

Errors Analysis of Spelling Among University Students of English in Jordan: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This paper aims at investigating the spelling errors made by students of English language at the World Islamic and Science Education University (WISE) in Jordan. Cook's classification of errors is adopted in this study. Errors and mistakes were categorized into four categories, which include substitution, omission, insertion, and transposition. The participants of the study were 50 students, who enrolled in "Error Analysis" course in two semesters of the academic year 2016/2017. The data for the study were derived from three exams: the first, the second, and the final exams, given to the students during the two semesters. Then the data were analyzed after completing the course in the second semester of 2016-2017. The results of the study revealed that (38 %) of the errors referred to omission and (28%) to insertion. However, errors of substitution and transposition occurred less frequently than the first two of errors, with a percentage of (22%) and (15%), respectively. The study showed that using vowels and pronunciation incorrectly is one of the major causes of the learners' errors. Further, the interference of the first language plays its role in this regard. The study concludes that more efforts and concern should be given to spelling errors made by students since the learning of spelling is an important part of language learning. Some recommendations and pedagogical implications for future research are suggested.

Keywords: Spelling mistakes, Omission Errors, Substitution Errors, Transposition Errors, Insertion Errors

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Introduction

Language is an audible behavior through which people can express and communicate their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Learning a second language has always been everyone's dream. However, it is challenging to learn a new language. There are some problems faced by EFL students when learning a language. One of these problems is spelling, which is one of English writing problems that EFL students encounter. Fagerberg, (2006) claims that spelling is essential since one misspelling may change the meaning intended to convey in the text. Spelling errors are the most common type of mistake in the written work of learners of English (Cook, 1999). According to AbiSamra (2003), errors are considered as a source of valuable information on the learning strategies of learners. They are regarded as a stratagem that can assist in the learning process. Errors provide evidence of the learner's level in the target language (Gass & Selinker, 1984).

English spelling and phonological rules share a reciprocal relation, which contributes to mainly make errors in spelling. This interdependence between English spelling and phonological rules leads to complicate spelling rules associated with difficulty and irregularity (Al-Saudi, 2013). Errors are often made by the learners, who are most familiar with words of specific written forms; therefore, differences between spelling and pronunciation in many languages pose a great challenge to inexperienced learners of English. That is to say, a word or a morph will be pronounced by students as spelled provided that its pronunciation is different from its spelling. Besides, interpreting some combinations of letters according to the rules of spelling of another language would be another common mistake (Wachowicz & Scott, 1999).

According to Hildreth (1962), correct spelling is evidence of good manners, while bad spelling may give the impression of inadequate education or carelessness. However, EFL learners encountered spelling problem for not being able to identify pronunciation distinctly, which is a serious problem affecting students to make mistakes particularly with the use of the vowel sounds and other consonant sounds that do not have direct equivalents in their own language e.g. /p/ /b/, /f/ and /v/. For example, students in Jordan, whose native language is Arabic, often make mistakes when they inscribe the /p/ sound and the silent /e/ at the end of a word; subsequently, /p/ becomes /b/ or vice versa as in: (put-but), (example- exambel), and (have-hav).

In Jordan, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) where students are expected to master the four skills of the language: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Analyzing spelling errors made by students provides a deep understanding of the learning process. Error analysis is significant in diagnosing the difficulties experienced by students, so that such spelling problems made by students can be facilitated and solved, which will help improve students' ability in writing, transforming them into good spellers. Many studies, which focused on students' spelling mistakes, have been reviewed particularly in Jordan. Only few studies conducted were found to discuss the difficulties in spelling faced by students majoring English language at Jordanian universities. These studies discussed issues like sources of errors, spelling and grammar together and spelling and pronunciation among students learning English.

One of these studies was conducted by Al-Zuoud (2013), who investigated common mistakes made by Jordanian students learning English in a written composition, classifying students' spelling errors according to Cook's classification of errors. More studies are reviewed in literature review section. Cook (1999) categorized errors into four categories: substitution errors where errors occur when students substitute a letter by another one; omission errors where errors occur when omitting a letter to the target word; insertion errors, which occur when students add a letter to the target word; and transposition errors, which occur when the students reverse the order of two letters or more.

Therefore, this study comes to analyze errors made by university students majoring English, investigating the problems and trying to understand them and so could be dealt with more effectively. The study also provides suggestions that can help students enhance their spelling skills. Error analysis in this study would reveal the sources of these spelling errors and the causes of their frequent occurrence. Having discovered the sources and causes, it would be possible to determine the remedy.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

- To explore the reasons behind students' errors which provide evidence of how language is learned.
- To identify, classify and analyze the different spelling errors and mistakes that constitute spelling problems for students of English at WISE University.
- To identify learning strategies and remedial procedures that might help students as well as instructors to remedy the wrong ways of misspelling.

Research Questions

This paper mainly focuses on analyzing the WISE University students' errors in spelling of English. The study also gives answers to the following research questions:

- What are the types and potential sources of the errors Jordanian university students make in spelling?
- What are the reasons of the common spelling errors that Jordanian university students make in their writing?
- What techniques should be applied in order to overcome the spelling problems of students?

Literature Review

This section reviews the literature related to spelling errors and mistakes made by students studying at universities. Some studies have investigated spelling difficulties among Arab EFL students when learning the language. One of these studies is conducted by Othman (2018), who investigated spelling errors made by the Saudi students at English Department at WISE University in Saudi Arabia. The study revealed that the major cause of errors is the wrong use of vowels and pronunciation as well as mother tongue interference, concluding that more attention should be given

to learners' spelling errors, as spelling teaching is an essential aspect of language learning.

AlBalawi (2017) investigated spelling errors of the introductory year students at WISE University in Saudi Arabia. The study concluded that there was an impact on the coherence of students' writings, which involved errors classified into three main categories; omission, addition and substitution. It was also found that the first language interference related to the differences between the systems of native language and foreign language led to spelling mistakes.

Hamed (2016), investigated spelling errors made by Saudi students when writing English. The data were collected from 26 Saudi EFL university students through a fifty-word dictation. The study indicated that there was a concentration on errors around vowel sounds, diphthongs and words containing silent letters. Besides, learners applied their knowledge of mother tongue on their English learning experience. The findings revealed that students' errors of substitution were the highest followed by omission, transposition and insertion. Alhaisoni et al. (2015) examined the types of spelling errors in English composition on 122 EFL undergraduate students at the University of Hail in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected using writing tasks by 53 males and 69 females in the first year. The findings indicated that omission errors are considered the highest among students, and that the majority of errors are based on wrong use of vowels and pronunciation. The study concluded that spelling errors occur due to anomalies existing in L2 and L1 interference.

Further, another study conducted by Benyo (2014), who examined English spelling errors made by first-year students studying at Dongola University. Two spelling tests (pre and post intervention) were administrated to 200 EFL Sudanese students in two different faculties. The pre -intervention test was given to the students during their first semester whereas the post- intervention spelling test was administered after two months of the second semester. The study revealed that students face difficulties with English vowel sounds and some consonant sounds which do not exist in Arabic. The study concluded that another primary cause of students' spelling errors is attributed to the students' unawareness and overgeneralization of English spelling rules.

Al-Saudi (2013) investigated spelling errors made by EFL students of English language at Tafilah Technical University (TTU) in Jordan. The study aimed at identifying the types of errors made by students in spelling when answering essay questions. It also seeks the spelling difficulties faced by the students in writing English. The study concluded most mistakes were due to the irregularities of spelling rules of English and the confusion or misspelling English pronunciation sometimes brings about. Al-Zuoud and Kabilan (2013) investigated common mistakes made by Jordanian students learning English in a written composition, classifying students' spelling errors according to Cook's classification of errors. It was found out that the most frequent spelling errors were substitution and omission errors. The researchers suggest strategies to help students to be good spellers, such as doing more practices in spelling to get a better understanding of spelling.

Additionally, Al-Harrasi (2012) conducted a study in Omani second-cycle school for females. The study aimed to investigate the most common patterns of spelling errors among Omanis, using a dictation test based on both one syllable words and multi-

syllable words. The errors were analyzed according to Cook's classification (1999). The study reported the reasons behind the errors discussed with the support of an interview and correspondence with previous researches. The results revealed that substitution is the most common type of spelling errors.

All the above-cited studies are relevant to the present study attempting to conduct similar objectives in investigating the Arab EFL students' spelling errors when learning English. However, this study is different from the above-mentioned studies in that it intends to investigate the most common spelling mistakes made by EFL students majoring English Language conducted at department of English at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University (WISE) in Jordan.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study consist of (50) students studying English language at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University (WISE) in Jordan. Those students were selected after they had registered a major course (Error Analysis) in two semesters of the academic year 2016/2017. In the first semester, (27) students attended the course, whereas in the second semester, (23) students attended the same course (Error Analysis). These students were also homogenous with regard to nationality, native language (Arabic), language proficiency and educational background.

Instruments of the Study

The data for the study were derived from three exams: the first, the second, and the final exams, given to the students during the two semesters. The data were collected through reviewing students' answer sheets on the three exams given to them during the semesters. The questions of the tests were based on spelling and grammatical mistakes. Only spelling mistakes were considered and reviewed for the purpose of this study. Then the data were analyzed after completing the course in the second semester of the year 2016-2017.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data in this study was based on Cook's (1999) classification of spelling errors, which includes omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition. Therefore, measuring reliability for this instrument was not needed as it was developed by Cook in 1999. The data were analyzed and categorized by reviewing all the mistakes made by students and classifying them according to the categories mentioned above. The mistakes and errors were measured and recorded as percentages. Such mistakes and errors were also discussed with the students, so that they could benefit from and avoid making them again.

Results of the Study

This section reveals the findings of the study and the analysis of spelling errors made by 50 students studying English at WISE. Each of the major types of errors (omission,

substitution, insertion, and transposition) was examined individually. The main sources of errors were also identified. The analysis of the study is based on Cook's classification (1999), through which the proportions of spelling mistakes/errors made by L2 students are examined. Errors in spelling were classified according to error types, which are Omission, Substitution, Insertion, and Transposition (OSIT), as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Frequency of Errors according to Cook's OSIT

| Type of Error | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Omission | 42 | 38 % |
| Insertion | 31 | 28 % |
| Substitution | 22 | 19 % |
| Transposition | 15 | 15 % |
| Total | 110 | 100% |

Table (1) shows that all the students made different types of error in spelling. The table indicates clearly that the total of errors made by the English language students at WISE was 110. These errors were classified according to the type the error. It was found that omission presents the highest error percentage of 38 % (42 errors). Next comes insertion type of errors with a percentage of 28 % (31 errors), followed by the errors of substitution with a percentage of 19 % (22 errors), and then errors of transposition with a percentage of 15% (15 errors). However, the study revealed that errors of transposition and substitution occurred less frequently than the first two types of errors. The results show that omission type of errors presents the highest score among other types.

For example, table (1) shows that investigation of the common type of spelling errors made by university students was omission (38 %) such as befor for before or wich instead of which. The second type of errors made by them was 'insertion' (28 %), such as withe for with or knowen for known. The third type of errors was substitution (19 %) such as than for then or thier instead of thier. Transposition was reported the least type of spelling errors found in the examples of English- major students' answers, which was 15 % the most frequent example of this type in this study was tow for two.

To explain, the findings of the study are discussed in the following subsections as shown in Table (1) above.

Omission Errors

Omission-based errors are made by students when deleting or leave out a letter or more from words as a result of ignorance of the actual word spelling. Students are not able to memorize word spelling as they do not practice writing and/ or they spell as they pronounce words. For example, the following are few examples on the omission of silent letters:

- rite instead of write
- now- instead of know
- forein- instead of foreign

- wich instead of which
- lisen instead of listen

To avoid this problem, EFL students are encouraged to practice spelling more, so that they can memorize words with silent sounds easily, as the more they practice, the better speller they become. Another example on error omission is omitting the phoneme /e/ at the end of English words, such as:

- hav- instead of have
- befor instead of before
- hid instead of hide
- languag instead of language

Further, the error based on consonant doubling is another problem faced by students in spelling. For example:

- swiming- instead of swimming
- begining - instead of beginning
- biger instead of bigger

It can be realized that the findings show that students' spelling errors are associated with their pronunciation. Therefore, any unpronounced sound is deleted, which is an error attributed to the lack of phonological rules that makes it difficult for the students to develop understanding of the relationships between sounds and letters. Such findings agree with Aqel's findings (1993) that indicate that the reason behind omission-based errors is the divergence between orthography and pronunciation of English. Besides, the mother tongue interference is also found as one of the main causes for omission spelling errors, which corresponds to Al-Jarf's findings (2010), where the transfer of the Arabic spelling system to English was the third most common source of spelling errors, which is due to the difference in orthographic complexity between English and Arabic.

Insertion Errors

This type of errors refers to inserting extra sound in a word. These misspelt words would be due to the lack of knowledge of English language spelling. Insertion errors occupy the second place with a percentage of 28% (31 errors). For example, students insert /e/ vowel sound where it is needed, such as (withe) for (with), (knownen) instead of (known), and (frome) for (from). Further, some students keep /e/ sound when adding -ing to a verb. For example, (haveing) instead of (having), (takeing) instead of (taking) and (writeing) instead of (writing) for these verbs (use, take, leave). Insertion of /t/ is also another type of error made by the students, such as (reacht) instead of (reach), (mutch) instead of (much) and (luntch) instead of (lunch). This finding is asserted by Albalawi, (2016), where the reason behind such errors is attributed to poor knowledge of spelling conventions. More examples on some spelling words of English- major student at WISE are shown in Table.2.

Substitution Errors

This type of errors occurs when one or more sounds are replaced by one or more different sound. In this study, substitution errors occupy the third high rate among other spelling errors. Having analyzed the learners' substitution spelling errors, it is found out that the silent sounds were clearly a major spelling problem as no sound-letter correspondence for silent sounds. Below are examples on spelling substitution errors:

A. Vowel Substitution Errors

(his) instead of (has) or vice versa; (went)- instead of (want); (throw) - instead of (through); (than) instead of (then); (pot) instead (put)

B. Plural form Substitution Errors

(Classez) instead of (classes); (vizits) instead of (visit); (friendz) instead of (friends). In these examples, the students substitute /s/ by /z/

C. Consonants Substitution Errors

(How) instead of (who) or vice versa; (but) instead of (put); (bacic) instead of (basic); (foto) instead of photo;
(jop) instead of (job); (beld) instead of (build); (litter) instead of (letter).

The examples given include the students' substitution of /z/ instead of /s/, /f/ instead of /ph/, /b/ instead of /p/, /k/ instead of /c/ and /s/ instead of /c/. These findings show the spelling problems faced by the students in term of substitution errors. This finding is in line with Cook (1999) who attributed the vowel substitution errors made by Arab students to pronunciation.

Table.2: Examples of some spelling words of English- major student at WISE

| Error/ mistake types | Errors/ Mistakes | The correct words |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Omission | - Languag/ language | - Language |
| | - Befor/ | - Before |
| | - Wich/ | - Which |
| | - Frind | - Friend |
| | - Hapy | - Happy |
| | - Now | - Know |
| | - Writen | - Written |
| | - Voicd | - Voiced |
| Insertion | - Knowen | - Known |
| | - Withe | - With |
| | - Pepol | - People |
| | - Writting | - Writing |
| | - Beautifull | - Beautiful |
| | - Frome | - From |
| | - Having | - Having |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Substitution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bitter - Jop - Their - Than - But - Beld - How | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better - Job - There - Then - Put - Build - Who |
| Transposition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their - Tow - Friend - Three - Bigen - Well | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their - Two - Friend - There - Begin - Will |

In addition, this study agrees with Aqel's (1993) that the substitution type of errors is due to the divergence between English orthography and pronunciation. This tendency is reinforced as of the influence of the Arabic system in which the spelling pattern follows the pronunciation pattern. Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) also state that most of the spelling errors students made were due to their mispronunciation, lack of awareness and regular spelling patterns (Othman, 2018).

Transposition Errors

This type of errors includes errors made as a result of mis-ordering the sounds of English. This study shows that transportation errors occupy the fourth place with a percentage of 15% (15 errors). The study reveals that transposition is one of spelling problems encountered by Jordanian students. For example, mis-ordering the vowels occurs in words like (freind) instead of (friend) (their) instead of (there). These transportation errors are due to the lack of competence and the right intuition of the correct pattern or rule, plus limited exposure to spoken and written English.

This study shows that the main sources of spelling errors are attributed to the fact that English and Arabic have totally different scripts; not only this but also Arabic has regular spelling according to its pronunciation while English does not. The results of this study are also in harmony with the findings of Alhaisoni et al. (2015) in his analysis of spelling substitution errors, claiming that there is a strong correlation between the articulations and the spelling of words.

Conclusion

This paper aims at investigating the most typical spelling errors made by Jordanian English major students at the University of WISE. In general, the process of learning a second language is challenging where learners are expected to make errors. Consequently, those who are interested in learning English should consider the fact that both Arabic and English language have completely different writing systems. For instance, Arabic writing style starts from right to left, whereas English writing style starts from left to right, which leads to confuse students. In addition, the way English is spoken differs from the way it is written. This is due to the fact the English is not a

phonetic language while Arabic is. Therefore, based on the results of this study, English- major students at WISE University made spelling errors due to many reasons such as the interference of students' first language. Students lack of concentration when answering questions in exams. Students who learn English as a second language may suffer from some difficulties with spelling. Thus, practicing more and focusing on how students spell and pronounce words could be the best solution.

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