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## Spelling Errors of Students with Afan Oromo L1 at Guangua Secondary School in Borena Zone, Oromia Region

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate and categorize spelling errors made by grade nine students at Guangua Secondary School in Borena Zone of the Oromia Regional State. To deal with English spelling errors, English language teachers' semi-structured interviews, L1 word translation, and dictation tasks at word and sentence level were administered to 60 students who were randomly selected using the lottery method. Content analysis was used to classify spelling errors into different categories: insertion, omission, substitution, and inversion. The total percentage of the spelling errors in the insertion category was 3.2% whereas those in the inversion category were quite insignificant (0.3%). The category of omission was the second most frequent spelling error which accounted for 29.2% of the spelling errors. Substitution spelling error type had the highest frequency among all other error categories (67.4%). Regarding the spelling errors that resulted from L1 interference, the findings revealed that students with Afan Oromo L1 often committed insertion, omission, and substitution errors. Based on the results, it was recommended that students should be taught correct pronunciation, basic spelling rules, and exceptions to English spelling rules.

**Keywords:** /Insertion/Inversion/Mother tongue/Omission/Spelling errors/Substitution/

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Spelling words correctly is an essential skill in written communication (Altamimi & Rashid, 2019). In order to maintain clarity in writing, students should be familiar with the spelling rules of the target language. Hence, learners need to learn how to spell words correctly. Besides, the ability to spell words correctly may imply to what extent a person is educated (Allaith and Joshi, 2011). Conversely, misspelling words may have an adverse effect on the clarity of the written text and ultimately causes misunderstanding (Fagerberg, 2006; Altamimi & Rashid, 2019; Khuwaileh and Al-Shoumali, 2000). Furthermore, it negatively affects students' academic achievement, self-esteem, and employment opportunities (Moats, 1991). On top of that, misspelling may suggest to what extent the person is inadequately educated (Alsaawi, 2015).

To become an effective speller in English, it is thus important to possess some morphological knowledge about words and derivatives. In this regard, morphological knowledge helps discover the link between related words, such as 'signature' and 'sign' despite their formal dissimilarity. In addition, learners need to possess knowledge about different forms of the verb (i.e. present, past, and past participle) and plural forms of nouns (i.e. regular and irregular). As spelling words is a complex skill, it requires learners to possess several language abilities: phonological, morphological, visual memory skills, semantic relationships

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as well as adequate knowledge of spelling rules (Staden, 2010). Hence, students need to synchronize these to spell words correctly.

Furthermore, knowledge of spelling is related to several skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary, reading, and writing. It seems that there is a much closer relationship between spelling and reading. Some researchers argue that bad spellers are usually bad readers (Koda, 2005; Fender, 2008). In this way, bad reading may presuppose bad spelling. Consequently, developing learners' reading skills may have a good effect on their spelling skills in the long run.

The causes of spelling errors in the second language can either be intralingually or interlingually provoked. Interlingually, spelling errors can reflect interference from the L1 literacy skills upon L2 processing (Akamatsu, 2003; Koda, 2005; Figueredo, 2006). The orthographic depth of the first language can affect the spelling of second language learners. On the one hand, second language learners may produce spelling errors due to their lack of familiarity with L2 systems, including phonological awareness, knowledge of orthography, or morphological-semantic correspondences (Apel and Masterson, 2001; Apel, et al., 2004).

In addition, the complexity of English spelling which lacks clear sound-to-grapheme rules contributes to students' making spelling errors (Mihiretu & Melkamu, 2011; Bassetti, 2012). For example, the /k/ sound in English can be represented by k, c, ck, or ch, depending on where it occurs in the word. More examples corroborate this situation: the digraph, *gh* has three different pronunciations as in *though, enough* and *ghost* and the /f/ sound is represented by different letter combinations as in *affair, enough* and *photograph*. Similarly, the letters can represent the sounds /s/ or /z/. The fact that the English language has more phonemes than graphemes (letters) might induce learners to make errors in spelling.

Nevertheless, Corder (1967) as cited in Darus (2009) errors that students make provide us with insights into how students learn the target language and they may apply them in their classroom instructions. Studies on language errors of students at different educational levels are, thus, aimed at studying systematically the errors that the particular learners make. Such studies might be helpful to throw light on the types and causes of errors and ultimately give recommendations for remedial work on a language instruction and material preparation. Besides, Sercombe (2000) error analysis may serve different purposes: to identify the language proficiency of the particular learners; to get an idea about the language learning difficulties of the learners, and to find out how people, in general, learn languages.

Several types of research point out that learners from different linguistic backgrounds are expected to have their own specific spelling problems (Fender, 2008). Therefore studies should focus on studying the spelling errors of learners from a particular linguistic community. In this regard, studies done on Oromo students were few. Besides, their focus was diverse. For example, Miressa and Dumessa (2011) studied the factors that contribute to students' spelling errors. Tamiru et al. (2015) studied mother tongue interference on students' writing skills whereas Gebeyanesh (2016) studied mother tongue interference on learners' orthography and pronunciation. Hence, it appears that there was little or no research that focused on the types of spelling errors that students with Afan Oromo L1 commit.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Ethiopian Educational Policy of 1994 stipulates that students' mother tongue should be used as a medium of instruction at primary schools. Consequently, students in Oromia Regional State in general and those at Guangua Secondary School, in particular, had been taught in Afan Oromo which used the Latin script (Getachew & Derib, 2006). At the same time, the Educational Policy declares that English should be taught as a subject starting from grade one and as a medium of instruction starting from grade nine. In spite of having such a long period of acquaintances with the English language, the students at Guangua Secondary School face difficulties in learning English in general and spelling words in particular. Spelling errors have been the most troublesome aspect of language learning for these particular learners. They keep repeating the same spelling errors which cause a major obstacle for them while writing their school assignments. At school, it is customary to see that students' assignments, class works, home works, tests, and lecture notes are littered with spelling errors to the extent that it becomes a formidable task for teachers to make out what learners have written.

Although the causes of spelling errors are diverse, mother tongue could be one of the factors that induces learners to make spelling errors (Gebeyanesh, 2016; Al-Sobhi et al., 2017; Altamimi & Rashid, 2019). In addition, Ridha (2012) claims that students' L1 may have a direct bearing on their learning of a foreign language. This is reflected in the errors they commit while speaking and writing in a foreign language. In this regard, Selinker and Gass (2008) contend that spelling errors result from learners' negative transfer of L1 linguistic features to the L2 or foreign language while learning to write or speak. Similarly, students with Oromo L1 make spelling errors in the English language because of their L1 interference (Tamiru et al., 2015; Gebeyanesh, 2016). This can be attributed to both languages sharing the same orthography but following different writing systems. Consequently, the motivation for undertaking the current study comes from the researchers' keen interest to fill the gap created by the scarcity of studies which focus on the spelling errors that result from L1 interference and error categories that Afan Oromo students experience.

### 1.3 General objective

The general objective of the present study is to analyze the types of spelling errors and identify the specific spelling errors because of their L1 influence.

#### 1.3.1 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives are to:

- a) investigate and categorize the types of spelling errors
- b) identify the categories in which most and least of the spelling errors occur
- c) sort out the specific spelling errors that might have been caused by L1 interference

## 2. Research Method

### 2.1 The Study Area and Sampling

Guangua is a small town, located at Oromiya regional state in southern Ethiopia. It is much closer to Dilla town situated in Southern Nations and Nationalities Region on the way to Moyale. Guangua is only 7 kilometers away from Dilla, which is 30 minutes drive.

The population of this study includes 374 grade nine students at Guangua Secondary High School. Simple random sampling was used to draw a sample of 60 students. As the learners belong to the same linguistic background, selecting sixty students may be sufficient to get the required data. That is to say, the students have just finished their junior education in Afan Oromo as a medium of instruction and started to take lessons in English which is the medium of instruction for secondary schools in Ethiopia. As Afan Oromo and English language share the same letters but different writing systems, this situation may create confusion for students while writing words and sentences. As learners from different cultures may have their own specific spelling problems (Fender 2008), Afan Oromo students were selected for the study on the belief that they might have their own specific spelling problems that result from their L1.

### 2.2 Tools for Collecting Data

Three tests and an interview with teachers was used to collect data about learners' spelling errors. These included: L1 word translation, dictation test at a word level, and dictation test at the sentence level. English language teachers' semi-structured interview was also used to identify the spelling errors students usually made. For dictation tasks, twenty words were selected from a grade nine English textbook and were administered to the study participants so that they would write the words as they listened to the dictation. Each word was read out three times taking short pauses and the sentences were similarly read out four times. The dictation tasks were very appropriate for the simple reason that these spelling tasks practically showed students in a situation to recognize English sounds and their written forms. Moreover, the study

participants were dictated ten words and asked to give the Afan Oromo equivalent or translation alongside each word. In cases of difficulties, the classroom teachers helped them to write the Afan Oromo equivalents. This may help the researchers to notice how their L1 writing system affected their English spellings. In this regard, Popović, (2011), regarded a translation task as an expressive or meaningful task to test learners' spelling performance. Regarding the difficulty level of tasks, since the translation, and dictation texts were samples taken from the learners' textbooks, their difficulty level was thought to match the students' level of language proficiency.

### 2.3 Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

Before the students started the spelling tests, the researchers with the assistance of the English teachers made the instructions clear. Besides, test-takers were identified by serial numbers instead of their names to avoid bias. The three tests were given on different days. On the first day, the dictation test consisting of twenty words was given. The students were instructed to listen to one of the researchers dictating each word three times before they attempted to write. On the second day, the other ten words were given as a translation task in which the students were asked to write down in English and then provide Afan Oromo words alongside each English word. A similar procedure was used to dictate the five sentences on the third day. Then, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview with English language teachers regarding students' perceived spelling errors.

Prior to analysis, the data were given to two TEFL instructors to sort out the spelling errors into the four categories (i.e., insertion, substitution, omission, and inversion). In this connection, Cook's (1999) classification of spelling errors was used to categorize all misspelled words from translation and dictation tasks. These categories included:

1. Insertion: This category involves all addition of unnecessary letters to the correct word.
2. Omission: This category includes all omissions of a letter or letters from a word.
3. Substitution: This category includes a letter or letters substituted wrongly for the correct letter.
4. Inversion: This category includes putting letters in the wrong positions.

Similarly, the data were given to three Afan Oromo teachers in Dilla University to analyze which of the spelling errors were related to L1 interference. Eventually, the data were tabulated and frequency counts and percentages were worked out to do comparisons between the different categories.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Analysis of Spelling Errors from Translation Task

**Table 1: Distribution of spelling errors by categories**

Words tested	Types of spelling errors				Total Errors
	Insertion	Omission	Substitution	Inversion	
cutting		10	48		58
correct	5	18	18		41
interrogative		33	24		57
discuss		7	49		56
control	9	6	35		50
accurately		25	34		59
knife		5	48	1	54
house		4	43		47
Organize	2	5	42		49
Always	9		46		55
Total	25 (4.75%)	113 (21.48%)	387 (73.57%)	1 (0.19%)	526

#### Category 1: Insertion Errors

Insertion errors cover spelling errors caused by the wrong insertion of a letter or letters into a word. As in Table 1, the insertion errors accounted for 25 (4.75%) out of 526 frequencies which is the least percentage (but higher than inversion errors) from the whole misspelled words in the translation task. Some misspelled words found in this category include: *correcte*, for correct; *conterol*, *controle*, for control; *allways*, *alaways*, for always; *organizen*, *organaze*, for organize; *korekti*, *koreetifor* correct.

#### Category 2: Omission Errors

Omission errors cover the spelling errors caused by omitting a letter or two letters from a word. It can be seen from Table 1 that omission errors accounted for 21.48% of 526 errors. Therefore, next to substitution errors, it represented the highest proportion of all misspelled words in this task. Some examples of misspelled words in this category comprise: discuss: *discus*, *discs*; cutting: *cuting*, *cting*; interrogative: *introgative*; correct: *corect*; knife: *nife*; organize: *organiz*, *organze*, *organ*, *organz*, *organez*; control: *conto*, *contro*; and house: *hous*, *hose*, etc.

#### Category 3: Substitution Errors

Substitution errors occur when one or more letters are replaced by others. As in Table 1, substitution errors seem to be the most frequent when compared to the rest of error types. In this category, the subjects produced 387 (73.57%) frequencies of spelling errors out of 526. Some examples of spelling errors that are produced by the research participants in this category included: control: *kontrol*, *konterul*, *konitrol*; cutting: *kanting*; discuss: *discass*, *discase*, *disicas*, *dscase*, *desekas*, *diskes*, *discace*, *discs*, *desekes*; house: *hause*, *hawse*, *hawas*, *howes*, *hawos*, *housi*, *haws*, *heus*, *huase*, *heuse*, *hawase*; accurately: *acoyuretly*; organize: *organayze*, *organaze*, *organaez*, *organayzs*, *organazii*, *organys*, *organith*; always: *olways*, *oliwase*, *olewes*, *olweys*, *olowys*, *olwayes*, *alweys*, *allways*; and correct: *korekti*, *curect*, *corkt*, *koreeti*.

### Category 4: Inversion Errors

Inversion errors cover the spelling errors caused by inverting the position of one or two letters in a word. The results from Table 1 also revealed that inversion errors were the least frequent errors in this category. In other words, the students rarely committed such kinds of errors since only 0.19% of inversion errors occurred out of the total 526 errors.

### 3.2 Analysis of Spelling Errors from the Dictation Test

**Table 2: spelling errors by categories**

Words tested	Insertion	Omission	Substitution	Inversion	Total
Language	1	16	16	1	33
library	4	1	50		55
factory	1	1	53		55
night			46		46
traffic	1	17	38		56
town	5	2	40	2	49
buildings		11	40	2	53
planning		18	41		59
mountain	1	2	52		55
hobbies		26	30		56
swimming		13	42		55
rubber		4	53		57
picture	1	1	44		46
holidays		13	33		46
cutting		6	50		56
ground		1	49		50
butter		3	55		58
salt	2		51		53
boys	7	4	11		22
babies		9	49		58
Total	23 (2.26%)	148 (14.52%)	843 (82.73%)	5 (0.49%)	1019

### Category 1: Insertion Errors

Insertion errors cover the spelling errors caused by the insertion of a letter or letters in a word. As in Table 2, insertion errors accounted for 23 out of 1019 frequencies or 2.26%. Next to omission errors, insertion errors are the least frequent spelling errors. Some misspelled words in this category include: *language* for language; *laibrary*, and *libraery* for library; *factorye* for factory; *tiraffic* for traffic; *towone* for the town; *mountaine* for mountain; *picuture* for picture; *sault* for salt; and *boysiys*, *boyss*, *boyse*, *booyes*, and *boyes* for boys.

### Category 2: Omission

Omission errors cover the spelling errors caused by omitting one or more letters from a word. It can also be seen from Table 2 above that omission errors account for 14.52% of 1019 errors in this category. Therefore, it represented the bigger proportion of all misspelled words next to substitution errors. Some examples of misspelled words in this category include: *laguge*, *languge*, *lague*, *langug*, *launge*, and *lange* for language; *factor* for factory; *nit* for night; *trafic*, and *trafc* for traffic; *twn* for town; *bidings*, *bidings*, *bilgs*, and *bligs* for buildings; *planing*, *plang*, *planig*, *pilang* for planning; *mountan* for mountain; *hobes*, *hobs*,

*hobies, hobis, and hobbs* for hobbies; *boy* for boys; *grond, and grund* for ground; *ruber* for rubber; *buter*, for butter; *holdays, hodays, holday, and holiday* for holidays; *ctng, cting, ctig, and cutting* for cutting; *babes, babe, babs, and babis* for babies; *swming; swing, and swimming* for swimming.

### Category 3: Substitution

Substitution errors occur when one letter or letters are written in place of another letter (s). It should be noted that the spelling error is considered a substitution error if at least one letter has been written in place of another letter. Substitution errors accounted for the highest proportion of errors (82.73% of 1019 errors) that students committed in the dictation test. More specifically, all words in this dictation task except the word “language” are misspelled by more than 30 students out of 60 in this category. The words which are misspelled by more than 50 learners out of 60 subjects in this category included: *butter, factory, rubber, mountain, salt, library, and cutting*. The frequencies of these errors are 55, 53, 52, 51, and 50 out of 60 participants, respectively.

Furthermore, the words ‘ground’ and ‘babies’ were misspelled by 49 learners who substituted the correct letter or letters by wrong letter(s) and these were the second-highest frequencies from all spelling errors in this dictation task. In addition, 46 learners out of 60 study participants made substitution errors when they transcribed the word ‘night’ and this was again the third highest frequency in this dictation task. The words ‘picture’, ‘swimming’, ‘planning’, ‘buildings’, and ‘town’ were misspelled by 44, 42, 41, and 40 learners, respectively. However, the research study participants committed the least substitution errors when they transcribed the word ‘language’. Some of the misspelled words in this category include language: *langouge, laaguujii, laungudge*; library: *labrery, lablary, laberare*; factory: *factery, faltery, factary, facteri*; night: *natght, nayti, nayit, nayete*; traffic: *trafek*; town: *tawn, tawne, tahun, taun*; buildings: *beldnges, belinds, bedengs, beldengis*; planning: *pelang, planege, palang, plant*; mountain: *mawontein, maunteen, mountaine, mawuten*; hobbies: *cobeese, cabise, cobizs, cabeis*; swimming: *sewemege, sweming, isuwing*; rubber: *reber, reberi, reben, rabare*; picture: *pechtere, peachear, pecheor, prechr*; holidays: *holandays, hoddey, holideys, holadays*; cutting: *catting, keting, catenge, kating*; ground: *geruuand, grount, gerawand, graund*; butter: *bater, battar, beter, better*; salt: *solt, saft, sold, solde*; boys: *bozes, boos, bosse, voice*, and babies: *bebas, bebos*.

### Category 4: Inversion

The lowest numbers of spelling errors fall under the category of inversion in this dictation task. As can be seen from Table 2 above, inversion errors accounted for 5 out of 1019 frequencies or 0.49%, which was the lowest percentage from the whole spelling errors in this task. For example, the three words which are misspelled because their letters are inverted by the learners include language as *langauge*, town as *twon*, and buildings as *bulidings, biuldings*.

### 3.3 Spelling errors identified from dictation test of sentences

**Table 3: Frequency of Spelling Errors by Categories**

sentences	Insertion		Omission		Substitution		Inversion		Total
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Coffee grows in our country. There are more than eighty languages in Ethiopia.	1	0.5%	73	34.0%	140	65.1%	1	0.5%	215
I traveled to Bonga last year.	26	11.7%	93	41.7%	104	46.6%			223
I fought a lion and a tiger yesterday.	5	1.8%	122	43.3%	154	54.6%	1	0.4%	282
A hippo is a hairless animal which lives in water	9	3.2%	132	47.5%	137	49.3%			278
Total	41	3.3%	554	44.3%	653	52.2%	2	0.2%	1250

Table 3 summarizes the findings related to the numbers and percentages of the identified spelling errors in the dictation task of five simple sentences. Learners' spelling errors identified are categorized into four categories: substitution, omission, insertion, and inversion errors.

The result in this dictation task shows that substitution errors account for 52.2% of 1250 errors, which is the highest percentage from the whole spelling errors in this task. Next to substitution errors, omission errors are more frequent than all spelling errors which accounts for 44.3% of 1250 errors, which constitutes a significant proportion of the spelling errors for all words in this task. A very small number of insertion errors are observed in this task, which accounts for 3.3% of 1250 errors. Inversion errors are the least significant spelling errors that account for 0.2% of 1250 errors.

The percentage distributions of the sentences show that they follow a similar pattern as the overall error distributions across the different categories: substitution errors are most significant; omission errors are less significant; insertion errors are least significant, and inversion errors are, quite insignificant.

As in Table 3, the total number of spelling errors in the first sentence is 215. Specifically, substitution errors account for 65.1% which is the highest proportion of errors. The next more frequent errors belong to omission errors accounting for 34% of 215 errors. Insertion and inversion errors are found to be quite insignificant as they account for only 0.5% of 215 errors. Some examples include: Omission errors: *coff*, *Coffe*, *Cof*, *contry*, *country*; Substitution errors: *grouis*, *geras*, *geros*, *graws*, *growth*, *gerose*, and *country*; Insertion error: *girows*; Inversion error: *ni*;

On the other hand, the second sentence is a bit different. Unlike the first sentence, there are hardly any errors registered under insertion and inversion categories. At the same time, omission errors are found to be the highest frequent errors (53.2%) which account for 252 errors. The next more frequent errors belong to substitution errors (46.8%) that account for 252 errors. Examples include: omission errors: *the*, *ther*, *mor*, *eity*, *eight*, *laguges*, *languges*, *langs*, *langeg*, *Ethipia*; substitution errors: *zarar*, *Ari*, *morii*, *zan*, *zean*, *eeti*, *eyet*, *eyiti*, *eyti*, *langougos*, *laagujjis*, *Ethiophya*.

Regarding the third sentence, students committed a total of 223 spelling errors. Like the first sentence, substitution errors account for 46.6% of 223 spelling errors whereas omission errors explained 41.7% of 223 spelling errors. However, insertion errors are found to be least significant as they account only for 11.7% of 223 spelling errors. Like the second sentence, students have not made any inversion errors. Instances such errors include: insertion errors: *Lasit*, *yeare*, *yeara*, *laaste*, *bongau*, *bongaa* and *Bongaa*; omission errors: *traveld*, *traved*, *travel*, *travld*; substitution errors: *trafled*, *trabled*, *list*.

The fourth sentence is the one in which students have committed the biggest number of spelling errors (i.e. 282). As the first sentence, substitution errors (54.6%) are the most frequent spelling errors of the total of 282 errors. The next more frequent errors belong to omission errors which account for 43.3% of 282 errors. insertion errors (1.8%) and inversion errors (0.4%) are found to be quite insignificant. Examples



include: insertion errors: *liyon,taiger,tayiger, Tigger and Tigher*; Omission errors: *fot, foght, yestday, yestrday*; substitution errors: *tager, tyger, phout*; inversion error: *loin*

When we observe the last sentence, the number of spelling errors is only 278. Substitution errors (49.3%) constitute the highest proportion of the total errors while omission errors (47.5%) are the next higher part of the total errors. However, insertion errors constitute the least proportion of 278 spelling errors. Like the third sentence, we don't have any errors of inversion. For instance: insertion errors: *wahater, wateri*; Omission errors: *hipo, wich, whic, whch*; substitution errors: *heppo,herless, anemal, woter*

### 3.4 Spelling Errors across Translation, Word-level, and Sentence-level Tasks

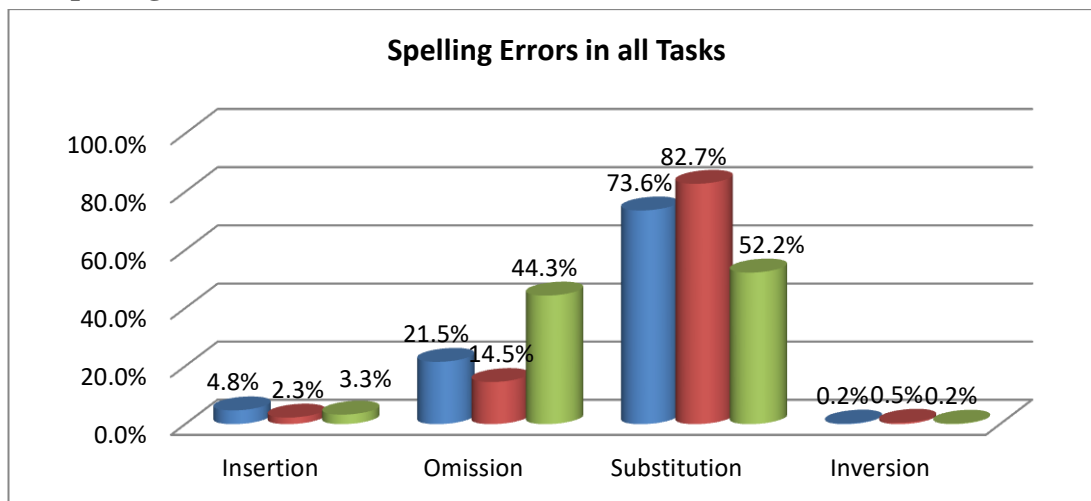


Figure 1: Spelling Errors across Tasks by Error Categories

As can be observed in Fig.1, the students seem to have committed the highest proportion of substitution errors in all of the tasks: word-level task (82.7%), translation task (73.6%), and sentence-level task (52.2%). Here, the word-level task (82.7%) appears to be the highest in proportion when compared to the others. Following substitution, omission errors seem to be the next category in which learners might have made a sizeable proportion of spelling errors: sentence-level task (44.3%), translation task (21.5%), and word-level task (14.5%). As can be observed in the data, omission tasks are a bit different from substitution errors concerning the different dictation tasks. Next to omission errors, insertion errors have formed the smallest proportion of spelling errors that the students have committed: translation task (4.8%), sentence-level task (3.3%), and word-level task (2.3%). Eventually, we may notice that inversion errors form the least proportion of spelling errors: word-level task (0.5%), translation task (0.2%), and sentence-level task (0.2%). Therefore, the data suggest that inversion errors are so insignificant that they do not deserve any attention.

### 3.5 Frequency of the Total Spelling Errors

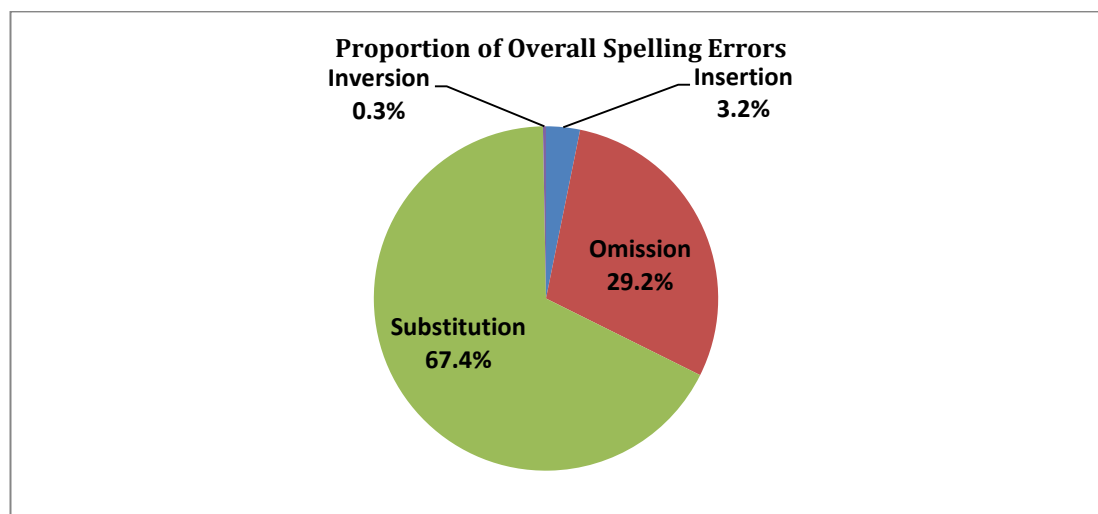


Fig. 2: Frequency of Overall Spelling Errors by Error Categories

The pie-chart demonstrates the total frequencies of each error category in all of the tests. As in the graph, the most frequent spelling errors made by the learners were substitution errors (67.4%) but omission errors (29.2%) were found to be less frequent. At the same time, insertion errors (3.2%) and inversion errors (0.3%) were found to be rarely committed and thus their proportions were insignificant when compared to the other two. These findings were in agreement with previous related studies (Al-Karaki, 2005; Al-Bakri, 1998; Al-Sobhi et al., 2017). This suggests that students belonging to different linguistic groups might experience similar types of spelling errors despite their linguistic differences.

### 3.6 Mother Tongue Interference Errors

L1 interference can be one of the factors that contribute to spelling errors. In this regard, Darus and Hein (2009) assert that L1 interference might lead to interlingual errors. This happens when there is a discrepancy in the writing system between the L1 and the target language. Hence, learners tend to compensate for their lack of knowledge by applying the writing system of their L1 to the target language. Some instances of L1 interferences are obtained from the data. These include insertion, omission, and substitution errors.

#### *A/Insertion errors*

In Afan Oromo, words do not end with a consonant; a vowel is added. Hence, learners were found to add vowels to word endings. For example, *correcte*, *controlefor* for control. *korekti*, *koreetifor* for correct. As there is no consonant cluster in Afan Oromo, learners insert vowels between consonants. For instance, *pilang* for planning, *laberare* for library, and *alaways*, for always

### **B/ Omission errors**

In Afan Oromo, there is no silent consonant which is not pronounced. As a result, learners avoid or drop a letter which is not pronounced; for instance, *nife* for knife. In addition, consonant cluster is not available in the L1; therefore, students drop consonant clusters which do not contribute its pronunciation; for example, *nit* for night; *hobes*, *hobs*, *hobies*, and *hobis* for hobbies. Otherwise, they replace the clusters by vowels or semi-vowels as in *nayit* for night.

### **C/ Substitution errors**

In Afan Oromo, the consonant 'c' is not read as 'k' rather as 'che'. Therefore, learners are more likely to use 'k' instead of 'c' as in control: *kontrol*, *konterul*, *konitrol*; and cutting: *kanting*; 'ou' is replaced by 'w' as in house: *hawse*, *hows*, *hawas*, *howes*, *hawos*; 'ize' is replaced by 'y'; for instance, organize: *organayze*, *organayzs*, *organys*; 'g' is replaced by 'j' in 'language': *laaguujii*, *laGujii*, *languajee*, *languaje*; 'y' is replaced by 'i' in 'library': *labireri*, *laibreri*; 'gh' is replaced by 'y' in 'night': *nayti*, *nayit*, *nayete*, *nayet*, *nayat*, *nayte*; 'o' is replaced by 'a' in 'town': *tawn*, *tawne*, *tahun*, *taun*, *tawun*, *tawan*; 'a' is replaced by 'o' as in 'salt': *solt*, *sold*, *solde*, *solti*, *solat*, *solot*

## **3.7 Analysis of Data from Semi-Structured Interview**

Regarding the problems that students had in their writing, two of the teachers reported that spelling errors were some of the difficulties experienced by most Oromo students. These teachers attached different reasons to their spelling errors. The teachers' responses showed that the majority of Oromo students wrongly applied their first language spelling systems to write English words. In other words, the study participants spelled words as they heard them. In addition, these teachers indicated that the students usually spelt words haphazardly without knowing the spelling rules.

Concerning learners' ability to pronounce English words, the teachers raised the issue of pronunciation as a barrier to Afan Oromo background learners in acquiring spelling skills in EFL classes. In other words, they stressed that their wrong pronunciation could mainly be attributed to the pronunciation habits of Afan Oromo words. The teachers cited some examples to show the case: 'fat' is read as 'faat' which is non-existent in English; 'cup' is read as 'kap'; 'run' is read as 'ran' and so on. This seems to be supported by the data obtained from the dictation and translation tests: *korekti*, *koreeti* for correct; *acuretey*, *acuret* for accurately; *oliwase*, *olewes* for always; *bildings*, *bidings*, *bilgs* for buildings; *grond*, *grund* for ground; *nayti*, *nayit* for night; and *sweming*, *isuwing* for swimming. These findings seem to be in conformity with Al-Jarf, (2008), Templeton (2004), who pointed out that pronunciation can affect spelling performance of learners. Eventually, the teachers stressed that mother-tongue instruction might have a great influence on learners' skills of spelling English words as both languages shared the same letters but followed different writing systems.

## **4. Conclusion**

To sum up, it appears that spelling errors seemed to create a serious problem for students while spelling words from the English language. As in the data from the translation and dictation tasks, the students' spelling errors seemed to have the highest frequency in two categories: substitution and omission whereas insertion and inversion appear to be insignificant or not causing many problems for the particular students. Furthermore, these findings conform with similar studies on Arab students. This may imply that students from different linguistic backgrounds might have same type of spelling errors despite their linguistic differences. Eventually, the students' spelling errors seem to come from their L1 influence. More specifically, this influence is reflected on three of spelling error categories: substitution, omission, and insertion. Hence, there is much possibility for spelling errors to occur especially when the target language and the students' L1 share the same script or letters.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Textbook writers should design spelling activities based on the error types identified in the current study. Specifically, they should give more coverage to substitution and omission error types. The presentation part should focus on teaching the basic spelling rules and the specific spelling errors that these students have. Furthermore, the textbook should provide drilling tasks that address specific phonemes with which the learners seem to have difficulty to pronounce.
2. English teachers should devote their time to correcting their students' spelling errors and assigning some marks during the assessment.
3. Teacher training institutes should develop courses that specifically develop the teacher-trainees knowledge about the spelling rules of the English language and equip them with the required methodological knowledge about how to teach the spelling rules to their students.
4. Since the study is limited to studying students' spelling errors from a specific linguistic group that uses the Latin script, not much is known about the spelling errors of students who use the Geez script. Future researchers should conduct a comparative study of spelling errors between learners who use different writing systems.

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