

Jordanian EFL Learners' Production of Synonyms

Ronza Abu Rumman^{1*}, Ghaleb Rabab'ah²

¹ The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.

² University of Sharjah, UAE.

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* Corresponding author:

ronza1.aburumman@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper reports on the findings of a study that explored Jordanian EFL learners' production of synonyms. The data were elicited through a translation task which consisted of 20 Arabic sentences to measure Jordanian EFL learners' ability to produce the correct synonym in contextualized English sentences. The subjects were asked to translate whole sentences from Arabic into English. Each sentence contains a certain Arabic word that has a specific appropriate English equivalent out of a number of semantically interrelated words that belong to the same category. These words were selected from Sheeler and Markley (1982). The findings indicate that Jordanian EFL learners face serious difficulty in dealing with synonyms on the production level. This can be attributed to some reasons, namely the transfer of training, the complexity of the foreign language, the lack of some English lexical items, the confusion of words on the ground of formal similarity, and the EFL learners' limited knowledge of English in general and of collocations in particular. Furthermore, the subjects employed a number of strategies to compensate for their lack of knowledge, such as overgeneralization, semantic approximation, literal translation, and message abandonment when they encountered a problem in rendering a target word.

Keywords: Collocations, communication strategies, EFL learners, semantic equivalence, synonymy.

قدرة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الأردنيين على إنتاج المرادفات

رونزا أبورمان¹، غالب رباب'اه²

¹ الجامعة الأردنية، عمان، الأردن.

² جامعة الشارقة، الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

ملخص

يقدم هذا البحث نتائج دراسة بحثت في قدرة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على إنتاج المرادفات الصحيحة (synonyms). وجرى ذلك من خلال ترجمة عينة الدراسة (20) طالباً لعشرين جملة عربية كاملة إلى اللغة الإنجليزية لقياس قدرة المتعلمين الأردنيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على إنتاج واستخدام المرادف والمصاحبات اللفظية (collocation) الصحيح. جرى الطلب من المشاركين ترجمة الجمل كاملة من العربية إلى الإنجليزية؛ حيث تحتوي كل جملة على كلمة عربية معينة لها مرادف إنجليزي مناسب من بين عدد من الكلمات المترابطة لغوياً، التي تنتمي إلى نفس الفئة. وجرى اختيار هذه الكلمات من Sheeler and Markley (1982) هذا وقد أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الأردن يواجهون صعوبة كبيرة في إنتاج واستخدام المرادفات اللغوية حيث لم يتمكن إلا 30.45% من الطلبة من تقديم المرادف اللغوي الصحيح. ويمكن أن يُعزى ذلك إلى عدة أسباب منها انتقال أثر التدريس/التدريب، وصعوبة اللغة الأجنبية، ونقص المعرفة في بعض المفردات اللغوية الإنجليزية، واللبس الذي يقع فيه المتعلمون فيما يتعلق بالكلمات المتشابهة لغوياً، ومحدودية معرفة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية باللغة الإنجليزية على نحو عام وبالمصاحبات اللفظية على وجه الخصوص. علاوة على ذلك، استخدم المشاركون عدداً من الاستراتيجيات للتعويض عن افتقارهم إلى معرفة بعض المرادفات الإنجليزية مثل التعميم المفرط (Overgeneralization)، التقريب الدلالي (Semantic approximation) والترجمة الحرفية (Literal translation) والتخلي عن الرسالة (Message abandonment) عندما مواجهة مشكلة في إيجاد الكلمة المستهدفة في مخزونهم اللغوي. الكلمات الدالة: المصاحبات اللفظية، استراتيجيات التواصل، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التكافؤ الدلالي، الترادف.



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1. Introduction:

There are various types of semantic relations that hold between lexical items, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, etc. Part of our knowledge of the meaning of a certain word in a language stems from recognizing that this word has a semantic relationship with other words in that language. For instance, there is a semantic relation between the following words father and mother; green, yellow and red; big and small; beautiful and nice, etc. There is no semantic relation that "can be said to be totally without significance, by no means all conceivable relations are of equal general semantic interest" (Cruse 1986: 84).

Saeed (1997: 63) maintains that a lexical field is "a group of lexemes which belong to a particular activity or area of specialist knowledge, such as the terms in cooking or sailing". Lexical fields are of great importance to lexical relations, such as synonymy since lexical relations are more common between words, which belong to the same lexical field. In particular, synonymy is one of the semantic relations that exist between lexical items. Cruse (1986: 267) defines synonyms as "lexical items whose senses are identical in respect of 'central' semantic traits, but differ, if at all, only in respect of what we may provisionally describe as 'minor' or 'peripheral' traits". Farghal (1998: 116) maintains that synonyms are lexical items that look different but are similar or nearly similar in their meanings. Cruse (1986: 267- 268) states that synonymy is often used to clarify the meaning of another lexical item. For instance, the word 'cashiered' in "He was cashiered", is a synonym of 'dismissed'. Furthermore, synonymous words are used to show the contrast (e.g. murdered and executed). On the other hand, Cruse assures that there is a degree of synonymity between lexical items and some of them are more synonymous than others.

Semanticists use the concept synonymy to refer to the semantic equivalence. Riemer (2010:150) shows the difference between "lexical synonymy" and "phrasal synonymy". Lexical synonymy refers to the semantic equivalence between individual lexemes, while phrasal synonymy occurs between linguistic expressions consisting of more than one lexeme.

Cruse (1986: 88) defines another type of synonymy, i.e. cognitive synonyms as follows "X is a cognitive synonym of Y if (i) X and Y are syntactically identical, and (ii) any grammatical declarative sentence S containing X has equivalent truth-conditions to another sentence S1, which is identical to S except that X is replaced by Y". As a result, the two words such as "aid" and "assistance" are cognitive synonyms.

The domain of this paper is the productive knowledge of synonyms by Arabic-speaking EFL learners, whose major is Applied English at the University of Jordan. The primary concern of this study is to investigate Jordanian EFL learners' ability to produce synonyms through a translation task. Particularly, the study seeks answers for two research questions: (1) What are the difficulties that Jordanian EFL Learners face in the production of synonyms? and (2) What are the communication strategies that Jordanian EFL learners employ when they are translating sentences that contain a certain word which has a number of semantically interrelated equivalents?

2. Literature review

2.1 Studies on synonyms and collocations

Many research studies have tackled the issue of semantic relations, such as synonymy by focusing more on EFL/ESL learners' synonymous errors and the strategies that they employ during language production (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Wilding and Mohindra, 1983; Hussein 1988; Rabab'ah, 2001; Rabab'ah, 2002; Li 2005; Ying 2006; Rabab'ah & Bulut, 2007; Kuo 2009; Shen 2010; Mahmoud 2011; Zhuang 2011; Ahmadian & Darabi 2012; Rabab'ah, 2013; Rabab'ah, 2015, among others).

Some studies have been conducted on Arabic-speaking EFL learners and found that they encounter difficulties in producing and understanding collocations and synonyms (Hussein, 1988; Ahmadian & Darabi 2012; Alanazi (2019a,b), and that they make many errors in producing synonyms (Khazaa, 2019; Fadlallah 2021). For example, Hussein (1988) examined the ability of third and fourth-year students majoring in English at Yarmouk University to collocate words. The researcher concluded that "the overall students' performance was not satisfactory in light of the low rate of collocations answered correctly" (ibid: 129). Ahmadian & Darabi (2012) explored the effect of the knowledge of near -synonyms of 60 EFL learners

on their proficiency in collocation. The researchers used corpus-driven tests, viz. a near synonym test and a collocational behavior test. The results showed that there was a very important relation between their knowledge of near synonyms and their ability to use collocation correctly.

In the same vein, Alanazi conducted two studies to examine the productive and receptive knowledge of synonyms. Alanazi (2017a) examined the productive knowledge of synonyms in English by 40 Saudi EFL learners. The study concluded that the main sources of error were L1 interference, lack of knowledge of some English lexical items, lack of awareness of the different nuances of meaning between the synonyms in English and lack of knowledge of English collocations. In another study, Alanazi (2017b) investigated 40 Saudi EFL learners' receptive knowledge of synonyms in English. The researcher concluded that "the main sources of error were interference habits from the participants' first language (L1), lack of awareness of the semantic differences between the synonyms in English and lack of familiarity with English collocations" (p. 58).

Some other researchers examined EFL students' collocational and near synonymous errors in Taiwan, China and Japan. Li (2005), for example, found that the misuse of synonyms was a result of the absence of some lexical items in the subjects' minds which collocate with other words correctly, e.g. invade. They used '*breach the privacy' instead of 'invade the privacy'. In a similar study, Kuo (2009) showed (31.15%) of the main types of a sample of 49 Taiwanese intermediate EFL college students' errors were synonymous errors. In a similar vein, Ying (2006) found that Chinese EFL learners underused the two synonymous words "almost" and "nearly" in their writing, and confused their collocational patterns. Similarly, Shen (2010) investigated Chinese EFL learners' synonymous errors when they were using two adjectives, i.e. *glad* and *happy*. The study indicated that there were an overuse and a misuse of some patterns and collocations as a result of negative transfer of native language and there was an overuse of *glad* and *happy* since they refer to the basic vocabulary.

In exploring verb errors made in writing by Chinese college students in Taiwan from four classes (two classes are sophomores and the other two are freshmen), Zhuang (2011) maintained that approximately from 60% -70 % of students used near-synonyms incorrectly such as rise/raise, and agree/realize. Based on the BNC corpus and Chinese non-native speakers' of English corpus CLEC, Li and Xia (2018:573) examined Chinese EFL learners' ability to provide the appropriate collocations of the following synonyms, namely *begin*, *start* and *commence*. The main findings revealed that Chinese students encounter a serious difficulty in providing the appropriate collocations of these synonymous words. The study showed that "learners tend to adopt avoidance strategy due to the lack of contextual awareness and the knowledge of collocational behavior" (p. 573).

2.2 Communication strategies in EFL context

Research has proven that both native and non-native speakers use communication strategies to compensate, in many cases, for a lack in their linguistic resources (c.f., Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Rabab'ah, 2001; Rabab'ah, 2016). Faerch and Kasper (1983) divided the communication strategies, which language users use to compensate for their lack of knowledge when they encounter a communication problem, into achievement strategies and reduction strategies. In the achievement strategies, foreign language learners maintain their plans to achieve their communicative goals and in this case they use strategies like paraphrasing, approximation, and literal translation. However, reduction strategies are used when the EFL learners reduce their goals, and use strategies like message abandonment or topic avoidance.

Many researchers have examined the use of communication strategies in various types of discourse, namely oral and written. Rabab'ah & Bulut (2007) investigated the compensatory strategies employed in the oral discourse of second-year students studying Arabic as a second language (ASL). The findings showed that the participants employed a number of communication strategies due to their limited linguistic knowledge. In another study, Rabab'ah (2008) examined the communication strategies employed during translation by 36 Arabic-speaking students at King Saud University. The results showed that the participants relied heavily on achievement strategies: approximation, circumlocution, and literal translation. In exploring the impact of communication strategy instruction on EFL students' oral communicative ability and their use of communication strategies, Rabab'ah (2016) conducted an experimental study, which included 80 learners divided into two main groups, namely the training group (n=44) which received CS training and the control group (n=36). The results indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group in their IELTS speaking test and their use of more CSs.

In a recent study, Latfia & Nur (2019) explored the type of communication strategies used by the Indonesian EFL Learner when communicating in English. The study revealed that Indonesian EFL learners use several strategies, namely code-switching, formal reduction, retrieval strategy, message avoidance, restructuring, approximation, topic avoidance, interlingual transfer, asking for help, repetition of the coming message, mime, and circumlocution. Similarly, Su (2021) found that the subjects used a large number of communication strategies. The highest frequent strategies were message abandonment, non-verbal, and socially effective strategies while the least-used types were "attempt to think in English" and "accuracy" strategies.

In order to help EFL/ESL learners be better language communicators, Rabab'ah (2004) proposed that communication strategies should become a major part of ELT syllabus in order to enable students to communicate more effectively and successfully. Besides, teachers should include a variety of techniques and tasks, such as story-telling or describing pictures which are related to teaching communication strategies in order to improve students' strategic competence and their overall communicative competence.

As shown in previous research, EFL learners encounter difficulties to render the exact semantic synonym and correct collocation; therefore, they resort to a number of communication strategies (e.g. paraphrase, literal translation, approximation and message abandonment) to compensate for their lack of knowledge. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there have not yet been any research studies that address Jordanian EFL learners' production of synonyms, and the strategies they use to compensate for their lack of the synonyms and collocational patterns. Therefore, the current study aims to fill this research gap and contribute to the existing literature on synonyms.

3. Methodology

3.1. Subjects

The subjects of the study were 20 fourth-year students majoring in Applied English at the University of Jordan. They were enrolled in the second semester 2020-2021. The subjects were chosen from English for Science and Technology class. Their age range was between 21 and 22. The subjects had covered between 126-132 credit hours and studied courses like English Linguistics, Pronunciation and Speech, English Grammar, Writing, Word Formation and Collocation, Essentials of Public Speaking, etc. Prior to this, they had twelve years of formal instruction in EFL at schools. All the subjects were native speakers of Jordanian Spoken Arabic, who also had a working knowledge of Modern Standard Arabic. None of the subjects stayed in an English-speaking country for more than three months or had a parent who is a native speaker of English.

3.2. Data Elicitation

The data were elicited through a translation task consisting of 20 sentences which were designed in order to find out the strategies that Jordanian EFL learners use when they are interacting with synonymy. The subjects were asked to translate the whole sentences from Arabic into English. Each sentence contains a certain Arabic word that has a specific appropriate English equivalent out of a number of semantically interrelated words that belong to the same category. These words were selected from Sheeler and Markley's book (1982) which is entitled as "*Words Words Words: A Guide to Formation and Usage Book 2*". For instance, the Arabic word [\jusliħ\](#) in sentence number (2) has the appropriate English equivalent (repair) out of a number of semantically interrelated words that belong to the same category, such as fix, mend, correct, rectify, remedy, etc. This task also examined students' abilities to recognize the slight differences between the words which belong to the same semantic category.

3.3. Data Analysis Framework

The subjects' responses to the translation task were collected, and classified into correct and incorrect responses. Frequencies and percentages were found out and described quantitatively. Then, the subjects' production of synonyms was analyzed qualitatively. Finally, the responses were classified into the various communication strategies that the subjects used in order to overcome the problems they encountered in finding the correct synonyms of the target words in the translation task. The framework used for the data analysis was that of Faerch and Kasper (1983). The strategies were divided into achievement and avoidance strategies.

4. Results and discussion

The findings of the study are presented and discussed in two sub-sections, vis. (1) Performance on the production level, and (2) Strategies underlying faulty responses on the production level.

4.1. Performance on the production level

Table (1) provides the complete list of percentages and frequencies of correct responses for the subjects (n=20) on each sentence. A glance at the mean of correct responses suggests that the supply of synonymous words constitutes a serious problem. Generally speaking, the subjects' performance was unsatisfactory because the subjects were senior BA English majors, and they took a number of English courses, such as Semantics and Word Formation and Collocation. Only 106 out of 400 (30.35%) provided the synonymous words correctly. This consolidates the finding of the previous studies that synonymy constitutes a main difficulty for EFL learners (Farghal, 1998). The relatively high achievement in few items might be ascribed to how frequently used the synonymous word is and how common its context is.

Table 1. The complete list of percentages and frequencies of correct responses on each sentence (N=20)

#	Correct Response	Percentage	Frequency
1	Department, section, store	75%	15
2	Repair	20%	4
3	Still	0%	0
4	Portion	5%	1
5	Eternal	20%	4
6	Surprised	100%	20
7	Originator	5%	1
8	Peered	0%	0
9	Spliced	0%	0
10	Wages	35%	7
11	Reliable, trusted	75%	5
12	Composed	15%	3
13	Gazed	5%	1
14	Ingredients	65%	13
15	Reckless	25%	5
16	Turned on	55%	11
17	Collapsed	5%	1
18	Disturb, annoy	80%	7
19	Glowed	5%	1
20	Declared	35%	7
Mean		30.35%	106/400

The pattern of responses in individual items revealed that the subjects' familiarity with these words has a great influence on their production. For example, in item (6) 100% of the subjects provided the correct synonymous word which was 'surprised' in the following sentence: *"No one has surprised me with a birthday party yet"*. In item (1) 'The toy department', 'the toy section' and 'the toy store' were also rendered correctly. The high percentage of correct answers in these items might be attributed to the fact that 'surprise', 'store', 'department' and 'section' are more frequently used than other words which belong to the same semantic field, whereas in item (3), item (8) and item (9). 0% of the subjects rendered the correct synonymous words, namely still, peered and spliced, respectively as in the following sentences:

- You have to stay still until I button your coat.
- The captain peered into the fog but could see no other ship.
- The boy spliced the rope quickly.

The interpretation for this big difference can be sought in the fact that the word “surprise” is commonly used and familiar to the subjects, while the subjects are not familiar with the latter items, viz. still, peered and spliced. In other words, the lack of knowledge of these English lexical items is the reason behind the subjects' unsatisfactory and incorrect responses.

Table (2) presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by the subjects on the two sentences:

1- The toy department/section/store has been closed recently.

2- John will repair the typewriter today.

Table (2) shows that the percentage of error for item one is 25%, while it is 80% for the second item. This indicates that the subjects were more proficient in arriving at the appropriate synonym for the Arabic word in item one.

Table 2. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the first and second sentence (N=20)

Responses to Item 1	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 2	Frequency	Percentage
Department, section, store	15	75%	Repair	4	20%
Area	2	10%	Fix	16	80%
Centre	2	10%			
Part	1	5%			

Table (3) presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the third and fourth sentences:

3- You have to stay still until I button your coat.”

4- I got the biggest portion of spaghetti.

Table (3) below reveals that none of the subjects were able to produce the appropriate word, i.e. *still*. As it is also noticed, only 5% of the subjects could get the correct synonym, i.e. *portion*. This implies that the majority of the subjects (95%) failed to provide the appropriate word.

Table 3. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the third and fourth sentence (N=20)

Responses to Item 3	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 4	Frequency	Percentage
Still	0	0%	Portion	1	5%
Calm	0	0%	Amount	7	35%
Quiet	13	65%	Share	3	15%
Polite	6	30%	Piece	3	15%
	1	5%	Part	2	10%
			Meal	1	5%
			Most of	1	5%
			The larger	1	5%
			No answer	1	5%

Table (4) below presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the fifth and sixth sentences:

5- There is an eternal life after death.”

6- No one has surprised me with a birthday party yet

Table 4 demonstrates that only 20% of the subjects could get the exact synonym for item 5 correctly; this implies that the majority of the subjects could not get it correct (80%). However, the study revealed that 100% of the subjects got the correct word for item 6.

Table 4. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the fifth and sixth sentences (N=20)

Responses to Item 5	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 6	Frequency	Percentage
Eternal	4	20%	Surprised	20	100%
Endless	4	15%			
Lasting	3	10%			
Unlimited	2	10%			
Permanent	2	5%			
Unfinished	1	5%			
Another	1	5%			
Forever	1	5%			
Long	1	5%			
Infinity	1				

Table (5) presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the seventh and eighth sentences:

7- The captain peered into the fog but could see no other ship.

8- Who is the originator of this new program?

The results show that the word ‘peered’ in item 7 was not correctly rendered in the translation of the subjects. On the other hand, 5% of the subjects could retrieve the correct word ‘originate’ in item (8).

Table 5. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the seventh and eighth sentences (N=20)

Responses Item 7	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 8	Frequency	Percentage
Peered	0	0%	Originate	1	5%
Looked carefully	5	25%	Creator	5	25%
Looked very well	2	10%	Founder	5	25%
Gazed	2	10%	Maker/Make	3	15%
Looked in	2	10%	Establish	2	10%
Looked closely	1	5%	Invent	2	10%
Took a deep look	1	5%	Produce	1	5%
Looked forward	1	5%			
Saw closely	1	5%			
Took a good look	1	5%			

Table (6) below presents the list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the ninth and tenth sentences:

9- The boy spliced the rope quickly.

10-I think that the wages of blacksmiths are increased.

As table (6) demonstrates, none of the students could retrieve the target word ‘spiced’ in item (9). However, 35% of the subjects retrieved the target synonymous word ‘wages’ in item (10).

Table 6. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the ninth and the tenth sentences (N=20)

Responses Item 9	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 10	Frequency	Percentage
Splice	0	0%	Wages	7	35%
Stick	8	40%	Salaries	7	35%
Paste	3	15%	Payment	2	10%
Fix	2	10%	Amount	1	5%
Tape	2	10%	No answer	3	15%
glue	1	5%			
attach	1	5%			
Connect	1	5%			
No answer	2	10%			

Table (7) below presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the eleventh and the twelfth sentences.

11- *Newspapers are considered as reliable sources.*

12- *Beethoven composed nine symphonies.*

As noticed in the table below, the percentage of error in item 11 is only 25%, which is low in comparison with item 12, which recorded a very high percentage of error (85%). This implies that almost 25% of the subjects lack the item 'reliable', whereas 85% of the subjects lack the term 'compose'.

Table 7. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the eleventh and twelfth sentences (N=20)

Responses Item 11	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 12	Frequency	Percentage
Reliable, Trusted	5	75%	Compose	3	15%
Credited	1	5%	Wrote	7	35%
Authentic	1	5%	Created	5	25%
Dependent	1	5%	Conducted	1	5%
Confidential	1	5%	Produced	1	5%
No answer	1	5%	Did	1	5%
			No answer	2	10%

Table (8) presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the **thirteenth and fourteenth sentences:**

13. *The children gazed at the puppets dancing in the air.*

14. *Mix the dry and wet ingredients for this cake well.*

Table 8. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects in the thirteenth and fourteenth sentences (N=20)

Responses Item 13	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 14	Frequency	Percentage
Gazed	1	5%	Ingredients	13	65%
Stared	12	60%	Content	3	15%
Looked	4	20%	Components	1	5%
Looked carefully	1	5%	Combination	1	5%
See closely	1	5%	Elements	1	5%
Gawked	1	5%	Materials	1	5%

Table (8) above indicates that 65% of the subjects could successfully retrieve the correct synonym of 'ingredients' that collocates with making the cake. However, the subjects could not score more than 5% of the correct responses to the word 'gazed'. This implies that the vocabulary item 'gaze' is not part of the subjects' linguistic repertoire.

Table (9) below presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by the subjects to the fifteenth and sixteenth sentences:

15. *Saeed is a reckless driver.*

16. *Hiba turned on the radio.*

The results of the analysis revealed that the subjects failed to get the word that collocates with 'driver', i.e. reckless. 25% of the subjects only could get it correct, implying that the percentage of error was 75%. However, 55% of the subjects could correctly get the word 'turned on' which collocates with 'radio'.

Table 9. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by the subjects to the fifteenth and sixteenth sentences (N=20)

Responses Item 15	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 16	Frequency	Percentage
Reckless	5	25%	Turned on	11	55%
Crazy	8	40%	Opened	9	45%
Careless	3	15%			
Bad	2	10%			
Violent	1	5%			
No answer	1	5%			

Table (10) below presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the **seventeenth and eighteenth sentences**:

17. Many buildings collapsed in the earthquake.

18. Do not disturb your father, he is busy now."

As noticed, Table 10 demonstrates that 95% of the students failed to provide the appropriate word 'collapsed'. However, the synonymous words 'disturb, annoy' were easier for them to use.

Table 10. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by the subjects to the seventeenth and eighteenth sentences (N=20)

Responses Item 17	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 18	Frequency	Percentage
Collapsed	1	5%	Disturb, Annoy	1	80%
Destroyed	8	40%	Confuse	3	15%
Fell	7	35%	Make a noise	1	5%
Damaged	3	15%	Stress	1	5%
Broke down	1	5%			

Table (11) presents the complete list of percentages and frequencies of responses provided by the subjects in the **nineteenth and twentieth sentences**:

19. The cigarette glowed in the dark.

20. The enemy declared war on our country.

Table 11 illustrates that 35% of the subjects used the correct word 'declared' in a sentence (20), while 95% of them failed to use the word 'glowed' in a sentence (19), implying that this word in a sentence (19) is more difficult than the word in a sentence (20).

Table 11. Percentages and frequencies of responses provided by subjects on the nineteenth and twentieth sentences (N=20)

Responses Item 19	Frequency	Percentage	Responses to Item 20	Frequency	Percentage
Glowed	1	5%	Declared	7	35%
Shined	10	50%	Announced	9	45%
Lighted	9	45%	Decided	2	10%
			Advertised	1	5%
			No answer	1	5%

To sum up, the unsatisfactory performance of students can be attributed to transfer of training or the context of learning. Brown (2000: 226) reported that "context refers, for example, to the class room with its teachers and its materials in the case of school learning or the social situation in the case of untutored second language learning". Moreover, Keshvarz suggested that "errors that result from pedagogical procedures contained in a text or employed by the teacher". The student can be misguided when the teacher tends to define a certain word by providing its synonyms without explaining the slight differences between them, e.g. declare and announce. As a result, the students might use these synonymous words interchangeably in all contexts.

In addition, it seems that the subjects were not able to recognize the main differences between synonymous words. Furthermore, the main reason for making errors is the learners' limited knowledge of the target language in general and of collocations in particular and the complexity of the second or foreign language compared with the subjects' mother tongue.

4.2. Strategies underlying faulty and inappropriate responses on the production level

The ability of foreign language learners to convey a message in the target language is sometimes hindered because of their limited linguistic resources. In trying to solve this problem, they use a number of communication strategies, such as approximation, literal translation, overgeneralization, etc. Table (12) presents the list of the strategies underlying the production of deviant responses along with their frequencies and percentages.

Table 12. Strategies underlying faulty responses on the production level

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Overgeneralization	178	44.5%
Semantic Approximation	100	25%
Literal Translation	12	3%
Abandonment	12	3%

The results from table (12) below show that Jordanian EFL learners employ a number of strategies while they are translating sentences which contain a word that has a number of synonymous equivalents from Arabic into English. The first strategy was overgeneralization (178 instances) in which the subjects use the general terms instead of using the specialized ones. More specifically, the subjects extend the meaning of a certain word to other semantic contexts where that word does not fit. The second strategy was resorting to a semantic approximation (100 instances) in which they provided words that belong to the semantic field of the target words. The third strategy was the use of literal translation in order to find the equivalent of the target word (12 instances). The fourth strategy was the abandonment or avoidance strategy (12 instances) in which the students avoided translating a certain word, which might be difficult. The results revealed that the most commonly used strategy was overgeneralization, accounting for 44.5%, followed by semantic approximation which registered 25%, whereas the least frequently used strategies were literal translation and message abandonment, accounting for 3% each.

In Table 13, we present the various strategies used to render the collocational synonym for each word in the sentences from 1 -20. In the following section, we will discuss every strategy and illustrate with examples.

Table 13. Strategies underlying the production of deviant responses along with their frequencies and percentages for each sentence.

# No.	The correct Responses followed by the employed strategies		Frequency	Percentage
1	Department 1. Overgeneralization (part) 2. Semantic Approximation (center, area)		6 7 7	30% 35% 35%
2	Repair 1. Overgeneralization (fix)		4 16	20% 80%
3	Still 1. Overgeneralization (quiet, calm). 2. Semantic Approximation (polite)		0 19 1	0% 95% 5%
4	Portion 1. Overgeneralization (amount, share) 2. Semantic Approximation (meal, piece, part) 3. Abandonment		1 10 8 1	5% 50% 40% 5%
5	Eternal 1. Overgeneralization (endless, lasting) 2. Semantic Approximation (unlimited, another, unfinished, long, infinity, permanent) 3. Literal Translation (forever)		4 7 8 1	20% 35% 40% 5%

# No.	The correct Responses followed by the employed strategies		Frequency	Percentage
6	Surprise		20	100%
7	Originator 1. Overgeneralization (establish, founder, creator). 2. Semantic Approximation (make, invent, produce, publish)		1 12 7	5% 60% 35%
8	Peered 1. Overgeneralization (Look, watch, gazed, stared) 2. Semantic Approximation (look carefully, see closely, take a good look) 3. Literal Translation (consider) 4. Abandonment		0 6 12 1 1	0% 30% 60% 5% 5%
9	Spliced 1. Overgeneralization (Stick, paste, taped, glue) 2. Semantic Approximation (fix, connect, attach) 3. Abandonment		0 14 4 2	0% 70% 20% 10%
10	Wages 1. Overgeneralization (salary) 2. Semantic Approximation (payment amount) 3. Abandonment		7 7 3 3	35% 35% 15% 15%
11	Reliable 1. Overgeneralization (trusted, authentic) 2. Semantic Approximation (credited, confidential, dependent) 3. Abandonment		5 11 3 1	25% 55% 15% 5%
12	Composed 1. Overgeneralization (wrote) 2. Semantic Approximation (conducted, created, produced) 3. Abandonment		3 7 8 2	15% 35% 40% 10%
13	Gazed 1. Overgeneralization (look, stared, gawk) 2. Semantic Approximation (looked carefully, see closely)		1 17 2	5% 85% 10%
14	Ingredients 1. Semantic Approximation (content, materials, combination, elements) 2. Literal Translation (components)		13 6 1	65% 30% 5%
15	Reckless 1. Semantic Approximation (bad, crazy, careless, violent) 2. Abandonment		5 14 1	25% 70% 5%
16	Turned on 1. Literal Translation (open)		11 9	55% 45%
17	Collapsed 1. Overgeneralization (fell down) 2. Semantic Approximation (destroy, damage, break down)		1 7 12	5% 35% 60%
18	Disturb 1. Overgeneralization (Annoy) 2. Semantic Approximation (confuse, make a noise, stress)		7 10 3	35% 50% 15%
19	Glowed 1. Overgeneralization (shined, lighted)		1 19	5% 95%
20	Declared 1. Overgeneralization (announced, advertise) 2. Semantic Approximation (decided) 3. Abandonment		7 10 2 1	35% 50% 10% 5%

4.2.1. Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization is a characteristic of intralingual errors (within the target language itself) which are a significant source of error for learners. It is a psychological tendency of foreign language learners to extend the meaning of a certain word to other semantic contexts where that word is inappropriately used. Hussein (1988: 124) maintained that EFL learners try to minimize the grammatical and the lexical properties of the target language, so they tend to use the general terms instead of using the specialized ones and this is called overgeneralization.

The use of this strategy can be illustrated through the following items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19 and 20). In item (1), 35 % of the subjects used the overgeneralization strategy in which they used the word 'part' since it is considered an English equivalent of the word /qism/ and overgeneralized the use of 'part' to this context in which it does not fit. The correct translation of item (1) is "*The toy department/store/section has been closed recently*". Department and part are considered English equivalents of the word /qism/. However, it seems quite clear that the participants are not aware of the collocational restriction of the synonymous words, i.e. part and department in which the word "toy" collocates with 'department, section and store' but not with 'part'.

Item (2) showed that 80% of the subjects used the word "fix" since they know that it is the English equivalent of /jugliḥ/, and it is quite common. As a result, they overgeneralized the use of the word 'fix' without paying attention to the context in which it should be used. For example, the verb 'fix' is used when we want to put something back into its original condition or restore a situation to its former state. As a result, 'fix' emphasizes the existence of a problem, whereas 'repair' is often used when we refer to the actual components of the problem. For instance, you can take your clothing, phone, computer, car or musical instrument to a shop to have it repaired. Accordingly, 'repair' emphasizes damage to certain things. The correct translation of item (2) is "*John will repair the typewriter today*". It seems quite clear that the participants are not aware of the collocational restriction of the synonymous words, i.e. fix and repair.

With respect to item (13), it was found that 85% of the participants used the overgeneralization strategy in which they used words, such as look, stared, gawk as an English equivalent of the word /juḥaddiq/, and they overgeneralized the use of these words to a context in which they do not fit. The correct translation of item (13) is "*The children gazed at the puppets dancing in the air*". According to (LDCE), look means "to turn your eyes towards something, so that you can see it", stare means "to look at something or someone for a long time without moving your eyes, for example because you are surprised, angry, or bored", gawk means "to look at something for a long time, in a way that looks stupid", and gaze means "to look at someone or something for a long time, giving it all your attention, often without realizing you are doing so". It seems quite clear that the participants are not aware of appropriate contexts in which these words are used.

Based on the above-mentioned, it appears that the subjects have used certain words as typical English equivalents of certain Arabic words and they overgeneralized the use of these words to other contexts without paying attention the collocational restriction of these words or to the context in which these words are used. In addition, it seems obvious that they resorted to overgeneralization as a communication strategy to compensate for their lack of knowledge of some linguistic items.

4.2.2 Semantic Approximation

The subjects resorted to the use of semantic approximation strategy which is related to intralingual strategies that involve only L2 when they failed to provide the correct word. By using this strategy, they depend on some sense relationship or some kind of semantic similarities between the target word and the words in their lexicon which could be near in meaning to the target word. (cf. Hamdan 2005:147). Tarone (cited in Brown 2000: 119) stated that semantic approximation is the "use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item". The use of this strategy can be manifested through the following items (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18 and 20). In item (1), 35% of the subjects used the semantic approximation strategy in which the subjects provided words that are semantically related to the target word /qism/, such as *center* and *area* instead of using the correct word 'department' as in "*The toy department has been closed recently*".

In their response to item (4), 40% of the subjects used the semantic approximation strategy in which the students provided

words that are semantically related to the target word /ʔal hussa/, such as *meal*, *piece*, and *part* instead of using the correct word "portion" as in "*I got the biggest portion of spaghetti*". Concerning item (10), the findings showed that 15% of the subjects used the semantic approximation strategy in which the participants provided words that are semantically related to the target word /ʔuɖʒu:r/, such as *payment* and *amount* instead of using the correct word "wages" as in "*I think that the wages of blacksmiths are increased*".

The study also showed that, in response to item 13, 10% of the subjects used the semantic approximation strategy in which the participants provided words that are semantically related to the target word /haddaqa/, such as *looked carefully*, and *see closely* instead of using the correct word "gaze" as in "*The children gazed at the puppets dancing in the air*". In their attempt to render the meaning of item (18), the study showed that 15% of the subjects used the semantic approximation strategy in which the participants provided words that are semantically related to the target word /juʒʕidʒ/, such as *confuse*, *make a noise*, and *stress* instead of using the correct word "disturb" in "*Do not disturb your father, he is busy now*". In their translation of item (20), it was found that 10% of the subjects used the semantic approximation strategy in which the participants provided words that are semantically related to the target word /ʔaʕlana/, such as *decide* instead of using the correct word "declare" in "*The enemy declared war on our country*".

4.2.3. Literal Translation

Literal translation is related to negative transfer or what it is called mother tongue influence. When the mother tongue language and the second or foreign language have different forms, the EFL learners depend on his/her native language to produce the form of the target language. Corder (1981:1) posited that "errors were therefore predicated to be the result of persistence of existing mother tongue habits in the new language". Richards (1971: 182) stated that "interference from the mother tongue is clearly a major source of difficulty in second language learning". These are errors which are attributed to the mother tongue interference. One of these errors can be made when there is only one word in the learners' mother tongue language which is commonly used in a number of contexts whereas there are two or more possible counterparts for this word which can be used to convey the same meaning in the target language. As a result, the students might use this word which is found in their mental lexicon without paying attention to the other words which are found in the target language and used differently according to the context. Below are some examples of the incorrect elicited answers due to literal translation or negative transfer.

The use of this strategy was manifested through the following items (5, 8, 14, and 16). In item (5), 5% of the subjects pursued the literal translation strategy to provide the equivalent of the Arabic word /ʔabadijja/. The students translated the word literally into 'forever' instead of using the word 'eternal' as in "*There is an eternal life after death*". In translating item (14), 5% of the subjects adopted the literal translation strategy to provide the English equivalent of the Arabic word /mukawwinat/. The students translated the word literally into 'components' which does not fit the context as in "*Mix the dry and wet ingredients for this cake well*". However, in rendering the meaning of item (16), 45% of the subjects pursued the literal translation strategy to provide the English equivalent of the Arabic word /fataha/. The students translated the word literally into 'open' which does not fit the context in "*Hiba turned on the radio*".

4.2.4. Message abandonment

This strategy is used when a particular language item is left unattempted due to EFL learners' lack of knowledge (Rabab'ah, 2001; Rabab'ah, 2002; Hamdan, 2005; Rabab'ah and Bulut, 2008; Rabab'ah, 2016). The subjects who pursued this strategy tended to exclude the words which they were not able to provide an equivalent for. Message abandonment is considered one of the avoidance strategies in which the learners avoid the words that cause a problem for them in communication (Rabab'ah, 2001).

The use of this strategy was manifested through the following items (4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15 and 20). Item (4), 5% of the subjects used the abandonment strategy to provide the English equivalent of the Arabic word /ʔal hussa. The students did not make an attempt to render the target word /ʔal hussa/ as in "*I got the biggest portion of spaghetti*". Similarly, in item (8,) 5% of the subjects used the abandonment strategy to provide the English equivalent of the Arabic word /ʔanʕama ʔalnaɖar/. The students did not make an attempt to render the target word /ʔanʕama ʔalnaɖar/ as in "*The captain peered into the fog*".

but could see no other ship". Some of the subjects also abandoned the vocabulary items *reliable*, *reckless* and *declared* as they lack the required linguistic items. It was found that 5% of the subjects used the abandonment strategy in attempting the translation of the Arabic sentence that includes the Arabic words /mawu:qan/, /mutahawwir/ and /ʔaʕlana/, respectively. The students did not make an attempt to render the previous target words as in the following statement.

- Newspapers are considered as reliable sources.
- Saeed is a reckless driver.
- The enemy declared war on our country.

In attempting the translation of sentences (9) and (10), 10% and 15% of the subjects (respectively) used the abandonment strategy. The findings showed that the students did not make an attempt to render the target word /ʔaʕsaqa/ as in "*The boy spliced the rope quickly*" and the Arabic target word /ʔudzu:r/ as in "*I think that the wages of blacksmiths are increased*".

5. Conclusions

This study has explored how Jordanian EFL learners interact with synonyms on the production level through a translation task. The overall subjects' performance was not satisfactory in light of the low mean of the correct responses (30.35%). In other words, Jordanian EFL learners face a great difficulty in producing synonyms. This finding is in line with previous research conducted on Arabic-speaking EFL learners, who were found to commit many errors in the use of correct synonyms and collocational synonyms (Alanazi, 2017a, 2017b; Saud, 2018; Khazaal, 2019; Fadlallah, 2021). It also lends support to previous studies conducted world-wide and they revealed that their subjects who came from different cultural background make many errors in the use of collocations and synonyms (Shen, 2010; Zhuang, 2011; Li and Xia, 2018). Their relatively low achievement may be ascribed to a number of factors, such as the transfer of training, the complexity of the second language, the lack of knowledge of some English lexical items, the confusion of words on the ground of formal similarity, and the EFL learners' limited knowledge of English in general and of collocations in particular.

The study also revealed that there are a number of strategies that the subjects used to overcome the difficulties they encountered during the translation task, such as overgeneralization, semantic approximation, literal translation and message abandonment. The most frequently used strategy was overgeneralization followed by semantic approximation, which were classified as achievement strategies (Faerch and Kasper, 1983). However, message abandonment (topic avoidance), and literal translation were the least frequently used strategies. These findings are in line with previous research on communication strategies. These studies showed that EFL learners encounter many difficulties in speaking and writing. In order for them to solve these problems they encounter, they resort to a number of CSs, namely achievement and reduction strategies. This is in line with previous research on communication strategies (e.g. Faerch and Kasper, 1983; Rabab'ah, 2001; Rabab'ah, 2005; Rabab'ah & Bulut, 2007; Rabab'ah, 2008; Rabab'ah, 2013; Rabab'ah, 2016; Latifa & Nur, 2019; Su, 2021). Based on these results, it is highly recommended that future research studies should focus more on the acquisition of vocabulary by EFL learners in order to identify the semantic, syntactic, and morphological difficulties these learners encounter while interacting with vocabulary and to suggest possible solutions and recommendations for teachers in the context of teaching English as a foreign language.

6. Implications and recommendations

The current research study has shown that synonyms form a serious problem for the Jordanian EFL learners. Incidental learning of the differences between the synonymous words and providing incidental exercises which asked for providing synonyms are not enough for improving EFL learners' proficiency in dealing with synonyms (Rabab'ah, 2004, 2008, 2016). Raising EFL learners' awareness of the differences between synonymous words will help them to use the appropriate synonym in the correct context and improve their proficiency in vocabulary in general and synonyms in specific. There are many effective ways of raising EFL learners' awareness of these differences. First of all, there should be more focus on the issue of synonyms in the vocabulary classes.

Moreover, while teaching English vocabulary, teachers should present these synonymous words in sentences or in an

appropriate context in order to show how each synonymous word might be used in a different context. In particular, teachers should direct students' attention to the collocational restrictions of the synonymous words they present to the students. This method would be more effective than just mentioning that these words are synonymous. Furthermore, designing synonyms exercises (multiple choice, translation, and fill in the blank tasks) for learners in order to interact with synonyms and increase their awareness of its importance and the errors that they may make if they do not recognize the differences between them.

Teachers should recommend a number of thesaurus dictionaries and collocation dictionaries, such as *Ozdic Dictionary of Collocation* and *Oxford dictionary of collocation* to their EFL students. These dictionaries will not only help them to increase their knowledge of synonymous words but also it will enrich their lexicon.

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