



A Contrastive and Error Analysis of Lexical Errors in Persian Essays of Arab Students

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1. Introduction

When language learners select words improperly or inaccurately due to either interference from their native language (also known as the mother tongue or L1), or a lack of knowledge of the target language (known as L2), they confuse the listener or the reader. The present study is significant because lexical errors are a neglected aspect of language learning that requires attention. The study adopts an error analysis and contrastive analysis joint theoretical framework to analyze and study lexical errors extracted from 200 compositions written by Arab learners of Persian. The two approaches form a framework through which inter-lingual and intra-lingual errors can be identified and studied.

The moderate version of contrastive analysis is used to study the inter-language errors. This approach provides a clear 'equation': wherever patterns are minimally distinct in form or meaning in one or more systems, confusion may result'. (Oller, J. & Ziahosseiny, S.M., 1970). In addition, the error analysis approach will allow the study of intra-language errors which mainly happen due to language (L2) ignorance (Keshavarz, 2011), based on Llach's taxonomy of errors as it seems to be the most comprehensive and economic framework simultaneously.

Research on this topic remains limited, with most studies focusing on grammatical errors while lexical errors have received less attention. According to the literature, no studies have addressed lexical errors in Persian from this viewpoint. This includes providing an appropriate taxonomy of errors, suggesting ways to learn to deal with these errors, and using these data to construct a dictionary of lexical errors.

Previous studies discussed in the literature review including (Qamsari, 2007), (Tahrezadeh, 2015), (Dehkhoda, Z. & Motavalian, R., 2014), (Ghiassi Zarch, A. & Jafari, F., 2020) have focused either solely on error analysis or solely on contrastive analysis. Furthermore, these studies did not specifically study lexical errors but rather

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different types of errors and how to address them in the teaching process.

2. Materials and methods

The paper adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. The qualitative method involved document analysis of the data corpus, which consists of compositions, as mentioned earlier. The quantitative method involved observing the types and recurrence of errors by providing frequency and percentage of the errors using SPSS software and analyzing the results.

The taxonomy of errors adopted in this research is based on Llach's (Llach, A. & Pilar, M.D., 2011) framework for analyzing lexical errors in students' compositions in Persian. The errors are classified under two main categories: formal and semantic, and two sources: inter-language and intra-language. Within these two main categories, the errors are further divided into 7 subcategories. Llach's taxonomy is a simplified framework that took shape after critically examining previous taxonomies of lexical errors, as discussed by Llach (Llach, A. & Pilar, M.D., 2011). An additional category, informal errors, was added to the taxonomy due to its importance in Persian.

Table 1

Taxonomy suggested by the current study; adapted to its objectives

LEXICAL ERRORS				
Source of Errors		Formal Errors	Semantic Errors	
	Interlanguage (Inter)		Borrowing	Calque
			Coinage	
	Intralinguage (Intra)		Misspelling (MS)	Semantic Confusion (SC)
		Informal Misselection (IFM)		
		Formal Confusion (FC)		

The participants of the current study were 200 Arabic-speaking students learning Persian as a foreign language. They were all Arabic native speakers. Despite their varied Arabic dialects, all the participants were familiar with Modern Standard Arabic and Modern Standard Persian.

Random compositions were collected from the universities in Lebanon (100 compositions) and Iran¹ (100 compositions) written by Arab students learning Persian. The variables were processed using the SPSS software to obtain the frequencies and percentages of the errors.

3. Results and discussion

There were 927 errors found in the compositions. Statistical results show that formal were the most frequent, with 94% occurrence rate. Formal errors included borrowing, coinage, MS, IFM, and FC. Of these, FC errors were found in 72% of the compositions. This suggests that formal confusion is a major area of concern, which should be paid a significant attention and addressed critically to improve the learning process.

In terms of semantic errors, 50.5% of the errors were SC, while Calque errors

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comprised 25%. Regarding psycholinguistic criteria, intra-language errors were more problematic, with 90.5% of the compositions containing these errors. This implies that L2 incompetence, generalization, or other factors mentioned earlier form a major source to errors in the process of learning.

The results indicate that the formal and semantic confusion errors, which are intra-language errors caused by factors such as simplification, overgeneralization, hypercorrection, faulty teaching, fossilization, avoidance, inadequate learning, and false concepts hypothesized are the most problematic areas for Arabic-speaking students learning Persian. Moreover, results shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between inter-language errors (L1 interference) and the non-local environment (Lebanon). This supports the moderate version of CA, as minimally distinct patterns in form or meaning in one or more systems prove to be problematic for learners.

4. Conclusion

There is no Persian dictionary designed for Arabic-speaking students, while such a dictionary will serve as a practical guide to lexical errors and their correction. It would include words and phrases based on the errors found in this study. The occurrences and frequencies of these errors reveal patterns that regularly cause difficulties for language learners, allowing for greater focus on the errors that are considered as more frequent and, hence, more difficult for the learners. The dictionary can also include a guide at the beginning on how to use it.

Therefore, the data from this study serve as a guideline for the researcher to compile a dictionary of lexical errors, similar to the Longman Dictionary of Common Errors. This dictionary will serve as a practical guide to lexical errors and their correction and a helpful tool for Arabic-speaking students learning Persian.

Additionally, this paper suggests the establishment of an online forum, where students from universities or schools in Lebanon and Iran can participate in online weekly meetings and discussions in Persian.

Keywords: contrastive analysis, error analysis, inter-language, intra-language, lexical errors