooperative learning in internet-aided writing, and finding their effects on learners' writing achievement.

## References

- Alhaysony, M. (2012). An analysis of article errors among Saudi female EFL students: A case study *Asian Social Science*, 8(12), 55-66.
- Ambroso, S. (2000). "Descripción de los errores léxicos de los hispanohablantes: análisis de la producción escrita de IT, el certificado de competencia general en italiano como L2", in E. de Miguel, M. Fernández Lagunilla, and F. Cartoni (eds.), *Sobre el lenguaje: miradas plurales y singulares*. Madrid: Arrecife, 53- 72.
- Beauvios, M. (1998). Write to speak: The effect of electronic communication on the oral achievement of fourth semester French students. In Judith A. Muykens (Ed.) *New Ways of Learning and Teaching: Focus on Technology and Foreign Language Education* (pp. 165-183). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Bollati, A. (2002). Creating a learning community through electronic journaling. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 8(9).
- Celaya, M., & Torras, M. (2001). L1 influence and EFL vocabulary: do children rely more on L1 than adult learners? in *Proceedings of the 25th AEDEAN Meeting*. December 13-15, University of Granada, 1-14.
- Cenoz, J. (2003). "The Influence of Age on the Acquisition of English: General Proficiency, Attitudes and Code Mixing", in M.P. García Mayo and M.L. García Lecumberri (eds.), *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language* (pp. 77-93). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

- Chaffee-Sorace, D. (1999). Computer pen pals: Writing activities for subjects of foreign languages. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 56(2), 251-254.
- Chen, H. (2004). Asymmetrical performances of English null subjects and null objects for Chinese college students. Paper presented at the Thirteenth International Symposium on English Teaching, Taipei.
- Cooper, M., & Selfe, C. (1990). Computer conferences and learning: authority, resistance and internally persuasive discourse. *College English*, 52(8), 847-873.
- Crusan, D. (2002). An assessment of ESL writing placement assessment. *Assessing Writing*, 8, 17-30.
- El-Hindi, A.E. (1998). Beyond classroom boundaries: Constructivist teaching with the internet. *The Reading Teacher*, (51), 694-700.
- Engber, C. (1995). The Relationship of Lexical Proficiency to the Quality of ESL Compositions. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 4 (2), 139-155.
- Foster-Cohen, S. (2001). First language acquisition...Second language acquisition: What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba? *Second Language Research*, 17(4), 329-344.
- García Lecumberri, M., & Gallardo, F. (2003). "English FL Sounds in School Learners of Different Ages", in M.P. García Mayo and M.L. García Lecumberri (eds.), *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language* (pp. 115-135). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- González-Bueno, M. (1998). The effects of electronic mail on Spanish L2 discourse. *Language Learning & Technology*, 1(2), 55-70.
- Grant, L. & Ginther, A. (2000). Using Computer-Tagged Linguistic Features to Describe L2 Writing Differences. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9 (2), 123-145.
- Hawkey, R. & Barker, F. (2004). "Developing a common scale for the assessment of writing". *Assessing Writing*, 9, 122-159.
- Hoffman, R. (1996). Computer networks: Webs of communication for language teaching. In M. Pennington (Ed.), *The power of CALL* (pp. 55-78). Houston: Athelstan.

- Hsiao-ping, W. & Esther, V. (2014). Types and attributes of English writing errors in the EFL context-a study of error analysis. *Journal of language teaching and research*, 5(6), 1256-1262.
- Huang, S. (2006). A case study of EFL students' writing errors on a web-based writing program. Paper presented at the International Conference & Workshop on TEFL and Applied Linguistics, Ming Chuan University.
- James, C. (1998). *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. New York: Longman.
- Jarvis, S.; Grant, L.; Bikowski, D.; & Ferris, D. (2003). Exploring multiple profiles of highly rated learner compositions. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12, 377-403.
- Karchmer, R. (2009). The journey ahead: Thirteen teachers report how the internet influences literacy and literacy instruction in their K-12 classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(4), 442-467.
- Kern, R. (1995). Restructuring classroom interaction with networked computers: effects on quantity and characteristics of language production. *Modern Language Journal*, 79(4), 457-476.
- Kim, H. (2011). Promoting communities of practice among non-native speakers of English in online discussions. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 24(4), 353-370.
- Lakshmanan, U. (2005). Child Second Language Acquisition and the Fossilization Puzzle, in Z. Han and T. Odlin (eds), *Studies of Fossilization in Second Language Acquisition*, Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 100-133.
- Lasagabaster, D., & Doiz, A. (2003). "Maturational Constraints on Foreign-language Written Production", in M.P. García Mayo and M.L. García Lecumberri (eds.), *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language* (pp. 136-160). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Laufer, B. & Nation, P. (1995). Vocabulary Size and Use: Lexical Richness in L2 Written Production. *Applied Linguistics*, 16, 307-322.

- Levy, M. (1997). *Computer-assisted language learning: Context and conceptualization*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Li, M., & Zhu, W. (2013). Patterns of computer-mediated interaction in small writing groups using wikis. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 26(1), 61-82.
- Llach, M. (2005a). The relationship of lexical error and their types to the quality of ESL composition: An empirical study. *Porta Linguarum*, 3, 45-47.
- Llach, M. (2005b). A critical review of the terminology and taxonomies used in the literature on lexical errors. *Miscelanea: A Journal of English and American Studies*, 31, 11-24.
- Llach, M. (2007a). Lexical errors in young EFL learners: How do they relate to proficiency measures?. *Interlinguistica*, 17, 63-73.
- Llach, M. (2007b). Lexical errors as writing quality predictors. *Studia Linguistica*, 61 (1), 1-19.
- Murray, D. (2000). Protean communication: the language of computer-mediated communication. *TESOL Quarterly* 34(3): 397-421.
- Olsen, S. (1999). "Errors and compensatory strategies: a study of grammar and vocabulary in texts written by Norwegian learners of English". *System*, 27, 191-205.
- Pratt, E., & Sullivan, N. (1994). Comparison of ESL writers in networked and regular classroom. Paper presented at the 28th Annual TESOL convention, Baltimore, MD.
- Read, J. & Chappel, C. (2001). A framework for second language vocabulary assessment. *Language Testing*, 18 (1), 1-32.
- Ruiz de Zarobe, Y. (2005). "Perspectiva longitudinal de la edad en producción escrita". *Proceedings of the II Simposio Internacional de Bilingüismo*, 333-341.
- Sanz, C. (2000). "Bilingual education enhances third language acquisition: Evidence from Catalonia". *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 21 (1), 23-44.
- Shang, H. (2007). An exploratory study of e-mail application on FL writing performance. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 20(1), 79-96.



- Shin, S. (2002). Error analysis: Lexical errors produced by Australian KFL learners. *KAREC Discussion Papers*, 3 (3), 1-25.
- Sullivan, H. ( 2001). The challenge of foreign language teacher preparation . *Cleaning House*, 74 (6), 66-86.
- Sullivan, N. (1993). Teaching writing on a computer network. *TESOL Journal*, 3(1), 34-35.
- Szymanka, L. (2002) . Lexical problems areas in the advanced learner corpus of written data. *Second Language Vocabulary Colloquium. Leiden University*.
- Taleghani-Nikazm, C. & Huth, T. (2010). L2 requests: Preference structure in talk-in interaction. *Multilingua* 29: 185-202.
- Thornbury, S. (1999). *How to Teach Grammar*. Essex: Longman.
- Torras, R., & Celaya, M. (2001). "Age-related Differences in the Development of Written Production. An Empirical Study of EFL School Learners". *IJES*, 1 (2), 103-126.
- Trenchs, M. (2011). Writing strategies in a second language: Three case studies of learning using electronic mail. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 52(3), 464-497.
- Verspoor, M., Schmid, M., & Xu, X. (2012). A dynamic usage based perspective on L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21, 239-263.
- Vurdien, R. (2013). Enhancing writing skills through blogging in an advanced English as a Foreign Language class in Spain. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 26(2), 126-143.
- Wang, L. (2003). "Switching to first language among writers with differing second-language proficiency". *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12, 347-375.
- Warschauer, M. (1996). *Motivational aspects of using computers for writing and communication*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.
- Warschauer, M. (1997). Computer-mediated collaborative learning: Theory and practice. *Modern Language Journal*, 81(3), 470-481.
- Woodall , R. (2002) . Language switching: using the first language while writing in a second language. *Journal of Second Language Writing*. 11 (1), 7-28.