

Spelling Errors Made by Second Year Students / College of Education / University of Tikrit

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Abstract

Spelling errors are the most common type of mistake in the written work of Arabic learners of English. Spelling is a particular problem, partly because of the differences in the writing systems of Arabic and English as well as because in English the relationship between sounds and writing is not regular. The present study aims at : (1) examining the sources of spelling errors of the students of second year in English department, College of Education, Tikrit University.(2) Studying and analyzing of spelling errors made by second year students will help identifying the strategies that they use in English spelling, obtain information on common difficulties in spelling English as a second language as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of spelling teaching materials

The test is limited to:(1) Choosing the right spelling word from 3 words.(2) The sample of the students will be limited to the second year students, College of Education, Tikrit University.(3) The academic year 2008-2009.

The Procedures adopted in this study include (1) Specifying spelling test.

2. Constructing an achievement test to internalize the errors made in spelling. (3) Classifying errors.(4) Analyzing results statistically. 5. Drawing Conclusions.

1. English Spelling

There are several important turning points: the introduction of the Roman alphabet in the Old English period, the Norman Conquest in 1066 AD, the Great Vowel Shift. Moreover, there was

constant integration of foreign words into the English language. Old English was mostly based on the Latin alphabet.

During the Middle English and Early Modern English period, the pronunciation of the long vowels changed. The reasons for this change are not clearly known; one hypothesis says that the changes were due to social stratification. People started to pronounce the long vowels with “a greater elevation of the tongue and a closing of the mouth” (Baugh et al 1993: 233).

Another example of differences in spelling and pronunciation occurring during the Great Vowel Shift is the so-called “silent letters” in words today. In the word *knight*, the letter (k) had usually been pronounced, but after the Great Vowel Shift people ceased to do so. Still, as the spelling standard had been set up according to the old pronunciation conventions, the (k) was preserved in the word, even though it was no longer pronounced by the speakers. These so-called loan words made up a considerable portion of the English vocabulary and made spelling a difficult matter.

Today, words from foreign languages still enter the English language and continue to shape the image of English as an “amalgam of several traditions” (Crystal 1995: 274-277).

2. English Spelling Rules

2.1 Pluralization

Eckersley & Eckersley (1969: 26-27) mentions the following about plural forms spelling:

1. The plural of almost all nouns is formed by means of a (s):
book....books cat....cats
2. Words that end in the letters s, sh, ch, x, z are pluralized by adding (es): **glass-glasses; church- churches; brush- brushes; box-boxes**
3. Most of the words that end with (-o) take (-es): **negro... negroes ; potato...potatoes; hero...heroes; volcano... volcanoes**

But there are some exceptions to this:

The words that are felt to be foreign take the -s form:

*Piano... pianos photo....photos; dynamo.... dynamos
magneto... magnetos; kilo... kilos*

The words that end with o preceded by a vowel take the –s form:

cameo... cameos ; radio... radios; studio... studios; curio... curios

4. Concerning the nouns that end in (-f) or (-ef), Greenbaum and Nelson (2002: 253) state that the (f) or (fe) is changed into (-ves):

Calf—calves; elf--- elves; knife--- knives; wife--- wives

2.2 Spelling of some Vowels and Consonants

The spelling of the following vowels and consonants are as follows:

1. Short and Long Vowels

1. To spell a short vowel sound, only one letter is needed:

at red it hot up

2. To spell a long sound you must add a second vowel. The second may be next to the first, in the VVC pattern (**boat**, **maid**, **cue**, etc.) or it may be separated from the first one by a consonant in the VCV pattern (**made**, **ride**, **tide**, etc.). If the second vowel is separated from the first by two spaces, it does not affect the first one. This is the VCCV pattern in which the first vowel remains short. Thus, doubling a consonant can be called "protecting" a short vowel because it prevents an incoming vowel from getting close enough to the first one to change its sound from short to long:

maid, **made**, but **madder**; **dine**, **diner**, but **dinner**.

2. Spelling the Sound /k/

This sound can be spelled in any one of four ways:

1. c 2. cc 3. k 4. ck

a. The single letter, **c** , is the most common spelling. It may be used anywhere in a word:

cat, corn, actor, victim, direct, mica, scat, bacon, public, cactus, inflict pecan

2. Sometimes the letter **c** must be doubled to **cc** to protect the sound of a short vowel:

Stucco, baccalaureate, hiccups, Mecca, tobacco, buccaneer, occupy raccoon

3. The letter **k** is substituted for **c** if /**k**/ is followed by an e, i, or y.

kin, make, sketch, poker, kind, risky, skin, token, skill, keep, liking. flaky

4. Similarly, the spelling **ck**, is substituted for **cc** if the following letter is an (e, i, or y):

lucky, picking, rocking, finicky, blackest, mackintosh, frolicked, ducking

5. The letters, (**k**) and (**ck**) are more than substitutes for **c** and **cc**. They are used to spell /**k**/ at the end of a monosyllable. The digraph, **ck**, always follows a short vowel:

Sack, duck, lick, stick, wreck, clock

The letter, **k**, follows any other sound: *milk, soak, make, bark, hawk duke, tank, peek, bike, cork, tusk, perk*

3. The Sound, / **dʒ** /

The sound, / **dʒ** / is spelled in three ways: **j ge** and **dge**.

a. The letter **j** is usually used if the sound is followed by (an a, o, or u.) *just, jam, jungle, injure, major, adjacent, jog, jar, Japan, jury, job, Benjamin, adjust, jacket, jolly, jaguar, jump, jealousy*

b. Since the letter (**g**) has the soft sound of / **dʒ** / when it is followed by an **e, i, or y**, it is usually used in this situation:

gentle, ginger, aging, algebra, Egypt, gem, origin, gym

c. If /**j**/ follows a short vowel sound, it is usually spelled with (**dge**). This is because the letter **j**, is never doubled in English.

badge, ridge, dodge, partridge, gadget, budget, judge, edge, smudge judgement

4. The Sound, / tʃ /

The sound / tʃ / has two spellings: (**tch**) after a short vowel, **ch** anywhere else:

witch, sketch, botch, satchel, catch, hatchet, kitchen, escutcheon

Exceptions:

which, rich, much, such, touch, bachelor, attach, sandwich, and ostrich.

5. Using -le

Words ending in **-le**, such as **little**, require care. If the vowel sound is short, there must be two consonants between the vowel and the **-le**. Otherwise, one consonant is enough.

*li tt le, ha nd le, ti ck le, a mp le, bo tt le, pu zz le, cru mb le, a ng le
bugle able, poodle, dawdle, needle, idle, people*

6. The Sound /j/

When this sound occurs before a vowel suffix, it is spelled (**ti**, **si**, or **ci**.)

partial, cautious, patient, vacation, special, deficient, suspicion, suction,

inertia, delicious, ratio, pension, musician, physician, optician, quotient

[<http://www.dyslexia.org/fag.html>]

2.3 Doubling of a consonant

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 29) mentions that consonants are doubled before a vowel letter when preceding vowel is stressed and spelled with a single letter:

bar—barring---barring permit---permitting---permitted

There is no doubling when the vowel is unstressed or written with two letters:

enter---entering---entered

dread---dreading---dreaded

Exception: Bases ending in certain consonants are doubled also after single unstressed vowels: g-gg , c-ck:

humbug---humbugged---humbugging

traffic---trafficking---trafficked

Note:

a. The consonants (**v**, **j**, **k**, **w**) and (**x**) are never doubled.

b. No normal English words ends with the letter (**v**). A final /v/ is always spelled with **ve**, no matter what the preceding vowel sound may be:

have, give, sleeve, cover, receive, love, connive, brave

2.4. The letter (y)

When a word ends in a consonant plus (y), change (y) to (i) before any suffix except (-ing) or (-'s) (Azar, 1992: 29):

body – bodily, family - familiar, marry - marriage , puppy – puppies,

many – manifold, vary – various, happy – happiness, beauty – beautiful plenty – plentiful, merry – merriment, company – companion, fury - furious

In other words, if the verb ends in a vowel + y, keep (y), do not change it to (i). If the verb ends in a consonant +y, keep the (y) for (ing) form, but change the (y) to (i) to make the (ed) form:

Play--- playing, enjoy ---- enjoying, worry----worried

2.5 Dropping final (e)

In words that end in a silent e you must drop it before you add a vowel suffix.

ride – riding, cure – curable, use – usual, age – aging, fame – famous, force – forcing, refuse – refusal, slice – slicing, pure – purity, ice – icicle, nose – nosy, convince – convincing

globe – global, race – racist, pole – polar, offense – offensive

Normally you drop a silent **e** before adding a vowel suffix. However, if the word ends in **(-ce)** or **(-ge)** and the incoming vowel is an **a**, **o**, or **u**, you cannot randomly toss out that silent **e**. It is not useless: it is keeping its left-hand letter soft, and your **(a, o, or u)** will not do that. Thus:

manage – manageable, peace – peaceable, courage – courageous

2.6 Prefixes

Do not add or subtract letters when you add a prefix:

un + easy → uneasy

un + necessary → unnecessary

dis + obey → disobey

dis + satisfied → dissatisfied

mis + spell → misspell

over + eat → overeat

over + rule → overrule

under + take → undertake

in + expensive → inexpensive

in + numerable → innumerable

(Greenbaun and Nelson 2002: 256)

The prefix **in-** is regularly changed to **il-**, **im-**, or **ir-** according to the first letter of the word that it is added to. The prefix often means ‘not’, as in:

illegal irrational immoral

illegible irregular, immortal

illegitimate, irrefutable, impartial

illogical, irresponsible, impure

(ibid:257)

3 Variation in the English and American Spelling.

At the level of educated speech there are relatively minor differences in grammar. When a British and an American holding a dialogue, they nearly communicate with full understanding. Many specialists in the field of linguistics emphasize the similarities between the two varieties than the differences (Wrenn, 1970: 93)

Cook (2004:179-180) states that the variation of spelling between British and American is one of the most obvious variation that people are aware of. Some evidences are shown as follows:

1. British spelling prefers the (-our) ending, American the (-or) (e.g. *colour* and *color*, *honour* and *honor*). A similar rule applies to (oul) in some word. British spelling tends to keep the (u) while American to drop it, such as *mould* and *mold*", and *smoulder* and „*smolder*.
2. British style uses (-re) but American chooses (-er). Say *centre* and *center*, *theatre* and *theater*, and *litre* and *liter*.
3. As McArthur (1992: 43) puts it British spelling uses both (-ise) and (-ize) where American prefers (-ize) in verbs and verb-derived forms. Usually American *apologize* is *apologise* in British spelling, (*recognise* *recognize*) and (*criticise* *criticize*). The (-ize) form is clearly American in many cases, but there are some American spellings with (-ise), such as *advertise*, *improvise* and *televise*. Likewise, British style has (-ize) in *capsize* and *seize*.
4. Nouns ending in -ce with -se verb forms: American English and British English both retain the noun/verb distinction in *advice* / *advise* and *device* / *devise*, but American English has abandoned the distinction with *licence* / *license* and *practice* / *practise* that British spelling retains. American English uses *practise* and *license* for both meanings (Trudgill, 1975: 102-107).
5. Some words vary arbitrarily between British spelling and American one. One group of words alternates (-ogure) and (-og).

British *dialogue*, *prologue* and *catalogue* versus American *dialog*, *prolog*, and *catalog*.

4 Methodology

In the previous sections, an attempt has been made to survey briefly about the sources of spelling errors. The errors made by second year students, College of Education, Tikrit University in spelling will be collected, analyzed, and tabulated with the aim of arriving at empirical results concerning good spelling. It is hoped that the statistical results that obtained will point out the causes of the errors made.

4.1 The Purpose of the Test

The purpose of the test undertaken in this study is to point out the weakness in spelling, and to trace the errors made by the students of second year in College of Education and analyzing them in order to find ways of remedy to be available to the teachers and students. Therefore, the results obtained from this study are hoped to be useful in teaching English as a foreign language as the finding may provide teachers with necessary information needed concerning spelling and whether this linguistic aspect requires additional training and practice.

4.2 Limits of the Test

The examination of spelling, will be limited to the second year students, in the College of Education in Tikrit University in the academic year 2008-2009.

4.3. Test Administration

As the test attempts to analyze actual errors that are made by second year students, the test has been administrated on fifty six students in Department of English.

Table (1)

The number of the Students and their marks

No. of the student	First question mark (60%)	Second question mark (40%)	Total (100 %)
1.	30	8	38
2.	50	18	68
3.	40	22	62
4.	28	10	38
5.	42	16	58
6.	32	12	44
7.	40	16	56
8.	36	14	50
9.	48	18	66
10.	zero	12	12
11.	zero	14	14
12.	18	34	52
13.	38	34	72
14.	44	22	66
15.	36	14	50
16.	32	18	50
17.	32	6	38
18.	28	18	46
19.	32	16	48
20.	30	12	42
21.	22	20	42
22.	22	14	36
23.	38	20	58
24.	38	14	52
25.	18	16	34
26.	40	20	60
27.	48	10	58
28.	40	28	68
29.	28	16	44

30.	38	14	52
31.	42	16	58
32.	26	18	44
33.	36	18	54
34.	40	14	54
35.	36	26	62
36.	44	6	50
37.	16	16	32
38.	40	16	56
39.	30	18	48
40.	42	20	62
41.	26	14	40
42.	38	20	62
43.	24	16	40
44.	38	24	62
45.	38	18	56
46.	24	16	40
47.	28	18	46
48.	32	14	46
49.	22	20	42
50.	40	24	64
51.	32	16	48
52.	28	14	42
53.	48	16	64
54.	30	16	46
55.	36	16	52
	1804	936	2744

The statistical means which is used in measuring the students' responses is:

The total of students' marks

The total of the students

$2744 / 55 = 49.89$ is the real average.

The hypothetical average: If the student answers all the sentences correctly, his mark will be (100).

($100/2=50$) the hypothetical average .

Because the real average of the students is (49.89) which is less than the hypothetical average, their levels are very low. Spelling is very important, and teachers should emphasize on teaching spelling.

4.4 Analysis and Discussion of the Result

According to the analysis of the errors which are found in this study, the following conclusions have been arrived at:

1. It is difficult for the students to choose the correct word among three in question 1, while in question 2 is easy to answer, because the students can complete the word by adding the affix and it may be right by chance.
2. Most of the students do not know that consonants are doubled before a vowel letter when preceded by a vowel and spelled with a single letter: omit----- omitted.
3. The students didn't pay attention to the words that end in silent (e) which they must drop before they add a vowel suffix: ride--- riding. But if the words end in (o-a- u), they cannot randomly lose out that silent (e).
4. Some of the students know that the prefix **in** is regularly changed to (**il**, **im**, or **ir**) according to the first letter of the word that it is added. The prefix often means 'not'. The other students do not know that.

4.5 The Factors of Making Errors

The factors that cause errors are considered the main reasons of the students' incorrect answers. One of these common sources of spelling errors is transfer of the Arabic spelling system to English due to the difference in orthographic complexity between English and Arabic. Another most common factor that affects ESL spelling difficulties is interference from other words and overgeneralizing

some features of English spelling, such as silent letters, consonant and vowel digraphs, doubling of consonants in words that are not spelled with double consonants [www.moe.gov.om/portal/sitebuilder/].

5. CONCLUSIONS

Learning to spell is something all our learners need to do. As a result of this study the researchers now more aware of the kinds of spelling errors made by the second year students are likely to make and thus the researchers feel in a better position to provide them with the support they need to become better spellers. It is hoped that teachers who read this work will feel that it also gives them some ideas about how they might learn about the spelling difficulties of their own learners of English.

Pronunciation is the first and essential step to acquire second language. If it is not well-acquired especially at the early stage, other aspects of English learning will be negatively affected. That is because of the numerous English varieties. Accordingly, students should be provided with a variety of opportunities and practice spelling..

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Q1: Choose the correct spelling for each word.

1.	exercise	excesize	excercise
2.	Occurrence	occurence	occurrence
3.	Sincerely	sincerly	sincerelly
4.	accidently	acidently	accidentally
5.	goveemment	goverment	government
6.	Definitely	definately	difinitely
7.	accomodate	accommodate	acommodate
8.	Millennium	millenium	millennium
9.	address	adress	adrese
10.	questionnaire	questionaire	questionnairre
11.	Beginning	beginning	biginning

12.	necessary	neccessary	necesary
13.	Definite	difinite	definite
14.	profesional	professional	proffessional
15.	sensative	sensetive	sensitive
16.	medicine	medicin	medecine
17.	accommodation	accomodation	acomodation
18.	grammar	grammer	gramar
19.	Describe	describe	discribe
20.	interesting	intristing	intresting

Q2: Try spelling these

1. state + ing = _____
2. indulge + ing = _____
3. base + ment = _____
4. home + ward = _____
5. peace + ful = _____
6. carry + ed = _____
7. fancy + ful = _____
8. pray + ed = _____
9. deploy + s = _____
10. encourage + ing = _____
11. buy + s = _____

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-
- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 12. bid + ing = | ----- |
| 13. shine + ing = | ----- |
| 14. knit + er = | ----- |
| 15. knife + s = | ----- |
| 16. omit + ed = | ----- |
| 17. forget + able = | ----- |
| 18. advertise + ment = | ----- |
| 19. society + al = | ----- |
| 20. potato + s | ----- |
| 21. Like + not = | ----- |
| 22. regular + il = | ----- |
| 23. change + able = | ----- |
| 24. garden + er = | ----- |
| 25. notice + able = | ----- |
| 26. stop + ed = | ----- |
| 27. change + less = | ----- |
| 28. tray + s = | ----- |
| 29. conceive + able = | ----- |
| 30. fascinate + ing = | ----- |