

Investigating the Performance of Iraqi EFL University Students in Using

Clipping: An Error Analysis

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1. Introduction

Clipping is a type of abbreviation of a word in which one part is 'clipped' off the rest, and the remaining word now means essentially the same thing as what the whole word means. For example, the word **rifle** is a fairly modern clipping of an earlier compound **rifle gun**, meaning a gun with a rifled barrel. (**Rifled** means having a spiral groove causing the bullet to spin, and thus making it more accurate.) Another clipping is **burger**, formed by clipping off the beginning of the word **hamburger**. (This clipping could only come about once **hamburg+er** was reanalyzed as **ham+burger**.)

(Kemmer, 2008:3)

Most Iraqi EFL university students may face difficulties in recognizing and producing clipping. In this respect, the problem that may arise is represented in the students' weakness in using the appropriate part of the clipped word in the appropriate sentences.

This study aims at: 1- Identifying Iraqi EFL university students' performance in recognizing and producing clipping, 2-Finding out the causes of the students' errors and the types of such errors so that some solutions can be posited to help them overcome the problems they face in using clipping and introducing some suggestions that help the students deal with such a word formation process.

It is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL university students face difficulties in using clipping. Students are influenced by the general form of the clipped word more than its original.

To achieve the aims of this study the following procedures will be adopted: Presenting a description of the English word formation process(i.e. clipping) , involving a sample of Iraqi EFL university students; second year in a test specifically designed to collect data about the difficulties that they encounter in using clipping,

using statistic methods to rate the students' performance at the recognition and production levels in using clipping and analyzing the results of the test and the conclusions and pedagogical implications that will be put forward.

2. Clipping

2.1 Introduction to Clipping

The everyday sense of **abbreviation** has been refined in linguistics as part of the WORD – FORMATION distinguishing several ways in which words can be shortened. **Initialisms** or **alphabetisms** reflect the separate pronunciation of the initial letters of the constituent words (TV, COD); **acronyms** are produced a single words (NATO, laser); **clipped forms** or **clippings** are reductions of longer forms, usually removing the end of the word. (**ad** from **advertisement**), but sometimes the beginning (**plane**), or both beginning and ending together (**flu**); and **blends** combine parts of two words (**sitcom**, **motel**).

(Crystal,2003: 1)

In linguistics, **clipping** is the word formation process which is formed by the reduction of a word to one of its parts (Marchand:1969). Clipping is also known as "truncation" or "shortening."

According to Marchand (1969:78), clippings are not coined as words belonging to the standard vocabulary of a language. They originate as terms of a special group like schools, army, police, the medical profession, etc., in the intimacy of a milieu where a hint is sufficient to indicate the whole. For example, *exam*(ination), *math*(ematic), and *lab*(oratory) originated in school slang; *spec*(ulation) and *tick*(et = credit) in stock-exchange slang; and *vet*(eran) and *cap*(tain) in army slang. While clipping terms of some influential groups can pass into common usage, becoming part of Standard English, clippings of a socially unimportant class or group will remain group slang.

2.1.1 Definitions of Clipping

According to Bauer (1983:233) clipping refers to the process whereby a lexeme or a word (simple or complex) is shortened, while still retaining the same meaning and still being a member of the same form class. In other words, it means cutting of the beginning or the end of a word or both, leaving a part to stand for a whole.

(Stageberg, 1981:123)

Hudson (2000: 242) defines clipping as " the shortening or clipping the spoken form of a word ". He assures that this definition excludes what are traditionally called **abbreviations**, which shortening just the written form of words.

- (1) **Mr.** for '**mister**'
Tex for '**Texas**'
etc for '**et cetera**'

(ibid)

The above examples do not ordinarily replace the long forms, but just substitute for them. **Abbreviations** ordinarily end in periods, and often have spellings which would be unsuitable for English words, like **Eng.**, and **govt.**

Clippings, on the other hand, have spellings which have the appearance and pronounceability of English words. With the passage of time, clippings may fully replace their original longer forms. Three examples are:

- (2) a. **pub** 'tavern' in British English the clipped form of '**public house**'.

Americans may recognize and use the term **pub** without knowledge of its original 'public house' form, illustrating that such clippings are not just abbreviations but may become new words.

- b. **Fan** 'devoted follower, as of sports' is clipped from **fanatic**.

Probably most users of this word are unaware of its origin as a shortened form, and many fans will tell you they are not fanatic, so **fan** has become a new word fully separate from **fanatic**.

- c. **pet** 'loved household animal' is thought to have been clipped from French **petite** 'small'.

(Hudson, 2000:242)

Kreidler (1979: 26) notes that clipping means the "subtraction of material which is not obviously morphemic", while Plag (2003: 22) hypothesizes that clipping (or 'truncation') is "the process of deleting material itself which is the morph", thus possibly even necessitating a new morpheme definition: "Truncation is a process in which the relationship between a derived word and its base is expressed by the lack of phonetic material in the derived word" (ibid: 116).

2.1.2 Types of Clipping

Clipping mainly consists of the following types:

2.1.2.1 Back Clipping

Back clipping or **apocopation** is the most common type, in which the beginning is retained. The unclipped original may be either a simple or a composite. Examples are:

- (3) **ad** for (**advertisement**)
- Cable** for (**cablegram**)
- Doc** for (**doctor**)
- Exam** for (**examination**)
- Fax** for (**facsimile**)
- Gas** for (**gasoline**)
- Gym** for (**gymnastics, gymnasium**)
- memo** for (**memorandum**)
- mutt** for (**muttonhead**)
- pub** for (**public house**)
- pop** for (**popular music**)

(James, 2004,5)

2.1.2.2 Fore-Clipping

Fore-clipping or **aphaeresis** retains the final part. Examples:

- (4) **chute** for (**parachute**)
- coon** for (**raccoon**)
- gator** for (**alligator**)
- phone** for (**telephone**)
- pike** for (**turnpike**)
- varsity** for (**university**)

(ibid)

2.1.2.3 Middle Clipping

In middle clipping or **syncope**, the middle of the word is retained. Examples are:

(5) **flu** for (**influenza**)

jams or jammies for (**pajamas/pyjamas**)

polly for (**apollinaris**)

shrink for (**head-shrinker**)

tec for (**detective**)

(ibid)

2.1.2.4 Complex Clipping

Clipped forms are also used in **compounds**. One part of the original compound most often remains intact. Examples are:

(6) **cablegram** for (**cable telegram**)

op art for (**optical art**)

org-man for (**organization man**)

linocut for (**linoleum cut**)

(ibid)

Sometimes both halves of a compound are clipped as in *navicert* (*navigation certificate*). In these cases it is difficult to know whether the resultant formation should be treated as a clipping or as a **blend**, for the border between the two types is not always clear.

According to Bauer (1983:85), the easiest way to draw the distinction is to say that those forms which retain compound stress are clipped compounds, whereas those that take simple word stress are not. By this criterion *bodbiz*, *Chicom*, *Comsymp*, *Intelsat*, *midcult*, *pro-am*, *sci-fi*, and *sitcom* are all compounds made of clippings.

2.1.2.5 Other Types of Clipping

Nilsen and Nilsen (1978: 93) say that there are some cases of double clipping. For example the word **Bye** is a clipping of **Good Bye** which is already a clipping. The word **Good Bye** originates from the statement **Good be with you**.

Bauer (1983:233) observes that clipping, particularly in scientific terminology is often much more complex than in other types of language for example:

(7) Parylene > paraxylene

Phorate > phosphroditioate

Preperg > preimpregnated

Bauer (1988: 33) also observes that “clipping frequently does change the stylistic value of the word.” An outwardly visible sign of this disassociation can be new spellings.

(ibid)

Yule (1999:66) adds that English speakers also like to clip each other names as in Al, Ed, Liz, Sam, and Tom.

2.1.3 Clipping and New Terms

Some clippings, such as **lab**, and **exam** are in wide use on college campuses nowadays without tending to replace their source words. Those who use them continue to recognize them as abbreviations, Clipping results in new free forms in the language and sometimes in the creation of new morphemes **bike**, **mike**, **condo**, **flu**, and **fax**, have probably in which they established themselves as new words, independent of their origins as **bicycle**, **microphone**, **condominium**, **influenza**, and **facsimile**, respectively.

(Hudson, 2000:242)

Hudson (ibid) states that the clippings have become more common than the long forms, and are sometimes known to the exclusion of the long forms, which may eventually drop out of the language, though **facsimile** can survive in its original general meaning 'copy' .

Trask (1993: 46) views that sometimes the term is extended to cases like:

(8) **Havana** from **Havana cigar**

canary from **canary bird**

(ibid)

However, the clipped form and the original word must be regarded as separate words for the clipped one and this is common in informal speech, news, headlines and advertisements, whereas the original word is kept for more formal, or more frequent use.

(Yule, 1985:58)

Fromkin and Rodman (1988:140) explain that abbreviations of longer words or phrases also may become "lexicized" for example:

(9) **nark** for **narcotics agent**

telly(the British word) for **television**

prof for **professor**

piano for **pianoforte**

gym for **gymnasium**

(ibid)

The above examples are only a few examples of such "short" forms that are now used as whole words.

Interestingly, written clippings can become parts of new combinations, and then they are pronounceable as clippings, for example, Atty-Gen < Attorney-General. Clipped compounds are shortenings of long combinations, which keep one constituent unshortened, as in lad mag and SimEarth (Simulation Earth). Further characteristics include the maintenance of plurals (apps and specs), informal spellings (loony < lunatic), and cases of new pronunciation and stress movement (‘Aussie

[-z-] < Aus’tralian [-st-]). Clipping shares a large degree of arbitrariness with blending: it neither considers stress nor syllable or morpheme structures. Rather extreme examples which demonstrate this disregard for stress and syllable boundaries are **blog** from weblog and **photog** from photographer. Therefore, one might argue that the results of clippings are ‘free splinters’(The concept ‘free splinter’ is proposed here in analogy to the term ‘free morpheme’ (as opposed to the ‘bound splinter’ in blending and the ‘bound morpheme’ in affixation))that is, independent elements which remain after a radical shortening process. Another feature that is unique to clipping is that clipping is pure shortening: unlike acronymy and blending, the shortening process is not accompanied by expansion.

(James, 2004,13)

While initials in acronyms are bound elements, and the same is true of splinters in blends, clipping, as a subtractive process, “sets splinters free”; as irregular parts of words from which they originated, they undergo a process of semantic and stylistic disassociation .Fandrych’s (2004: 31) mini-experiment around exam, which showed

that **exam** is used in the sense of a ‘test of knowledge’ as opposed to examination in the sense of a ‘doctor’s examination’.

Also Lehrer (1996: 362; 1998: 4 and 16), who notes that splinters can become new word-formation elements, such as combining forms, and eventually even morphemes.

3. The Test

Skehan (1999:303) states that a test is " a systematic method of eliciting performance which is intended to be the basis for some sort of decision making".

The test comprises two questions: the first question is designed to measure the subjects' responses at the recognition level whereas the second question is designed to measure the subjects' responses at the production level. The first question includes twenty items intended to measure the subjects' ability to match between group A(the clipped words) and group B(their cut). The subjects are provided with two lists one of them the clipped words and the other one is their cut and they are asked to match between the suitable words and the suitable cuts. The second question consists of twenty items in which, the subjects are instructed to give the original words from which the given clipped words were formed.

It aims at locating the precise areas of difficulty encountered by Iraqi EFL university students in using clipping and simultaneously identifying the causes and types of their errors.

3.1 Result Analysis

This section displays the results in relation to the subjects' performance on each question of the test. It is the cornerstone of approving or disapproving the hypotheses i.e. they are either verified or refuted.

3.1.1 Subjects' Performance of the First

Question

This question is determined to measure the subjects' responses at the recognition level. To see whether they are capable of recognizing and choosing the correct cut of the correct clipped word. The subjects' performance at the recognition level is not very good since their incorrect responses are (23.5%,400) whereas their correct responses

are (26.5%,450).This leads to the verification of the first hypothesis that reads Iraqi EFL university students face difficulties in using clipping .

3.1.2 Subjects' Performance of the Second

Question

The second question of the test is built in a way to measure the subjects' responses at the production level. Also, it is formed to approve or disapprove the second hypothesis that students are influenced by the general form of the clipped word more than its original. It has been observed that the total number of the correct responses (8.7%, 148) is lower than the incorrect responses (41.3%, 702). This refers to the subjects' low performance concerning clipping. As such, the second hypothesis is validated.

3.1.3 Subjects' Performance of Clipping in the Whole Test

It has been concluded that the total number of subjects' incorrect responses (41.3%) at the production level is higher than that at the recognition level which is (23.5%). While the total number of subjects' correct responses (26.5%) at the recognition level is higher than that at the production level which is (8.7%). Also, there are certain means used to confirm the obtained results such as the mean and the coefficient variation.

The mean for the production level (6.03) is lower than that for the recognition one (10.5) and the coefficient variation for the production level (40.3) is higher than that for the recognition one (34.4). This happens because the students' performance at the recognition level is better than their performance at the production one.

Table (1)

The Frequency and Rate of Subjects' Performance at the Recognition and Production Levels in the Whole Test

Level	No. of Question	No. of Correct Responses	%	No. of Incorrect Responses	%
Recognition	Q.1	450	26.5	400	23.5
Production	Q.2	148	8.7	702	41.3

3.2 Error Analysis

Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors that the learners make. It involves a comparison between the errors made in the target language and that target language itself.

(Taylor, 1975:74)

3.2.1 Possible Sources of Errors

It is seen that " Systematically analyzing errors made by language learners make it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching".

(Corder, 1974:120)

These errors can be of great help to the learners' in order to specify the points of weaknesses since making errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn.

(ibid)

3.2.1.1 Interlingual Transfer

This kind of errors is attributed to the native language (henceforth, L1). Lado (1964:86) mentions that this source of error is the result of the native influence of the mother language on the performance of the target language learner (henceforth, L2). The interlingual effect is clear through the subjects' errors in their responses at the production level to items (2) and (16) in question (2):

Item (2) sport(game) ----- disport

* sport(game) ----- **sport**

Item (16) Tony ----- Anthony

* Tony ----- **Tony**

It seems from the subjects' responses that they have depended upon translation. Although the subjects know that the clipped words in particular items (2 and 16) i.e., disport and Anthony . The subjects rely upon what they can understand from the given clipped words ignoring its meaning in relation to clipping rules. The total number of errors of this kind is (2.01).

3.2.1.2 Intralingual Transfer

According to Richards (1974:6), intralingual errors are due to the language being learned target language, independent of the native language. They are " items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language ".

(ibid)

As regard sources of errors, there are many that have been reported by different authors:

- 1- **Overgeneralization:** It is associated with reduction. It covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language.
- 2- **Ignoring of rule restrictions:** It refers to the applying of the rules to contexts to which they do not apply.
- 3- **Incomplete application of rules:** It is the learners' effective communication through using simple rules which does not help the learner to acquire the complex types of structure.
- 4- **Semantic errors such as building false concepts/systems:** The learners of L2 are seen to adopt wrong hypothesis or build wrong rule about L2 i.e., faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language. (Corder, 1974:120)

The subjects' strategy of **overgeneralization**, as mentioned earlier, is one of the factors that can lead to errors' generation. Error type 2 which is **using familiar words in more than one place** in items (8), and (12) is seen in question (1). The items below can illustrate this aspect:

Item (8)	bus	omni
	* bus	A
Item (12)	van	cara
	* van	air

Apparently, it seems that error type 4 in question (2) which is **failure to give the correct cut for the suitable clipped word** may be attributed to **ignorance of rule restrictions**. The following examples in question (2) give an apparent idea about such type of errors.

Item (12) fridge ----- refrigerator
 * fridge ----- **fridgerator**

Item (3) Taxi ----- Taxicab
 * Taxi ----- **Taxi**

The effect of **ignorance of rule restrictions** is obvious in error type 1 which is **failure to choose the correct cut for the suitable clipped word** in question (1) in items (14), and (15).

Item (14) cab Taxicab
 * cab **turn**

Item (15) memo memorandum
 * memo **riolet**

Errors attributed to **incomplete application of rules** are mostly found in errors type 4 which is **failure to give the correct cut for the suitable clipped word** in question (1) as shown in items (6), and (1).

Item (6) Al Albert
 * Al **cara**

Item (1) Fred Erick
 * Fred **phonic**

A large number of the subjects' errors might be ascribed to **false concepts hypothesized** as shown in error type 5 which is **failure to give the original words of the given clipped words** in question (2) in items (1), and (15).

Item (1) porno ----- pornographic
 * porno ----- **pronominal**

Item (15) flu ----- influenza
 * flu ----- **flunce**

The total number of this kind of errors is (26.3).

3.2.1.3 Context of Learning

The third major source of errors, though it overlaps with both types of transfer, is the " Context ". It refers to the influence of the situation of learning, i.e., classroom. Buck, Byrnes, and Thompson (1989:3) define context as " the circumstances or

settings in which a person uses language". The context of learning's influence can be noticed obviously in the second question in item (17).

Item (17) Gene ----- Eugene
* Gene ----- **Gene**

The total number of this kind of errors is (4.06).

3.2.1.4 Communication Strategies

There are strategies employed by a learner to convey a message to a hearer. The learner may simply use his native language whether he knows that language or not. There are many communicative strategies but some of them have been observed in the subjects' responses such as **guessing** which refers to clues that either language or not language based, including knowledge of a context, world, or text structure. The following examples are from question (2), items (19 and 20):

Item (19) Phil ----- Philosophy
Item (20) curio ----- curiessoil

The deployment of such a strategy results in error type 3 in question (2). This type of error produces responses that do not yield any type of answer i.e., **giving no answer**. The total number of error is (17.63).

4. Conclusions

- 1- It is sufficient sometimes to depend on the general rule of clipping for determining the clipped parts.
- 2- Minor word formation processes (i.e. clipping) shows different frequencies. So, they have limited productivity.
- 3- Iraqi EFL university students at the second stage fail to use clipping on both of the two levels i.e. recognition and production. This is proved by the high rate of errors (104.8, 1781) committed by the sample students. This validates the first hypothesis of the study which states that Iraqi EFL university students face difficulties in using clipping.
- 3- The analysis concerning the second question states that most of the subjects fail to give the original words of the clipped words . This is

evident from the rate of their incorrect responses to these questions which is (78.3,1331) whereas the rate of their correct ones is (21.7,369). Such rate confirms the second hypothesis.

4- Five types of errors are made by the subjects in the field of using clipping. The errors types pinpointed by this study can be summed up as follows:

- 1- Failure to choose the correct cut for the suitable clipped word.
- 2- Using familiar words in more than one place.
- 3- Giving no answer.
- 4- Failure to give the correct cut for the suitable clipped word.
- 5- Failure to give the original words of the given clipped words.

5- The reasonable causes underlying the subjects' low performance can be attributed to the following factors that are organized hierarchically relying on the rate of the committed errors in the whole test:

I- Intralingual transfer which forms most of the subjects' errors and it accounts for (26.3) of their total errors. The inadequate understanding of using clipping contribute towards making the subjects depend on overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, false concepts, hypothesized, and failure to learn conditions for rule application.

II- The communication strategies in using L2 knowledge are deployed when learners do not have the adequate linguistic means for the concept they wish to express. Such strategies form (17.63) of their total errors.

III- Interlingual transfer which refers to the subjects' use of their native language's rules instead of using second language's rules in the production of the clipped words. This kind of errors forms (2.01) of their errors.

IV- Context of Learning constitutes (4.06) of the subjects' total errors. The insufficient focus given to clipping especially in their textbooks may be the major cause behind the rate of this kind of errors.

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