

Investigating the Performance of Iraqi EFL University Students in Using Attributive and Predicative Adjectives: An Error Analysis

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Abstract

The speaker sometimes wish to ascribe a quality to the thing he is talking about or to describe the manner in which something is done; thus, he uses an adjective and an adverb respectively. Simply, adjectives and adverbs are used to make one's communication informative and inspiring.

It is noted that Iraqi EFL university students face difficulty in identifying attributive and predicative adjectives.

In addition, it has been observed that the recognition and production of the categories of adjectives are problematic for Iraqi EFL learners of the fourth academic year, although this grammatical phenomenon is indicated in their year of study.

Moreover, the two major areas of difficulty are: the inherent difficulty of the English syntactic system of the learners' native language on the one hand and that of the foreign language on the other hand.

According to the previous statements, it is to be assumed that Iraqi

EFL university learners use different strategies in recognizing and producing attributive and predicative adjectives. This study aims at discovering the types and causes of errors which Iraqi EFL university learners commit in the use of attributive and predicative adjectives. This study also will present a material about attributive and predicative adjectives which can be of help to distinguish those types of adjectives.

1. Introduction

The speaker sometimes wish to ascribe a quality to the thing he is talking about or to describe the manner in which something is done; thus, he uses an adjective and

an adverb respectively. Simply, adjectives and adverbs are used to make one's communication informative and inspiring.

It is a problem when one wants to know how to choose between adjectives, verbs and nouns which are to be closer to the noun head-word. Some linguists think that there are degrees of intimacy between the modifier and the head-word which vary according to the native speaker's intuition and acceptability of the sequence order of the modifiers. The order of the adjectives in Arabic is just the reverse of that used in English at surface level, the head noun comes before the adjective(s) in Arabic.

It is noted that Iraqi EFL university students face difficulty in identifying attributive and predicative adjectives.

In addition, it has been observed that the recognition and production of the categories of adjectives are problematic for Iraqi EFL learners of the fourth academic year, although this grammatical phenomenon is indicated in their year of study. Reasons behind this difficulty are many: one of these reasons is the lack of the exactly corresponding categories in Arabic (Aziz, 1988:160-188). To illustrate, the students are unable to identify the categories of the underlined adjectives represent:

- (1) The happy news is yet to come. (an attributive adjective)
 - (2) Tom seems happy today. (a predicative adjective)
 - (3) These are real flowers. (an attributive adjective.)
 - (4) I found her angry. (a predicative adjective)
- (Quirk et al., 1972:231-258)

Moreover, the two major areas of difficulty are: the inherent difficulty of the English syntactic system of the learners' native language on the one hand and that of the foreign language on the other hand.

According to the previous statements, it is to be assumed that Iraqi EFL university learners use different strategies in recognizing and producing attributive and predicative adjectives. This study aims at discovering the types and causes of errors which Iraqi EFL university learners commit in the use of attributive and predicative adjectives. This study also will present a material about attributive and predicative adjectives which can be of help to distinguish those types of adjectives.

The test consists of three questions. The first question is designed to measure the subjects' responses at the recognition level. The second and third questions are concerned with the production level (see appendix 1).

The subjects of the test were 100 students chosen randomly from the four year, Department of English, College of Education, University of Babylon.

After the administration of the test, all answer sheets were checked and corrected on right – wrong basis. The test has been scored out of 50. The scores have been distributed in such a way as to give one score for each correct answer and zero score for the incorrect one. The items that are left by the testees with no answer have also been given a zero since they predicate that the subjects have failed to give any answer.

2. Attributive and Predicative Adjectives

One task of language is to paint a picture .If verbs and nouns are outlines and shapes, then adjectives are colours and textures (Strumpf and Douglas, 1999:97).

Adjective is 'a word used to describe or give more information about a noun', or rather more fully, 'a word that qualifies a noun, adds to its meaning but limits its application' (Eckersley and Eckersley, 1983:64). Adjectives fall into a broad class of words called modifiers. A modifier is any word that acts to describe or qualify another word in such a way that it changes the other word's meaning. Describing and qualifying nouns and pronouns are the primary functions of adjectives (Strumpf, 1999:97).

The major syntactic functions of adjectives are attributive and predicative. Adjectives are attributive when they premodify nouns, i.e. appear between the determiner and the head of the noun phrase. In other words, an adjective is used to be attributively when it is placed next to the noun or noun equivalent it qualifies, i.e.,

(5) She has beautiful hair

(6) A beautiful view (Miller, 1954; 49)

An adjective is said to be used predicatively, when it is placed in the predicate as the complement of a verb of incomplete predicate, i.e.:

(7) The view is beautiful.

(8) He found her beautiful. (Ibid.)

Although most adjectives like: **hungry, beautiful, happy, difficult, old**, etc. can function both attributively and predicatively, some adjectives can be used only attributively. Those include:

1-Some adjectives like: **certain, sheer, real, mere**, etc., which are called **emphasizers**. These are intensifying adjectives that have a heightening or lowering effect on the noun they modify:

(9) A certain (sure) winner

(10) It is sheer madness.

(11) He is a mere child. (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1983:121)

(12) What you say is utter nonsense. (Alexandar, 1988:121)

2- Some adjectives that are derived from nouns such as **medical, criminal, atomic**, etc. are attributive only:

(13) -a medical school

- a criminal law

- an atomic scientist (Ibid.)

3-Limiter adjectives that particularize the reference of the noun have only an attributive:

(14) The main decision / *the decision was main.

(15) The mere ignorance / * the ignorance was mere. (Palmer, 1982:64)

(16) The very man I wanted to see. (Alexandar, 1988:111)

4- Other adjectives that are attributive only can be related to adverbials. For example, the adjective former can be related to the adverb formerly:

(17) She was the former prime minister → she was formerly a prime minister. (Leech and Svartvik, 1999:219)

5- Other adjectives which can have the sense of "**very**" when they are used attributively:

(18) - a close friend

- a complete(perfect, total) fool.

- a pure nonsense

- a strong supporter (Alexandar, 1988:110)

6 - some -ing adjectives can qualify other adjectives. They have an intensifying effect equivalent to "**very**" in fixed phrases:

(19) - boiling hot

- freezing cold

- hoping mad

- soaking wet. (Ibid.)

Predicatively, Leech and Svartvik (1999:219) indicate that "an adjective that occurs as the complement of a linking copulative verb is known as ' predicative adjective' ":

- (20) The train will be late this morning.
 (21) It has been sunny today. (Leech, 1989:14)
 (22) The bee is very hard- working.
 (23) The dog is faithful to its master. (Vikas, 1988:113)

Predicative adjectives can be:

a – Subject complement:

- (24) Your daughter is pretty. (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1983: 115)
 (25) She becomes very sad.
 (26) I feel sick. (Leech and Svartvik, 1999:219)

b – Object complement:

- (27) He made his wife happy.
 (28) They painted the wall blue.
 (29) We found her tiresome. (Strumpf, 1999:111)

Although most adjectives can be used both attributively and predicatively, some groups of adjectives are predicative only. They include the following:

1- Adjectives which are in connection with health:

faint, ill, poorly, unwell, fine, better, ect., i.e.,

- (30) His sister was ill.
 (31) My father is very well.(Coe, 1982:58)

When **faint, fine, better** are not used as health adjectives, they can be used attributively as in:

- (32) She loves a fine man.
 (33) They found a better worker. (Leech and Svartvik, 1999:222)

2 – Many adjectives that begin with "a" or "as" :

- (34) The children were asleep.
 (35) They're awake.
 (36) The building is alight.
 (37) Everything that is alive.

(Alexandar, 1988:109)

Table (1):Subjects' Performance at the Recognition Level in Question One

No. of Item	No. of correct response	%	No. of incorrect response	%	No. Of Item	No. of correct response	%	No. of incorrect response	%
1	60	60	40	40	14	28	28	72	72
2	36	36	64	64	15	47	47	53	53
3	55	55	45	45	16	19	19	61	61
4	60	60	40	40	17	29	29	71	71
5	26	26	74	74	18	46	46	54	54
6	32	32	68	68	19	35	35	65	65
7	50	50	50	50	20	60	60	40	40
8	41	41	59	59	21	53	53	47	47
9	44	44	56	56	22	40	40	60	60
10	28	28	42	42	23	24	24	56	56
11	51	51	49	49	24	31	31	59	59
12	35	35	65	65	25	22	22	78	78
13	57	57	43	43	Total	1010	40.4	1490	50.6

3 – Some adjectives describing feeling and reaction:

- (38) I am very glad to meet you.
 (39) Your hotel is quite near here. It is not far from here. (Ibid.)

4 - Adjectives followed by prepositions:

(40) He is capable of managing well.

(41) My friend is fond of Hemingway.

(42) I am loath to make any comment.

(43) She is afraid of the dog. (Chalker, 1989:176)

In addition to the attributive and predicative functions of adjectives, adjectives also have a postpositive function. The most common adjectives that are used postpositively are those that are used in compounds:

(44) - body politic

- court material

- not any public (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1983:116).

3. Results and Discussion of the Subject's Responses

After analyzing the results of the test, the following tables show the subject's performance at the recognition and production level:

Table (1) sums up the results as follows:

(1) The total number and the percentage of the correct responses are (1010, 40.4%), respectively.

(2) The total number and the percentage of the incorrect responses (including avoided items) are (1490, 59.6 %), respectively.

Table (2):Subjects' Performance at the Production Level in Question Two

No. of Item	No. of correct response	%	No. of incorrect response	%
1	22	22	78	78
2	49	49	51	51
3	44	44	56	56
4	19	19	81	81
5	50	50	50	50
6	42	42	58	58
7	21	21	79	79
8	33	33	67	67
9	25	25	75	75
10	22	22	78	78
11	18	18	82	82
12	40	40	60	60
13	22	22	88	88
14	21	21	79	79
15	19	19	81	81
Total	458	30.5	1042	69.5

This table presents the following results:

(1)The total number and the percentage of the correct responses are (458, 30.5%), respectively.

(2)The total number and the percentage of the incorrect responses (including avoided items) are (1042, 69.5%), respectively.

Table (3):Subjects' Performance at the Production Level in Question Three

No. of item	No. of correct response	%	No. of incorrect response	%
1	12	12	88	88
2	24	24	76	76
3	31	31	69	69
4	25	25	75	75
5	15	15	5	5
6	37	37	63	63
7	21	21	79	79
8	36	36	64	64
9	53	53	47	47
10	60	60	40	40
Total	314	31.4	686	68.6

It has been concluded from Table (3) that:

- (1) The total number and the percentage of the correct responses are (314, 31.4%), respectively.
- (2) The total number and the percentage of the incorrect responses (including avoided items) are (686, 68.6%), respectively.

Table (4):Subjects' Total Performance at the Recognition and the Production Levels

Level	No. of correct response	%	No. of correct response	%
Recognition	1010	40.4	1490	59
Production	772	30.9	1728	69
Total	1782	35.6	3218	64.4

The highest rate of the subjects' incorrect responses (including avoided items) is (3218, 64.4%), as shown in Table (4) above. This means that Iraqi EFL university learners face difficulty in mastering attributive and predicative adjectives at both levels: recognition and production. Nevertheless, they face more difficulty at the production level since the total number of their correct responses (772, 30.9%) is lower than their correct responses at the recognition level (1010, 40.4%).

It is obvious that the subjects' productive knowledge is low since most of their responses are incorrect (1782, 69.1%) as compared with their correct ones (772, 30.9%). These results show that Iraqi EFL university learners encounter difficulties in using attributive and predicative adjectives.

4. Factors of Errors

4.1 Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are attributed to the negative transfer of the first language of the learner into the second (Dulay & Burt, 1982:138). These errors take place when the

patterns of the first language differ from those of the second language. These errors are also called interference errors. Alexandar (1988:108) states that EFL Learners may experience interference from their own language in relation to the following characteristics of adjectives in English:

1. They do not vary in form to agree with nouns:

a tall man → tall men

2. They generally precede nouns when used attributively :

cool drink, a long day , a pretty dress

3. When used attributively, they always combine with a noun:

a young man

An adjective is considered to be a type of noun in traditional Arabic grammar. It describes the state of the modified noun. In Arabic, the adjective may be used as noun. i.e.

The beautiful girl الفتاة الجميلة

The clever boy الولد الذكي

In addition, Aziz (1989: 161) proposes that adjectives in standard Arabic can be attributive and predicative , with no reference to those adjectives performing one function rather than the other,i.e., there are no peripheral Arabic adjectives . Moreover, there is no concept of inherent and non- inherent adjectives in both languages

an old house بيت قديم (an inherent adjective)

an old friend صديق قديم (a non- inherent adjective) (Al- Zaidi, 2005:135)

Some of interlingual errors are widespread at the production level. They show the interference in which the testees use syntactic features of Arabic adjectives to establish those of English. For example, the testees put the adjective after the noun as in Q.2 in items (4, 7, and 9):

(4) *The girl ill.

(7)* The children asleep.

(9) *The food salt.

Translation may lead to the first language interference by which the learner can transfer forms from his native language to the target language he is learning. Thus, when he translates the words in his first language he notices the changes that occur as he puts the adjective after the noun as in Q.3 in items (5, 8, and 9).

(5)* This man alone.

(8) *These flower wonderful.

(9) *The homework long.

These errors are due to the mother tongue interference since the above sentences are literally translated from Arabic. In addition, the testees do not use verb before the adjective in Arabic:

The man is alone. الرجل لوحده

The girl is beautiful. الفتاة جميلة

The researcher notices that about (437) errors are ascribed to this factor, i.e. (13.6%) of the total number of the subjects' errors.

4. 2 Intralingual Transfer

Intralingual errors result from a complex structure of the target language itself. They occur within the second language itself as a result of misinterpreting its grammatical rules. Such errors occur at both levels: recognition and production. They may be attributed to overgeneralization and ignorance of rule restrictions.

Overgeneralization refers to the incorrect application of the previously learned material to a present foreign language context (Ellis, 1984:171). The testees try to overgeneralize a pattern that leads to the irregularity of the structure in English language. For example, they put the adjective before the verb, or they may put the article after the adjective. Items (1, 2, 7, and 9) in Q.2 reflect this strategy:

- (1) *The children ready are.
- (2) *The girl ill is.
- (7) *Children asleep were.
- (9) *The food salt tastes.

The other source of errors is ignorance of rule restrictions .In this case the learners apply a rule to a category which is incorrect that leads to error committing. The subject put the noun between the adjective and the article. These errors can be seen in items (1 and 2) in Q.3:

- (1) *This is the president former.
- (2) *John is a driver careful.

The influence of the ignorance of rule restrictions can also be noticed in items (1, 4, and 10) in Q.2 and items (1 and 5) in Q.3 in which the subjects do not know that some adjectives can be used predicative only. Thus, the subjects use these adjectives attributively:

- (1) *The ready children
- (4) *The ill girl
- (10) *The afraid boy is to do it.
- (1) *This is the former president
- (5) *This is alone man

As a result, the total number of errors that are possibly due to the intralingual transfer is (940, 29.2%).

4.3 Context of Learning

The context of learning is another source of the subjects' errors. It depends thoroughly on the triangle that is made of the instructor or lecture, the material, and the student. The misleading explanations by the teacher, incomplete or faulty presentation of linguistic structures or element lead to make false concepts or hypotheses about the language (Brown, 1987:179).

The influence of the context of learning can be seen in items (4), (7) and (10) in Q.2 and (1), (5) in Q.3

- (2) *The ill girl
- (7) *The asleep children
- (10)* The afraid boy
- (1) *The formal president
- (5) *This alone man

The errors attributed to this factor have resulted from the limited exposure to certain adjectives. The subjects ignore most adjectives which are used predicatively and cannot be used attributively.

The total number of such errors is (669.20.8 %).

4.4 Communication Strategies

Communication strategies are used by the learners to overcome a communication problem caused by a lack of or inability to access second language knowledge (Ellis, 2003:340).Corder (1973:104) states that the subjects' errors in communication strategies are due to reduction or avoidance strategies.

Avoidance is one of these strategies. It means not saying what one wants to say (Yule, 1996:197).

According to this strategy, the subject may tend to give no responses or make no choices. In other words, avoidance strategy has been used and represented by the items that were left by the subjects with no responses.

The influence of this strategy can be seen in items (4, 6, 8, and 10) in Q.1 and (2, 4, 7, and 10) in Q.2.

The total number of errors that might be attributed to using such strategy is (1172, 36.4%) of the total number of the subjects' errors.

To sum up, the following table shows the frequency and percentage of the sources of the errors of the whole sample:

Table (5)

Type of Strategy	Frequency of Errors	%
1.Communication strategy	1172	36.4
2.Intralingual strategy	940	29.2
3.Context of Learning	669	20.8
4. Interlingual strategy	437	13.6
Total	3218	100

5.1 Conclusions:The error analysis carried out in this study reveals the following points:

1. Iraqi EFL university learners at the fourth year face difficulty in mastering attributive and predicative adjectives. This is indicated by their low performance in the main test as the rate of their correct responses (1782, 35.6%) is lower significantly than that of their incorrect ones (3218, 64.4%).
2. The subjects' performance in the test has also revealed that EFL university learners encounter more difficulties in using attributive and predicative adjectives at the production level than at the recognition one. This is due to the fact that the total number and the percentage of the correct responses at the production level (772, 30.9%) is lower than the total the total number and the percentage of the correct responses at the recognition level which are equal (1010, 40.4%).
3. The learners' errors in using attributive and predicative adjectives may be traced back to the following factors arranged hierarchically according to the frequency of errors attributed to each:
 - a. Communication strategy accounts for (1172, 36.4%) of all the subjects' errors.
 - b. The second – highest rate of error cause is intralingual transfer which is (940, 29.2%) of all the subjects' errors.
 - c. The rate of errors pertaining to context of learning is (20.8) of all the subjects' errors.
 - d. Interlingual transfer has been found to be responsible for only (13.6 %) of all the subjects' errors.

5.2 Recommendations:On the bases of the results of the present study, the following recommendations can be posited:

- 1- More emphasis should be given to English adjectives because this area is very important for the students of English to learn and more necessary for the structure of the English sentence.
- 2- More practice and exercises should be conducted among students in attributive and predicative adjectives in order to eliminate the students' errors in this area.
- 3- More attention should be given to the kinds of adjectives at all levels of education.

4- English adjectives must be taught in context which provide meaning or in the form of dialogue.

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Appendix 1

The Test

Q.1 Classify the underlined adjectives in the following sentences by putting **At.** if the adjective is **attributive** and **Pr.** if the adjective is **predicative**. (25 M.)

For example:

The car is red. At.

1- She has beautiful hair.

2- He grew old.

3- The ceiling is white.

4-He found her beautiful.

5- The young lady bought a new hat which costs much money.

6- I find him careless.

7- He has got a bad headache.

- 8- A very young girl came in.
- 9- She smiled at me in a friendly way.
- 10- Is your life really so boring?
- 11- The dog is faithful to its master.
- 12- The elephant went mad.
- 13- A big river flows through the town.
- 14- My grandfather is still alive.
- 15- She is a hard worker.
- 16- You're late again.
- 17- Is the house new?
- 18- To drive a car is dangerous.
- 19- We admired his rose garden.
- 20- I considered what he did foolish.
- 21- My tired feet need a massage.
- 22- The birds' calls blended into a sweet song.
- 23- His efforts proved useless.
- 24- That boiler makes the water hot.
- 25- Mary dyed her hair brown.

Q.2 Change the underlined adjectives from **attributive** into **predicative adjectives** or vice versa. If the adjective cannot change, say cannot change: (15M.)

- 1- The children are ready.
- 2- The sweet candy.
- 3- The puppies are healthy and happy.
- 4- The girl is ill.
- 5- This is the eleventh example.
- 6- The girl seemed happy.
- 7- The children were asleep.
- 8- Our teacher gives us easy tests.
- 9- The food tastes salt.
- 10- The boy is afraid to do it.
- 11- The young man is awake.
- 12- The bee is very hard-working.
- 13- These peaches are not delicious.
- 14- I like this hot soup.
- 15- The two pictures are alike.

Q.3 Re-arrange the words so as to make full sentences. (10M.)

- 1- is, the former ,this , president.
- 2- drinking ,the, pure ,is, water, best.
- 3- John ,a, careful ,is, very, driver.
- 4- is .he, of , capable ,managing, well.
- 5- This ,alone , is , man.
- 6- They ,of ,are, her , fond.
- 7- taste , sour , lemons.
- 8- these ,flowers ,smell , wonderful.
- 9- gave , the, us, teacher, homework, long.
- 10-married, a, she, rich, businessman.