

## **ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE MOST COMMON SPELLING ERRORS AMONG SAUDI FEMALE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH: CAUSES AND REMEDIES**

**Fatima Salamh Albalawi**  
ELC / Tabuk University  
**SAUDIA ARABIA**

### **ABSTRACT**

Many learners of English, including Saudi learners in universities exhibit difficulties with English spelling. These difficulties are attributed to a number of causes, such as the irregularity of the orthographic system of English and mother tongue interference. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the spelling errors made by the Saudi students (female) who are studying English language as an essential requirement to begin their academic study in Prince Fahad Bin Sultan University. This study adopts Cook's classification of errors, which categorized errors into four categories: substitution, omission, insertion, and transposition. Participants of this study are 80 female students whose first language is Arabic. 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 whereas transportation spelling errors occur as the lesser frequency with a percentage mean of 4.3% (36 errors). The major cause of the of learners' spelling errors is due to the wrong use of vowels and pronunciation. The findings of this study emphasized more focused attention to learners' spelling errors, as spelling teaching is an essential aspect of language learning. In the light of the study findings, the researcher suggested some recommendations and pedagogical implications for future research and teaching.

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

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language is the mirror that reveals what is going on in the human mind. It is the audible behavior, which distinguishes man from other living things (Yule 2006:9). English is taught in Saudi Arabia as a foreign language (EFL) whereby students are expected to master the four basic language skills i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing. English writing skills are significant as it plays an important role in communication. To convey messages effectively, correct spelling is strongly required. Spelling is essential since one misspelling may change the meaning that the author intended to convey in the text (Fagerberg, 2006). Spelling in particular is one of the many English writing problems EFL students encounter, including Saudi students.

As an EFL teacher, I have constantly noticed that Saudi students often find difficulty in spelling or pronouncing very simple monosyllabic words. Saudi Students commit many errors when they try to create a piece of writing, especially in spelling. Wrong spelling makes it difficult for Saudi students express their ideas because they cannot spell words correctly. Cook (1999) claims that spelling errors are the most common type of mistake in the written work of learners of English. In Language learning, Corder (1967) states that "errors were considered a problem that should be eradicated as soon as possible." However, errors are now looked on as a device that can assist in the learning process. They provide evidence of the learner's level in the target language, Gass and Selinker (1984). AbiSamra (2003) considers errors as a source of valuable information on the learning strategies of learners. Hasyin

(2002) agrees with many previous studies that errors are bad things in learning English as a foreign language; error analysis is advantageous for both learners and teachers. It provides information to the teachers on students' errors. Teachers can make use of this information to correct their students' errors, and to improve their teaching as well as focus on those areas that need reinforcement. There is no doubt that spelling accurately is a basic and an essential skill for every student of English, which enables writers to express their thoughts and feelings in a standard manner. Chandler- Olcott (2001) considers spelling as a communication tool, not an end in itself. Hyland (2003) emphasizes that poor spelling hinders pupils from better communication. Inaccurate spelling often sends a message that the writer is careless or less intelligent than other students (Granham& Harris, 2005). On the other hand, 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) claim 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'. In this study, Cook's classification of errors is adapted; errors are categorized 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.
- Transposition errors: errors that occur when the students reverse the order of two letters or more.

The purpose of this study is not merely to analyze the students' errors but also to determine the problems and try to understand them so that they could be tackled more effectively and to provide suggestions on how to help students improve their writing skills. Error analysis in this study would reveal the sources of these spelling errors and the causes of their frequent occurrence. Once the sources and causes are discovered, it would be possible to determine the remedy.

### **Importance of the Study**

The significance of this study runs from the importance of spelling in learning .The current study is needed to fill this gap in order to gain new insights into the spelling problems that face Saudi students and possible teaching strategies that could help overcome spelling problems and enhance the students' competence in spelling.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To reconsider the causes leading to the problem of misspelling, and to suggest a solution or treatment.
2. To identify, classify and analyze the different spelling errors and the sounds that constitute the problematic areas for the female Saudi students of Prince Fahad Bin Sultan University.
3. To provide recommendations to help teachers improve their techniques of teaching spelling and help students overcome errors and mistakes.

## Research Questions

1. What are the most common spelling errors that Saudi Female students made in their writing?
2. What are the reasons of the common spelling errors that Saudi student made in their writing?
3. Are there ways that could help teachers to improve students' performance in English spelling?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the publication of *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* in 1974 by Fries, a lot of studies have been carried out to account for L2 acquisition in different languages around the world. Spelling is the learner's ability to write a word correctly from memory. It is a representative of a language Langer (2014). Moreover, it is a basic and essential skill for every student of English, which enables writers to express their thoughts and feelings in a standard manner. Effective writing depends on effective spelling and so understanding learners' spelling difficulties can help teachers support the development of learners' writing. Cook (1992) states that spelling is the way writers can express clearly their ideas. Hyland (2003) adds that in spite that spelling is an important component of writing, it poses a major challenge to most beginner learners of English, resulting in misspelled words and incoherent sentences. A great deal of research investigating the spelling errors made by students learning English has been conducted, but as for the literature on spelling errors among Arab students, only some studies have been carried out on the difficulties that face Arab students in studying EFL.

Ibrahim (1978) conducts a study of the spelling errors in the writings of undergraduate Arabic-students of English enrolled in the Department of English at the University of Jordan. He has found that most of the errors are a result from silent letters, as the case in the word government (government). Also, some of the errors are caused by the differences between the Arabic and English sound systems. Swan & Smith (1987) and Kharma & Hajjaj (1989). Investigate the kinds of spelling problems that encounter Arabic learners of English. They attribute those difficulties to the fact that Arabic is written from right to left (thus learners may write crwonrather than crown). Ryan and Meara (1991) investigate the spelling of Arabic speaking English language learners. The participants included ten Arabic speaking students enrolled in university, ten non-Arabic English learners whose English proficiency matched with the Arabic speakers, and ten adult native speakers of English who were teachers in university. The results of this study find that Arabic speakers have great difficulty in processing English words due to vowels that cause particular difficulty for Arabic speakers who use mental representations of English words that rely heavily on consonantal segments and ignore vowels.

Azzam (1993) examines the spelling errors made by children learning Arabic, aged 6 to 11 years. The result indicates the misspellings of Arabic speaking children persisted through primary school, pointing to the difficulties involved in mastering the Arabic written language. The spelling errors centered around context sensitive rules, additions and omissions of letters. Aqel (1993) concludes that the spelling errors committed by Palestinian students learning English are almost the same as those errors committed by other Arab learners of English, which can be attributed to Arabic influence which is evident in the replacement of the "b" for "p", deletion of silent consonants, and vowel deletion finally. Other reasons are attributed to

inter language errors resulting from overgeneralization of L2 rules and ignorance of L2 rules. EL-Hibir and Taha (1993) conduct a study on spelling errors; they find that the discrepancy between the writing system and the pronunciation of English makes orthography far from phonemic. They add that spelling errors result not only from the inconsistencies in English spelling and pronunciation but also from the influence of the student's mother tongue. Cook (1999:1) asserts, "Unlike native speakers, students may not know the actual system of English, and will appear to use the wrong letter". Writing well is really a big challenge for both native and non-native students. He deals with the learners spelling difficulties and suggests three main problems that are single words, pronunciation-based, and spelling-correspondence problems. Single word problems come from the fact that English consists of many individual words and so learners have to study some words individually. Pronunciation-based problems occur when learners do not know the English sound system and therefore use the wrong letters. Spelling-correspondence problems. Cook (1999) also specifies four types of spelling errors that learners of English commonly make. These are omissions (leaving letters out), substitutions (replacing letters with incorrect ones), transpositions (reversing the position of letters), and insertion/additions (including extra letters). In their study of spelling errors, Swan and Smith (2001) has found that spelling problems of the Arab students are due to the linguistic differences between Arabic and English, whereas the low rate of spelling errors has been scored by other learners from non-Arabic backgrounds, whose languages share more similarities with English.

Phenix (2001) divides spelling difficulties into two categories: 1) linguistic, which are related to the nature of the language and 2) personal, which relate to the different stages of development learners go through. He describes these stages as follows:

Pre-phonetic – learners use a mixture of pictures, shapes, letters or signs.

Semi-phonetic – learners use letter names to represent sounds.

Phonetic – learners use known sounds to write words and they become aware of word boundaries and leave spaces between words.

Visual – learners use most letters correctly, if not in the right order; they use vowels in every syllable.

Mature – learners use a full range of strategies to spell words and they are able to make analogies from known spelling patterns; they are able to recognize incorrect spellings.

Abu- Rabia and Siegel (2002) in their study of the spelling of bilingual Arabic children (grades 4-8) compared with monolingual English children matched for age; they find a significant correlation between spelling in Arabic and spelling in English. In another word, the bilinguals who had reading disability perform significantly better than the monolinguals with areading disability on the spelling measures, reflectingthe positive transfer from Arabic to English. So, the results of their study suggest a positive transfer from the regular nature of the Arabic orthography to the English orthography despite the different natures of the two systems. Saiegh-Haddad, (2003, 2004, 2005, 2007) in their studies have related spelling errors in general and spelling errors of similar phonemes in Arabic in particular among native Arabic pupils explaining them as a result of the diglossic nature of Arabic. Cook (2004) states that when second language/foreign language learners learn how to write in English as a second writing system, they tend to transfer features of their first writing system to the second. Learners not only transfer the phonology, but also other characteristics of their first language (L1). Abu-Rabia and Taha (2004) investigate the spelling errors of 5<sup>th</sup> grade dyslexic Arabic readers compared with age- matched and reading-level-matched young normal readers. They find that the spelling error profiles of the dyslexic group were similar to

those of the reading-level-matched group in both percentage and quality. The analysis of the spelling errors revealed that the most prominent type of spelling errors was phonetic. Figueredo and Varnhagen (2004) in their study of the difference in spelling errors and correction of the Canadian students classify the spelling errors into three types: phonological, orthographic, and morphological. They come up with the result that the participants made more phonological errors compared to orthographic and morphological errors. Al-Jarf (2005) in her study of the spelling difficulties that face Arab students in studying EFL, deals with the correlation between the spelling and listening comprehension of students and a decoding test in the Saudi context. Similarly, Al-Jabri (2006) investigates the spelling errors of Omani students in two rural schools in Oman. He has found that the most frequent errors committed were also errors of omission and substitution, while the errors of transposition and insertion were less frequent. Abu-Rabia and Taha (2006) investigate the spelling error profiles of Arabic speaking students in grades 1 - 9. They conclude that phonological spelling errors predominated in all grades over other error categories and represented 50% of the total errors. Al-Taani (2006) presents a study of spelling errors in students' writings at the secondary school level in the United Arab Emirates. He focuses on the position of spelling errors and finds that most spelling errors occur in the middle of misspelled words. He recommends that more time should be allocated to the investigation of spelling errors of this type.

Again in (2007) Al-Jarf examines spelling errors in one of the universities in Saudi Arabia. She claims that important influences in English spelling errors were Arabic spelling system. Hamdan & Amayreh, (2007) investigate the source of spelling errors of consonants among elementary Bedouin pupils by conducting a qualitative study using writing tasks. The results of the study show that this phenomenon occurs even in the end of elementary school, while full proficiency in the standard form of Arabic may be achieved only at later age. Fender (2008) conducts a study on the spelling of Arabs and non-Arab ESL students and finds that Arab students tend to have lower success level spelling skills, as well as difficulties in spelling patterns of general and multi-syllabic words. Dehham and Mohammed (2011) consider that the most difficult aspects of English spelling for Iraqi Students are the complex correspondence between sound and letters. Al-Jayousi (2011) is a comprehensive study that investigates the spelling problem among Arab learners of English in UAE public schools. It identifies the most common types and causes of their spelling errors and measures how much progress they achieve in spelling proficiency as they move to higher grades. In 2012, Al-Saqqaf and Vaddapalli conducts a study of Arabic and English vowels and come up with a result that the mispronunciation of some of these vowels may have its impact on the students' writing.

Al-Zuoud and Kabilan (2013) examine spelling errors in the written compositions of EFL students of English in a Jordanian university. They come up with the result that the most frequent spelling errors were substitution and omission errors. Taha, (2013), investigates the emphatic phoneme /d/ (ض) which is considered as emphatic to the soft phoneme /d/ (ذ). Taha indicates that this phonological similarity between the emphatic and the non-emphatic phonemes produces spelling inaccuracy (spelling errors) in spelling words that include one emphatic phoneme or more, and concludes that spelling words that contain those emphatics demands proficient spelling abilities and a strong establishment of the mental orthographic lexicon. Fragman, (2013) explores spelling accuracy in formal Arabic among 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Bedouin pupils. He has found no significant improvement in spelling accuracy from fourth to sixth grade, also he explores that Bedouin pupils encounter difficulty representing emphatic phonemes in the written form of Arabic, and represent them by a similar phoneme, for example /s/ and /ʃ/ or /d/ and /d̥/. Among the recent studies are Subhi & Yasin (2015)

which investigate the spelling mistakes and errors made by the Iraqi students who are studying English language as an essential requirement to begin their academic study in Malaysian universities. The results indicate a high percentage of spelling errors in Iraqi students writing a composition. Furthermore, the results of analyzing the problems behind the spelling errors and the causes of these errors are also discussed. The study concludes that more attention in writing drills and activities must be paid to vowels using, multi-syllabic words and errors that occur in the middle of the words. Alhaisoni et al, (2015) report the types of spelling errors made by the beginner learners of English in the EFL context as well as the major sources underpinning such errors in contextual writing composition tasks. The findings suggest that spelling errors are mainly the outcome of anomalies existing in the target language of the learners as well as L1 interference from their internalized Arabic language system. Al-Busaidi& Al-Saqqaf (2015) investigate the problems that university Arab learners face in spelling English vowels. The study has primarily focused on monosyllabic words and concluded with important implications for future research and for teaching.

A review of literature on spelling errors shows that still there is a need for more studies to investigate the difficulties that Arab university students face on spelling when learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, the present study is important for investigating the different types of spelling errors committing by Saudi students to determine the cause of these errors. In addition, the findings would give the teachers and curriculum designers some useful insights to adopt suitable strategies and develop effective practices in order to solve the problems of spelling errors. The classification and data analysis of spelling errors in this study are 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).

## Overview

In light of the preceding discussion, this paper is devoted to exploring types of the English spelling errors committed by 80 Saudi female EFL students at the FYP (foundation year program) Prince Fahad Bin Sultan University. For analyzing the data, the following analytical procedures were used to:

- 1) Identifying the deviant forms. This was done by a detailed analysis of the output.
- 2) Analyzing and classifying spelling errors found in the writing samples.
- 3) Establishing a frequency count of such errors and the sources of the errors.

## PARTICIPANTS

Participants of this study are 80 female in Prince Fahad Bin Sultan University, whose first language is Arabic. All participants enrolled in an intensive English language program (FYP). The Preparatory Year Program in Prince Fahad Bin Sultan University aims at preparing students to gain the necessary English Language proficiency and study skills to further their academic studies. Students are also offered Mathematics, Information Technology as well as English for Special Purposes which will prepare them for their undergraduate courses and for their future professional life. The PYP is a two-semester preparatory program of one-year duration. Students are required to pass semester one courses before proceeding onto semester two. After passing FYP successfully, the students would be upgraded to a higher level.

## **Instruments of Data Collection**

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

### **Writing Task**

The participants were asked to write a well-organized essay on one of seven familiar topics. They were asked to write approximately 150 to 200 words and the time was sufficient. The suggested topics were:

- 1) Shopping
- 2) National Day
- 3) My Family
- 4) Summer Holiday
- 5) Friendship
- 6) Dubai City
- 7) My hobby

### **Spelling Task**

Students were asked to spell a number of words. Spelling continued until all students had reached a ceiling of at least 15 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 80.

## **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. Since Cook developed this type of classification in 1999, and there was no need to measure reliability for this instrument again.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section offers the findings of the study and an analysis of spelling errors most frequently committed by 80 Saudi female EFL. After that 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), 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) (see table one for details).

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

Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	484	59.7%
Substitution	238	28.9%
Insertion	66	8%
Transposition	36	4.3%
Total	824	100%

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 (80) learners. Table 1. Illustrates that all of the learners committed different types of spelling error in their writing. It is apparent from the table (1) that out of 824 total spelling errors committed by 80 female students; the type of errors committed by the largest numbers of learners is the omission. Omission type of errors scores the highest percentage mean of 59% (484 errors), in the second rank, the errors of substitution with a percentage mean of 28.9% (238 errors). This result matches the results of other studies such as Al jarf (1999) Smith (2001), Al haysony (2012), Al-haisoni et al. (2015) Golshan (2015). In the present study, the spelling errors of insertion occupy the third place with a percentage mean of 8% (66 errors). Transportation spelling errors occur as the lesser frequency with a percentage mean of 4.3% (36 errors).

### **Omission Errors**

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.

#### **Examples of Omission Errors**

##### **A. Omission of silent letters like:**

(rite instead of write)  
(wak- instead of walk)  
(foreign- instead of foriegn  
(tak instead of talk)  
(Wite instead of white)

To avoid this problem, EFL students should be able to memories words with silent letters and to recall them from memory when they are needed in writing.

##### **B. Omission of the phoneme /e/ at the end of the words like:**

(nic- instead of nice)  
(lik- instead of like)  
(fin instead of fine)  
(hid instead of hide)  
(writ instead of write)

### C. Consonant doubling errors like:

(swiming- instead of swimming)  
(begining - instead of beginning)  
(traveling instead of travelling )  
(hiding instead of hiding)

The findings of this study show that the students' spelling pattern follows the pronunciation pattern. In another word, the students tend to write what they pronounce, so they delete any English letter that is not pronounced. This type of errors can be attributed to the poor phonological awareness skills and this makes it difficult for the students to develop understanding of the relationships between sounds and letters. Beginner writers, at an early stage of spelling and writing, depend heavily on their 'phonemic awareness and orthographic knowledge to spell' Kelman&Apel (2004: 57). So the findings of this study correspond with Aqel(1993) who states that the reason for the omission spelling errors is the discrepancy between English orthography and pronunciation. Moreover, based on the results obtained in this study show that the mother tongue interference is one of the main causes for omission spelling errors, and this finding is consistent with findings of other prior studies in the spelling literature. Al-Jarf (1999) who considers the third most common source of spelling errors is the transfer of the Arabic spelling system to English due to the difference in orthographic complexity between English and Arabic. This study is also in line with Alhaysoni et al. (2015) who states that the reason for the occurrence of the omission errors is interlingual, which can be attributed to the distinction found between English and Arabic.

### Substitution Errors

Substitution errors mean replacing one or more letters with one or more incorrect letters. As mentioned earlier in this study, substitution errors occupy the second high rate among other spelling errors. In analyzing the learners' substitution spelling errors, we have found that the silent letters were clearly a major source of difficulty because there is no sound-letter correspondence for silent letters.

### Examples of Spelling Substitution Errors

#### A. Vowel Substitution Errors Like

(helpfol instead of helpful )  
(lyfe- instead of life)  
(throo- instead of throw)  
(iye instead of eye)  
(garl) instead (girl)

In the above examples, the students substitute [u] with [o], [i] with [y], [w] with [o], [i] with [e] and [a] instead of [i]

#### B. Regular past Tense Substitution Errors Like

(looket) instead of (looked)  
(talket ) instead of (talked)

In the above two examples, the students substitute [d]with [t]

**C. Plural form Substitution Errors Like**

(Classez ) instead of (classes)

( visitorz ) instead of (visitors)

(friedz) instead of (friendz)

In the above examples, the students substitute [s] with [z]

**D. Consonants Substitution Errors Like**

(menshen) instead of (mention)

(vizit) instead of (visit)

(elefannt) instead of elephant

(bool) instead of (Pool)

(Fisitor) instead of (visior)

(kold) instead of (cold)

(offise) instead of (office)

In the above examples, the students substitute [sh] with [tio], [z] instead of [s], [f] instead [ph], [b] instead of [p], [k] instead of [c] and [s] instead of [c]. The findings of this study reveal the challenges face the female Saudi students in term of substitution errors. They tend to write the words as the way they pronounce it. This finding aligns with cook (1999) who attributed the vowel substitution errors committing by Arab students to pronunciation. The results of this study show that Saudi female students get especially confused with phonemes that do not exist in Arabic, such as (/p/ & /v/), so the present study findings align with Allaith and Joshi (2011) who investigate the impact of the Arabic phonological system on the English spelling system. They found that the Arabic phonological system has an impact on the English spelling system, which corresponds to different studies that examined the same issue but with different L1s. Similarly, Ryan and Meara (1991) findings show that Arabic learners of English struggle more than any other non-native speakers of English with English vowels. They have found that Arabic speakers suffer in processing English words. This difficulty might be because Arabic writing does not represent short vowels or it may be a result of Arabic lexical structure and the orthography of Arabic.

This study is also in line with Aqel's (1993) that the substitution spelling errors is attributed to the discrepancy between English orthography and pronunciation. This tendency is reinforced due to the influence of the Arabic system in which the spelling pattern follows the pronunciation pattern. Also Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) state that most of the spelling errors students made were because of their "mispronunciation, lack of awareness and regular spelling patterns". Also the findings of this study emphasize that in order to master the English writing/spelling system, an association between English phonemes and written graphemes should be applied (Al-Jarf, 2010). 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. In this way, the present study agrees with Haggan's (1991). The results of this study are also in harmony with the findings of Alhaisoni et al. (2015) in his analysis of spelling substitution errors, claims that there is a strong correlation between the articulations and the spelling of words.

## Insertion Errors

Insertion Errors refers to the occurrence of errors as a result of the addition of redundant letters in a word. Insertion errors occupy the third place with a percentage mean of 8% (66 errors). For example:

Insertion of [t] like the following examples;

(reatch ) instead of (reach)

(mutch) instead of (much)

(luntch) instead of (lunch)

The cause of the above errors is attributed to poor knowledge of spelling conventions.

## Transposition Errors

Transposition errors refer to the errors that are committed as a result of mis- ordering the letters. In the present study transportation errors occupy the fourth place with a percentage mean of 4.3% (36 errors)

Examples of themis-ordering of the vowels 'ie':

(freind) instead of (friend)

(their) instead of (there)

The above 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.

## Commonly Confused Areas that Cause Spelling Errors

### Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization refers to imposing certain spelling features on words that do not contain them Al-Jarf (1999). In the present study, over application of spelling rules and overgeneralization are found to be one of the causes for spelling errors committed by the Saudi female students. For example;

Forming the plural form in irregular manner, for example,

(womans instead of women)

(citys instead of cities)

(countrys instead of countries)

## Homophones

A homophone is a word that sounds like another but it is spelled differently and, importantly, also has a different meaning. Homophones can be considered as a confused area that causes spelling errors in the writings of EFL learners. A lack of knowledge of grammar or parts of speech (e.g. if it is a noun, adjective or verb) can be considered one of the main causes of spelling errors.

In the present study, there are some examples of homophones spelling errors;

(to- instead of two)

(hear- instead of here)

(where instead of were)

(there instead thier)

A lack of knowledge of grammar or parts of speech (e.g. if it is a noun, adjective or verb) can be considered one of the main causes of the above-mentioned spelling errors.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explained the types of spelling errors in the English writings of Saudi female students at the University of Prince Fahad Bin Sultan in Saudi Arabia. It has given an account of and the reasons for the widespread prevalence of spelling errors among the female students. The English writing system is considered a problematic issue for female Saudi learners. Due to their native language, influence (Arabic), Female Saudi students of English struggle with double consonant letters, silent letters, final [e] and vowels in general. The results of this study indicate that problems of Saudi 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. The results of the study implemented are similar to previous studies in literature. The students commit spelling errors of letter omission, addition, transposition and substitution. These errors were attributed to the irregularity of English spelling, ignorance and incomplete application of rules. Besides, overgeneralization the rule, in addition to lack of training and carelessness of the students. Moreover, the differences in the sound and spelling system of English is considered as the main source of students spelling errors, besides the interference of mother tongue Benyo (2014), Alhaysoni (2015). To sum up, English spelling has not been taken into account in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. 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 L1 and L2 languages can be helpful.

## Pedagogical Implications

Students in Saudi universities seem to have an overwhelming spelling problem that affects their overall language proficiency and particularly in terms of spelling errors. Considering the results of the present study, several instructional implications can be suggested for teaching English spelling to Arabic speakers. Furthermore, it appears that little is done to overcome this problem. Teachers need assistance in helping students overcome spelling problems. They need more spelling activities to be incorporated into textbooks and training programs that focus on spelling instruction. Since many elements that constitute the difficulty for Saudi students do not exist in their native language, so that more time and effort should be allocated to the instruction of elements that students find more difficult than elements that they find easy. There is a real need to teach spelling while emphasizing the differences that exist between Arabic and English. The teacher should keep in his mind that students should understand, changing one vowel in a word completely changes its meaning. Spelling is closely intertwined with pronunciation, vocabulary, listening, reading, and writing.

So, to help Saudi students master English spelling, they should receive more listening practice and they should be more exposed to English. Several activities that can develop listening skills: doing (physical); choosing; transferring; answering; condensing; extending; duplicating; modeling; and conversing Van Duzer (1997). Glenn and Hurley (1993). Suggests several practices and activities like fostering the use of full cues in reading, encouraging visualization of words and syllables, providing a print-rich environment, providing computers for spell-checkers and materials for word banks, and teaching spelling patterns and etymology. Ample time to read, write and use words in a meaningfully connected text is essential in developing good spelling ability. To sum up, the findings of this study emphasizes more focused attention to this essential aspect of language learning. Teachers are likely to differ in their approach to handling spelling. While some might prefer to adopt a

more explicit approach and teach the students the different phonemic structures (analytic-linguistic approach), others might choose to take a less direct approach by introducing pronunciation within meaningful communicative activities (integrative approach) (M. Hismanoglu & S. Hismanoglu, 2010). English language teachers should take into consideration that learners also differ in their ability to self- assess their language skills and difficulties (Dlaska & Krekeler, 2008).

## REFERENCES

- AbiSamra, N. (2003). An analysis of errors in Arabic speakers' English writing. In Mourtaga, K. (Ed.), *Investigating writing problems among Palestinian students studying English as a foreign language*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Abu Rabia, S., & Siegel, S. L. (1995). Different orthographies, different context effects: The effects of Arabic sentence context on skilled and poor readers. *Reading Psychology*, 16, 1–19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0270271950160101>.
- Alhaisoni, E. et al (2015) Analysis of Spelling Errors of Saudi Beginner Learners of English Enrolled in an Intensive English Language Program, *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 8, No. 3;
- Alhaysoni, M. (2012). An analysis of article errors among Saudi female EFL students: A case study. *Asian Social Science*, 8(12).
- Al-Jabri, F. (2006). *Common English spelling difficulties of Omani Learners*. Sultanate of Oman: Ministry of Education.
- Al-Jarf, R. (2005). The effects of listening comprehension and decoding skills on spelling achievement of EFL freshman students. *ETAK (Journal of the English Language Teachers in Korea)*, 11, 2.
- Al-Jarf, R. S. ((2007). *Faulty Strategies of EFL Freshman Spellers*.
- Al Jarf, R. "Phonological and Orthographic Problems in EFL College Spelling". First Regional Conference on English Language Teaching and Literature (ELTL1) at Islamic Azad University, Iran, 2008.
- Al-Jarf, R. (2010). Spelling error corpora in EFL. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 7(1), 6-15.
- Al-Jarf, R. (1999). *Listening-spelling strategies of freshmen students*. TESOL Arabia.
- Al Jayousi, M. T., 2011. *Spelling errors of Arab students: types, causes, and teachers' responses*. Thesis (Master). The American University of Sharjah.
- Allaith, Z.A. and Joshi, R.M. (2011). Spelling performance of English consonants among students whose first language is Arabic. *Reading and Writing*, 24(9), 1089-1110.
- Al-Saqqaf, A. & Vaddapalli, M. (2012). Teaching English Vowels to Arab Students: A search for a Model and Pedagogical Implications. *International Journal of English Language and Literature*, 2(2), 46-56.
- Al-Taani, M. (2006). *An investigation of spelling errors found in written composition of Second and third secondary students in the United Arab Emirates (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis)*. Sudan University science and technology.
- Aqel, F. (1993). Grammatical and spelling errors among Palestinian students learning English. *Mansoura Faculty of Education Journal*, (22), 1-12.
- Al-zuoud, K., & Kabilan, M. (2013). Investigating Jordanian EFL Students' Spelling Errors at Tertiary Level. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 5(3), 164–176.
- Azzam, R. (1993). The nature of Arabic reading and spelling errors of young children. *Reading and writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5, 355-385. doi:10.1007/BF01043112
- Bean, W., & Bouffler, C. (1987). *Spell by writing* (p. 67). Sydney: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Chandler-Olcott, K. (2001). The spelling symposium: Examining a critical event in the

- History of a school wide teacher-research group. *English Education*, 33(3), 190-213.
- Cook, V. (1999). Teaching spelling. Retrieved February 10, 2013, from <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/Writings/index.htm>.
- Corder, S. (1967). The significance of learners' error. *Interlanguage*, international review of Applied Linguistics. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/iral.1967.5.1-4.161>.
- Draska, A., & Krekeler, C. (2008). Self-assessment of pronunciation. *System*, 36(4), 506-516. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.03.003>.
- Dehham, S., & Mohammed, M. (2011). Iraqi EFL Learners' Performance in English Spelling. *Babylon Universit.*
- El-Hibir, B., & Taha, F. (1993). Tips for dealing with spelling errors. *English Teaching Forum*, 31(1), 41-92.
- Fagerberg, I., 2006. English spelling in Swedish secondary schools: Students' attitudes and Performance [online]. Karlstads University Press. Available from: <http://kau.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2.../FULLTEXT01.pdf> [Accessed 18 March 2013].
- Fender, M. (2003). English word recognition and word integration skills of native Arabic- and Japanese-speaking learners of English as a second language. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 24, 289-315. doi:10.1017/S014271640300016X.
- Figueredo, L., & Varnhagen, C. K. (2004). Detecting a problem is half the battle: the relation between error type and spelling performance. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 8, 337-356. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532799xssr0804\\_2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532799xssr0804_2).
- Fragman, A. (2013). Spelling Accuracy of Consonants in Arabic among Negev Bedouin Students. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 3, 330-336. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2013.34042>.
- Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (1984). *Language transfer in language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Glenn, P. and Hurley, S. (1993). Preventing spelling disabilities. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*; 8, 3; 1-12.
- Graham, S., & Harris, K. (2005). Improving the writing performance of young struggling writers. *The journal of special education*, 39(1), 19.
- Golshan, M. (2015). Analysis Spelling Errors: Iranian Female Beginner Learners of English, *MJAL* 7:2
- Haggan, M. (1991). Spelling errors in native Arabic-speaking English majors: A comparison between remedial students and Fourth year students. *System*, 19, 1-2, 45-61.
- Hamdan, J. & Amayreh, M. (2007). Consonant profile of Arabic-speaking school-age children in Jordan. *Folia PhoniatrLogop*, 59, 55-64.
- Hasyin, S. (2002). Error Analysis in the Teaching of English. *A Biannual Publication on the Study of Language and Literature* (4) 1, 62-74.
- Hildreth, G. (1962). *Teaching spelling: A guide to basic principles and practices*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, inc.
- Hismanoglu, M., & Hismanoglu, S. (2010). Language teachers' preferences of pronunciation teaching techniques: traditional or modern? *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 983-989. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.138>.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ibrahim, H. (1978). "Patterns in spelling errors". *ELT* 23(3):207-212.]
- Kelman, E., & Apel, K. (2004). Effects of a multiple linguistic and perspective approach to spelling instruction: A case study. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 25(2).
- Kharma, N., & Hajjaj, A. (1989). *Errors in English among Arabic speakers: Analysis and remedy*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Khuwaileh, A. A., & Al Shoumali, A. (2000). Writing errors: a study of the writing ability of Arab learners of academic English and Arabic at university. *Language Culture and*

- Curriculum, 13(2), 174-183.
- Phenix, J. (2001) *The Spelling Teacher's Handbook*. Dunstanble: Folens Publishers.
- Ryan, A., & Paul, M. (1991) "The Case of the Invisible Vowels: Arabic Speakers Reading English Words". *Reading in a Foreign Language* 7: 531–540.
- Saiegh-Haddad, E. (2003). Linguistic distance and initial reading acquisition: the case of Arabic diglossia. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 24, 431-451. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0142716403000225>.
- Saiegh-Haddad, E. (2004). The impact of phonemic and lexical distance on the phonological analysis of words and pseudo words in a diglossic context. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 25, 495–512. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0142716404001249>.
- Saiegh-Haddad, E. (2005). Correlates of reading fluency in Arabic: diglossic and orthographic factors, *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18, 559–582. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11145-005-3180-4>.
- Saiegh-Haddad, E. (2007). Linguistic constraints on children's ability phonemes in Arabic. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 28, 607–626. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S014271640>.
- Al-Busaidi, S. & Al-Saqqaf A. (2015), English Spelling Errors Made by Arabic-Speaking Students *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 8, No. 7; 2015 ISSN 1916-4742 E-ISSN 1916-4750.
- Smith, B. (2001). Arabic speakers. In Swan, M., & Smith, B. (Eds.), *Learner English: a teacher's guide to interference and other problems* (pp. 195-213). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Subhi, S. & Yasin, M. (2015), Investigating Study of an English Spelling Errors: A Sample of Iraqi students in Malaysia, *International Journal of Education and Research* Vol. 3 No. 6 June 2015.
- Taha, H. (2013). Reading and spelling in Arabic: linguistic and orthographic complexity. 67 [www.macrothink.org/ijl](http://www.macrothink.org/ijl) *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3, 721-727. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.5.721-727>.
- Swan, M. & Smith, B. (1987) *Learner English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Duzer, C. (1997). Improving ESL learners' spelling skills: At the workplace and beyond. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED406855.
- Yule, G (2006). *The Study of Language*. Cambridge University Press, New York.