

The Ability of Iraqi Undergraduates to Recognize and Produce Confusing Words in English

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Abstract

This research describes the problem of lexical choice and the representations of world knowledge. This is done by shedding light on some confusing words in English (Appendix 1). This study has two hypotheses: the Iraqi undergraduates at the Department of English/ College of Education/ University of Thi-Qar face difficulty in recognizing and producing the confusing words in English and the undergraduates at the first, second, third and fourth years do not make the progress of semantic knowledge as it should be when they move from one year into another. To confirm the two hypotheses, two recognition and production tests are designed. The jury members have given valuable suggestions about their validity, easiness/difficulty and time that the testees need to answer. The tests aim at finding out whether the subjects are able to recognize and produce the confusing words in English and which progress they achieve when they are in an advanced year. Depending on the results of the two tests, the two hypotheses are confirmed. The undergraduates are unable to recognize and produce the confusing words easily but their receptive knowledge is better than productive one. Furthermore, the first year subjects are better than the second year ones in their responses and similarly the third year subjects have correct responses more than their fourth year competitors while the latter are better than the second year subjects. So it is a matter of language knowledge (keeping more vocabulary in mind in addition to other aspects of language) not of the stages at which they are studying.

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحديد مشكلة اختيار مفردات اللغة عند الطلبة العراقيين غير المتخرجين في قسم اللغة الانكليزية في كلية التربية- جامعة ذي قار ويُحقق بدرج بعض الكلمات المُربكة في الإنكليزية. وهذه الدراسة لها فرضيتان: الأولى هي أن الطلبة العراقيين غير المتخرجين يواجهون صعوبة في نطق وتمييز الكلمات المُربكة في الإنكليزية والثانية هي أن الطلبة في المراحل الأولى والثانية والثالثة والرابعة لا يحرزوا أي تقدم من ناحية معرفة المعاني عندما ينتقلون من مرحلة إلى أخرى. ولغرض تأكيد الفرضيتين فقد تم بناء اختبارين. وقد قدم أعضاء اللجنة مقترحات قيمة حول مصداقيتهما وصعوبتهما والوقت الذي يحتاجه الطلبة للإجابة. يهدف الاختباران إلى كشف القدرات الشخصية لنطق وتمييز الكلمات المُربكة في الإنكليزية وأي تقدم يُنجز عندما يكونوا في مرحلة متقدمة. اعتمادا على نتائج الاختبارين فقد تم إثبات الفرضيتين وهي أن الطلبة غير قادرين على نطق وتمييز الكلمات المُربكة بسهولة كما أن طلبة المرحلة الأولى أفضل من طلبة المرحلة الثانية في إجاباتهم وطلبة المرحلة الثالثة أكثر قابلية من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة ولكنهم أفضل من طلبة المرحلة الثانية. وهكذا تُعزى هذه النتائج إلى معرفة الطالب باللغة من ناحية حفظه للمعاني بالإضافة إلى جوانب أخرى في اللغة وليس للمراحل التي يدرس بها.

1. Introduction

The daily contact with the Iraqi undergraduates at the (FI, S, T& F years) (Appendix 2) prove the fact that there is a list of words they commonly confuse. So, this study aims at listing confusing words with comprehensive definitions provided to help the readers differentiate between the words to avoid confusing them, describing the lexical knowledge that is required to decide, in analysis, the exact semantic and stylistic intent of a readers' use of a particular word, and, in generation, which word most precisely matches the style and meaning that is to be conveyed. This study also aims at measuring the undergraduates' ability at the four years to recognize and produce those words in English and to what extent they make a progress when they are to be in another year.

It is hypothesized that the undergraduates at the Department of English/ College of Education face difficulty in recognizing and producing confusing words in English but their receptive ability is better than their productive one, and it is not necessary to avoid confusing words by moving from one year into another.

To confirm or disconfirm these two hypotheses, two tests (Appendix 3 &4) are designed. Number of the undergraduates is equal in year and sex. From each year ten males and ten females are taken. They are totally 80 (40males and 40 females). Depending upon the jury¹ members' suggestions and certain modifications are made, like changing and omitting some items.

It is not a matter of the year the subjects are at to make a progress but of their vocabulary repertoire.

2. Easily Confusing Words

A good writer cares about words and their distinctions. As Twain (2002: 2) said, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between **lightning** and the **lightning bug**." The writer who uses '**simplistic**,' for example, when he means '**simple**' risks being labeled a simpleton. A thesaurus can be helpful when it is used to trigger a word already in your vocabulary. But simply plucking out a near-synonym can result in some disastrous prose because the word may not fit the context of your sentence. So use a thesaurus judiciously.

When you are sick, do you have a temperature or a fever? Do you put

¹ The jury includes: 1. Prof. Dr. Mohammed al- Saedy, 2. Dr. Raad al- Nawas(Assis. Prof.)3. Mr. Umran Mousa (Lecturer)

jam or jelly on your toast? It is not always easy to know which word to use. Although the words in these questions are often used for each other, they mean different things. A temperature is the degree of heat or cold measured by a thermometer. A fever in a person is a body temperature above 98.6 °F. Jelly is a combination of fruit juice and sugar; jam is boiled fruit pulp and sugar. Many words in English language are similar in meaning but not the same. (Stoddard, 2001:3)

Confusing words are a collection of words that are troublesome to readers and writers. Words are grouped according to the way they are most often confused or misused. Two words are more or less similar, but not identical, in meaning. If we want to describe the action of someone who is looking out of a window for an extended time, how do we choose between the words **gazing**, **staring**, and **peering**? What exactly is the difference between an **argument**, a **dispute**, and a **row**?

Lyons (1996:60-61) gives the following words as examples, ‘**mist**’ and ‘**fog**’; ‘**stream**’ and ‘**brook**’; ‘**dive**’ and ‘**plunge**’. They are near synonyms not absolute ones (it is the interchangeability of pairs of words in any context which is rare at best), since they do not meet the conditions of absolute synonymy, which are as follows:

“ (i) *all their meanings are identical;*

(ii) *they are synonymous in all contexts;*

(iii) *they are semantically equivalent (i.e., their meaning or meanings are identical) on all dimensions of meaning, descriptive and non- descriptive.”*

Lexically speaking, these conditions are dependent on each other. They are to be explained one by one: the two adjectives ‘**big**’ and ‘**large**’ are treated as polysemous in standard dictionaries of English. In the following two sentences: - ‘**They live in a big/ large house**’, they are synonymous, but in these two sentences:

‘I will tell my big sister’ and ‘I will tell my large sister’, the two adjectives are not identical in meaning, i.e., they fail to meet the first condition, so they are partially not absolutely synonymous.

Concerning the second condition, the words to be synonymous should occur in all contexts. This is referred to as collocational range of a word. It depends upon the meaning of the word, so synonymous words occur with the same collocational range, i.e., one word is used to replace another in all contexts. For example, the sentence: - ‘You are making a big mistake’, is grammatically well- formed, meaningful and collocationally acceptable, but * ‘You are making a large mistake’, is also grammatically well-formed, meaningful but collocationally unacceptable and unidiomatic. This shows that the two adjectives are not substitutable.

According to the third condition, “ two words have the same descriptive (or propositional) meaning (i.e., are descriptively synonymous) if, and only if, propositions containing the one necessarily imply otherwise identical propositions containing the other, and vice versa.” (ibid: 63)

Depending on that criterion, the two adjectives ‘big’ and ‘large’ are regarded as descriptively synonymous in one of their meaning and in a number of contexts. Thus, in the above two sentences, one person can say that he lives in a big house and his friends live in a large house, no one will tell him that what he said is wrong or can not be affirmed.

Linguists give us a classic example of descriptive synonymy, which is a relation between ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried man’. There are different points of view about that relation. Some people do not consider these two words synonymous because ‘unmarried man’ is either ‘*a divorced man*’ or ‘*a man who has never been married*’. So they are synonymous if ‘unmarried’ does not refer to divorcees at all. For others, the relation is not obvious.

Talking about expressive (or socio- expressive) meaning which is the only type of non-descriptive meaning, it is not possible to decide that two or more than two words can be differentiated in terms of the degree or nature of their expressive meaning. For instance, the following four words ‘ huge’, ‘ enormous’, ‘ gigantic’ and ‘ colossal’ are expressive than ‘ very big’ and ‘ very large’ that are descriptively synonymous in terms of how to convey the speaker’s feelings towards what they are describing. It is not easy matter to make comparison between these four words relying on the degree of expressivity. But there can be intuitions of the speakers about two or more of them. This can be determined in terms of relatively objective psychological tests. (ibid: 64)

For words, which can be differentiated in terms of their expressive meaning, there is one difference to be drawn between words that imply approval or disapproval and those that are neutral with respect to expressivity. For example, ‘ statesman’ versus ‘ politician’, ‘ thrifty’ versus ‘mean’, ‘ stingy’ versus ‘ economical’, ‘ stink’ versus ‘ stench’ versus ‘ fragrance’ versus ‘ smell’, ‘crafty’ versus ‘ cunning’ versus ‘ skillful’ versus ‘ clever’, etc, the words that imply approval or disapproval, can be affirmed rather than in terms of their descriptive meaning. For example, when the two words ‘ bitch’ and ‘ swine’ are metaphorically used; one can be modified as a bitch or swine in terms of their expressive rather than descriptive meaning.

On the other hand, two dimensions are to be considered along which words can vary: semantic and stylistic, or, equivalently, denotative and connotative. If two words differ semantically (e.g., mist, fog), then substituting one for the other in a sentence or discourse will not necessarily preserve truth conditions; the denotations are not identical. If two words differ solely in stylistic features (e.g., frugal, stingy), then inter-substitution does preserve truth conditions, but the connotation, the stylistic and interpersonal effect of the sentence is changed. (ibid: 65)

2.1 How to test synonymy

Two tests are applied to decide whether two words are synonymous or not. The first is to see whether the two words are substitutable or not. For example,

1. Business in this country is not as profitable (lucrative) as it is in certain other countries.
2. I don’t like such dirty (filthy) jokes.
3. He has a wide variety (range) of goods in his shop.
4. Almost every rich (wealthy) family in that village owns a video cassette recorder.

In these above sentences, every two words can be replaced instead of each other.

While there are words which can be interchanged with each other in some, not all contexts, for example, the two words ‘ handsome’ and ‘ beautiful’:

5. You can say ‘ a beautiful woman & a handsome woman’
6. You can say ‘ a beautiful present & a handsome present’
7. You can say ‘ a beautiful village but not a handsome village’
8. You can say ‘ a beautiful dog but not a handsome dog’
9. You can say ‘ a beautiful voice but not a handsome voice’
10. You can say ‘ a beautiful weather but not a handsome weather’

In spite of such differences between each two words, they are dealt with as synonymous. (Thakur, 2001: 25)

The second test is to see if the two words have the same antonyms in all contexts; otherwise, they will be synonymous in one context and not synonymous in another. For example, if we look at the two words ‘profound’ and ‘deep’ in the following three sentences:

11. He listened to that speech with profound interest.
12. He listened to me with deep interest.

13. The river is very deep.

We will find that the antonym of the words in the first two sentences is ‘superficial’, so they are synonymous in this context but they are not in another since the antonym of the word ‘deep’ in the third sentence is ‘shallow’.

It is concluded, “No two words have exactly the same meaning. Even if two words have exactly the same referential meaning, they may differ from the point of view of their emotive meaning or from the point of view of the associations they carry and the evocative effects they produce”. (ibid: 26-27)

3. The Procedure

3.1 The Tests

The confusing word test consists of two types. Each test contains 20 sentences. In the first one, the subjects at the FI, S, T, and F years of the College of Education/ University of Thi-Qar have to choose the correct “confusing” word from the pair to complete the sentence. While in the second, they have to show the difference in meaning between two confusing words in two different sentences.

The sentences present some pairs of commonly confusing words. The subjects are to test their sensitivity to the language by choosing the word that best completes the sentence.

The test is of two sides: recognition and production. The tests try to measure the subjects’ ability at the FI, S, T & F years to recognize and produce confusing words in English to show to what extent there is a progress in the subjects’ level concerning the investigated topic when they move from one year into another.

They are applied to eighty subjects. From the F year, ten males and ten females are taken, the same is for the rest years.

3.2 Data Discussion and Results

The following two tables show that the females at FI, S, T and F years are more able to recognize the confusing words in English than the males.

Table (1): The Subjects’ Recognition of Confusing Words

FI & S Years

Items	FIMS			SMS			FIFS			SFS		
	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc
1	7	35	3	2	10	8	9	45	1	6	30	4
2	6	30	4	2	10	8	6	30	4	3	15	7
3	2	10	8	3	15	7	6	30	4	4	20	6
4	5	25	5	1	5	9	7	35	3	3	15	7
5	6	30	4	2	10	8	8	40	2	6	30	4
6	6	30	4	2	10	6	6	30	4	5	25	5
7	6	30	4	0		10	7	35	3	4	20	6
8	4	20	6	3	15	7	6	30	4	0		10

9	4	20	6	3	15	7	7	35	3	2	10	8
10	6	30	4	2	10	8	6	30	4	1	5	9
11	7	35	3	4	20	4	8	40	2	6	30	4
12	7	35	3	1	5	9	9	45	1	2	10	8
13	5	25	5	1	5	9	7	35	3	4	20	6
14	6	30	4	3	15	7	3	15	7	0		10
15	4	20	6	2	10	8	6	30	4	3	15	7
16	8	40	2	3	15	7	7	35	3	7	35	3
17	7	35	3	2	10	8	8	40	2	2	10	8
18	6	30	4	6	30	4	8	40	2	3	15	7
19	7	35	3	5	25	5	9	45	1	5	25	5
20	8	40	2	2	10	8	8	40	2	3	15	7

Table (2): The Subjects' Recognition of Confusing Words

T & F Years

Items	TMS			FMS			TFS			FFS		
	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc
1	9	45	1	6	30	4	10	50	0	4	20	6
2	6	30	4	4	20	6	9	45	1	5	25	5
3	8	40	2	7	35	3	8	40	2	6	30	4
4	9	45	1	2	10	8	7	35	3	4	20	6
5	6	30	4	5	25	5	8	40	2	7	35	3
6	7	35	3	3	15	6	9	45	1	7	35	3
7	7	35	3	1	5	9	8	40	2	4	20	6
8	6	30	4	2	10	8	7	35	3	2	10	8
9	6	30	4	3	15	7	6	30	4	4	20	6
10	8	40	2	1	5	9	9	45	1	4	20	6
11	7	35	3	6	30	4	7	35	3	8	40	2
12	8	40	2	2	10	8	8	40	2	2	10	8
13	4	20	6	2	10	8	7	35	3	5	25	5
14	3	15	7	1	5	9	6	30	4	2	10	8
15	6	30	4	4	20	6	7	35	3	5	25	5
16	6	30	4	7	35	3	9	45	1	9	45	1
17	8	40	2	6	30	4	8	40	2	3	15	7
18	7	35	3	1	5	9	9	45	1	2	10	8
19	9	45	1	4	20	6	10	50	0	7	35	3
20	9	45	1	7	35	3	9	45	1	7	35	3

The FIMSS' responses are better than those of the SMSs' in all items except they have equal marks in item (18) and SMSs have more correct responses than SFSs only in item (3) while FIFs and SFSs have equal marks in item (16). The correct responses of the FIFs' are more than the incorrect ones, while most of the SSs' responses are incorrect.

Similarly, TSs' (male and female) correct responses are more than the FSs' ones in all items. Both TFS and FFS are more competent than TMS and FMS.

Table (3): The Subjects' Production of Confusing Words

FI & S Years

Items	FIMS			SMS			FIFS			SFS		
	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc
1	4	20	6	0		10	4	20	6	2	10	8
2	2	10	8	0		10	6	30	4	2	10	8
3	2	10	8	2	10	8	6	30	4	4	20	6
4	1	5	9	0		10	3	15	7	1	5	9
5	1	5	9	0		10	4	20	6	2	10	8
6	1	5	9	2	10	8	3	15	7	3	15	7
7	0		10	2	10	8	2	10	8	0		7
8	4	20	6	1	5	9	3	15	7	0		10
9	0		10	1	5	9	1	5	9	2	10	8
10	1	5	9	0		10	3	15	7	3	15	10
11	0		10	0		10	3	15	7	0		10
12	3	15	7	1	5	9	6	30	4	3	15	7
13	0		10	1	5	9	1	5	9	1	5	9
14	1	5	9	0		10	2	10	8	1	5	9
15	2	10	8	1	5	9	3	15	7	0		10
16	2	10	8	2	10	8	3	15	7	1	5	9
17	7	35	3	2	10	8	6	30	4	6	30	4
18	7	35	3	2	10	8	4	20	6	4	20	6
19	4	20	6	4	20	6	7	35	3	3	15	7
20	1	5	9	1	10	9	3	15	7	4	20	6

Table (4): The Subjects' Production of Confusing Words

T & F Years

Items	TMS			FMS			TFS			FFS		
	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc	Co	%	Inc
1	3	15	7	1	5	9	1	5	9	3	15	7
2	0		10	1	5	9	1	5	9	3	15	7
3	4	20	6	2	10	8	2	10	8	3	15	7

4	7	35	3	2	10	8	2	10	8	4	20	6
5	4	20	6	0		10	0		10	2	10	8
6	3	15	7	0		10	0		10	2	10	8
7	1	5	9	0		10	0		10	4	20	6
8	3	15	7	1	5	9	1	5	9	4	20	6
9	2	10	8	1	5	9	1	5	9	2	10	8
10	4	20	6	3	15	7	3	15	7	0		10
11	1	5	7	2	10	8	2	10	8	3	15	7
12	4	20	6	3	15	7	3	15	7	2	10	8
13	3	15	7	1	5	9	1	5	9	1	5	9
14	2	10	8	2	10	8	2	10	8	4	20	6
15	6	30	4	2	10	8	2	10	8	2	10	8
16	3	15	7	0		10	0		10	3	15	7
17	4	20	6	1	5	9	1	5	9	7	35	3
18	5	25	5	2	10	8	2	10	8	4	20	6
19	5	25	5	2	10	8	2	10	8	3	15	7
20	3	15	7	3	15	7	3	15	7	2	10	8

In the above two tables, the females in each year are more able to produce the confusing words in English than the males. On the production side, the FISs are more competent than the SSs and the same is with the TSs who are more competent than the FSs.

FIMSS' correct responses are more than SMSs' ones in the items (1,2,4,5,8,10,12,14,15,17 &18) except with items (3,11,16,19 &20) they have equal marks; but FIFS and SFSs' correct responses are equally marked in items (6,10,13,17 &18).

In spite of TMSs' correct responses are better than the FMSs', the latter are better than their competitors in items (2 &11) and FFS have more correct responses than TFMS in items (4,9,11 &16).

The above results are also supported by the statistical process (mean), which has been used to draw a comparison between the recognition and production sides on the one hand, between the females and males from each year and then between each two years on the other hand. This is done as shown in the following tables:

Table (5): Mean value on the recognition side

FIMS	5.8	SMS	2.45	TMS	6.95	FMS	3.7
FIFS	7.05	SFS	3.45	TFS	8.05	FFS	4.9

F I M S	5 . 8	F I M S	5 . 8	F I M S	5 . 8	S M S	2 . 4 5	S M S	2 . 4 5	T M S	6 . 9 5
S M S	2 . 4 5	T M S	6 . 9 5	F M S	3 . 7	T M S	6 . 9 5	F M S	6 . 9 5	F M S	3 . 7

F I F S	7 . 0 5	F I F S	7 . 0 5	F I F S	7 . 0 5	S F S	3 . 4 5	S F S	3 . 4 5	T F S	8 . 0 5
S F S	3 . 4 5	T F S	8 . 0 5	F F S	4 . 9	T F S	8 . 0 5	F F S	4 . 9	F F S	4 . 9

Table (6): Mean value on the production side

FIMS	2.15	SMS	1.1	TMS	2.60	FMS	1.45
FIFS	3.65	SFS	2.1	TFS	4.2	FFS	2.9

F I M S	2 . 1 5	F I M S	2 . 1 5	F I M S	2 . 1 5	S M S	1 . 1	S M S	1 . 1	T M S	2 . 6 0
S M S	1 . 1	T M S	3 . 3 5	F M S	1 . 4 5	T M S	2 . 6 0	F M S	1 . 4 5	F M S	1 . 4 5

F I F S	3 . 6 5	F I F S	3 . 6 5	F I F S	3 . 6 5	S F S	2 . 1	S F S	2 . 1	T F S	4 . 2
S F S	2 . 1	T F S	4 . 2	F F S	2 . 9	T F S	4 . 2	F F S	2 . 9	F F S	2 . 9

The subjects at the FI, S, T and F years are more able to recognize than to produce confusing words in English. Mean of the recognition side is 5.28 and of the production side is 2.54. So their responses from the production side are less than their responses from the recognition one.

On both sides, the FSs are more competent than the SSs. This proves that there is a progress when the subjects move from one year into another but not in the way that there should be.

Thus, it is not a matter of the stages at which they are studying, it is a matter of language knowledge. They have not read about confusing words in particular but it depends upon information about such words they store in their minds.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

4.1 Conclusions

This study concludes that:

1. The SSs and FSs do not make the required progress concerning the investigated topic when they move into another year. The FISs are better than the SSs and similarly the TSs are better than their competitors (FSs) in their responses in both tests: recognition and production.
2. The females at FI, S, T and F years are more competent than the males in this topic.
3. The subjects at the four years face difficulty on the production side than the recognition one.
4. During the four years at the college, there is no emphasis on the use of suitable vocabulary or expressions but on grammar only. How can the subjects construct correct sentences grammatically and semantically not only grammatically? To ask them to give other words instead of this word or that expression. Or to teach them not to use this word in this place but use that instead because there will be a change in meaning.
5. Although all the words used in the investigated topic are to be well known for the subjects, it is found out that they do not know most of them.

4.2 Suggestions

After these conclusions, we suggest that:

The emphasis and attention paid to grammar, phonetics and phonology should be the same for other materials like composition, comprehension and conversation through which the subjects can receive more vocabulary and expressions.

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Appendix (1): A list of Confusing Words

It is an easy way to collect the words that the subjects confused so that they might refer to their list in their own copybooks as a helpful way for them to avoid confusion. These words are provided with explanations and examples. The following is a list of the words that people commonly confuse.

1. Accept and agree

Accept (verb): to agree to take (something), or to take (something) as satisfactory, reasonable, true, etc.

- The new telephones will accept coins of any denomination.

Agree (verb): to have the same opinion, or to accept (a suggestion or idea).

- I know what you think we should do, but I'm afraid I don't agree.

2. Avoid and prevent

Avoid (verb): to stay away from (someone or something), or prevent (something) from happening or not allow yourself to do (something).

- You really should avoid him- he'll only try to borrow money from you.

Prevent (verb): to stop (something) happening or (someone) doing something.

- Label your suitcases to prevent confusion.

3. Borrow and lend

Borrow (receive) (verb): to get or receive (something) from someone with the intention of giving it back after a period of time.

- Could I borrow your bike next week?

Lend (verb): to give (something) to someone for a short period of time, expecting it to be given back.

- She does not like lending her books.

4. Rob and steal

Rob (verb): to take money or property illegally from (a place, organization or person), often using threats or violence.

- **The terrorists financed themselves by robbing banks.**

Steal (verb): take away

- The boys were charged with stealing bikes from a house in Summerhill Rd.

5. Accuracy and precision

Accuracy (noun): is the agreement between the true value and the result obtained by measurement.

Accurate(adjective): it means “errorless”.

- Journalists are not always accurate in what they write.

Precision (noun): it is the agreement among repeated measurements of the same quantity.

Precise(adjective): it means “ clearly delineated, definite.”

- The answer is 100, or 99.8 to be precise.

6. Imply and infer

Imply (verb): it means, “ to suggest”.

Infer (verb): It means “ to deduce”, “ to guess”, “to conclude”.

- His tie and shirt colours imply that he is colourblind, so we infer (surmise) that he merely has wretched taste.

7. Mutual and common

Mutual (adjective): It means, “ reciprocally exchanged between two persons or things”.

- **We met at the house of our mutual friend (i.e. a friend of both of us), Peter Cox.**

Common (adjective): it means, “ shared by all”.

- A fruity quality is common to all wine made from this grape.

8. Connote and denote

Connote (verb): It means to imply or suggest.

- The word ‘ espionage’ connotes mystery and intrigue.

Denote (verb): It means to indicate or refer to specifically.

- The symbol for ‘pi’ denotes the number 3014159.

9. Convince and persuade

(Verbs): strictly speaking, one convinces a person that something is true but persuades a person to do something.

- **Pointing out that I was overworked, my friends persuaded (not convinced) me to take a vacation.**

- **Now that I’m relaxing on the beach with my book, I’m convinced (not persuaded) that they were right.**

10. Invaluable and worthless

Invaluable (adjective): extremely useful

- We received invaluable help from many students in our research.

Worthless (adjective): having no value in money.

- A \$30 million fund has been created to reimburse those people whose tickets became worthless following the collapse of the airline.

11. Ability and capacity

Ability (noun): the mental or physical capacity, power or skill required doing something.

- **He has the ability to solve complex problems.**

Capacity (noun): the ability to hold or contain something.

- The room was filled to capacity.

12. Anticipate and expect

Anticipate **(verb): to expect and prepare for it.**

- They anticipated it by adding more seats.

Expect **(verb): to think or believe that something will happen or that somebody, something will come. It does not include preparation.**

- **This is the parcel we've been expecting from New York.**

13. Female and feminine

Female: **the sex of a woman or animal.**

- **The female of the species is very aggressive.**

Feminine **(adjective): describing a quality or type of behaviour that is considered typical for a woman.**

- **He's an excellent boss with a feminine intuition.**

14. Allude and refer

Allude **(verb): means to refer to something indirectly or covertly.**

- You alluded in your speech to certain developments- what exactly did you mean?

Refer **(verb): without qualification, implies referring to something directly, by naming.**

- **The victims were not referred to by name.**

15. Audience and spectators

Audience: **a group of people who have gathered together to hear or watch somebody, something.**

- **The audience applauded enthusiastically after the performance was finished.**

Spectators: **persons who watch a show or game.**

- Noisy spectators at boxing match.

16. Title and headline

Title: **the name of a book, poem, picture, etc.**

- The theme of the poem is stated in the title.

Headline: **a line of words printed in large letters at the top of a page or an article, especially in a newspaper.**

- **The article's headline reads "Politician Wants Answers".**

17. Shade and shadow

Shade: **a darker usually cooler area behind something.**

- It's so hot! I need to find some shade.

Shadow: **a dark area on a surface caused by an object standing between direct light and that surface.**

- **The shadows lengthened as the sun went down.**

18. Look and watch

Watch: **to look at somebody/something with attention; to observe something/somebody.**

- **I spent my evening watching television.**

Looking at: **to examine something closely.**

- Your ankle is badly swollen- I think the doctor ought to look at it.

19. Overcome and overtake

Overtake: **to come from behind and pass a moving person or vehicle.**

- The car tries to overtake the bus on the freeway.

Overcome: **to succeed in dealing with or controlling something.**

- **He overcame a strong temptation to run away.**

20. Remember and remind

Remind to tell somebody again about something or to do something; to help somebody to remember something that they may have forgotten.

- **Please remind me to pick up some bread at the market.**

Remember: to have or keep in the memory something that was said, done or agreed previously; to recall something to one's memory.

- **'Have you met my brother?' 'Not as far as I remember.'**

21. Fault and mistake

The two refer to something that has not been done correctly or properly.

Mistake: is the most general and used in most situations. An action or opinion that is foolish or wrong; an error of judgement.

- **This is not my bill, there must be some mistake.**

Fault: an aspect of something that is wrong or not perfect; a mistake or Flaw.

- **I like him in spite of all his faults.**

22. Sensible and sensitive (adjectives)

Sensible: it means based on or acting on good judgement and practical ideas or understanding.

- **I think the sensible thing to do is to phone before you go and ask for directions.**

Sensitive (KIND): understanding what other people need, and being helpful and kind to them.

- Dr. Abraham said he hoped teachers would be sensitive to signs of stress in children at exam time.

Sensitive (UPSET)(of people) easily upset, especially by things that are said or done, or (of things) causing people to be upset or producing a difficult or embarrassing situation.

- **Her reply showed that she was very sensitive to criticism.**

23. Realize and notice

Notice: to see, hear, or to feel something.

- **He spilled the tea, but Mrs. Whitley did not notice.**

Realize: to know and understand the importance of something.

- **Do you realize that you are an hour late?**

24. Aggravate and irritate

Aggravate: to make worse and more severe.

- **My father told me that spending too much time outdoors would aggravate our neighbour.**

Irritate: to provoke impatience or anger, to make more sensitive.

- **The baby's cry irritated me.**

25. Wound and injure

They are both used in talking about damage to the body. They are often used in the passive. A person can wounded by a knife, gun or other weapon. It is a deliberate action, connected with fighting or war.

- **He was wounded in the civil war.**

In an accident, for example involving a car or a machine, a person might be injured.

- **Five people were seriously injured in last night's train crash.**

26. Libel and slander

Libel: a written statement intended to damage a person's reputation.

- **The man sued the paper for publishing libel.**

Slander: an oral statement intended to damage a person's reputation.

- **Slander had ruined the man's life.**

27. Look and see

Look: to pay attention, to try to see what there is.

- Look at the board, please.

See: visual impression come to our eyes.

- Can you see the blue car over there?

28. Thankful and grateful

Thankful: for a thing.

- **Baby was thankful for his new ball.**

Grateful: for an action/ service.

- **Mam and Dad were grateful for the help they received.**

29. Hear and listen

Hear: to be aware of sounds in your ears.

- I can hear music in Peter's room.

Listen (to) to pay attention to somebody/ something that you can hear.

- Peter often listens to music when he's at home.

30. Actually and now (adverbs)

Actually: in fact, really

- I did not actually see her- I just heard her voice.

Now: at present

- She used to be a teacher, but now she works in publishing.

31. control and check(verbs)

Control: to order, limit, instruct, or rule (something or someone's actions or behaviour.)

- **You're going to learn how to control that temper of yours!**

Check: to make certain that (something or someone) is correct, safe or suitable by examining it or them quickly.

- **You should always check your oil, water and tires before taking your car on a long trip.**

32. comprehensive and understanding (adjectives)

comprehensive: complete and including everything that is necessary.

- We offer you a comprehensive training in all aspects of the business.

understanding(approving):An understanding person is good at knowing how someone is feeling or what their situation is, and can forgive them if they do something wrong.

- **He had expected her to be horrified, but she was actually very understanding.**

33. Among, between (prepositions)

Among: it is used with more than two items.

Between: it is used with two items, except some close collective relationships.

- We quarreled among the five of us, but the real argument was between Bob and Harold.

34. Few and less (adjectives)

Few: means small in number. It is used with countable objects.

- This department has few employees.

Less: it means small in amount or degree. It is used with objects of indivisible mass.

- **Which jar holds less water?**

35. Ambiguous and ambivalent (adjectives)

Ambiguous primarily means ' having more than one meaning, open to different interpretations.'

- **His closing words were deliberately ambiguous.**

Ambivalent means ‘ having or showing mixed good and bad feelings about a particular object, person or situation’.

- She is ambivalent about her future career.

36. Cologne and perfume (nouns)

Cologne is a scented liquid made from alcohol and fragrant oils.

Perfume is a quickly evaporating scented oil either obtained from flowers or manmade. It is more concentrated (stronger) and much more expensive than cologne.

37. Dinner and supper

Dinner is always the main meal of the day, whether it is eaten at noon or in the evening.

Supper is eaten only in the evening, whether it is a large or small meal.

38. Dough and batter (nouns)

Dough is a thick mixture of flour, liquid, and other ingredients that is usually rolled or shaped into bread and other baked goods.

Batter is a thinner mixture than dough and is made of flour and liquid. Batter can be poured into pans to make pancakes, biscuits, and cakes.

39. Earth and universe (nouns)

Earth, the planet on which we live, is the third planet from the sun in our solar system.

- I must be the happiest woman on earth!

Universe includes everything that exists, including all the planets, the stars, and space.

- Are there other universes outside our own?

40. Envy and jealousy (nouns)

Envy is the desire to have something that another person has and the feelings of resentment or unhappiness at the person’s having it. You may feel envy when someone you know gets something you’ve always wanted.

- He couldn’t cancel his envy at my success.

Jealousy is like envy but includes suspicion. It is often associated with competition, especially in love. Sometimes you may be jealous of a brother or sister because you think your parents love him or her more than they love you.

- She grew tired of his petty jealousies.

41. Information and knowledge (nouns)

Information is a fact or knowledge about a specific event or subject.

Knowledge means having information and understanding it through experience.

- I have only (a) limited knowledge of computer programming.

42. Melody and tune (nouns)

A melody is a group of notes in a certain order that results in a sweet or agreeable sound.

A tune is an easily remembered melody.

43. Part and portion (nouns)

Part is a piece of something that has been divided. When all the pieces are put together, they equal a whole.

Portion is a share or part used or given in a specific way.

44. Passport and visa (nouns)

A passport is a document, usually a booklet that states a person’s official identity and citizenship and allows that person to visit another country.

- Hold a Canadian passport. Go through passport control.

Visa is stamped on a passport. It shows that the passport has been examined by the officials of a country and permits entry into that country.

- **Apply for an American visa. Renew a visa.**

45. Soap and detergent (nouns)

Soap is a cleansing agent that comes from natural fats and oils. A substance is used with water for washing and cleaning, made of fat or oil combined with an ALKALI.

Detergent is a cleansing agent that is usually made from synthetic or manmade, products. A substance removes dirt, for example, from the surface of clothes or dishes.

46. Experience and experiment (nouns)

Experience means something that a person lives through, i.e. something that someone experiences. It also means “ knowledge gained by doing something”.

First meaning: - His experiences in Germany were rather depressing.

Second meaning: - I’m afraid I don’t have much sales experience.

Experiment means that something that you do to see the result. Often used when speaking about scientists and their studies.

- **They did a number of experiments last week.**

47. Objection and criticism

Criticism is the action or process of indicating the faults of somebody/ something or one’s disapproval of somebody/something.

- **The bank’s actions attracted heavy widespread criticism.**

Objection is a statement or feeling of dislike, disapproval, or opposition.

- **I’d like to come too, if you’ve no objection.**

48. Anniversary and birthday

Anniversary is a date that is exactly a year or a number of years after an event.

- **It is the hundredth anniversary of the composer’s death.**

Birthday is the (anniversary of) the day of a person’s birth.

- **Happy birthday.**

49. Look, gaze, stare, peer

look (at): to direct one's eyes towards a particular object.

- **Just look at this beautiful present.**

Gaze (at): to keep one's eyes turned in a particular direction for a long time. We can gaze at something without looking at it if our eyes are not focussed.

- **She sat gazing unhappily out of the window.**

Stare (at): It suggests a long, deliberate look. Staring is more intense than gazing, and the eyes are often wide open. It can be impolite to stare at somebody.

- **She stared at me in astonishment.**

Peer (at): to look very closely and suggests that it is difficult to see well.

- **He peered at me through thick glasses.**

The above list of the confusing words is taken from The British Council (2000) which is the United Kingdom’s international organization for educational and cultural relations.

Appendix (2): A List of Abbreviations

C	Correct
F	Fourth
FI	First
S	Second
T	Third
FIFS	First Female Subjects
FFS	Fourth Female Subjects
FIMS	First Male Subjects
FMS	Fourth Male Subjects
Inc	Incorrect
SFS	Second Female Subjects
SMS	Second Male Subjects
TFS	Third Female Subjects
TMS	Third Male Subjects

Appendix (3): A Copy of the Recognition Test

Q1: Select one answer from the two choices provided after each sentence. The word you choose should fit the blank in the sentence:

- 1. I know what you think we should do, but I'm afraid I don't -----.**
(agree, accept)
- 2. Label your suitcases to ----- confusion. (avoid, prevent)**
- 3. Could I ----- your bike next week? (borrow, lend)**
- 4. The boys were charged with ----- bikes from a house in Summerhill Rd. (stealing, robbing)**
- 5. Journalists are not always ----- in what they write. (accurate, precise)**
- 6. His tie and shirt colours ----- that he is colourblind, so we ----- that he merely has wretched taste. (imply, infer)**
- 7. We met at the house of our ----- friend, Peter Cox. (common, mutual)**
- 8. The word 'espionage' ----- mystery and intrigue. (connotes, denotes)**
- 9. Pointing out that I was overworked, my friends -----me to take a vacation. (persuaded, convinced)**
- 10. A \$30 million fund has been created to reimburse those people whose tickets became ----- following the collapse of the airline. (worthless, invaluable)**
- 11. He has the ----- to solve complex problems. (ability, capacity)**
- 12. They ----- it by adding more seats. (expected, anticipated)**
- 13. The ----- of the animal species is very aggressive. (female, feminine)**
- 14. You ----- in your speech to certain developments- what exactly did you mean? (referred, alluded)**
- 15. Noisy ----- at boxing match. (spectators, audience)**
- 16. She used to be a teacher, but ----- she works in publishing. (actually, now)**
- 17. She is -----about her future career. (ambivalent, ambiguous)**
- 18. I have only (a) limited -----of computer programming. (knowledge, information)**
- 19. It is the hundredth -----of the composer's death. (anniversary, birthday)**
- 20. I'd like to come too, if you've no----- . (criticism, objection)**

Appendix (4): A Copy of the Production Test

Q2: Differentiate the confuseing words underlined in the following sentences:

1. The theme of the poem is stated in the title.

The article's headline reads " Politician Wants Answers".

2. It's so hot! I need to find some shade.

The shadows lengthened as the sun went down.

3. Your ankle is badly swollen- I think the doctor ought to look at.

I spent my evening watching television.

4. The car tries to overtake the bus on the freeway.

He overcame a strong temptation to run away.

5. Please remind me to pick up some bread at the market.

' Have you met my brother?' ' Not as far as I remember.'

6. This is not my bill, there must be some mistake.

I like him in spite of all his faults.

7. I think the sensible thing to do is to phone before you go and ask for directions.

Dr. Abraham said he hoped teachers would be sensitive to signs of stress in children at exam time.

8. Do you realize that you are an hour late?

You may notice a numb feeling in your fingers.

9. The baby's cry irritated.

The wise man told me that spending too much time outdoors would aggravate my friends.

10. He was wounded in the civil war.

Five people were seriously injured in last night's train crash.

11. Slander had ruined the Mr. Watson's life.

The editor-in-chief sued the paper for publishing libel.

12. Can you see the blue car over there?

Look at the board, please.

13. Mam and Dad were grateful for the help they received.

John was thankful for his new ball.

14. Peter often listens to music when he's at home.

I can hear music in Peter's room.

15. You're going to learn how to control that temper of yours!

You should always check your oil, water and tires before taking your car on a long trip.

16. We offer you a comprehensive training in all aspects of the business.

He had expected her to be horrified, but she was actually very understanding.

17. We quarreled among the five of us, but the real argument was between Bob and Harold.

18. This department has few employees.

Which jar holds less water?

19. I must be the happiest woman on earth!

Are there other universes outside our own?

20. He couldn't cancel his envy at my success.

She grew tired of his petty jealousies.