

Education and Language: Errors in English Language and their Remedies

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Suggested Citation:

Muriungi, P. K., Mukuthuria, M. and Gatavi, M. (2011). Education and language: Errors in English language and their remedies *The Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 7(2), 87-116.

Abstract

Problem Statement: The current study tries to investigate the nature and typology of errors that primary school pupils in Nembure Division, Embu County, Kenya make in the acquisition of English as a second language. Primary school learners of English as a second language are prone to making numerous errors. This is worrying because good performance

in English in Kenya and the world enhances a learner's choice of prestigious careers especially those that strictly consider English as a special requirement.

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to investigate the nature and typology of errors made by second language learners of English in Nembure Division and to suggest remedies to these errors.

Methods: A written task in the form of a composition was administered to collect data from 182 class seven pupils.

Findings and Results: The results revealed that learners make many errors in the area of spelling and phonetics.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Learners make many errors in the process of acquiring English as a second language. The study recommends that English language teachers isolate errors from the learners' work and give individualized attention to those learners' with unique problems; that English language teachers categorize the errors that learners make and address them from that perspective; that teachers give spelling exercises to the learners frequently, and that the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) should consider starting an oral examination for pupils in primary schools. This will encourage the pupils to improve their spoken and consequently their written language.

Keywords: second language acquisition, error analysis, error analysis procedure

Introduction

English is used as a second language for most people in the world. According to UNESCO (2009) English leads world languages as far as communication and publication is concerned. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) observe that English has become the

international language for business and commerce, science and technology and international relations and diplomacy. It is therefore important that English is learnt so that people can fit well in the international community.

In Kenya the importance of English as a medium of instruction in schools goes way back to the colonial period. According to Oluoch (1982), the Phelps Stoke Commission of 1924 suggested that Kiswahili and other local languages be used as languages of instruction in schools. The same commission recommended that English be taught only in higher. In 1925 the East Africa commission also recommended that local languages be used as a media of instruction at elementary stages. In secondary schools, English alone would be used as the medium of instruction.

Oluoch (1982) further states that in 1927, the Advisory Committee of the Colonial Office noted that English was regarded by parents as the principal means for economic advancement. They said that no attempt should be made to delay its introduction in the African schools. And in 1957, the Education Departments' Annual Report called for the teaching of English in lower classes in primary school. The report stated that it was unsatisfactory to use three languages (Vernacular, Kiswahili and English) as the media of instruction in primary schools. It recommended the teaching of English as early as possible and the Asians took this so enthusiastically that they started teaching English in standard one. In African schools, English was to be taught as a subject from standard one and would become the medium of instruction in standard 5. This wave of change from the use of mother tongue to English as the medium of instruction was so strong that it had a lasting impact on the language policy after independence.

Abonyo (2005) argues that after independence, the position of English in Kenya remained. It was still the official language while Kiswahili became the national language. The government business was to be conducted in English (members of parliament had even to pass an English proficiency test), legal documents and all official documents were in English. English was also to be the medium of instruction from upper primary through secondary and post secondary levels of learning. These important functions have resulted in English being associated with power, prestige, progress, success and achievement and therefore rated highly. Because of this, English has been regarded by parents as a means for economic advancement. It is also viewed as the language of the elite in Kenya. Other than being the official language, it is also the language of the international community.

The Ominde Commission of 1965 attests to the above argument when it emphasized the need for teaching English and Kiswahili in schools. However, English was to be the medium of instruction from upper primary while Kiswahili was to be taught as a subject. The importance of English was further emphasized by Mackay Report of 1982, at the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education when it made English a compulsory subject and one had to pass in it to gain admission into the University.

But even though English has been accorded a prestigious position of being the official language, and the language of instruction from standard four onwards, learners still experience difficulties while learning it. According to Corder (1967) when people are learning a second language, they already have a first language. The first language has rules that the learners have learnt and understood and they therefore tend to use the rules of the first language on the second language and end up creating errors. The mastery of English is crucial for satisfactory examination performance and for communication particularly in

official circles and as such every effort should be made to make sure that learners master it. Therefore, the researcher investigated all the errors made by class seven pupils while learning English and suggested remedies for them.

Method

Subjects

Data was collected from 182 class seven pupils, from a total population of 1257 class seven pupils. This sample was appropriate for the study because according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) a size of 100 respondents is acceptable for a descriptive research. In addition, Anderson (1990) claims that samples in the range between 100-200 are rarely brought into question on the basis of size.

Instruments

Data was collected through the administration of a task to the learners. This was in form of an open composition which was administered by subject teachers in class seven with the permission of head teachers of their schools. The task took forty minutes to accomplish. The administration of the instrument by subject teachers reduced anxiety on the part of the learners. The open composition on the other hand, gave the learners an opportunity to express themselves freely without limitations.

Data Analysis

Error analysis was used to investigate the nature of all the errors in the English of primary school pupils in Nembure Division, Embu County. Error analysis was done so as to

investigate the extent to which primary school pupils could manipulate English language and thereby suggest remedial measures of trying to minimize the errors. The steps suggested by Corder (1974), were followed. These are:

- i) Selection of target language. English was selected. This is the language learners used to write the compositions.
- ii) The other step was to collect a sample of learner language and this was done through administration of an open composition to the pupils.
- iii) Identification of errors. The researcher determined elements of sample of learner language norms or rules. This was done through careful scrutiny of sample of learners' language. All the errors identified were highlighted and then lifted from the learners work to the researcher's note book. These errors were picked from their context. They were later arranged according to their linguistic categories. All those elements that had deviated from the target language norms were all noted down. They were then tabulated and frequencies found. All the learners were Kiambu L1 speakers.

Results

The results are presented in the form of indentified errors, as guided by the error analysis procedure

Regularization of Irregular Plurals and Irregular Verbs

There were errors where irregular verbs were regularized and where the plural marker was used on already formed plurals. The pupils came up with the following constructions. The italicized words were incorrectly used.

- (i) We saw *womens* and *men*.
(We saw women and men.)
- (ii) The *childrens* were eating food.
(The children were eating food.)
- (iii) We *putted* our things in bags.
(We put our things in bags.)
- (iv) He was *cuttet* with a panga.
(He was cut with a panga.)
- (v) He *writet* a letter.
(He wrote a letter.)
- (vi) Mother *selled* a goat to pay for me the tour.
(Mother sold a goat to pay for me the tour.)
- (vii) We *tooket* the food with us.
(We took the food with us.)
- (viii) He *camed* home late.
(He came home late.)
- (ix) The teacher *catchet* one bird.

(The teacher caught one bird.)

(x) I *carryed* a bag.

(I carried a bag).

Omission of the Plural “s”

Learners also failed to use the plural marker – s on plural nouns. The following constructions are examples of constructions where grammatical morphemes were omitted.

The italicized words are incorrectly used.

(i) The *student* in our class were excited.

(The students in our class were excited)

(ii) Many *person* came.

(Many persons came.)

(iii) I do not have any *sock* to wear.

(I do not have any socks to wear.)

(iv) The *flower* were looking smart.

(The flowers were looking smart.)

(v) There were *building*.

(There were buildings.)

(vi) The *teacher* were sung.

(The teachers were singing.)

- (vii) Many *thing* were happening.

(Many things were happening.)

- (viii) Two *pilot* and two *engine*.

(Two pilots and two engines.)

- (ix) I *am* five *year* old.

(I am five years old.)

Omission/Wrong Use of Prepositions

The learners' omitted preposition or used them wrongly in constructions. The following are examples of such constructions. The italicized construction is incorrect.

- (i) *When we reached at Nakuru*

(When we reached Nakuru.)

- (ii) *After we got Nakuru.*

(After we got to Nakuru.)

- (iii) *To wait for the pupils arrive.*

(To wait for the pupils to arrive.)

- (iv) *We were class seven.*

(We were in class seven.)

Wrong use of prepositions was also noted. The italicized preposition in the following constructions are incorrectly use.

(i) We went *at* the stage.

(We went to the stage.)

(ii) The man came *with* a leather jacket.

(The man came in a leather jacket.)

(iii) When he was *on* the hospital.

(When he was in the hospital.)

(iv) That was because of what I explained *for* her.

(That was because of what I explained to her.)

(v) He *cane* me *for* a panga.

(He beat me with a panga.)

(vi) *At* the road I saw many things.

(On the road I saw many things.)

(vii) Carried *with* a vehicle.

(Carried in a vehicle.)

(viii) My mother called me *with* a phone.

(My mother called me on a phone.)

(ix) *In 20th October, 2009.*

(On 20th October, 2009.)

(x) There *in* the road.

(There on the road.)

Misordering Errors

Misordering errors were also noted. According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), these are errors where items in construction are misordered and require a reversal of word order rules that had previously been acquired. These errors also involve misplacing items that may be correctly placed in more than one place in a sentence. The following constructions were found in the data collected.

(i) *I and my mum.*

(My mum and I)

(ii) *Where are they have run.*

(Where have they run to?)

(iii) *A baby bouncing boy.*

(A bouncing baby boy.)

(iv) *You want what food?)*

(What food do you want?)

(v) *That cow is thinking how?*

(How is that cow thinking?)

(vi) *Where was I going.*

(Where I was going).

(vii) *Bought for me a present*

(Bought a present for me.)

(viii) *I wonder where is my mother.*

(I wonder where my mother is.)

In the examples given above, some errors came about as a result of subject verb inversion. For example, in a construction like, *I wonder where is my mother* the verb *is* comes before my mother which is the subject. The correct construction should be, I wonder where my mother is.

Subject “me”

Use of ‘me’ as a subject was also common. Learners came up with constructions such as the following. The italicized word is incorrectly used.

(i) *Me* I asked her to come

(I asked her to come)

(ii) *Me* I ate mangoes

(I ate mangoes)

- (iii) *Me* I went to school

(I went to school)

- (iv) *Me* with my friend

(My friend and I)

The use of *me* as a subject followed by *I* brings about unnecessary emphasizes and its use is therefore incorrect.

Lack of Gender Agreement

Learners also failed to mark gender appropriately. The italicized words in the following constructions are incorrectly used.

- (i) My mother *he* called me.

(My mother called me.)

- (ii) John took *her* bag.

(John took his bag.)

- (iii) My father told *her* friend to come home.

(My father told his friend to come home.)

- (iv) It was on Friday morning when my mother came and told me that *he is* going to pay for me a tour.

(It was on Friday morning when my mother came and told me that she was going to pay for a tour for me.)

Errors Regarding Auxiliaries

Other errors noted were in the use of auxiliary verbs. Learners omitted them in their constructions and came up with incorrect constructions. The italicized construction is incorrect.

(i) *The day I born.*

(The day I was born.)

(ii) *I surprised like a woman who pregnant.*

(I was surprised like a woman who was pregnant.)

(iii) *I could rushed.*

(I could have rushed.)

(iv) *We surprised*

(We were surprised.)

(v) *To left.*

(To be left.)

Lack of Agreement

Disagreement of subject and the verb was another error that was found in the data analyzed. The italicized construction is incorrect.

(i) *All of them was imagining about the ceremony.*

(All of them were imagining about the ceremony.)

(ii) *I were in high spirits.*

(I was in high spirits.)

(iii) *The two cars was...*

(The two cars were...)

(iv) *It is the day we are going.*

(It is the day we were going.)

(v) *The owner of the house were crying.*

(The owner of the house was crying.)

(vii) *They told me they was...*

(They told me they were...)

(viii) *The pupils was very surprised.*

(The pupils were very surprised.)

Attachment of the Past Marker to an Infinitive

Learners attached the past tense marker to an infinitive. In the following examples, the italicized constructions are incorrect.

(i) *People were coming at home to remembered the day I was born.*

(People were coming at home to remember the day I was born.)

(ii) *He was want to took a cheetah.*

(He wanted to take a cheetah.)

(iii) *To ruled...*

(To rule...)

(iv) *I was want to sent Werimba to Kithimu.*

(I wanted to send Werimba to Kithimu.)

(v) *They went to ate the food.*

(They went to eat the food.)

(vi) *We go to visited the museum.*

(We went to visit the museum.)

(vii) *Jane went to the teacher to asked for permission.*

(Jane went to the teacher to ask for permission.)

Omission of Verbs

Omissions of main verbs were also found. These omissions made it difficult to understand the learners' meanings. The following italicized constructions are incorrect.

(i) *I was by my mother that...*

(I was told by mother that...)

(ii) *Immediately the bus arrived Nairobi.*

(Immediately the bus arrived at Nairobi.)

(iii) *They mangoes.*

(They ate mangoes).

(iv) *Nobody at home.*

(Nobody was at home.)

(v) *He to stay in his house.*

(He doesn't want to stay in his house.)

(vi) *I was back to hospital.*

(I was taken back to hospital.)

(vii) *I back home.*

(I went back home.)

Mothertongue Influence

Mother tongue influence was found in the data collected. Learners translated Kiambu into English and they ended up making errors. The italicized constructions are incorrect.

(i) *People were arounding*

(People were surrounding.)

(ii) *At the game park we walk with legs.*

(At the game park we walked on foot.)

(iii) *The teacher told us to go and eat our money.*

(The teacher told us to go and spend our money.)

(iv) *The car bend the corner at high speed and fell down.*

(The car negotiated the corner at high speed and crashed.)

Mother tongue influence was also found in the learners spellings. The following examples are an indication of these type of errors.

(v) *I will neva go there again.*

(I will never go there again.)

(vi) *The teacher read the mbaible.*

(The teacher read the bible.)

(vii) *I could not imagini going to Mombasa.*

(I could not imagine going to Mombasa.)

(viii) *My dress was very simati.*

(My dress was very smart.)

Spelling Errors

Numerous spelling errors were also found. Some of these errors came about as a result of insertion or deletion in cases where Kiambu does not share sound inventories with English. According to Massaba (1996) different languages of the world have similarities and differences in their phonological systems. Where properties of the different languages are shared, learning becomes easy and where not shared learning becomes difficult. Kiambu does not have /l/ in its inventory and some learners deleted the /l/ in words and inserted /r/. At other times, they deleted the /r/ and inserted the /l/. The italicized words are incorrect.

(i) *celemony*

(ceremony.)

(ii) *clack*

(crack.)

(iii) *alive*

(arrive)

(iv) *Bressed*

(blessed)

(v) *leady*

(ready)

(vi) *callying*

(carrying)

(vii) *lite*

(right)

(ix) *browing*

(blowing)

(x) *liding*

(riding)

Learners also made additions of some letters when writing certain words. Such additions were unnecessary. The italicized word is incorrect.

(i) *bendroom* – bedroom

(ii) *mardmen* - madmen

(iii) *dropp* - drop

(iv) *untill* - until

(v) *comming* - coming

In words that have silent letters in English; these are letters that are not pronounced, learners tended to leave out these letters in their spellings. This was because all letters in Kiambu language are pronounced.

(i) *nocked* – knocked. The /k/ in knocked is silent.

There were other misspellings where the learners interchanged letters while writing certain words. The following are examples of such words

(i) *Strat* – start

(ii) *thier* – Their

(iii) *dei* – die

(iv) *froest* – forest

(v) *tow* – two

(vi) *treid* – tried

(vii) *gentelmen* – gentlemen

(viii) *tlak*- talk

Omissions of letters in certain words were also noted. This is what is known as deletion. The following are examples of such words.

(i) *brige* – bridge

(ii) *kichen* – kitchen

(iii) *thourolly* – thoroughly

(iv) *answerd* – answered

(v) *thiking* – thinking

(vi) *wether* – whether

(vii) *thought* - thought

Use of the Wrong Auxiliary

Learners used the wrong auxiliary.

(i) *My mother was already slaughtered a bull.*

(My mother had already slaughtered a bull.)

(ii) *He being killed by a cheetah.*

(He was killed by a cheetah.)

(iii) *I has reached...*

(I had reached...)

(iv) *We was went.*

(We had gone.)

(v) *I never been position one.*

(I have never been position one.)

(vi) *We have chairs.*

(We had chairs)

Table 1

Summary of errors in Learners work

Errors	Frequency	Percentage
Regularization	150	12.5
Omission of grammatical Morphemes	80	6.7
Omission of preposition	100	8.3
Incorrect use of Prepositions	110	9.2
Misordering errors	30	2.5
Use of 'me' as a subject	30	2.5
Failure to mark gender appropriately	30	2.5
Omission of auxiliary verbs	40	3.3
Disagreement of subject and number	70	5.8
Attachment of past marker to an infinitive	60	5
Omission of main verbs	30	2.5

Mother tongue influence	140	11.7
Spellings	240	20
Incorrect use of the verb 'to be'	60	5
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Total	1200	100
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Discussion

Errors found in the learners' work were classified as being morphological, phonological, lexical and others fell into the general linguistic category. The fact that learners made mistakes indicated that they have not mastered English language rules and norms.

Morphological Errors

Those classified as being morphological errors were those that had the wrong use of morphemes. According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) grammatical morphemes do not contribute much to the meaning of sentences. These include the omission plural markers, the past tense and articles. From the data collected, many omissions were made. Constructions like *we saw many lion and many giraffe* were found where the plural marker 's' was omitted. Also a construction like *we ate cake* where article 'a' is omitted was found.

Phonological Errors

Errors classified as phonological were those falling under the category of words that were misspelt. The misspelling could be attributed to wrong use of English oral skills where learners spelt out words the way they pronounce them thus creating errors. It could also be attributed to the existing difference between English spellings and sounds. In English some letters are silent and therefore not pronounced and yet must be written down. This could be a

source of phonological errors for learners of English as a second language. An example of a silent letter *k* in the word *knocked*. Learner's spelt this as *nocked*. Learners also substituted an /l/ for an /r/. For example, the word *right* was spelt as *lite* and *carrying* as *callying*.

Lexical Errors

Lexical errors were classified as those that had the wrong use of English words. Since words are used in context, their wrong use altered the intended meanings by the users. In some cases the learners' translated Kiambu into English and ended up making mistakes.

The following are examples of such:

At the game park we walk with legs.

The teacher told us to go and eat our money.

Blood was going like water on the road.

The wrong use of words by the learners affected the meaning and therefore interfered with comprehension. The examples given above indicted that learners have inter-lingual problems as their L1 interferes with the L2 being learnt.

General Linguistics Category

These were identified as errors within language. These errors came about because learners have not mastered English rules and therefore overgeneralized the rules. Richards (1971) defines overgeneralization errors as those caused by learner's failure to observe a boundary of a rule. A learner uses a syntactic rule of the target language inappropriately in his/ her attempt to generate a new target language. Learners made errors such as *each men* and *we was going* instead *each man* and *we were going* which indicate that the learners have not mastered the rule governing subject and number. Errors were also noted in subject +verb agreement, for example, *I were in high spirits* and *The owner of the house were crying*

instead of *I was in high spirits* and *The owner of the house was crying*. There was incorrect use of the forms of the verbs for example, *we was went* and *I has reached* instead of *we went* and *I had reached*. The learners used some prepositions incorrectly. For example, *when he was on the hospital* instead of *when he was in hospital*. In some constructions prepositions were missing altogether, for example *looking me* instead of *looking at me*.

Another error within language was where the learners used 'me' as a subject. Learners came up with constructions such as the following: *Me I asked her to come, Me I ate mangoes, Me I went to school, Me with my friends* instead of, *I asked her to come, I ate mangoes, I went to school and My friend and I*.

Learners also made errors in using main verbs. This is where they omitted them altogether. Construction such as the following were found, *I was by my mother that..., They mangoes, Nobody at home, I was back to Hospital and I back home*. These constructions should have been, *I was told by my mother, They ate mangoes, I was taken back to hospital and I went back home* respectively. Omission of main verbs interfered with comprehension.

Other errors noted were in the use of auxiliary verbs. Learners omitted them in their constructions and came up with the following constructions, *The day I born, I could rushed, We surprise* and *To left*. These could have been, *The day I was born, I could have rushed, We were surprised* and *To be* respectively.

Pupils made omissions of -ing when forming the progressive tense. They came up with constructions such as *we were eat* and *we were write what we saw* instead of *we were eating* and *we were writing what we saw* respectively. Errors of misordering were also noted. Misordering errors according to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) are errors where items in constructions are misordered and require a reversal of word order rules that had previously

been acquired. Misordering errors also involve misplacing items that may be correctly placed in more than one place in a sentence. The following errors were found *I and, When we gathered all of us and where are they have run*. These should have been, *My mum and I, When all of us were gathered and where have they run to* respectively. Another error was that of attaching past tense marker to an infinitive. This brought about constructions such as *to ruled the nation* instead of *to rule the nation*, *to explained to them* instead of *to explain to them* and *He wanted to took cheetah* instead of *He wanted to take a cheetah*. Learners also failed to mark gender appropriately and made constructions such as, *My mother he called me* and *John took her bag*. These could have been *My mother called me* and *John took his bag*.

Given the many errors that have been identified, I suggest the following remedies to be put in place to improve performance in English and hence general performance in careers that use English as a medium of instruction.

- i) English language teachers should isolate errors from the learners' work and give individualized attention to those learners' with unique problems.
- ii) English language teachers should categorize the errors that learners make and address them from that perspective.
- iii) That teachers should give spelling exercises to the learners frequently.
- iv) That the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) should consider starting an oral examination for pupils in primary schools. This will encourage the pupils to polish their spoken language.

Conclusion

From the data collected and analyzed it can be concluded that primary school pupils in Nembure Division have a problem in the area of spelling and phonetics. This conclusion is

arrived at due to the many misspelling errors found in the data that was analyzed. This could be explained by the fact that the learners lack adequate exposure to the spoken and written English language. Mastery of English is very important as poor performance in English language implies that performance in other subjects may also decline. All efforts should therefore be put in place to boost performance in English as it is the pedestal upon which success in education and in many careers lies.

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