Building Adjectives in light of Domains Theory

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Abstract

Iraqi learners need to enhance their proficiency in writing. Writing demands continuous development (Zsuzsi, 2017). Mastering the use of adjectives in English is important because it clarifies the target topic. Adjectives play an important role in making sentences clearer. Drawing upon Langacker's Domain theory (1987), the researcher undertakes an experimental study involving 92 students from the University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women. The aim of this study is to improve writing skills via improving adjective usage. Quantitative data were gathered through two distinct tests – one administered at the commencement of the experiment and the other at its conclusion. Qualitative data were obtained through questionnaires, observations, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were meticulously analyzed using the SPSS statistical editor and Excel sheet. The findings indicated that getting proficiency in using adjectives contributes to enhanced writing clarity among participants, fosters accuracy in depicting events, individuals, and locations, and empowers them to elaborate on details by leveraging the interconnected meanings.

Keywords: Adjectives, Domains Theory, Iraqi Learners, Meaning Interrelationship, Writing Skills

بنـــــاء الصــفات وفق نـــظرية المجــالات

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المستخلص :

يحتاج المتعلمون العراقيون إلى تعزيز كفاءتهم في الكتابة. تتطلب الكتابة التطوير المستمر (زسوزسي، ٢٠١٧). يعد إتقان استخدام الصفات في اللغة الإنجليزية أمرًا مهمًا لأنه يوضح الموضوع المستهدف. تلعب الصفات دورًا مهمًا في جعل الجمل أكثر وضوحًا. وبالأستناد إلى نظرية المجال لانجاكر (١٩٨٧)، أجرت الباحثة دراسة تجريبية شملت ٩٢ طالبة من جامعة بغداد، كلية التربية للبنات، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. الهدف من الدراسة هو تحسين مهارات الكتابة من خلال تحسين استخدام الصفة. تم جمع البيانات الكمية من خلال اختبارين متميزين ـ أحدهما تم إجراؤه في بداية التجربة والآخر عند نهايتها. تم الحصول على البيانات النوعية من خلال الاستبيانات والملاحظات ومناقشات مجموعات التركيز. تم تحليل البيانات الكمية بدقة باستخدام المحرر الإحصائي SPSS وورقة Excel. أشارت النتائج إلى أن استخدام الصفات يسهم في تعزيز وضوح الكتابة لدى المشاركين، ويعزز الدقة في تصوير الأحداث والأفراد والمواقع، ويمكنهم من تفصيل التفاصيل من خلال الاستفادة من المعاني المترابطة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصفات، نظرية المجال، المتعلمون العراقيون، معنى العلاقة المتبادلة، مهارات الكتابة

1- Introduction

Iraqi students, much like other non-native English language learners, are actively engaged in the pursuit of mastering the English language and its four essential skills. To achieve this, they employ diverse strategies aimed at acquiring requisite information and enhancing their academic and scholarly performance. Adjectives hold significant breadth and importance within the English language, contributing detailed nuances to sentences and enriching textual expression; thus, they serve as a fundamental support for honing writing skills (Zsuzsi, 2017). The utilization of Langacker's Domain theory (1987) became imperative for a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of meanings. This association between vocabulary meanings fosters a proactive exploration and incorporation of new relevant vocabulary within the given context.

There are many studies that have addressed various problems and challenges that Iraqi students face in learning the English language in tenses (Aajami 2023), in learning and mastering writing (Aajami 2020b), and in learning and mastering prepositions (Aajami 2019b).Iraqi learners actively sought to elevate their English language proficiency by actively participating in numerous research endeavors with their academic instructors, exploring various theories and effective methodologies for language acquisition (Nasser, 2018). Aajami (2019a) delved into the interrelationship of meanings among English vocabularies, guided by the theory of domains. The study aimed to empower participants to employ vocabulary contextually and encourage the exploration of additional vocabulary that aligns with the specific context; this practice contributes to the solidification of these vocabularies in long-term memory. In a subsequent study in (2020 a), Aajami focused on word meaning, endeavoring to expand the vocabulary repertoire of EFL Iraqi learners. The present study seeks to enhance the writing proficiency of Iraqi students by honing skills in using adjectives, understanding their arrangement, and comprehending the relationships among their interconnected meanings within the given context. The study drew upon the principles of the theory of domains to construct adjectives in sentences, unravel their meanings, and discern their implications.

The Aims of the Study

This study aims at improving the writing skills of the Iraqi EFL learners via improving the usage of adjectives. The research question is that does the domain theory effective in developing adjective usage by Iraqi EFL learners, how?

The Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to first-year students from the University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women, Department of English, academic year 2022/2023. 92 participants participated in this study voluntarily.

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2- Theoretical Framework

2-1 The Theory of Domains

In 1987, Langacker introduced the term "domain," influenced by Fillmore's frame-semantic theory (Clausner & Croft, 1999). These theories posit that meaning is encyclopedic, and comprehensive knowledge structures can be utilized to handle lexical concepts or domains (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 230).

Domains are cognitive entities characterized by conceptual lexicons, representational spaces, concepts, or mental experiences (Langacker, 1987, p. 147). Langacker's definition of domains rely on the human mind's interpretation of language. A knowledge structure can be considered a domain if it contains fundamental information enabling users to employ language and comprehend lexical concepts. For instance, understanding the degrees of kinship between individuals and families requires an understanding of social life and intermarriage (Lemmens, 2015). Similarly, grasping temperature differences, such as cold, warm, and hot, necessitates comprehension of the temperature system structure (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 230). Field theory aids learners in both source and target languages by deriving meaning through close associations in meanings, enhancing language use across proficiency levels (Lowe, 2008, p.1).

Language is an integral part of human semantic knowledge, with individuals forming perceptions in their minds before articulating them, constructing meanings based on their linguistic knowledge influenced by their environment (Chen, 2016). To acquire the vocabulary of the target language, learners must exert considerable effort and practice using it, thereby solidifying its meanings in their minds and facilitating its easier utilization (Gobet, 2015).

Domain theory comprised four primary aspects and is considered an extension of the basic theory. Firstly, paradigmatic arrangements of domains encompass a set of lexical concepts derived from the main concept. For instance, the logical frame of the concept "car" includes aspects like its shape, type, color, and activities (Clausner & Croft, 1999, p.6).

Figure 1
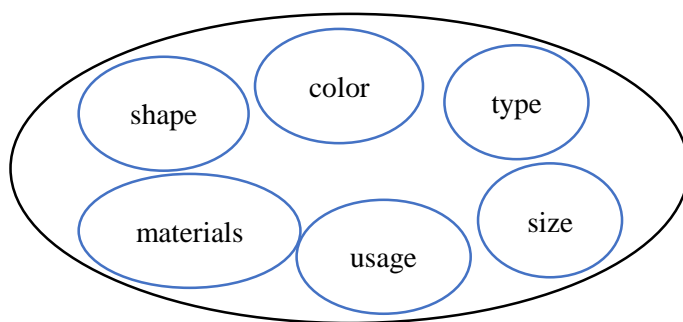
The domain of the concept car
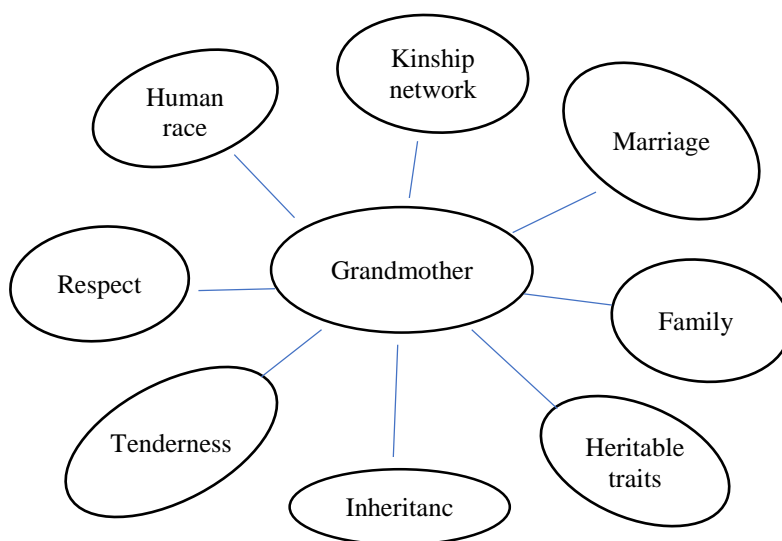Note. This figure is set by the researcher

By understanding the domain in the previous example, learners can construct adjectives in the same way to add details that serve their goal in writing. Details can be added via using adjectives of different types for example:

1. BMW produces beautiful cars.
2. BMW produces many beautiful cars each year.
3. BMW produces many beautiful cars each year. These cars are sold at high prices.
4. Our beautiful BMW car is spacious, red, and sporty. It is a very expensive car.
5. BMW, What a masterpiece!

In other words, learners can, during writing, focus on all aspects of the description and describe it as it appears to highlight its details through its description. Details are shown in type, shape, color, model, constituent material, and purpose.

Most lexical items can be described in terms of a domain matrix and there are some lexical items in terms of a single domain. In other words, from a single lexical element many other concepts are bifurcated that are self-contained domains. For example, the concept grandmother (see Figure 2): grandmother, human race, kinship network, marriage, family, heritable traits, inheritance, respect (Lowe, 2008, p. 2).

Figure (2)

The domain matrix of the concept grandmother
Note. This figure is set by the researcher.

Through the previous example in field theory, adjectives can be built for the descriptor through separate sentences for each adjective.

6. Grandmother is a kinship that distinguishes humans from other creatures in knowing its intertwined relationships. When we hear the word grandmother, the following details come to mind: grandchildren and posterity.

7. The grandmother is a link between children and grandchildren, and before them parents and grandparents.

8. At the time my grandmother lived, marriage traditions were simple and disciplined with strict customs and traditions.

9. Most of my grandmother's grandchildren have wide eyes, a trait they inherited from her.

10. My grandmother's inheritance was distributed among the family members by mutual consent and equality.

11. When we gather at my grandmother's house, we feel safe, and we are enveloped in the tenderness that dwells in every corner of the house.

12. All my grandmother's children and grandchildren have great respect for her and respect her cute friends as well.

Through a single lexical element, it is possible to define its relationships in several domains that are directly related to it, and then describe them in complete sentences related to the main lexical element, grandmother.

Langacker (1987) delved into the abstract and foundational domains, extending this concept beyond the scope of Frame Semantics theory. By grounding our understanding in experience, distinctions in fundamental realms such as time, space, hate, and love become apparent, varying for each individual based on their cumulative experiences. Our awareness of these fundamental domains is shaped by personal experiences and sensory perceptions of nature, further complicated by diverse human and cultural experiences across different social environments. Gaining a profound understanding of abstract domains necessitates substantial experience and knowledge concerning their intricate relationships with other domains. Illustratively, exploring the domain of love requires recognition of two primary aspects: the private and the general. The private dimension encompasses the sexual relationship and related affections and closeness between partners, while the general aspect involved customs and traditions related to marriage, including details like weddings, arrangements, and food (Hagoort, 2019). Langacker organized lexical concepts hierarchically, exemplified by the concept of an antique artifact, which encompasses various areas like museums, value, antiquities, civilization, and tourism (see Figure 3). In essence, domain theory is dedicated to conceptual development by constructing and organizing knowledge while scrutinizing the interrelationships among concepts. Domains that rely on other fields for

comprehension are termed basic domains (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 231).

Figure (3)
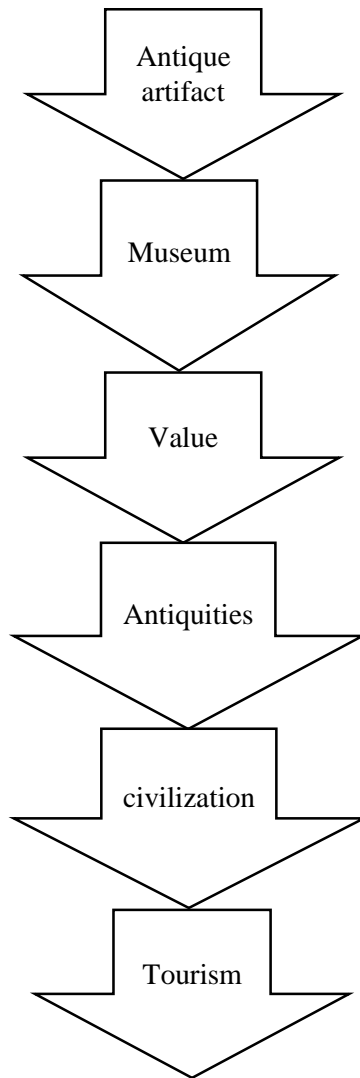
The hieratical modal of domains
Note. This figure is set by the researcher.

This point in the theory, which is the hierarchical arrangement of fields, can be employed in accurately arranging the various adjectives of the item to be described. This is clear in the following example:

13. In the museum, we saw two nice, small, old, round, golden, roman, gold, decoration rings.

Example 13 shows the arrangement of adjectives in the order that set by English grammarian scholars as show in Table (1).

Table (1)
Adjective order

1	Descriptive adjective	careful, hatful, beautiful, huge
2	Numerical adjective	many, three, four
3	Quantitative adjective	some, little, much, half, any
4	Demonstrative adjective	such, these, those, this, that
5	Interrogative adjective	what, which, whose
6	Possessive adjective	my, her, their, our, his
7	Proper adjective	English, Turkish coffee, American brand
8	Exclamatory adjective	who, what

Note**.** From (Nordquist, 2019)

These are the parts of the theory that pertain to the research, and through them the researcher can help the participants in communicating the main idea from the purpose use of adjectives. In addition to providing them with mental diagrams to understand the lexical elements and the areas related to them.

2-2 Related Works

Mohammad & Al-Khazaali (2022) conducted a study on Iraqi learners as EFL learners. The two researchers seek through this study to know the difficulties that Iraqi students face at the secondary level. This study relied on 6 samples from Iraqi public secondary schools. This study looks at the oral difficulties facing Iraqi learners. Data was collected through observations and direct interviews. The results showed that there are many reasons, the most important of which is that teachers are not qualified to train learners to speak and build correct and meaningful sentences. The procedures of the educational system do not support speaking activities in the curricula, as well as large numbers in the classrooms.

Mukhtar found in a study conducted in (2020) that Iraqi learners face difficulties in mastering writing due to grammatical and grammatical errors. Many Iraqi students do not show their willingness to present their writings except on specific occasions such as official exams or during writing lessons. The researcher used symbols to encourage Iraqi learners to improve their participation in writing skill. The results showed an improvement in the performance of Iraqi students in writing through enriching ideas and increasing the focus of the participants.

Dehham (2014) conducted a study about using compound adjectives by

Iraqi learners. There are three main goals for this study. The first is to help Iraqi learners use these adjectives. The second is to investigate the ability of Iraqi learners to use such adjectives. The third is knowing the reasons for the mistakes made by the Iraqi learners when using these adjectives. A diagnostic verification test was adopted from several questions and a sample of 100 students from the University of Babylon, fourth year, English Department. The answers were collected and analyzed, and the following results were reached: The results showed that the participants had difficulties in distinguishing between adjectives and producing compound adjectives. As for errors, the results showed three reasons for their existence, which are ineffective learning strategies; Interlanguage effect, that is, the effect of the mother tongue on the target language; And the poor educational attainment of the participants regarding these adjectives.

3- Methodology

3-1 Research Design

The primary objective of this study is to enhance the proficiency of Iraqi students in the effective utilization and construction of adjectives, employing Langacker's theory of domains. This research takes an experimental approach, incorporating both pre and post-tests, along with pre- and post-questionnaires, supplemented by observations and focus group discussion sessions. The study involves the participation of 92 first-year students from the University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women. The researcher assesses participants' knowledge of adjectives and their application in English, along with an examination of Langacker's theory of domains. The study unfolds in three key phases:

1. **Entrance to the Experiment Stage:** In this initial phase, the researcher elucidates the study's rationale, objectives, and anticipated benefits to the participants. At the conclusion of this stage, a pre-questionnaire and pre-test are administered. This phase spans three sessions.

2. **Conducting the Experiment Stage:** This phase is characterized by educational activities, wherein comprehensive details about adjectives, the role of Langacker's theory of domains in determining lexical elements, and the appropriate incorporation of adjectives in context are thoroughly explained. The emphasis is on studying adjectives and their contextual application without undue exaggeration or neglect.

3. **Testing and Evaluation Stage:** The final phase involves the administration of post-tests, post-questionnaires, and focus group discussion sessions. These assessments aim to ascertain participants' proficiency in using adjectives effectively and in alignment with the desired context.

3-2 Participants and Procedures

The participant count comprised 92 first-year students of a pre-intermediate level. The theory of domains was introduced as a novel concept to them, and their usage of adjectives was based on their prior learning in earlier stages. The procedural steps 3were executed as follows:

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1. **Study Plan Presentation:** Initially, the researcher outlined the study plan and provided an introductory explanation of the characteristics of the domains approach.
2. **Distribution of Handouts:** Subsequently, participants received handouts containing a detailed explanation of the theory of domains.
3. **Individual, Pair, and Group Work:** During class, participants engaged in individual, pair, and group activities to identify lexical elements, particularly nouns, and associate adjectives with them. They were tasked with identifying fields related to the subject under study and developing characteristics based on them. To illustrate, if the lexical element was "woman," learners would write about aspects such as shape, color, height, hair, weight, eye color, and clothing. Collaborative work in pairs and groups facilitated mutual assistance among participants.
4. **Modification Exercise:** Finally, the researcher prompted participants to make changes to the main lexical element to which they attached adjectives. Following this, they were asked to modify the attributes they had initially attached to the primary basic element.

3-3 Instrument

Tools used to collect data include:
1. Pre-questionnaire and pre-test: They are conducted before entering the experiment phase to determine basic knowledge.
2. Educational activities provided during: Handouts and teaching materials to convey details about Langacker's attributes and field theory.
3. Post-tests and post-questionnaires: They are applied in the testing and evaluation phase to evaluate participants' competence and understanding of the attributes and their applications.
4. Focus group discussions: A qualitative data collection method used to gather insights into participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the experimental approach and the impact of Langacker's field theory on their learning. Together, these tools provide a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the experimental intervention in enhancing Iraqi students' proficiency in using and constructing adjectives.

3-4 Treatment Phase

This phase constitutes the focal juncture of the study, commencing after the outcomes of the pre-questionnaire and the pre-test. It serves as the intervention stage that significantly contributed to concentrating on adjectives and elucidating their utilization and adaptation within the contextual framework, aligning with the perspectives of field theory.

Participants were tasked with composing sentences featuring lexical elements identified by the researcher, subsequently iterating the sentence, and introducing a new adjective with each repetition. Prior to commencing sentence construction, participants were required to pinpoint the domains

associated with the main domain. This preliminary step aimed to assist participants in selecting suitable adjectives for each lexical element. Delving into the intricacies of the primary field paved the way for participants to elucidate it by concentrating on its defining characteristics. After confirming participants' proficiency in selecting appropriate adjectives and applying them to each lexical element within the initial context, participants advanced to delineating semiotic symbols conveyed through meaningful images or drawings. This process was coupled with defining the main domain and its related domains in a diagram. Familiarity with domains and their shared relationships enhanced participants' comprehension of nuanced details that warranted clarification through written expression. Subsequently, participants were prompted to compose comprehensive pieces describing places, people, things, animals, or objects. It was imperative for participants to articulate the details of the chosen topic with precision, ensuring readers could vividly envision the depicted scenarios. Following the culmination of this stage, the post-test and post-questionnaire were administered.

4- The Analytical Part
4-1 Data Collection and Analysis

In the beginning, the pre and post questionnaires were considered. Data was collected in a pre-questionnaire consisting of several statements. Domain theory is clear and useful and can improve learners' use of adjectives. Domain theory is complex and cannot improve learners' use of adjectives. Refuse to answer.

Figure (4)
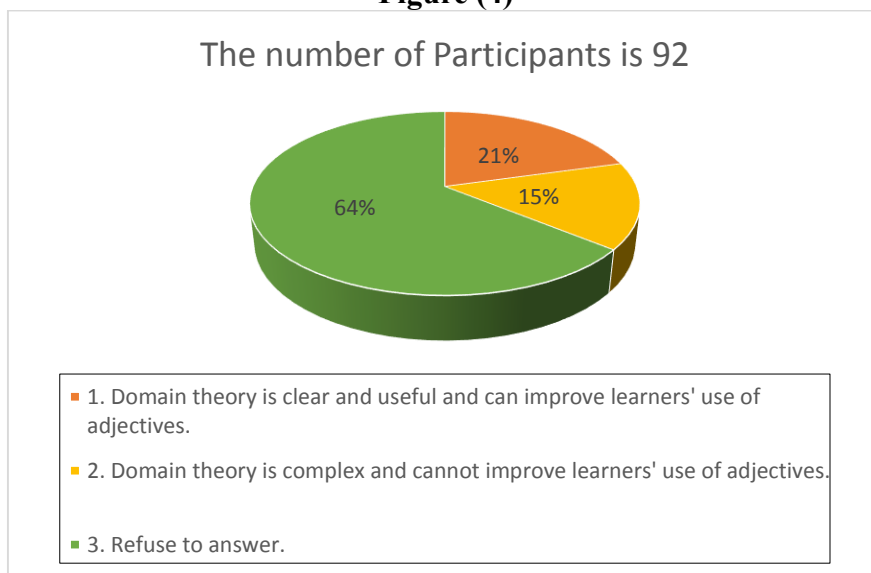
The Analysis of the Pre-Questionnaire

Since this questionnaire was conducted at the beginning of the experiment, its results seem logical because most of the 59 participants chose to refuse to answer and they constituted 64% of the total number of participants. While 19

participants, representing 21% of the total number of participants, expected that the theory would be useful and can help them. 14 participants, representing 15%, expected domain theory to be complex and not useful in building adjectives.

Figure (5)

The number of Participants is 92

- 1. Domain theory is clear and useful and can improve learners' use of adjectives.
- 2. Domain theory is complex and cannot improve learners' use of adjectives.
- 3. Refuse to answer.
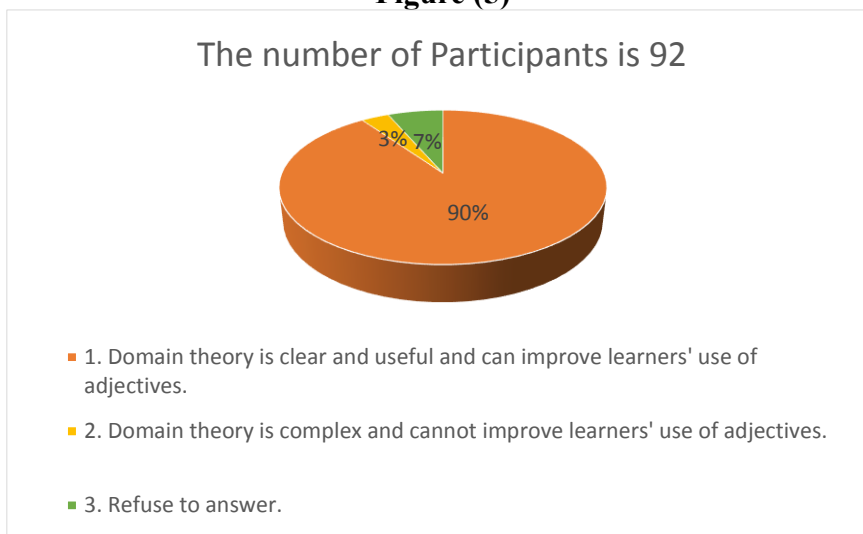
The Analysis of the Post-Questionnaire

As for the results of the post-questionnaire, they show the following: Most of the participants, 83 participants, representing 90%, support that the domain theory is clear and effective in teaching learners to build adjectives and use them well in writing. 3 participants, or 3%, said that the theory is difficult and complicated in teaching the characteristics of the participants. 6 participants, or 7%, chose not to answer.

4-2 Pre-Test and Post-Test Analysis

A total of 92 scores were collected from the participants in the preliminary test to assess their ability to use adjectives and their validity and appropriateness to the context used. It seemed clear that the participants used adjectives in many places, but they did not exceed one adjective for each noun. Learners also seemed unable to provide accurate details of what they describe because they did not use adjectives well or were content with one adjective. Most of the students were not familiar with field theory. Moreover, the students were not skilled in analyzing the related domains of each lexical element. For the image analysis, many of the participants were satisfied with writing one or two sentences to describe each image. These results prompted the researcher to apply the theory of domains in determining the schemes of the lexical elements to be described.

After reviewing the results of the preliminary test, the researcher began applying the experiment in detail. This stage included a lot of workshops, lectures, and tests. These procedures lasted for eight weeks, at a rate of two meetings per week. The sessions were divided into theoretical and practical

sessions. Power point slides and videos were also presented to explain the domain theory approach and how adjectives are attached to lexical elements in a single, binary, or series of adjectives based on the experience of Tyler and Evans (2003). Also, work has been done to draw meanings charts for the targeted lexical elements. The students worked individually, in pairs, and in groups in selecting pictures, drawing diagrams, and writing accurately and in detail.

In the following table is an analysis of the preliminary and post-test data through SPSS statistical editor:

Table (2)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Paired-Sample Statistics				
Pre-test	92	9.49	3.836	.400
Post-test	92	13.4239	3.19764	.33338

Table (3)

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Paired-Sample Test						
Test Value = 0.05						
					Lower	Upper
Pre-test	23.490	91	.000	9.394	8.60	10.19
Post-test	39.981	91	.000	13.32891	12.6667	13.9911

The results of the analysis of the pre and post tests show a clear progress in the results of the participants. The post-test average scored 13.4239, while the pre-test average scored 9.49, a difference of two and a half degrees. The results of the two tests confirm the effectiveness of the theory of domains in helping Iraqi learners to build adjectives.

4-3 Observation

During the experiment, the researcher noticed at the beginning that the learners use adjectives in a limited and insufficient way. Participants made mistakes in constructing sentences in the required order according to the rules of the English language. They were also unable to generate semantic charts for the target words. Moreover, most of the participants could not adequately analyze and describe symbols and images.

After conducting the experiment, the learners seemed more interested and accurate in drawing meaning diagrams, choosing adjectives, and arranging them in an acceptable manner. They also became better able to analyze symbols and describe them adequately. The mistakes they made when using

adjectives were significantly reduced.

4-4 Focus Group Discussion

The researcher held about eight focused group discussion sessions to allow all participants to speak during the session and know their opinions and impressions of the experiment. When the participants were asked about the effectiveness of the theory in the ability to use adjectives in the English language, the overwhelming majority believed that the theory is effective and useful in using adjectives well. A few participants said that the theory is complicated because they need to chart the meanings of the words before they start adding adjectives. When the participants were asked about the method of theory in teaching adding adjectives and among the old methods, most of the participants said that theory enables them to think and choose adjectives more accurately and logically, while the old method was not able to add more than one or two adjectives to each noun. Many of the participants said that the experience was enjoyable and vital, as they could decipher and analyze symbols and draw diagrams for the meanings of the words to be clarified. The outcomes of the focused group discussion sessions confirm the importance of applying the theory of domains in building adjectives.

5- Discussion and Conclusions

The results showed that the theory of domains enhances the Iraqi learners' ability to use adjectives. Since this theory requires learners to draw diagrams of the meanings of target lexical items and their related domains, it helps learners to be more accurate in using adjectives and to expand their vocabulary repertoire.

Learners need to focus more on grammar and the variety and accuracy of ideas to improve their writing. The grammatical aspect is important because it enables learners to avoid many mistakes that would reduce their academic achievement. As for the aspect of ideas and their abundance, learners need to train in a more refined and more precise way, and this is what the theory of fields can do with them. The theory opens the way for learners to have a more accurate understanding of symbols and a greater possibility of analyzing images and their implications. They can also write in more detail and accurately describing people, places, animals, or things.

Domain theory is of great help in learning, building, and using adjectives. Regarding the number of participants and the place of the experiment, this experiment is considered limited, and its results cannot be generalized until its results are repeated under the same conditions in different places in Iraq. This study opens the way for further studies to improve English language learning through the application of appropriate theories.

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