

ENGLISH SPELLING ERRORS MADE BY KINSHASA SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS: THE CASE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF LEMBA

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ABSTRACT

Ten sixth formers from five secondary schools of the Municipality of Lemba were interviewed. They were also asked to write a one page composition to allow the researcher to detect spelling errors. After examining their sheets, he disclosed twenty-seven misspelled English words. The most frequent type of spelling error in their compositions is faulty grapheme error.

Keywords: *Composition, spelling, error, grapheme, spelling error, misspelling*

RESUME

En utilisant la technique d'interview, les dix élèves de cinq écoles secondaires de la commune de Lemba étaient soumis à l'exercice de la rédaction anglaise pour déceler leurs fautes d'orthographe. L'étude a révélé vingt-sept mots mal orthographiés. La catégorie la plus fréquente d'erreur d'orthographe observée dans leurs rédactions est celle d'erreur de faux graphème.

Mots clés: *Rédaction, orthographe, erreur, graphème, erreur d'orthographe, mal orthographe*

I. INTRODUCTION

As an EFL teacher, the researcher observed that many secondary school pupils have difficulties in spelling correctly English words. They generally write in English the way they hear sounds. In this study, the researcher is interested in analysing the English spelling errors made by pupils of the five selected secondary schools of Lemba. In those schools, only ten sixth formers were selected to participate in the investigation.

Three major questions needed answers: First, what are the English spelling errors made by the pupils concerned?

Second, how can those English spelling errors be classified?

Third, what is the most frequent type of spelling error observed in their compositions?

The ten sixth formers were scheduled for a face to face interview. Two of them were selected per school. In the interview questions, a question related to writing was asked to the pupils concerned. They had to select one of the topics among the following five topics: write about your birthday; write about your family; write about your school and write about your church.

The study attempted, first, to identify the English spelling errors of the pupils concerned. Second, to classify those errors and finally disclose the most frequent type of spelling error observed. Error analysis provides a clear insight into the process of learning a foreign language. It studies errors made by foreign language learners with the assumptions that they are a natural phenomenon in learning languages. (Naima 2016). This study focused on the analysis of the English spelling errors made by the selected ten sixth formers.

Findings of the current study will help prospective English teachers to look for strategies in order to overcome those English spelling errors.

II. ENGLISH SPELLING ERRORS

Many scholars have recognised the goal teaching spelling. Gentry J. (1982) points out that one of the goals of teaching spelling is to support learners to develop the knowledge's required as well as flexible and efficient strategies that they can draw upon when learning to spell unfamiliar words. While most learners will develop some strategies for themselves, these are often not sufficient to meet all their spelling needs. The teacher's role, therefore, is to extend the repertoire of strategies learners have at their disposal. Some of these other strategies might include: "look, say, cover, write, check", spelling by analogy. For example, knowing how to spell ball facilitates the spelling of fall, call, tall, or using mnemonics (memory aids, for example, the principal is my pattern and other resources such as dictionaries and spell checkers entry. Spelling is related to the arrangement of vowel and consonant letter. Spelling is a set of rules on how to write a language using letters, words, and punctuation as ingredients. These limits indicate the meaning of spelling words different from the word spelling. Spelling is an activity of reciting letters, syllables, or words; while the spelling is a system of rules that is far wider than just a matter of pronunciation. Spelling regulates the whole way of writing the language.

Spelling is related to the learners' ability to write a word correctly and accurately. Writing correct and accurate spelling can add the quality of overall writing texts. The study of learners' spelling errors provides an opportunity for them to understand and facilitate the learners' spelling difficulties. It will result in the improvement of learners' writing and may largely contribute to transforming learners into good writers. Spelling errors commonly attribute to major errors in writing English. Having good spelling skills can develop over time, mainly through practices and experiences (Naima 2014).

For Reima (2010) states that spelling errors can be classified into three terms or categories, namely whole word errors, faulty graphemes and faulty phones. The three terms are the unit of analysis of spelling error.

Whole word errors are those in which the learner does not write anything in a gap (in dictionary) or in which the target word is substituted by extraneous word or by partially or fully invented word.

Faulty graphemes or grapheme clusters are those where the misspelled word does not look like the printed target word because of a grapheme is deleted, added, substituted by another or reversed with another. A faulty grapheme can be deleted, added, reversed, substituted written novel, consonant, vowel or consonant digraph phonogram, morpheme, suffix or prefix.

Faulty phones are those in which the misspelled word does not sound like the target word because a consonant, a vowel, a syllable, a suffix, a grapheme cluster is deleted, substituted by faulty ones, added, or reversed with other. Here, the written form does not correspond with the spoken sound as in writing "rember" or "member" instead of "remember".

Concerning spelling problems, two problems can be mentioned: phonological and orthographic ones. The former refers to errors in which the misspelled word does not sound like the target word because the whole word, a prefix, a suffix, a grapheme cluster is not heard at all, is misheard, is added or reversed with another. Here the written symbol does not correspond with the spoken sound, syllable or word. Instances of phonological problems are failing to bear or discriminate all or some of the phonemes or the word failing to bear the correct word sequence, failing to hear the boundary, failing to discriminate between minimal pairs, failing to discriminate single vowel or consonant phonemes, failing to hear the final syllable or suffix, failing to hear the correct sequence of CV phonemes in a word, vowel phoneme, consonant phoneme or syllables, or failing to recognize flaps and elision as mentioned the tables below:

Table n° 1. Phonological problems

Phonological problems	Tag word	Errors
Discriminating most phonemes in a word.	Worry	Know
Hearing all phonemes in a word.	Ferry	No word
Discriminating V.	Especially	Espcially
Hearing suffix.	Staying	Staly
Confusion minimal pairs.	Another	Anther
Discriminating voiced/ Voiceless C.	Cable	Caple
Remembering word sequence.	Down	Up
Hearing C.	Tourist	Torest

Discriminating suffix	Attraction	Attractive
Hearing final syllable.	Country	Cont
Discriminating C pho.	Ferry	Thery
Hearing middle syllable.	Transportation	Transportion

Table n°2. Orthographic problems

Orthographic problems	Forget word	Errors
V digraph	Cheopest	Cheapest
Silent V	Relatives	Relativs
Double C	Middle	Midle
Confusing homophones	Hall	Whole
Silent C	Excellent	Excellen
Remembering VV sequence	Break	Breck
C digraph	Brought	Brout
CV Sequence	Use	Ues
C forms	Economical	Echonomical
Phonogram	Connects	Conex
Hidden	Question	Equesion
Silent digraph	Neat	Neaght

Harmer (2007) points out that one prevalent category of spelling errors involves phonetic representations of words. Learners often spell words based on how they sounds, leading to inaccuracies such as “fone” instead of “phone” or “dawter” instead of “daughter”. These types of errors reveal the influence of phonetics on spelling and underscores the need for phonic- based approaches in language education.

He keeps on stating that spelling errors can also stem from missing or additional letters in words, as seen in words like “definatly” instead of “definitely” or “happiness” instead of “happiness”. These kinds of errors may occur or arise from a lack of visual memory for word forms and can be addressed through mnemonic strategies and visual aids.

Busaki (2013) states that phonological errors occur when the spelling of a word does not accurately represent its phonetic structure. This type of error is common among early learners and individuals with dyslexia. For example, a child might spell “phone” as “fone” due to the phonetic similarity. These phonological errors highlight difficulties in mapping sounds to their corresponding letters, especially in English, where phoneme- grapheme correspondence can be inconsistent. One of the reasons that spelling is difficult to be learned is related to the correspondence between the word sound and the way to spell it correctly (Benyo 2014).

Crystal (2006) states that homophones, words that sound alike but have different meanings and spellings, contribute to another common spelling error

category. For examples include using “their” instead of “there” or “two” instead of “too”. These errors stem from confusion over word meanings and require targeted instruction to differentiate between similar- sounding. The letter reversal which occurs when individuals transpose letters within a word, leading to misspellings such as “the” instead of “the” or “flied” instead of “field”. This type of error often occurs in early stages of language development but can persist if not addressed through explicit instruction and practice.

Reima (2010) also mentions the incorrect use of the conventional spelling rules and patterns of a language. These errors can be seen in the misuse of homophones or the incorrect application of spelling rules. For example, is spelling “their” as “thier”. That orthographic error often results from inadequate exposure to the written form of words and insufficient practice in spelling rules. Moreover, the morphological errors are related to the incorrect application of morphological rules such as the use of prefixes, suffixes, and root words. These errors often occur when individuals do not properly apply rules for inflections or derivations. For instance, spelling “running” as “runing” omits the doubling of the consonant “n”. It can be suggested that the fact of understanding that morphology is crucial for spelling complex words, as it involves recognizing and correctly using the structural components of words.

For Fitria (2018), an error is the use of a word, speech act, or grammatical items unit such as part of speech which seems imperfect and significant of incomplete learning. The skill of spelling will help strengthen the relationship between sound and letters in writing English. Spelling is a rule that must be obeyed by language users for order and uniformity, especially in written language. Form and order will have implications for the accuracy and clarity of meaning. Incorrect spelling changes the meaning of the sentences.

Fitria (2019) states that a spelling rule is a guideline or principle meant to assist writers in the accurate spelling of a word. It is also called a spelling convention. Spelling rules differ from the rules of grammar. Spelling rules can help us as the learners can spell accurately by giving guidelines on how to make plurals (more than one), how to add suffixes (such as -ly and -ment) and how to change the form of verbs (for example, by adding -ing), etc. English spelling is not just a matter of spelling A to Z in English. Instead, English spelling involves adding or fusing letters in a word ending in a certain letter.

Cook (1999) investigated the most common types of spelling errors in the written work of learners of English and the four types of spelling errors which commonly found in the learners writing are: 1) omission (leaving a or more letters), 2) substitution (replacing a or more letters with incorrect ones), 3) transposition (reversing the position of a or more letters), and the last is 4) insertion / addition (including a or more letters).

For the current work, the researcher was based on both the above Cook's (1999) and Reima's (2010) classifications to analyse the spelling errors made by the pupils concerned.

III.1. DATA ANALYSIS AND CLASSIFICATION

It is important to mention that all the ten informants participated in the face to face interview. They all provided useful answers.

III.1.1. Identification variables

III.1.1.1. Gender

Examining the variable related to gender, the results revealed that both males and females participated equally.

Table n°3. Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	5	50
Female	5	50
Total	10	100

III.1.1.2. Age

For this variable, most of the pupils were not less than fifteen years old. Pupils who were fifteen years old scored the most.

Table n°4. Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
15 years old	9	90
16 years old	1	10
Total	10	100

The above table shows that only one pupil was sixteen years old.

III.1.2. Research interest variables

III.1.2.1. Learning English spelling

In the interview, a question on learning English spelling was asked the pupils concerned. All of them answered positively.

III.1.2.2. Spelling errors made by the pupils

A question on composition writing allowed the researcher to identify the English spelling errors made by the pupils concerned. Their sheets were processed individually. Here are the results per pupil.

III.1.2.3. The first pupil

The first pupil selected the topic on 'write about your family'. The following four English words were misspelled:

- Family, fader, mader, wactching.

III.1.2.4. The second pupil

This pupil wrote a one page composition on 'write about your school'. The misspelled English words are:

- Wondeful, comonlly, follo, mani

III.1.2.5. The third pupil

This pupil misspelled five English words. He selected the topic 'write about your school'.

- Dificolty, bicause, wile, tabole, yello

III.1.2.6. The fourth pupil

The fourth pupil who selected the topic 'write about your first day at school' misspelled the following five words

- Foutbol, shot, peopole, lete, correct

III.1.2.7. The fifth pupil

While writing about her school, she misspelled the English words below:

- Badroum, choes, flor,

III.1.2.8. The sixth pupil

The sixth pupil selected the topic 'write about the family'. He misspelled a couple of words:

- Swiming, apatment

III.1.2.9. The seventh pupil

Similar to the sixth pupil, she misspelled the following words:

- Confotable, current

III.1.2.10. The eighth pupil

This one selected the topic about his birthday. He misspelled the following words:

- Firs, fantastique

III.1.2.11. The ninth pupil

The ninth pupil selected the topic 'write about your family'. He misspelled the following English words:

- Wondeful, difficulty

III.1.2.12. The tenth pupil

This last one, who wrote her church, misspelled only one word:

- Fantastique

III.2. Classification

One of the objectives of this study was to classify the identified English spelling errors made by the pupils concerned. After the data analysis, twenty-seven English misspelled words are found out. Three words were mentioned twice by the sixth formers, namely 'wondeful', 'Dificolty' and 'Fantastique'. Each of them scored frequency (2). The following table provides a clear situation.

Table n°6. Misspelled English words of the pupils concerned

N°	Misspelled English words	Frequency
1	Familly	
2	Fader	
3	Mader	
4	Wactching	
5	Wondeful	2
6	Comonlly	
7	Follo	
8	Mani	
9	Dificolty	2
10	Bicause	
11	wile	
12	Tabole	
13	Yello	
14	Foutbole	
15	Shot	
16	Peopole	
17	Lete	
18	Corect	
19	Badroum	
20	Choes	
21	Flor	
22	Swiming	
23	Apatment	
24	Confotabole	

N°	Misspelled English words	Frequency
25	Firs	
26	follo	
27	Fantastique	2

The researcher was based on the Reima's (2010) and Cook's (1999) classifications of spelling errors. Concerns the whole word error; the English words, 'table', 'foutbole', 'badroum', 'confotabole' and 'fantastique' are classified into this type. Looking at those words they are substituted or fully invented. It is difficult to recognize that in 'table', the pupil has inserted the grapheme 'o' to spell it the cluster 'bl'. Once the grapheme 'o' is deleted the English is spelled correctly as 'table'. It is similar to the word 'confotable' whereby the pupil has deleted the grapheme 'r' and inserted the grapheme 'o'. The word is correctly spelled as 'comfortable'. For 'foutbole' and 'badroum', the pupil has inserted the French spelling with the grapheme 'ou'. With 'Fantastique' the whole word is spelled French like. It may be called 'French spelling borrowing' as the pupil has written the whole word in French.

Regarding faulty grapheme error, the following words may be mentioned; 'for the sake of restriction, a problem will be selected among the two problems of spelling which are phonological and orthographic ones. With 'family', it is a faulty grapheme error whereby the grapheme 'l' is doubled when it is not necessary. The word 'commonlly' is in the similar situation.

With 'fader', it is a faulty grapheme error whereby the pupil confuses the grapheme 'th' with the sound /d/. The same situation is identified with 'mader' whereby there is also a vowel substitution. The grapheme 'o' has been replaced by 'a' as the pupil had recourse to spelling pronunciation. The grapheme substitution is also noticed with following misspelled words:

1. 'bicause'. 'i' has replaced 'e'
2. 'difficolty' 'o' has replaced 'u'
3. 'lete' the grapheme 'e' after 'l' has replaced 'a'
4. 'Choes' 'c' has replaced 's'
5. Badroum 'd' has replaced 'th'

Regarding the consonant doubling, there is a case of the omission of the consonant doubling. The word 'swiming' is misspelled as the grapheme 'm' is not doubled. It is similar to the word 'corect' which is correctly with the doubling of the grapheme 'r'.

With faulty grapheme error, a problem of grapheme deletion or omission is mentioned with the following misspelled words:

1. 'wondful' - the grapheme 'r' after 'e'
2. 'follo' - the final grapheme 'w'
3. 'wile' - the grapheme 'h' between 'w' and 'i'

4. 'yello' – the final grapheme 'w'
5. 'shot' – the grapheme 'r' after 'o'
6. 'flor' – the grapheme 'o' before 'r'
7. 'apatment' – the grapheme 'r' before the medial 't'
8. 'confotable' – the grapheme 'r' before 't'
9. 'firs' – the final grapheme 't'.

With the above omission, the misspelled words 'yello' and 'follo' show the silent final semi consonant 'w'. The pupil did not take it account while spelling the words the 'firs' situation is identified with 'firs'. The final consonant is not graphically represented. It is a case of spelling pronunciation.

With the word 'wactching' is identified among the spelling errors made by the pupils concerned. It is an instance of both transposition and insertion. The way the word is misspelled, the grapheme 'c' and 't' have been first transposed and the pupil has inserted another grapheme 'c' after 't' since the word is correctly spelled as 'watching'.

The findings of the current study revealed two categories of spelling errors according to Reima (2010) which served in the classification of those errors. They are respectively whole word error and faulty grapheme error. The latter is the most frequent observed category. Cook's (1999) classification also helped. The researcher disclosed all the four types of spelling error, namely grapheme omission, grapheme insertion, grapheme substitution and grapheme transposition. The category of Reima (2010) termed faulty phone error was not identified with the twenty-seven words misspelled by the pupils concerned.

CONCLUSION

The current study entitled, English spelling errors made by Kinshasa secondary schools pupils, concerned ten sixth formers from five secondary schools of the municipality of Lemba. They were interviewed and asked to write a one-page composition on the different topics in English. Thanks to their compositions, the researcher disclosed the following twenty-seven English misspelled words repeated below:

N	Misspelled English words
1	Familly
2	Fader
3	Mader
4	Wactching
5	Wondeful
6	Comonlly
7	Follo
8	Mani
9	Dificolty
10	Bicause
11	wile
12	Tabole
13	Yello
14	Foutbole
15	Shot
16	Peopole
17	Lete
18	Corect
19	Badroum
20	Choes
21	Flor
22	Swiming
23	Apatment
24	Confotabole
25	Firs
26	follo
27	Fantastique

After classification, it is disclosed that the most frequent type of spelling error made by the pupils concerned is faulty grapheme error. Among the twenty-seven words, almost all of them are concerned with grapheme insertion, grapheme substitution, grapheme transposition and grapheme deletion conforming to Cook's (1999) classification. The twenty-seventh word (Fantastique) is a case where a pupil spelled the whole word French like. This may be called French spelling borrowing. It can be assumed that the pupil was not able to spell it in English (Fantastic).

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