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Analysis Spelling Errors: Iranian Female Beginner Learners of English by 1. Mohammad Golshan and 2. Pouya Reigani

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Abstract

This empirical study evaluated spelling errors of Iranian female beginner learners of English and aimed to shed light on error analysis in form level; so, adopted Cook's classification of errors, which categorized errors into four categories: substitution, omission, insertion, and transposition, to what the percentage and frequency of their error is. Participants of this study are 40 female students who were drawn from three classes of grade one (FC3: First Friends 3) students in Isfahan, Iran, whose first language is Farsi. The data were collected through writing task, and English spelling task. An analysis of errors established that errors of omission (59%) constituted the highest proportion of errors. The majority of learners' spelling errors were related to a wrong use of vowels and pronunciation. When uncertain about accurate spellings, beginner learners often associated a wide range of vowel and consonant combinations in an attempt to spell words accurately, sometimes even combining two distinct lexical items by overlapping vowels. This research noticed that students do not know the actual sound system of English and students use their mother-tongues in their spelling, so they use the wrong letters.

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



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1. Introduction

As an important component of writing, spelling poses a major challenge to most beginner learners of English, resulting in misspelled words and incoherent sentences Hyland (2003). Hildreth (1962) observes that correct spelling is evidence of good manners and bad spelling may give the impression of inadequate education or carelessness. Bean and Bouffler (1987) claimed that, ‘Standard spelling has assumed importance beyond the function it plays in written language. It has become the ‘ticket’ to the literacy club—the heir to the traditions and scholarly world of print’. Spelling is a communication tool, not an end in itself (Chandler-Olcott, 2001). Inaccurate spelling often sends a message that the writer is careless or less intelligent than other students (Granham & Harris, 2005).

Addressing spelling errors should be an integral part of teaching English language. Bad spelling affects English sentence structure and causes the mispronunciation of words. Bowen (2011) emphasized the learning of spelling as a component of writing, not as the result of studying isolated words. Despite the importance of spelling in producing meaningful written texts, language programs mostly focus on teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary building, and grammar and often neglect spelling instruction. We, as the researchers, claim that spelling in the Saudi context has not been given the priority it deserves.



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English is taught in Iran as a foreign language (EFL) whereby students are expected to master the four basic language skills i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing. However, most of the EFL Iranian students face difficulties when they try to create a piece of writing. Students face many difficulties when they write, especially in spelling. They cannot express their ideas, because they cannot spell words correctly. The researchers noted that there is a problem with the Iranian students in writing and spelling in particular, where they have difficulties in spelling and pronunciation of the word, because of the difference between and English. It was also noted that when students cannot spell the English word, they try to write it in Farsi.

This study sheds light on error analysis in form level; the researchers adopted Cook's classification of errors, which categorized errors into four categories: substitution, omission, insertion, and transposition. That is,

- Substitution errors: errors that occur when students substitute a letter by another one.
- Omission errors: errors occur when students omit a letter to the target word.
- Insertion errors: errors occur when students add a letter to the target word.



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- Transposition errors: errors that occur when the students reverse the order of two letters or more.

The purpose of the study reported on in this paper was to analyze the errors made in spelling in the context of the concurrent development of spelling skills in a context of second-language learning.

The study's research questions are as follows:

- 1) What types of spelling errors do Iranian female students make in English?
- 2) To examine whether students use their mother-tongue language or not in their spelling.

2. Background

Some research indicates that phonological knowledge plays an important role in learning how to spell in a second language (e.g., Fashola et al., 1996; Geva, Yaghoub-Zadeh & Schuster, 2000). Error analysis (EA) is a linguistic study of errors committed by language learners. Stephen Pit Corder and colleagues (Corder, 1967) established this theory in the 1960s. It was an alternative approach to contrastive analysis, it is also an approach that was influenced by behaviorism through which applied linguists sought to use the form distinctions between the



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learners' first and second language to predict errors. According to (Weirseechsh, 1991), EA is a valuable aid to identify and explain the difficulties that learners faced.

Figueredo and Varnhagen (2004) also compared the difference in spelling errors and correction. The sample for this study consisted of Canadian students (16 males and 37 females). The researchers used two essays written by the university students. Participants were given to read essays written by university students and identify spelling errors in those essays. The researchers classified the spelling errors into three types: phonological, orthographic, and morphological and found that the participants made more phonological errors compared to orthographic and morphological errors.

Likewise, Al-Jabri (2006) investigated the spelling errors of 114 Omani fifth-grade students in two rural schools in Oman. Data were collected from spelling tests on 10 words. In this study, the most frequent errors committed were also errors of omission and substitution, while the errors of transposition and insertion were less frequent.

He and Wang (2009) investigated spelling errors among two Chinese EFL beginner young learners for 14 months. The results showed that spelling errors occurred as a result of using 10 name-based letters and 20 sound-based letters.



MJAL 7:2 Summer 2015

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Additionally, errors occur with EFL writers who cannot grasp the complexity of vowels and consonants in the English spelling system. In Singapore, Dixon et al. (2010) examined the first language (L1) influence on 285 bilingual children's spelling performance in their second language (L2). The analysis showed a significant direct influence of L1 on correct spelling: Chinese group made more substitution and transposition errors than Malay and Tamil.

The various errors committed by the Iranian EFL learners have attracted the attention of some Iranian EFL researchers. Mohammadi (1992) analyzed the errors collected from the final examinations samples of Iranian school level EFL learners, and upon analysis he concluded that the spelling errors are the most common.

Keshavarz and Abdollahian (2007) made a cross-sectional study of composition errors. They explored the sources of errors in students' compositions, giving a greater weight to Interlingua errors. Nayyernia (2011) analyzed 30 erroneous sentences of some Iranian EFL learners with Persian as their mother tongue to find error patterns. Only 16.7 percent of the errors were Interlingua errors.

A review of literature on spelling errors reveals a lack of research and shows that very few studies have investigated the difficulties that Iranian students have with spelling when learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, our study is important for measuring frequency and finding major sources of spelling errors in



MJAL 7:2 Summer 2015

ISSN 0974-8741

Analysis Spelling Errors: Iranian Female Beginner Learners of English by 1. Mohammad Golshan and 2. Pouya Reigani

writing from Iranian EFL. The classification and data analysis of spelling errors in this study is based mainly on Cook's classification (1999): 1) Omissions (the deletions of some letters), 2) Substitutions (replacing one letter with another), 3) Insertions (adding extra letters), and 4) Transpositions (reversing the position of letters).

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Participants of this study are 40 female students who were drawn from three classes of grade one (FC3: First Friends 3) students in Isfahan, Iran, whose first language is Farsi. The majority of children who enter grade one (FC3: First Friends 3) can speak in English.

3.2. Instruments

The data were collected through writing task, and English spelling task.

3.2.1. Writing task

The participants were asked to write a well-organized essay on one of familiar topics of their books. They were asked to write approximately 20 to 30 words and the time was sufficient. The suggested topic was "*My Room*".



MJAL 7:2 Summer 2015

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3.2.2. Spelling task

Students were asked to spell a number of words. Spelling continued until all students had reached a ceiling of at least 10 consecutive errors on the spelling words. Some students reached a ceiling earlier than others but testing continued until it was clear that the ceiling had been reached by all students. Spelling scores were totaled and then converted into a percentage score out of 40.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers classified errors according to Cook's classification of spelling errors (1999) (omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition). Moreover, the researchers recorded the frequency of each error type and their percentages of the total. Cook developed this type of classification in 1999, and there was no need to measure reliability for this instrument again.

4. Examples

This section offers the findings of the study and an analysis of spelling errors most frequently committed by 40 Iranian female EFL. Then each of the major error types examined (omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition) individually as well as the main sources of errors. The study draws mainly on Cook (1999),



Analysis Spelling Errors: Iranian Female Beginner Learners of English by 1.Mohammad Golshan and 2. Pouya Reigani

who studied the proportions of spelling mistakes/errors made by L2 students. Errors in spelling were categorized according to OSIT (Omission, Substitution, Insertion, and Transposition).

Table 1. Examples of Spelling Error

Type Of Error	Actual word	Example
Omission	Home , Friend	Hom , Frend
Substitution	boy	doy
Insertion	Monkey	Monkeye
Transposition	Tuesday	Teusday

The spelling errors analyzed in table 1 according to the four categories suggested by Cook (1999); the percentages in the table below based on total (40) learners:

Table 2. Frequency of errors according to OSIT

Type Of Error	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	242	59%
Substitution	18	4.3%
Insertion	33	8%
Transposition	119	28.7%
Total	412	100%



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All of learners committed at least one error in their writing. The type of errors committed by the largest numbers of learners is omission. In omission type, students omit some letters from words, because they do not know the actual spelling of the words. Students can remember words but not the spelling so, they write and say as they pronounced words.

Students should carry out more activities or co-activities in their courses to improve their spelling words. The researchers found a new type of errors in students' writing in which they use words from their native language, because they are incapable to write the actual words. This may help doing further studies in this type of errors.

This may tell us that less attention has been given to spelling in English courses. The main cause of substitution errors is the lack of knowledge of the relationship between sounds and written symbols and faulty pronunciation.

This study highlights some findings that are important to teachers of English in Iran. The researchers found also another type of errors, which are technical errors. Students write words with the capital letters instead of small ones or in transposition error used "b" instead of "d". They also found the students using Persian words with English letters as well as actual Persian words to express their ideas. To return to the research questions, the researchers found that, this study



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answered all of the questions. There were four types of spelling errors in students' writing substitution, omission, transposition, and insertion, but there is another type of errors related to technical error, such as capitalization. The statistics of this study regarding the four basic types of errors are again in agreement with previous studies. The researchers noticed that students do not know the actual sound system of English, so they use the wrong letters. The researchers suggest some of the points that support teachers to help their students to be good at spelling:

- Explain the rules of spelling to students.
- Drill and practice on spelling rules, such as suffixes, prefixes, and (y to ie).
- Tell students to say and spell the words aloud.
- Encourage students to read more, the more you read the more you will see how different words spelled and used in context.

With these strategies, the researchers hope that errors are bound to decrease.



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5. Conclusion

This paper is a study on the spelling errors made by Iranian beginner female learners of English students in their writings and spelling. This study tried to discuss more on the situation and causes of the problems occurred in the writing practice through an error analysis approach. Founding of this study indicates that problems of Iranian learners of English spelling lie mostly in omission. The detailed analysis of these errors also shows that the learners' most important source of errors is mother-tongue transfer; unawareness of the rules of target language can be considered as the origin of some of these errors. Spelling English words among learners is confused, because of completely different Persian and English writing systems (such as, the number and quality of vowels and diphthongs, consonant clusters in word initial, medial and final positions is different for the English sound system). Therefore, in order to improve the spelling and writing ability of the learners, teachers should pay more attention to the two alphabet systems and rules. To meet this purpose, teachers' knowledge of both L_1 and L_2 languages can be helpful.



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MJAL 7:2 Summer 2015

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