

Errors Committed by EFL University Students in Using Confusing English Adverbs

Hussein M. Kadhim Al-Nasrawi

College of Basic Education

1. Introduction:

An adverb is a word used to modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb (Shaw,198:121). Being a teacher of English as a foreign language for a long time, the writer found a great deal of errors committed by the Iraqi university students of English when dealing with confusing adverbs. This investigation tests the possibility of committing errors in this area of the language and the reasons behind such errors. It is hypothesized that most of errors are committed due to influence of the mother tongue as well as to the complexity of the target language. The present study is intended to identify and analyze the errors committed by the Iraqi university students of English. The researcher will discuss thirty-five items of adverbs which are of two categories : (i) twenty four items of adverbs of two elements such as: clean / cleanly ,dead/ deadly, etc.. (ii) eleven items of adverbs which are of one form like very/ quite/ too, also/ as well/ either/ too, etc. The importance of the study lies in helping students avoid committing errors when using such adverbs. It includes: introduction which gives an idea about the subject , the section of confusing adverbs which identifies and analyzes the material under investigation, the test which shows the errors of the sample involved, and finally the conclusions which summarize the results of the study.

2. Confusing Adverbs:

Confusing adverbs are the adverbs which are difficult to understand and not clear because they show nearly similar meaning and almost different structure (Hornby, 1995:242).

2.1 Confusing adverbs of two forms:

2.1.1 clean / cleanly:

(Clean) means ‘completely’ and can be used in an informal style with the verb ‘forget’, the preposition ‘over’ and ‘through’ and the adverbs ‘away’ and ‘out’ (Swan, 1980: 12 and Doniach, 1984: 65):

1) Sorry I didn't turn up – I **clean** forget.

The adverb (cleanly) means 'exactly' or 'sharply' and it is often used with the verb 'cut' (Hornby, 1974: 152):

2) This knife doesn't cut **cleanly**.

2.1.2 close / closely :

According to Alexander (1994: 36) , the adverb (close) usually means near :

3) Stand **close** to me.

(Closely), however, means 'carefully with great attention' (Swan, 1980: 12):

4) Study this **closely**: it's very important.

2.1.3 dead / deadly:

The adverb (dead) means 'exactly' or 'completely' (ibid, 1980: 12) as in :

5) You're **dead** right.

(Deadly) means 'as if dead' or 'extremely' (Hornby, 1995: 298) as in :

6) He is **deadly** serious. (extremely)

7) She is **deadly** pale. (as if dead)

2.1.4 direct / directly:

According to Clark(1989 :121) and Leech and Svartvik (1994 :223), (direct) means 'straight to a place', while (directly) means 'almost at once' :

8) They flew **direct** to Frankfurt, with no break at Paris.

9) Don't hesitate to get in touch with us **directly**.

2.1.5 easy / easily:

(Easy) means 'to go gently' .The normal form of the adverb is (easily) which means 'with ease', 'without doubt' or 'possibly' (Hornby,1974 : 274; Bailie and Kitchin,1976:108 and Webster, 1992 : 295) :

10) Take it **easy**.

11) That is **easily** the last TV programme. (without doubt)

12) That may **easily** be the case. (possibly)

2.1.6 fair / fairly:

As Low (1986:190) demonstrates, both (fair) and (fairly) mean 'in honest or honorable manner':

13) Play **fair / fairly**.

On the other hand, (fairly) can be used in a different sense, ie, 'moderately' or 'completely' (ibid:190):

14) This is a **fairly** easy book. (moderately)

15) We are **fairly** caught in the trap. (completely)

2.1.7 fine / finely:

(Fine) as an adverb means 'well' (Doniach , 1994:140):

16) That suits me **fine**.

(Finely),however, means 'splendidly' or 'into small pieces', (Hornby, 1974:321):

17) She's **finely** dressed. (splendidly)

18) Carrots can **finely** be chopped up. (into small pieces)

2.1.8 flat / flatly:

(Flat) is used in a musical sense to mean , 'on a note that is too low' , '(lying) spread out' or 'positively' (Hornby,1974:327 ; Swan, 1980:12) :

19) She song **flat**.

20) He fell **flat** on his back.

21) He went **flat** against orders.

(Flatly) means 'absolutely', (Hornby, 1974:327):

22) The suggestions were **flatly** opposed.

2.1.9 free / freely:

According to Swan (1980 : 12), the meaning of the adverb (free) is 'without payment'. (Freely) is 'without limit' :

23) You can eat **free** in my restaurant whenever you like.

24) You can speak **freely** in front of George – he knows everything.

2.1.10 hard / hardly:

(Hard) means 'with great energy', while (hardly) is used in negative meaning, ie, 'almost not', (Praninskas, 1975:16; Thomson and Martinet, 1986:62 and Leech and Svartvik, 1994:228):

25) He studied **hard**.

26) He has **hardly** any money. (= very little money)

2.1.11 high / highly:

The adverb (high) refers to 'height'. (Highly) denotes an extreme degree of meaning 'very much', (Swan, 1980:12 and Low,1986:190) :

27) He can jump really **high**.

28) She's very **highly** paid.

2.1.12 just / justly:

(Just) means 'exactly' but (justly) means 'in accordance with justice or the law' (Hornby, 1974:460; Bailie and Kitchin, 1976:166 and Doniach, 1984:206):

29) That is **just** what I meant.

30) He was **justly** punished for his crimes.

2.1.13 late / lately:

Fitikides (2000:109) says that the adverb (late) is 'the opposite of early' while (lately) means 'recently' :

31) Last night I went to bed **late**.

32) I haven't been there **lately**.

2.1.14 loud / loudly :

Both adverbs can be used to mean 'in not quiet or soft manner'. (Loud) is often used after 'talk', 'speak', 'laugh' and 'shout' to refer to the sound volume (Hornby, 1974: 505) :

33) Don't talk so **loud**.

(Loudly), however, is the form for the figurative sense of clamorous and vociferous (Bailie and Kitchin, 1976:182):

34) He complained **loudly** when they cut off his allowance.

It is worth mentioning that the adverb (aloud) is often used with the verbs: ' read', 'think' and 'call' to say that words are spoken, not just 'said silently in the head' (Hornby,1974 :25 ; Swan, 1980:43):

35) He called **aloud** for help.

2.1.15 most / mostly:

The adverb (most) is used to mean 'very'. (Mostly) means 'chiefly or mainly' (Thomson and Martinet, 1986:48, 51):

36) She behaved **most** generously.

37) The medicine was **mostly** sugar and water. (Hornby, 1974:550)

2.1.16 pretty / prettily:

(Pretty), adverbially, means 'very' whereas (prettily) means 'in a pretty way' (ibid:48)

:

38) The exam was **pretty** difficult.

39) Her little girls were always **prettily** dressed.

2.1.17 real / really:

(Real) can be substituted for (really) when meaning 'very'. But (really) has a different meaning when indicating 'surprise or doubt (Hornby, 1994:968):

40) I'm **real** sorry.

41) ' We're going to Japan next month . '

– 'Oh. **really** ?'

2.1.18 right / rightly:

Both of them can be used to mean 'correctly' and after the verb 'act' (Alexander, 1994:158):

42) I don't think you acted **right/rightly** there.

On the other hand, only (right) should be used in preference to (rightly) when the meaning is 'so as to produce a correct or satisfactory result' (Bailie and Kitchin, 1976:258 and Swan, 1980:12):

43) Turn **right** at the traffic lights.

44) He guessed **right**.

2.1.19 sharp / sharply:(Sharp) as an adverb has the following meanings: 'punctually', 'suddenly' or 'above the true pitch in music'. In other senses, we use sharply to mean 'in a sharp manner' (Hornby, 1974:786 and Shaw, 1986:122):

45) We start at twelve-twenty **sharp**. (= punctually)

46) Turn **sharp** to the left. (= suddenly)

47) He sang **sharp**. (= to sing on a note that is too high)

48) He looks **sharply** (= (look) here is not a linking verb)

2.1.20 short / shortly:

(Short) means 'suddenly' while shortly means 'soon' (Low,1986:190) :

49) He stopped **short**.

50) He is **shortly** to leave for Mexico.

2.1.21 sound / soundly:

(Sound) is used in the expression 'sound asleep' to mean 'deeply and peacefully asleep'. (Soundly) means 'thoroughly', (Hornby, 1974:824 and Doniach,1984:374) :

51) The baby fell **sound** asleep.

52) He is **soundly** beaten at tennis.

2.1.22 sure / surely:

(Sure), as an adverb, means 'certainly'; (surely) has the same meaning in American English in answers. Yet, it can be used to express 'surprise in belief or difficult in believing' (Swan, 1980:13):

53) Can I borrow your tennis racket?

– **Sure**.

54) **Surly** this wet weather won't last much longer!

2.1.23 tight / tightly:

According to Bailie and Kitchin (1976:288) and Parrot (2000:31), (tight) is the same as (tightly) except that it emphasizes the result of an action. (Tightly) refers to 'the manner which something is carried out' :

55) He slammed the door **tight**.

56) She grasped me **tightly** round the waist.

2.1.24 wide / widely:

Hornby (1974:983) says the normal adverb is (wide) meaning 'far from the point aimed at':

57) The arrow fell **wide** of the mark.

The adverb (widely) means 'in many different places' (Swan, 1980: 12):

58) He has travelled **widely**.

2.2 Confusing Adverbs of one form:

2.2.1 especially / specially / particularly:

According to Hornby (1974:610) and Baillie and Kitchin (1976:117), (especially) means 'to an exceptional degree' and 'singles out what is prominent or pre-eminent'.

(Specially) means 'for a specific purpose' or 'to a particular end'. The adverb (particularly) can be used instead of (specially) as in the following examples :

59) The winter was **especially** severe that year.

60) This dress was made **specially** for her.

61) I **particularly** mentioned that point.

2.2.2 scarcely / rarely:

Both adverbs imply the negative. (Scarcely) means 'not quite' while (rarely) means 'not often' (Fitikides, 2000: 109):

62) He **rarely** comes to see me now.

63) I **scarcely** know him.

2.2.3 presently / at present:

(At present) means 'now' but (presently) means 'soon' (ibid):

64) We don't need anymore **at present**.

65) We will come back home **presently**.

2.2.4 before / ago:

According to Eckersley and Eckersley (1960:223) , (ago) means 'in counting from the time of speaking to a point in the past', and it should be used with a verb in the simple past tense. Yet, we use (before) 'in counting from a distant to a nearer point in the past' :

66) I met him a week **ago**.

67) I haven't seen him **before**.

2.2.5 very / quite / too:

(Very) is used as an intensifier, ie, to make the adjective or the adverb stronger (Swan, 1980:618):

68) The weather is **very** cold today.

(Quite) is the adverb of degree which has two meanings: firstly, it means 'completely' when used with a word or phrase to express the idea of completeness 'all right, wrong, sure, right, empty, etc', and when it is used with a very strong adjective/adverb such as 'amazing, extraordinary, horrible, perfect'. Secondly, (quite) has 'a slightly weakening effect' when used with other adjectives / adverbs, ie, 'fairly' (Thomson and Martinet, 1986:61-62):

69) You're **quite** wrong. (= completely)

70) He was **quite** good. (= fairly)

As for (too), the meaning is 'more than enough' and it often precedes an infinitive (Fitikides, 2000:107 and Parrot, 2000:37):

71) It is **too** heavy to carry.

2.2.6 very / much /absolutely: According to Redman (1997: 64) and Fitikides (2000: 107), (very) is used with the positive adjectives, adverbs and participles as adjectives and with scale adjective like (big, small, tired, interesting, surprised, etc). Conversely, (absolutely) can be used with the limit adjectives like (boiling, huge, tiny, exhausted, fascinating, astonished, terrified, etc). As for (much), it is always used with comparatives:

72) She is **very** intelligent.

73) The film was **absolutely** wonderful.

74) Riding motorcycles is **much** dangerous than riding cars.

2.2.7 too much / very much: (Very much) is used for emphasis, meaning 'greatly' (Thomson and Martinet, 1986:51) . (Too much) can be used to denote 'excessive quantity or degree' or 'more than enough' (Swan, 1980:608):

75) Thank you **very much**.

76) Don't eat **too much**.

2.2.8 also / as well / either / too:

(Also) meaning 'too' is used in the mid-position of the sentence while each of (as well), (either) and (too) goes in the end-position of the sentence. Both (as well) and (too) mean 'in addition' and can be substituted for each other . On the other hand, the adverb (either) is used instead of (also) and (too) in negative sentences (Hornby, 1974:911 and Swan, 1980:45,193):

77) 'I like watching TV'

- 'I do **too**'.

78) 'I don't like watching TV'.

- I don't **either**.

79) It can **also** be used in Geography.

80) You have been punished **as well**.

2.2.9 almost / nearly:

Although these adverbs have the same meaning, (almost) not (nearly) can be used with (never, nobody, no-one, nothing, nowhere, no and none) (Hornby, 1995: 32):

81) I **almost** / **nearly** lost the match. (Redman, 1997:68)

82) **Almost** no one believed him.

Another difference is that only (nearly) can be used after (not, very, pretty) (Quirk et al, 1985:447):

83) It's not / very / pretty **nearly** dark.

2.2.10 already / yet:

Both (already) and (yet) mean 'by this time', but they are different in the usage, that is, (already) is used in the positive constructions while (yet) in the end of negative statements and questions (Al-Hamash, 1976:210):

84) I have **already** explained it.

85) He hasn't finished his work **yet**.

86) Have you heard from your brother **yet** ?

2.2.11 farther / further:

These adverbs seem to be identical, but there is a theoretical difference between them ,ie, (farther) indicates 'distance' whereas (further) refers to 'distance' , 'greater extent', 'more' or 'moreover' (Marks and Bryon,1946:223 and Quirk et al, 1985: 429) :

87) We can't go any **farther** without a rest.

88) It's not safe to go any **further**. (distance)

89) Don't go **further** in discussing the topic. (greater extent)

90) We must get **further** information. (more)

91) He said that the watch was lost. **Further**, that there was no hope of being found. (moreover)

3. The Test:

The researcher submitted some of the Iraqi university students to a test to measure their ability in choosing the right items so as to know whether they are liable to commit errors when dealing with the confusing adverbs.

Thus, he has decided to make a multiple – choice question test for the 4th year students – Department of English – College of Basic Education – University of

Babylon . The reason behind choosing 4th year students is that they have already studied such area, ie , (adverbs) in the third year. The number of the students participated in the test is forty . Each item of the test contains pair of alternatives , since the most adverbs described in this paper have been presented as pair confusing adverbs.

The test has been approved by a jury committee of three experienced lecturers. It includes:

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

Lecturer Jasim M. Al- Muhayyawy(Ph.D. in Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language) College of Basic Education- University of Babylon.

Lecturer Chassib A. Al- Jubury(Ph.D. in Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language) College of Arts – Jami'at Ahlil-Beit.

4. Error Analysis :

Following Brown (1987:75), Learners' errors can be classified into four categories: (i) interlingual transfer. (ii) intralingual transfer. (iii) context of learning. and (iv) communication strategies.

Interlingual transfer is a form of generalization that takes prior language experiences and applies them correctly (ibid:8). The learner depends on his native language to solve problem of foreign language (FL) because of the deficiencies of his knowledge of the FL (Corder.1981:48). According to Conner (1996:13) intralingual transfer is the extending patterns from the target language (TL) or overgeneralization of a learner's rule. The error may be because of the influence of one target language item upon another (Penny. 2001:9). Yet, context of learning is defined as "other features that may be of negative influence in the teaching / learning environment, are lacking explanations by foreign language teachers as well as the textbook writers who may wish to emphasize some point at the expense of some other points depending on their own beliefs about how language and grammar should be taught", (Salebi, 2004:210). Brown (1987:80) says that communication strategies are the conscious employment of verbal or non-verbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when practicing

linguistic forms or for some reason not available to the learner at the point in communication.

The researcher found that the errors committed by the students in the test lie in two sources only, ie, inter-intralingual interference and such errors are analyzed respectively:

(A) Interlingual:

In relation to interlingual transfer, some errors have been committed in the test and the items of this domain are as follows:

Item (2) deals with the adverbs wide and widely. 25% of the students have chosen the wrong option due to the similarity in meaning of the adverbs and the negative transfer of the native language. In Arabic, we say:

سافرتُ إلى أماكنٍ عديدةٍ.

- He opened the door **wide**.
- He has travelled **widely**.

Item (3) deals with the adverbs before and ago. 22.5% of the students have chosen the wrong option ascribed to the confusion between the abovementioned adverbs and because of the negative interference between the native language and the foreign language. In Arabic, we say :

قابلتُهُ قبلَ أسبوعٍ

- I met him a week **ago**.
- I haven't seen him **before**.

Item (5) deals with the adverbs very and absolutely. 87.5% of the students have chosen erroneous alternative attributed to negative transfer of the mother tongue. In Arabic, we say :

كانَ الفلمُ رائعاً جداً.

- Thank you **very** much.
- The film was **absolutely** wonderful.

Item (6) deals with the adverbs too and either. 90% of the students have chosen the wrong option due to the similarity in meaning and the negative transfer of the mother tongue. In Arabic, we say:

- 'I like watching TV'
- 'I do **too**'.
- 'I don't like watching TV'.
- 'I don't **either**'.

Item (7) deals with the adverbs farther and further. 47.5% of the students have chosen the wrong option alternative since the two adverbs have the same meaning and the negative interference between the foreign language and native language. In Arabic, we say:

علينا الحصول على المزيد من المعلومات

- We can't go any **farther**.
- We must get **further** information.

Item (8) deals with the adverbs nearly and almost. 25% of the students have committed mistakes due to the similarity in meaning as well as negative transfer of the native language. In Arabic, we say:

لم يُصدقها أحدٌ تقريباً

- **Almost** none believed her.
- It's not/ very/ pretty **nearly** dark.

Item (11) deals with the adverbs most and mostly. 7.5% of the students have made mistakes ascribed to the negative transfer of the native language as well as the confusion in the meaning. In Arabic, it is said:

تصرفتُ بغاية اللطفِ

- She behaved **most** generously.
- The medicine was **mostly** sugar and water.

Item (12) deals with the adverbs free and freely. 35% of the students have chosen the incorrect option because of the confusion in meaning as well as the positive transfer of the native language. In Arabic, we say:

تستطيع أن تتكلم بحرية أمام علي لأنه يعلم كل شيء

تستطيع أن تأكل مجاناً في مطعمي متى ما تحب

- You can eat **free** in my restaurant whenever you like.
- You can speak **freely** in front of George – he knows everything.

(B) Intranlingual:

As for intranlingual, the following items show the errors of such field :

Item (1) deals with the adverbs present and presently. 65% of the students have chosen the wrong option because of the similarity in meaning as well as the tradition of ending a sentence with an adverb with -ly, ie, overgeneralization of such a rule. Item (4) deals with the adverbs already and yet. 37.5% of the students have chosen the false choice attributed to the failure in guessing which of which is used in negative or affirmative.

Item (9) deals with the adverbs dead and deadly. 50% of the students have chosen the wrong option ascribed to the confusion between the adverbs, ie, (dead) is always considered as an adjective while the adverb (deadly) is the right word because of the –ly suffix.

Item (10) deals with the adverbs flat and flatly. 60% of the students have committed mistakes due to the difference in meaning as well as the wrong use of –ly suffix in the adverb as to end the sentence. Item (13) refers to the adverbs hard and hardly. 45% of the students have chosen the wrong alternative since the students overgeneralize the –ly suffix of adverbs as well as confusion in meaning. That is, (hardly) implies the negative sense and cannot come at the end of the sentence whereas (hard) which does not imply negative can come at the end of it.

Item (14) indicates the adverbs high and highly. 75% of the students have chosen the false choice because of confusion in meaning. Item (15) contains the adverbs just and justly . 90% of the students have chosen the wrong option ascribed to the confusion in the meaning of the two adverbs as well as the confusion of the tense, ie,(just) is always used with the perfect tenses.

Item (16) deals with the adverbs late and lately. 55% of the students have committed errors attributed to the similarity in meaning and overgeneralization of –ly rule of adverbs to end a sentence. Item (17) deals with the adverbs pretty and prettily. 37.5% of students have chosen the wrong option due to the confusion in meaning as well as the commonly use of adverbs ending with -ly to modify adjectives for the sake of emphasis. They also internalize the use of adverbs ending with -ly. Item (18) deals with the adverbs real and really. 15% of the students have done the wrong alternative

because of lacking knowledge of the meaning and the usage. On the other hand, there is an ability to make use of positive interference between the native language and foreign language as in :

نحنُ ذاهبونَ إلى المكسيكَ الشهرَ القادمَ
! حقاً –

- I'm **real** sorry.

- 'We're going to Japan next month' - Oh, **really!**

Item (19) deals with the adverbs right and rightly. 5% of the students have made the wrong option ascribed to the difference in meaning and confusion in usage.

Item (20) deals with the adverbs sound and soundly. 45% of the students have committed mistakes since the adverbs are similar in meaning as well as confusing in usage.

5. Conclusions:

To sum up, the confusing adverbs dealt with in the present study represent an area through which the Iraqi university learners encounter difficulties when dealing with such adverbs. It is concluded that the Iraqi learners are liable to commit errors in this field. The highest percentage of committing errors happened with such adverbs as: at present / presently, too / either, flat / flatly, high / highly, just / justly and late/ lately. The repeated errors committed by the students in the test are due to overgeneralization of –ly suffix as well as similarity in meaning. The students always try to avoid using confusing adverbs lest they should make errors. Hence, they either give no answer or do it by chance. They still have no enough idea about this area of grammar, because, as the researcher's point of view, theoretical material is given more attention than the practical one. The researcher also noted that some students answered the question carelessly giving no attention to whether the choice is right or wrong due to traditional poor syllabuses in grammar.

It is necessary for teachers of English to pay a great attention to the errors made by the Iraqi university learners especially in such a field of investigation in order to improve their ability in using them in particular and in using good English in general. To follow such studies might be a panacea to avoid committing errors as well as improving the faculty of the students to use English correctly.

Appendix 1

The test

Choose the correct word between the brackets:

(100 marks)

- 1- We don't need anymore ----- . (at present, presently)
- 2- He has travelled ----- (wide, widely)
- 3- I met him a week ----- (before, ago)
- 4- Have you heard from your brother -----? (already, yet)
- 5- The film was ----- wonderful. (very, absolutely)
- 6- I don't like watching TV. I don't ----- . (too, either)
- 7- We must get ----- information. (farther, further)
- 8- ----- no one believed her. (nearly, almost)
- 9- You are ----- right. (dead, deadly)
- 10- John's suggestions were ----- opposed. (flat, flatly)
- 11- She behaved ----- generously. (most, mostly)
- 12- You can speak ----- in front of George – he knows everything. (free, freely)
- 13- He studies ----- . (hard, hardly)
- 14- She is very ----- paid (high, highly)
- 15- He was ----- punished for his crimes.(just, justly)
- 16- Last night I came back home ----- . (late, lately)
- 17- The exam was ----- difficult. (pretty, prettily)
- 18- We're going to Japan next month – Oh. -----? (real, really)
- 19- Turn ----- at the traffic lights. (right, rightly)
- 20- The baby became ----- asleep. (sound, soundly)

Appendix 2

percentages

No of Item	Correct		Incorrect	
	No.	%	No.	%
1.	14	35	26	65
2.	30	75	10	25
3.	31	77.5	9	22.5
4.	25	62.5	15	37.5
5.	5	12.5	35	87.5
6.	4	10	36	90
7.	21	52.5	17	47.5
8.	30	75	10	25
9.	20	50	20	50
10.	16	40	23	60
11.	37	92.5	3	7.5
12.	26	65	14	35
13.	22	55	18	45
14.	10	25	30	75
15.	4	10	36	90
16.	18	45	22	55
17.	27	62.5	13	37.5
18.	34	85	6	15
19.	38	95	2	5
20.	22	55	18	45
	Total	Total	Total	Total
	434	1080	366	894

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