

## LINGUISTICS

### ARAB EFL LEARNERS' ACQUISITION OF VERBS OF SENSES

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#### ABSTRACT

This study attempts to explore the difficulties that Arab EFL learners of English encounter in the use of five verbs of senses when used as copulas, main verbs, main verbs with a metaphorical use, and as parts of idioms. A questionnaire consisting of three parts was specially designed to elicit the necessary data for this study at the levels of recognition and production. The subjects of the study were 30 randomly selected senior English major university students. The results of the study show that the students encountered tangible difficulties in using the five target verbs. A hierarchy of difficulty was established and the main causes of the problem were identified.

#### 1. Introduction

The two essential constituents in the structure of any English sentence are the NP and VP. Proper grammatical and semantic knowledge of these two constituents is essential for successful communication. Verbs, the first major constituent of any well-formed sentence, can be categorized according to different syntactic and semantic parameters. One of the most common classifications is the one that categorizes verbs into *state* and *action* verbs. The former is defined by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999: 120) as verbs that “do not involve change. They depict a state situation that is assumed to last more or less indefinitely.” The second, action or activity verbs, are perceived as “durative and describe ongoing action” (Celce-Murcia – Larsen-Freeman 1999: 119).

State verbs include different classes such as verbs of emotion, cognition, perception and sense. Verbs of senses are those that describe one's feelings, perception or sensation of something. In their classification of verbs, Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 47) refer to the class of verbs that includes the five verbs in our study as “verbs of inert perception and cognition”. In their book *A student's*

*grammar of the English language* (1990), Greenbaum and Quirk further classify stative verbs into five subcategories including those that indicate “states of perception” (1990: 55). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999: 120) refer to such verbs as verbs of “sensory perception”, which include *smell, see, hear, taste, feel*, etc.

In this paper, the authors investigate the verbs of senses in terms of the difficulties they pose for Arab EFL learners. They endeavor to explore the extent to which upper-intermediate Arab learners of English can demonstrate an ability to comprehend and use the verbs of senses when used as copulas (referring to sensing and sensation), main verbs, main verbs with meaning extension (metaphorical use) and finally when used as parts of idioms. More specifically, the study seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1) How well can Arab EFL learners semantically differentiate the verbs of senses from each other?
- 2) How well can they use these verbs properly when used as copulas, main verbs, main verbs with meaning extension and finally as parts of idioms at the levels of both recognition and production?
- 3) What difficulties do learners encounter in using these verbs of senses?
- 4) What implications for teaching EFL can such a study provide?

## 2. Review of literature

Foreign language learners usually encounter different types of difficulties in the process of learning a target language, and Arab EFL learners are no exception. Many studies have been conducted to identify the problems that these learners encounter in the various stages of learning English and at the various linguistic levels starting from the segmental phonemes up to the level of sentence and discourse. Such studies have proved that acquiring the semantic and syntactic behavior of verbs tends to be more troublesome than is the case with nouns. This difficulty may be attributed to the fact that verbs are associated with complex semantic and syntactic features pertaining to tense, time, aspect and phase. Thus, verbs are cognitively more demanding than nouns in learning (Gentner 1981, 1982, 2006; Gropen et al. 1991; Kersten – Smith 2002; Mandler 1996).

A number of researchers investigated how children and young learners acquire certain linguistic aspects. For example, Parish, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2006) conducted a study on a sample of 49 children in order to identify the factors that determine the acquisition of verbs. They were able to identify five major factors that play an important role in verb acquisition. These factors are: (1) the variety of syntactic frames in which a verb is used; (2) repetition (especially in the ostensive context) and distributed learning; (3) multiple exemplars and corrective feedback; (4) actions with goals/results; and (5) pragmatic cues.

Furthermore, Papafragou and Selimis (2010) investigated how young Greek learners acquire motion verbs in English. They found that Greek and English encode the concept of motion in different ways, a matter which creates difficulties and causes confusion to Greek learners of English and vice versa.

On the other hand, other researchers examined how adult foreign language learners acquire lexical items, especially verbs. In her unpublished Master's thesis, Rogers (2006) examined foreign students' acquisition of verbs in English. An attempt was made to answer a number of questions, chief among which are:

- a) How do the learners differ with respect to background characteristics?
- b) To what extent do learners differ with respect to verb use in writing?
- c) To what extent do learners differ with respect to verb use in speaking?
- d) How do learners differ with respect to verb use in both the speaking and writing tasks?

Other researchers investigated the acquisition of certain syntactic features of certain verbs. For example, Joo (2003) investigated the Korean learners' knowledge of locative alternation in certain English verbs. The researcher found that Korean and English are similar in terms of broad-range constraints, but dissimilar in terms of narrow-range constraints for locative alternations. It was also found that interlingual differences between Korean and English were influential factors in the acquisition of Korean students of locative alternation in English.

Hu (2007) conducted a study to investigate how adult Chinese immigrants who came in contact with the Spanish language and Ecuadorian culture acquire the Spanish morpho-syntactic (or grammatical) features of the present verb tense. Data were elicited from 26 adults who came into contact with the Spanish language. The researcher analyzed the influence of a number of factors on the process of acquisition such as: (1) person of the verb form, (2) alternative form used, (3) type of subject, (4) age of speakers, and (5) household composition. The findings of the study indicated that the subjects had a great tendency to use the third person singular form whether there is agreement or not. When there was a lack of subject/verb agreement, the participants used the third person singular form. In addition to the third person singular forms, other incorrect uses were of non-conjugated forms, infinitives and gerunds, and specific cases of use of incorrect plurals.

Lennon (1996) analyzed the errors that advanced German learners of English as a foreign language made in lexical verb choice of frequently used verbs such as *put*, *go*, *recognize* and *take*. The findings of this study revealed that 13% of the errors committed were in verb choice. Although the target verbs were of

high frequency, the subjects displayed lack of knowledge of collocational probabilities and restrictions as well as confusion in distinguishing the semantic boundaries of verbs. The author concluded that “teaching at the advanced level should aim not only to increase the word store but also to flesh out the incomplete or ‘skeleton’ entries which even advanced learners may have for high-frequency verbs” (Lennon 1996: 209).

Another more detailed study was conducted by Altenberg and Granger (2001) to investigate EFL learners’ use of high frequency verbs, and the verb *make* in particular. The study attempted to answer the following questions: Do learners tend to over- or underuse these verbs? Are high-frequency verbs error-prone or safe? What part does transfer play in misuse of these verbs? The findings of the study revealed that foreign advanced learners of English encounter great difficulty with the high-frequently used verb ‘make’. Relevant pedagogical recommendations to teaching lexical items were also suggested.

Saeed and Fareh (2006) explored the salient contextual consideration that determine the use of the synonymous verbs *steal*, *rob*, and *burglarize*. The researchers were able to identify a list of semantic features that characterize each verb and make it distinct from the others. They also recommended that further research be conducted to differentiate other confusing classes of verbs that may create difficulties for foreign language learners such as the verbs of motion, verbs of completion and verbs of saying. In response to the recommendations of that study, Fareh (2006) examined the Arab learners’ competence in using the English verbs of saying at the levels of recognition and production. The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which university Arab EFL learners have acquired the verbs of saying at the two levels of linguistic competence, i.e. recognition and production. The findings of the study revealed that the acquisition level of Arab learners of English of the target verbs was far from being academically acceptable. The percentage of acquisition was found to be 61%. Therefore, it was recommended that further detailed studies be conducted to examine the uses of potentially confusing words, especially with regard to their subtle semantic and syntactic behavior.

Another study was conducted by Saeed (2009). In this study, the author investigated Arab EFL learners’ mastery of modals at the level of recognition and production. Using a questionnaire that assesses learners’ ability to recognize and use modals accurately, the author found that the overall performance of a randomly selected group of 30 English major university students was rather low. The average percentage of accurate responses was 64% in the recognition part against 49% in the production part. The study delineated the major difficulties that Arab EFL learners encounter in learning modals and proposed a set of

recommendations that are hoped to set the scene for teaching modals properly. Again, such low results in the proper use of modal verbs motivated the authors to investigate other groups of verbs that are very frequently used and that may pose difficulties for Arab EFL learners such as the verbs of senses, the focus of this study.

### 3. Rationale

Lexical knowledge constitutes an indispensable component of learning a foreign language. Knowing the meaning of vocabulary items as well as their collocations, lexical chunks, semantic and syntactic features and constraints are essential for idiomatic and fluent communication in language. This knowledge is perceived as a prerequisite that learners should possess in order to develop their overall communicative competence at the levels of reception and production. Acquisition studies are not confined to a certain linguistic area rather than another. In fact, they should cover all linguistic levels. However, research in second language acquisition has focused more on the acquisition of certain grammatical aspects and slightly overlooked others. Ellis (1986) stated,

Second language acquisition refers to all aspects of language that the language learner needs to master. However, the focus has been on how L2 learners acquire grammatical sub-systems, such as negatives or interrogatives, or grammatical morphemes such as the plural {s} or the definite and indefinite articles. Research has tended to ignore other levels of language (Ellis 1986: 5).

This study investigates upper-intermediate to pre-advanced Arab learners of English acquisition of a certain category of highly frequent verbs, namely the verbs of senses.

The role that vocabulary plays in the process of language learning has been emphasized in a number of studies including Beck et al. (1982); Stahl (1983); Laufer (1992); and Coady (1993) among many others. These studies elaborated the significant role of vocabulary in improving reading comprehension and reported a considerable correlation between vocabulary knowledge and high achievement in reading comprehension.

On the other hand, lexical errors in the performance of foreign language learners very often lead to a breakdown in communication since they disrupt comprehension. Gass and Selinker (2001: 372) state that "lexical errors constitute the most serious and disruptive obstacles to communication". This implies that it is easier for native speakers to understand an utterance or a sentence that is grammatically ill-formed, but with properly used vocabulary than to understand the same sentence or utterance with perfect grammar, but with wrongly used vocabulary.

A number of factors motivated the researchers to conduct such a study, including the following:

- a) lack of lexical acquisition studies conducted on Arab EFL learners at university level
- b) the important role that vocabulary plays in communication
- c) confusion in the use of the target verbs by EFL learners
- d) recommendations of other studies to further investigate the EFL learners' competence in commonly used verbs such as the verbs of senses

#### 4. Methodology

To investigate the extent to which Arab EFL learners have mastered the meanings and uses of the verbs of senses, the authors designed a questionnaire that comprises three major parts: recognition, production and grammaticality judgment. In the first two major parts, the five verbs in the study are represented by twenty exemplifying sentences, most of which were extracted from dictionaries. Each verb is represented by four sentences, showing its use as: (a) a copula, (b) a main verb (MV), (c) a main verb in an idiom, and (d) a main verb with a meaning extension, i.e. an extended meaning of the verb that differs slightly or completely from the original 'sensing' attribute characteristic of these verbs.

In the production version of the questionnaire, the subjects were asked to complete the test items with appropriate verbs from the list provided at the beginning of the test. In the second part of the questionnaire, i.e. the recognition part, which comprised twenty multiple choice sentences, the subjects were asked to select the most appropriate verb. Finally, the grammaticality judgment section consisted of 20 items in which the subjects were asked to judge the grammatical and or semantic well-formedness of twenty sentences and correct those that they perceived as incorrect. Therefore, this section was used to provide extra evidence for the recognition as well as the production components of the questionnaire. The subjects were asked to decide or recognize whether a sentence is well-formed or not (recognition part) and to provide the correct form whenever a sentence was judged ungrammatical (production part).

The following table shows the distribution of the five verbs in the study in both the production and the recognition versions of the questionnaire:

Table 1. Test item numbers representing the uses of each verb

	Recognition Version					Production Version				
	feel	look	smell	sound	taste	feel	look	smell	sound	taste
<i>Copula</i>	4	15	19	1	14	3	13	1	10	12
<i>MV</i>	6	3	18	2	17	4	2	5	20	19
<i>Mean- ing Exten- sion</i>	12	5	20	8	13	15	16	18	17	7
<i>Idiom</i>	16	9	7	11	10	6	9	11	8	14

Thus, in the recognition part of the questionnaire, item number 6, for instance, is an example of the use of the verb *feel* as a main verb (MV), whereas test item number 6 in the production part represents the idiomatic use of the verb *feel*.

Before distributing the questionnaire to the randomly selected students, the authors gave it to a native speaker colleague in their department to check if all the examples were appropriate and that only one answer in the case of the multiple choice part was possible. The questionnaires were slightly modified in accordance with the native speaker's feedback.

## 5. Respondents

The respondents in this study are senior English major students from the University of Sharjah. At the time of the study, the English proficiency level of the students was supposed to be upper intermediate or pre-advanced given the fact that all of them had met the Department admission requirement that is obtaining a minimum score of 500 on the TOEFL. In addition, all of them had spent more than three years in the Department and had studied all the language skills courses as well as most of the content ones in their B.A. program including Extensive Reading, Advanced Language Skills, Syntax 1, Syntax 2, Discourse analysis, Error analysis in addition to a number of literature courses.

The students were given the production part of the questionnaire first and a week later they were given the recognition part in order to minimize the washback effect, i.e. the effect of learning that may result from performing the recognition task at the beginning. The students were allotted enough time to do both parts of the questionnaire.

## 6. Data analysis

The results were fed into a table that was designed to calculate the correct and incorrect answers of the respondents on each verb use. Each correct response in the recognition version of the questionnaire was given a score of one, whereas each incorrect one was given a score of zero. On the other hand, students' responses in the production version of the questionnaire were calculated as follows:

- a) a score of two was given if the selected verb was correct and the form was correct too
- b) a score of one was given if the selected verb was correct, but the form was wrong
- c) a score of zero was given to the response that was incorrect.

The following example illustrates the calculation process:

- 5) Once you have \_\_\_\_\_ luxury, it is very hard to settle for anything else.

Here, a score of 2 is given to the use of *tasted*; a score of 1 is given to the use of *taste*, and a score of 0 is given to the use of any other verb.

## 7. Findings and Discussion

### 7. 1. Recognition

Data analysis reveals that the students encountered a tangible difficulty in recognizing the appropriate use of the five verbs in the study. Table (2), below, shows the general results of the four categories of use.

Table 2. Recognition: Correct responses and rank of difficulty

Verb use	Average	Percentage	Rank of Difficulty
Copula	22.8	76	3
Main verb	27.4	91.3	4
Meaning Extension	16.2	54	2
Idiom	15.4	51.3	1
Average	20.45	68.075	

As Table (2) shows, only 68% of the students' responses were accurate, which means that about one third of the items in the questionnaire received incorrect answers. This result is rather startling, given the fact that the randomly selected students in the study are supposed to be pre-advanced in English. Scrutinizing the percentages of the individual categories, we can observe that the use of these verbs as main verbs emerged as the easiest for students, i.e. occupying the last position in the hierarchy of difficulty. On the other hand, the use of these verbs as parts of idioms constituted a concrete difficulty for students; nearly half the items in the questionnaire that exemplify such use received wrong responses. Similarly, the metaphorical uses of the verbs (meaning extension) emerged as the second most difficult for learners, with virtually half the items representing this use receiving incorrect responses. In fact, only four of the thirty students in the study identified the appropriate answer in the following sentence:

- 6) Perhaps you could \_\_\_\_\_ the chairwoman out before the meeting, to see which way she's going to vote.  
 a. sound    b. taste    c. feel    d. look

Most of the students opted for *look* as a response in this sentence. Apparently, they thought that the expression *look somebody out* meant *look for*, i.e. 'look for the chairwoman before the meeting to see how she would vote'. Perhaps *sound out* may not be one of the very commonly used expressions in daily communication, yet the fact that only four students were able to come up with the right answer is rather surprising.

The use of the verbs as copulas was fairly easy for learners, though not as easy as it was expected. The authors thought that this category would emerge as the easiest for learners. However, examining the individual responses of the thirty students in the study, the researchers found that the learners encountered a difficulty comprehending the sentence that exemplifies the use of the verb *taste* as a copula. The following is the sentence used for this purpose:

- 7) It \_\_\_\_\_ like humus. Let me try it one more time.  
 a. smells    b. feels    c. tastes    d. looks

The following table shows the students' responses to this item:

Table 3. Students' responses to the item that contains the verb *taste*

Verb	Smells	feels	tastes	looks
Ss' responses	4	5	10	11

The table shows that only 10 out of the thirty students in the study chose the right answer, namely *tastes*. Opting for answers such as *looks*, *feels* or *smells* implies that the learners were unable to make use of the context tailored in the example to assist them select the appropriate answer. If the sentence were: *It \_\_\_\_\_ like humus*, i.e. without the second part of the item, then almost all the choices would be acceptable. However, the continuation: *Let me try it one more time* provides a clear and unambiguous context that was hoped that it would help students opt for *tastes*.

The percentages of students' accurate responses to individual verbs are displayed in Table (4). The table shows the accurate responses each individual verb received together with the hierarchy of difficulty of these verbs and their categories of use, i.e. inter-verbal difficulty vs. intra-verbal difficulty.

Table 4. Recognition: Correct responses and rank of difficulty

Verb	Cop.	MV	M.ext	Idiom	Overall %	Rank of difficulty
look	26	30	28	23	89.16	5
sound	29	25	2	8	53.3	2
feel	22	29	22	24	80.83	4
taste	10	28	14	4	46.66	1
smell	27	25	15	18	70.83	3
Overall %	76	91.3	54	51.3	68.15	

As the table shows, the verb *look* emerged as the easiest for the subjects with a high percentage of correctness that approaches 90%. On the other hand, the verbs *taste* and *sound* occupy the lowest positions in terms of correct answers with percentages of correctness as low as 46 and 53 respectively. What is interesting in these results is the fact that the rank of difficulty in the use of individual verbs correlates with the frequency of use of such verbs in the language. According to the first 1000 Most Commonly Used English Words list, the five verbs in the study are ranked as follows:

Table 5. Rank of the five verbs in the study on the most common 1000 words list

Verb	look	sound	feel	smell
rank	70	103	422	988

Thus, the verb *look*, which emerged here as the easiest for learners is, in fact, among the first one hundred in the 1000 most common English words. On the other hand, the verb *taste* that occupies the highest rank in terms of difficulty for the EFL learners in the study is not among the 1000 most commonly used English words, an intriguing finding indeed. This interesting correlation holds with the other verbs in the study except for the verb *sound*. This finding proves that there is a correlation between the frequency of a word in English and the level of difficulty in the use of such word.

## 7.2. Production

As indicated above, the production component of the data elicitation technique consisted of 20 items and each verb was represented by four sentences that cover the uses of each verb as a copula, a main verb, part of an idiom and its use as part of a metaphor. The students were asked to fill in the blanks with the correct form of the appropriate verb (*look, feel, smell, sound or taste*). Table (6) below displays the averages and percentages of the subjects' correct responses on the production test.

Table 6. Production: Correct responses and rank of difficulty

Verb	Cop.	MV	M.ext	Idiom	Overall %	Rank of difficulty
look	93.3	83.3	56.6	48.3	70.4	5
sound	68.3	33.33	6.7	3.3	27.9	1
feel	83.3	76.7	18.3	60	59.5	3
taste	61.6	96.7	58.3	10	56.5	2
smell	86.7	95	38.3	46.6	66.7	4
Overall %	78.6	77	35.6	33.6	56.2	
Rank of Difficulty	4	3	2	1		

The Table shows the overall percentages of correct answers for each verb and the overall percentages of mastery for each use of each verb separately. A quick glance at the table reveals the hierarchy of difficulty among the verbs themselves (inter-verbal difficulty) and among their uses as well (intra-verbal difficulty).

The Table shows that the subjects' overall mastery level of the target verbs at the production level is rather low (56.2%), taking into consideration the fact that the subjects are university English language majors and have been studying English for more than 14 years at schools and at university. This low level of mastery is academically unacceptable because the target verbs are among the early words that foreign language learners are exposed to. They are also among the most common words in English, as indicated above.

As far as inter-verbal difficulty is concerned, Table (6) shows that the verb *sound* ranked first in terms of difficulty followed by the verbs *taste*, *feel*, *smell* and *look*; these results are more or less similar to those on the recognition component. Here, again, there is a correlation between the frequency of use of these verbs in daily communication and the level of difficulty as revealed in the production part of the questionnaire.

The findings also revealed that the subjects encountered a tangible difficulty in using these verbs. The overall percentage of correct answers was 56.2. This means that 43.8% of the subjects failed to answer the test items properly. Furthermore, this low level of performance clearly indicates that the subjects encountered a major problem in producing the target verbs.

Most of the problems that the subjects encountered can be summed up as follows:

- a) Mis-selection: The subjects replaced a verb with another because they were unable to distinguish among the verbs semantically. For example, the verb *sound* was very often replaced by *look* and the verb *look* was in many cases replaced by the verb *feel*. The verb *taste* was often replaced with the verbs *feel*, *look*, or it was left blank.
- b) Inaccurate use of verb forms: The subjects, for example, used *feel* instead of *feeling*, *sounds* instead of *sound*, or *smelling* instead of *smell*. This problem indicates that the subjects do not have an adequate knowledge of the syntactic behavior of the verbs. It might be convenient here to remember that knowing the syntactic behavior of a word is an essential component for knowing what a lexical item means in language learning.

As for the intra-verbal difficulty, the use of verbs in idioms was the most difficult aspect. The percentage of correct answers for all the subjects in the idiomatic uses of verbs was 33.6. This means that more than 66% of the subjects did not answer the items on the idiomatic use of verbs correctly. In this respect, the verb *sound* was often erroneously replaced by the verb *look*. This is probably due to two reasons. The blank space where the verb *sound* was required to be filled in was followed by the preposition *for*, a matter that tempted most of the subjects to opt for the verb *look* that is often followed with this preposition.

The second reason for such a difficulty may be attributed to the students' lack of knowledge and awareness of the idiomatic uses of verbs. They were not able to tell that the verb in this context was used idiomatically. Another example that represents this difficulty was manifest in the idiomatic use of the verb *taste* in item 14, which reads, "I want to taste the sky and feel alive".

The second most difficult aspect in each verb was the use of the verb in metaphors in which the basic meaning of the verb extends beyond its common use in daily life. The overall percentage of correct responses in the metaphorical use of the target verbs was 35.6. This also clearly shows a considerable difficulty in using the verbs metaphorically since more than 64% of the subjects answered it incorrectly.

The low performance of the subjects in these two areas of the verbs implies a methodological weakness in teaching vocabulary to foreign language learners. Therefore, teachers of English as a foreign language need to be made aware of the fact that knowing a lexical item involves, as Nation (1990: 31) puts it, adequate knowledge of its "denotation [meaning/s], connotations, spelling, pronunciation, grammatical behavior, collocations and register" (the choice of a vocabulary item according to the context in which it is used). This difficulty was manifest in the responses of most subjects who failed to select the correct verb in item (17) in the questionnaire, in which the verb *sound* was metaphorically used in the sentence "They have sent commissioners to sound for peace". The verb *smell* in item (18) "... I smell trouble" was often replaced with the verb *feel*.

Similar to the findings in the recognition part of the questionnaire, the analysis of the production section revealed that the idiomatic and metaphorical uses of the verbs were the most problematic to the learners. This difficulty is indicative of the way vocabulary items are taught to the learners, and it also reflects the manner in which lexical items are presented in textbooks. The low achievement in these two areas implies that the idiomatic and metaphorical uses of words are neither taught properly nor focused on in textbooks, despite the importance of metaphors and idioms in communication.

The third least difficult verb use was the use of these verbs as main verbs; the mastery level was 77%. This finding may be attributed to the fact that verbs are commonly used as main verbs and they rarely shift to a lower rank. The least difficult use of the target verbs was their use as copulas or linking verbs. The overall percentage of correct answers in the use of verbs as copulas was 78.6. This may be ascribed to the fact that the verbs of senses are the most common verbs that have copular uses.

It can be concluded that the major difficulties that students encounter at the intra-verbal level can be summed up as follows:

- a) Inadequate ability to use the verb idiomatically: the overall percentage of idiomatic uses of verbs was 33.6.
- b) Inadequate ability to use the verb metaphorically, as part of a metaphor: the overall percentage of correct answers in this respect was 35.6.

It might be expedient, at this point, to present the results of the subjects on the grammaticality judgment section. In this part, the data elicitation technique was, as indicated in the methodology section, a grammaticality judgment test in which the students were asked to decide whether each sentence was grammatically correct and to provide the correct answer when they decide that a sentence is ungrammatical. This section encompasses both recognition and production. The overall percentage of correct answers was 65. This percentage is very close to the overall mastery at the recognition and the production levels that is 62.14. This percentage also reflects the low achievement level of the subjects at the levels of recognition and production.

Table (7), below, shows the subjects' performance in both recognition and production.

Table 7. Production and recognition

Verb use	Recognition%	Production%
Copula	76	78.6
Main Verb	91.3	77
Meaning Extension (metaphor)	54	35.6
Idiom	51.3	33.6
Overall average	68.15	56.2

Table (7) indicates the differences between the performance of the subjects on the recognition and the production levels. It shows that the overall performance of the subjects in the recognition part is higher than that in the production. This finding is consistent with the findings of other researchers in this field. Brown (2000: 33) states: "research evidence indicates the general superiority of comprehension over production". Furthermore, we can argue that a large portion of the information we gain is stored in our passive memory and this means that we can recognize it more readily when we see or hear it rather than when we need to use it in speech or writing. The performance of the subjects is consistently higher in all tested aspects except in the use of the verbs as copulas, and this was due to the nature of sentences used in the questionnaire.

## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of the study indicate that university Arab learners of English encounter a tangible difficulty in attaining an adequate mastery level in the process of learning certain sets of English vocabulary. The overall mastery level in the three components of the test: recognition, production and grammaticality is noticeably low. Table (8) below shows the overall mastery level in three aspects.

Table 8. Overall mastery level of acquisition

Verb use	Recognition%	Production%	Grammaticality	Average
Copula	76	78.6		77.3
Main Verb	91.3	77		84.15
Meaning Extension (metaphor)	54	35.6		43.8
Idiom	51.3	33.6		42.45
			65	65
Overall average	68.15	56.2	62.54	62.54

This Table shows that the overall mastery level in production and recognition for the five verbs of senses is 62.54. This level of competence is rather low from an academic point of view. Although the target verbs are among the most frequent verbs that are taught to students at schools and universities, the subjects' mastery level of these verbs is unacceptable. This low level of achievement implies that the process of teaching and presenting vocabulary in EFL curricula and textbooks is far from being adequate. Vocabulary items are not taught properly in the various stages of learning. Focus seems to be more on teaching the dictionary meanings or the denotations of the lexical items than on teaching their idiomatic or metaphoric uses. This conclusion is substantiated by the findings that indicate a rather high level of performance in the uses of the target verbs as copulas and main verbs than in their uses in idioms and metaphors. The overall mastery levels for copulas and main verbs are 77.3 and 84.15 respectively. The performance of the subjects in the other aspects of meaning, i.e. metaphors and idioms, was strikingly low as can be seen in Table (8) above. These findings agree with those of Lennon (1996); Altenberg and Granger (2001); as well as those of Fareh (2006), who found that even advanced language learners encounter a considerable level of difficulty in acquiring the use of high frequency verbs especially as far as their idiomatic and metaphorical uses are concerned.

The findings of this study suggest that curricula designers and textbook writers need to take into account the various aspects of meaning in teaching vocabulary rather than just focusing on the basic meanings of lexical items. English language teachers should also be made aware of the components of meaning when they teach vocabulary. Depending on the level of learners, EFL teachers should present vocabulary items in contextualized sentences that make it easier for learners to grasp the various shades of meaning that a lexical item possesses.

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## APPENDIX

**Part A: Production.****PART I:**

Please fill in the blanks with suitable verbs from the box. *Make sure you use the correct form of the verb.*

**look feel smell sound taste**

- a) Your socks \_\_\_\_\_ terrible – why don't you wash them?
- b) He has \_\_\_\_\_ everywhere for his keys.
- c) I am still \_\_\_\_\_ a bit weak after my operation. It is probably the effect of the medication.
- d) Just \_\_\_\_\_ how cold my hands are!
- e) What is going on in the kitchen? I \_\_\_\_\_ something burning.
- f) I \_\_\_\_\_ on the top of the world today.
- g) Once you've \_\_\_\_\_ Sharjah's life style it's very hard to settle for anything else.
- h) Perhaps you could \_\_\_\_\_ the chairwoman out before the meeting, to see which way she's going to vote?
- i) "You \_\_\_\_\_ a million dollars in that suit!"
- j) Your comments \_\_\_\_\_ like the perfect description for this painting.
- k) We expected the General Manager get mad after Tom insulted him in front of everybody, but he just smiled and left. I \_\_\_\_\_ a rat!
- l) Hmm – what is in this cake? It \_\_\_\_\_ scrumptious. I could eat it all.
- l) She \_\_\_\_\_ fabulous in that red dress.
- m) I want to \_\_\_\_\_ the sky and feel alive.
- n) Everybody here \_\_\_\_\_ for Marry. She was harshly criticized.
- o) We \_\_\_\_\_ to have a good year.
- p) They have sent commissioners to \_\_\_\_\_ for peace.
- r) All the opponents are in the meeting this morning. I \_\_\_\_\_ trouble.
- s) I would like you to \_\_\_\_\_ this cake and see if it is appropriate for tonight's family party.
- t) If she \_\_\_\_\_ the danger signal, we will come to her rescue.

**Part B: Grammaticality Judgment**

Determine whether each of the following sentences is **grammatically correct (C)** or **incorrect (INC)**. Write C or INC on the lines provided and then correct those that are incorrect.

1 \_\_\_\_. This pasta tastes deliciously.

\_\_\_\_\_.

2 \_\_\_\_. This material is feeling very soft.

\_\_\_\_\_.

3 \_\_\_\_. He has been tasting the cake.

\_\_\_\_\_.

4 \_\_\_\_. Roses are smelling great in this garden.

\_\_\_\_\_.

5 \_\_\_\_. The cat is smelling the food.

\_\_\_\_\_.

6 \_\_\_\_. This room feels terribly cold.

\_\_\_\_\_.

7 \_\_\_\_. They have tasted blood. Now it is hard to control them.

\_\_\_\_\_.

8 \_\_\_\_. The food is tasting lovely.

\_\_\_\_\_.

9 \_\_\_\_. Your arguments are sounding fine.

\_\_\_\_\_.

10 \_\_\_\_. When it flicks like this, it is tasting or smelling the air.

\_\_\_\_\_.

11 \_\_\_\_. You look sickness.

\_\_\_\_\_.

12 \_\_\_\_. The alarm sounded and everybody was scared.

\_\_\_\_\_.

13 \_\_\_\_. He has a severe cold. He sounds awfully.

\_\_\_\_\_.

14 \_\_\_\_. I am happy – you are sounding good today.

\_\_\_\_\_.

15 \_\_\_\_. The soup has tasted good.

\_\_\_\_\_.

16 \_\_\_\_. The argument looked well.

\_\_\_\_\_.

17 \_\_\_\_. You have looked weird – what is the problem?

\_\_\_\_\_.

18 \_\_\_\_. These problems look trivial.

19 \_\_\_\_. It smells like daffodils.

20 \_\_\_\_. He feels as if he were a prince.

**Part C: Recognition.**

**Please circle the correct option (a, b, c or d).**

- 1 Your job \_\_\_\_\_ really interesting.  
a. looks    b. sounds    c. feels    d. tastes
- 2 I \_\_\_\_\_ in case of fire, \_\_\_\_\_ the alarm and leave the building.  
a. sound    b. look    c. feel    d. smell
- 3 This window \_\_\_\_\_ out onto a beautiful garden.  
a. sounds    b. looks    c. smells    d. feel
- 4 She \_\_\_\_\_ certain that she is right. The problem is she cannot convince us all.  
a. feels    b. looks    c. sounds    d. smells
- 5 I'm \_\_\_\_\_ to start my own business. Wish me luck.  
a. sounding    b. looking    c. feeling    d. smelling
- 6 This is a high quality material. You can \_\_\_\_\_ the smoothness of leather.  
a. taste    b. look    c. feel    d. smell
- 7 They have been working together lately despite the fact that they always disagree with each other. I \_\_\_\_\_ a rat!  
a. taste    b. smell    c. feel    d. look
- 8 They have sent commissioners to \_\_\_\_\_ for peace.  
a. sound    b. look    c. feel    d. smell
- 9 You \_\_\_\_\_ a million dollars in that dress, honey!  
a. sound    b. look    c. feel    d. taste
- 10 I want to \_\_\_\_\_ the sky and feel alive.  
a. smell    b. feel    c. taste    d. look
- 11 Perhaps you could \_\_\_\_\_ the chairwoman out before the meeting to see which way she's going to vote?  
a. look    b. feel    c. sound    d. taste
- 12 I really \_\_\_\_\_ for you. I'm sorry it turned out this way.  
a. smell    b. feel    c. taste    d. look
- 13 Once you have \_\_\_\_\_ luxury, it is very hard to settle for anything else.  
a. smelled    b. felt    c. tasted    d. looked

- 14 It \_\_\_\_\_ like humus. Let me try it one more time.  
a. smells    b. feels    c. tastes    d. looks
- 15 He \_\_\_\_\_ depressed today. He has not uttered a single word since he came – what is the problem?  
a. smells    b. feels    c. sounds    d. looks
- 16 I \_\_\_\_\_ on the top of the world today.  
a. smell    b. feel    c. taste    d. look
- 17 Could you \_\_\_\_\_ the soup and tell me if the salt is OK?  
a. smell    b. feel    c. taste    d. look
- 18 I \_\_\_\_\_ something burning.  
a. smell    b. feel    c. taste    d. look
- 19 Nice scent! It \_\_\_\_\_ like daffodils.  
a. smells    b. feels    c. tastes    d. sounds
- 20 They have not been talking to each other lately. I \_\_\_\_\_ trouble.  
a. smell    b. feel    c. taste    d. look