# Lexico-Semantic Errors: Their Effect on Readability Level and Comprehensibility of the Written Texts

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***Abstract:*** *Writing in Foreign Language Contexts, and research about it is unique in its focus on lexico-semantic errors, and that focus alone would make the groupa chief contribution to the field of L2 writing research. In this paper, we present a study which describes and compares the level of readability in texts written by pre- intermediate English learners with and without lexico - semantic errors. Identifying the most frequent lexical error types and their effect on the readability level of the written texts by students, can be insightful in improving the EFL learners writing. The results show a slight improvement in readability level of the text just by correcting the lexico-semantic errors. Also, in this paper the comprehensibility of the texts with and without lexico- semantic errors has been evaluated, it was found that lexico-semantic errors don't have any impact on the comprehensibility of the written texts.*

***Key words:*** *lexico semantic errors,readability levels, comprehensibility*

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## I. Introduction

Teaching is an activity to convey or communicate knowledge from the teacher to the student. The aim of it is to make students understand with the material given by the teacher. There are four basic skills which are necessary to be grasped by the student in studying a language. Those are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Learning writing skills needs proficiency in some aspect of English such as mastery of vocabulary, structure and grammar, and generally it is a difficult task. As language academicians, teachers and learners around the world increasingly focus their attention on issues related to writing in a second language (SL), and research is an obligatory and required task for L2 writing improvement.

One aspect of teaching a foreign language is focusing on error analysis. Error analysis is concerned with the comparison of two languages for the purpose of foreign language teaching. According to Ziahosseiny (2009),

"Since language pedagogy is shifting towards more cognitive procedures, the demand for contrastive studies and error analysis for foreign language teaching methodology is increasing. This is because contrastive studies on the basis of specific perceptual and conceptual strategies will reveal how and under what specific conditions, different language emanates different cultures and habits of respective language communities" (p. 5).

It also provides the language teachers insights into, how the underlying rules that speakers and writers use in language are different from culture to culture, so it is largely associated with language teaching.

Everyone who writes, demands to have a readable text so people who read it can comprehend it easily. This statement is also correct for teachers; they would like to make their students to produce a piece of writing which is readable and comprehensible enough. Readability is what makes some texts easier to read and comprehendcomparing to others. George Klare (1984) defines readability as "the ease of understanding or comprehension due to the style of writing." This definition focuses on writing style as separate from issues such as content, coherence, and organization.

As we all know the main purpose of people who go to FL classes is to communicate in that foreign language, so being able to write a text which is comprehensible is importantfor the sake of communication. Since texts that are not readable cannot be comprehended, measuring readability level of texts is of prime importance if comprehension is intended. Furthermore, the readability of a text is measured by some procedures that are called readability formulas; these formulas are being increasingly used to measure the readability of a text and consequently understandability of that text.

In this paper the researcher has tried to find out if the lexico-semantic errors affect the readability level of texts, and consequently comprehensibility of that text.

## II.  Review Of The Related Literature

Many studies have been done to discuss lexico-semantic errors, and some of them are presented below.

### Lexico-semantic errors

Andronache and Sfetea (2012), did a research with the aim to show and notify the readers about the use of lexical and semantic errors in Romanian and Italian written press and, at the same time, to try to explain some of the reasons of these errors. They concluded that, out of the desire to replace the English words and phrases with theirtranslation or approximate meaning, given the connotation or the stylistic role which the wordcan obtain, the existance and the modernity of the English word and theneed to avoid repetition, the written press often shoes many lexical-semantic errors, whichthe reader takes as being correct. This expansion of wrong words and phrases is due to rush,lack of knowledge or ignorance of the meaning.

In addition, Llach (2015), conducted a research which describes and compares the production of lexical errors at the end of two important educational stages including primary and the necessary years of secondary education. Recognizing the most frequent lexical error types at each learningstep can be very helpful in distinguishing between proficiency levels and establishing lexical benchmarks. Their results show a slight decrease in lexical error production, only significant for direct L1 borrowings. However, they also reveal an increase of miss selections and coinages at higher levels. Furthermore, they observed presence of fossilized errors and errors in structures. Results are interpreted in light of previous research-related literature concerning the evolution of lexical errors along proficiency levels. Finally, the suggested some pedagogical implications to improve the lexical production of primary and secondary school learners in order to prevent and alleviate the lexical errors they committed.

Somba (2009) has studied the lexico-semantic errors made by hearing-impaired pupils. The study found and analyzed the number, types and patterns of lexico-semantic errors of hearing-impaired pupils. A comparison between a group of hearing pupils in the same classes was also done. The study compared the lexico-semantic errors of the hearing-impaired with those of the comparison group and studied if the lexico-semantic errors could be related to hearing impairment. The study was based on interlanguage and error analysis theories. Tools for data collection were tests, which included a free composition, a picture story and a cloze passage. Data was collected at Ngala Special School for the deaf and St. Paul's primary school, where the comparison group was chosen. Both schools are in Nakuru. The population sample consisted of thirty hearing-impaired and thirty hearing pupils. The tests which were conducted were all written tasks from which lexico-semantic errors were brought out and classified by the use ofthe five steps of error analysis.

In the same vain, Taiwo (2001),examined the lexico-semantic relation errors in ESL writing. The data was taken from 200 SSS students' letter texts in 10 secondary schools randomly selected from two states in the South-Western Nigeria, the lexico-semantic errors were found related to four linguistic sources such as collocation, generalization, similarity, and duplication. From these seven sub-categories of errors were detected. The findings reveal that collocation errors are the most important, accounting for 56.5% of the total lexico-semantic errors. The reason for this may be because ofthe improper mastery of lexical sense relations. This aspect of lexical studies is often abandoned in an ESL classroom. So, the writers cannot characterize boundaries that separate lexical items. The study suggested that teachers should teach lexical sense relations and should emphasize collocations, especially the types that learners have difficulties in learning as observed in the writing. In addition, they mentioned thatstudents should also be encouraged to read a lot of literature written in English, since collocations are better acquired through reading.

Omidipour (2014), claimed that learning a foreign language is a complex process where there are no sufficient exposures to thelearners. This will accomplish different skills learners try to learn. His study checked out writingskills in adult Persian-speaking learners from Iran who were learning English at Parsa language institute in Bavanat, Fars. For doing the research, 40 Persian learners of English participated in the study. They were asked to write about two different topics based on their book  which was Top Notch 1A. For data analysis the researcher followed Keshavarz (2001) and Corder (1973) model of error analysis, first errors were identified and then the researcher classified them into three major categories including, orthographic errors, syntactico-morphological errors, and lexico-semantic errors. Then the errors were classified into four subcategories based on Corder (1973): omissions, additions, misformation and misordering. The results of the study showed that errors in foreign language learning can be seen as a natural aspect and also the crucial role ofL1 is inevitable. For learners, error analysis is substantial as it shows the areas of difficulty in their writing. He also claimed that the outcomes of the study may be helpful for teachers to be more careful about learners'administration in the process of learning a foreign language.

Consequently, Shalaby, Yahya and El-Komi (2009), performed a research on lexical errors made by foreign language students in comparison to research in other problematic areas in writing, such as grammar. Their study aimed at presenting a comprehensive taxonomy able toaccount Saudi EFL students' lexical errors. It examined the types of lexical errors produced by female Saudi students studying English as part of the requirements of the elementary year at Taibah University in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarrah, Saudi Arabia. The

study aimed to find out what types of lexical errors are common in the writings of female EFL students studying in a elementary year program at a Saudi university and which of these lexical errors are most common. Also, it aimed to find out which of these errors are due to the influence of the students' first language. According to the results of the study, the wrong choice of a suffix was the highest category of errors, and in general, semantic lexical errors were more than formal lexical errors. The researchers also discuss the pedagogical implications for the teaching of vocabulary for second/foreign language learners.

Finally, SattiHamad، Yassin (2015), ran a research with the aim of investigating the lexical errors and their effect on universitystudents' writing performance. The researcher used the descriptive analytical approach.Data has been gatheredby the use of a questionnaire for university English language teachers and a composition test for the university students from different English departments. The findings showed that university students make lexical errors because of the many factors;the most important of them is the interference of the mother tongue.

### Readability Formulas

Zamanian and Heydari, (2012) claimed that, Lively and Pressy (1923), were the first who thought that it would be helpful to have a way to measure the vocabulary load of text books. After that many formulas have been proposed for measuring readability level of the texts. The ones which were used in this research were FOG index, SMOG, Flesch and Flesch Kincaid. Scores obtained in FOG range from 6-the easiest to 17 the most difficult. SMOG predicts the years of education needed to understand a piece of writing. Flesch uses a scale from 0 which is equivalent to 12th grade and 100 equivalents to 4th grade.Finally, Flesh-Kincaid can be used to determine the number of years of formal education generally required to understand a text.

### Text Comprehension

Generally, text comprehension is a subjective interpretation of the meaning of the text's content by the reader. Gavora (2012), argues that text comprehension is an effective process and a creation of individual version of the text by the reader.

Writing to learn is writing for comprehension and providesstudents with an opportunity to recall, clarify, and question what theyhave read, and it provides them with a venue to voice questions or curiositiesthat still remain (Knipper & Duggan, 2006 cited inWallace, Pearmany, Hurst, 2007).

Nuroozi and Rezaee (2011) done a research to investigate the relationship between readability of texts and students" comprehension of them and the results of that study showed that when the proficiency level is lower grammatical markers has more effect on comprehension, while lexical markers effect on comprehension in higher levels.

### Research Questions

This research sought to answer the following questions:
1.  Do the lexico-semantic errors have any impact on the readability level of the texts?
2.  Do the lexico-semantic errors have any impact on the comprehensibility of the texts?
Based on the above questions, the null hypotheses were formulated.

## III. Method

### Participants

Participants were four groups of pre intermediate English students, each group contained 10 students. The first two groupswere asked to write a text in order to give the chance to the researcher to find the lexico-semantic errors and the second two groupswere askedto read thosewritten texts to create the opportunity for the researcher to evaluate the texts readability levels and comprehensibility of them. Students were chosen from Safir Language Academy, Mashhad, Iran. Participants in both groups were students in pre- intermediate level, and they were selected randomly from different classes in this level with different teachers.The students have been chosen in this way because as Lincoln and Guba (1985) mentioned, the most advantageous strategy for qualitative studies is maximum variation sampling. All participants were participated by their own desire to take part in the study and the researcher did not offer any reward for participation in the study.

### Instrument

In this study, the lexico- semantic errors were detected by the researcher, according to Keshavarz (2011) definition who said that, "lexico-semantic errors refer to errors related to the semantic properties of lexical items,as illustrated in following examples. *Iran is my mother country. * my father learned me the Koran." (p.88).

FOG, SMOG, Flesch and Flesch-Kincaid readability formulas were used to detect the readability level of the written texts. Finally, for evaluating students' comprehensibility of the texts, three techniques were used.

The First was cloze test which according to Gavora (2012) is a text passage from which some words are missing and the students' task is to fill in the appropriate words. The second technique was test retelling which as Cohen, Krusted and May (2009), stated is a system for evaluating of students" text understanding, based on their attempts to retell or recall what they have read. Finally, personal response was used that by Day and Park (2005) definition requires readers to respond with their feeling for the text and the subject.

### Procedure

First, the researcher gave a topic to the participants in the first two groups and asked them to write about it in the word range of 250 to 300. Second, the researcher checked the writings to find lexico-semantic errors in them and corrected the errors in the text written by one of those groups which is called experimental group and the other group's lexico semantic errors remained untouched, this group is called control group.

After wards, the readability formulas were used to determine the readability levels of the texts. FOG and SMOG formulas were used as online apparatus, Flesch and Flesch-Kincaid levels were measured by Microsoft word.

Finally, the texts by experimental group were given to one group of readers and the texts written by control group were given to the other group of readers, and for checking comprehensibility the tests including cloze test, retelling and personal response was sent to the students by email which as Meho (2006) states is quite a new method for data collection and it has some benefits such as it remarkably costs less to conduct, it reduces the cost of transcribing also it allows researchers to interview more than one participant at a time.

## IV. Results

### Lexico semantic errors

The topic which was given to the students was "introduce yourself and talk about your family". There were many lexico semantic errors in all texts such as "my bigger brother" instead of my older brother, "I eat tea" instead of "I drink tea, "English effect my job" instead of "English affect my job" and many other lexico semantic errors like this.

### Readability levels

In order to find out whether the readability levels of the two groups of written texts (experimental group and control group) are different, the texts were put in four readability formulas. As mentioned earlier, the readability formulas are Guning FOG, SMOG, Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. The results are presented in the following table:

| Texts by | SMOG | FOG | Flesch | Flesch- Kincaid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| experimental group | 10.6 | 14.6 | 50.3 | 9.9 |
| control group | 11 | 14.5 | 46.3 | 10.4 |

By looking at the results you can see that according to all four formulas the texts written by the control group was more difficult than the corrected texts from experimental group, this difficulty maybe because of lexico semantic errors. But as it is obvious this difference is very slight, so it can be concluded that although lexico semantic errors has an effect on the readability levels of the texts, it is not the main factor which affects it.

### Comprehensibility of the text

The texts were given to 20 pre-intermediate level English students, each 10 students in one group, and the comprehensibility was measured qualitatively through cloze test, retelling and personal response.

The first group of students was given the corrected text. The results showed that in answering the cloze test, the average of experimental answers was 65%, in retelling just one out of 10 students couldn't remember much to write, 5 of them were able to write about 2 lines, and only two of them could remember most of the text. Out of 10 students, 6 of them said they would like to continue reading the text. All of them need about 5-6 minutes to finish reading and all of them said they found the text easy to read.

The answers of the second group which were given the text written by control grpup were quite similar. The results demonstrated that in answering cloze test 60% of the answers were correct, 5 students were able to remember most of the text and the other 5 could write a summary about 2 lines. Six out of 10 students claimed that they would like to continue reading the text. Like the texts written by experimental group, it was taken about 5 minutes for students to complete reading it, 7 of them claimed that they found the text easy to read and the other 3 said that, to be able to remember more they needed to read the text more than once.

### Trust worthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "trustworthiness" is a method for evaluating qualitative researches which involves establishing: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirm ability.

Techniques mentioned by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to achieve the so-called criteria were fulfilled by the researcher. Also, the researcher got benefit of triangulation defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as "the corroboration of results with alternative sources of data" (pp. 305-307). Therefore, she used four readability formulas and three techniques to check comprehension in order to have various sources of data.

In addition, the results were given to some members of the researcher's own major formally and informally to provide the technique of member checking.

Also, the researcher did an attempt to keep a reflexive journal of all the ideas, decisions and activities she tried in this study to be capable of providing a thick and rich description of the participants' feelings and insights about what they said and how they acted in the interviews.

Another technique is having a peer interrogator to give her interpretation over all the angles and stages of this research. She acknowledged to go over the study, especially in the parts of data collection and data analysis, also was asked to attend the pilot and follow-up focus group interviews as a kind of moderator and commenter (ibid. pp. 305-307).

## V. Discussion And Conclusion

It can be concluded that although the level of readability improved slightly by correcting the lexico semantic errors in the texts, this improvementwasn't something drastic. So, it can be said that in the factors which affect readability of a text, lexico-semantic errors are not an important one. So for further research, others can focus on other aspects of writing like word choices or length of the clauses and sentences to see how these factors can change the read ability level.

Also it has been shown that lexico-semantic errors don't have any impact on the comprehension of the texts by the students. It is a fact that there were some mistakes in the texts written by the wrong group, but these mistakes didn't cause any problem for the texts comprehension. Again, the other factors which determine the readability level of a text can be checked for their impact on the comprehensibility of the texts.

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