

Abstract 67

An Analysis of the Error Patterns in Spellings of the Students at the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce at the University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Sri Lanka

Umeshi Rabel

Visiting Lecturer, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce,
University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Sri Lanka
umeshi20@yahoo.com

The topic of this study is to analyse the patterns of spelling errors among the second language learners of English. The aim of this study is to account for the underlying causes of spelling errors made by the first year and the second year students of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce at the University of Sri Jayawardenepura. It first presents a general overview of writing and goes on to discuss the different writing systems such as the Alphabetic and the Phonetic Writing systems, to which English, being the Second Language of the sample group and Sinhalese, being the First Language of the sample group, belong to, respectively. It then goes on to explain the Acquisition of the Second Language and the concept of Error Analysis. Afterwards, it gives a detailed account of how data was collected and the ways in which the errors were classified. The errors were classified under Substitution, Omission, Confusion of Consonant Doubling, Addition, Misapplication of Spelling rules, Transposition and Homophone Confusion. The results are then statistically analysed and discussed accordingly. The distinction between English and Sinhalese writing systems which tends to be attributed to the occurrence of these misspellings has been accounted for. It is surmised that the Sinhalese being a phonetic language, where words are written according to their pronunciation, habitually contradicts with the orthographic system of English being an Alphabetic language, where there is no one to one grapheme correspondence, hence the students are unable to transcribe as they do with Sinhalese. Unaware of this characteristic, they transcribe by habit, causing the misspelling of words as one grapheme represents several sounds in relation to the environment in which it appears. Therefore it is this L1 interference that causes the spelling errors by these students. It is important for both teachers and learners to be aware of underlying causes of spelling errors, in order to assist in minimising erroneous spelling. It is argued that understanding these causes could be of great help not only to second/foreign language (L2/FL) learners, but also to university lecturers in this field.

Key words: alphabetic writing system, error analysis, phonetic writing system, second language acquisition, spelling