

Student's Performance in Using Adjectives**Hussein Musa/ College of Basic Education
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In English, adjectives are syntactic or lexical category that function as the head of the adjective phrase and have the semantic value of *qualifying or describing* (Fromkin et al, 2003:573).

Greenbaum and Quirk (1992:129) assert that adjectives have four major characteristics:

a. They can freely occur in *attributive* function, i.e., they can premodify a noun by appearing between a determiner and the head word of the noun phrase. For example:

1. An *ugly* painting, (ibid)

b. They can freely occur in *predicative* function, i.e., they can work as a subject complement:

2. The painting is *ugly*. (ibid)

c. They can be premodified by the intensifier *very*:

3. The children are *very happy*. (ibid)

d. They can take the *comparative* and the *superlative* forms (-er and -est) or (more and most).

4. My children are the(*happi/er/est*) now.

5. The students are more intelligent

6. The students are the most intelligent.

However, it is assumed that Iraqi students of English often face difficulties in using English adjectives, particularly, a group of adjectives are considered *confusing* to learners by L.G. Alexander (1994) *Right Word Wrong Word* and consequently, may be misused by Iraqi students.

These adjectives are considered *confusing*, in the sense that some adjectives may appear similar in meaning (like *big, great, or huge*) or in form (like *historic, historical, classic, classical*) but they are different in use, due to meaning differences.

The paper will attempt to provide a list of these adjectives (adopted from – L. G. Alexander, 1994 *Right Word Wrong Word*). Then, a special test is designed and applied on Iraqi students of English to measure the extent of errors committed within this area in order to be analysed separately, ie, to show the progress for each of the two levels (2nd year and 4th year) involved in the test. Finally, the paper will provide a group of recommendations in the light of the results arrived at.

1. Confusing adjectives

Following Alexander (1994) here is a complete list of the confusing adjectives:

1.1 *Adjacent / Contiguous*

Adjacent means lying near or close or adjoining. *Contiguous* has more restricted sense of touching or being in close proximity to (Baillie & Kitchin, 1976:15):

1. A small field lay *adjacent* to the main road.

2. France is *contiguous* to Spain.

1.2 *Amatory/ Amorous*

Amatory means expressing love is frequently applied to something written. *Amorous* is more frankly concerned sexual desire (ibid):

3. The author of a book of *amatory* poetry.

4. No girl could resist his *amorous* approaches.

1.3 *Ambiguous \ Ambivalent*

Ambiguous means open to various interpretations or having a doubt meaning. *Ambivalent* has mixed or conflicting feelings (ibid: 26 and Webster, 1992: 28):

5. To their clear question he gave an *ambiguous* answer.
6. The older members of the staff were *ambivalent* in their attitude towards the new young manager.

1.4 *Amiable/ Amicable*

Amiable is used only to refer to people and means being a good-natured disposition. On the other hand, *amicable* means friendly and peaceable and refers to arrangements, settlements and attitudes, (Hornby, 1974:27):

7. He proved to be a most amiable companion.
8. They came to an *amicable* agreement.

1.5 *Barbarian/ Barbaric \ Barbarous*

Barbarian means rough or uncultured. *Barbaric* means crude, rustic, simple (especially used with taste). *Barbarous* denotes cruelty and violence, the harsh side of barbarian behaviour and is the antitheses of everything cultured and civilized. (Bailie & Kitchin, 1976:44 & Kent, 1984:21):

9. The barbarian tribes know nothing about civilization.
10. Those gaudy ties he wears display his barbaric tastes.
11. The docking of dog's tail is a *barbarous* practice.

1.6 *Big/ Great/ Large*

Generally speaking, *big* or *large* imply size. *Big* and *great* have more abstract meanings, i.e., important events or actions and only *great* is used normally with uncountable nouns, some other uses of *great* are: to mean "famous" powerful, or historically important and an exclamation to show linking or approval, (Swan, 1980: 109):

12. Sir Henry was feeling decidedly sleepy after a large lunch. (size) .
13. Mummy, can I have a big lunch today? (size)
14. You're making a big \ great mistake. (important events and actions)
15. I had a great difficulty in getting through on the phone.(uncountable nouns)
16. Napoleon was not a big man, but he was a great man. (great = famous)
17. "How do you like my dress? ----- "Great"! "exclamation to show liking and approval"

1.7 *Childish/ Childlike*

Both words are defined as "like or befitting a child", but *childish* is more slightly derogatory sense, meaning that certain behaviour is suitable only for a child. Whereas *childlike* is a term implying admiration and stressing the freshness and innocence of childhood. (Webster, 1992:170):

18. Such a childish display of temper will achieve nothing.
19. Her *childlike* simplicity appealed to all who come in contact with her.

1.8 *Fictional \ Fictitious*

Fictional means something that occurs only in fiction, created from the imagination. *Factious* is untrue, counterfeit or false (Hornby, 1992:317 & Webster, 1992:319):

20. This is a fictional story. (The researcher's example)
21. Gulliver is *fictitious* character. (Kent, 1984:91)

1.9 *Fleshly \ Fleshy*

Fleshly is pertaining to the flesh or body, and is generally used in the carnal sexual sense. *Fleshy* means plump, pulpy. (Clark, 1989 :164):

22. He took every opportunity to indulge his fleshly desire.
23. He preferred pale, *fleshy* women to thin, tanned girls.

1.10 *Forceful \ Forcible*

Forceful means powerful, vigorous and effective. *Forcible* means having force or effected by force or violence. (Doniach, 1984:147):

24. The spokesman made a forceful speech at the meeting.

25. The protesters made a *forcible* entry to the meeting.

1.11 *Fragile \ Frail*

Clark (1989: 170), points out that *Fragile* means easily broken (of an object, because it is brittle, like glass).

Frail means easily broken (of person, because he or she is weak \ unhealthy):

26. It is fragile glass.

27. She's nearly 90, and very *frail*.

1.12 *Grisly \ Grizzly \ Grizzled*

Grisly is an objective meaning gruesome or causing horror. Both *grizzly* and *grizzled* mean grey or grey haired. (Bailie & kitchin, 1976 :137) :

28. There was a grisly accident in the street. (The researcher's example)

29. It was a *grizzly/ grizzled* bear over there. (The researcher's example)

1.13 *Habitable / Inhabitable*

Both words, live-in-able, *habitable* is usually applied to dwellings, houses, flats, etc. *Inhabitable* generally refers to much larger areas or regions(Clark, 1989: 185):

30. This house is no longer habitable. (Hornby, 1995: 533)

31. The land is *inhabitable* by only birds. (The researcher's example)

1.14 *Historic/ Historical*

These words are frequently confused but their meanings are quite distinct. *Historic* means, well-know or important in history (Alexander,1994:92):

32. Pulling down the Berlin Wall will be remembered as one of the *historic* events of the late 20th century.

Historical concerned with or relating to history (Doniach, 1984: 179 and Swan, 1980: 302):

33. January 1st 1973- the *historic* date when Britain joined the common market.

1.15 *Human \ Humane*

Both adjectives refer to what is characteristic of human beings, but their meanings are now quite separate. *Human* can refer to the good and bad in mankind: *human* weakness, or to man as opposed to God: *human* frailty, divine compassion (Hornby, 1974: 416):

34. To err is *human*, to forgive is divine.

Humane, which was once interchangeable with human, is now restricted to the idea of being tender and compassionate towards the sufferings of others (Shaw, 1985: 257-258):

35. The general insisted upon *humane* treatment of all prisoners.

1.16 *Lyric \ Lyrical*

According to Swan (1980:302), *lyric* is used for a kind of poetry expressing story personal feelings. While *lyrical* means 'full of praise' :

36. It was Elizabethan lyric verse.

37. Martha was absolutely *lyrical* about my mushroom salad.

1.17 *politic \ political*

Politic means "wise" or "prudent", but *political* means "connected with politics", (ibid):

38. I don't think it would be politic to ask for a loan now.

39. Your suggestion is a *political* advantage.

1.18 *Economic \ Economical*

Economic refers to the science of economics or to the economy of a country or finance. Whereas *economical* denotes 'not wasting money' (Webster, 1992:296):

40. Europe is more than economic community. (Alexander, 1994:60)

41. Our use of the central heating is fairly *economical*. (ibid)

1.19 *Classic\ Classical*

Classic means typifying the best, first class; *classical* refers to the ancient Greece or Rome, the opposite of romantic or popular:

42. She wore a classic gown made of black silk.

43. The church was designed in *classical* style and built of local materials only fifty years ago. (Clark, 1989:84)

1.20 *ill\ sick*

To be *ill* means to be in bad health. To be *sick* means to vomit:

44. The smell made me sick.

45. He is ill. (Fitikides, 2000, 115)

1.21 *Imaginary\ Imaginative*

Imaginary is an image created in the imagination, having no existence in reality. *Imaginative* is having the faculty for creating such images or mental pictures:

46. Her work is highly *imaginative*, yet it was possible to believe in the existence of her *imaginary* character. (Bailie & Kitchin, 1976:149)

1.22 *Illegal\ Unlawful\ Illegitimate\ Illicit*

Illegal is against the law of the land. *Unlawful* may be against the law or what the law intends, but it can also apply to religious or moral laws. *Illegitimate* is outside the law, not in accordance with or sanctioned by law, often used with particular reference to birth out of wedlock. *Illicit* is applied to actions that are against the law, the customs, or the rules of society. (Clark, 1984: 113-119):

46. To buy this land is illegal.

47. It is an unlawful act.

48. He is an illegitimate child.

49. It is illicit to buy or sell opium.

1.23 *Unmoral\ Amoral\ Immoral*

Unmoral means "having no morality" or unable to distinguish right from wrong'. *Amoral* means 'not concerned with moral standard' or 'not to be judged by criteria or standard of morality'. *Immoral* means 'wicked' or contrary to accepted principles of right and wrong. (Shaw, 1986: 264-5):

50. It is unmoral to cheat others. (The researcher's example)

51. Someone of *amoral* upbringing may develop *immoral* tendencies. (Clark, 1989:30)

1.24 *Illegible\ Unreadable*

52. *Unreadable* means 'too obscure or dull to read'. *Illegible* refers to indecipherable.

53. The article was so badly written that it was *unreadable* by anyone but an expert in the subject.

54. The *letter* was so badly written that it was *illegible* to everyone but the writer.

(ibid: 421)

1.25 *Immanent\ Imminent\ Eminent*

Immanent indicates or taking place within the mind or having no effect outside it. It is a little used word, occurring most frequently in a theological contexts. *Imminent* means impending or about to occur (of events especially dangers). *Eminent* means famous. (Hornby, 1974: 42-43):

55. Adaptation for survival is an immanent characteristic of most organisms.

56. Because of pollution the extinction of several organisms is imminent.

57. These statements were made by an *eminent* biologist. (Clark, 1989: 201). 1.26 *Ambiguous\ Vague*

Ambiguous means more than one meaning or open to a various interpretations, but *vague* refers to not clear. (Webster, 1992: 28, 1085):

58. I have a vague memory of the game. (Redman, 1997: 198)

59. His closing words were deliberately *ambiguous*. (Hornby, 1995: 35)

1.27 *Explicit\ Implicit*

Explicit means 'clearly expressed or defined' . *Implicit* denotes 'implied rather than openly stated' , ' understood' . It is also means 'absolute' (Doniach, 1984:130,187):

60. He was quite explicit about the matter, left no doubt about what he meant. (Hornby, 1984:130, 187)

61. He made an *implicit* threat. (ibid:426)

1.28 *Incapable\ Unable*

Both words mean lacking ability or power to do something. The chief difference is that *incapable* is usually applied to a long –standing condition unable to specific situation:

62. He is incapable of expressing himself clearly, so it is not surprising that he was *unable* to make himself understood at the meeting. (Baillie & kitchin, 1976:155)

1.29 *Industrial\ Industrious*

Industrial means with highly developed industries. *Industrious* is hard-working or diligent. The first is applied to the process of industry, the second to the people concerned with it as in:

63. Japan is industrial nation.

64. The Japanese people are very industrious.

(Alexander, 1994: 99)

1.30 *Masterful\ Masterly*

At one time these words were very close in meaning and there is still some confusion about their correct use. *Masterful* means showing the qualities of

A master or dominant person , authoritative or domineering. *Masterly* mean showing a high degree of skill in the performance of any activity, (Hornby 1974:52):

65. She admired him for his masterful manner in dealing with other people.

66. She envied him his *masterly* command of languages.

(Clark, 1989:254)

1.31 *Endemic / Epidemic / Pandemic*

Endemic applies to a disease which peculiar to a particular people on locality. *Epidemic* (noun & adjective) applies to a disease that temporarily affects many people in a particular place. *Pandemic* (noun & adjective) is one which prevalent throughout an entire region, such as a country or continent. (Webster, 1992: 311, 317, 725):

67. Myxomatosis is endemic among the rabbits of Australia.

68. The new strain of Asian flu has reached epidemic properties in Britain this winter.

69. Scientists predict that AIDS may become a worldwide *pandemic* unless a cure or vaccine is discovered soon.

(Clark, 1989 : 143)

1.32 *Emotive / Emotional*

Both words can be used to mean " exciting emotion " or " appealing to the emotions ". However, in practice a sharp distinction is between them. *Emotive* is restricted to causing emotion and *emotional* to being effected or expressing emotion. (Baillie & Kitchin, 1976 : 113):

70. It is an emotive scene.

71. She is an *emotional* woman.

1.33 *Female / Feminine / Womanly*

Female is both a noun and adjective describing the sex of a plant , animal or human being. *Feminine* is an adjective only, qualifying the condition of being female and applied only to human beings. *Womanly* is used primarily in opposition to manly, indicating possession of qualities that are especially feminine or, sometimes in contrast girlish, meaning mature.(ibid: 12):

72. There's certainly no female equality where top jobs are concerned.

73. "---ess" in waitress is a feminine ending.

74. I was expecting a bit of womanly sympathy, not a bucket of cold water.(Alexander, 1994: 75)

1.34 Male / Manly / Masculine

Male is always used with reference to sex, whether of human beings, or other form of life. *Manly* means possessing the noblest qualities to be found in man. *Masculine* refers to those qualities that are supposed to be characteristic of the male sex or belonging to the gender of words in grammas. (Webster , 1992 : 603, 607, 614):

75. *Male* animals in herds protect the females.

76. His manly show of defiance in the face of adversity was an inspiration to us.

77. He was noted for his *masculine* enthusiasm for the outdoor life.

(Baillie & kitchin, 1976 : 126)

1.35 Momentary / Momentous

Momentary means 'lasting only very briefly', where as *momentous* means 'of a great important' or 'serious' (Hornby, 1974: 46):

78. He caught a momentary glimpse of a very beautiful woman.

79. His decision was a *momentous* one for the future of the word. (Baillie & kitchen, 1976 : 194)

1.36 Notable / Noted

Notable is 'worthy of notice or attention', while *noted* means 'well-known', or 'celebrated'. In general notable is applied to events or things and noted to people. (ibid: 207 & Hornby, 1995: 789-90):

80. He made a notable contribution to the science of astronomy.

81. He is a *noted* astronomer.

(Clark, 1989: 279)

1.37 Aural / Oral

Aural is pertaining to the ear or hearing; *Oral* is pertain to the mouth the voice or speaking. (ibid: 43):

82. He is an aural surgeon.

83. I have an *oral* examination tomorrow. (Hornby, 1974: 51)

1.38 Perspicacious / Perspicacious

Perspicacious means 'having keen mental perception, shrewd or discerning' and usually applied to people. *Perspicacious* means 'clear to the understanding or clearly expressed' and usually refers to something written or spoken. (Webster, 1992:749):

84. His perspicacious conduct of affairs was appreciated by all.

85. A *perspicacious* description of the situation is inevitable.

(Baillie & kitchen, 1996: 231)

1.39 Practicable / Practical

These adjectives are very close in some of their senses and an obvious source of confusion ; *Practicable* means 'able to be done ', capable of being into practice or carried out in action. *Practical*, when applied to people , means 'sensible or business like', when applied to things, it means 'efficient and workable' (as opposed to theoretical); (Doniach, 1984 : 296):

86. Before the era of electronics, televisions did not seem practicable.(Kent, 1984: 171).

87. Anne is so calm and practical. She does everything well.(applied to people).

88. I'm not at all *practical*. I can't even use a hammer. (applied to things).(Alexander, 1994 : 144)

1.40 Repairable / Reparable

Both adjectives mean 'capable of being repaired', but *repairable* is normally used only of material things. *Reparable* is generally used of abstract things to be remedied or put right, such as loss, a mistake or harm. For the other.(Baillie & Kitchin, 1976: 254):

89. The road is repairable at public expense.(Hornby, 1995 : 991)

90. His loss is *irreparable*.(The researcher's example)

1.41 Same / Similar

They indicate a resemblance between things. *Same* means identical in every respect, while *similar* resembles in certain respects or in a general way, or having certain qualities in common, (Baillie & Kitchin, 1976: 261):

91. She wears the same clothes every day.

92. Your views on the subject are *similar* to mine.

1.42 Scots / Scottish / Scotch

Both *Scots* and *Scottish* have the same sense, i.e., belonging or pertaining to Scotland. *Scotch* should be used only with reference to food, flowers and objects generally. (Webster, 1992: 896):

93. *Scottish* blood, Scots soldiers.

94. Scotch tweed, Scotch terrier. (Baillie & kitchen, 1976: 263)

1.43 Sensible / Sensitive

The most common meaning of *sensible* is 'having or showing good sense or sound judgment'. It can, however, have meaning of 'keenly aware', when it is usually followed by (of). *Sensitive* means 'readily or easily affected by'. (Hornby, 1974:776):

95. I'm sure Amy will make the right decision. She is a *sensible* woman.

96. Amy is very *sensitive*. She wouldn't want to hurt anyone.

(Alexander, 1994: 164)

1.44 Little / small

Little refers to size, duration or extent. It is widely used figuratively and in these senses it contrasts with much, qualifying amount or degree. *Small* is a word of dimension, of limited size, or quantity. It too is used figuratively, and in some expressions overlaps with little but on the whole each has its place in accepted use. (Baillie & kitchen, 1976: 181 and Thomson and Martinet, 1986 : 35):

97. There is little dog in the orchard.

98. Only little hopes to achieve the goat.

99. The house has three *small* rooms.

100. Small *thanks* go to the servants.

1.45 Spirituous / Spiritual

Spirituous means 'containing alcohol, alcoholic'. *Spiritual* means 'pertaining to the spirit or soul, as opposed to the body. (Webster, 1992: 958):

101. The plastic surface should be cleaned with spirituous liquid.

102. I have long been friends with Amanda, but our relationship has been only *spiritual*. (Clark, 1989: 386)

1.46 Abnormal / Subnormal / Supernormal

Abnormal means any difference from normal; *Subnormal* refers to below normal; *Supernormal* denotes above the normal. (Ibid: 6):

103. We have had an abnormal amount of rain for this time of the year.

104. The oil becomes very viscous at subnormal temperatures.

105. The winning candidate demonstrated *supernormal* intelligence.

1.47 Uneatable / Inedible

The main distinction between these two is that *uneatable* means unpalatable and is generally applied to something which could in circumstance be eaten. *Inedible*, on the other hand, usually refers to something which could not be eaten under any circumstances. (Baillie & Kitchin, 1976: 296)

106. The cold stew was uneatable.

107. There are many *inedible* plants.

1.48 Urban / Urbane

Urban means 'belonging to or situated in cities or towns. *Urbane* means confident or polite. (Alexander, 1994: 191):

108. I don't like urban life.

109. An *urbane* manner is a great social asset.

1.49 *Older (Oldest) / Elder (eldest)*

Older and *oldest* are applied to both people and things, while *elder* and *eldest* are applied to people only, and most frequently to related people. Moreover, *older* is not the same as *elder*, i.e., can't be followed by (than), (Fitikides, 2000: 111):

110. This girl is older than that one.

111. My *eldest* brother is not here.

112. My *elder* brother is called Jim .

1.50 *Interesting / Interested*

Following Hornby (1974: 445), *interesting* refers to (thing) which arouses interest, whereas *interested* to the (person) who takes an interest in the thing.

113. It makes interesting reading. (Hornby, 1995 : 622)

114. Are you *interested* in history? (ibid)

1.51 *Wounded / Injured / Hurt*

People are *injured* or *hurt* as a result of accident or a fight but people are wounded in wars and battles. (Fitikides, 2000: 112):

115. Jack was injured / hurt in a car accident.

116. They were *wounded* in the war.

1.52 *High / Tall*

We generally use *tall* with people, and it's opposite of short. *High* is used when referring to trees, building, or mountains, and it's the opposite of low. (ibid: 115):

117. My elder brother is six feet tall.

118. The building is *high*.

1.53 *Beautiful / Handsome / Good-looking*

We usually say that a man is *handsome* or *good-looking* and that a woman is *beautiful*, lovely, and *good-looking* or pretty, (Webster, 1992: 438 & Fitikides, 2000: 115):

119. Boris is a handsome/good-looking young man.

120. Linda is a beautiful girl. (Alexander, 1992: 21)

1.54 *Politic/ Political*

Politic means 'wise or prudent' , but *political* means ' connected with politics' (Swan, 1980:302):

121. I don't think it would be politic to ask for a loan just now.

122. Your suggestion is a *political* advantage.

1.55. *Ancient/ old*

Old is used in terms of time; ancient in terms of history as in the ancient Greeks:

123. Mr. Briggs is an old friend of mine. (Alexander, 1994:11)

124. The incidents happened before I was married and that is all *ancient* history now. (Hornby, 1995:58)

1.56. *Soluble/ Solvable*

Soluble is used of both substances and problems and means 'capable of being dissolved' or capable of being solved. *Solvable* means 'capable of being solved', and is applied to problems only.

125. Glucose is soluble in water.

126. Problems are not easily *solvable*. (ibid:131).

1.57. *Alive/ Living*

Alive and *living* both mean 'not dead', but we cannot use *alive* in front of a noun while *live* (pronounced /laiv/) can also mean 'happening now/ active':

127. Are your grandparents still alive/ living?

128. careful! That wire is *alive*. (Alexander, 1994:8-9).

1.58 *Modest/ Moderate*

Modest means ‘bashful’ unassuming, unobtrusive, whereas *moderate* means ‘unextreme, temperate, middling(of size)’:

129. He lived in a *modest* house of *moderate* size. (Clark, 1989:263).

1.59 *Fatal/ Fateful*

Fatal is “leading to/ causing death, disastrous’ ; *fateful* is determined by fate:

130. He swallowed a fatal dose of poison.

131. Turning back proved to be *fateful* course of action. (ibid:159).

1.60 *Past/ Last*

Last means “previous” while *past* refers to the one we are in now:

132. The first iron ships were built in the last century.

133. . We have seen unbelievable advances in technology in the past century.

(Alexander, 1994: 138).

1.61 *Impassable/ Impassible*

Impassable means “cannot be passed”, whereas *impassible* refers to non feeling impassive.

134. Snow blocked the valley and made it impassable.

135. His response was *impassible*, and his face expressionless. (Clark, 1989:202)

2. The Test

The test applied in this paper was made by the researchers, and sentences used in the test are mostly taken from L. G. Alexander, 1994 *Right Word Wrong Word* see appendix(1). It is made multiple choice so as to be easily and objectively corrected. The test presents sixty items(in order to cover nearly all adjectives under investigation, which made it long for the testees, and in order to avoid being too boring to answer, it was administered by *short doses* ,i.e., making the testees do the test not in one piece). Each item tests students ability to select the proper suitable adjective. Number of items were made sixty in order to test nearly all the adjectives that are considered confusing.

The testees are Iraqi university students of English of second year(University of Kerbala, College of Education, Department of English) and fourth(University of Babylon, College of Basic Education, Department of English). Second year are selected because students at that level are supposed to be better after passing a course in English grammar in first year. Fourth year are selected because students at that level are supposed to have a good level in English grammar. Number of students participated in the test is twenty students for each level.

The test validity was examined by a number of the following experts:

Assist Prof Hameed Hasson Al-Masudy (Ph D in Translation and Linguistics) College of Education-University of Babylon.

Assist Prof A’sim A Al-Dulaimy (Ph D in Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language) College of Basic Education-University of Babylon.

Assist Prof Jasim R Al-Muhayyawi (Ph D in Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language) College of Basic Education-University of Babylon.

Assist Prof Adil A Al-Akkam (MA in Linguistics) College of Basic Education-University of Babylon.

Assist Prof Ibtisam A Abdilrrasul (MA in Linguistics) College of Education-University of Kerbala.

Lecturer Ghanim J I’dan (Ph D in Linguistics) College of Education-University of Kerbala.

3.Errors Analysis

Brown (2000:216) states that human learning is essentially a process that involves the making of errors. Misjudgements and erroneous assumptions form an important aspect of learning in any target language.

Ellis(1999:68) asserts that investigating learners’ errors serves two major purposes:

1. It provides data from which inferences about the nature of language learning process can be made.
2. It indicates to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language learners find difficult to produce correctly.

S. P. Corder(1967:160) states that there is a difference between *mistakes* and *errors*. Mistakes are slips of the tongue and are not systematic because they are performance failures done by all speakers.

Errors on the other hand, are systematic which reflect the learners' competence.

Generally, Brown (2000:224) asserts that all studies of error analysis identify three principal causes for errors.

1. Interlingual transfer: this class of errors is known also as errors of negative transfer from the mother-tongue.
2. Intralingual transfer: overgeneralization of the rules of the target language, i.e., the errors that result from the learning process.
3. Context of learning: this class of errors is assigned to faulty teaching techniques or materials.

3.1 Interpretation of Errors

After identifying and categorizing students' errors, a description of the possible factors that caused them could be presented. Errors identified within this area (*confusing adjectives*) can be classified into intralingual and errors related to the context of learning. Interlingual errors cannot be traced within this area, because Iraqi students of English are mostly exposed to adjectives like those under investigation when they started studying English at the university level. Besides, there may be no possibility of any negative or positive transfer from their mother tongue, because of the sharp cultural differences between the two language, namely (English and Arabic).

3.1.1 Intralingual Errors

This type of errors include errors that are committed due to reasons other than the negative effect of the mother-tongue. More intralingual errors in the target language are clearly manifested as learners begin to acquire more knowledge of the system of the target language.

Overgeneralization of previous knowledge in the target language is the most common form of intralingual errors. The students may create deviant structures in the target language as a result of incorrect application of structures in the target language. Such deviancies (overgeneralizations) include processes such as incomplete applications of rules, false conceptual hypothesis, and ignorance of certain language rules restrictions.

All errors committed within this area can be traced back into the fact that students may overgeneralize their knowledge in using adjectives that may look synonymous for most students, like *big, great, large* ,or *historic, historical etc.* , without being a aware of the differences in meaning, though they apparently look similar.

3.1.2 Teaching-related Errors

This type of errors is assigned to teachers' faulty teaching techniques or materials. S.P. Coder (1978:103) states that "little systematic study has been made to know the real cause of this type of errors and consequently errors not readily classed as inter-or intra-lingual can be confidently assigned to this type."

Brown (2000:178) asserts that in classroom situation, the teacher and the textbook may play a very significant role in making students develop a certain faulty hypothesis about the use of such adjectives. Neither teachers nor textbooks highlight the differences between adjectives like *classic* and *classical*, *historic* and *historical*, *childish* and *childlike* , *lyric* and *lyrical*, *human* and *humane* ,etc. Iraqi students are usually given the highest dose of vocabulary in first and second, particularly, in comprehension lessons four hours per week after it was three hours. In addition, there is no separate vocabulary topics in all the

syllabuses designed for four years study at the university level, and most teachers of English may not be aware of the differences that may exist among adjectives under investigation, or not devoting some time for such adjectives due to shortage in time.

4. Conclusions

In English, adjectives are syntactic or lexical category that function as the head of the adjective phrase and have the semantic value of *qualifying or describing* (Fromkin et al, 2003:573). Iraqi university students of English often face difficulties in using English adjectives, particularly, a group of English adjectives which are considered confusing and consequently, misused by Iraqi students. A complete list of these adjectives was provided by L. G. Alexander in (1994) *Right Word Wrong Word*. Then, a special test is designed and applied on Iraqi students to measure the extent of errors committed within this area in order to be calculated and analysed. The analysis proves the following:

1. None of the adjectives under investigation was answered right by all the students who did the test (second year and fourth year).
2. There is a remarkable difference in the percentage of errors committed. Fourth year students commit less number of errors in comparison with second year. This proves that there is a progress or development in students' knowledge in the target language, particularly, in the area of adjectives (see appendix 2).
3. Some adjectives got the highest percentage of the errors committed in comparison to other adjectives and this can be referred to the fact some Iraqi students are almost unaware of the exact meanings or uses of these adjectives (see appendix 2). However, the percentage of errors committed by Iraqi university students differ between second year students, and fourth year. The errors committed by the second year students is more than those committed by the fourth year (the percentage of the difference between second and fourth year students is about 14%).

5. Recommendations

1. Adjectives should be given more attention from both syllabus designers and teachers at the university level.
2. Confusing adjectives should be given more attention when teaching adjectives by shedding light on its meanings and differences in relation to other seemingly similar adjectives.
3. More research is to be made in the area of confusing adjectives in English in relation to the difficulties Iraqi students may face, and to what extent teachers and textbooks shed light on that area.

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Appendix(1)

The Test

Complete the following sentences by selecting the suitable words

1. France isto Spain.
a. adjacent b. contiguous c. adjacently d. contiguously
2. The author of a book of.....poetry.
a. amorous b. anatory c. amorously d. anatorily
3. To their clear question he gaveanswer.
a. ambiguous b. ambivalent c. ambiguously d. ambivalently
4. He proved to be a mostcompanion.
a. amiable b. amicable c. amiably d. amicably
5. Thetribes know nothing about civilization
a. barbaric b. barbarian c. barbarically d. barbarously
6. Sir Henry was feeling decidedly sleepy after alunch.
a. big b. large c. great d. huge
7. Such adisplay of temper will achieve nothing.
a. childish b. childlike c. childishly d. child
8. Gulliver is a.....character.
a. fictional b. fictitious c. fictionally d. fictitiously
9. He took every opportunity to indulge his.....desires.
a. fleshy b. fleshy c. flesh d. fleshless
10. The spokesman made a.....speech at the meeting.
a. forcible b. forceful c. force d. forced
11. She is nearly ninety and very.....
a. fragile b. frail c. frailly d. fragilely
12. This house is no longer.....
a. inhabitable b.habitable c. inhabitably d. habitably
13. Pulling down the Berlin Wall will be remembered as one of the *historic* events of the late 20th century.
a. historic b. historically c. historical d. history
14. The general insisted upon.....treatment of all prisoners.
a. humane b. human c. humanly d. humanely
15. It was on Elizabethan.....verse.
a. lyric b. lyrical c. lyrically d. lyrical
- 16 There was a.....accident in the street.
a. grisly b. grizzly c. grizzled d. grisled
17. I do not think it would be.....to ask for a loan.

- a. political b. politic b. politically d. policy
18. Europe is more than an.....community.
a. economical b. economic c. economically d. economy
19. She woregown made of black silk.
a. classical b. classic c. class d. classically
20. The smell made me
a. ill b. sick c. ill some d. sickly
21. Her work is highlyyet, it was possible to believe.
a. imaginary b. imaginative c. image d. imagine
22. To buy this land is.....
a. unlawful b. illegal c. legal d. unlawfully
23. Because of pollution, the extinction of several organisms is.....
a. imminent b. immanent c. eminent d. immanently
24. I have a.....memory of the game.
a. vague b. ambiguous c. vaguely d. ambiguously
25. He made an..... threat in front of the policeman.
a. explicit b. implicit c. explicitly d. implicitly
26. Japan is an.....nation.
a. industrial b. industrious c. industrially d. industry
27. She envied him his.....command of language.
a. masterful b. masterly c. master d. masterfully
28. It is an.....scene.
a. emotive b. emotional c. emotion d. emotioned
29. Myxomatosis isamong the rabbits of Australia.
a. epidemic b. endemic c. pandemic d. pandemics
30. -ess in *waitress* is a.....ending.
a. female b. feminine c. womanly d. woman
31. Hisshow of defiance in the face of diversity was an inspiration to us.
a. man b. manly c. masculine d. man
32. His decision wasone for the future of the word.
a. momentary b. momentous c. moment d. momentary
33. He is aastronomer.
a. notable b. noted c. note d. notably
34. I have an.....examination tomorrow.
a. aural b. oral c. orally d. aurally
35. Hisconduct of affairs was appreciated by all.
a. perspicuous b. perspicacious c. perspicual d. perpicacal
36. Anne is so calm and.....She does everything well.
a. practicable b. practical c. practice d. practicably
37. His loss is
a. repairable b. reparable c. repair d. prepared
38. She wears the.....clothes every day.
a. similar b. same c. resemble d. like
39. John resembles the..... blood of his forefathers.
a. Scottish b. Scotch c. Scotland d. Scotlandy
40. I am sure Mary will make the right decision. She is a.....
a. sensitive b. sensible c. senseless d. sensitivity
41. Only.....hope to achieve the goal.
a. small b. little c. smaller d. little some
42. The plastic surface should be cleaned with.....liquid.

- a. spirituous b. spiritual c. spirit d. spiritually
43. There are many.....plants.
a. uneatable b. inedible c. eaten d. indelibly
44. An.....manner is great social asset.
a. urban b. urbane c. urbanely d. urbaned
45. Mybrother is not here.
a. oldest b. eldest c. old d. oldly
46. Are youin English.
a. interesting b. interested c. interest d. interestingly
47. They werein the war.
a. hurt b. injured c. wounded d. hurt
48. My brother is six feet
a. high b. tall c. short d. higher
49. Jim is a.....young man.
a. beautiful b. handsome c. pretty d. lovely
50. Mr. Brown is an a..... friend of him.
a. old b. ancient c. elder d. eldest
51. Glucose is.....in water.
a. solvable b. soluble c. solved d. solubly
52. Are you grandparents still.....
a. lived b. alive c. live d. living
53. He lived in a.....house of middle size.
a. modest b. moderate c. moderately d. modestly
54. He swallowed a.....a dose of poison.
a. fatal b. fateful c. fate d. fatally
55. The first ships were built in the.....century.
a. last b. past c. lastly d. end
56. Snow blocked the valley and made it.....
a. impassable b. impassible c. impassed d. impassability
57. It is.....to cheat others.
a. unmoral b. morally c. immoral d. moral
58. He is.....of expressing himself clearly.
a. unable b. capable c. capability d. inability
59. The letter was so badly written that it was.....to everyone.
a. unreadable b. illegible c. reading d. illegibility
60. The winning candidate demonstrated.....intelligence.
a. abnormal b. subnormal c. supernormal d. normal

Appendix(2)

The table shows the percentage of errors in relation to each adjective

<i>adjectives</i>	<i>Second year</i>	<i>Fourth year</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Adjacent/ contiguous	76%	71%	5%
Anatory/ amorous	70%	66%	4%
Ambiguous/ ambivalent	65%	59%	4%
Amiable/ amicable	62%	55%	7%
Barbarian/ barbaric Barbarous	58%	50%	8%
Big/ great/ large	51%	47%	4%
Childish/ childlike	66%	60%	6%
Fictional/ fictitious	69%	61%	8%
Fleshly/ fleshy	73%	66%	7%
Forceful/ forcible	61%	52%	9%
Fragile/ frail	77%	69%	8%
grisly/ grizzly/ grizzled	75%	70%	5%
Habitable/ inhabitable	60%	55%	5%
Historic/ historical	68%	59%	8%
Human/ humane	50%	43%	7%
Lyric/ lyrical	46%	38%	7%
Politic/ political	44%	33%	10%
Economic/ economical	34%	27%	7%
Classic/ classical	41%	33%	8%
Ill/ sick	28%	20%	8%
Imaginary/ imaginative unlawful/illegitimate Illegal	43% 76%	32% 66%	9% 10%
Unmoral/ amoral/ immoral	66%	58%	8%
Illegible/ unreadable	70%	63%	7%
Immanent/imminent	77%	70%	7%
Ambiguous/ vague	54%	40%	14%
Explicit/ implicit	33%	23%	10%
Incapable/ unable	20%	10%	10%
Industrial/ industrious	21%	10%	9%
Masterful/ masterly	56%	45%	11%
Endemic/ epidemic/ pandemic	78%	70%	8%
Emotive/ emotional	62%	51%	11%
Female/ feminine/ womanly	35%	20%	15%
Male/ manly/ masculine	38%	21%	17%
Momentary/ momentous	62%	51%	11%
Notable/ noted	14%	8%	6%
Aural/ oral	38%	10%	28%

Perspicacious/perspicuous	67%	42%	25%
Practicable/ practical	31%	12%	19%
Repairable/ reparable	42%	31%	11%
Same/ similar	16%	9%	5%
Scots/ Scottish/ scotch	66%	52%	8%
Sensible/ sensitive	63%	45%	17%
Little/ small	29%	11%	18%
Spirituos/ spiritual			
Abnormal/ subnormal/ supranormal	67%	53%	14%
Uneatable/ inedible	78%	68%	10%
Urban/ urbane	76%	53%	23%
Older/ elder	43%	23%	20%
Interesting / interested	32%	21%	11%
Wounded/ injured/hurt	40%	21%	19%
High/ tall	23%	12%	11%
Beautiful/ handsome/ good-looking	64%	41%	23%
Ancient/ old	31%	12%	17%
Soluble/ solvable	67%	44%	23%
Alive/ living	27%	17%	10%
Modest/ moderate	65%	38%	27%
Past/ last	23%	17%	6%
Fatal/ fateful	56%	49%	7%
Impassable/ impassible	71%	63%	8%