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Investigating Iraqi EFL Learners' Use of Lexical Relations

A paper

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By

Seinaa Noori Yousef Abdullzahra

Supervised By

Asst. Prof. Lihadh A. Mubarak , (PhD)

Dedication

I dedicate this piece of work to the source of my strength and cause of any success I have ever achieved: my great mother.

I also dedicate this work to my late father, mercy and light descend upon him, I wish he witnessed my success.

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All words of thanks, praises are due to Almighty Allah

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Abstract

Lexical relations are one of the most important semantic relations in exploring the meanings of words in English language. They are mainly used to analysis the meanings of words in terms of their relations to each other within sentences. Those relations vary according to the kind of the relation that a word may have with another word or words. The current study aims at investigating this level of language by illustrating what lexical relations are and how they are manifested in language. In addition, the paper surveys the most important and the most basic kinds of lexical relations. Finally, it discusses in detail the importance of lexical relations in language use being an important linguistic source in the analysis, understanding and use of language.

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Chapter One: Introduction

١.١ The Problem

Lexical relations describe relationship among word meanings. It is the study of how lexicon is managed and how the lexical meanings of lexical items are related each other. There are several types of lexical relations, such as; homonym, polysemy, synonymy, antonym, hyponymy, and metonymy (Palmer, ١٩٧٦).

This study attempts to find answers for the following questions:

١. Have Iraqi EFL learners good knowledge about lexical relation?
٢. Are they good in recognition level?
٣. Are they good in production level?
٤. Are they better on the recognition or on the production level?

١.٢ The Aims

This study aims to find out the difficulty faced by Iraqi EFL university students in using lexical relation. It also aims to investigate Iraqi EFL university students' performance recognizing and producing the different lexical relation.

١.٤ The Procedures

The following steps will be followed in this paper:

١. Presenting a comprehensive theoretical study about lexical relation.
٢. Explaining the types of lexical relation.

٣. Designing a test to examine the recognition as well as the production level of Iraqi EFL learners.
٤. Applying the test to a random sample of students in using lexical relation.
٥. Analysing and discussing the results that represent the performance of group of students in using lexical relation.

١.٥ The Limits

This paper is limited to the study of lexical relation and the test is applied to a random sample of Iraqi EFL university students taken from the fourth year classes in the Dept. of English ,College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon during the academic year (٢٠٢٢-٢٠٢١).

١.٦ The Value

It is hoped that the study will be valuable for students, teachers and those who have interests in linguistics and grammar.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

۲.۱ The Definition of Lexical Relations

We can characterize the meaning of a word in a number of ways, including morphology, phonology, and categorization: whether it is animate, human, feminine, or adult. There is, however, another way to characterize a word's meaning: through its lexical relations. Lexical relationships are the links made between one word and another; for example, we all know that "closed" is opposite "open," and "literature" is similar to "book." These words have a substantial relationship to one another, although words like "chair" and "coffee" may not; hence, lexical associations can provide information about a word's meaning. Crystal (۲۰۰۳:۳۴)

Lexical relations are one of the most important subfields of semantics which are entirely concerned with approaching the meanings of words through relating them to other words within English sentences. Such relations are manifested according to the type of the relation that a word may have with another word or words as when having two words with close meanings, two words with opposite ones and so on. They play major role in explaining the exact meaning of words in relation to other words and not in relation to the meaning of the word itself.

The paper aims at exploring such types of semantic relations by showing the main features of lexical relations in addition to surveying their main types that are widely used in the explanation and analysis of

the meanings of words. The study focuses in particular on synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms with various instances. Finally, it aims at showing the importance of lexical semantics in the use of language as well as the analysis of meanings. Finch (٢٠٠٥:٩٨)

The importance of lexical relations can be clearly seen in various communicative events and situations especially when the meaning of a word is unclear or it is to be explained thoroughly. Sometimes, when using words in everyday conversation or in any other situation, speakers may explain them according to their relationships. For instance, when speakers are required to explain the meaning of the word ‘conceal’, they may simply say ‘it means hide’. Another instance could be considered when explaining the meaning of the word ‘shallow’ as being the opposite of ‘deep’ and so on. In doing so, the explanations of the meanings of words are understood not according to what they mean (their features) but in terms of their relationships with other words. This way of describing the meanings of words is used in semantics and is called the analysis of lexical relations (Yule, ٢٠٠٦:٨٧). Knowledge of vocabulary items is not enough for the development of learners’ lexical competence. It also requires understanding of the different relations between words. Trask (١٩٩٩:٤٥) likewise puts a general statement that the meaning of a word is related to the meaning of other word in ways that may be simple or complex.

The word young, for example is more closely related to old than it is to lazy. Also rose is related in one way to flower, in another way to lilac, and in a third way to red. The meaning of a word could be characterized not in terms of its component features , but in terms of its

relationship to other words , in other words according to its lexical relations. Thus, the importance of such relations arise from the fact that they explain the meanings of words in terms of their relations to others at various levels and by doing so, there would be much exposure to language and much augmentation as far as the knowledge of the vocabulary used in language is concerned.

۲.۲ Types of Lexical Relation

۲.۲.۱ Synonymy

According to (Parker and Riley, ۲۰۰۵:۶۵) this is perhaps the most commonly understood of all the lexical relations. Synonymy is the idea that some words have the same meaning as others, though this is not always the case; that is, there are some synonyms which cannot replace one another in a sentence. When words have the same meaning, they can replace one another without altering the meaning of a sentence; for example:

Jane is quick

Jane is fast

Jane is speedy

All three sentences have the same meaning even though they are each unique instances of that sentence; only because the meanings of all three words at the end of the sentences are the same. This, by extension, then allows each sentence to maintain the same meaning as before.

Now, this lexical relationship, as said earlier, does not necessarily hold for all synonyms. Consider some of these pairs: quick/high-speed, quick/brisk. When we do the same sentence exercise as above, we will get radically different meanings:

Jane is quick

Jane is high-speed

Jane is brisk

So, synonyms sometimes lack the same meanings when applied to a specific context or sentence; indeed, there are cases where the result will give us something incoherent or incredibly odd. Therefore, the key to remember with synonyms is that, although they have a relationship in meaning, they do not always have the same meaning in sentences.

۲.۲.۲ Antonymy

Antonymy is precisely the opposite of synonymy. With antonymy, we are concerned with constructions which are opposite to one another with respect to lexical relationships. For example, ice/hot, beautiful/ugly, and big/small. These words have meanings which are opposite to one another, and these opposite meanings come in two forms: categorical and continuous. (Lobner : ۲۰۰۲:۵۴)

The categorical distinction is one that has two categories that contrast one another; for example, fire/water. These are categorical because there is no continuum between them; that is, less fire never means more water and less water never means more fire.

Comparatively, antonyms that are on a continuum are constructions like big/small. This is due to the relative nature of these words; meaning, when we call a horse small, it may be relative to something else like another horse. And when that same horse is compared yet again, it might be the case that the horse is now big. So, the meanings between big and small are on a continuum relative to the object of discussion.(Ibid). Some example phrases of antonymy are as follows:

Jane is small

Jane is big

Jane is slow

Jane is fast

These phrases all have opposite meanings to one another, and we can see this more readily through their applications to sentences. It is also important to note that antonymy can have issues as well, though only when we shift the nature of our communication: “The economy is going nuts,” can also be said, though sarcastically, in the following manner: “the economy is perfectly healthy”. Traditionally, “going nuts” and “mentally healthy” are viewed as opposite meanings, but when we shift the manner in which we speak, like with sarcasm, this relationship fails to hold up. Thus, antonyms work differently when we hold as an assumption a literal or straightforward view of discourse. (Ibid)

٢.٢.٣ Hyponymy

Hyponymy is similar to the notion of embeddedness; meaning, the semantics of one object is implied by another. That is to say, because words represent objects, the semantic properties of a particular object, like whether it is a female or animate, can be embedded in a word that implies those same objects; and so, the meaning of word “x” can be embedded in word “z”. For example, “Donald Trump” implies “human,” or “animate”. This is due to the fact that Donald Trump, despite the beliefs of others, is both a human and animate. With each word, there is implied the notion of another semantic feature. (Lyons ١٩٩٥: ٦٠)

These semantic features, might I add, are organized in an ordinal fashion, which means there is a rank for embeddedness: from specific to general. The most general word would sit atop the hierarchy; so, with respect to our friend Donald Trump, the hierarchy might look something like the following:

١. Animate

٢. Human

٣. Male

٤. Adult

There are also technical terms that are used to describe the relationships amongst these hierarchies: superordinates and co-hyponyms. In the previous example, animate would be considered superordinate to human and human would be considered

superordinate to female. On the other hand, when a term is on the same level as another word, then it is named a co-hyponym; for instance, “dog” and “cat” are a co-hyponyms that have “pet” as their superordinate. So, hyponyms move from either specific to general or general to specific, where general is at the top of the hierarchy and specific is at the bottom. So hyponymy is the idea of embedded semantic features in a hierarchical order. When we speak of Donald Trump, we necessarily bring up specific semantic features. Cruse (1986: 260)

2.2.4 Polysemy

Polysemy deals with constructions that have multiple meanings; for example, “head,” “over,” or “letter,” can all adopt multiple meanings. These words could be considered polysemous since they each have many potential meanings. The word “head” can be used to refer to the top of someone’s body: “Jane received a head injury”; it can be used to refer to the front of a line: “Jane is at the head of the line”. It can also be used to refer to how prepared someone is: “Jane is way ahead of the curve, she already read the chapter for next week”. So, the word “head” is polysemous since it has many meanings. Another word with many meanings is “over”. The word “over” can be used more ways than countable; for instance, “she lives over there,” is different from, “she lives over the hill”. Even furthermore, “the lid is over the pot,” and, “is it over yet,” are both different from one another and the two previously mentioned examples. The word “over,” as said already, has more meanings than countable. Cruse (1986: 90)

Words are not alone when it comes to being polysemous, sentences are polysemous too; for instance, “Jane hit the man with the umbrella”. Here, it is unclear as to whether Jane had hit someone with an umbrella, as though the umbrella were a weapon, or if she had bumped into someone that was holding an umbrella. And not every meaning associated with a given polysemous sentence will be the same.

So, polysemy pertains to words and phrases that can have more than one meaning; sometimes the context of a specific phrase will allow us to negate other phrases, like if someone was holding an umbrella, but when removed from context, phrases remain ambiguous. And thus, polysemy highlights the importance of analyzing semantic features of words rather than analyzing syntax alone. (Lyons, 1999:87)

Chapter Three: Methods

٣.١ The Sample of the study

A random sample of students are selected from fourth stage in English department , College of Education for Human Sciences , University of Babylon during the academic year (٢٠٢٢-٢٠٢١). This sample consists of thirty-three students (males and females). They are non - native speakers of English .

٣.٢ The Instruments

A test was designed to be utilized in the current study in order to achieve the aims of the study.

٣.٢.١ Definition of Test

According to Skehan (١٩٩٩: ٢٠٣), a language test is a systematic method and a means of checking the students' performance through the elicitation of certain behaviour to make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual. For Aljuboury (١٩٩٩:١) a test is any means of checking what students can do with the language . Also , it is as a systematic procedure for observing and describing one or more characteristics of person with the aid of either a numerical of category system(Nitko and Brookhart, ٢٠٠٧:٦).

٣.٢.٢ Features of a Good Test

Aljuboury(١٩٩٩: ٢٤) states that a good test should contain the following features :

٣.٣.٣.١ Validity

According to **Al-Juboury** (١٩٩٩:٨٤), validity is the degree to which a test measures what is supposed to measure or can be used successfully for the intended purpose. " In fact, there are four kinds of validity but here the researcher is going to shed light on two of them; content validity and face validity .

١- Content Validity

It is the extent to which a test covers the syllabus to be tested. A valid test must be used upon careful analysis of the subject or skill we are testing. (ibid :٢٥)

٢- Face Validity

It is the way the test looks to the examinees, supervisors or in general to the people concerned with student's education. (Ibid: ٢٦)

٣.٣.٣.٢ Reliability

Reliability means the constancy of test scoring. If a test is applied twice to the same student it would give the same result(ibid: ٢٦).

٣.٣.٣.٣ Practicality

It is also known as usability. A test which is valid and reliable but difficult to administer or score or which is expensive, may fail to gain acceptance. (ibid:٢٧).

٣.٣ Test Design

The test consists of two questions the first measures the recognition level and the second measures the production level. Each question consists of ten items. Question one examines the recognition level. In this question the students were asked to make the correct choice of lexical lexical relation among four choices given in each item. While question

two examines the students' performance on the production level. In this question, ten types of lexical relations are given and the students are asked to give example for each type.

Chapter Four: Data analysis

٤.١ Introduction

In this chapter , the researcher analysis the results of the test after testing fourth year university students at the Department of English for the academic year ٢٠٢٢-٢٠٢١. The test consists of two questions: question one consists of ten items which are designed to the students' performance at the recognition level in which the students are given a situations and being asked to choose whether the sentences are true or false. While the second question consists of ten items which are designed to measure the students' performance at the production level in which the students are asked to change sentences into indirect speech . The researcher collects the correct/ incorrect responses . The researcher , also provides the percentage of each correct/incorrect response by using the following formula: the number of the total correct / incorrect responses mutilated by ١٠٠ and divided on the total number of the students which is thirty three.

٤.٢ The students' answers on the recognition level (Question ١)

Item (١,٩)The total number correct responses is (١١) while the percentage of incorrect responses is (٢٢). Items ٢ and ٨ have the lowest percentage of the correct responses (٥٧,٦%) while the percentage of the incorrect responses are (٤٢,٤%). Items ٣, ٧ and ١٠ have the percentage of the correct responses (٢٤,٢%)while the percentage of the incorrect responses are(٧٥,٨%). Item ٤ has correct responses and the percentage is (٥١,٥%)while the incorrect answers are of percentage (٤٨,٥%). This item

has the highest of correct responses. Item (٥) The total percentage of the correct responses are(٧٢,٧%) while the incorrect ones are(٢٧,٣%)

**Table (١) The performance of the students at the recognition level.
(Question ١)**

Items	No. of correct responses	Percentage	No. of incorrect responses	Percentage
١	١١	٣٣,٣%	٢٢	٦٦,٧%
٢	١٩	٥٧,٦%	١٤	٤٢,٤%
٣	٨	٢٤,٢%	٢٥	٧٥,٨%
٤	١٧	٥١,٥%	١٦	٤٨,٥%
٥	٢٤	٧٢,٧%	٩	٢٧,٣%
٦	٧	٢١,٢%	٢٦	٧٨,٨%
٧	٨	٢٤,٢%	٢٥	٧٥,٨%
٨	١٩	٥٧,٦%	١٤	٤٢,٤%
٩	١١	٣٣,٣%	٢٢	٦٦,٧%
١٠	٨	٢٤,٢%	٢٥	٧٥,٨%

٤.٣ The students' answers on the production level (Question ٢)

In this part of the test, student have problem in producing examples . In fact the problem is with terms, they know the answer but they are not familiar with the terms. They know how to identify the problem with each sentence but are unable to describe it with a term. They know there is something wrong with a sentence but unable to identify it. Students are able to produce the correct answer especially in

items (٣ and ٥,) which have the highest number of the incorrect answers. Items (٢,٤,٩) have the highest percentage of correct responses. Terms are knew for them

Table (٢) shows the performance of the students at the recognition level. (Question ٢)

Items	No. of correct responses	Percentage	No. of incorrect responses	Percentage
١	١٨	٥٤,٥%	١٥	٤٥,٥%
٢	٢٠	٦٠,٦%	١٣	٣٩,٤%
٣	٢٣	٦٩,٧%	١٠	٣٠,٣%
٤	٢١	٦٣,٦%	١٢	٣٦,٤%
٥	٢٣	٦٩,٧%	١٠	٣٠,٣%
٦	١٨	٥٤,٥%	١٥	٤٥,٥%
٧	٢٠	٦٠,٦%	١٣	٣٩,٤%
٨	٢٠	٦٠,٦%	١٣	٣٩,٤%
٩	٢١	٦٣,٦%	١٢	٣٦,٤%
١٠	١٨	٥٤,٥%	١٥	٤٥,٥%

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendation

٥.١ Introduction

Knowledge of vocabulary items is not enough for the development of learners lexical competence . It also requires understanding of the different relations between words . That the meaning of a word is related to the meaning of other word in ways that may be simple or complex . The word young , for example is more closely related to old than it is to lazy . Also rose is related in one way to flower , in another way to lilac, and in a third way to red . The meaning of a word could be characterized not in terms of its component features , but in terms of its relationship to other words , in other words according to its lexical relations

٥.٢ Conclusions

In this regard the following points are concluded :

١. Knowledge of lexical relations is an essential element in the development of learner's lexical competence .
- ٢- The presentation (explanation) of the different types of lexical relations including hyponymy , synonymy and antonymy should be done after diagnosing areas of strength and weakness in the learner's knowledge of these relations .
- ٣- The development of learner's lexical competence requires providing learners with instructions on how select and use the different types of vocabulary learning strategies . Providing learners with such instructions should be based on learner's knowledge of lexical relations and works on overcoming learner's weakness connected with mastering such relations .

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Appendices

The Test

Q١/ Give the type of the lexical relation of each of the following pairs of words: (hyponymy, synonymy, meronymy, or polysemy)

١. clock = minute hand - hour hand – case

٢. clock = digital - analog - alarm

٣. bear (animal) - bear (to tolerate)

٤. bear - bare

٥. giggle - laugh

٦. conceal - cover

٧. bold - meek

٨. common - rare

٩. bat (animal) - bat (for baseball)

١٠. duck (animal) - duck (lower the head)

Q٢/ Give example words about the type of the lexical relation :

١- homonym

٢- polysemy

٣- synonymy

- ξ- antonym
- ο- hyponymy
- Ϛ- metonymy
- ϣ- homonym
- ϝ- synonymy
- Ϟ- hyponymy
- Ϡ- polysemy