



ORTHOGRAPHIC ERRORS AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL IN BIHAR

MUKESH KUMAR

Research Scholar, Centre for Linguistics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi



MUKESH KUMAR

Article info:

Article Received : 30/06/2013

Revised from :01/07/13

Accepted 11/07/2013

ABSTRACT

In this paper titled “Orthographic Errors at the Undergraduate Level in Bihar”, I have discussed various types of spelling errors that the undergraduate students in Bihar make. The results included in this paper are based on the analysis of 177 writing samples collected from five districts of Bihar: Darbhanga, Muzzafarpur, Patna, Bhagalpur, Saharsa. The paper closely looks at the spelling errors like “Wibsite”, “Belam”, “Becouse”, “Bulgur” and so on to answer why the students at the undergraduate level commit spelling errors, which are otherwise standardized across the globe.

(Krishnamurti, 1978) discusses the influence of spelling on Indian English pronunciation. Further, about this relationship between spelling and pronunciation (Sailaja, 2009) observes that a number of English words are merely heard (often mispronounced), thus it is not uncommon to see misspellings across the country. In Bihar, spelling errors are commonplace in student writing and found in large numbers in their samples, an investigation into it is, thus, badly required to understand the causes of these errors for better handling of them in classrooms.

In recent years, with the advent of Spelling Checker Applications in various computer tools, accuracy of spelling is no longer emphasized upon resulting in large numbers of stumbling blocks for readers. On many occasions, readers fail to understand the text because of bizarre spellings. Thus, the paper apart from discussing the law of errors talks about the errors that are “ultra vires” i.e. beyond the comprehension of the speakers of standard varieties of English.

Keywords: Spelling Errors, Orthographic performance, misspellings, Undergraduate English in Bihar,

INTRODUCTION

It’s known that English spellings are difficult to learn for the second language learners and the learners of the language struggle with English spelling rules, which are too many to learn. Carney (1994) reports that there are 225 minor or major spelling rules in English. Some experts of English language argue that the word ‘rule’ is a misnomer if applied to English spelling. Because of these reasons, many attempts have been made to reform¹ spellings in both the US

and UK. Therefore, it’s not unusual to come across spelling errors in the writing samples of the English

reforms were also attempted in the US later as it was argued that English spellings were irregular because of their mongrel parentage and intermarriage with other languages. Horn (1969) made an observation that out of five hundred most frequently used English words, 354 were spelled irregularly. Thus all these words had to be memorized as independent units, making the task of learning spellings difficult.

¹ Samuel Johnson is usually credited with standardising English spelling. His *Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1755. Spelling

learners in Bihar, who learn English as the third language. However, the number of spelling errors in the writing samples is way too high and there are many which the learners should learn to avoid. Therefore, this paper looks through the errors in the writing samples to find a common thread among a certain error type, which could be the basis for the categorization of errors under one umbrella. There are spellings that are incomprehensible even in the context, which is a grave concern at the undergraduate level when the learner has already been exposed to the language for more than 10 years. In the following sections, we look through the errors of various types found in the writing of the undergraduate students in Bihar.

Literature Review: The research on spelling errors in the past showed that it was difficult to put all spelling errors into neatly defined categories. Ott (2007) has discussed this problem with spelling error analysis and says that misspelling analysis, though time-consuming, is often reliant on judgement and is not an exact science – different explanations can be given for different types of errors but it is a diagnostic tool. We can categorize the errors effectively if we know the cause of errors. There are various factors that influence learner spelling in the Indian context. Krishnamurthy (1978) and Sailaja (2009) have talked of spelling pronunciation in Indian English, which in turn influences the spellings of the learners. For example, it's common to hear geminate articulation in words like "happy", "unnatural", "irresponsible", etc. Learners, sometimes, don't ever look up the spellings of the words they hear in their environment. Another common thread among the types of spelling errors is the large number of homophonous words in the language. There are many other reasons for the occurrence of spelling errors in English and we discuss them along with the category of spelling errors.

Methodology

The data for this research was collected through a writing contest held at five districts in Bihar. The participants, 175 in number, were informed that the

data collected through the contest will be used for research, but they weren't informed of the nature of research. The text collected from them was then entered in a word document and the spelling errors were highlighted in the text. Later, the data was copied in an excel sheet and segmented into various error categories. We have discussed these categories under Study Findings.

Study Findings: While we could categorize most errors found in the writing samples in one or the other category based on the cause of the error, we couldn't determine the cause for some and put all such errors in the 'Miscellaneous' category. Below, we discuss the various error types we found in the writing samples:

1. Spelling Errors due to Learners' Inability to Discriminate between Sounds

As per the study in the past on the Indian varieties of English, it was found that specific sounds and sound patterns in English are difficult to learn in various parts of India. Here, we report those that are difficult to learn for the speakers of Eastern dialects of Hindi.

As described in Table 1, the speakers of eastern dialects of Hindi fail to discriminate between the following sounds: b/v/w as in best, vest, and west. The spelling errors as a result of inability to discriminate between some sounds are more frequent. In Table 2, we see several instances of errors that have occurred because the students could not differentiate some sounds from the others, for example, 'b' in place of 'v' in favourite. There are many examples which reaffirm the findings of 1972 by CIEFL. We have found the instances of such errors in the samples from both Patna and Muzzafarpur in Bihar. We have also found the examples of errors due to other instances of sound discrimination. The errors like 'used fool', 'harmfool', 'massanger', 'sopping' and the others given in Table 5 best describe that the students sometimes fail to discriminate between sounds and end up spelling incorrectly.

Table 1: Based on the Sound System of Indian English, Monograph No. 7, Central Institute of English, Hyderabad, 1972 as published in A Handbook of Pronunciation of English Words by Sethi & Jindal (2009)

S.No	Sounds, Sound Discrimination and Sound Sequences	Remarks
1	f as in file	Problematic for all speakers
2	b/v/w as in best, vest, west	Problematic for all speakers
3	dʒ/z as in Jew and Zoo	Problematic for all speakers
4	s/ʃ as in sip/ship	Problematic for all speakers
5	i:/i as in seat/sit	Problematic for all speakers
6	u:/ʊ as in fool/full	Problematic for all speakers
7	e/el as in tell/tail	Problematic for all speakers
8	e/æ as in pen/pan	Problematic for all speakers
9	consonant clusters as in school	No definite studies available but known to be problematic for all speakers of Eastern Hindi dialects

Table 2 Instances of Spelling Errors due to Problems in Discriminating between Sounds Listed in Monograph 7, CIEFL, Hyderabad (1972)

Erroneous Spelling	Correct Spelling [in British English]	Description of Error
FABOURITE	FAVOURITE	b/v/w as in best, vest, west
BULGURITY	VULGARITY	b/v/w as in best, vest, west
BEBSITE	WEBSITE	b/v/w as in best, vest, west
PURCHAGING	PURCHASING	dʒ/z as in Jew and Zoo
MASSANGER	MESSANGER	e/æ as in pen/pan
HARMFOOL	HARMFUL	u:/ʊ as in fool/full
DIFFRANT	DIFFERENT	e/æ as in pen/pan
SOPPING	SHOPPING	s/ʃ as in sip/ship
DISAGE	DISHES	s/ʃ as in sip/ship
FILL	FEEL	i:/i as in seat/sit

2. **Spelling Errors Due to Pronunciation:** Other than the difficulty in sound discrimination, the difference in pronunciation of words is also a cause of spelling errors in Bihar. As spelling is known to have influence on learners' pronunciation, pronunciation can also similarly affect the way learners spell words. The effect is more likely in the context where learners don't get a chance to look up the spelling of the word and completely rely on the

verbal input from the environment. In many cases, the pronunciation from the environment is misleading and therefore we find that the subjects of the present research have committed spelling errors, which are very likely to have been caused by incorrect input from the environment. There could be even other factors at play, but wrong input appears to be one of the reasons we have such errors in the writing samples.

Here, we have discussed some examples from the writing samples that appear to be errors

resulting from non-standard pronunciation.

Table 3 Spelling Errors Due to Wrong Pronunciation

Erroneous Spelling	Correct Spelling [in British English]	Possible Cause of Spelling Error
WIBSITE	WEBSITE	/wibsait/
FELIM	FILM	/filim/
INTERTENMEN	ENTERTAINMENT	/intärtenmen/
BELAM	BLAME	/bilem/
APURCHUNITY	OPPORTUNITY	/əpərʃʊniti/
CHARTAR	CHARTERED	/ʃartər/
WEBSITE	WEBSITE	/websaid/
FASTEVAL	FESTIVAL	/fæstivəl/
HABBIT	HABIT	/hæbbit/

In some cases, even the correct pronunciation can be misleading if the learner completely relies on it for spelling the word as many English words don't have a regular form and don't directly relate to their pronunciation.

Here we will see some examples of such spelling errors:

Table 4 Spelling Errors Due to Pronunciation: Phonetic Spelling

Erroneous Spelling	Correct Spelling [in British English]
HET	HATE
GRATE	GREAT
KNOLAGE	KNOWLEDGE
PLESENT	PLEASANT
PROFECER	PROFESSOR
PRE	PRAY
CHEK	CHEQUE
DICIPLINE	DISCIPLINE
JUGEMENT	JUDGEMENT
WICH	WHICH
BECOM	BECOME
CAST	CASTE

3. Spelling Errors Due to Grapheme Phoneme Mismatch

There are about 40 distinctive phonemes in English, but 70 letters or letter combinations to symbolize phonemes. This relationship between graphemes and phonemes is not easy to learn for the learners of English. Treiman's (1993) work discusses that 'phonemes' that have many possible spellings are

harder than phonemes that have few spellings. For example, /k/ sound can be spelt with 'c' at the beginning and middle of words in some instances, with 'ch' in the words borrowed from greek (Orchid, Chemist), with 'ic' in words like "music", "panic", etc, with 'cc' in the middle of words like "hiccup", "account", with 'que' in the words like "mosque", "antique", etc., with 'x' in the words like "box", "mix", etc. and with 'kh' in the beginning and end of Persian and Arabic words like "khaki" and "sheikh". Many spellings for a phoneme is one of the major causes of spelling errors for the students in Bihar going by the results of the present research. Other than this vowels are the most frequently misspelt letters. This is in agreement with the research findings of Ehri et al. (1987), which also says that the short vowels are more often confused and the short vowel /e/ and /i/ sounds are the most often confused ones. "In Table 5, the examples of spelling errors of this type have been listed."

4. Spelling Errors due to Homophonous or Graphemically Similar Words and Syllables:

There are plenty of words in English which are homophonous or sometimes partially similar; a syllable or two being similar. This auditory or visual similarity between words can confuse language learners. These errors thus occur because of some kind of analogy with the other words. For example, 'Charter' is similar to 'character' or 'fill' has auditory similarity with 'feel' in Bihar. Therefore, analogical errors are made when an individual attempts to match a word from visual memory to a particular word pattern, such as spelling 'nite' for night

'because it rhymes with bite'. (Ott, 2007). "The spelling errors of this type have been shared in Table 6."

Table 5 Spelling Errors Due to Phoneme Grapheme Mismatch

Erroneous Spelling	Correct Spelling [in British English]
OPENION	OPINION
DIPENDS	DEPENDS
COLLED	CALLED
QUALITE	QUALITY
ACCAUNT	ACCOUNT
BECOUSE	BECAUSE
COMFERTABLE	COMFORTABLEE
TAIP	TYPE
TICHER	TEACHER
TIPS	TYPES
REJISTRATION	REGISTRATION
SERVIVE	SURVIVE
PARSEL	PARCEL
MAIND	MIND

Table 6 Spelling Errors Due to Analogy: Homophonous and Graphemically Similar Words

Erroneous Spelling	Correct Spelling [in British English]	Description of Error
CHARACTER	CHARTERED	Visual Similarity
ACCOUNTANT	ACCOUNTANT	
FAST	FIRST	Auditory Similarity
FAVORATE	FAVOURITE	Auditory Similarity
HEART	HURT	Auditory Similarity
HOLE	WHOLE	Auditory Similarity
INTERFARE	INTERFERE	Visual Similarity
MANY	MONEY	Visual Similarity
NO	KNOW	Auditory Similarity
PATENT	PATIENT	Visual Similarity
SEEN	SCENE	Auditory Similarity
SUM TIME	SOME TIME	Auditory Similarity
THAN	THEN	Auditory Similarity
THEREFOUR	THEREFORE	Auditory Similarity
USEFULL	USEFUL	Auditory Similarity

5. Spelling Errors Due To Flawed Derivation: Some spelling errors occur when new words are derived by adding affixes to words. There are specific rules for addition of certain affixes in English

and when learners fail to learn them, they are not sure of how the derived word should be spelled. For example, one of the most common rules of derivation in English is the rule for doubling a letter when adding suffixes. Also, some learners are not

aware of the exact affix and thus spell the word from their memory and may cause spelling errors. In Table 7, we have some morphophonological errors from the writing samples of the undergraduates.

Table 7 Spelling Errors due to Flawed Derivation

Erroneous Spelling	Correct Spelling [in	Description of Error
LOVELEALY	LOVELY	Affixed LEALY
CARRING	CARRYING	Dropped 'Y' for ing
SIMPLELY	SIMPLY	Ly addition
CHATING	CHATTING	Final letter
FINALY	FINALLY	Ly addition
FILD	FILLED	Past tense
COMMING	COMING	Letter

6. Incomprehensible Spelling Errors

Many spellings in the writing samples of the learners were incomprehensible even in the context and caused the sentence to be incomprehensible. We have listed some of these spelling errors, which show sign of incomplete learning of the spelling system of English. Though the number of such errors is not alarming, there are quite a few that we have found in the writing samples. Here are the incomprehensible spellings from the present work: Analysic, Aprovely, Bdegets, Cusy, Degerus, Drested, Effaatd, Exait, Seceam, trien, and so on.

7. Spelling Errors due to Incorrect Word Boundary

Many times, the learners have a problem with deciding the word boundary of derived words. They fall into the trap by believing that there are two words instead of one and break words into two meaningful words as observed in the present research. For example, "help" and "full" are two meaningful units and therefore learners may take them for two separate words. In the below table, we have listed errors due to false word boundaries.

8. Miscellaneous Error Types

Other than the above categories which accounted for the majority of the errors, there were some that could not be classified into specific error categories and thus they have been put under an umbrella, Miscellaneous Errors, and have been listed in Table 12. Most of these errors are the result of incomplete learning of the second language spelling. These

spellings are close approximation of the correct ones and at times very distorted and won't be comprehensible out of the context. For example, "spreem" for "supreme" or "gurniter" for "guarantor". Then there are other spelling errors that occur because of dropping or insertion of vowels or consonants. There are many errors in this category, but because we couldn't find any pattern in these errors, we have listed them in the "Miscellaneous Error" group.

Table 8 Spelling Errors due to False Word Boundary

Erroneous Spelling	Correct Spelling [in British English]
FACE BOOK	FACEBOOK
ALL MOST	ALMOST
BE COME	BECOME
EVERY PLACE	EVERYPLACE
HELP FULL	HELPFUL
INTER STING	INTERESTING
MISS USE	MISS USE
MORE EVER	MOREOVER
OUT PUT	OUTPUT
USE FULL	USEFUL

Table 9 Miscellaneous Spelling Errors

Erroneous Spelling	Correct Spelling [in British English]	Description of Error
ANTHER	ANOTHER	Vowel drop
CARPITION	CORRUPTION	Malformed
CITIZENE	CITIZEN	Word Final Vowel Insertion
DIROSES	DIVORCES	Malformed
DEVLPING	DEVELOPING	Vowel Drop
EMLOYEE	EMPLOYEE	Consonant Drop
FRUSTEAD	FRUSTRATED	Malformed
GREATION	GRADUATION	Malformed
IMPOTANT	IMPORTANT	Consonant Drop
INCRRESS	INCREASE	Malformed
MENTAINSONED	MENTIONED	Malformed

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: We have found that while most errors can be categorized, there are some that can't be. While the number of

incomprehensible errors is not alarming, learners often commit these and make the text incomprehensible. Thus, there is a need for teaching spelling rules in schools at an early age, so as to develop good spelling habits. This view is supported by Edelsky (1986) and Hudelson (1984) and they further state that bad spelling habits will be difficult to break later. Boder (1973) established that those who knew the spelling rules made fewer errors and that their errors were good phonetic approximation. Thus, this might also reduce the number of incomprehensible spellings. There may be arguments that today we don't need to pay attention to spellings because of spell-check options available in writing applications like MS Word and others. Keates (2000) in this context has said that "Fine ingredients and state-of-the-art kitchens do not in themselves result in good cooking. The master chef knows, understands and uses experience and skills to produce well-cooked food; so does a good writer."

REFERENCES

- Boder, E. (1973). Developmental dyslexia: A diagnostic approach based on three atypical reading-spelling patterns. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 663-687.
- Edelsky, C. (1986). *Writing a Bilingual Program: Habia Una Vez (Writing Research Series)*. New York: Praeger.
- Ehri, L., & Wilce, L. (1987). Does learning to spell help beginners learn to read words? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 47-65.
- Hudelson, S. (1984). Kan yu ret an rayt en Ingles: Children become literate in English as a Second Language. *TESOL Quarterly* 18, 221-238.
- Keates, A. (2000). *Dyslexia and Information and Communications Technology: A Guide for Teachers and Parents*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Ott, P. (2007). *How to Manage Spelling Successfully*. New York: Routledge.
- Sailaja, P. (2009). *Dialects of English: Indian English*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Sethi, J., & Jindal, D. V. (2009). *A Practical Course in English Pronunciation*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Private
- Treiman, R. (1993). *Beginning to Spell: A Study of First-Grade Children*. New York : Oxford University Press.