



## **Persian to English Lexical Transfer Errors in the Iranian EFL Learners' Writings**

**Rasoul Mohammad Hosseinpour** (Corresponding Author)

*Department of English Language and Literature, University of Qom, Qom, Iran.*

[rmhosseinpur@gmail.com](mailto:rmhosseinpur@gmail.com)

**Fatemeh Ghanbarpour**

*Department of English Language and Literature, University of Qom, Qom, Iran.*

[Grfmmfa@gmail.com](mailto:Grfmmfa@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

Interference or transfer from language learners' first language (L1) is one of the significant variables that contributes to the complexity of SLA process and usually persists intensely at the initial stages of L2 acquisition and development. Drawing upon Meriläinen's (2010) taxonomy of lexical transfer errors, the present study intended to explore Iranian EFL learners' lexical transfer error caused by word form, word meaning, and word use. To this aim, a corpus of 189 compositions written by 89 male and 100 female students was investigated. The results revealed that females in general had more lexical transfer errors than males, and that a large amount of the errors stemmed from word use (54%) which was followed by word form (36%) and lastly word meaning (10%). The findings of the study suggest that shifting the students' attention from vocabulary size to vocabulary depth and exposing them to a large number of authentic collocations and prefabricated patterns are advisable activities that might counteract negative lexical transfer.

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## 1. Introduction

Different variables contribute to the complexity of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) process, among which interference or transfer from language learners' L1 can be of great significance, as it usually persists intensely in the initial stages of L2 acquisition and development (Yule, 2010). Language learner's L1 influence on L2, known in the SLA literature as transfer, interference, mother tongue influence or cross-linguistic influence, refers to a process in which learner's mother tongue affects both positively and negatively learning a new language (Gass, 2013; Meriläinen, 2010).

Although a substantial body of research in the literature of the language transfer has mainly focused upon syntactic transfer (e.g., Dodigovic et al 2017), it should be noted that language transfer could occur at different linguistic levels ranging from phonology to discourse. Lexical transfer which refers to "the influence of word knowledge in one language on a person's knowledge or use of words in another language" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008, p. 72) enjoys an essential position in the language transfer studies (Schmit, 2000) because a sound knowledge and appreciation of lexis furnishes the ground for language learners to achieve a higher level of development in the four basic language skills and communication in the target language.

A number of studies have examined lexical transfer error from diverse aspects worldwide (e.g., Atle, 1994; Dissington, 2018; Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006; Rullan, 2016; Ye, 2019). However, despite the significance of the lexical transfer and lexical errors in SLA research, this area has mainly remained under-explored especially regarding the writing skill in the Iranian EFL context. Previous studies (e.g., Lennon, 1991; MacWhinney, 1992) suggest lexical errors are found to be the most frequently occurring errors in students' written output, and that these lexical errors could be served as a sign of writing quality in assessing compositions in formal contexts. Agustín Llach (2011) asserts that errors in general, and lexical errors in particular, together with some other factors are good indexes of writing quality. Therefore, a full appreciation of the origin and the reason for lexical errors could offer a lot to the field.

Drawing upon Meriläinen's (2010) taxonomy of lexical transfer errors including *word form*, *word meaning* and *word use* and their subcategories, the present study is an attempt to investigate lexical transfer errors from Persian to English in BA male and female students' English compositions.

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of transfer, due to its significance in learning a second language, has long been discussed in SLA research (Gass, 2013). Language transfer is a highly complex phenomenon that may occur between any languages, and this happens when some linguistic features of one language affect those of another language either positively, if the linguistic features of L1 and those of L2 are the same, or negatively, when the linguistic features of L1 differ from those of L2 (Ellis, 2015; Gass, 2013).

Lexical transfer, among other types of transfer, enjoys an essential position, because as Wilkins (1972) put it, "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p. 111). Vocabulary is the main component in every language, and

analyzing the lexical transfer errors of the language learners can be beneficial for teachers, learners, as well as researchers (Hinnon, 2014).

To date, different researchers have defined lexical transfer in different ways and have presented various classifications for this phenomenon (e.g., Agustin Llach, 2010; Bardel, 2015; James, 1998; Meriläinen, 2010; Ringbom, 1987).

## 2.1 The Classification of Lexical Transfer

Agustin Llach (2010) classified lexical transfer as borrowings, loan words, coinages, false friends, calques, and literal translation. Ringbom (1987) suggested that lexical transfer is of two types: transfer of form and transfer of meaning. Bardel (2015) categorized lexical transfer as formal transfer and semantic transfer.

Drawing upon Nation's (2001) three aspects of L2 learners' lexical knowledge, *word form*, *word meaning*, and *word use*, Meriläinen (2010) put forward a classification of lexical transfer (Table 1) that covers a larger number of transfer categories and highlights other aspects of L2 learner's vocabulary knowledge comprehensively. Due to the advantage of this classification over other ones, this taxonomy was used in this study.

**Table 1.** *Classification for Lexical Transfer (Borrowed from Meriläinen, 2010)*

Word Knowledge	Transfer Categories
Word Form	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Substitutions</li> <li>2. Relexifications</li> <li>3. Orthographic transfer</li> <li>4. Phonetic transfer</li> <li>5. Morphological transfer</li> </ol>
Word Meaning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loan translations</li> <li>2. Semantic extensions</li> </ol>
Word Use	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collocations</li> <li>2. Functional transfer</li> </ol>

As Table 1 indicates, *Word form*, in this classification, refers to learner's deficient appreciation of word forms in English language; *word meaning* relates to the transfer of L1 semantics; and *word use* suggests those kinds of transfer that influences learners' usage of English words such as function words and the correct combination of English words.

The first subcategory of *word form* is *substitutions*. As the name suggests, it includes the substitution of an English word with an L1 word. This subcategory was previously mentioned by Ringbom (2007) as complete language shift, and it usually happens with proper names like place names (Meriläinen, 2010). The following examples show these errors in Farsi:

- *We have met so many Hendi\* people in India. (English: Indian; Persian: Hendi).*
- *I have lived in Holland\* for five years. (English: Netherlands; Persian: Holland).*

The second subcategory of *word form* is *relexifications*, which is similar to the previous subcategory. This type of transfer happens when students use an L1 "word form in English, but instead of using it in an unmodified form, they have tailored it to look like an English word"

(Meriläinen, 2010, p. 72). In fact, in this kind of transfer, the L1 word must remind the learner of the target language words; in Meriläinen's words "the L1 word must, in the learner's mind, bear some resemblance to TL words so as to appear as a reliable source for modification" (Meriläinen, 2010, p. 71).

- *Our bodies consist of a lot of cellools\**. (English: cells; Persian: cellools).
- *The Process of fondasion\** is going to start soon. (English: Foundation; Persian: fondasion).

The third subcategory of *word form* is *orthographic transfer* which happens when L1 spelling influences the learner's written English production. Orthographic transfer might appear in three different forms; the misspelling of compound words, the misuse of upper-case letters in the initial positions and the misplacement and confusion of some English letters with their corresponding L1 equivalents such as misusing the letter "c", which is of foreign origin in Persian, with some letters like "k" or "s".

- *My classmate showed me her new pencilsharpener\**. (English: pencil sharpener; Persian: pencilsharpener).
- *They live in Filipins\**. (English: Philippines; Farsi: Filipins).

The next subcategory of *word form* refers to *phonetic transfer* which occurs when the lack of harmony between Persian language and English overshadows students' ability to spell the English words properly. The problem with stress pattern and the lack of distinction between voiced and voiceless sounds, according to Meriläinen (2010), are two major phonetic influences that usually lead to spelling mistakes of the language learners in the process of writing.

- *Jack and Joe go to eschool\** every day. (English: school; Persian: eschool).
- *There are different types of laptobs\** nowadays. (English: laptops; Persian: laptobs).

The last subcategory of *word form* concerns *morphological transfer*. This type of transfer happens when L1 morphemes are transferred to the L2. The most common and typical example of this type is adding plural "s" into singular forms in English. Nonetheless, there are other kinds of morphological transfer such as choosing a wrong preposition and addition of genitive inflection into context where they should not be used. One may say the addition of plural endings is related to syntax, but as Nation (2001) put it, the knowledge of word parts can be regarded as one's lexical knowledge.

- *This new notebook has a lot of papers\**. (English: Paper, non-countable noun; Persian: Papers).
- *We need new furnitures\** for the new house. (English: furniture, non-countable noun; Persian: furnitures).

*Loan translation* and *semantic extension* are regarded as the subcategories of *word meaning*. Ringbom (1987) states that loan translation happens when "the semantic properties of one item

are transferred in a combination of lexical items” (p. 117). Literal translation of first language collocations and idiomatic expressions into the target language is a common form of loan translation. Usually, the transformed items are not common in target language or might be used with different meanings.

- *Don't be afraid of him. He wouldn't hurt an ant\**. (English: hurt a fly; Persian: hurt an ant).
- *We should not talk aloud in the bookhouse\**. (English: Library; Persian: bookhouse).

The other subcategory that lies within the category of *word meaning* is called *semantic extension*. In this type of transfer, the language learners usually transfer the semantic features and properties of some words in their mother tongue to the target language words.

- *I could pass the test and I got 79 numbers\**. (English: Marks; Persian: numbers).
- *His cat's noun\* was Lucy*. (English: name; Persian: noun).

The last two subcategories, *collocations* and *functional transfer*, are concerned with one's knowledge of *word use* in English. They refer to instances in which students choose an incorrect translation equivalent for L2 collocations. The incorrect equivalents the students choose are usually semantically close to the English collocations.

- *Mary cannot take good decisions\**. (English: Make decision; Persian: take decision).
- *Little children cannot close their shoelace\* by themselves*. (English: tie shoelace; Persian: close shoelace).

The last subcategory of *word use* lexical transfer is *functional transfer* which embraces students' knowledge of grammatical functions of L2 words. As Meriläinen (2010) put it, *function words* are those words that have information about the grammatical properties of the expressions within a sentence. In this type of lexical transfer errors, the language learners are usually under the assumption that some words in their first languages and their equivalents in the target language perform the same grammatical functions and use them inappropriately. Examples of this type can be the usage of articles in an inappropriate context and the incorrect use of relative pronouns.

- *The girl, which\* is sitting next to Jack, is my classmate*. (English: the girl who/that; Persian: the girl which).
- *They live in the\* Tehran*. (English: Tehran; Persian: the Tehran).

## 2.2. Empirical studies

Due to the significance of written production of language learners, especially in EFL contexts, which is believed to be the most difficult language skill among EFL learners (Author, 2015), various studies have examined lexical transfer error of EFL learners in different contexts.



Agustín Llach et al. (2005), for example, targeted Spanish and German learners of English and explored lexical errors quantitatively and qualitatively in their written production. The findings indicated that both groups had similar performance in terms of lexical error types, but Spanish participants had fewer lexical errors than the German learners. Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) investigated the lexical errors Thai EFL learners had in their writings. They concluded that most of the learners' errors stemmed from L2 intrinsic difficulty and that near synonyms, preposition partners, and suffixes were the most frequent errors in the learners' writings. Meriläinen (2010) investigated lexical and syntactic transfer patterns in the writings of Finnish EFL learners. The findings of her study revealed that the genetical and typological distance between the L1 and L2 is a determining factor in the transfer pattern, and that the distance between L1 and L2 leads to persistent transfer at syntax level. Abdul Ridha and Al-Riahi (2011) considered the compositions of Iraqi students and studied the lexical collocational errors in them. The findings of their study revealed that most of the lexical collocational errors in the writings of the Iraqi EFL learners mainly stemmed from the negative transfer from their L1s. Burton (2012) conducted a study with Italian high-school language learners and found out that cross-linguistic influence mainly happens with content words and cognates. In action research in the Chilean EFL context, Dissington (2018) examined Chilean Spanish-speakers' common lexical errors and suggested that systematic pedagogical intervention and practice along with raising learners' awareness of lexical errors could be beneficial for language learners. Considering the influence of learners' L1 on their L2 acquisition, Ye (2019) scrutinized the patterns and reasons for lexical transfers in the Chinese EFL learners' writings. Chinese polysemes were found to be the main reason for negative lexical transfer. Drawing upon contrastive analysis and error analysis approaches, Sinkala et al., (2020) studied lexical errors in the writings of Zambian students. Their findings highlighted the significant role of the participants' L1 in their lexical transfer errors.

Drawing upon the written production of EFL learners, most of these studies have mainly focused upon specific aspect of lexical transfer errors along with syntactic transfer errors and have reported the influence of language learners' L1 as the most significant reason behind such errors. Although lexical transfer errors of EFL learners have been investigated in different contexts by researchers, few studies have considered it in the Iranian EFL context. For example, Rostami Abusaeedi and Boroomand (2015) concluded that interlingual and intralingual sources are responsible for the lexical transfer of Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to examine lexical transfer errors in the written production of language learners in the Iranian EFL context, as investigating lexical transfer errors in different socio-cultural contexts can contribute a lot to the field and interested researchers. To this end, the following research questions were formulated

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Corpus**

The corpus of this study included 189 essays written by 89 male and 100 female Persian BA students majoring in English Language and Literature between the academic years of 2020 and 2021 in Iran. Most of the participants were intermediate in terms of their overall language proficiency. The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP) which had already

been conducted prior to the study, had indicated that the participants were at level two or intermediate. The corpus was collected by the first author of this manuscript who was teaching the course of Essay Writing at the university and then was handed over to the second researcher. The students had written these essays for the final examination of the Writing Course. They had been asked to choose one topic from among three topics- compare and contrast essay, argumentative essay, and descriptive essay- and then write an essay about it. The essays had been written in about 80 minutes and ranged between 400 to 500 words.

### 3.2 Instrument

Meriläinen's (2010) classification of lexical transfer (Table 1) was employed in this study to examine lexical transfer errors in the written output of language learners in the Iranian EFL context. Inspired by Nation's (2001) three aspects of L2 learners' lexical knowledge, word form (substitution, relexification, orthographic transfer, phonetic transfer, and morphological transfer), word meaning (loan translation and semantic extension), and word use (collocation and functional transfer), Meriläinen introduced a comprehensive taxonomy for the analysis of lexical transfer errors.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

For the purpose of the current study, 189 essays written by male and female Iranian EFL learners at BA level were collected as the main corpus. As the first step, the researchers labeled each paper from 1 to 100 for females and 1 to 89 for males and wrote the numbers and the gender on top of each paper. This was done in order to facilitate finding the errors related to each paper. Then, the researchers assigned a number for each of the lexical errors proposed by Meriläinen (2010) as following:

1. Word form
  - 1.1 Substitution
  - 1.2 Relexification
  - 1.3 Orthographic transfer
  - 1.4 Phonetic transfer
  - 1.5 Morphological transfer
2. Word meaning
  - 2.1 Load translation
  - 2.2 Semantic extensions
3. Word use
  - 3.1 Collocations
  - 3.2 Functional transfer

As the next step, the researchers together read through each paper one by one and underlined the lexical errors with a pencil and wrote the related number of the error on top of it. The correct form of the errors was also written next to the errors. When the coding procedure for the essays written by both male and female students was completed, the researchers entered all the errors found in the papers in an excel file. To this end, the researcher created two sheets in an excel file. One was attributed to the females and the other was attributed to the males. Then, they classified all types of errors and their correct form in English on the top of the excel file. In this

way, all the errors were collected and recorded in an excel file. After classifying the errors, the researchers created two other sheets namely, frequency of female learners' errors and frequency of male learners' errors in which the frequency of each lexical category was recorded.

To make sure that the researchers had been on the right track, they invited two TEFL university professors to inspect the procedure. In addition, the two professors went through 10% of the errors recorded in the excel file and approved that the lexical errors had been coded correctly.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data from the study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19. To provide an answer to the research questions of the study, the frequency, percentage, and standardized residuals of lexical transfer errors of male and female learners were computed.

## 4. Results

This study was undertaken to investigate how *word form*, *word meaning* and *word use* account for the lexical transfer errors of male and female EFL learners' writing. The data collected were analyzed and reported in terms of frequency counts, percentages and standardized residuals (Std. Residual).

### 4.1. Exploring the First Research Question

The first research question of the study aimed at examining how *word form* accounted for the lexical transfer errors of male and female students' writing. Table 2 displays the frequencies, percentages and Std. Residuals for the male and female learners' lexical transfer errors caused by *word form*; i.e., substitution, orthographic, phonetic and morphological transfers. It should be noted that the frequency of the relexification lexical transfer error across male and female groups was zero.

**Table 2.** *Frequencies, Percentages and Standardized Residuals for Lexical Transfer Errors Caused by Word Form by Gender*

		Word Form				Total
		Substitution	Orthographic Transfer	Phonetic Transfer	Morphological Transfer	
Male	Count	1	309	2	14	326
	%	0.3%	94.8%	0.6%	4.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.9	.3	.7	-1.4	
Female	Count	0	435	1	36	472
	%	0.0%	92.2%	0.2%	7.6%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.8	-.2	-.6	1.2	
Total	Count	1	744	3	50	798
	%	0.1%	93.2%	0.4%	6.3%	100.0%

*Note.* Relexification errors were not included in the table because their frequencies for both groups were zero.

The results showed that (94.8%) of male group's lexical transfer errors caused by *word form* involved orthographic transfer errors. This was followed by morphological transfer errors

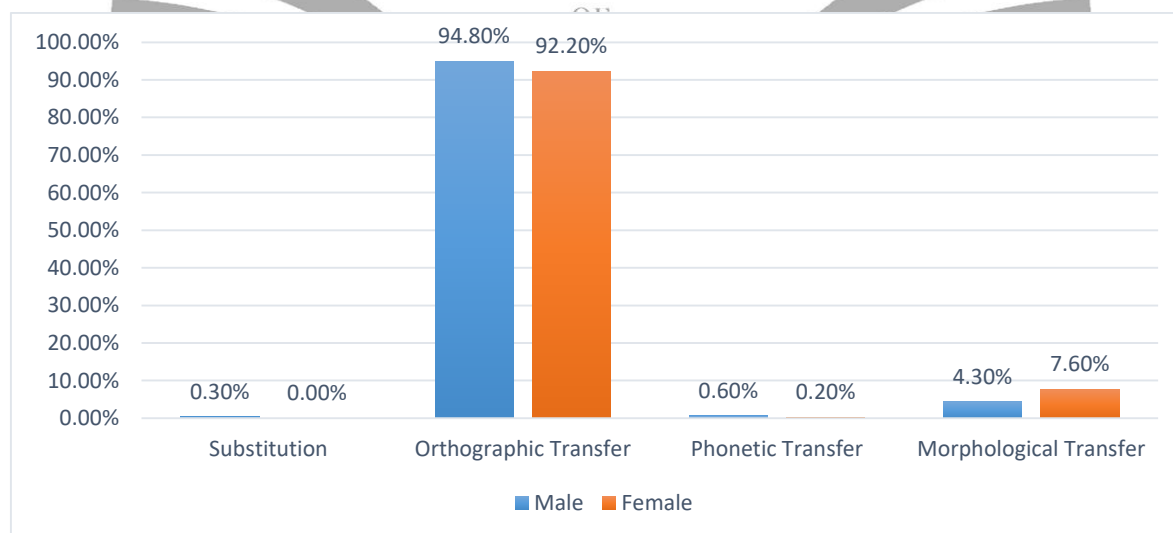


which comprised (4.3%) of the total errors. The percentages for the phonological transfer (0.6%) and substitution errors (0.3%) were negligible.

Based on the results displayed in Table 2, it can be concluded that 92.2 percent of female EFL learners' lexical transfer errors caused by *word form* was orthographic transfer errors. This was followed by morphological transfer errors which comprised 7.6 percent of the total errors. The percentages for the phonological transfer (0.2%) and substitution errors (0.0%) were negligible.

Each cell in Table 2 includes Std. Residuals values which can be used to compare the cell frequencies for any significant differences. Std. Residuals higher than  $\pm 1.96$  indicate that frequencies are significant beyond/below what was expected. Since none of the Std. Residuals were higher than  $\pm 1.96$ , it can be concluded that there were not any significant differences between the male and female groups' frequencies of lexical transfer errors accounted for by *word form*. [Figure 1 below](#) compares the percentages of the two groups' errors.

**Figure 1.** Lexical Transfer Errors Caused by Word Form by Gender



#### 4.2. Exploring the Second Research Question

The second research question was an attempt to examine how *word meaning* accounts for the lexical transfer errors of male and female students' writing. Table 3 displays the frequencies, percentages and Std. Residuals for the male and female EFL learners' lexical transfer errors caused by *word meaning*; i.e., loan translation and semantic extension.

**Table 3.** Frequencies, Percentages and Standardized Residuals for Lexical Transfer Errors caused by Word Meaning by Gender

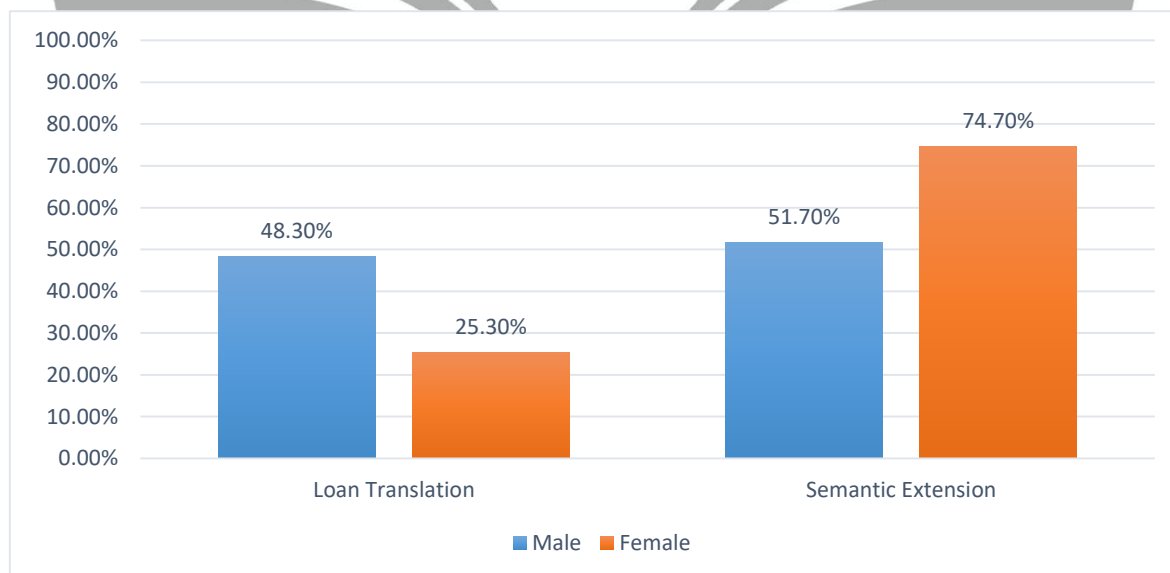
		Word Meaning		Total
		Loan Translation	Semantic Extension	
Male	Count	29	31	60
	%	48.3%	51.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	2.3	-1.6	
Female	Count	42	124	166
	%	25.3%	74.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-1.4	1.0	
Total	Count	71	155	226
	%	31.4%	68.6%	100.0%

The results displayed in Table 3 indicated that the male EFL learners made 31 semantic extension errors which were slightly higher than the 29 loan translation errors. The percentages for the two types of lexical transfer errors made by *word meaning* were 51.7% for semantic extension and 48.3% for loan translation.

The information presented in Table 3 showed that female EFL learners have made semantic extension errors ( $n = 124$ ) almost three times more than loan translation errors ( $n = 42$ ). The percentages for the two types of lexical transfer errors made by *word meaning* were (74.7%) for semantic extension and (25.3%) for loan translation.

The comparison of Std. Residuals indicated that the male group significantly made more loan translation errors (48.3 %, Std. Residual = 2.3 > 1.96) than the female group (25.3 %, Std. Residual = -1.4 < -1.96). The difference between the two groups' semantic extension errors; i.e., (51.7%) for male and (74.7%) for female EFL learners, was not a significant one because Std. Residuals were lower than +/- 1.96. Figure 2 displays the percentages of the errors for both groups.

**Figure 2.** Lexical Transfer Errors Caused by Word Meaning by Gender



#### 4.3. Exploring the Third Research Question

The third research question intended to explore how *word use* accounted for the lexical transfer errors of male and female students' writing. Table 4 displays the frequencies, percentages and Std. Residuals for the male and female EFL learners' lexical transfer errors caused by *word use*; i.e., collocational and functional errors.

**Table 4.** *Frequencies, Percentages and Standardized Residuals for Lexical Transfer Errors Caused by Word Use by Gender*

		Word Use		Total
		Collocational	Functional	
Male	Count	88	373	461
	%	19.1%	80.9%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-3.0	1.8	
Female	Count	226	505	731
	%	30.9%	69.1%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	2.4	-1.4	
Total	Count	314	878	1192
	%	26.3%	73.7%	100.0%

The results displayed in Table 4 indicated that the male EFL learners made 373 functional errors which was much higher than the frequency of collocational errors; i.e., 88. The percentages for the two types of lexical transfer errors made by *word use* were 80.9 percent for functional errors and 19.1 percent for collocational errors.

Based on the results demonstrated for the female learners in Table 4, it can be concluded that female EFL learners made functional errors ( $n = 505$ ) more than collocational errors ( $n = 226$ ). The percentages for the two types of lexical transfer errors made by *word use* were (69.1%) for functional and (30.9%) for collocational errors.

The comparison of Std. Residuals showed that the female group significantly made more collocational errors (30.9 %, Std. Residual = 2.4 > 1.96) than the male group (19.1 %, Std. Residual = -3 > -1.96). The difference between the two groups' functional errors; i.e., (80.9 %) for male and (69.1 %) for female EFL learners, was not a significant one because Std. Residuals were lower than +/- 1.96. [Figure 3](#) shows the percentages of the errors in both groups.

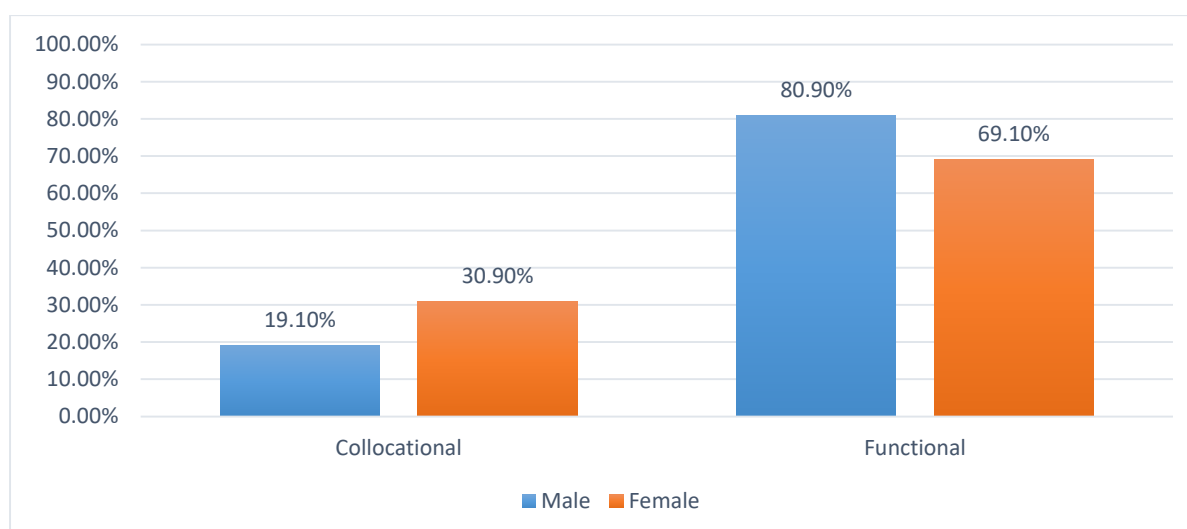
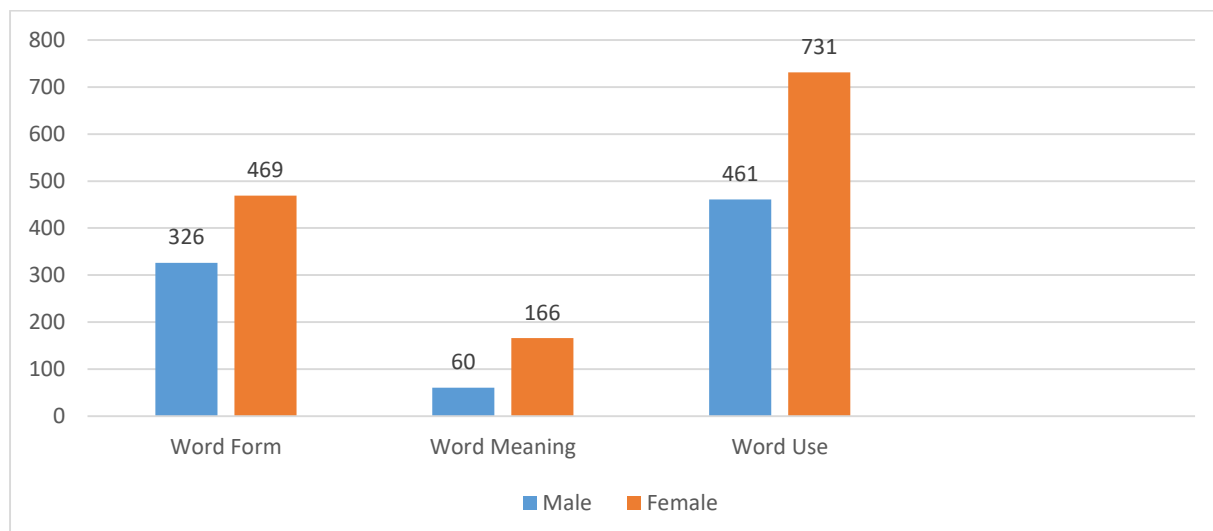
**Figure 3.** *Lexical Transfer Errors Caused by Word Use by Gender*

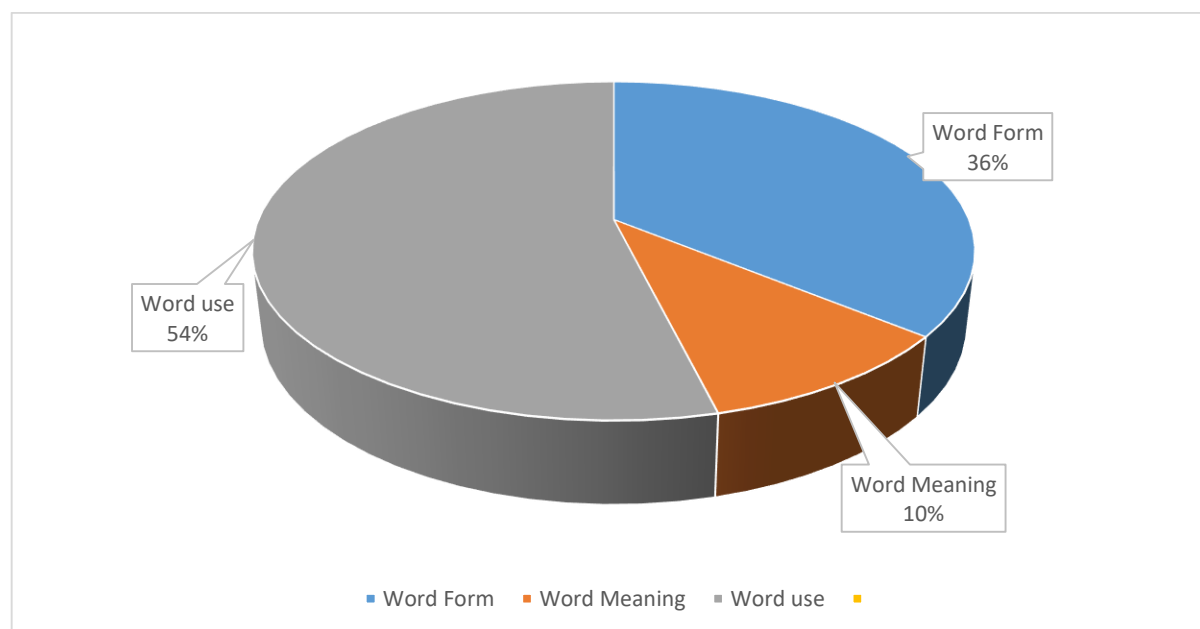
Figure 4 below presents a bird's eye view of the findings in terms of the errors caused by *word use*, *word meaning* and *word use* in both male and female students' essays.

**Figure 4.** A Total Number of Lexical Transfer Errors Caused by Word Form, Word Use and Word Meaning



As it is clear, male students had a total of 326 errors caused by *word form*, a total of 60 errors caused by *word meaning* and a total of 61 errors caused by *word use*. Female students, on the other hand, had a total of 469 errors caused by *word form*, a total of 166 errors caused by *word meaning* and a total of 731 errors caused by *word use*. Percentages of lexical transfer error caused by *word form*, *word meaning* and *word use* are presented in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5.** Percentage of Lexical Transfer Error Caused by Word Form, Word Meaning and Word Use for Both Genders



According to [Figure 5](#), the percentages for each error type are as follows: errors caused by *word form* (36%), *word meaning* (10%), and *word use* (54%). It can be concluded that *word use*, *word form* and *word meaning*, respectively are responsible for the lexical errors produced by EFL learners in this study.

## 5. Discussion

The present study investigated different types of lexical transfer errors in the writings of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, writings of both male and female students were gathered and investigated to find lexical transfer errors. After gathering the data, they were categorized according to the Meriläinen's (2010) taxonomy for lexical transfer error.

The first research question aimed at exploring different types of lexical transfer errors caused by "word form" in the written production of both male and female BA learners of English. The results revealed that *orthographic transfer error* and *morphological transfer error* were the most frequent error types in the compositions of the learners. This finding is in line with Meriläinen's (2010) study. It is worth mentioning that both male and female BA students had no *relexification error*. The other two errors that found to be rare in compositions, were *phonetic transfer* and the *substitution*. In the same vein, Meriläinen (2010) also found substitution and relexifications error as rare in the writings of Finnish students.

In line with the findings of this study, many other studies (e.g., Agustín Llach, 2005; Agustín Llach, Fontecha, & Espinosa, 2005; Bao, 2015; Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006; Niu & Ji, 2018) have also reported word form as a source of lexical transfer error. For instance, Agustín Llach (2005) found orthographic error as one of the lexical errors which affected the quality of students' essays. Agustín Llach et al. (2005), in another study, reported spelling errors to be frequent among young EFL learners at the early stages of acquisition, they also found that word choice errors occurred as complete language shift, relexification or literal translation, mainly (borrowing, coinage and claque) in the students' written production. Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) stated that misspelling were the second most frequent formal errors in Thai EFL learners' writings. Bao (2015) highlighted lexical errors caused by substitution in writings of Chinese EFL learners, and finally Niu and Ji (2018) concluded that morphological errors led to lexical errors of Chinese learners.

The first subcategory of *word form* errors is *substitution* error which usually happens with proper names like the names of special places, cities, and countries (Meriläinen, 2010). For example, one of the students had written *Irani\** soldier instead of Iranian soldier. The student did not seem to be aware of such error when writing the composition. Usually, students making this type of error might not realize that some Persian words have English equivalents, or they might forget about the English equivalent at the time of writing and thus write the Persian word instead.

Relexification error as the second subcategory of word form error happens when students try to make an L1 word look like an English word (Meriläinen, 2010). For example, using *cellools\** instead of cells by one of the students indicates that the L1 word reminds the learner of the L2 word.

*Orthographic transfer errors* as the most frequent type of error in both male and female students' written production happen either when students do not use uppercase letters with proper nouns such as *internet\** and *english\** or when students split compound words in their writings such as *everything\**, *every one\**, *cannot\**, and *anything\** or when students replace certain letters with their typical Persian equivalents such as *fizical\** and *psychologists\** instead of physical and psychologists (Meriläinen, 2010). It seems that, regardless of some factors such



as lack of time and the students' anxiety during writing, the students' lack of English knowledge and L1 transfer have been the main reasons leading to their errors.

*Phonetic transfer errors* usually happen with voiced/ voiceless sounds (Meriläinen, 2010). Many Iranian EFL learners have problems with the consonants b (voiced) and p (voiceless) which sometimes make them write *laptob\** instead of *laptop*. Such error is common in Persian context too, as most people say *shambe\** instead of *shanbe*. Another phonetic lexical transfer type can manifest itself in using a vowel before a consonant in words like *specific* and *school*.

*Morphological transfer errors* tend to occur when students add the plural *s* into English words where it should not be used (Meriläinen, 2010). *Childs\**, *persons\**, *medias\**, *peoples\**, and *informations\** were wrongly used by the students. It can be said that some students were not familiar with non-countable nouns and considered them countable nouns and thus added the plural *s* at the end of these words.

The second research question aimed at exploring different types of lexical transfer error caused by *word meaning* in the written production of both male and female BA students. According to the findings, there were two types of errors: *loan translation* and *semantic extension*. Based on the results, *semantic extension* seems to happen more frequently in both males' and females' written production rather than *loan translation*. This finding was in line with what Meriläinen (2010) found. She also found *semantic transfer* error as more frequent in comparison with *loan translation* in the compositions by Finnish students. *Loan translation*, on the other hand, seemed to happen less in comparison with *semantic extension*. This type of error was seen to happen more for male students in comparison to female students.

This finding is compatible with some other studies (e.g., Sinkala, Kaira, & Simwinga, 2020; Yang, Ma, & Cao, 2013; Ye, 2019) conducted in the field. Yang et al. (2013) found that some of the errors in Chinese students' written production are caused by lexical errors due to word for word translation. Ye (2019) concluded that Chinese polysemy that is words with more than two or more related meanings led to the most frequent lexical transfer from Chinese to English. Also, the four subcategories of Multi-Word Units which are idioms, proverbs, fixed phrases, and phrasal verbs also led to lexical errors of Chinese high school students. Sinkala et al. (2020), in their study, noticed that literal translation of Zambian words into English were part of Zambian students' lexical error in their writings.

The first type of error caused by *word meaning*, is *loan translation*. This type of error manifests itself in literally translating L1 compound words, idioms or idiomatic expressions into the L2 (Meriläinen, 2010). The expressions and compound words such as *as easy as eating a bottle of water\**, *generally talking\**, *homewife\**, *todayes\**, *I am agreeing\**, and *go to a trip\** were used wrongly by male and female students. Students' lack of knowledge in using different idioms and expressions in English made them translate these expressions or idioms literally. When students do not know the appropriate English equivalents, they tend to translate literally from their L1.

The other type of lexical transfer error caused by *word meaning* is *semantic extension*. This error happens when students take the semantic features of an L1 word and extend its meaning and relate its meaning to an L2 word (Meriläinen, 2010). Words such as *sicknesses*, *sport*, *awaringly*, *liking*, *unless*, *part*, *lots of*, *cheat* and *mind health* were wrongly used instead of

illnesses, exercising, with awareness, interest, at least, role, deceive and mental health. Both *loan translation* and *semantic extension* errors are concerned with semantic L1 influence. In such errors, students refer back to their L1 and when the correct L2 word does not appear in their mind, without paying attention to the context, try to choose an L2 word which is the closest meaning to what they have in their minds. In other words, *semantic extension* happens with those English words or units that have more than one Persian equivalents. Thus, they may choose an L2 word and give it “a new meaning which is not driven from its direct L1 translation equivalent but from an L1 word that sounds similar to the translation equivalent” (Meriläinen, 2010, p. 94).

The third research question aimed at investigating different types of lexical transfer error caused by *word use* in the written production of both male and female BA students. There are two types of lexical transfer error caused by *word use* namely, *collocation* and *functional transfer errors*. The findings revealed that the students had more problems with *functional transfer* than *collocations*. It also came to light that female student had more problems in *functional transfer error* and *collocation error* than male students. This finding is also in line with Meriläinen's (2010) work. She found that Finnish students had more functional transfer error than collocation error. This finding supports some aspects of the previous studies done in this area. For example, Dodigovic et al. (2017) found that some of lexical transfer errors of Chinese EFL learners were caused by different patterns of collocations. Shiri et al. (2017) came to this conclusion that advanced Iranian EFL learners had problems with lexical collocational errors in their writings. Niu and Ji (2018) concluded that improper collocations in Chinese college students' writing led to negative lexical transfer error. Ye (2019) reported that Chinese collocations accounted for lexical transfer from Chinese to English in the English production of high school students. Finally, Chang (2019) asserted that Chinese learners make errors in using collocations and that the lexical transfer is its main reason.

The first subcategory of lexical transfer caused by *word use* is *collocation error*. *Collocation error* happens when students choose an incorrect translation equivalent for an L1 collocation (Meriläinen, 2010). Since the translation equivalent chosen by the learners is semantically close to the English collocation, students make more errors in this area. In other words, students extend the English word use in different context which lead to *collocation error*. The findings indicated that the students had problems with some collocations such as: *pass time\**, *keep remember\**, *in the night\**, *continue doing\**, *are agree\**, *seeing TV\**, *doing punishment\**, and *nearness\**. These errors were wrongly used instead of their correct form: spend time, remember, at night, keep doing, agree, watching TV, punishing and closeness. Of course, *collocation errors* might have different patterns, but this study does not focus on them. The underlying reason could be caused by some reasons such as lack of lexical collocations knowledge and not avoiding literal translation or direct translation. Teachers can provide learners with lists of lexical collocation, lexical matching exercises and monolingual dictionaries like *Oxford Collocation Dictionary* to help students improve their lexical collocation awareness and learn how collocations are used in English. The next lexical error type caused by *word use* is *functional transfer error* which can be said was the most frequent type of error among all the errors. This type of error happens “when learners assume that L2 words have the same grammatical function as their L1 equivalents do and extend their use into

contexts which they should not be used” (Meriläinen, 2008, p.268). *Functional transfer error* manifest itself in the misuse of function words: auxiliaries, reflexive, indefinite, demonstrative and relative pronouns, as well as certain conjunctions, connectors and particles.

Errors like *that\* parents*, *when\* buying*, *Internet\**, *biggest industries\**, *themselves\**, *where\**, *in day\**, *radio\**, and *himself\** were wrongly used by BA students. They were wrongly used instead of those parents, while, the Internet, the biggest industries, themselves, when, the radio, and himself. It seems that some of the students had problems with articles, demonstrative, relative pronoun and reflexives. The misuse of articles was one of the most frequent errors that students made according to the data.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

This study was conducted to identify and analyze different types of lexical transfer error in the writings of BA students based on the taxonomy proposed by Meriläinen (2010). The results revealed that *word form* accounted for (36%), *word meaning* accounted for (10%), and *word use* accounted for (54%) of students’ lexical transfer errors. On the other hand, females had more lexical transfer errors than males.

The findings of this study suggest that EFL learners can have a better understanding of the types of lexical error that might happen in their writings and thus try to learn and use different strategies to reduce such errors.

Teachers can also change their strategies in teaching vocabulary by shifting their focus from size to depth. In this way, learners are pushed to learn the concept and meaning of each new vocabulary and not to just memorize them. They can also learn how to use those words in their correct context (Bagheri Nevisi et al., 2020). In addition, transfer-driven errors should be identified and incorporated into teachers’ syllabuses and material developers’ textbooks. It seems that the global acceptance of communicative approach and teaching in line with the principles of communicative approach has culminated in the marginalization of the explicit focus on form in some English language teaching classrooms. Judicious and principled focus on lexical transfer errors in the writing classes by teachers could be beneficial for second language learners.

Lexical teaching strategies should be different for students with different English proficiency. For example, the use of L1 equivalents should be avoided for intermediate and advanced students. This is to help avoid semantic fossilization. Teachers can also provide learners with difficult words in English especially those multiple English equivalents of the high-frequency polysemous Persian words. Since some learners have problems in using English collocations, collocations should be taught as fixed expressions instead of separate words.

In this study, the focus was on the taxonomy presented by Meriläinen (2010), and it included just some aspects of lexical transfer. Other studies can be conducted using other taxonomies of lexical transfer proposed by other scholars in the field. The present study did not focus on different genres in writing, nor has it considered other language skills other than student’s writings. Therefore, other studies can take these variables into account

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