



**CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN USING SYNONYMS  
IN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN ENGLISH OF SOPHOMORES  
AND SENIORS AT CAN THO UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM**

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**Abstract:**

Speaking and writing are crucial skills that have a significant impact on the effectiveness of foreign language learning. Using synonyms in speaking and writing correctly has always been challenging for learners. This study was conducted with the aim to identify common errors in using synonyms in spoken and written English and providing solutions to solve the problems. The participants in this research were 50 second-year and 50 final-year students from the EFL high-quality program at Can Tho University. Two tools were used to collect data: A multiple-choice test and a questionnaire. With the test, data on the student's proficiency in synonyms were collected. With the questionnaire, students' perceptions and attitudes toward synonyms were measured. By using the SPSS program, the responses to the test were analyzed by calculating the frequency and percentage of correct and incorrect answers. The responses to the questionnaire were measured with descriptive analysis of errors and solutions using synonyms. The findings revealed that students often misunderstood the meaning of synonyms and they did not understand all the layers of meaning of a word. This study contributes to the field of linguistics by presenting several possible solutions that can assist students in avoiding the misuse of synonyms in spoken and written English.

**Keywords:** difficulties, using synonyms, solutions, synonyms

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, English has become the only language for world citizens. Most universities around the world have used English in their instruction. Teaching and learning English is thus crucial for communicative purposes to cope with the growing national and international demands for English skills. It's said that the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all integrated and contribute to learners' understanding of the world around them. While reading and listening are receptive skills, writing and speaking are productive skills, which require learners to use a wide variety of vocabulary and synonyms to make their performance more proficient and impressive. In Vietnam today, English is considered a foreign language, and is used for academic achievements, career improvement, and traveling abroad. To cope with the growing demands, efforts from the government and educators involved have been made to the educational system to help boost the learners' English performance. Most universities have prioritized building a solid foundation of English for students, especially for students who major in the English language. In fact, during the learning process, students have faced lots of challenges especially with using words and synonyms appropriate for situations in speaking and writing. This leads to low self-esteem, restraint, lack of confidence, and limited ability to express themselves in a variety of ways when communicating in English, even affecting students' writing. In the context of teaching and learning, the problem of learners' recognition, finding solutions, and further research on synonyms have been paid proper attention to yet. Currently, the number of research on synonyms in Vietnam has been limited, i.e. it has not been exploited and explored in depth so far there are a few typical studies such as those of author Tran Thi Le Dung (2017, 2020) about synonyms from the perspective of semantics and pragmatics in the article "Comparing English and Vietnamese synonyms in terms of semantics and pragmatics" and "Semantic characteristics of some synonym sequences in English and Vietnamese". In addition, outstanding is the concern about common mistakes when using synonyms of Vo Thi Dieu Thao (2021). The author stated that *"correctly understanding words and the context in which synonyms are used will have a direct impact on the content of the communication. In the article, the author has specifically analyzed the common errors when using synonyms and proposed solutions to improve this problem"*.

In the world, errors in main synonyms in English have been a concern for many researchers because of their important roles in the process of communication, conveying messages, and expressing goodwill in each context. Common synonym errors have been analyzed and evaluated over the years in many countries with many different aspects, depending on the region. The views on errors are very diverse and the method of error analysis is also extremely rich. According to Dulay (1982), errors are classified according to linguistic composition, using linguistic terms: phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Richard (1993) has distinguished errors between language and content. According to him, interlanguage errors are *"those created solely by the adverse influence of the first language."* Lado (1957) agrees with Richard and describes that the error between

languages is interference, the negative influence of the mother tongue. In India, there has been a lot of research on semantics in general, Abdalla (2017) assesses learners' errors in using synonyms in their research. In addition, Khazaal (2019) analyzes and explains the errors university students make when using synonyms in English for specific purposes possible. Moreover, revealing the difficulties that students face in using synonyms. This study demonstrates that the most common mistakes are due to limited vocabulary, which causes countless challenges for learners in choosing the appropriate synonyms in different contexts. In China, the authors Liu and Zhong (2016) examine the use of four sets of synonyms by intermediate/advanced EFL/ESL learners and native English speakers. In addition, researcher Phoocharoensil (2010) studied synonyms based on word corpus which illustrates that we cannot replace all synonyms meaning for each other in all contexts because synonyms are different in all factors and the author has also helped learners distinguish synonyms Kayaoğlu (2013) has shown the feasibility of using a corpus to help learners distinguish between synonyms that are close to the same and have similar meanings but cannot be substituted for other words and this article suggests that corpus can be a very rich and effective source of experimental data for both teachers and students for foreign learning language becomes more meaningful and interesting. From the above-mentioned research, with the context at Can Tho University, this study is intended to find out the challenges and possible solutions in using synonyms in speaking and writing English. The objective of this study is to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are common mistakes that students make when using synonyms in speaking and writing English?
- 2) What are possible solutions to correct the mistakes in synonyms?

## 2. Literature review

According to the "Great Soviet Encyclopedia", Volume 23, the term synonymy is derived from Greek. In Greek, Synonymia means "the same name", indicating the relationship between two expressions that are synonymous but not identical. Equivalence here is understood as correspondence either with the same sign (denotative) (event, object, etc.) or with the same significance (what is signified currently in the language). In English, the term Synonymy means "synonymous phenomenon", and Synonym is "synonym". Many Western linguists have focused their research on the phenomenon of lexical synonymy, they try to explore the complex aspects of semantic relationships in the totality of word meanings and especially try to identify synonyms and analyze how synonyms function when substituted in sentences.

Cruse (1986, p. 285) argues: "*it would be incorrect to define synonyms as identical in meaning because no two units of meaning are completely identical*". According to Cruse, synonyms denote the phenomenon of two or more different linguistic forms having the same meaning. The phenomenon of synonymy is broader than that of synonyms. Synonymy is the relationship between constrained morphemes, predicates, lexical units, phrases, clauses, sentences, and clauses. Thus, synonymy can be classified either into

lexical or syntactic synonymy. Lexical synonymy is concerned with constrained morphemes, predicates, and fixed language. Lexical synonymy is the relation of meaning between two or more lexical units that have the same sense in contexts in which they are interchangeable.

The syntactic synonymy phenomenon concerns clauses, sentences, and clauses, which can be explained as roundabouts when the contents of the sentences are identical: Mary fed the cat. The cat was many fed by Mary. It was the cat that Mary provided (Mary fed the cat. The cat was fed by Mary. It was the cat that Mary provided). (Can et al., 2009, p9).

Cruse (1986, p.293) also argues that it is possible to establish a scale of synonymity - "*some words are more synonymous with each other than others.*" The scale that Cruse showed includes absolute synonymy and near synonymy. The phenomenon of complete synonymy is a situation where two or more predicates are identical when they have precisely the same meaning. There are two things worth noting. First, the function or use of one of the synonyms will gradually become unnecessary, and as a result, it will soon be phased out. Second, it is difficult to prove the interchangeability of synonyms in all contexts because exceptions are inevitable, i.e., although two words are synonymous, they are still not interchangeable in specific contexts. Therefore, there is no absolute synonymy phenomenon in the lexicon of natural languages. It is generally accepted that the phenomenon of complete synonymy is impossible or nonexistent. It can only be considered as a reference point on the proposed scale of synonymy or as the primary criterion for determining a synonymous phenomenon.

Murphy (2013) considers that synonyms are words with relatively close or similar meanings: mist/fog, stream/brook, drive/plunge. The phenomenon of synonymy is associated with the overlap of definitions and meanings. The implications of the phenomenon of synonyms overlap to a very high degree, but not completely. William gives the opinion that there is no case in which the similarity of meaning is not based on the similarity of usage - with "use" being used in the sense that he explained. He wants to claim that the two banners are synonymous insofar as, and only in so far as they have the same usage - "usage" in the sense he has explained. According to William, two banners are considered to have the same user only insofar as (a) the two banners are sentences, and both sentences express the same linguistic fact, that is, perform the same thing or more language acts, or (b) the two expressions are sentence components and they can be substituted for each other in sentences without changing the language-action potentials of those sentences. Although this formula provides a necessary condition for similarity of usage, it is clear to William that it gives a sufficient condition. He noted that we should not say the two sentences "*I have just been to dinner at the White House / I have just had dinner at the White House*" and "*Heisenberg has just asked me to write a face to his latest book / Heisenberg has just asked me to write a preface to his latest book*" is meaningful. However, it is likely that each of these sentences performs the same linguistic act, namely to impress the listener. Nor will we say that 'dinner' and 'call' are synonymous even though "*I have just been to dinner at the White House / I have just been to dinner at the White House*" and "*I*

*have just been to call at the White House / I've just been called into the White House*" mean the same thing to the listener, so he said, if we want the same meaning based on the same user then we do not consider the similarity of language action potentials a sufficient condition for similarity in usage. William points out that the adequate need for similarity in use must be more adequately stated as follows: The two banners have the same usage insofar as, and only insofar as, is (a) that the two expressions are both sentences, and both sentences perform one or more of the same linguistic actions *d* (when '*d*' describes some linguistic act); or (b) the two banners are sentence components, and they are interchangeable in the sentence without changing the sentencing potential to perform language actions *d*. The task is to find a reasonable explanation for '*d*', so that the similarity of meaning is associated with the similarity in usage, where the similarity of usage is related to the similarity of the potential to perform linguistic actions.

According to O'Grady, synonyms are words that have the same meaning in some contexts. For example: big (to) – large (wide); youth (teenager) – adolescent (adolescent). Although youth - teenager or adolescent - adolescent both refer to people of the same age, the word adolescent means "young" in the phrase: He's such an adolescent! (He's like a minor!). Radford defines synonymy as "the sameness of meaning". However, this simple definition does not say much about the true nature of synonymy. Synonyms are inconsistent. necessarily have the same meaning. The meanings of two or more synonyms may differ in some respects and to a certain extent.

Palmer (1981) found that synonyms cannot be perfect synonyms because two words with exactly the same meaning would not exist. In the same language. He lists several reasons for the lack of absolute synonymy. For example, synonyms can belong to different dialects of a language, or farming conditions vary depending on where the people who use them live, e.g. cowshed and barn cow (cowhouse). Or the synonyms may belong to different contexts, like formal versus casual (e.g. dead versus dead); or synonyms can convey different sentimental or evaluative meanings, even though the expressive meanings are the same (e.g., initiate and initial express agreement and disagreement; especially; In particular, the first word of the synonym pair is said to convey a more positive meaning than the latter - the thesis author gives examples to illustrate better what Palmer is saying). Palmer also observed that the interchangeability of synonyms depends on specific words. To identify true synonyms, Palmer proposes a way to test whether a synonymy word can be completely substituted for another in the same important context.

Church et al. (1994) suggest the substitution test to help lexicographers verify if words are assumed to be close synonyms, namely if one word can be replaced by another word in the same context so that the overall meaning of the message does not change. The degree of substitution of such words is high, and therefore they are high capacity is a synonym. Church also discusses synonyms: this is the semantic relationship between semantically similar words, or close synonyms, located on a scale of synonymy such that each close synonym can be found. sees itself on one rung of the scale. The concept of synonymy is similar to that proposed by Cruse in terms of synonymy, but with the

difference that Church does clearer passages to allow words to move from synonym to antonym.

According to Lyons (1995), it is necessary to distinguish between absolute synonymy and quasi-synonymy. Absolute synonyms are rarer than near-synonyms. It occurs when all the meanings of certain words are the same; when synonyms can be used equally in all circumstances; and when semantics are equivalent in both descriptive and non-descriptive terms, that is, in terms of the state of real-world things they describe, and in terms of the speaker's beliefs, attitudes, and feelings show. But absolute synonyms are not easily established because, even words that can be assumed to have exactly the same meaning, may not represent the phenomenon of absolute synonyms: for example, *big* has at least one (adult) meaning that is not synonymous with *to*, "*because of the polysemantic nature of big*" and the words *big* and *big* cannot be used the same way in all contexts because they have different idioms in use.

Saeed (1997) reconsiders what Palmer (1981) has noticed, namely the rarity of absolute synonyms, and in particular, he emphasizes the importance of grammar, style, and combination in choosing synonyms that, as he pointed out, can convey different attitudes of speakers in relation to certain situations (e.g. neutrality) positive, negative or negative). As an example, he cites words like *fuzz*, *pig*, or *slime* that convey a negative speaker attitude, while *police* (*cop*) seems to be a neutral word count. The above semantics scholars observe that absolute synonymy is rare because when two semantics are identical, they do not tend to survive in the same language. If two semantics coexist, there are two outcomes: either disappear or one develops a new meaning. So-called synonyms often tend to be "indicated" almost as synonyms, that is, terms that have slightly different meanings, especially using expressive meanings, or terms that are characterized by different meanings or languages in terms of the user context (such as domain, syntactic framework, distribution).

### 3. Methodology

To prepare this paper, relevant books, journals and websites have been used as secondary data. Primary data were also collected and analyzed to examine the practical situation of using synonyms, students' perceptions and attitudes towards synonyms, and possible solutions. The research methods employed for this study are:

- 1) Literature review to have a clear idea about the topic and its components, to collect relevant data and existing literature on using synonyms in speaking and writing English.
- 2) A test with 100 students from the School of Foreign Languages, CTU to determine their competence in using synonyms.
- 3) A questionnaire survey with 100 students from the School of Foreign Languages, CTU to analyze stud students' perceptions and attitudes towards synonyms.
- 4) A semi-structured Interview with 20 students to find out possible solutions to correct mistakes in using synonyms.

The responses to the test and the questionnaire were analyzed by calculating the frequency and percentage of correct and incorrect answers, using the SPSS program (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences), statistical techniques such as percentage and mean were used, and tables were created to illustrate the studied data. To summarize, this section discusses the study's methodology. The findings of the data analysis will be examined in relevance to the study's hypotheses in the next section.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

*\*LNN: semantic errors*

*\*LCP: syntax errors*

*\*LKH: collocation errors*

*\*LNC: context errors*

*\*GPLNN: semantic error solutions*

*\*GPLCP: syntax error solutions*

*\*GPLKH: collocation error solutions*

*\*GPLNC: context error solutions*

#### a. Sources of error

**Table 1:** Sources of semantic and syntactic errors

		LNN1	LNN2	LNN3	LNN4	LNN5	LCP1	LCP2	LCP3	LCP4
N	Valid	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.59	3.03	3.43	3.12	3.13	2.93	3.13	3.13	2.96
Std. Deviation		.780	1.105	.924	.998	1.143	1.130	1.079	1.116	1.238
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	5

In LNN1 the number of answers agree with accounts for 70% while those who disagree account for 9%, showing that people often misunderstand the meaning of synonyms. In LNN2, the highest percentage was in agreement with 47%, and the lowest 14% disagree, this figure shows that people have difficulty distinguishing between synonyms and near-synonym LNN3, about 65% of the answers agree with the idea that they do not understand all the layers of meaning of a word. While only 14% of people disagree. In LNN4, 45% of the answers agreed and 22% disagreed with the idea that students wrote and said synonyms directly without understanding the meaning of the words. In LNN5, there is a big difference between the number of people who agree 54% and 28% disagree with the idea that students do not understand the nuances of the meaning of words (a subtle feature that distinguishes synonyms, for example: tell: tell), talk, speak).

In LCP1 the number of respondents agreeing was 46% while those disagreeing accounted for 23%, showing that students do not understand the context of speaking and

writing English. In LCP2, the highest percentage is answering that agree and 51%, the lowest is disagrees with 24%, the opinion that students use the wrong grammatical structure. In LCP3, about 52% of the answers agree with the idea that students find it difficult to express grammatically correct speech during the speaking process. While disagreements accounted for 22% In LCP4, 47% of the respondents agreed and 29% disagreed with the student's opinion being influenced by the structure of the mother tongue.

In the Minimum column, the minimum value of the variable LNN1-LNC4 is 1, which means that in this 100 respondents, there will be 1 respondent, which is the lowest level. In the Maximum column, the maximum value of the LNN1, LNN5, LCP1, LCP4, LKH1, LKH2, LKH3, LKH4, LKH5, LNC1, LNC2, LNC3, LNC4 is 5, which means that in this 100 respondents, there will be respondents at level 5 and this is the highest level. While errors and solutions remained are 4, that is out of these 100 respondents, and this is the highest level.

The mean column means the value of the variable. This is the most explanatory column in the table. Scale Likert 5 levels, we have a score of 3 as intermediate, if it is 3-5, it means that the respondents agree with the point of view of the given variable. Conversely, if biased 1-3, respondents disagree with the view of the variable. Additionally, the variable has a Mean of 2.93 to 3.59, so the higher data shows that the respondents agree with the point of view of the given variable. Meanwhile, the former variables have mean levels less than 3, the data shows that the majority of respondents rated above average.

Column Std. Deviation standard deviation of the variable takes the number 1 as an intermediate, greater than 1 is a high standard deviation and conversely, less than 1 is a low standard deviation. Standard deviation describes the degree of difference between respondents' answers. If the standard deviation is smaller, the respondents' answers do not differ too much. In other words, many respondents give the same answer to a statistical question. Std. Deviation of LNN2, LNN3, LNN5, LCP1, LCP2, LCP3, LCP4, LKH1, LKH2, LKH3, LKH4, LKH5, LNC1, LNC2, LNC3, LNC4 > 1 shows that there are many different answers in the respondents' answers. Whereas the Std value. Deviation of LNN1, LNN4 < 1 shows that the answers of the respondents do not differ too much.

**Table 2:** Sources of collocation and context errors

<b>Statistics</b>								
LKH1	LKH2	LKH3	LKH4	LKH5	LNC1	LNC2	LNC3	LNC4
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3.09	3.02	3.01	3.15	3.00	3.10	3.26	3.25	2.93
1.164	1.189	1.133	1.114	1.119	1.087	1.011	1.114	1.241
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

In LKH1 the number of answers that agree accounted for 48% while those that disagreed accounted for 25%, showing that students lack the vocabulary to express their ideas. In



LKH2, the highest percentage is the answer agreeing with 47%, the lowest saying disagrees with 26%, this figure shows that the students lack the combined vocabulary. In LKH3, about 39% of the answers agreed with the student's idea of using incorrect conjunctions. While only 23% of people disagree. In LKH4, 49% of the answers agree and 23% disagree with the idea that students do not distinguish the difference between pairs of synonyms when combining. In LKH5, there is a big difference between the number of people who agree 42% and 27% disagree with the idea that students often translate each word instead of the whole phrase in a sentence.

In LNC1 the number of respondents agreeing with 46% while the dissent accounted for 23%, showing that students do not understand the context of speaking and writing English. In LNC2, the highest percentage was in agreement with 47%, and the lowest with 26% in disagreement, which indicates that the students substituted synonyms that were out of context. In LNC3, about 55% of the respondents agreed with the student's use of a synonym for multiple contexts. While those who disagree accounted for 18%. In LNC4, 43% of the answers agree and 30% disagree with the idea that students understand the context but lack the vocabulary to express it.

### b. Solutions to surmount synonyms error

**Table 3:** Descriptive data of solutions for semantic and syntactic errors

GPLNN1	GPLNN2	GPLNN3	GPLNN4	GPLCP1	GPLCP2	GPLCP3	GPLCP4
100	100	100	100	99	99	99	99
0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
3.22	3.10	3.27	3.02	2.94	3.03	3.19	2.88
1.124	1.096	1.100	1.271	1.276	1.241	1.167	1.327
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4

In GPLNN1 the number of answers agreeing accounted for 56% while those who disagree accounted for 19%, showing that students agree with the solution to overcome semantic errors to understand the meaning of words correctly. In GPLNN2, the highest percentage is 47% of the answers agreeing with the solution to fix the semantic error by providing the definition of the word, the rest disagree with 24%. In GPLNN3, about 56% of the answers agree with the solution to overcome semantic errors when reading words. Read the dictionary definition carefully. While those who disagree accounted for 18%. In GPLNN4, 53% of the answers agree and 28% disagree with the solution to overcome semantic errors through studying the definition description and corresponding examples.

In the GPLCP1 the number of answers agreeing with 51% while the disagreement accounted for 31%, showing that the students agree with the solution to fix the syntax error by improving their grammar knowledge. In GPLCP2, the highest percentage is 54% agree, the lowest is 28% disagree about the solution to fix syntax errors and regularly practice grammar. In the GPLCP3, about 61% of the answers agree with the solution to

fix the syntax error, which makes it a habit to think less about your mother tongue before speaking and writing English. While dissenting opinions accounted for 23%. In GPLCP4, 51% of the answers agree and 33% disagree with the solution to fix syntax errors when learning English words.

In the Minimum column, the minimum value of all variables is 1, which means that in this 100 respondents, there will be 1 respondent, and this is the lowest level. In the Maximum column, the maximum value of the almost variable is 5, which means that in this 100 respondents, there will be respondents at level 5, which is the highest level 5. While GPLCP1, GPLCP2, GPLCP3, and GPLCP4 are 4, this is the highest level. The variables have a mean from 2.82 to 3.27, so the higher data shows that the respondents agree with the point of view of the given variable. Meanwhile, the other variables have e Mean level of less than 3, the data shows that the majority of respondents rated above average.

Column Std. Deviation standard deviation of the variable takes the number 1 as an intermediate, greater than 1 is a high standard deviation and conversely, less than 1 is a low standard deviation. Standard deviation describes the degree of difference between respondents' answers. If the standard deviation is smaller, the respondents' answers do not differ too much. In other words, many respondents give the same answer to a statistical question. Std. Deviation of all variables > 1 shows that there are many different answers in the respondents' answers.

**Table 4:** Descriptive data of solutions for collocation and context errors

GPLKH1	GPLKH2	GPLKH3	GPLKH4	GPLNC1	GPLNC2	GPLNC3	GPLNC4
99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2.82	2.84	2.82	2.86	3.15	3.00	3.10	3.01
1.296	1.323	1.358	1.302	1.257	1.270	1.233	1.321
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

In GPLKH1 43% of the respondents agree and 32% disagree with the solution to overcome the combination error by improving vocabulary. In the GPLKH2, the highest percentage is the answer that agrees with 46%, and the lowest disagrees with 32%, in the section on solutions to fix errors in combination to cultivate collocations in English. In GPLKH3, about 48% of the answers agree with the solution to fix the combination error from learning vocabulary with its collocation. The opinions disagreeing with this solution accounted for 36%. In the GPLKH4, 45% of the answers agreed and 32% disagreed with the solution to fix the error combined with the habit of translating the whole phrase. Additionally, the minimum value of the variable GPLKH1-GPLKH5 is 1, which means that the answer to strongly disagree occurs with the lowest frequency. The maximum value of the variable GPLKH1-GPLKH5 is 5, showing that the majority of respondents agree with the given point of view. Mean column mean value of the variable. The variable

GPLKH1-GPLKH5 has Mean > 2.50, so the data shows that the majority of respondents agree with the point of view of the given variable and have a neutral opinion.

In GPLNC1 the number of answers agreeing accounted for 61% while those disagreeing accounted for 25%, showing that students agree with the solution to overcome the contextual error in learning contextual vocabulary. In GPLNC2, the highest percentage is the answer that agrees with 51%, the lowest disagrees with 29%, this number shows that students agree with the solution to the context error when giving an example. In what contexts can synonyms be used? In the GPLNC3, about 57% of the answers agreed with the solution to fix the vocabulary learning context error in the English-English dictionary. While those disagreeing with this solution accounted for 27%. In GPLNC4, 58% of the answers agreed and 28% disagreed with the solution to fix the context error by looking at examples of sentences containing the vocabulary to be learned. In addition, the minimum value of the variable GPLNC1-GPLNC4 is 1, which means that the answer to strongly disagree occurs with the lowest frequency. The maximum value of the variable GPLNC1-GPLNC4 is 5, showing that the majority of respondents agree with the given opinion. Mean column mean value of the variable. The variable GPLNC1-GPLNC4 has Mean > 2.50, so the data shows that the majority of respondents agree with the point of view of the given variable and have a neutral opinion.

### c. Result of the test

**Table 5:** Descriptive data of the test

Questions (C)		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13	C14	C15
N	Valid	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		.42	.77	.35	.63	.85	.48	.84	.57	.63	.51	.31	.42	.39	.50	.66
Std. Deviation		.496	.423	.479	.485	.359	.502	.368	.498	.485	.502	.465	.496	.490	.503	.476
Minimum		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

The minimum value of the variables C1-C15 are all 0, then the number of wrong answers occurs less. The maximum value of variables C1-C15 are all 1, and the number of correct answers appears many. The Mean column is the column of the average value of the variable C1-15. According to the data, the mean has a value of 55.5. The data showed that the number of people who answered correctly was higher than the number of people who answered incorrectly. However, still, half of half, of the wrong answers are the wrong semantics of the vocabulary. The value of Std of the variables C1-C15. The variable C14 has the largest standard deviation of those variables, which is 0.503. Besides, the variable C15 has a standard deviation behind the variable C14 which is 0.476. Meanwhile, the lowest standard deviation in the C5 variable is 0.35. Besides, variable C1 has a standard deviation of 0.49, variable C2 has a standard deviation of 0.42, variable C3 has a standard deviation of 0.47, and variable C4 has a standard deviation of 0.48. In addition, variable

C6 has a standard deviation of 0.50, variable C7 has a standard deviation of 0.36, variable C8 has a standard deviation of 0.49, variable C9 has a standard deviation of 0.48, variable C10 has a standard deviation of 0.50, variable C11 has a standard deviation of 0.46, variables C12 and C13 have equal standard deviations of 0.49. Thus, the collected data, proves that there is a big difference between the answers of the respondents.

As far as the findings are concerned:

- Learners continue to struggle with synonym usage, they do not understand all the layers of meaning of a word.
- Students find it difficult to express themselves grammatically correctly during speaking.
- Students do not distinguish between pairs of synonyms when combining them.
- Students use a synonym for multiple contexts.

From there, giving practical solutions to overcome the above errors, the solution that accounts for the highest percentage of the answers:

- It is necessary to overcome semantic errors when reading words that need to carefully read the definition in the dictionary.
- The importance of correcting syntax errors, making it a habit to think less about your mother tongue before speaking and writing English.
- It is indispensable to overcome the combination error from learning vocabulary with the combination phrases of that word.
- It is necessary to overcome the error of contextual vocabulary learning.

#### **4.2. Discussion**

The paper produced by EL-Hassan (20 is relevant to this subject. The study's major goals are to identify the issues with acquiring the English language in terms of meaning and application through the questionnaire. It also tries to identify synonymy and hyponymy as useful approaches for learning and teaching the English language. This analysis was also linked with another study by Salama (2012); the main objectives are to determine the value of lexical relations in learning the English language and educate EFL teachers about the importance of employing sense relations to expand students' vocabulary. The researcher also tried to persuade syllabus designers to emphasize the relevance of using sense linkages in English vocabulary teaching. These previous studies deal with synonymy as part of sense relations, which is similar to this study. The distinction between this study and other ones is that this one analyzes common errors of learners when utilizing English synonyms. The initial research focuses solely on the role of sense relations in teaching lexical item meaning. On the other hand, our study expands deeply on four different errors, in semantics, syntax, combination, and context.

The test indicated that there is a high difference in the use of synonyms in various positions of students. Some errors that learners make are due to students not having enough knowledge about the use of synonym words in English. According to the analysis results from the test, the average number of students who answered correctly was higher than the average number of students who answered incorrectly. However, the number

of learners who answered incorrectly still accounted for nearly half of the total number of respondents. Therefore, this test has shown that students still have difficulty using synonyms. This study is similar to Khazaal (2019), this researcher collected data for the study from the test. However, the test uses a written test which has five different questions. In addition, the study was compatible with Abdalla (2017), a test was used in the study and the test concluded four key questions. Moreover, this study is similar to (Mohammed, 2014), the study illustrated that most learners' misuse of synonyms is a result of their incomplete knowledge of English synonyms. The selection of the appropriate synonyms is extremely challenging due to this lack of understanding. However, the difference between our test and other tests is that we use a multiple-choice format consisting of 15 questions with 3 answers for learners to choose from. It is clear that the test has shown that the use of synonyms in English is still one of the difficult problems for learners. When the results are considered as a whole, the researcher shed light on the solutions that are critical in advancing synonyms, and the synonym is one of the most crucial elements in the teaching and learning of a foreign language to principal to speaking and writing English.

## **5. Recommendations**

Aiming to improve the student's ability to use synonyms through this study, the researchers offered recommendations based on the existing state of the problem with synonym errors in English among Can Tho University's English majors. The following suggestions are provided to help students communicate and write in English without making synonym mistakes. Enhance both the teaching and learning of English in this process.

### **5.1. Suggestions for students**

First, students should regularly consult dictionaries and contemplate the meaning of words in order to improve their comprehension of synonyms. The truth is that while searching for a word in a dictionary, most students do not take the time to consider the word's broader meaning. Students will only be able to impress deeply those words for a longer period of time if they give them real thought rather than just skimming through them. After that, practice your vocabulary on your own. In addition to the information presented in class by professors or in textbooks, students should proactively read and write more in order to increase their capacity for rich word use. The ability to understand more and supervise study through websites should help students concentrate and learn more. Because we necessitate a solid foundation to be able to develop individuals, the thing that students need to do is recognize the mistakes that they frequently do, then correct them. Students must therefore set aside time to consolidate their newly learned material. Finally, it's critical for students to identify and resolve errors, thus they must constantly practice synonym exercises using study tools and websites. Students can

surmount their mistakes and comprehend areas of weakness that need to be strengthened thanks to this. Therefore, reducing mistakes and advancing the use of synonyms.

### **5.2. Suggestions for teachers**

First, teachers teach their students the importance of synonyms. Understanding the significance of synonyms in written and spoken English can help students become more conscious of the value of developing their synonym skills. Second, teachers should encourage their students to use dictionaries so that they can completely comprehend the meaning of a word. This is because students can benefit from learning new concepts and their counterparts by consulting dictionaries. Third, teachers must prioritize teaching students how to use synonyms through classes on speaking and writing English as well as grammar lessons, syntax, and syntax in English in order to ensure that students use synonyms appropriately. Fourth, teachers are dedicated to teaching students synonyms or near-synonyms in order to improve the effectiveness of their lessons. This could be due to the fact that words with a lot of synonyms are easier to comprehend if they are explained immediately for longer-term retention. Last but not least, teachers should concentrate on implementing the best vocabulary learning strategies for both English-majored and non-English-majored students.

### **5.3. Suggestions for further studies**

Future studies examine the effects of grammar, syntax, and context on the use of synonyms in order to identify more complex errors made in previous factors, in addition to helping students understand and use synonyms, also aids in their professional development and gives them the confidence to communicate and apply their knowledge in essays and scientific articles. Additional study is required, with a particular emphasis on programs that remedy synonym usage problems. It is feasible to compare the English synonym errors of English-majored to those of non-English majors students in the school.

## **6. Conclusion**

The present study attempted to investigate university students' errors in using synonyms. The study's analytic results revealed that students in the second and final years of the Department of Foreign Languages at Can Tho University struggled with using synonyms and made numerous mistakes. Some of these errors are caused by the student's lack of knowledge in acquiring synonyms, as they are unaware of the various types of these words and their usage. The data presented in the tables clearly demonstrated that the students made mistakes when using synonyms. The researcher achieved the data analysis and come out with its results.

- Students majoring in English have problems understanding synonyms.
- Students majoring in English have problems with the use of synonyms.
- Students majoring in English have not fluently used the possible solutions to avoid mistakes when using synonyms.

We can see that the selection and use of synonyms in English play an extremely important role in contributing to the development of skills for English learners. In addition, knowing how to use synonyms will help learners gain flexibility in learning English and confidently in the process of communicating and academic writing.

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