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Spelling Errors in English Composition: A Case Study of Iraqi University Students

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الأخطاء الإملائية عند الكتابة باللغة الإنكليزية:
دراسة حالة إفرادية لطلبة الجامعات العراقية

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Abstract

Writing is a pivotal system that transfers spoken utterances from being heard to being seen and read. Literacy is appraised not only by reading and writing accurately, but also spelling words correctly. Generally speaking, second language learners (L2) may struggle in their English writing more than first language speakers (L1) due to different reasons. Even among L2 learners, it is believed that Arab learners struggle with English spelling more than any other non-native speakers. The present study aims at identifying, classifying and explaining the errors that EFL students make from linguistic perspectives. The sample of the study is 50 students (first grade of English Department at Al Esraa University College) all of them are native speakers of Arabic, spelling errors were collected and analyzed from their written composition. Frequency of spelling errors was calculated. Then, errors were categorized according to their types and likely causes. The results of this study are consistent with previous researches, which found that spelling errors made by Arab learners are associated with the impact of their L1. The most common spelling errors are consonant doubling, silent letters, final [e] and vowels in general. It is, thus, indispensable for Arab instructors to scrutinize this dilemma explicitly.

Keywords: Writing, Spelling errors, Types and Causes.

المستخلص

الكتابة هي نظام محوري ينقل الكلام المنطوق من شيء مسموع إلى شيء يرى بالعين ويقراً. حيث يعرف مقدار ومستوى تعلم الأشخاص ليس من خلال معرفتهم للقراءة والكتابة على نحو صحيح فقط وإنما يتعدى الأمر إلى معرفتهم لتهجئة الكلمات بشكل صحيح أيضاً. بشكل عام , قد يعاني متعلمو اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة ثانية في كتابتهم أكثر من اولئك الذين تكون فيه اللغة الإنكليزية لغتهم الام او الاولى ولأسباب مختلفة. بين متعلمي اللغة الثانية, يُعتقد بأن المتعلمين العرب هم من اكثر المتعلمين معاناة في إملاء اللغة الإنكليزية اذا ما قورنوا بباقي متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية من اصحاب اللغات الاخرى. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد وتصنيف وشرح الأخطاء التي يرتكبها دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية من منظور علم اللغة. حيث ان عينة هذه الدراسة هم خمسون طالباً (طلبة المرحلة الأولى لقسم اللغة الإنكليزية في كلية الإسراء الجامعة) جميعهم من الناطقين باللغة العربية , وقد تم جمع وتحليل الأخطاء الإملائية من قطع إنشائه كتبها الطلبة. حيث تم من خلالها حساب تكرار الأخطاء الإملائية وصنفت الأخطاء وفقاً لأنواعها والأسباب المحتملة. تتوافق نتائج هذه الدراسة مع الأبحاث السابقة التي وجدت أن الأخطاء الإملائية التي ارتكبها المتعلمون العرب ترتبط بشكل كبير بتأثير اللغة الام على اللغة الانكليزية وان أكثر الأخطاء الإملائية شيوعاً هي مضاعفة الحروف الصحيحة واطفاء الحروف الصامتة والاطفاء التي تحدث مع حروف العلة بشكل عام وحرف ال [e] الذي يقع في نهاية الكلمة بشكل خاص. لذلك , يتوجب على المدرسين العرب تفحص هذه المشكلة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الكتابة، الأخطاء الإملائية، أنواعها وأسبابها.



1. Introduction

The English language has become the world's lingua franca; it is the main language for international communication in different fields including commerce, industry, politics and education. This is the main reason why millions of language learners all over the world are striving to improve their English language proficiency. An essential component of this proficiency is improving one's ability to communicate via writing since it is crucial to effective communication and essential to employment in today's world. One important factor to consider with writing competency is spelling as one single misspelled word can change a word and alter the whole meaning of the sentence. In general, good spelling is regarded as a sign of good education whereas poor spelling is considered ill (Fageberg, 2006).

Poor spelling can have drastic effects on reading and writing. As Templeton and Darrel Morris put it, "Orthographic or spelling knowledge is the engine that drives efficient reading as well as efficient writing" (1999: 103). Good spelling knowledge is extremely important for effective word recognition, which can greatly enhance or hinder reading. As for writing, poor spelling can make writing a labored activity with regular interruptions to the thought process by excessive attention to spelling (Moats, 2000). Poor spelling also limits the writer's choice of words, which negatively impacts creativity and leads to short and sometimes incoherent pieces of writing. In addition, poor spellers often have low motivation to write (Sitton, 1995).

On the other hand, the complexity of English spelling which lacks clear sound-to-grapheme rules is the main reason of the problem. For example,



the /k/ sound can be represented by k, c, ck, or ch, depending on where it occurs in the word. Another example is the graphemic sequence gh which has three different pronunciations as in *though*, *enough* and *ghost* and the /f/ sound which is represented by different letter combinations as in *affair*, *enough* and *pharaoh*. Besides, the English language has more phonemes than graphemes, such as the letter s which can represent the sounds /s/ or /z/. Moreover, the context can greatly influence orthographic information. For instance, an e at the end of a one-syllable word lengthens the preceding vowel and double letters do not often appear at the beginning of words. It is also important to possess some fair morphological knowledge of words and derivatives to become an effective speller in English. The spelling of the suffixes *ed* for past or *s* for plural are good examples. Similarly, morphological knowledge helps discover the link between related words, such as ‘signature’ and ‘sign’ despite their formal dissimilarity. In brief, good English spelling requires a complex interaction between phonology, orthography and morphology (Treiman and Cassar, 1997).

Spelling competency becomes even more challenging for EFL Arab learners due to the dissimilarity between English and Arabic orthography. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the formal or literary form of Arabic used for all written texts, is written from right to left and letters within words should be combined when possible. MSA also uses an alphabetic orthography that consists of 28 letters. They mainly represent consonants but also include three letters that correspond to long-vowel phonemes. In addition, diacritics, which are marked above or below letters, represent different sounds, such as three short vowels, no vowel or vowel lengthening (Bauer, 1996; Fischer, 1998).



Hence, Arab EFL learners have been generally found to manifest better and faster improvements with oral and aural proficiency than with English literacy skills (Fender, 2003; Milton & Hopkins, 2006; Ryan, 1997; Ryan and Meara, 1991). The anecdotal evidence shows that Arab EFL learners perform much better at the listening and speaking levels than at EFL reading and literacy skills partly due to difficulties with word recognition and spelling. The present study is an attempt to explore the difficulties faced by Arab EFL learners with spelling competence. The study focuses in particular on the spelling proficiency of Iraqi university students, in an attempt to identify patterns among their spelling errors that can help explain the difficulties they face with English spelling.

2. Literature review

2.1 Error Causes in the Literature

The Irregularity of English is considered a source of confusion for all learners of English, including native speakers because of the non-phonetic nature of English (Hildreth, 1962; Kharma and Hajjaj, 1997; Bahloul, 2007). Many researchers regard Mother Tongue interference as cause of errors, because research has shown that learners from different language backgrounds have different spelling problems (Odlin; 1989, Broselow, 1993; Swan and Smith, 2001; Fender, 2008). Lack of Knowledge of Rules and their Exceptions, many researchers attribute many of the spelling errors that some students commit to lack of command of spelling rules and regular spelling patterns. For them, such errors can be overcome by explicit spelling instruction of these rules and patterns (Hildreth, 1962; Ringbom, 1977;



Shemesh and Waller, 2000). The final category of errors, Performance, was also regarded by many researchers as a cause of errors that can be overcome if the habit of proofreading is built into students (Book and Harter, 1929; Smedley, 1983; Al- Karaki, 2005).

A number of studies analyzed spelling errors according to cause. However, like the case with the types of errors, differences existed between different studies in the methods used for classifying the errors and in the number of causes identified. More importantly, percentages were absent from most studies, which made comparing results not feasible.

Book and Harter (1929) classified the 18 types of spelling errors that they identified into two main categories. The first cause is that some students had inadequate mental control over the process of writing words, which caused them to misspell words the correct spelling of which they knew. The second cause is that some pupils had not observed the words correctly and so had not really learned how to spell them, which had students spell some words as they are pronounced, which caused a lot of spelling errors. While writing a word as it is pronounced was considered a type of errors in their study, it was observed as a cause of errors in other studies, such as Al-Karaki (2005). Book and Harter noted that around 25% of errors identified were caused by the tendency to spell by sound.

Ringbom (1977) also observed pronunciation errors as a type of errors responsible for a high percentage of spelling errors. Ringbom also considered Overgeneralization a main cause of errors.

Ramadan (1986) included in his classification of the types of errors a category for errors that were committed because students broke spelling rules or regular spelling patterns. Al-Bakri (1998) and Bahloul (2007) attributed the



errors that they collected to three main causes: intralingual, developmental, and interlingual. However, neither Al-Bakri 1998 nor Bahloul (2007) gives percentages. Similarly, Al- Karaki (2005) attributed the spelling errors that she identified into six causes. However, she did not include a clear analysis of these causes. She only mentioned, based on her review of literature, a number of likely causes of errors supported by examples from her corpus without reporting the percentage of each. According to Al-Karaki, the main causes of spelling errors of ALE are pronunciation, differences between the sound systems of English and Arabic, overgeneralization, arbitrary nature of English word derivation, incomplete application of English spelling rules, or the lack of knowledge of the exceptions of spelling rules, and performance errors.

To sum up, lending support to the views of many researchers and the findings of many studies, the findings of the current study demonstrated that the Irregularity of English, Mother tongue interference, and the Lack of knowledge of spelling rules are the most prominent causes of spelling errors. However, some differences existed between the classification of the current study and some other studies in the literature reviewed. For example, pronunciation was viewed as a type of errors in some studies, whereas it is viewed as part of the irregularity of English in the current study. Consequently, all errors that resulted from pronunciation problems or mismatch between the written form and the spoken one are categorized in the category of the Irregularity of English. Similarly, lack of spelling rules was considered by Ramadan (1986) as a type of errors, whereas it is considered as a cause of errors in the current study.



2.2 Error Types in the Literature

A number of studies have been conducted to analyze spelling errors in Arabic and non-Arabic contexts. These studies classified errors into different types. Although many similarities existed between these studies, differences were also present. For example, different studies had different names for the same type of error. To exemplify, omission errors were present in all studies. However, they had different names in some studies. For example, Bahloul (2007) created a category called Monographicization, which contained the words in which clusters of graphemes were simplified in the written form. Such errors are categorized as omission errors in the current research.

Another difference in the method of classification between different studies is that some of the problems that were considered as types of errors in some studies were viewed as causes of errors in other studies. The current study has made a distinction between the types of errors and their causes, whereas many other studies did not make such a distinction and classified all the errors identified as types of errors. For example, Book and Harter (1929), Ramadan (1986), and Al- Bakri (1998) considered writing a word as it is pronounced a type of errors, whereas Al-Karaki (2005) considered this problem as a cause of errors. In the current research, this problem is categorized as a cause of errors within the category of the Irregularity of English.

Another difference is that different studies came up with different numbers of categories. For example, Book and Harter (1929) identified 18 types of spelling errors, while Bahloul identified 12 and Al-Bakri identified 8. In the current study, only six 6 categories were identified. One of the reasons behind these differences is the variation in the methods used for data collection and



classification. For example, Book and Harter analyzed essays, exam papers, and dictation test papers. This resulted in creating categories for the errors that appear in dictation tests. One of such categories was created for the misspelled words that some students did not hear well when being dictated and consequently spelled them wrongly. As for differences in classification methods, Book and Harter, for example, considered adding a letter to a word that was anticipated because it appears later in the word, adding an extra letter, and doubling the wrong letter as three different categories. In the current study, all those three types are categorized as Addition errors.

A last problem that appears between some studies is that some studies did not include clear results concerning the proportions of some categories. For instance, Book and Harter (1929) mentioned the proportions for most categories. However, in some instances, they commented “only few errors were identified.” Ringbom (1977) was interested in highlighting the difference in performance between the two groups of learners that he was studying without mentioning overall proportions for the categories that he created. However, from his analysis, substitution, omission, addition, and disordering were main categories. Similarly, Bahloul (2007) did not include any percentages. He only listed the types of errors that were identified.

Because of the differences in classification and number of categories that are present between the current study and other studies, it was not always possible compare results. Sometimes, it was decided to combine the proportions of two or more categories that match the characteristics of a category in the current study in order to compare the results and arrive to conclusions regarding the prominent types of errors. For example, in Ramadan (1986) Omission errors appeared under the categories of Inflection



and Derivation errors. Thus, it was needed to combine the proportions of Omission errors in those two categories. Following is an overview of the most prominent types of errors in other studies.

In Book and Harter (1929), Omission errors comprised 21% of the total number of errors, taking into consideration that this percentage does not include the proportion of omission errors which were also found in the category of Non-doubling letters, because no percentage of errors was mentioned for this category. Similarly, excluding one category for which there was no percentage indicated, Addition errors comprised 19.3% of the errors. Disorder errors comprised 7% of the identified errors. As for Substitution errors, no proportions were indicated.

Ramadan (1986) divided spelling errors into three main categories: Morphemic, Intra-morphemic, and Splits. Each of these categories was divided into subcategories. The subcategories had many types in common with the types identified in the current study with similar prominence. Omission constituted an average of 29.5%. Addition errors comprised 4.4%. Segmentation errors (called Splits in Ramadan's study) comprised 6% of the identified errors. As for Substitution and Disorder errors they were also found in Ramadan's findings. However, it was difficult to calculate their percentages as they were part of the categories of Articulation, Ambiguous correspondence, and Phonetic errors. These categories also had some addition and omission errors in them.

Al- Bakri (1998) identified eight types of errors, 4 of which, according to the researcher, comprised significant portions of the errors: Substitution (19.98%), Insertion (17.84%), Omission (16.75), and Inversion (16.69). The other less significant types of errors were Segmentation (13.87), Pronunciation



(5.23), Unclassified (5.84), and Miscellaneous (5.23). These results are, except for the category of Pronunciation, very similar to the results of the current study in terms of the identified types and significance of each type.

Al-Karaki (2005) identified six types of errors that are similar to the categories identified in the current study. Additionally, salient similarities were identified regarding the most prominent types of errors. However, while in Al-Karaki's research Omission errors occupied first place at 34.1% and Substitution errors came in second place at 24.2%, the current study revealed that Substitution errors are more prominent than Omission errors

To sum up, disregarding the different terminology and classification methods that different studies used (discussed above), similar to the current study, Substitution, Omission, Addition, Disorder, and Segmentation errors were the commonest types of errors in all the studies reviewed. Additionally, similar to the current study, Substitution, Omission, and Addition errors were the most prominent types of errors in most studies reviewed.

2.3 Significance of Current Study

Clearly, English spelling is a problem for most learners of English. Nevertheless, the linguistic differences that exist between Arabic and English seem to complicate English spelling even more for many ALEs. Consequently, it is expected that ALEs sometimes make different spelling errors from other learners from other language backgrounds, and thus require different instructional procedures. Thus, it is important to have a close look at the specific problems that ALEs have in general and in Iraq in particular, and not depend entirely on other studies done in different contexts and on students from other language backgrounds.



In Iraq, a few researches investigate spelling problems. The current study is needed to fill this gap in order to gain new insights into the spelling problems that face Iraqi students and possible teaching strategies that could help overcome spelling problems.

2.4 Research Design

Only one instrument or research method was used for collecting data: students' compositions. Students were asked to write a composition of 150 words about a topic that was thematically related to what they had studied in their textbooks. The frequency of spelling errors in these compositions was noted. Additionally, the spelling errors identified were categorized according to type and likely cause.

2.5 Error analysis procedures

In order to identify the spelling errors, each piece of writing was read more than three times by the researcher. Misspelled words were marked with a blue, but sometimes red check for identification purposes. Then, a random sample of 20 compositions was given to a colleague to review them in order to make sure that the spelling errors and the total number of words was identified correctly. A total of 434 spelling errors were collected for analysis. Once the error corpus was collected, it was used for the following purposes:

- The frequency of errors was calculated, in order to measure how big the problem is.
- To find out what are the main types of spelling errors and what are the reasons behind this errors.



A- Seriousness of the problem

The seriousness of the problem was measured by calculating the frequency of errors in students' compositions.

b- Categorization of errors

In order to show what the predominant types and likely causes of spelling errors, the identified errors were classified according to type and likely cause.

B-1 Categorization by type

The spelling errors that were identified in students' compositions were analyzed and categorized into five types. A sixth category was created for unrecognizable words. Below is an explanation of each category.

1. Substitution, includes errors caused by substituting a letter or more for another, as substituting o for a in small (smoll).
2. Omission, includes errors caused omitting one letter or more, as omitting e in the word friend(frind)
3. Addition, refers to adding an extra letter or letters to a word, as in adding a final e to the word capital (capitale).
4. Disordering, refers to disordering some letters in a word, such as writing sea as (sae).
5. Segmentation, refers to writing one word as two, as segmenting the word breakfast (break fast).
6. Unrecognizable, includes words that were unrecognized because they were unreadable, such as babiuto.



B-2 Categorization by cause

In order to get more insight into spelling problems, it might be useful to consider as well the likely causes behind spelling errors in order to develop suitable activities that can help overcome or at least reduce them. The errors identified in the corpus were analyzed and attributed to one of four causes described below. It needs to be pointed out here that though the classification of errors identified in the corpus into their likely causes was done cautiously in light of related literature (e.g. Ringbom, 1977; Ramadan, 1986; Odlin, 1989; Broselow, 1993; Al- Bakri, 1998; Kharma&Hajjaj, 1997; Ediger, 2001; Swan &Smith, 2001; Bahloul, 2007; Fender, 2008), it depended on my own analytical judgment. Thus, error in this classification is possible.

The first category of errors is “Irregularity of English.” This category contains the errors that are mostly caused by the non-phonetic nature of English orthographic system. Unlike English, Arabic has a highly phonetic orthographic system, as words are mostly written as they are pronounced. Therefore, this difference is expected to cause ALEs some spelling problems. One example is that English has a large number of words that have silent letters. Thus, many learners might omit silent letters. Another example is that all vowel graphemes in English have more than one pronunciation. For example, the vowel grapheme a is pronounce differently in the words have, bake, and ball. Therefore, many ALEs might write words as they pronounce them or use wrong vowel graphemes. Homophones, words that have different meanings and different spellings but sound the same, also are expected to cause learners some confusion.

The second cause of errors is “Mother tongue interference”. This category includes the errors which result from the differences between the



written and sound systems of English and Arabic. English has some sounds that are not found in Arabic, such as /p/ as in park, /v/ as in very, and /č/ as in much. Many ALEs replace these sounds with their closest written equivalents that are found in Arabic, which are the b, f, and sh respectively. For example, some learners would write shange for change. "Consonant clusters" is another problem that comes under this category. In Arabic, these clusters are very rare. That is why; some ALEs break these clusters by inserting a vowel sound in the words, as writing seplash for splash. Another problem is the problem of graphemes that confuse some students, while they write d/b and p/q. One reason for this error is right to left directionality of Arabic writing system, which is expected to cause many Arab learners to confuse these letters and spell, for example, about as adout. The deletion of short vowels, as in writing seven as svnis a further problem that comes under this category, presumably because such vowels are not represented in written Arabic.

"Lack of knowledge of spelling rules and their exceptions" is the third cause of errors. This category contains the words that were misspelled because students seemed to lack the ability to apply some of the basic spelling rules of English, such as forming the plural of the words that end with the letter y such as buddies for buddies, doubling the last consonant finally for final, or dropping the final e when adding inflections such as carefully for carefully.

The final cause of errors is "Performance". This category contains the errors that students seem to commit as a result of haste or fatigue, such as writing m instead of n. Errors were categorized as performance errors on the basis that the letter (s) causing the error did not appear to be plausible as



misinterpretations or misrepresentations of English phonemes or graphemes, but rather as evidence of lack of fine motor control. Examples of such errors are writing beoause instead of because and i'w instead of i'm.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Seriousness of the spelling problem

In order to get insight into the seriousness of this spelling problem, the frequency of spelling errors in students' compositions were calculated (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of words in students' compositions and the frequency of errors

Number of Words	Number of Errors	Frequency of Error
4742	434	10.9

Table 1 illustrates that the frequency of spelling errors in students' compositions averaged out at 1 spelling error nearly every 10 words.

3.2 Categorization of Errors

Spelling errors from students' compositions were analyzed and categorized according to their types and likely causes.

A. Types of spelling errors

- The spelling errors that were identified in students' compositions were analyzed and categorized into five types. Two categories were created for unrecognizable words and mixed problems words.



- Substitution, substituting one letter or more for other letters in a word (adout for about).
- Omission, omitting a letter or more in a word (Arabin for Arabian).
- Addition, adding a letter or more to a word (capitale for capital).
- Disordering, reversing the order of adjacent letters in a word (aest for east).
- Segmentation errors, writing one word as two (power ful for powerful).
- Unrecognizable words, words that were unreadable (tish).
- Mixed problems errors, words that have more than one error from the above errors such as moush for (much)

Table 2 and Figure 1 below summarize the findings related to the numbers and percentages of the identified spelling errors classified according to their types.

Table 2: Numbers and percentages of spelling errors according to type

Substitution	Omission	Addition	Disordering	Segmentation	Unrecognizable	Mixed Problems	Total no. of errors analyzed
138 31.7972%	125 28.8018%	64 14.7465%	39 08.9862%	3 0.6912%	12 02.765%	53 12.212%	434 100%

The following chart is about the frequency of spelling errors according to their types

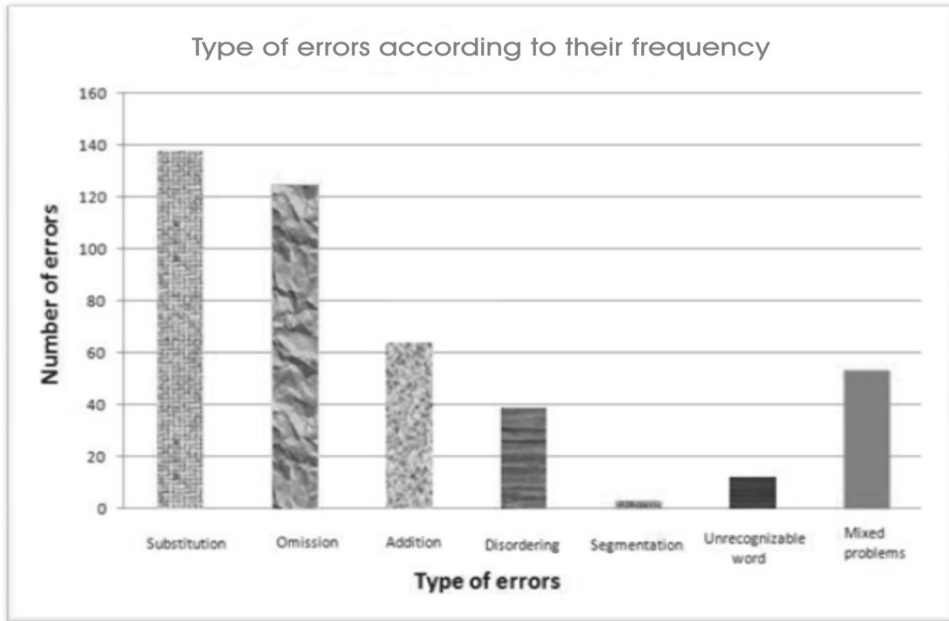


Chart 1: Frequency of spelling errors according to their types

In this chart, we can clearly observe that the high frequency error is occurring in the type of substitution, which is very close to the frequency of Omission. Both of them are between 120- 140 words while, the category of addition comes in the third higher frequency with more than 60 words, then mixed problem words with more than 50 words and the rest comes lower as it mentioned in table 2 with exact numbers. By the help of the analyses of the data, we found that the category of segmentation is the less frequent type among others with three words only whereas, the category of unrecognizable words with 12 words among the compositions of the students.

Depending on the below figure, we can find that substitution and omission are the most highly frequencies with higher percentages (over

30%). As for the other types of errors, they occurred much less often than the previous two types. Addition errors were the third commonest type of errors ranging just over 14%. Mixed errors is about 12%, Disordering errors were the fifth commonest type of errors with a percentage ranging about 8%. Figure shows that the least common type of errors was segmentation.

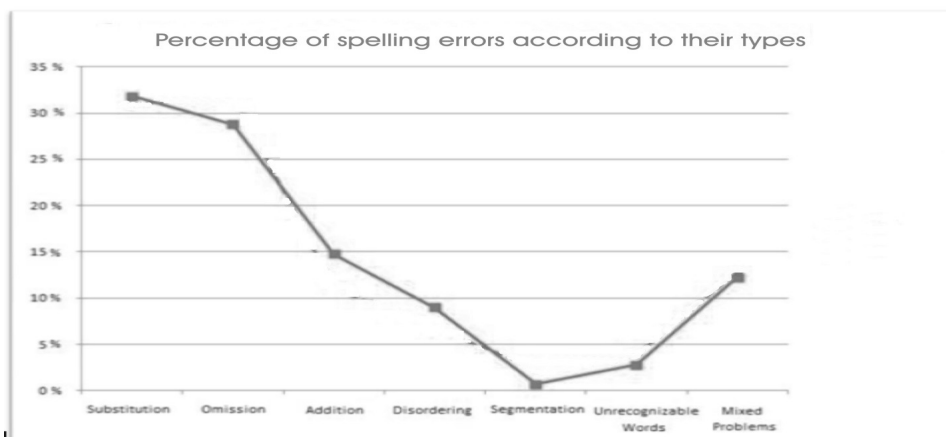


Figure 1: Frequency and percentage of spelling errors according to their types

Generally, spelling errors were highly concentrated in Substitution and Omission errors which constituted around 61.8% of the total number of errors. To a certain extent, the results of the current research correspond with the results of a number of similar studies in terms of the types of errors and their prominence.

B. Likely causes of spelling errors

The errors identified in the corpus were analyzed and attributed to one of four causes. Below is an overview of the four categories with some examples from the corpus.



Irregularity of English, contains errors caused by the non-phonetic nature of English. Some examples are:

- Omission of silent letters (rites for writes).
- Writing words as they are pronounced (laivfor live).
- Wrong vowel graphemes (capetalfor capital).
- Disordering vowel graphemes (bueatifallfor beautiful).
- Confusing homophones (were for wear).

Mother Tongue Interference, includes the errors which resulted from the differences between the written and sound systems of English and Arabic. Some examples are: (for a complete list of those rules, which were used as criteria for classifying words under this category see Methodology section).

- Replacing the sounds that are not found in Arabic, such as /p/, /v/, and /č/ with their closest written equivalents that are found in Arabic (clup forclub, cofers forcovers, and shange forchange).
- Breaking consonant clusters (weset forwest).
- Reversing the direction of some graphemes as caused by the right to left directionality of Arabic (dig for big).
- The deletion of short vowels (vist forvisit).

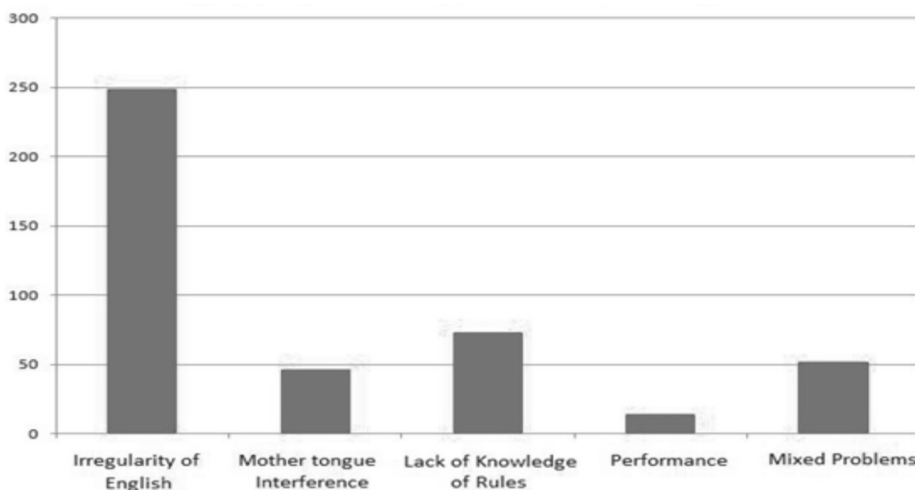
Lack of Knowledge of Spelling Rules and their Exceptions, contains the words that were misspelled because students seemed to lack the ability to apply some of the basic spelling rules of English. Some examples are: (for a complete list of those rules that were used as criteria for classifying words under this category see Methodology section).

- Forming the plural of the words that end with the letter y (citys for cities).
- Doubling the last consonant in words that end with a CVC combination of letters (fater for fatter).



- Dropping the final e in some words when adding inflections (smokeing for smoking).
- General spelling rules that can apply to a big number of words and have a limited number of exceptions. For example, writing city as cty, because of lack of the knowledge that the grapheme c is only pronounced as /s/ when followed by the graphemes e, i, and y.
- Performance, contains the errors that students seemed to have committed as a result of haste or fatigue (if for of).

Causes of spelling errors according to their frequency



Chat 2: Likely causes of spelling errors

The most frequently category is the irregularity of English with 249 words. While lack of knowledge of rules is the second most frequency category with 73 words. The third is most frequency category is mother tongue interference, and the last is the performance with 15 words only.

Table 3 below summarizes the findings of the study in relation to the numbers and percentages of the misspelled words according to their likely causes

Table 3: Numbers and percentages of misspelled words according to likely causes

Irregularity of English	Mother Tongue Interference	Lack of Knowledge of Rules	Performance	Mixed Problems	Total no. of errors analyzed
249 57.3733%	46 10.5991%	73 16.8203%	14 03.2258%	52 11.9816%	434 100%

Generally, spelling errors caused by the irregularity of English seemed to cause most errors among the population of the study. This category accounted for a much higher percentage of errors than all other categories. Proportions ranging from 57.3% of the identified spelling errors were attributed to the irregularity of English orthographic system.

Frequency and percentage according to their causes

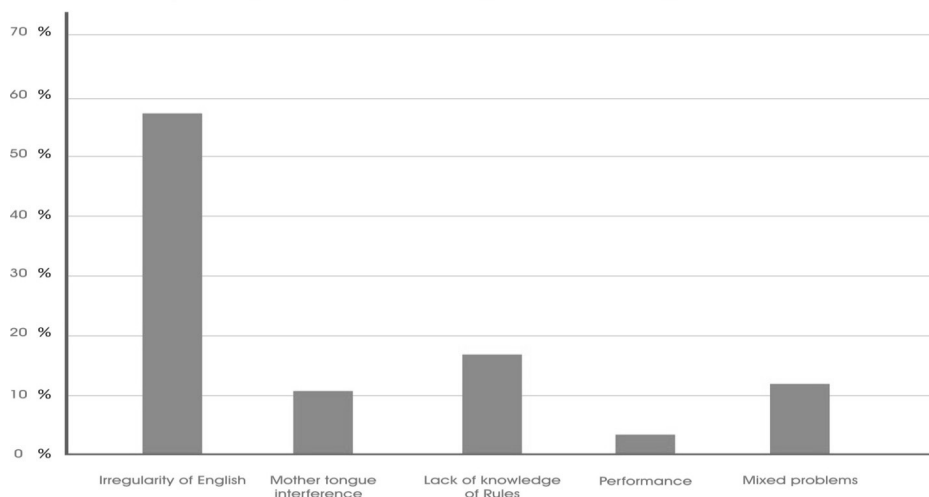


Chart 3: Causes of spelling errors according to their frequency and percentage



Mother tongue interference was the third most important cause, causing 10.5% of errors respectively. Apparent lack of knowledge rules was the second most important cause, accounting for 16.8% of errors. As for the last cause of errors, performance errors, it represented very low proportions ranging only 3.2% of the total number of errors.

The current study attributes spelling errors errors to four causes, which are Irregularity of English, Mother Tongue Interference, Lack of Knowledge of Rules and their Exceptions, and Performance Errors. Irregularity of English accounted for the majority of errors ranging 57.3%. Mother Tongue Interference and Lack of Knowledge of Rules and their Exceptions, though of much less significance, came in second and third place, ranging from 10.5% to 16.8%. Despite differences in classification and terminology, the findings of the current study lend support to many studies and views regarding the main causes of spelling errors.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the error corpus indicates clearly that there is a major problem with regard to students' spelling proficiency. The frequency of errors was very high, mounting to an average of one spelling error nearly every ten words.

It is obvious from the results that Iraqi learners of English find English spelling system complex and difficult to learn and they seem to fail to master this system with its difficult rules. It is obvious that wrong spelling representation of vowels and diphthongs, omission as well as substitution of letters by another form the largest portion of errors among other types of spelling errors which also constitute large number of errors.



The researcher believes that one of the most important conclusions that have been arrived is that identification of the exact sources of errors made by the students is not ambiguous and that an error may be attributed to more than one sources.

As noted above, most of learners' errors could be traced back to their mother tongue and the writing habits of his first language, i.e., most of the errors made by the students are transfer errors. Other main causes of errors in spelling may be traced back to some possible reasons such as:

1. The complexity of English spelling system.
2. The differences between Arabic and English sound system.
3. The incomplete application of spelling rules.
4. The non-phonetic nature of English spelling.
5. The students' carelessness and overgeneralization.



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