Lexical Errors in Kurdish EFL University Students' Summary Writing

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Abstract

The current study works toward identifying and categorising the lexical errors made by Kurdish EFL students in writing summaries. The sample of the study consists of 40 Kurdish EFL students at the college of Basic Education in Salahaddin University. The lexical errors in their summaries, i.e. 40 summaries, were calculated and categorised into seven categories (based on Ander and Yıldırım's classification 2010). The analysis of the data revealed that misspelling is the most common type of lexical errors made by Kurdish EFL students. It was followed by wrong word choice and errors of literal translation.

The most prevalent type of error was misspelling. The reason behind the dominance of this type of error is ascribed to orthographically cross-linguistic differences between English and Kurdish on one hand; and the ineffective examination policy adopted in designing the twelfth grade large-scale exams in Kurdistan Region (which depends 100% on multiple choice items).

Key words: Lexical Errors, Summary Writing, &Vocabulary Acquisition

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الأخطاء المعجمية في كتابة ملخصات طلاب الجامعات الأكراد الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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الـمستخلـص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد وتصنيف الأخطاء المعجمية التي يرتكبها طلاب الجامعات الأكراد الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في كتابة ملخصاتهم. تكونت عينة الدراسة من 40 طالبًا كرديًا يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في كلية التربية الأساسية بجامعة صلاح الدين. تم حساب الأخطاء المعجمية في ملخصاتهم، أي 40 ملخصًا، وتصنيفها إلى سبع فئات . كشف تحليل البيانات أن الأخطاء الإملائية هي أكثر أنواع الأخطاء المعجمية شيوعًا بين طلاب الجامعات الأكراد الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، يليها أخطاء اختيار الكلمات وأخطاء الترجمة الحرفية. وكان أكثر أنواع الأخطاء شيوعًا هو الأخطاء الإملائية. يُعزى انتشار هذا النوع من الأخطاء إلى الاختلافات الإملائية بين اللغتين الإنجليزية والكردية من جهة، وسياسة الامتحانات غير الفعالة المُتبعة في تصميم امتحانات الصف الثاني عشر واسعة النطاق في إقليم كردستان (والتي تعتمد بنسبة 100% على أسئلة الاختيار من متعدد).

الكلمات المفتاحية: أخطاء معجمية، كتابة الملخصات، اكتساب المفردات

1. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of effective writing skills is by itself an intricate task; developing essential summary writing skills in a second language is an even more difficult process that afflicts second language students. Zhu et al (2021) consider summary writing as a pivotal competency that the students need to master while studying in various academic contexts. Similarly, Ono (2021) asserts that summary writing skills are essential and indispensable in academic writing contexts. This assertion is specifically true for university contexts where writing summary tasks are commonly assigned to students (Marshall, 2017).

Mallahi (2022) asserts that since summary writing necessitates some subsidiary skills like textual borrowing and paraphrasing, inadequate practice in these sub-skills lead students

to resort to copy the original work or patch-writing by altering only some of the words, which consequently results in wrong lexical choice.

Lexical knowledge is essential to acquire second language proficiency. It is considered as the backbone of language learning, especially in writing skill. Hence, shortage in vocabulary knowledge makes writing a daunting task for EFL learners (Abu Naba'h, 2011).

Accordingly, EFL teachers encounter the challenging task of handling their students' lexical errors, which is quite common among EFL students. Tackling such a problematic area demands teachers to be familiarised with the nature of these errors since this would facilitate understanding the reason behind these errors. Consequently, this awareness would enable teachers to appropriately address these problems in class.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Lexical Errors

Berkoff (1981) defines a lexical error as "a deviation in form and/or meaning of a target language lexical word" (p.10). Deviation in form encompasses deviation in orthography or phonology on the level of single words, in addition to syntactic restriction. On the other hand, meaning deviations cover ignoring semantic restrictions and the wrong choice of words.

According to Llach (2005), lexical errors are good indications of students' vocabulary acquisition in a foreign showing their lexical knowledge breadth and width, and shortage.

Similarly, Fakhrudin and Dzulfikri (2023) proclaim the existence of a strong correlation between vocabulary acquisition and lexical errors. That is to say, lexical errors can be considered a major source of information about students' vocabulary acquisition in providing precise student language data. Consequently, Shormani (2014) asserts that lexical errors in themselves are significant to teachers and researchers since they are viewed as an evidence of an interactive process in language learning.

Badilla and Núñez (2020) attribute lexical errors to the erroneous choice of content words that leads to expressing meaning differently in a context resulting in misunderstanding. According to Fauzan et al. (2020), lexical errors result in misinterpretation on the part of readers. Therefore; students need to work on making their wring of a better quality and teachers should help them amend their lexical errors.

Chubaryan and Vardanyan (2023) associate lexical errors in academic vocabulary with lexical competence. For them, to know a word does not only entail having the semantic knowledge of a word but it also involves having morphological, syntactic and pragmatic knowledge in a way that enables learners to use a specific word effectively in different contexts.

2.2 Classification of Lexical Errors

Discrete descriptive error classifications have been proposed to deal with errors in EFL contexts. Specifically, these lexical error classifications differ based on the analyst's perspective when they handle students' written performance in an EFL context (Arb-chaaba, 2017).

Engber (1995) contends that lexical errors made by learners are of two kinds, namely lexical choice errors and lexical form errors. The former includes individual and combined choice of lexical items, while the latter covers derivational errors and spelling errors.

In his classification, James (1998) approaches lexical errors from formal and semantic standpoint where he evidently distinguishes the different subgroups of formal (formal mis-election, mis-formation and distortion) and semantic errors (confusion and collocation errors).

Lexical errors are considered as 'natural' and they are generally classified into two types: inter-lingual errors (includes transfer errors where the learner fails to keep a conceptual separation between the first and second language, and intra-lingual errors that result from inadequate knowledge of the second language (Brown, 2000; Iyere 2021). Analogously, Putra et al (2024) are of the belief that students' blunders should not be disregarded since they show the developing features of students' language learning.

Ander and Yildirim (2010) provide another taxonomy for classifying lexical errors that comprises seven types:

1. Wrong Word Choice: a student uses a wrong word that makes it puzzling to decide on the meaning of a sentence.
2. Errors of Literal Translation: a student makes a literal translation of their first language into English that leads to a wrong word choice.
3. Errors of Omission or Incompletion: a student deletes a word and the deletion causes a change in the meaning of a sentence where identifying the intended meaning is difficult.
4. Misspellings: a student misspells a word and causes confusion for the reader.
5. Errors of Redundancy: a student excessively repeats words or phrases that are unnecessary.
6. Errors of Collocation: a student commits mistakes in how words are used together. This type intersects with idiomaticity.
7. Errors of Word Formation: a student uses derivationally an incorrect form of a word.

It is worth noting that the researchers will adopt this classification for the purpose of classifying and analysing students' lexical errors in this study because it encompasses the most common types of lexical errors that Kurdish students may make. In this respect, Llach (2015) maintains that specific lexical error types are identified on the grounds of the dimension of the lexical error that are prevalent in the research and the type of data

used. Hence, the lexical errors in the current study entail the incorrect use of a word in our students' summaries.

2.3 Previous Studies

Saengchan and Schmitt (2006), are of the belief that in spite of the prevalence and seriousness of lexical errors, they are still quite under-researched and have not been thoroughly examined due to their complexity. This is quite true for the Kurdish context, where no studies have been conducted in this respect. Reviewing the literature revealed that the researchers mainly focused on writing errors rather than lexical errors.

In a study conducted by Ahmed (2019), she tried to explore the challenges that Kurdish EFL learners encounter in essay writing and determine the most common ones. Thirty-two students from third year students of English Department at the Soran University were selected as the sample of the study. Data was gathered through analysing thirty-two randomly selected essays. The findings showed that the students encountered four major challenges in grammar, organizing ideas, punctuations, and limited vocabulary.

In another study, Haji (2022) looked at the difficulties that could hinder students' overall progress and success in writing. The researcher utilised a questionnaire and semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect the needed data. Two hundred EFL students from four public universities in the Kurdistan Region responded to the questionnaire. Besides, an interview was conducted with ten EFL university instructors. The results indicated that Kurdish EFL students encountered different difficulties, like inadequate grammar, punctuation, spelling, word choice, and negative language transfer.

Omar and Barzani (2022) conducted a study to examine and categorise writing errors committed by Kurdish EFL students at Cihan University in Duhok. Their sample comprised 37 third-year from English department. They collected their data from students' response sheets for the poetry midterm exam. They concluded that students' writing errors ranged from spelling and punctuation errors to grammatical issues like misuse of prepositions and pronouns.

Recently, Ali (2024) carried out a study seeking to identify and classify the errors in Kurdish post-graduate students' writing. Thirty-two postgraduate students were enrolled in the study. The major data collection tool was the students' compositions from a multi-levels program. The findings revealed that the participants made fourteen various types of writing errors, namely: "grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, literal translation, misuse of verbs, articles, unnecessary prepositions, misuse of pronouns, subject-verb agreement, misuse of prepositions, apostrophes, misuse of conjunctions and sing of wordiness". Moreover, it was concluded that the most dominant errors were concerned with grammar and punctuation.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

A total of 40 Kurdish EFL students in English department/ evening classes took part in this study during the academic year 2024-2025. The subjects were second grade students who have already studied reading comprehension in the first grade. The researchers conducted this research within reading comprehension module in the second grade, where the students were required to write a summary for each reading passage at the end of each unit.

Summary writing was assigned due to its significance in foreign language learning, as Chin (2013) contends, it is an interplay between students' receptive and productive skills and it assists the holistic development of students' reading and writing skills simultaneously.

3.2. Instrument and Data Collection

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method. Forty summaries were used as the main instrument for the study to gain real language excerpts from the participants. The summaries ranged from 120 to 150 words. The mean length of the 40 summaries was **5550** words. It is worth mentioning that the students wrote their summaries of the reading comprehension text in a full class time (50 minutes), and they were asked not to use any type of dictionaries while writing their summaries.

They had an instructional session beforehand so as to enhance their summary skills and teach them how to write effective summaries. They were instructed on how to read the passage carefully, describe and pull out both the main and supporting ideas covered in the text, write down and arrange the ideas, and finally draw some conclusions.

Each summary was carefully reviewed, and lexical errors were identified and classified based on the previously established categories. This was done with the assistance of another experienced rater so as to ensure data reliability.

3.3. Data Analysis

Jichun (2015) contends that error analysis is an effective approach prevalently utilised to investigate writing in second languages that emphasizes on identifying and classifying errors made by students. Furthermore, error analysis transcends the plain identification and listing of errors; it can provide an extensive framework for promoting writing skill (Parameswari et al, 2024).

After the data was collected, the two raters worked collaboratively and they agreed on the identification of almost all of the errors. Then, the lexical errors were categorised into 7 subcategories. Students' summaries were cautiously reviewed to identify the lexical errors they had made, then, the errors were coded and categorized into different types.

Eventually, the results were transformed into a percentage to indicate the error frequency. The taxonomy of lexical errors created by Ander and Yıldırım (2010), as mentioned earlier, was used to examine the data of this study. It is worth mentioning that this taxonomy rules out the errors that are mainly governed by grammatical processes (inflections), for instance, plurality, genitive, tense, and comparative and superlative forms. This taxonomy was adopted due to the complexity of lexis and the blurred boundaries among the different categories. As Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) contend that in spite of the problematic overlap between categories, the use of a comprehensive categorisation framework can result in a more accurate identification and discussion of error types.

The researchers utilised descriptive qualitative analysis technique (percentage) to analyse the data. The following formula was used:

$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$

Where:

P = Percentage

F = Frequency of incorrect answer

N = Number of sample

Table (1) The frequency and percentage of errors at category level

No	Identification of Error (examples)	Error Category	Error Frequency	Percentage
1.	College headmaster (dean) Military process (operation)	Wrong Word Choice	85	17.5 %
2.	Take decision Eat lunch	Errors of Literal Translation	72	14.8 %
3.	Take care his people's needs We very confident in success	Errors of Omission or Incompletion	8	1.6 %
4.	Foriegn Basicly	Misspellings	244	50.5 %
5.	Return back Recomplete again	Errors of Redundancy	5	1.06 %
6..	Do a change Take an appointment	Errors of Collocation	55	11.3 %
7.	Attendment Influencial	Errors of Word Formation	15	3.1 %
	Total		485	100%

As is clear from the table above, the most problematic type of lexical errors was Misspelling 245 (50.5%). That was followed by Wrong Word Choice 85 (17.5%), and then followed by Error of Literal Translation 72 (14.8%). Next was Errors of Collocation 55 (11.3 %), and then Errors of Word Formation 15 (3.1 %). Then came Errors of Omission or Incompletion 8 (1.6 %). Finally, Errors of Redundancy 5 (1.06%) was the least problematic type of errors. The figure below clearly shows this data:
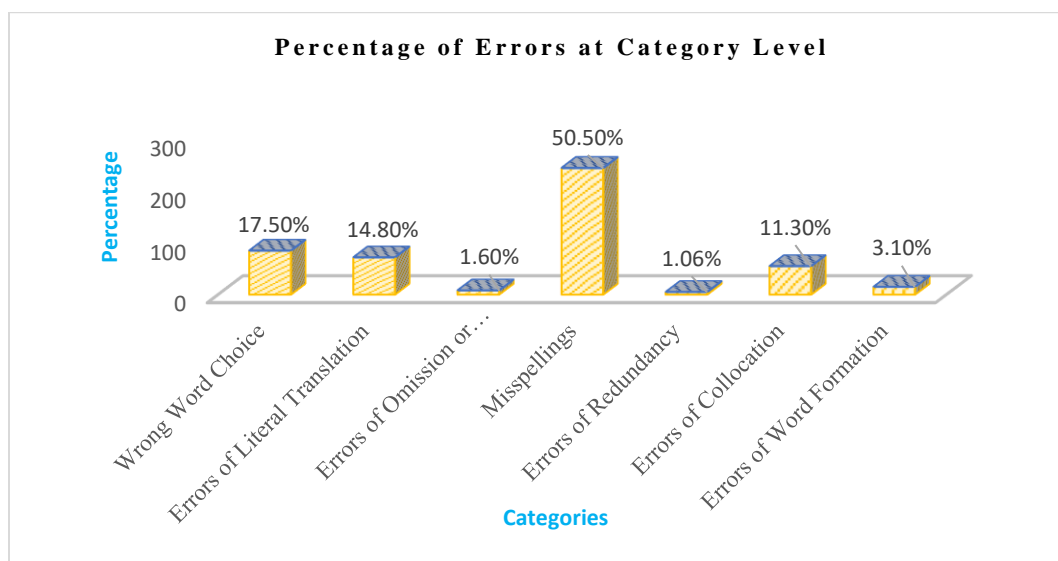
Figure (1) Percentage of Errors at Category Level

Below are some examples for each error category as appeared in students' summaries:

1- Wrong Word Choice
- I will always **remind*** (remember) this election.
- I vote for a **conscious*** (conscientious) candidate who tries to do what is right.
- I am **greatful*** (grateful) to Allah because I can take part in the election.
- We stayed there for three **ours*** (hours).
- The authority should **replace*** (compensate) the people for their belated salaried.
- They decided to **agree*** (accept) the challenge.
- We are **worry*** about our future.
- We eagerly **see*** (watch) the political scene.
- **World*** issues (worldwide/global issues)

There were cases where the students knew a word, but they could not use its proper derivative form:
- The candidate showed **brave*** (bravery) in his speech.
- Some politicians suffer from **death*** (dead) conscience.

2- Errors of Literal Translation
- She was **crimed*** (accused) of fraud
- **Extract*** (eliminate) social injustice.
- There are **much*** (many) cases of injustice.
- Becoming a member of parliament enables them to **gather*** (make) money easily.
- In my **idea*** (opinion) ….

It is worth noting that there were also some cases of misordering, which can be attributed to L1 interference. In Kurdish language, unlike English, adjectives follow verbs and the possessed precedes the possessor:
- They make <u>promises big</u> that they have little intention of keeping.
- The <u>results final</u> need to be announced publically.
- The <u>beliefs candidate's</u> is important.

3- Errors of Omission or Incompletion
- we are waiting* (for) new reforms.
- He was embarrassed* when we asked him about his future plans. embarrassed
- They should follow* (up) the coordinator's suggestion; it seems sensible.
- He (is) **interested*** in politics.
- They (are) **concerned*** with social issues.
- We need to **look*** (into) and check the parties' program.
- Women **make up*** 65% (of) the voters.

There were also cases of substitution, e.g.:
- The candidate aimed **in*** (at) convincing their voters of their future plans.
- He made his way to the hall surrounded **with*** (by) his supporters.

4- Misspellings errors
completly, describtion, foriegn, sieze, contries, begining, discusion, rouph, Turky, sitreet, see, absence, accomodate, confrance, comitee, defintely, seprate, occurnce, bussy, ancsiety, envirment, knowlege, therfor, wether, dipartment, becose, prefered….

5- Errors of Redundancy
- They claim they have **very** unique projects for the young.
- Appointment upon graduation is **absolutely** guaranteed.
- We will not retreat **back** even if we lose.
- Provide **basic** essentials of life.
- Reduce **foreign** imports.

There were also errors of addition:
- Defy **against*** the other candidates.
- The two parties united **together*** recently.

6- Errors of Collocation
- It is necessary to **elevate*** (raise) political aspiration.
- The election campaign was **managed*** (run) successfully.
- Under good governance, we can **grow*** (develop) hope and positive attitudes.
- **Sound*** (voice) of public should be taken into account.
- **Divide*** (distribute) the resources evenly among the citizen.

7- Errors of Word Formation
Obsetion, assuranse, disstrong, maluse, misdefend, reask, undirect, conclution, preservation, sensassion, posibility…

Table No. 2 provides a detailed descriptive statistical analysis of the gained data. It shows the variation in the frequencies of errors at the individual level:

(2) Frequency and percentage of errors at the individual level

No	Wrong Choice	Literal Translation	Omission or Incompletion	Misspellings	Redundancy	Errors of Collocation	Word Formation	Total
1	1	/		5		/	1	6
2	2	2		7		1	1	13
3	3	2		10	1	2	1	19
4	3	2	1	8		2	1	17
5	4	1		6		3		14
6	2	1		5		2	1	11
7	3	2		7		4		16
8	4	3	1	7	1	4	1	21
9	/	1		6		1		8
10	2	1		7		3	1	14
11	/	1		6		1		8
12	2	3	1	8		2	2	18
13	4	3	2	10		1	1	21
14	2	3		7		1		13
15	2	3		6		2		13
16	4	1	1	7		1		14
17	2	3		7		2		14

18	/	2		/		1		3
19	3	2	1	6		2		14
20	2	/		6		/		10
21	2	1		4		1		8
22	3	2		5		3	1	14
23	3	2		5		2	1	13
24	/	1		3		2		6
25	2	2		6				10
26	3	1		7		1	1	13
27	1	/		4				5
28	1	2		5		1		9
29	1	2		6		2		11
30	4	3	1	5		1		14
31	2	3		8	1	2		16
32	/	2		6		1		9
33	2	1		4				7
34	2	1		5				8
35	3	3		7		1	1	15
36	2	4		9	1	1	1	18
37	3	2		6	1	1		13
38	2	1		6		1		10
39	3	2		5				10
40	1	1		7		1		10
Total	85	72	8	244	5	56	15	485
percentage	17.52 %	14.84 %	1.64 %	50.51 %	1.06 %	11.34 %	3.09 %	100%

4. DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 2, the 40 summaries of the same text by different students yielded **485** lexical errors. Specifically, each summary contained **12** errors on average. The errors were of different frequency: common, relative frequency, and low frequency. In other words, these errors were not evenly distributed across the error-category scale, which in turn made the process of error detection difficult.

Misspelling errors seemed to be the most prevalent error in Kurdish EFL students' summary writing. Approximately, half of the errors (50.51 %) belonged to this category. This result agrees with that of Al-Bereiki and Al-Mekhlafi (2016), who assert that a student's first language leads to serious spelling difficulties if the two languages are linguistically distant in terms of sound-letter relationships when the student heavily relies on phonetic bases due to having no discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation. This

assertion applies to Kurdish language, in which words are written as they are pronounced, unlike English. In addition, the examination policy and the machine-based scoring adopted in the twelfth grade large-scale exam has significantly contributed in Kurdish students' spelling deterioration. The students are merely prepared to tick the correct answer to get high marks and join university. Their cognitive skills are promoted on the expense of their productive skills since answering the questions involves no writing and they completely rely on multiple choice items. Unfortunately, students' deficiency in their spelling skill arises prominently in their tertiary education.

The other common spelling errors were wrong word choice 85 (17.5 %) and literal translation 72 (14.8 %). This result corresponds to Thuy et al (2022), who state that students suffer from word choice because it is difficult for them to grasp, utilize, revise, and recall words efficiently. Besides, they do not have sufficient writing practice.

The results show that Kurdish EFL students to a great extent have problems with literal translation. This result agrees with Sharifudin (2019) who contends that students produce literal translation errors mainly due to the cross-linguistic differences between the two languages, especially with words that have multiple meanings, i.e. determining equivalent and appropriate meaning becomes problematic.

Errors of word formation appeared with the frequency 15 (3.1 %), which indicates that it is problematic for Kurdish EFL students to some extent. This result is aligned with what Shawqi and Sultan (2024) concluded; EFL students make errors in the area of English word-formation due to different reasons: students' carelessness, L1 interference, and the complicated nature of word formation itself.

There were very few occurrences of the other two types of errors (Errors of Omission or Incompletion and errors of redundancy).

5. CONCLUSION

Depending upon the data analysis, it can be inferred that Kurdish EFL students made different types of lexical errors in their summary writing. These errors were not evenly distributed across the error-category scale. However, misspelling appeared to be the most prevalent type of error. In fact, half of students' errors were of this type, which means Kurdish EFL students' summary writing is afflicted by this problem. The reason behind the dominance of this type of error is ascribed to orthographically cross-linguistic differences between English and Kurdish on one hand; and the ineffective examination policy adopted in designing the large-scale exams in Kurdistan Region (which depends 100% on multiple choice items). Other reasons for students' lexical errors were students' L1 interference and students' carelessness.

The Ministry of Education is recommended to reconsider its examination policy in administrating the large-scale exams of the twelfth grade and incorporate subjective and essay types of questions into the large-scale exam so as to encourage students hone their writing skills.

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