

## LEXICAL ERRORS IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACADEMIC WRITING

**Astghik Chubaryan\***

*Yerevan State University*

**Mariam Vardanyan\*\***

*Russian-Armenian University*

The main focus of error analysis, a branch of applied linguistics, is investigating and studying errors that are made by second language (L2) learners. The present study is based on quantitative and qualitative analysis as well as corpus-aided analysis of lexical errors in academic vocabulary. The study aims to assist educators and teachers to develop, organize lessons or courses, which will enhance the effectiveness of academic vocabulary learning on the part of the students. Based on the results of the given research, teachers can refer to the errors in academic vocabulary, which will help them notice the gap in Academic Word List (AWL), by raising their awareness and emphasizing on certain areas of academic vocabulary. The instruments of the study were 39 essay scripts written by the AUA (American University of Armenia) first-year students majoring in English and Communications.

**Keywords:** *lexical error, error analysis, Academic Word List, academic vocabulary.*

### Introduction

Making errors in writing is inevitable, and errors are signs and evidence of students' learning and mind processing (Agustin-Llach, 2017). The current corpus-based study focuses on lexical errors in academic vocabulary. The notion of lexical errors in academic vocabulary is closely related to lexical competence. Knowing a word implies not only semantic knowledge of a word but also its morphology, syntax and pragmatics. Moreover, lexical competence

---

\* [astghik.chubaryan@ysu.am](mailto:astghik.chubaryan@ysu.am)

\*\* [mariam\\_vardanyan19@alumni.aua.am](mailto:mariam_vardanyan19@alumni.aua.am)

Received: 06.02.2023

Revised: 17.03.2022

Accepted: 10.04.2023



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

© The Author(s) 2023

entails knowing how to use a particular word in combination with other words in context, in communicative situations or texts (Aguttsin-Llach, 2011). Hence, a lexical error is a semantic, orthographic, phonological, syntactic deviation of a word in target language. Concerning academic vocabulary, one should emphasize Academic Word List (AWL), 570 academic word families, which cover most academic texts. The misuse of academic vocabulary or lexical errors in AWL may lead to misunderstanding of the conveyed message, hamper successful completion of academic tasks of both native and non-native speakers of English, may impact negatively on reading comprehension of academic texts and disturb their academic writing (Gardner & Davies, 2013; Hemchua & Shmitt, 2006; Saud, 2018).

Concerning the research on misuse of academic vocabulary in its productive form (writing), few studies focus on lexical error analysis in academic vocabulary. There is limited research available that considers the misuse of AWL in writing (Dodigovic & Wang, 2015). One such study referring to lexical error analysis is Harutyunyan's (2018) research on EFL students' lexical errors in writing. However, at large, little is known about lexical errors in academic vocabulary of Armenian students. In fact, no study has been carried out so far to reveal the misuse of Academic Word List by EFL Armenian learners.

Hence, the current study seeks to identify two types of errors - context and spelling errors in AWL and elicit possible causes of those errors. To gain results and complement information in different parts of data in the following corpus-based analysis, we have applied to elements and aspects of both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the interest of obtaining reliable and useful data, the descriptive analysis that allows to explore, study data, analyze the findings, count frequencies of errors and interpret them has been applied (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015, p.36). As far as Error Analysis is concerned, Gass & Selinker's (2008) technique of analyzing the errors is adopted and implemented. Thus, the methodology used is based on the Mixed Method Research (MMR).

### **Data collection and data analysis**

Before moving to the procedure and data collection, some relevant aspects of the present study should be highlighted. To conduct the corpus-based analysis, a data source was required which is a compilation of the small learner corpus containing 39 essays, written by AUA undergraduates, who are native speakers

of Armenian, majoring in English and Communications. The essays, which the students wrote as an obligatory task, are on different topics: social media in our lives, harassment, the educational system in Armenia, reflections on academic writing techniques.

The data analysis was conducted in the following way. To analyze the learner corpus containing academic written essays, Corpus Builder Software was used, which is found on the website [luxtutor.ca](http://luxtutor.ca). To identify AWL, the Vocabprofile tool was implemented, with VP-Classic element found on the same site. The Vocabprofile tool highlights all academic words and word families, which is Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List. To check and elicit the errors in AWL, Luxtutor collocation tool was used with British Academic Written corpus of 8 million words.

In the current study, the above mentioned thirty-nine essays were collected from the database of the students' writings. Both the instructor and the students were informed that the essays would be analyzed for the current study. Before integrating the students' writing into a corpus, all the data that may violate the confidentiality of the students were excluded (students' names, surnames, supervisor's name, citations).

Lexical error taxonomy, which is based on word knowledge depth, is presented and described with examples of errors. The present study has five steps in analyzing the data and in Table 1 the steps of error analysis are presented:

Number of steps	Steps	Steps Definition	Examples
1	Compile and Collect Learner Corpus	Collecting essays (Word Documents)	39 Essays from undergraduate AUA students majoring in English and Communications
2	Error identification and classification	Lexical errors in AWL	Wrong word in context, wrong spelling
3	Quantifying Errors in AWL	Overall number of errors in AWL Number of errors caused because of L1 and L2	Number of lexical errors in AWL in each group (context and spelling). The amount of L1 and L2 errors in AWL

4	Analysis of errors in AWL	Possible causes and reasons for errors	Intralingual or Interlingual errors in AWL
<p><i>Note:</i> The table is taken and adapted from Gass &amp; Selinker (2008).</p>			

In error analysis, the identification and classification of errors is taken and adapted from Dodigovic et al. (2014) lexical error taxonomy, which is based on word knowledge depth. Besides the identification and classification of errors, underlying reasons for those errors have been highlighted, whether there are interlingual or intralingual errors. To reveal whether the given error is interlingual or intralingual Online Nayiri Armenian Dictionary was also implemented to check the translation of words and to find out whether the error is caused because of direct translation or not. In table 2, the classification of errors examples of error occurrences are presented:

<i>Table 2: Lexical error taxonomy with examples</i>			
Criteria	Explanation	Example	Correction
Context	Wrong word choice (e.g. <i>improve</i> instead of <i>ameliorate</i> )	<i>People start to underestimate their individualities by becoming fake <b>options</b> of Rihannas or Beyonces.</i>	<i>Options-Versions</i>
Spelling	Incorrect/Correct	<i>While a tax paying legal citizen of a country generally doesn't need to be afraid of mass surveillance, Corrupt officials, <b>Military</b> criminals, and all other sorts of illegal activates</i>	<i>Military-military</i>
<p><i>Note:</i> The table is taken and adapted from Dodigovic et al. (2014)</p>			

The results of the current study demonstrate two types of errors found in AWL. Most frequent types of errors are also identified referring to lexical error taxonomy. Most frequent lexical errors in AWL are also highlighted referring to the sources of those errors. The reasons and causes of all the errors in academic vocabulary are detected, whether the errors are interlingual (L1) or intralingual (L2).

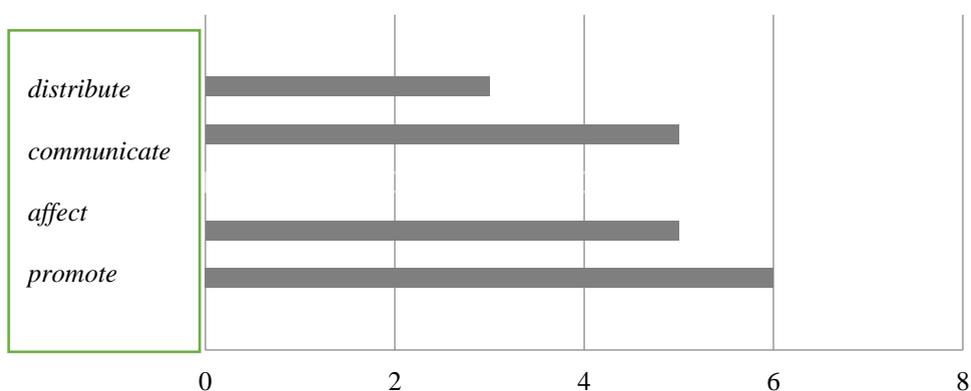
### Lexical errors in AWL

Error Category	<i>f</i>	%
Context	28	84.84
Spelling	5	15.15
TNT in AWL	2111	
TNT	28.065	
Total Number of Errors in AWL	33	

Note: *f* =frequency, AWL=Academic Word List, TNT=total number of tokens, %=percentage

Table 3 shows lexical error types in AWL subdivided into two categories: the total number of tokens in both AWL (2111), and learner corpus (28.065) with the total number of errors in AWL (33). Notable result worthwhile to be highlighted is that in the category of Context which incorporates wrong word choice and meaning, confusion of synonyms, opposite meaning, the highest frequency of errors in academic vocabulary is detected, which is 84.84% with total 28 errors. There are 5 lexical errors in the category of Spelling (15.15%), with least frequent errors in AWL. Moreover, in the category of Spelling, most of the errors could be due to unnecessary capitalized words. For example, the words *illegal*, *military*, *globalization*.

**Figure 1: Most frequently misused words**



The bar chart (Figure 1) shows words that are most frequently misused, based on the number of occurrences. The figure demonstrates new findings on the most misused academic vocabulary in the learner corpus. As shown in

Figure 1, the most misused word is the word *promote* (6 times). The next most frequently misused words are *affect*, *communicate* (5 times each), and *distribute* (3 times). In all the sentences, the following misused words constitute both nouns and verbs. For instance, the word *communicate* is presented as the base form of content word *communication*, which is a noun and is misused in the writings. The word *distribute*, is used only as a verb. Overall, students made errors more often in verbs than in nouns and other parts of speech.

<i>Table 4: Number of Lexical Errors in AWL According to the Source of their Cause</i>		
Criteria	<i>f</i> of Interlingual errors	<i>f</i> of Intralingual errors
Context	22	6
Spelling	0	5
<i>Note: f =frequency</i>		

Table 4 shows the total number of lexical errors in AWL, based on categories and error source. As it is depicted in the table, Context constitutes the highest number of interlingual errors in AWL (21). Context errors and its L1 source can be the result of literal or direct translation of the Armenian students' writings from L1 into L2. Another prominent result shown is that Spelling errors belong only to intralingual ones, they cannot be caused because of L1, as Armenian and English have different spelling systems.

### **Errors in context**

Under the term Context confusion of synonyms, sense relation, incorrect word choice, and word meaning are included. The following category encompasses the largest portion of lexical errors in AWL in the learner corpus, which is in line with Harutyunyan's (2018) results, where the largest portion of lexical errors in writing accounts for the category of Context and the following result is also in line with Saud's (2018) study, where most errors are detected in the confusion of sense relations. All the errors that the students made in their writing are because of direct translation from L1 to L2 translation. It is revealed that 28 errors occurred in AWL – 22 interlingual errors that is influenced by L1 and 6 intralingual developmental errors and as was mentioned in James (1998), developmental errors occur irrespective of L1.

In the current learner corpus that consists of Armenian students' essays, errors in AWL in the category of context with prevailing L1 errors could be the result of direct translation from Armenian. The same situation was revealed by

Shalaby et al. (2009) in Saudi college students' writings. Another source of errors is revealed to be the existence of polysemantic words in Armenian. This finding is in line with Dodigovic et al. (2017). For example, the word *distribute* can be used in Armenian to show different meanings in different contexts. For instance, *distribute rebellion* – ապստամբություն տարածել (apstambutyun taratsel), *distribute responsibilities* – բաշխել պարտականությունները (bashkhel partakanutyunnere). The above mentioned factors could be the reason why the learners misuse academic vocabulary. Some examples are provided below:

*Syria, The United Arab Emirates and Iran, consider it as a large vehicle for **distributing** political riot (instigate).*

*The webpage is used to **conduct** the websites traffic jams in large scales and counted the number of illiterate (manage).*

*Now teachers are merely instructing students and without further explanation **transmit** their opinions (convey).*

As for the errors caused by L2, the possible reason can be sought in the fact that the students, whose writings comprised the corpus of the present study, want to appear more advanced in terms of language proficiency and have more refined writing. The following examples show some of the error occurrences in AWL based on the mentioned factor:

***By the way** of conclusion, education is one of the most important aspects of the life (**in conclusion**).*

*The website gives the opportunity to get educated in what sphere you prefer by **involving** every type of newspapers (**including**).*

*We hope that the question-and-answer sheet will help you to understand how problematic and distracting is the sexual harassment, which will make you aware and ready for it or will prevent you from **conducting** it (**engaging in**).*

There are also cases when students misused academic vocabulary merely due to lack of knowledge in AWL:

*It is the main **communicator** between different cultures (**means of communication**).*

*Terrorist groups can quickly circulate some **motivating** ideas for civilians (**disruptive**).*

### Errors in spelling

Last but not least, lexical AWL errors in the category of Spelling have been detected. This is the only category where no L2 error has been found. According to Agustin-Llach (2017), the absence of L1 seems predictable, as there is no similarity and coherence in spelling between Armenian and English. In the following learner corpus, spelling errors in AWL are mainly capitalized, and this could happen because of lack of typographic skills and it is important to highlight that the writings of the learners are Word Documents, hence in Word Docs the spelling errors are automatically checked and corrected. Nevertheless, according to James (1998) these are slips of the pen rather than errors. The examples are provided below:

*Society has been made aware of the fact that Social Media  
cites (sites) sell their daily information to governments  
Propaganda of Globalization (globalization)*

### Most frequently misused words

Besides lexical errors in AWL, the most frequent words that were misused in AWL are also elicited and analyzed. The most frequently misused word is the word *promote* (6 times). The word *affect* (3 times) is misused as a verb, once as an adjective and once as a noun. The word *communication* (3 times) is misused once as a noun, once as a verb and once as an adjective. And last but not least, the word *distribute* (3 times) is misused as a verb. Hence, 13 misused verbs, 2 misused nouns and 2 adjectives. The results indicate that the verbs in AWL should receive much more attention.

Thus, the results of the present research show that both learners and educators should lay more emphasis on errors in productive use of academic vocabulary and on depth of vocabulary, rather than on grammar (Bardakci, 2016; Hasan & Shabdin, 2016).

### Conclusion

Taking into account the educational background and exposure to the English language that students have at English medium University, the causes of errors have been subdivided into interlingual (L1) and intralingual (L2) causes of errors in academic vocabulary. The corpus analysis unveiled that L1 errors dominate L2 errors in these two categories. As it is seen, students face

difficulties and have problems in academic vocabulary and an emphasis should be put on all the above-mentioned factors, as learners frequently make errors because of wrong affiliation and direct translation from L1 academic words.

The current corpus aided analysis described the areas of AWL in which the students experience difficulties. Error Analysis also helped to determine the causes of errors and perceive that besides interlingual cause of errors, intralingual ones also play a significant role in making and triggering errors in AWL. In addition, the given study may serve for educators and teachers as a base for designing lessons, curriculum, activities in order to help Armenian students to evade and eradicate lexical errors in AWL. Besides, this research may also assist teachers to create an authentic context for mastery of academic English vocabulary.

### References

- Agustin-Llach, M. P. (2011). *Lexical errors and accuracy in Foreign Language Writing*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Agustin-Llach, M. P. (2017). Vocabulary teaching: Insights from lexical errors. *TESOL International Journal*, 12(1), 63-74.
- Bardakci, M. (2016). Breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and their effects on L2 vocabulary profiles. *English Language Teaching*, 9(4), 239-250.
- Coxhead, A. (2000). A new academic word list. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(2), 213-238.
- Dodigovic, M., & Wang S. (2015). The misuse of academic English vocabulary in Chinese student writing. *US-China Foreign Language*, 13(5), 349-356.
- Dodigovic, M., Li, H., Chen, Y., & Guo, D. (2014). The use of academic English vocabulary in the writing of Chinese students. *English Teaching in China*, 5, 13-19.
- Dodigovic, M., Ma, C., & Jing, S. (2017). Lexical transfer in the writing of Chinese learners of English. *TESOL International Journal*, 12(1), 75-90.
- Gardner, D., & Davies, M. (2013). A new academic vocabulary list. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(3), 305–327.
- Gass, S.M., & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second language acquisition*. New York: Routledge.
- Harutyunyan, N. (2018). Lexical errors in the writing of EFL students in the Armenian context (master's thesis). Yerevan, American University of Armenia.

- Hasan, K. Md., & Shabdin, A. A. (2016). Conceptualization of depth of vocabulary knowledge with academic reading comprehension. *PASAA*, 51, 235-268.
- Hemchua, S., & Schmitt, N. (2006). An analysis of lexical errors in the English compositions of Thai learners. *Prospect*, 21(3), 3-25.
- James, C. (1998). *Errors in language learning and use. Exploring error analysis*. London: Longman.
- Paltridge, B., & Phakiti, A. (2015). *Research methods in Applied Linguistics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Saud, W. I. (2018). Lexical errors of third year undergraduate students. *English Language Teaching*, 11(11), 161-168.
- Shalaby, N. A., Yahya, N., & El-Komi, M. (2009). Analysis of lexical errors in Saudi college students' compositions. *Journal of the Saudi Association of Languages and Translation*, 2(3), 65-93.

**ԲԱՌԱՅԻՆ ՄԽԱԼՆԵՐԻ ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԿԱՐԵՎՈՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ  
ԳՐԱՎՈՐ ԳԻՏԱԿԱՆ ԽՈՍՔՈՒՄ**

**Աստղիկ Չուբարյան  
Մարիամ Վարդանյան**

Մխալների վերլուծությունը կիրառական լեզվաբանության կարևոր բնագավառ է, որի նպատակն է սխալների քննության միջոցով առավել արդյունավետ դարձնել օտար լեզվի մատուցումն ու դասավանդումը: Հոդվածում դիտարկվում է օտար լեզվի, մասնավորապես գրավոր գիտական խոսքի յուրացման գործընթացում բառային սխալների վերլուծության դերը: Հետազոտության փաստական նյութը Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանի «Անգլերեն և հաղորդակցություն» մասնագիտության առաջին կուրսի հայ ուսանողների անգլերեն գրված 39 էսսեներն են: Նյութի քննությունն իրականացվել է գիտական բառապաշարի բառային սխալների քանակական և որակական, ինչպես նաև կորպուսային վերլուծության մեթոդների կիրառմամբ՝ նպատակ ունենալով օգնել դասավանդողներին կազմակերպելու և մշակելու դասընթացներ, որոնք կնպաստեն անգլերենը՝ որպես երկրորդ լեզու սովորողների գիտական բառապաշարի զարգացմանը:

*Բանալի բառեր՝ բառային սխալ, սխալների վերլուծություն, ակադեմիական բառացանկ, գիտական բառապաշար:*