An Investigation of the Most Common Spelling Errors in English Writing Committed by English-Major Male Students: At the University of Tabuk

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Abstract

The objective of the present study is to investigate the spelling errors committed by the Saudi English- major students (male) who are majoring English language at Department of Language and translationat the University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia. This study adopts Cook's classification of errors, which categorized errors into four categories: substitution, omission, insertion, and transposition. The participants of this study included 45 male students whose first language is Arabic. The researcher used one research instrument which is the written composition essay. An analysis of errors established that errors of substitution reported (36.7%) constituting the highest proportion of errors whereas insertion spelling errors occur as the lesser frequency with a percentage mean of (14.4.%) producing13 errors. The major cause of the of learners' spelling errors is the wrong use of vowels and pronunciation as well as mother tongue interference. The findings of this study emphasized more focused attention to learners' spelling errors, as spelling teaching is an essential aspect of language learning.

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

1. Introduction

Writing is an essential skill for EFL learners because it is a means through which they develop their critical thinking and enhance their creativity. Specifically, it is crucial for university students as it helps them to excel in their academic courses due to its interdisciplinary nature (Zahida, Farrah, & Zaru, 2014). For example, it enables them to write their essays, answer questions, prepare their reports, write their research papers, and other writing assignments. Writing is a method that transfers spoken language from being heard to being seen and therefore read. In order to represent spoken language in a written script, a system must be invented and therefore precisely implemented. Thus, the English writing system is the one that native speakers and L2 learners should strictly follow. However, L2 learners may suffer in their English writing more than native speakers due to the impact of their L1. In particular, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the importance of spelling (Alsaawi, 2015: 56).

Spelling is the learner's ability to write a word correctly. Writing accurate spelling adds to the quality of overall writing texts. The study of learners' spelling errors provides an opportunity to understand and facilitate in the learners' spelling difficulties. It will result in the improvement of learners' writing and may largely contribute to transforming learners intogood writers. Spelling errors attribute to major errors in writing English. The researchers reviewed the studies that focused on students' spelling errors, especially in Saudi Arabia and foundthat a very few studies have been carried out with regard to the difficulties that Arab studentsshave in spelling. Over and above, these studies were concerned with sources of errors,spelling and grammar together, spelling and sounds. For example, Cook (1999) investigatedthe most common types of spelling errors in the written work of learners of English and thefour major types ofspelling errors that learners of English commonly make. These errorswere categorized broadly into four major errors: omission (leaving letters out), substitution(replacing letters with incorrect ones), transposition (reversing the position of letters), andinsertion /addition (including extra letters).The researchers classified students' spelling errors according to Cook's classification.

(Al-Zuoud &Kablian, 2013).

English is taught in Saudi Arabia as a foreign language (EFL) whereby students areexpected to master the four basic language skills i.e. reading, listening, speaking,and writing. However, most of the EFL Saudi students face difficulties when theytry 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 (Al-Zuoud & Kablian, 2013) The researchers noted that there is a problem with the Saudi students in writing and spelling in particular, where they have difficulties inspelling and pronunciation of the word, because of the difference between Arabic andEnglish. It was also noted that when students cannot spell the English word, theytry to write it in Arabic.This study sheds light on investigation of the most common spelling Errors in English Writing Committed by English-Major Students : At the University of Tabuk.

2. Statement of the Problem

Writing is considered an important skill and probably the most difficult to master. It is central to the fulfillment of

various writing assignments/projects in varied fields of human career. EFL students of University of Tabuk encounter numerous problems in writing. One of the most common problems, which are not takenseriously by most learners and many instructors, is the properproduction of good command of correct spelling. This is a phenomenonthat is clearly observed in almost all students' assignments and exams.Cook (19991:1) asserts that "unlike native speakers, EFL students may not know the actual system of English, and will appear to use the wrong letter" .For example: Choosing between two or three consonants [c, z and s] : *recognice [recognize]*tradisional [traditional] *spetial [special].The researcher as an English language teacher at the Department of English Language and Translation at the University of Tabuk, he noticed that Saudi English-Majormale 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. Therefore this paper aims at an investigation of the most common spelling errors among Saudi male students of English Language and Literature major at the University of Tabuk as well as to find some suitable solutions.

3. Objectives of the Research
1. To identify, classify and analyze the most common types of spelling errors committed by Saudi English – Major students in their English writing.
2. To find out the causes that leads to the problem of misspelling, and suggest a suitable solutions this problem.
3. To find out the most frequent errors in students' English writing.

4. Questions of the Research
This study aims at investigating the spelling errors committed by English-major students at the University of Tabuk. Hence, the study attempts to address the following research questions:
1. What are the most common types of spelling errors committed by Saudi English –Major students in their English writing?
2. What are the reasons of the most common spelling errors that Saudi English –Major make in their English writing?
3. What are the most frequently committed spelling errors made by Saudi English-Major in their English writing?

5. Litterateur Review
The literature on spelling errors among students contains only some studies investigating the spelling difficulties which Arab students face in studying EFL. For example, AlBalawi (2017) conducted a study on spelling errors of the introductory year students at the English language Centre at Tabuk University in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study indicated that the participants committed a number of spelling errors that affect the coherence of their academic written text. These errors involved three main categories; omission, addition and substitution. Also, the findings showed that these spelling errors may be attributed to mother tongue interferences in which they relate to the differences between the systems of both native language and foreign language. This research recommends that future investigations be conducted in the area to confirm the results of the current research in order to examine from other perspectives such as age and grade.

Similarly, Abalawi (2016) investigated 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.

Likewise, Al-Zuoud and Kabilan (2013) examined spelling errors in the written compositions of 43 Jordanian students ofEnglish in a university. They analyzed a total of 228 spelling errors that occurred in 43 written papers andsubsequently categorized them into four types according to Cook's classification (1999): a) omission, b)substitution, c) insertion, and d) transposition. The results indicated that the most frequent spelling errors were substitution and omission errors.

Also, Benyo (2014) explored English spelling errors committed by first year students studying at Dongola University to discover the factors behind these problems. In order to collect the data, two spelling tests (pre and post intervention) were administrated to 200 Sudanese EFL 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 vowels sounds as well as some English sounds which do not exist in Arabic. The study also indicated that the students' unawareness and overgeneralization of English spelling rules might be another primary cause of their spelling errors.

In addition, Al Harrsi (2012) investigated a study in one of the classes in Omani second-cycle school for females. The aim of this study is to investigate the most common spelling errors patterns among Omanis. In an effort to explore spelling errors, the participants had a dictation test that combines both one syllable words and multi-syllable words. The errors found in this study are sorted into the categories suggested by Cook (1999). Then, they are analyzed to explore the most common spelling mistakes made by learners. The reasons behind these errors are discussed with the support of an interview and correspondence with previous researches. Preliminary results indicate that substitution is the most common type of spelling.

Currently, Alhaisoni, Al-Zuoud, and Gaudel (2015) examined the types of spelling errors in Englishcomposition on 122 EFL undergraduate students at the University of Hail in Saudi Arabia. Data were collectedthrough writing tasks of 53 males and 69 females in the preparatory year. The findings indicated that omissionerrors are considered the highest among students. And the majority of spelling errors are centralized aroundwrong use of vowels and pronunciation. The findings indicated that spelling errors occur as a result of anomaliesexisting in L2 as well as L1 interference. In another study, Hameed (2016) investigated the spellingerrors which Saudi students make in English while writing. The subjects of the study included 26 Saudi EFL university students, and the data were collected via a fifty-word dictation. The analysis of the students' responses showed that there was a concentration of errors around vowel sounds, diphthongs and words containing silent letters. About 93% of the responses turned out to be incorrect. In addition, learners applied their knowledge of mother tongue (i.e. as being a phonetic-based language) on their English learning experience. As far as spelling error type is concerned, the findings revealed that the students the errors of substitution were the highest followed by omission, transposition and then insertion. All the studies have been cited above are related to the current study attempted to conduct similar objectives, i.e. to investigate Arab EFL spelling errors in their writing. However, this study differs from those mentioned studies; this study is devoted to investigate the most common spelling errors in English writing committed by English Language Major Students at the department of languages and Translation at the University of Tabuk.

6. Methodology
- Participants
The total of participants of this study included one group comprising 45 male students studying B.A English Language and Literature at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. All the students selected randomly for the study are bilingual students (English and Arabic speakers). When this research study was conducted, the students had successfully completed their basic writing programme of EFL for two years as a compulsory subject as part of their B.A degree syllabus requirements.They are similar in age, ranging from 19-22 years.They are also homogenous with regard to nationality, native language (Arabic), language proficiency and educational background.

- Instrument
The participants were asked to write a well-organized essay on one of familiartopics of their academic context. They were required to write approximately 200 to 250 words andthe time was sufficient. The suggested topic was "***Why do you study English?***

- Data Analysis
The researchers classified errors according to Cook's classification of spelling (1999) (omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition). Moreover, the researchers recorded the frequency of each error type and their percentages of thetotal. Cook developed this type of classification in 1999, and there was no need tomeasure reliability for this instrument again. As Al-Oudat (2017) used this classification when he classified the spelling errors of Omani Students at Al-Balqa Applied University students in Jordan.

7. Results and discussion
This section offers the results of an investigation of themost common spelling errors in English writing committed by 45 English-Major Students at the University of Tabuk. The researcher then examines each error type (omission,substitution, insertion, and transposition) individually in addition to the main sources of errors. The analysis of study ismainly based on the classification of cook (1999), who studied spelling errors committed by L2students. Spelling errors were categorized according to OSIT (Omission, Substitution, Insertion, andTransposition).

Table.1:Frequency of Errors based on OSIT/English Major Students – UT

Type of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
Substitution	33	36.7
Omission	30	33.3
Transposition	14	15.6
Insertion	13	14.4
Total	**90**	**100**

Based on the investigation of 45 English-major male students written composition at University of Tabuk, Table 1 clearly shows that out of 90 errors found in total, the errors of substitution present the highestfigure with a percentage of 36.7% (33 errors), followed by errors of omission with a percentage of 33.3% (30errors). Followed by errors of transposition with a percentage of 15.6 % (14 errors), followed by errors of insertion with a percentage of 14.4% (13 errors). In this study, errors of transposition and insertion , however, occurred less frequently than the first two of errors, with percentage of 15.6 (14)and 14.4% (13), respectively.

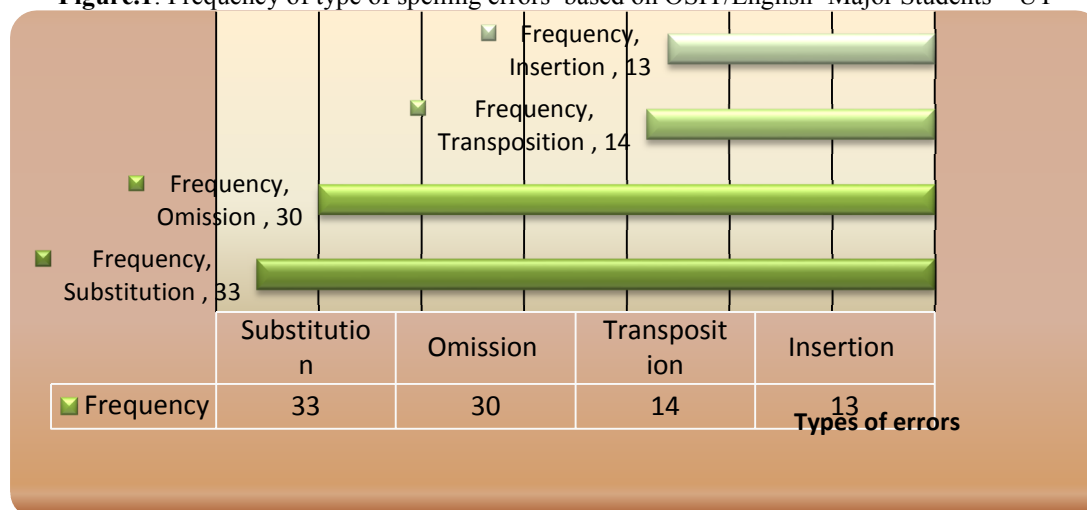**Figure.1**: Frequency of type of spelling errors based on OSIT/English- Major Students – UT

Figure 1 displays the investigation of the common type of spelling errors committed by Saudi English-major male students written composition was 'substitution' (36.7%) such as <travil> for <travel> or <jop> instead of job) followed by 'omission' (33.3%), such as <contry> for <country> or <becose> for <because>. In third position was 'transposition' (15.6%) such as <weid> for <wide> or <frined> instead of <using>. Insertion was the least type of spelling errors found in the examples of Saudi English- major students' composition which was (14.4%) the most frequent example of this type in this study was   <peopole> for <people>.

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

Types of Errors	The MispeltWords	The Actual Words
Substitution	-went -travil -jop - petter -inglish -will -Fenished -hestory	- Want -Travel -Job -Better -English -Well -Finished history
Omission	- contry -becose - scond -decid - comuinty -complet	-Country -Because -Second -Decide -Community - complete
Transposition	- Wied - Frined -Futuer -Knowelge -Sceince	-Wide -Friend -Future -Knowledge -Science
Insertion	- Peopole -Teccqnology -Bepole -Foreigin -wainted -using - leaveing - takeing	-People - technology -People - foreign - wanted - using - leaving - taking

7.1 Substitution Errors

As shown in table 1, the errors of substitution were the most frequent errors in the samples produced by theparticipants. The researcher found that vowels and consonants were clearly a major source of difficulty and they were mainly related to pronunciation. This is inaccordance with Cook (1999) who found that a high percentage of vowel substitution errors and pronunciationerrors, with the majority of errors corresponding to Arab students' pronunciation. For example, students got confused between / p/ voiceless phoneme and /b/ voiced phoneme, therefore they write 'jop' instead of the word 'job' and this is due the similarities between the languages English and Arabic. Also, vowels cause another problem for Arab students, for instance 'inglish' instead of ' English' and 'hestory' for 'history'. This type of errors are caused by the misspelling of the word. The participants committed some errors when they wrote the words according to their pronunciation. This is connected with the fact that some English letters may possess varied pronunciations in different contexts.

7.2. Omission Errors

This study shows that the spelling pattern of the participants follows the pronunciation pattern, which is anindication of the strong correlation between English words articulation and the ways participants spelled thesewords. EFL students may associate and manipulate a variety of consonants and vowels combinations while forming words. The most common form of omission errors is the phoneme [e] at the end of the words as in 'decid' for'decide''complet for 'complete'. This is caused by the poorphonological awareness and the fact that Arabic is written the way it is articulated, making it difficult for theparticipants to develop relationships between letters and sounds. The potential for omission errors in formingaccurate spellings in the English language system, which is more complex due to the lack of patterns inarticulation and spelling.

7.3. Transposition Errors

As can be noted in the table above, errors of transposition, or miss ordering, had taken place of the leastfrequently noticeable errors. Depending on this fact, transposition errors should not be neglected since thepurpose of this study is to investigate the common spelling errors committed by Saudi English –major students at the University of Tabuk. For instance, transposition errors as in 'frined' for'friend,'futuer' for 'future', and 'sceince' for 'science' could be attributed to students' carelessness.

7. 4.Insertion Errors

This type of errors mainly appeared because of the addition of extra letters in a word. These errors would be as a result of the lack of knowledge as English is not a phonetic language. For instance, students tend to write wordsthe way they say it, such as: 'peopole' for 'people''wainted' for 'wanted'and'foreigin' for 'foreign'. .Another source of errors could be attributed to the studentsmisuse of some grammatical rules. Forexample, some students write 'using' instead of 'using', 'takeing' instead of 'taking and 'leaveing' instead ofleaving' when adding –ing for these words (use, take, leave). To form grammatically correct words, studentshave to remove the final phoneme 'e' then adding–ing. In addition, Students tended to use regular patterns toform plurals or past tenses on words that would have irregular formation.

8. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to investigate the most common types of spelling errors committed by Saudi English – Major students in their English writing at the University of Tabuk. In general, the process of learning a second language is challenging where learners are expected to commit errors.Consequently, those who are interested in learning English should take into their consideration the fact the bothArabic and English language have completely different writing system. For instance, Arabic writing style startsfrom right to left whereas English writing style starts from left to right, this may cause confusion for the student.In addition, the way we speak English differs from the way we write it; this is due to the fact the English is not aphonetic language while Arabic is. Therefore, based on the results of this study, English- major students at Tabuk University committed spelling errors due to many factors such as the interference ofstudents' first language. For example, the absence of someletters in Arabic phonological system such as /p/ and /v/ so students substitute these two letters with /b/ and /f/ that they have in their language as in *petter* for *better*. Students who learn English as a secondlanguage may suffer some difficulties with spelling. Thus, focusing on how students spell andpronounce words could be the best solution. Moreover, in order to improve the spelling and writing ability of thestudents, teachers should pay more attention to the two alphabet systems and rules.

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