A Study on Orthographic Errors among University Tamil Students

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Abstract: Education is a process of providing systematic instruction, particularly at a school or university or any institution. Education is based on teaching and learning which includes language. In language learning processes committing errors is a common phenomenon. Students commit various types of errors when they learn language. One such error is termed as orthographic error. This type of error is committed by the students when they write a language. Error analysis is considered as a process in learning and research. Usually, error analysis, studies the types and causes of language errors which are classified according to the modality and linguistic levels. Linguistics is one of the disciplines which study a language scientifically. The linguistics analysis is used to fit the errors within the types of phonological errors for this study. The errors committed are classified as, errors committed through mispronunciation, errors committed through uncommon words, errors committed through borrowed words and positions of phoneme in orthographic errors. The descriptive research method is used for this study. Corpora were collected from 150 compositions. Out of these 150 samples collected, 141 were from female students and 9 were from male students. The errors are discussed in this article in detail with the collected corpora. This study identifies the errors committed by the Tamil students from a renowned university in Malaysia. The finding of the study reveals that, a total number of 184 errors are identified.

Key words: language, Tamil, orthographic, errors, identify

INTRODUCTION

Error analysis studies the types and causes of language errors committed by students or leaners. Errors are classified according to the modality which includes level of proficiency in speaking, writing, reading & listening, and the linguistic levels such as, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and style (Vijaya, 2001). Orthographic error is one type of error which is usually

found in written documents. An error is the use of a word, speech act or grammatical items in such a way that it seems imperfect and significant of an incomplete learning (Richard and Schmidt, 2002)

Orthography is a correct way of writing a particular language. The term *orthography* was originated from the Greek language which means 'correct way of writing' (Wiki). The predictable spelling system of a language is orthography. Also, it is the standardised procedure of a writing system which includes spelling, pronunciation, word break, emphasis, etc. In general, punctuation, work break, and emphasis are not a serious issue for the learners because writing doesn't bother much to the learners. But spelling is an issue for all learners and it remains as the major issue in orthography. In language like Tamil, spelling plays an important role in writing process. It is not easy to write without any spelling mistakes even for a native speaker of Tamil unless being a scholar. Moreover, because of the spelling mistakes in a word or phrase the meaning of the word changes.

A descriptive research method is used to collect the corpus, to analyse and to interpret in this study. In this article, the researchers have given a clear picture of orthographic errors committed by students when they write Tamil compositions (individual and group assignments, quiz tests and exam answer sheets). These orthographic errors are analysed linguistically. The errors committed by these students are slotted under different types of orthographic errors. The reasons behind the committed errors committed by the students and remedies are also given. The corpus for this study is limited to Tamil student of a renowned university in Malaysia.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Tamil language is one of the major languages in Dravidian language family which has a long history. It has a rich literature background starting from 3BC. 'Tolkaappiyam' is considered as the ancient grammar book in Tamil language. It is mainly spoken in Tamilnadu in India, Singapore, Mauritius, Fuji Island, UK, US, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and many parts of the world.

In Malaysia, Tamil language is spoken among one of the ethnic groups which is commonly termed as Indians. Tamil language became popular during the period of Tamil Chola Dynasty of 11th Century (Nuhman, 1999). Today they form the third largest ethnic group in Malaysia after Malays and Chinese. It constitutes 6.8% of the total Malaysian population. Tamil language is taught in various universities for the Indian and non-Indian students with different backgrounds in Malaysia.

Orthographic errors are cognitive errors consisting of the substitution of a deviant spelling for a correct one when the writer simply doesn't know the correct spelling of a particular word or forgot it or misconceived it (Thambi Jose, 2014). One can find two important characteristic features of orthographic errors.

➢ They generally result in a string which is phonologically identical or very similar to the correct strings.
> For example, *kal* 'stone' instead of *kaL* 'toddy'.
➢ Proper names, infrequent words (uncommon words) and borrowed words are particularly prone to orthographic errors.
> For example, *mar* 'plural marker' instead of *kaL* 'plural marker'.

The spelling in Tamil language depends upon the phonemic / phonetic representations.

ORTHOGRAPHIC ERRORS

In universities, most of the students who learn Tamil language commit orthographic errors while they write compositions including essays, assignments and many more. For this study, the corpora were collected from Tamil language students of a renowned university in Malaysia from their written documents. Samples of 150 compositions were collected and the errors were differentiated according to the positions or environments of the phonemes. Out of these 150 samples collected, 141 were from female students and 9 were from male students. The male students committed 79 errors and female students committed 105 errors. Some errors were identical and some were different.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Linguistics can be defined as the scientific study of language (Chomsky, 1980). It has various aspects in languages. It has five main branches such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Hockett, 1956). The linguistic analysis refers to the scientific analysis of a collected language sample. It involves at least one of the five main branches of linguistics such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The linguistic analysis is intensively used to understand and to describe the concepts of linguistic knowledge that instigates the ability to speak a particular language, and to understand how the human mind processes and creates that language. In this study the linguistics analysis is used to fit the errors under the types of phonological errors. In this, there will be a change in phoneme.

ERRORS COMMITTED THROUGH MISPRONUNCIATION

In teaching and learning process, many methods or principles or techniques are used especially to learn the spellings. Some languages have strict morphophonemics. In one of such learning techniques or methods, it is assumed that learners know how to speak the language and how to write. While reading or speaking apt pronunciation is essential. Knowing the correct pronunciation of a word and the graphemes of an alphabet would be intuitive and easy to infer the correct spelling of any word (Roy, 1995). Some languages provide clue for correct pronunciation. But Tamil language does not provide the writer or reader a clue to spell and write it correctly. According to Ganesan (2005), Tamil language has more alphabets and the writing system is complex when compared to other languages like English, etc. This can be the major cause for the students to commit more orthographic errors in Tamil compositions. Moreover, Mispronunciation or misspellings of words in compositions are usually committed without any reason because the writer does not know the right way to pronounce or spell them (Nuhman, 1999). The writer of Tamil language does not commit the errors through mispronunciation intentionally, but can be due to misconception.

Some vocabularies in Tamil language with meaning in English are mentioned here which are from the corpora.

The word *kalam* 'pot' is mispronounced as *kaLam* 'place' and is written as *kaLam* 'place'. Similarly, the following words are mispronounced written as such.

munnaaL	as	*munnaal*	'former'
maN	as	*man*	'sand'
kaN	as	*kan*	'eye'
nanRi	as	*nanri*	'thanks'

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pulam	as	*puLam*	'faculty'
anniyan	as	*anniyan*	'stranger'

All these words written as they pronounce.

The corpora is analysed using the phonological features. Replacive and deletion phonological features are identified in the collected words. Both the replacive and deletion are common errors.

Replacive: In a word, if a phoneme is replaced with another phoneme then it can be called as replacive. The replaced phoneme can be a vowel, diphthong or a consonant. The following are examples taken from the corpora.

Puumpantu	*puuppantu*	'ball' (consonant *m>p*)
kannam	*kaNNam*	'cheek' (consonants *nn>NN*)
puuntottam	*puuttottam*	'ditch' (consonant *n>t*)
ooTinaan	*ooTunaan*	'He ran' (vowel *i>u*)
raamanai	*raamane*	'Rama' (diphthong *ai>e*)

Deletion: In a word, if a phoneme is deleted then that can be called as deletion. In the process of deletion, the deleted phoneme can be a vowel, diphthong or a consonant in that particular language.

paktiyai	*pakti*	'devotion' (*yai* is deleted)
pookkiri	*pookiri*	'naughty' (*k* is deleted)
ezuttu	*elutu*	'letter' (*t* is deleted)
avanaikkanteen	*avanaikanteen*	'Saw him' (*k* is deleted)

Both the replacive and deletion are errors identified from the corpora collected.

ERRORS COMMITTED THROUGH UNCOMMON WORDS

Orthographic errors are also committed because of uncommon words used in spoken referents. Each and every language uses different types of vocabularies. Similarly, Tamil language uses technical words and borrowed words in writing. In such cases, there are possibilities to commit errors. This is due to the simple ignorance of the exact spelling of words and writing the spelling with assumption with the spoken pronunciation.

thuRavu is written as *thuravu*	'saint'
piriyam is written as *priyam*	'loveable'
shri is written as *sti*	'Mister'

Such errors occurred due to the lack of usage or they are uncommon words in writing.

Errors Committed Through Borrowed Words

Global languages borrow words from other languages. This is another type of spelling error which is related to the word origin. Since many words in English are borrowed from other languages like Greek, Latin, German, French, English, etc. there are possibilities for a non-native speaker to commit errors while writing and pronouncing.

'android' is written as *antiroid*
kuujaa is written as *kuucaa*   'jar in English'
'Tajuk' is written as *tajuk*   'Topic in Malay'

Such errors are also committed by the students while they write in Tamil language. Year by year due to the advancement of technology, many borrowed words came to exit in Tamil language. Even the COVID19 is a borrowed word used in Tamil language until they coined a new term for it.

Positions of Phoneme in Orthographic Errors

Taufik (2013) says in his study that error analysis is considered as a process and it should be analysed in systematically. The orthographic errors identified are analysed with their occurrence in a word. In a language, orthographic errors can occur at any position of a word. In the discipline linguistics, there are three occurrences or positions for a single phoneme in a word. They are differentiated as initial, medial and final positions. The errors committed by the Tamil students can be differentiated according to the positions of phoneme occurred in a word.

Initial position

The orthographic errors committed at the initial position of a word. This type of error is not found in the Tamil origin words and found in words from other languages.

Hyundai is written as *kunTaay*
Busy is written as *pisi*
Fan is written as *paan*

Here, in the initial positions of the words, *H* is written as *k; b* as *p* and *f* as *p.*

Medial position

Here the errors committed at the medial position of a word. The following words can be considered.

kannam is written as *kaNNam*   'cheek'
puRam is written as *puram*   'outside'
malayaaLam is written as *malayaalam*   'Malayalam language'

Here, the changes can be seen in the initial positions of the words, *nn* is written as *NN; R* as *r* and *L* as *l.*

Final position

From the collected corpora, the following orthographic errors committed at the final position of a word are identified.

teLivaaka is written as *teLivaa*   'clearly'
makkaL is written as *makkal*   'people'
naaL is written as *naal*   'Day'

When the collected corpora are calculated for statistical purpose, the variations in initial, medial and final positions of phoneme in a word are seen. The statistical analysis says that 55% of the errors are committed at the word final position, 43% at medial position and remaining 2% are at the initial position. Errors in initial position can be seen with borrowed words.

Grace (2014) says that the errors committed by the college students are common and most of them are related to their ignorance and non-serious. This study also reveals the similar idea of Grace (2014), where most of the errors are committed without intention. Moreover, the study identifies that there are students who commit errors while writing their compositions. Students commit orthographic errors in all the aspects of phonology in linguistics and only some of them are mentioned in this study due to time constraint.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The orthographic errors can be identified and analysed with the error analysis method with linguistic aspects. It is an effective way to trace and identify the students' errors. This study analysed the orthographic errors found among the Tamil language students. Corpora were collected from a renowned university. The study can lead the students to be aware of committing orthographic errors. The reason for such errors can be, due to the advancement of technology, the students are forced to use computers, laptops, notepads and tablets for different purposes. This may also lead the students to commit errors since most of the students type the words with auto correct option or due to the default spell checker loaded in the system. The findings of the research indicate that errors are common among the students. In the 150 compositions collected, a total number of 184 errors are identified. According to Xia (2015) lots of errors committed by the students can be seen at the phonological level. In this study too, errors are identified at phonological level.

Based on the findings, the following are recommendations can be implemented. Teachers as instructors at their educational institutions can force their students to read more and more. More exercises and drills can be provided. Moreover, the teacher can explain the necessity of error free words, phrases and sentence constructions. Further, the teachers can explain the rules of formation of vocabularies and their pronunciation. New technologies can be used in the language class, so that students will focus on the class teaching.

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