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The Effect of Iranian EFL Learners' Motivation and Proficiency Level on Types of Their Spelling Errors

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of Iranian EFL learners' motivation and proficiency level on types of their spelling errors as well as identifying the degree to which these errors are common among them. Data were collected through a motivation questionnaire and dictations of 106 Iranian EFL learners (female) at a junior high school in Shiraz, Iran. The spelling errors found in the dictations were analysed and classified into six categories of errors including addition (insertion), omission (deletion), substitution, segmentation, disordering (transpositions), and miscellaneous (unrecognizable). Students' proficiency level was determined by calculating the mean of their midterm and final exam scores. Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and MANOVA were used to analyse data. Results indicated that omission and substitution were the most and disordering and segmentation were the least common types of spelling errors. Results of regression analyses showed that there was a significant relationship between independent variables of motivation and proficiency and the dependent variables of substitution, omission, addition and miscellaneous errors. However, the results of the correlation analysis showed that only proficiency level, and not motivation, had a meaningful negative relationship with substitution and omission errors and a significant negative relationship with the addition and miscellaneous errors. Finally, the MANOVA results indicated that the interaction of the two independent variables had a significant effect on all different types of spelling errors. In other words, students with higher degrees of proficiency and motivation had made fewer spelling errors in comparison with those with lower levels of proficiency and motivation.

Keywords: Motivation, Significant, Effect, Proficiency, Types of Spelling Errors

Introduction:

This paper provides general information on the main variables of the study and the problem that is going to be explored. Then, research objectives, the significance, questions of the study are presented. Finally, key terms of this study are defined.

Spelling is an important sub-skill which affects other main skills especially reading and writing (Al-Zuoud, 2013) .Research has supported the relationship between spelling, on the one hand, and reading and writing on the other. Smedley (1983) believes that spelling errors negatively affect the clarity of the written messages and consequently interfere with communication between writer and reader.

Learning English spelling is difficult for native students as well as second language learners due to irregularities which exist in relationships between letters (symbols) and sounds. If the students cannot learn spelling, they will have a problem in reading and writing. Although there are some rules for English spelling in spite of all exceptions and irregularities, teachers cannot cover all the spelling rules and students cannot memorize them. As a result, EFL learners make a lot of spelling errors.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of Iranian EFL learners' motivation and proficiency level on types of their spelling errors. In other words, this study aims to investigate different types of errors made by Iranian EFL beginner learners

The significance of this study arises from the fact that accurate spelling helps the learner to become a faster and more accurate writer and reader.

Different kinds of problems or errors that students have in their spelling. These problems are classified into six groups, namely, addition (insertion) adding an extra letter such as *feriend* instead of *friend*, omission (deletion) deleing a letter such as *sevn* instead of *seven*, substitution (substituting a letter or more for another) such as *smoll* instead of *small*, segmentation (writing one word as two) such as *help ful* instead of *helpful*, disordering (transposition which refers to disordering some letters in a word) such as *sae* instead of *sea*, and miscellaneous (unrecognizable referring to errors which are not classified under other error categories) such as *elina* instead of *Elina* and *babiuto* which is completely unreadable. (Al-Karaki ,2005)

Motivation is about the act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something. Also it could be stated that motivation is the driving force or influence that causes someone to do something .(Deci ,1975)

Proficiency refers to a good standard of ability and skill. It covers the abilities, competences and skills that a learner has acquired in a language.

Theoretical basis of research:

Motivation:

Motivation is about the act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something. Also it could be stated that motivation is the driving force or influence that causes someone to do something .(Deci ,1975) . One definition about motivation divides it into two parts integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation means the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and desires to integrate into the target language community. Instrumental motivation refers to gaining some social or economic reward through L2 achievement.(Falk,1978). Another definition about motivation divides it into two parts intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is the inner forces of the students. There is no reward except the activity itself. It means that the essence of the motivated action is a sense of autonomy, self-initiating, and self-regulating. Extrinsic motivation refers to motivation that comes from outside of an individual. Its factors are external or outside rewards such as money or grades and these rewards provide satisfaction and pleasure that the task itself may not provide.(Brown,2010)

Proficiency:

Proficiency refers to a good standard of ability and skill. It covers the abilities, competences and skills that a learner has acquired in a language.

Types of Spelling errors:

Different kinds of problems or errors that students have in their spelling. These problems are classified into six groups, namely, addition (insertion) adding an extra letter such as *feriend* instead of *friend*, omission (deletion) deleing a letter such as *sevn* instead of *seven*, substitution (substituting a letter or more for another) such as *smoll* instead of *small*, segmentation (writing one word as two) such as *help ful* instead of *helpful*, disordering (transposition which refers to disordering some letters in a word) such as *sae* instead of *sea*, and miscellaneous (unrecognizable referring to errors which are not classified under other error categories) such as *elina* instead of *Elina* and *babiuto* which is completely unreadable. (Al-Karaki ,2005)

Research Background:

Delgado (2010) studied the influence of Spanish on the acquisition of English spelling skills. The purpose of this investigation was to study the spelling errors of bilingual adolescents as they learn English. All samples were analyzed using the Phonological Orthographic Morphological Assessment of Spelling-Spanish (POMAS-S), a linguistically-based sensitive to effects of cross-language transfer. Misspellings were extracted from the students' writing samples and were examined by looking at the effects of linguistic category, genre, and gender.

Al Jayousi (2011) contends that many learners of English, including Arab learners in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) public schools exhibit difficulties with English spelling. These difficulties have been attributed to a number of causes, such as the irregularity of the orthographic system of English and mother tongue interference.

These spelling difficulties cause learners to commit many spelling errors that distort their written production, affecting negatively their overall writing proficiency. In addition to the negative effect of poor spelling on writing proficiency, it has been argued that many poor spellers have problems with reading.

Alhaisoni et al. (2014) have reported the types of spelling errors made by the beginner learners of English in an EFL context as well as the major sources underpinning such errors in contextual writing composition tasks.The spelling errors found in the writing samples was analysed and classified into four categories of errors according to Cook's Classification: omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition. An analysis of errors established that errors of omission constituted the highest proportion of errors. The majority of learners' spelling errors were related to a wrong use of vowels and pronunciation. When uncertain about accurate spellings, beginner learners often associated a wide range of vowel and consonant combinations in an attempt to spell words accurately, sometimes even combining two distinct lexical items by overlapping vowels.

Benyo (2014) investigated English spelling errors made by freshmen students of Dongola University including both consonant and vowel. This study was based on the assumption that the first year university students had weaknesses in English speaking. The aim was to discover factors behind these problems. Unawareness of spelling rules sound problems might have been the cause.

Taylor & Francis (2016) maintain that spelling is an important skill that is crucial to effective written communication. In their study, brief experimental analysis procedures were used to examine spelling instruction strategies, for example: whole word correction, word study strategy, positive practice, and

cover, copy, and compare for four students. In addition, an extended analysis was used to determine the effectiveness of the selected strategy over time.

Research methodology

The population, sample and sampling

The population of this study were 106 female Iranian EFL learners in junior high school in Shiraz.. They were chosen based on convenience sampling. The students were in grade 9 in junior high school. They were studying in 4 classes.

Research tools

The instrument used in this study, Motivation was measured by a questionnaire taken from SLA Topics SLA Bibliography, Vivian Cook SLL and LT (adapted from Gardner's AMTB, 1985). This questionnaire has 8 questions and a likert-type seven answer format ranging Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

The second instrument utilized in this study was two proficiency exams developed by researcher and taken from the students in a one-month interval . The mean of these two exams was calculated and used as the students 'proficiency score .

The third instrument was a dictation from a text taken from the students' textbook. This text which was selected from lessons that the learners had studies (was familiar) included two paragraphs.

The Analysis of Data

We have used a normalization test, descriptive statistics, regression analysis, MANOVA (multivariate analyses of variance) and Pearson correlation . SPSS software was also used for the purpose of running the statistical analyses.

Research Findings

The results of the descriptive statistics are presented

Table 1: Descriptive statistic of variables

variables	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Motivation	26.42	26.00	3.51	-14%	-0.69
Proficiency	18.68	20.00	2.04	-1.67	1.18
Addition	4.16	3.00	1.12	1.84	0.57
Omission	8.31	6.00	1.70	1.03	0.27
Substitution	2.70	1.72	2.73	1.72	2.70
Segmentation	0.83	1.00	0.16	0.20	-0.75
Disordering	0.55	0.05	0.02	1.08	-0.05
Miscellaneous	2.58	1.00	0.08	2.11	0.83

As can be seen in the table above, the mean obtained for the disordering error type is 0.55. It means that it is the error type which students have made least. On the other hand, the mean obtained for omission error type is 8.31 which means that omission has been the most common error type among the respondents.

The mean of the proficiency scores is 18.86 and the median is 20. Also, the mean of the motivation variable is 26.42 and the median is 26.00. The skewness indices also show that there is a positive skewness for the motivation variable. However, for the error types and the proficiency the distribution is normal. This is also confirmed by the Kolomogoruf-Asmirnof (KS) test of normality. The amount of KS is more than 0.05 which means that the distribution of this study is normal.
Table .2 demonstrates the results of the Kolomogoruf-Asmirnof (KS) test.

Table 2: Kolomogruf-Asmirnoof (KS) test of normality

Variables	**Kolomogoruf-Asmirnof (KS)**	**significant**	**Normality**
Motivation	**0.972**	**0.301**	**+**
Proficiency	**1.370**	**0.060**	**+**
Addition	**1.502**	**0.088**	**+**
Omission	**1.578**	**0.170**	**+**
Substitution	**1.742**	**0.088**	**+**
Segmentation	**1.837**	**0.112**	**+**
Disordering	**1.637**	**0.109**	**+**
Miscellaneous	**1.346**	**0.095**	**+**

Table 3: Results of regression analyses

Types of spelling errors	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
Addition	.608	.370	.358	3.30228
Omission	.800	.640	.633	4.66458
Substitution	.817	.668	.661	6.82751
Segmentation	----------	----------	----------	----------
Disordering	----------	----------	----------	----------
Miscellaneous	.574a	.330	.317	4.20579

Table 4: Correlation analysis

	proficiency	motivation	omission	substitution	mis	disorder	addition	segmentation
Proficiency	1	.058	-.799**	-.814**	-.574**	-.016	-.603**	-.132
		.552	.000	.000	.000	.874	.000	.178
	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106

motivation	.058	1	-.095	-.119	-.023	-.052	-.118	-.107
	.552		.333	.223	.814	.596	.228	.276
	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106

As can be seen in the table above, a significant negative relationship was also observed between proficiency and other two error types, that is, addition and miscellaneous, though this relationship is not meaningful. Overall, it was observed that proficiency level had a significant negative relationship with the occurrence of the most error types and in two cases, this relationship was strong enough to be regarded as a causal relationship as indicated by the regression results.

Table 5: Testing the homogeneity of variances in types of spelling errors

Variables	**Coefficient (F)**	**DF 1**	**DF 2**	**The level of meaningfulness**
Addition	1.665	52	53	0.908
Omission	2.989	52	53	0.087
Substitution	3.490	52	53	0.141
Segmentation	2.027	52	53	0.105
Disordering	3.398	52	53	0.104
Miscellaneous	3.657	52	53	0.908

As can be seen in the table above that different levels of the dependent variable i.e. spelling error types, were also, the level of meaningfulness for all types of spelling errors is more than 0.05. Consequently, variances observed in types of spelling errors are normal. Table presents the MANOVA results for two independent variables and one dependent variable with 6 levels.

Table 6: MANOVA results

Variables	**Sum of squares**	**The degree of freedom**	**Mean squares**	**F**	**The level of meaningful**	**Testing Square**
Addition	4471.265	25	17.891	3.771	0.000	1.00
Omission	549.065	25	21.963	1.702	0.025	0.933
Substitution	1865.504	25	74.620	3.747	0.000	1.0
Segmentation	12.843	25	0.514	1.158	0.005	0.705
Disordering	15.610	25	0.624	1.046	0.012	0.763
Miscellaneous	511.359	25	20.454	5.474	0.000	1.00

As can be seen in the table above, the interaction of the two independent variables has had a significant effect on the different types of spelling (p<0/001). In other words, though motivation showed no significant relationship with none of the error types, its interaction with proficiency level has had a significant effect on committing all types of spelling errors.

Conclusion:

Data analysis showed that regarding the students' performance on different types of spelling errors in the dictation, omission and substitution were the most frequent types and disordering and segmentation were the least common types of spelling errors among Iranian EFL learners.

Considering the effect of students' motivation and proficiency levels on their spelling errors, the results showed significant effect of proficiency variable on certain types of spelling errors including substitution, omission, addition, and miscellaneous error types. This was not observed for motivation. Finally, the last research question was about the interaction of the two main independent variables of the study on spelling errors. According to the results of the MANOVA analysis, the interaction of these two variables had a meaningful effect on all types of spelling errors. In other words, students with higher levels of proficiency and motivation committed less spelling errors and had fewer errors compared with less proficient and less motivated students.

Practical suggestions:

Interested researchers can use an experimental research design to better examine the nature of spelling errors. This could be done in free writing activities rather than dictation to denote a better sense of the real use of language. In addition, a more comprehensive questionnaire of motivation and proficiency tests can provide more valid and credible results in future studies.

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