English similar in meaning Confused Words

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1. Introduction:

The present research paper has been designed to meet the requirements of students and users whose mother tongue is not English. Its main purpose is to help to correct the common mistakes of some synonymic confused words and expressions to which foreign learners of English are liable.

In spite of the fact that these groups of words are more or less alike in form and meaning, they have distinct differences in one or the other of these elements. The present paper deals with synonyms or words having similar meaning, a group of these confused words or synonyms have been selected to be studied and among them; certain verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs are clarified, such as: **begin** and **start**; **make** and **do**; **nearly almost** and others.

The above group of confused words, though they have the same meaning, are found in different uses that are grammatically distinct from each other.

– He **made** one mistake in dictation.

– I **did** my best concerning the last problem.

2. The Syntactic and Semantic Interpretation of Confused Words:

2.1. Make and Do.

These words are very similar, but there are some differences. Both of these verbs are followed by a noun.

- He **made** a cake.

- She **did** her work.

Swan (1996: 162) implies that **do** is used where no certain thing is mentioned. So the verb **do** may be followed by words like: **thing, something, nothing, anything, everything, what.**

- Then he **did** a very strange thing. (Not Then he **made** a very strange thing).

- **Do** something.

The verb (**do**), as Swan (**Ibid**) clarifies, is used in the formal structure (do …ing) to talk about activities that take a certain time, or are repeated (jobs and hobbies). There is usually a determiner e.g. the, my, some.

- During the holidays I'm going to **do** some walking, some swimming and a lot of reading.

Swan (1996: 120) states that the verb **make** functions as a causative verb followed by either infinitive, as in:

- I **made** her **cry**. (Not I **made** her to cry)

the infinitive here must follow the object.

or It may be followed by a past participle:

- She had to shout to **make** herself heard.

Make with the meaning (prepare, manufacture) as in: s

- Can you **make me a birthday cake** by Friday?

It may also be followed by object + object complement.

- The rain **made the grass wet**. (Not the rain made wet the grass).

Make may come before subject complement.

- Terriers **made good hunting dogs**.

The verbs **do** and **make** mean the same thing or at least they are very similar in meaning, but there are some differences.

Allen (1956: 175) argues that "these two verbs often depart from their fundamental meaning of 'act' and 'construct' in idiomatic usage.

Examples of fundamental meaning of '**do**' and '**make**'.

1. what are you **making**? A cake.

2. what are you **doing**? writing a letter.

Broukal (2005: 144) agrees with what Allen has mentioned and says that "the verb **to make** means to produce or create, whereas **to do** means **to perform**, **to act**.

Expressions with make include:

make a mistake	make a plan
make a difference	make an invention
make a comparison	make an offer
make a discovery	make a choice
make use of	make an attempt
make a profit	make a decision
make a suggestion	make a prediction

Expressions with do include:

do one's duty	do harm
do homework	do research
do justice to	do an assignment
do business	do one's best
do wrong	do a service
do work	do damage
do a kindness	do wonders "

Swan, (Ibid, 163) in his part, mentions some other common fixed expressions concerning **do** and **make**:

do good, harm, business, one' best, a farour, sport, exercise, one's hair, one's teeth, one's duty.

make   a journey, an offer, arrangements, a suggestion, a decision, an attempt, an effort, an excuse, an exception, a mistake, a noise, a phone call, money, a profit, a fortune, love, peace, war, a bed, a fire, progress.

He (Ibid) indicates that **make** is used in the expression: **make a bed,** but **do** is used in **doing the bed(s)** as part of housework:

- He's old enough to **make** his own bed now.

- I'll **start** on the vegetables as soon as I've **done** the beds.

Take is used instead of **make** in **take a photo** and **have**, not **make**) in **have an experience.**

- The verb **make** is also used with meals as in: make a dinner.

2.2. Begin and Start

Both the verbs **begin** and **start** can be followed by infinitive and ing-forms. Swan (1996: 285) illustrates that "**begin** and **start** can be followed by infinitives or-ing forms. Usually there is no important difference.

- She **began playing/ to** play the guitar when she was six.

- He **started talking/ to talk** about golf, but everybody went out of the room.

After progressive forms of **begin** and **start**, infinitives are preferred.

- I'm **beginning** to learn karate. (Not I'm **beginning learning**…. Infinitives are also preferred with verbs of mental condition like **understand, realize, knew.**

- I slowly **began to understand** how she left. (Not…. **began under standing**).

- He **started to realiz**e that if you wanted to eat you had to work. (Not… started realizing). Witherspoon (1957: 165) clarifies that "the addition of **in** or **up** to the verb **start** is a common colloquial habit, which is contrary to good usage":

- When do you **start** (not **start in**) to work?

- He started (not started in) shouting.

- They began (or started; not started up) a quarrel as soon as they entered the room.

- They **started** (not **started up**) a factory to make the articles".

    For Swan (1984: 63) the verb **start** is preferred when one is talking about an activity that happens regularly, with 'stops and starts'.

- It's **starting** to rain.

- What time do you **start** teaching tomorrow morning? The verb **begin** is preferred when one is talking about long, slow activities, and when he is using a more formal style.

- Very slowly, I **began** to realize that there was something wrong.

- We will **begin** the meeting with a message from the president.

He (Ibid) makes a comparison between the uses of **start** and **begin**, indicating that:

start (but not **begin**) is used to mean:

1- start a journey

- I think we ought to **start** at six, while the roads are empty.

2- start working (for machines)

- The car won't **start**.

3- make (machines) start.

- How do you **start** the washing?" (Swan 1984: 63).

2.3. End and Finish

These two verbs have similar meanings, but there are some differences especially when they are followed by direct objects.

Swan (1996: 184) gives some details concerning the cases in which both **end** and **finish** are followed by direct objects, and he arranges them as follows:-

1- Finish + object = complete.

Here the verb **finish** is preferred when one is talking about getting to the end of something or completing an activity.

- He never lets me **finish** a sentence.

- Have you **finished** cleaning the floor yet? The verb **finish** can be followed by an-ing form:

- He's finished mending the car. (Not He's **finished** to mend)

2. end + object = stop

End is used when it refers to stopping or breaking something off.

- I decided it was time to **end** our affair.

- **End** cannot be followed by an-ing form.

- I decided to stop seeing her. (Not… to **end** seeing her)

3. end + object = bring to a close.

Also **end** is used when it refers to a special way of bringing something to a close or shaping the end of something.

- How do you **end** a letter to somebody you don't know?

- My father **ended** his days. (= died) in a mental hospital.

4. shape

The verb **end** is preferred when it refers to the shape of things, rather than to time.

- the road **ended** in a building site.

- Nouns that **end** in-share plurals in-es.

In other cases, there is often little or no difference of meaning.

- What time does the concert **end**/ **finish**?

- Term **ends**/ f**inishe**s on June 23.

2.4. Speak and Talk

There is not very much difference between **speak** and **talk**. In certain situations one or the other is preferred (though both of them are usually possible). "**Talk** usually refers to a conversation between two (or more) people. It is not followed by a direct object (except in a few idioms, e.g., **talk business**). It sometimes has an indirect object after **to**.

- Students **do not talk** to one another during an examination". (Praninskas, 1975: 202).

She (ibid: 203) gives an explanation about the verb **speak** and says that it sometimes means to greet. In this case it is followed by an indirect object introduced by **to**.

- Professor Baker always **speaks** to his students when he meets them on campus.

Swan (1996: 552) makes a comparison between **talk** and **speak** concerning the situations in which they are used. **Talk** is the more usual word to refer to conversational exchanges and informal communication.

1. When she walked into the room everybody stopped **talking. Speak** is often used for one- way communication and to form exchanges in more serious or formal situations.

- I'll **speak** to that boy- he's getting very lazy.

   Talk is often used for the act of giving an informal lecture (a talk); **speak** is preferred for more formal lectures, sermons etc.

- This is Mr. Allen, who's going to **talk** to us about flower arrangement.

- The pope **spoke** to the crowd for seventy minutes about world peace.

   Speak is the usual word to refer to knowledge and use of languages, and to the physical ability to speak.

- She **speaks** three languages fluently.

   One usually asks to speak to somebody on the phone (use also **speak with**).

- Hello, could I speak to Karen, please?

   Talk is used before **sens**, **nonsense** and other words with similar meanings.

- You're **talking** complete **nonsens**, as usual. (Not…. you're speaking complete nonsense).

   Mclntosh et al. (2009: 787) mentions another situation in which **speak** means (to use one's voice to say sth).

- The main character **speaks** directly into the camera.

- He spoke out against mismanagement.

   He (ibid: 845) illustrates that the verb **talk** is used to mean:

1- say something formally.

- He has agreed to **talk** exclusively to our reporter about his life.

- I can't **talk** about it just now.

- The police questioned him for four hours trying to make him talk.

2. say the right things.

- The senior managers **talk a good game** about customer relations.

2.5.   Happen and Take place.

   Happen, like **occur**, is applied to circumstances which are not the result of planning. Witherspoon (1957: 120) states that happen involves more of the elements of chance. Thus: His death **occurred** at five in the evening.

   How did you **happen** to be there at the time?

   Take place should be used of events that are planned or arranged. Thus: The wedding **took place** at the chapel at high noon.

   "**Happen** can be used with a following infinitive to suggest that something happens unexpectedly or by chance.

- If you **happen to see** Joan, ask her to phone me.

- One day I **happened to get** talking to a woman on a train, and she turned out to be a cousin of my mother's.

In sentences with **if**, the idea of **by chance** can be emphasized by using **should** and **happen**.

- Let me know **if** you **should happen to** need any help". (Swan, 1996: 227).

2.6. Like and As.

Swan (1996: 312) agrees with Murphy (1994: 116) in the fact that **like** acts as a preposition as in the following pattern:

like + noun / pronoun.

- you look **like your sister**. (Not… as your sister).

- What does Sandra do? she's a teacher, **like me**. (Not…. as me)

- Be careful! the floor has been polished. It's **like walking** on ice. (Not…. as walking).

Fitikides (1963: 140) identifies that **like** is not a conjunction, but an objective which behaves like a preposition in being followed by a noun or pronoun in the objective case.

- You do not look **like** your brother.

According to Swan (1996: 313) **like** is used as a conjunction instead of **as** in informal English. This is very common in American English. It is not generally considered correct in a formal style.

- Nobody loves you **like I do.**

- You look exactly **like your mother did** when she was 20 sometimes **like** = for example.

- Some sports, **like** motor racing, can be dangerous. **Such as** is also used to express = for example.

- Some sports, **such as** motor racing, can be dangerous. Some **adverbs**, **very**, **quite** and other adverbs of degree can be used to modify **like**.

- He's **very like** his father.

- She looks **a bit like** Queen Victoria

Swan (1996: 312) proceeds to clarify the difference between **like** and **as** saying that as is a conjunction. It is used before a clause, and before an expression beginning with a preposition.

as + clause

as + preposition phrase

- Nobody knows her **as I do**.

- In 1939, **as in 1914**, everybody seemed to want her.

He (ibid: 313) mentions that **as**, in a very formal style, is sometimes followed by:

auxiliary verb + subject.

She was a Catholic, as were most of her friends. **As** can sometimes replace **it** as the subject of a clause (rather like the relative

pronoun **which**), especially before **happen** and verbs with similar meanings.

- An earthquake can destroy one part of a city while leaving other parts untouched, **as happened** in Mexico in 1986. (Not … **as it happened**).

Also **as** is used to introduce some expressions referring to facts which are 'common ground' known to both speaker/ writer and listener/ reader. (as **you know**, as **we agreed**, as **you suggested**).

- **As you know**, next Tuesday's meeting has been cancelled.

There are some passive expressions of this kind for example (as is well known; as was agreed).

- As is well known, more people get colds in wet weather. (Not **as it is well known**….) or **as usual, as always.**

- You're late **as usual**.

Murphy (Ibid.) illustrates that **as** can also be a preposition but the meaning is different from **like**.

- As the manager, he has to make many important decisions. (**as** the manager = in his position as the manager).

- **Like the manager**, she also has to make important decisions. (**Like** the manager = similar to the manager). In the above examples, **as** (preposition) when **as** is used as a preposition it means (in the position of, in the form of, etc).

2.7. Quite and Rather

Both **quite** and **rather** modify adjectives, verbs, noun and adverbs. According to Murphy (1994: 103) **quite** expresses less than '**very**' but more than **a little.**

-   I'm surprised you haven't heard of her. she's **quite famous**. (= less than very famous) but more than a little famous.

Swan (1984: 101) and Murphy (ibid) clarify that **quite** and **rather** go before **a/ an**.

-   **quite** a nice day (not a **quite** nice day).

-   **quite** an old man.

Sometimes **quite** is followed by a noun (without an objectiv).

-   I didn't expect to see them. It was **quite a surprise**. **quite** is also used with some verbs, especially **like** and **enjoy**.

-   I **quite like** tennis but it's not my favorite sport.

Murphy (Ibid) explains that **rather** is similar to **quite**. It is used mainly with negative words and negative ideas.

-   It's **rather** cold. You'd better wear your coat.

-   What was the examination like? **Rather** difficult, I'm afraid.

Quite is also possible in these examples.

So **quite** is used with a positive idea and **rather** with a negative idea:

-   She's **quite intelligent** but **rather lazy**.

Rather is used before positive adjective (nice/ interesting..) In this case, it means '**unusually**' or '**surprisingly**'.

- These oranges are **rather nice**. Where did you get them ?

Quite means **completely** with a number of adjectives, especially:

sure, right, true, clear, different, incredible, amazing, certain, wrong, safe, obvious, unnecessary, extraordinary, impossible.

- She was **quite different** from what I expected (= completely different).

It is also used with some verbs to mean = completely.

- I **quite agree** with you. (= I completely agree).

2.8   All and whole

All (**of**) and **whole** can both be used with singular nouns to mean '**complete**', **every part of**'. The word order is different.

- Determiner + whole + noun.

- All (of) + determiner + noun

- Julie spent **the whole week** at home.

- Julie spent **all (of) the week** at home.

Murphy (1994: 178) states that **all** is used to mean '**the only thing(s)**'.

- **All** I've eaten today is a sandwich. (= the only thing I've eaten today).

    All is used in the expression (all about).

- They told us **all about** their holiday.

    When **all** is followed by (day, week), the definite article **the** is not used before these words.

- We spent **all day** on the beach.

    According to Swan (1984: 31), **all** precedes uncountable nouns.

- She's drunk **all the milk**. (Not … the whole milk)

    There are exceptions for example, **the whole time**, **the whole truth.**

    Whole is more common than **all** with singular countable nouns.

- He wasted **the whole lesson**. (More common than **all the lesson**).

    The whole of or **all (of)** is used before proper nouns, pronouns and determiners.

- **The whole of**/ **All of** Venice was under water. (Not **whole Venice**…).

- I've just read the **whole of** 'war and peace'. (or– **all of '**war and peace').

2.9 Almost and Nearly

"**Almost** and **nearly** can both express ideas connected with progress, measurement or counting. **Nearly** is less common in American English.

- I've **almost**/ **nearly** finished.

- There were **almost**/ **nearly** a thousand people there"

(Swan: 1996: 37).

He (1984: 32) shows that **almost** is a little 'nearer' than **nearly**.

- It's **nearly** ten o'clock. (= perhaps 9.45)

- It's **almost** ten o'clock. (= perhaps 9.57).

Very and **pretty** can be used with **nearly** but they can not be used with **almost**.

- I've **very/ pretty nearly** finished. (Not… very almost)

Swan (1996: ibid) elaborates in distinguishing between **nearly** and **almost** mentioning that **nearly** mostly suggests progress towards a goal or closeness to a figure. **Almost** is preferred for other ideas like 'similar to', but not 'exactly the same', and to make statements less definite.

- Jake is **almost** like a father to me.

- I **almost** with I'd stayed at home. (Not I **nearly** with…).

Nearly is not used before negative or non-assertive words: **never**, **nobody**, **nothing**, **any** etc. Instead, **almost** or **hardly** with **ever**, **anybody**, **anything** etc.

- She's **almost never**/ **hardly ever** at home (Not… **nearly never**).

- **Almost nobody**/ **hardly anybody** was there.

- He eats **almost anything.**

2.10 In case and If

"**In case** is not the same as **if**. **In case** is used to say why somebody does (or doesn't do) something. Something is done now **in case** something else happens later". (Murphy, 1994: 226)

- We'll buy some more food **in case** Tom comes. (= perhaps Tom will come; we'll buy some more food now, whether he comes or not; then we'll **already** have the food **if** he comes).

- We'll buy some more food **if** Tom comes. (= perhaps Tom will come; if he comes, we'll buy more food; if he doesn't comes, we won't buy any more food).

"In clauses which refer to the future, **in case** is normally followed by a present tense (like most other conjunctions).

- I've bought a chicken **in case** your mother **stays**. to lunch. (Not … **in case** your mother **will stay**…), (Swan, 1996: 257)

Should + infinitive is used (with a similar meaning to **might**) after **in case**. This adds the meaning 'by chance'.

- I've bought a chicken **in case** your mother **should stay** to lunch.

This structure is especially common in sentences about the past.

- I wrote down her address **in case** I **should forget** it.

- **In case** can be used (+ pas) to say why somebody did something:

In case can be used (+ past) to say why somebody did something:

- I drew a map for Sarah **in case she couldn't** find the house.

The prepositional phrase **in case of** has a wider meaning than the conjunction **in case**, and can be used in similar situations to **if**.

- **In case of** fire, break glass. (= if there is a fire)

- **In case of** emergency, telephone this number. (= if there is an emergency …).

In case of is used to shorten an if – clause.

- **If there is a fire, leave the room**

- **In case of fire, leave the room**

While if expresses a condition**, in case is used to express a** smaller possibility.

3. The Test's Results Presentation

This chapter is devoted to show the general subjects' performance in some English synonymic confused words. Then the discussion is made to deal with the students' erroneous responses after discussing error analysis in general.

The researcher has tested 50 students at the third year level in the English department, College of Al-Turath during the academic year 2010– 2011.

The researcher, in this test, tries to find out the student general performance and scores' mean in recognizing English confused words. A test of recognition level has been designed to show the ability of students to distinguish between both the syntactic and semantic features of English synonymic confused words.

The first step towards determining whether, or not, the structural area under investigation is acquired is to specify the criterion of acquisition at which the area of investigation is said to be acquired. Hence the criterion of adequacy has ranged between 70% and 80% (Al-Jazrawi, 1998: 86).

Table 1 General scores' Mean of the Subject's General Performance

	70% – 100%	Below 70%
Subjects، No.	22	28
scores' Mean	80	50

A survey of table (1) above shows that the mean of the subjects' general performance is 64%. This means that Iraqi EFL learners under investigation are generally not well-aware of English confused words and fail to acquire them.

3.1 Error Analysis

Error analysis focuses on the error learners make in the second or foreign language. This is achieved by comparing between the errors made in the target language (TL) and that TL itself (Halliday et. al., 1964: 119). According to Brown (1987: 170) an error "is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker".

Data analysis has shown that a high rate of learners' errors is attributable to communicative strategies which occur in the domain of **comprehension** intake, storage end recall.

Examples of errors attributable to communicative strategies are:

1- She thinks we ought to **begin** at six, while the **roads** are empty.(Item No.2)

2- You're **speaking** complete nonsense, as usual. (Item 4).

3- The road **finished** in a building site. (Item 3).

4- The wedding **happened** at the chapel at high noon.(Item 5)

The highest rate of the subjects' errors have been committed in the items that demand more syntactic interpretation than semantic one. Such errors are attributed to what is called:

Context of learning. Stenson (1983: 256) names the errors of this type **induced-errors**. They result from the classroom situation more than from the student's incomplete competence in English grammar.

Examples of this type of errors are:-

1- It's **quite** cold. (item 7).

The student uses (**quite**) before the adjective (**cold**) since he is used to put such an adverb in front of the adjective. So he isn't able to distinguish between (**rather**) and (**quite**) and he doesn't know that **rather** is followed by a negative meaning– adjective, and **quite** is followed by a positive- meaning one.

2- She's drunk **the whole** the milk. (item 8).

The students can't recognize that **whole** isn't followed by the definite article **the**. This is a probable teacher-talk induced error, or look up error caused by taking the word **whole** to mean the something as **all** syntactically and semantically.

3- Mrs. Allen drew a map for Sarah **if** she couldn't find the house. (item 10).

This is another look-up error. The student chooses (**if**) depending on the syntactic analysis, he sees that the conditional **if** is preceded by simple past and followed by could + an infinitive. Instead

the sentence should be analysed semantically. As a result, in this complex sentence, Mrs. Allen drew a map so that Sarah could find the house, if she couldn't find it.

Conclusion

English confused words can be sub- classified into those words which are more or less alike in form, sound, or meaning, but which have distinct differences in one or the other of these elements. The present research deals with words that are similar in meaning but have different uses.

In general, the method adopted throughout this study is uniform. All English similar in meaning-confused words that have been selected are singled out e.g. (**do** and **make**), (**if**, **in case**) for they have to be recognized and used in different expressions; finally, expensive explanations are given wherever necessary to justify particular usages.

It is not claimed that this research is exhaustive for English similar in meaning-confused words. Nevertheless, the difficulties tackled are real, and the examples, the difficulties tackled are real, and the examples are representative of the chosen confused words and the mistakes commonly made by foreign students of English, being the result of observations made over an obvious period of observations and according to the results of the students subjected to the test made in this research.

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Underline the correct word that completes the sentence:-

1- During the holidays I'm going to (do/make) some swimming and a lot of reading

2- She thinks we ought to (begin / start) at six , while the roads are empty.

3 - The road (ended/ finished) in a building site .

4- You're (talking /speaking) complete nonsense ,

5- The wedding (happened / took place) at the chapel at high noon.

6– He looks (as / like) his brother.

7- It's (rather /quite) cold .

8- She's drunk (all / the whole) the milk.

9- I (nearly/almost) wish I'd stayed at home.

10- Mrs. Allen drew a map for Sarah (if / in case) she couldn't find the house.