

## Investigating Spelling Errors of Moroccan EFL University Students

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### Abstract

Spelling is a real problem for learners of English as a foreign language and Moroccan learners are no exception. The present study analyses and categorizes the spelling errors made by Moroccan university students of English. The errors were taken from 100 essays of composition for two academic levels (first and third year students). The main objective of the study is to investigate the patterns of spelling errors made by the subjects. Another objective is to investigate the extent to which academic level affects the patterns of spelling errors. The study aims also to attribute the errors to possible sources. The findings indicate that spelling errors fall mainly into four categories; omission, addition, substitution and ordering. Another finding is that academic level has no effect on error patterns. Findings equally show that spelling errors can be attributed to many sources.

**Key words:** Spelling; Error analysis; Spelling errors; Attribution; Error sources

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### INTRODUCTION

Error analysis is one of the techniques used in applied linguistics to provide a clear insight into the process of learning second and foreign languages. It studies errors made by second/foreign language learners with

the assumption that errors are a natural phenomenon in learning languages. In this perspective, Dually, Burt and Karshen (1982, p.138) point out that “making errors is an inevitable part of learning. People cannot learn languages without first systematically committing errors”. Thus, error analysis studies learners’ errors because they are significant in three respects. First, errors are important for the teacher to know what progress is being made by the learner and in which areas the latter needs more focus. Second, errors are significant to the researcher as they provide information about language learning and about the learner’s strategies in dealing with the target language. Third, errors are of considerable importance for the learner him/herself because they are a way of checking the validity of his/her hypotheses about the target language (Corder, 1974, p.25). In addition to this, error analysis identifies the causes of learners’ errors with the aim of providing more appropriate and effective teaching materials and techniques.

Within this framework, one of the phenomena that are worth studying is spelling errors. They are important in that the misspelling of a number of words in a piece of writing may affect the understanding of the message (Khuwaileh & Al-Shoumali, 2000) or it may affect the attitude of the reader towards the writer and reduce the motivation to write (Nauclér, 1980; Sipe, 2008). Spelling errors are important also because their occurrence indicates that something is wrong in the internalization of spelling systems and rules by the learner. This is clear in the definition of spelling errors as a part of the learner’s “competence, as they emanate from deficient knowledge of spelling rules” (Nauclér, Op.cit, p.41).

Additionally, spelling is essential because of its relation to other aspects of language such as phonetics, phonology and semantics. The interaction between phonetics and spelling is illustrated by the fact that ignorance of some phonetic rules or notions can lead to misspellings. An example of this is the following

spelling rule: In polysyllabic words ending in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, when a suffix is added, the final consonant is doubled if the last syllable is stressed, but this is not applicable if stress is not on the last syllable; hence, “commit” in the simple past is “committed” and “submit” is “submitted” but the past of “credit” is “credited”. Ignorance of the notions: “Syllable” and “stress” can lead to misspelling “credited” as “creditted”.

Spelling is related to phonology as well in the apparent lack of a clear sound-to-letter relationship in the English spelling system which may be exemplified by the fact that the combination “ou+gh” is pronounced as /ʌf/ (e.g. “tough”) or as /U/ (e.g. “through”) or as /ə/ (e.g. “thorough”) or as /ɔ:/ (e.g. “thought”). Such inconsistencies can lead to misspelled words. As for semantics, its relation to spelling is clear in the sense that the misspelling of a word can end in a different word, consider for example the word “hoarse” which can be misspelled as “horse”, a completely different word.

This study is a tentative analysis of spelling errors made by Moroccan university students of English. It aims at emphasizing the seriousness of this phenomenon because it seems that spelling attracts less interest in comparison with other aspects of language. As Ibrahim (1987) argues “this immense activity [research in language teaching] has included almost every aspect of language teaching with one notable exception, Viz. spelling”. Despite the importance of spelling in producing meaningful written texts, language programmes mostly focus on teaching the four skills, vocabulary, and grammar neglecting spelling (Bowen, 2011).

## 1. SPELLING: AN ISSUE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

### 1.1 The Importance of Spelling

The spelling system of a language is important because of its relation to many linguistic and nonlinguistic fields and to “the types of conflicting criteria which any writing system has to meet” (Stubbs, 1980, pp.71-73). These criteria are:

- Linguistic: Is the system characterized by economy, consistency and unambiguity in terms of its symbols?
- Psycholinguistic: Does it conform to the psycholinguistic process of reading and writing?
- Educational: Is it characterized by easiness for both native and foreign learners?
- Sociolinguistic: Does it relate in appropriate ways to social and regional language varieties?
- Cultural: Are the attitudes of its users favorable towards it?
- Technological: Does it suit the needs of modern life like printing and information storage?

It is clear, then, that spelling is important at an internal linguistic level and also at the external level including cultural factors. The question to be asked then is whether the English spelling system fulfills these requirements or not.

### 1.2 English Spelling

Attitudes towards the English spelling system vary from those who emphasize its positive aspects to those who focus on its negative characteristics. Taylor (1981, p.316) argues that English spelling is not unsystematic and consequently, it is not an obstacle to learn English. Although he acknowledges that this system is not without “a number of irregularities”, he focuses on its positive aspects such as having regular phonological rules and a guidance to pronunciation and stress. He, then, concludes that the problem is not in the system itself, but rather in the way this system is taught, it should be taught as “a help rather than a hindrance”. In the same perspective, Stubbs (1980, p.44) states that “the present system, despite some anomalies, has some considerable advantages in the way it represents English”. The same opinion is expressed by Luelsdroff (1985, p.35) who views English orthography as an optimal system which “fairly and consistently maps letters into systematic phonemes”. Hence, it is noticeable that these researchers view the English spelling system in a positive way mainly because it represents the English language systematically. Thus, the focus is on whether the orthographic system in English reflects speech or not.

On the other hand, the main criticism directed to the English spelling system is the absence of a clear sound-to-letter relationship, which creates difficulties especially to foreign learners of English. As Stubbs (1980, p.56) points out:

The English spelling system is well designed for a native speaker of the language who knows its automatic phonological rules, but it is not good for a foreigner who needs a higher level of redundancy and help in pronouncing words.

He goes on to list a number of characteristics of English spelling which may be viewed as problematic. First, it does not work according to one single system. Second, words of different linguistic origins are spelled differently as they keep the spelling of their original languages. Furthermore, the pronunciation of English has changed and as a result the spelling has become “out of date”. Consequently, those who consider the English spelling system as unsuitable ask for its reform but in vain, which makes Stubbs (1980) wonder “why is it that the English spelling system has remained unchanged in spite of some four hundred years of reform and continuity of complaints about some obvious inconsistencies in it” (p.70).

What can be deduced from these opinions about the English spelling system is that, as any other system, it has advantages and disadvantages. This fact results in that even people who focus on its advantages cannot deny the existence of a number of inconsistencies in this

system. What is also worth noting here is that the focus of both those who are for or against the English spelling system is on the relationship between writing and speech and the influence of pronunciation upon writing. This reveals the fact that the English spelling system's great difficulty is embedded in the system of derivation which has a number of irregularities. Consider, for example, the word "pronunciation" which is derived from the verb "pronounce" or the verb "differentiates" which is derived from the noun "difference", or the noun "redemption" and the verb "redeem", or the adjective "deep" and the noun "depth". It is clear, then, that English spelling has some weak points which may result in difficulties, especially for foreigners.

## 2. SPELLING ERRORS

A spelling error is defined as a "violation of a spelling rule" (Naucière, 1980, p.40), but there is a distinction to be made between "slips of the pen" and conventional errors; the former are made by learners who "are aware of the community spelling norms" and the latter are made by "spellers who are unaware of the community spelling norms and they are duplicated in a text" (Luelsdroff, 1986, p.35). There are different causes or sources of spelling errors, mainly the non-phonetic nature of English spelling as Stubbs (1980, p.43) points out: "there is a general agreement that English spelling is more abstract in its principles than a grapheme-phoneme correspondence system". There are also errors caused by the inconsistent nature of word derivation in English. Additionally, there are errors which are the result of the generalization found in the various methods of teaching writing at schools (Ibrahim, 1978; Naucière, 1980). However, the task of explaining spelling errors is not easy, especially "when a word occurring more than once is misspelled in different ways" (Naucière, op.cit, p.42). To conclude, it may be said that one of the causes of spelling errors can be the English spelling itself, with

its inconsistencies. Another cause could be other external factors such as the learner him/herself, i.e. the way in which he/she interacts with the language. Transfer from other languages known to the learner or the teaching context, techniques and materials could also explain the occurrence of some errors.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Questions

The present study purports to investigate the following questions:

- What are the patterns of spelling errors made by Moroccan university students of English?
- Is there a difference in the patterns of spelling errors according to academic level?
- What are the possible sources of spelling errors made by Moroccan university students of English?

The questions are answered through analyzing students' answers to examination questions in the composition paper (semester 2/first year) and essay questions (semester 5/third year).

### 3.2 Analysis of Spelling Errors

#### 3.2.1 Recognition of Errors

The errors were extracted from 100 written essays submitted during a third year examination (advanced composition) and a first year examination (composition). The difference between the two groups reflects a difference in academic level and in language proficiency.

#### 3.2.2 Description of Errors

What follows is an attempt to classify the errors into categories (omission, addition, substitution and ordering).

##### 3.2.2.1 Omission

Errors of omission involve the deletion of segments from words. The segments are either consonant-letters or vowel-letters. The following table contains some examples of errors of omission:

**Table 1**  
**Examples of Omission Errors for Both Groups**

Errors of omission			
1 <sup>st</sup> year students		3 <sup>rd</sup> year students	
Omission of consonant-letters	Omission of vowel-letters	Omission of consonant-letters	Omission of vowel-letters
"sunny" "planed" "studing" "usually" "stoping" "exept" "mentaly" "totaly" "gradually" "adition" "swiming"	"helt" "weakning" "pleasur" "orgnized" "prepars" "mat" "met" "unfortunatly" "lone" "mony" "betwen" "gretest"	"dout" "peacefuly" "occurring" "forgeting" "aquisition" "moraly" "intellectual" "youg" "shoked"	"ara" "conversly" "hypocrit" "tiresom" "nawdays" "befor" "agricultur" "completly"

##### 3.2.2.2 Addition

Errors of addition involve inserting non-existent segments in words. The additional items can be either vowel-letters

or consonant-letters. The following table contains some examples of errors of addition:

**Table 2**  
**Examples of Addition Errors for Both Groups**

Errors of addition			
1 <sup>st</sup> year students		3 <sup>rd</sup> year students	
Addition of consonant-letters	Addition of vowel-letters	Addition of consonant-letters	Addition of vowel-letters
“hollidays” “broc” “family” “habbits” “chosen” “avoind” “advertissement”	“loose” “humain” “plane” “heard” “peopple” “relarxe” “problemes”	“immitate” “stricking” “ellaborate”	“begain” “systeme” “successfule” “loose” “government” “employe”

**3.2.3 Substitution**

Errors of substitution involve the use of one segment instead of another. Examples of these errors are contained in the following table:

**Table 3**  
**Examples of Substitution Errors for Both Groups**

Errors of substitution			
1 <sup>st</sup> year students		3 <sup>rd</sup> year students	
Substitution of consonant-letters	Substitution of vowel-letters	Substitution of consonant-letters	Substitution of vowel-letters
“consern” “sigarettes” “advice” “khest” “happyly” “resqued” “historuque” “lieing”	“enjured” “devide” “desease” “bed” “Frence” “westing” “chicking”	“differenciates” “conserning” “conccideration” “watsh” “confortable” “certision”	“altornative” “previlige” “benifical” “espicially” “bihind” “delenquency” “inheret” “academic”

**3.2.4 Ordering**

Errors of ordering involve a disorder of segments in a sequence of letters. Examples are included in the following table:

**Table 4**  
**Examples of Ordering Errors for Both Groups**

Errors of ordering	
1 <sup>st</sup> year students	3 <sup>rd</sup> year students
“recieve” “decieve” “foriegn” “concluded”	“familail” “wheater”

In addition to the aforementioned errors, there are others which are also not easy to classify within the aforementioned categorization. These are errors of spelling but the resulting erroneous words exist in English, they are not words intended by students because they are different in meaning:

- “leave” (live) - “loose” (lose) - “their” (there) - “quiet” (quite) - “lack” (luck) - “rewording” (rewarding)

**3.3 Explanation of Errors**

In this third step of the analysis, an attempt is made to attribute the errors to potential sources.

**3.3.1 Non- Application of Spelling Rules**

Some errors in the examples above are caused by the fact that the students did not apply a spelling rule in the English spelling system:

- The following errors: “Occuring”, “unforgettable”, “begining”, and “forgeting” are the result of the non-application of the spelling rulle which stipulates that in monosyllabic words ending with a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, the consonant is doubled when a suffix is added, hence, “begin” becomes “beginning”. In polysyllabic words which end in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, the consonant is doubled if the last syllable is stressed; hence “forget”

becomes “forgetting”.

- The errors: “Totaly”, “peacefully”, “moraly”, “equally”, gardually” and “financialy” are the result of the non application of the spelling rule which indicates that when adverbs in “ly” are formed from adjectives ending “l”, the endings will be “lly”, thus “totally” is the derived from the adjective “total”.

- The misspelled words: “Payed” and “dayly” are the result of the non-application of the spelling rule which stipulates that in words ending in “y” preceded by a vowel and a single consonant, when a suffix is added the “y” is changed “i”.

- In the misspelled words: “Recieve” and “decieve” the disordering of “i” and “e” is the result of the non-application of the spelling rule. “i” precedes “e” except after “c”.

- The error: “Complety” is the result of not applying the rule stipulating that in words ending in “e”, “the latter is kept when a suffix is added”.

**3.3.2 Errors Due to Interference From French**

The interference is clear when some words are misspelled because they exist in both English and French, but they are spelled differently. These errors are:

“nostalgie” “developement” “planetes”  
“gouvernement” “deplome” “presonnality” “principe”  
“exemple” “indistriel” “encyclopedies” “confortable”  
“systeme” “responsability”

### 3.3.3 The Influence of Pronunciation

#### 3.3.3.1 Letters That Are Not Pronounced Are Omitted

“hypocrit” “tiresome” “befor” “agricultur” “creates”  
“therfore” “provids” “satellits” “sculptur” “dout”  
“aquisition” “conversly” “shoked”

#### 3.3.3.2 Letters Which Are Realized in Pronunciation as /ð/Are Omitted

“nowday” “lone” “centry” “orgnized”

The reason seems to be that /ð/ is a weak vowel that is not heard clearly in pronunciation.

#### 3.3.3.3 Letters Which Are Realized as the Same Sound In Pronunciation Are Confused

“conserning” “concideration” “cretisism”

Here, the letters “s” and “c” are confused because they are both realized in pronunciation as /s/.

#### 3.3.3.4 Sounds That Are Close to One Another in Pronunciation Are Confused

The /i/ sound is described phonetically as: high, front, unrounded.

The /e/ sound is described phonetically as: mid-high, front unrounded.

It is clear, then, that these two sounds are close in articulation; they differ only in one feature, i.e. the height of the tongue, as a result; they may be taken to be similar. Hence, the following errors occur:

“benificial” “deseases” “previliges” “bihind”  
“inhance” “espicially”  
“acadimic” “convinient” “intertainment”  
“inheret” “delenquency”

#### 3.3.3.5 Errors Occurring as a Result of Comparing Them With Other Words in Pronunciation

- “alturnative”: substitution of “o” for “e” as a result of having “or” pronounced as /ð/ in words like “attorney”.

- “concreate”: substitution of “a” for “e” as result of having “ea” pronounced as /i:/ in words like: “repeat” and “defeat”.

- “comparision”: addition of “i” as a result of having “ion” pronounced as /n/ in words like: “competition” and “compensation”.

- “proved”: substitution of “oo” for “o” as a result of having “oo” pronounced /as/ u: /in words like: “loose”; “loop” and “loom”.

- “preceeding”: addition of “e” a result of having “ee” pronounced as /i:/ in words like “proceed”, “meet” and “seelp”.

- “prarticle” as a result of having the combination “le” preceded by a consonant at the end of a word pronounced as /ð/ in words like “principle”.

- “extream” as result of having “ea” pronounced as /i:/ in number of words like: “dream” and “stream”.

- “helth”: as a result of having “e” pronounced as /e/ in a number of words like: “held”; hell and “help”.

- “stricking”: as a result of having the combination “ck” pronounced as /k/ in words like: snack, lack, and shock. The same explanation can be applied to the occurrence of “smocke”.

- “complaine”, “successful”, “factores”, “instilles”, “foreigne” and “progresse”, these words occur as a result of the fact that the letter “e” occurs at the end of many words in English but it is not pronounced like in: “take”, “make”, “fate” and “more”.

- “resurches” occurs as a result of having “ur” pronounced as /ð:/ in words like: “urge”, “urban” and “urchin”.

- “attendence”: as a result of having “e” pronounced as /ð/ in words like “irreverent”, “interrupt” and “interact”.

- “extant” as a result of having “a” pronounced as /ð/ which is close in articulation to /e/ in words like: “militant” and “instant”.

#### 3.3.3.6 Errors Caused by Confusion of Homophones

- “there” for “their” - “quiet” for “quite”  
- “their” for “there” - “leave” for “live”  
- “Luck” for “lack” - “enable” for “unable”

It seems that students who committed these errors know the meaning of both words but, because they are exposed to such words mainly in oral form, they confuse them with other words that are pronounced in the same way when writing them though their meaning is different. In other words, the students may know one word (e.g. “there”) and hear it used in other contexts, so he/he uses it; not being aware that another word is intended although it sounds like what he/he knows.

#### 3.3.3.7 Not Doubling Letters Which Are Pronounced in the Same Way as When They Are Not Doubled

The reason for omitting certain letters seems to be that they are pronounced in the same way as when they are not doubled. For example, the /f/ sound is the same in “fear” as well as “different”, the doubling of the letter “f” does not distinguish it from the non-doubled one. The following words are examples illustrating this:

- “polution” - “diferent”- “intellectual”  
- “disapearance” - “oportunity”

#### 3.3.4 Errors Caused by Confusing Lexical Items

These errors are particular in that the erroneous versions are words which exist in English. A possible explanation here is that the student who uses, for example “plans” for “planes”, knows that the word “plans” is an English word and not an erroneous form. The problem is that the forms of words are confused and not their meanings, and consequently, when proofreading, the student does not pay attention to the “erroneous” word simply because it exists in English. Examples of this are:

- “later” for “latter” - “principals” for “principles”  
- “plans” for “planes” - “rewording” for “rewarding”

- “mad” for “made”    - “loose” for “lose”
- “mean” for “means”    - “employees” for “employers”

**3.3.5 Errors Caused y Derivation**

These errors occur because of the difference between the derived word and the root it is derived from. This is clear in the following words:

- “differenciates” occurs as a result of having “difference” as the noun from which the verb “differentiates” is derived.
- “relient” occurs as a result of having the verb “rely” conjugated in the third person singular in the simple present as “relies” or in the past as relied.
- “writting” occurs as a result of the existence of “written” as the past participle derived from “to write”.

**3.3.6 Errors Caused by a Wrong Application of Spelling Rules**

These errors involve one spelling rule or another, but the problem is that the rule is applied in the wrong way.

- “opening”: “Open” is a word which ends a in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, but the stress is not on the final syllable. Here the cause of

- “walfare”    - “coled”    - “crisise”    - “despeared”    - “culter”    - “ruddness”    - “couclude”
- “knauldg” - “vihical”    - “desease”    - “sympathic”
- “young” - “peopple” - “ emeregence” - “immitate” - “chinging”    - “spreed” - “theses” - “sharring”
- “beauty” - “manifactors”
- “illiminate”    - “ara” - “begain”    - “pregonant”

Hence, it is clear that spelling errors can be attributed to various sources as summarized in the following table:

**Table 5**  
**Possible Sources of Spelling Errors Made by Both Groups**

Possible sources of errors	1 <sup>st</sup> year students		3 <sup>rd</sup> year students	
	N	%	N	%
Non- application of spelling rules	16	12.31	15	10.64
Interference from French	10	07.70	16	11.35
Influence of pronunciation	49	37.69	61	43.26
Confusion of lexical items	19	14.62	09	06.38
Errors caused by derivation	03	02.31	03	02.13
Wrong application of spelling rules	01	00.78	04	02.84
Errors not attributable to a clear source	32	24.62	33	23.40

**DISCUSSION**

Concerning the first research question, the main patterns of spelling errors made by the subjects are omission, addition, substitution and ordering. In addition to this, there are errors that are caused by confusing homophones or lexical items which results in words that are spelled correctly but the meaning is erroneous. As for the second research question it is clear that academic level has no effect on the patterns of spelling errors since the same patterns are observed for both first and third year students. The analysis has shown that errors are even attributed to the same sources for both groups. This could indicate that if the problem of spelling is not

the error seems to be a misapplication of the doubling rule concerning polysyllabic words ending in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel.

- “Comitt”: The error seems to be the result of the fact that the learner is aware that “t” is doubled in some cases (when a suffix is added), or it seems that the learner is aware a letter is doubled but is not sure which one. The same can be said about “graddually”.

- “foriegn”: This error seems to result from the fact that “e” never precedes “i” except after “c”, a rule which has some exceptions like “foreign”.

**3.3.7 Errors Which Are Not Attributable to a Clear Cause**

These errors do not seem to have a “logical” explanation. They may be the result of the conditions under which students take exams like anxiety, time pressure or nervousness, which lead to inattention and confusion. They may also be attributed to the fact that some students do not proofread at the end of exams, which leads to the occurrence of errors which could have been avoided. The list of these errors is:

solved for a student since the beginning, it continues to exist regardless of academic level.

However, although the same causes may be assigned to the occurrence of errors made by the respondents of both groups, there is a difference in the hierarchies of errors. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that errors caused by the influence of pronunciation constitute the largest part. This can be explained by the fact that the English spelling system is not consistent since it has no clear sound-to-letter relationship. In other words, there is a difference between the way a word is pronounced and the way it is written. This seems to be the reason why a great number of students face problems when they try

to write words as they are pronounced. An example of this is the omission of letters which are not pronounced. Additionally, almost all Moroccan students of English are familiar with standard Arabic and French, two languages which have, more or less, a clearer sound-to-letter relationship than English. This fact seems to make it difficult for these students to deal with a language which is different.

Errors attributed to examination conditions constitute the second largest part of errors for both groups. These errors occur because students, during the day of the examination are under psychological stress (fear, anxiety, nervousness, etc.) which leads to a lack of attention from them. A second potential factor is that students, when answering examination questions are interested in the meaning of what they write more than in how to write it. Still another explanation is that students do not proofread at the end, sometimes because of lack of time which results in the occurrence of errors that could have been avoided.

Errors caused by the confusion of lexical items are the third type of errors for first year students and the fifth for third year respondents. The difference may be explained by the fact that third year students are more familiar with English than first year students. For both groups, these errors seem to be the result of the fact that students are aware that the erroneous words actually exist in English. This means that the student who makes this type of errors when proofreading does not pay attention to them simply because they are English words and not "erroneous".

Errors caused by the non-application of spelling rules are the fourth type in both groups. The non-application of spelling rules seems to cause considerable difficulty to both first and third year students, 12.31% and 10.64% respectively. This can be explained by the fact that students are not taught English spelling rules in a consistent way. In other words, apart from mentioning some spelling rules by some teachers, especially in the first year grammar course when dealing with tenses and adverbs, there is no clear interest in teaching spelling rules to university students of English. This is what warrants the introduction of a new course component concerned with teaching spelling.

Errors caused by interference from French are another type which attracts attention. The interference may be explained by the fact that Moroccan university students of English are familiar with French 7 years before they start studying English. Another factor which is worth mentioning here is that English and French have a shared part of vocabulary, but the similarity is only in meaning and not in spelling. The suggestion of introducing a course of spelling is also applicable here, if it takes into consideration the focus on words which exist in both languages but are spelt differently.

Errors caused by derivation, i.e. the difference between the spelling of a word and that of the root it is derived from, constitute almost the same part of errors for both first and third year respondents (2.31% and 2.13% respectively). They can be attributable to the existence of a number of inconsistencies in the English spelling system concerning derivation. Teaching spelling may be a solution to these errors since it will draw the attention of students to the existence of inconsistencies in the spelling system, consequently making them pay more attention to the problem.

The last cause of errors is the wrong application of spelling rules. These errors constitute 00.78 for first year students and 2.84% for those of third year. The problem which leads to the error here is that the student knows that a certain spelling rule exists but he/ she applies it in the wrong way. This explains the difference between first and third year students. The latter are more aware of the spelling rules than the former, but they do not apply them in the right way. This can be attributable to the lack of attention resulting from the conditions of the examination.

It is clear, then, that there is, more or less, a similarity between the errors made by both first and third year students of English regardless of their level.

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## CONCLUSION

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The results obtained from the analysis of spelling errors made by the two groups of subjects for this study lead to the conclusion that spelling constitutes a serious difficulty to Moroccan university students of English, a fact which should be taken into consideration by both students and teachers. The former should be aware that spelling is as important as other aspects of the language, and the latter will help them to do so if they emphasize the importance of spelling whenever they give feedback on their students' assignments. One way of achieving this may be a course component in spelling to be incorporated within the writing course in first year. This will, at least, draw the attention of students to the problem. A course component of spelling does not only mean teaching the limited rules of English spelling, but it can also relate these rules to pronunciation. The difficulty arising from the irregularities of the English pronunciation may be reduced if the focus is on how the phonological level of English can offer guidance to its spelling. An example of this is the difference between monophthongs and diphthongs. It is clear that if a student knows that in monosyllabic words vowels are short (e.g: "put", "sit", "hit") he/she will not confuse "plan" with "plane" or "smock" with "smoke" since the presence of the second vowel in the polysyllabic words makes the first vowel a diphthong. The point here is that if the sound-to-letter relationship, which seems to create a problem to students is emphasized, students will pay more attention to it.

However, this does not mean that the problem of spelling will be overcome only by a course component of spelling; rather, there are other factors to be taken into account. Since spelling is related to every aspect of language, the potential solutions to its problems are also related to every component of the syllabus. Encouraging reading can solve the problem partly. Practice in writing is needed to reduce the difficulty in spelling, which makes it necessary to encourage students to write. It is known that students are more motivated to work if they receive feedback from their teachers that is if they feel they are oriented.

This does not suggest that students are not, on their part, responsible for their difficulties in spelling and in other aspects of the language. It is noticeable that they read only what is related to the syllabus and sometimes they do not even read it. In other words, since they lack motivation, because of many reasons, students seem to focus only on the examination and how to pass it, delaying all reading and writing until a month before the exams.

On these grounds, it can be concluded that the problem of spelling, as well as other problems of language, is the result of many factors including the whole system of education. This means that in order to make the students aware of many problems, and consequently motivated to overcome them, it is necessary to introduce reform in the syllabus, the methodology used in some courses and the materials used in Moroccan high schools and universities.

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