

## **‘A Bale of Water?’ Influence of First Language Transfer on Spoken English in Secondary Schools in Mogotio Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya**

<sup>1</sup>Marotse S. Violet, <sup>2</sup>Vicky Khasandi-Telewa

<sup>1,2</sup>Laikipia University, Kenya

### **Abstract**

*There is a notable decline in the performance of spoken English in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub County. It is speculated that first language (L1) among other factors is responsible for this decline. Therefore, the objectives of the study were to identify the nature of errors in spoken English and to establish whether performance in spoken English influences students' performance in written English in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub County. The study was guided by error analysis and inter-language theories. The study was based on a descriptive design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the study population sample of 279 form two students from four secondary schools. Data were collected by means of a guided written composition and a reading proficiency test. The reading sessions were recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found out that the errors made were classified into phoneme deletion, phoneme oddity, syllable deletion, phoneme identification, phoneme segmentation, phoneme substitution, phoneme addition, inter-lingual errors and intra-lingual errors. The study also concludes that L1 interference influenced students' performance in written English in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub County. The study recommends that teachers should view students' errors positively and not as the learners' failure to grasp the rules and structures of English.*

**Key words:** Phonology, Learner errors, Second language acquisition, Baringo County.

### **Introduction**

English language has been considered as the most significant language for instruction and communication in the vocational world. It is not easy to accurately estimate the number of English language speakers but linguists estimate that about 5.7% of the world population are native English speakers (O'Neil, 2011). The language is perceived to be the cornerstone of intellectual and occupational advancement. The process of language acquisition entails learners practising all the four skills of writing, speaking, listening and reading in all contexts so as to grasp how to manipulate the language well. In the English-speaking nations, English language functions as a means of communication and communication competency in English language requires an understanding of how to organize speech in different situations. This enables the learner, particularly second language speakers of English, to communicate fluently, independently and accurately in everyday life.

English as a second language is typically an official or societal dominant language needed for education, employment and other basic purposes. However, its mastery may be affected by L1 (O'Neil, 2011). Several studies have been conducted on the role that the first language (L1) plays on the functioning of a second language (L2). For instance, a cross cultural study by Ransdell (2003) showed that Asian students (Chinese, Indian and Korean) experienced more difficulty in English phonological awareness tasks than native English-speaking students. The reason behind this could be that while learning a second language (L2), the alphabetical shapes and structures of first language (L1) would create transfer. Hence, teachers might not appropriately make L2 learners do practice exercises in (L2) language

especially in cases where the medium of communication in schools is L1. Therefore, L2 learners do not get enough exposure to acquiring language.

In India, Avanika (2009) established that English language is learnt as a second language and is used for cross-cultural communication. According to Bamgbose (2000), L2 learners in schools in Nigeria face two major problems. First, the government had erroneously decided to teach them in foreign languages that were alien to them. Second, most of their teachers were poor role models since they were not proficient in English language. Thus, later in their lives, the learners had to unlearn their teachers' awkward language constructions. In South Africa, there exist challenges as regards language of instruction in spite of faring well in terms of respecting both linguistic rights and the human right to education (Brock-Utne, Desai & Qorro, 2003). Desai and Qorro (2003) further show that in South Africa, English is the medium of instruction after Grade 4; however, in some regions L2 learners use isiXhosa for spoken classroom interaction in order to bring about more effective learning. In spite of that, all written tests are done in English.

In Kenya, English is the main language of instruction from upper primary schools. The other languages taught and examined in schools include Kiswahili which is the Kenyan national language and foreign languages such as Arabic, French and German. English is also taught in both primary and secondary schools as an examinable subject. The rationale for teaching English is to develop communicative competency skills among the students (KICD, 2001). The task of the English teacher is to prepare the learners to acquire competencies in the four skill areas by emphasizing the acquisition of the standard structural and grammatical aspects of English language. Since English is a functional language, accuracy and fluency in all the skill areas enables learners to perform better in the other subjects.

According to Gacega (1986) linguistic competence in English is a cardinal goal for every student since all subjects except Kiswahili and foreign languages in the secondary school curriculum are taught in English. Being an integral language, poor performance in spoken English should, of course, worry many teachers and stakeholders in the education sector. This is not exceptional in Mogotio Sub County where majority of the students come from the Kalenjin speech community who speak the Tugen language. Tugen is a language spoken by the Kalenjin community of Baringo County, Kenya. The term Kalenjin was coined in the 1940s to refer to an administrative rather than a linguistic entity (Kurgat, 1989).

The Kalenjin ethnic group is largely thought of as a dialect cluster (Chebii, 2008). Tugen is classified under the Southern Nilotic group of languages. The Southern Nilotic group is further divided into Kalenjin (Nandi, Pokot, Tugen, Keiyo, Merkweta, Kipsigis, Sabaot, Kony, Pok, Terik, Kinare, Sogoo, Akie and Tatooga (Omotik and Tatooga). Tugen has the following dialects: Arror of Northern Baringo, Samor of Central Baringo, Eldorais of the Lowlands and Lembus of Koibatek. According to Kurgat (1989) Tugen has approximately 144,000 speakers and is taken to be a VSO/VOS language. Some of the major features of the Tugen which may have a bearing on this study include its tone and its patterns, the nouns and their inflections, case marking, verbs and their inflectional and derivational features, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and prepositions.

According to Kurgat (1989) Tugen has 16 consonants. Of these consonants, 5 are stops, namely, /p/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /tʃ/; three fricatives /β/, /s/ ʃ/; four nasals /m/, /n/, /ɲ/ and /ŋ/; one lateral /l/; one trill /r/ and two glides /j/ and /w/. The plosive /p/ has the allophones [p] and [β] while /k/ has the allophones [k] and [ɣ]. These allophones occur in free variation in some words. There are also 3 pre-nasalised stops: /mb/, /nd/ and /ŋg/.

Also, Tugen has 9 vowels which are of two kinds; long and short. The short and long vowels are also specified for +/-ATR (Advanced Tongue Root) and -ATR (Retracted Tongue Root) except /a/ which is specified only for -ATR. -ATR involves the pronunciation where the tongue root is retracted while +ATR is pronounced when the tongue root is pushed forward

and thereby creating different phonemic qualities. This brings the number of vowels in Tugen to 18 (Toweett, 1977).

In describing a tone language, Yip (2002:37) says “A language with tone is one in which an indication of pitch enters into the lexical realization of at least some morphemes”. Tugen is a tonal language in the sense that tone is used to differentiate lexical items. A lexeme such as *pis* has two meanings depending on the tonal pattern. It can be *pís* (desist from something) or *pìs* (spray something). Other lexemes are *pút* (demolish) or *pùt* (fall) and *mút* (take someone) or *mùt* (cut) and *táá* (fold something) and *tàà* (delay me). However, Tugen is not a typical tone language in that not every lexeme has different tones. Tone can be used to signal lexical, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information.

Tone is always transcribed in the syllable nucleus which is usually a vowel; this masks the fact that tone may be phonetically realized on the voiced sonorant segments. Tugen has two underlying tones namely: H (igh) and L(ow) tones. The tones appear both on short and long vowels. The H tone is unmarked in the language. The high tone has several varieties: H, super (extra) H and down step. Tone is a feature that is used to differentiate dialects such as Nandi and Tugen. For example, *máát* in Tugen and *mààt* in Nandi for (fire), *yá* and *yâ* (bad) and *kóót* and *kòòt* (house) for Tugen and Nandi respectively. Tone is used grammatically to show aspects like definiteness, subject and object (Kurgat, 1989).

Many researchers and linguists such as Ngonga (2002) and Bett (2008) have dedicated a considerable amount of time to investigate the causes of declining standards of spoken English language. Bailey (2000) however, maintains that policies on language need to be pluralistic and accommodative of the emergence of new language phenomena and address the influence of L1 interference. However, the standard of Spoken English language has continued to decline (KNEC, 2012 & KNEC, 2011) in learning institutions in Kenya possibly due to the influence of L1 (KICD, 2001).

The current trends in Kenya show that the standard of spoken English is on the decline and this could be affecting communicative competency and the performance of speaking skills in English language (KNEC, 2012 and KNEC, 2011). Students’ performance in spoken English as measured by English paper one, which tests students on various aspects of received spoken or performance-based language skills, has shown declining trends for the last five years (KNEC, 2011) as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1: Trend in Performance in Oral and Functional Skills in English**

Year	Mean Score	Deviation
2007	26.11	-
2008	24.59	-1.52
2009	30.75	+6.16
2010	28.12	-2.63
2011	27.94	-0.18

Source: KNEC (2011)

For example, national performance in oral and functional skills declined from 26.11 in 2007 to 24.59 in 2008. In 2009 the performance improved by 6.16 points. However, the performance declined by 2.63 points from 30.75 in 2009 to 28.12 in 2010 (KNEC, 2011). In 2011 the performance declined from 28.12 in 2010 to 27.94 (KNEC, 2012). The same trends have been replicated in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub County where the overall performance in oral and functional skills declined from a mean score of 5.93 in 2009 to 5.25 in 2010 (MOE, 2010)

The level of spoken English among students in many secondary schools in Kenya is low. In particular, learners’ performance in English speaking skills is not satisfactory among students in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub-County. Thus, students underperform in

functional and oral skills in English which in turn has led to dismal performance in the language in national examinations. However, the factors influencing poor performance in spoken English among secondary school students in Mogotio Sub-County may have not been adequately investigated. This study therefore sought to analyze the influence of L1 transfer on spoken English in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub County, Baringo, Kenya. The objectives of the study were to identify the nature of errors in spoken English and to establish how LI influenced performance in spoken English affected students' performance in written English among the students in Mogotio Sub County.

### Literature Review

In this section literature is reviewed on spoken and written performance in English as well as on how the theory of error analysis has been applied in diverse studies. Achieving effectiveness in communication requires mastery of the knowledge of language and the ability to use the knowledge in actual communication (Canale, 2013; Canale & Swain, 1980). The knowledge of language, or linguistic competence, encompasses mastery of lexis, grammar and the sound system of the language. While linguistic competence needs to be complemented by sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competencies for effective communication to take place, excessive gaps in linguistic accuracy can compromise meanings made.

Studies on linguistic accuracy in written texts have focused on the sources of the errors, among which is L1 transfer. For example, Bennui (2008) examined L1 transfer at the level of words, sentences and discourse in the study of paragraph writing of 28 third-year English-minor Thai students at Thaksin University. Bennui reported that the lexical transfer takes the form of literal translation of Thai words into English whereas the transfer at the sentence level involves structural borrowing from Thai language such as word order, subject-verb agreement and noun determiners. At the discourse level, the wordiness or redundancy style of Thai writing appeared in the students' written English observed Bennui (2008). By situating paragraphs in the context of texts produced for a particular purpose, Henry and Roseberry (2007) showed that there is a relationship between the types of errors and the move-strategy or the way in which a genre move is realized in content.

A search of literature on error analysis of spoken texts in English indicated a near-absence of attention in this domain. Studies on spoken English tend to deal with areas such as speaking skills (Josephine, Lourdunathan & Menon, 2005), students' reluctance to speak in English classes (Zaidan & Jassem, 1997) and general features of English. Linguistic accuracy of spoken language may be more difficult to study because of the nature of speech. McCarthy (1998) writes about real dialogues which do not look neat with well-formed sentences. According to Bartram and Walton (2002), accuracy in spoken English refers to "utterances as near as to a native speaker's as possible. Brumfit (1984) refers to the accuracy of the language content: grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. However, the grammatical accuracy in spoken language is different from written language. Beattie (1983) states that 'spontaneous speech is unlike written text'. It contains many mistakes while sentences are usually brief (Halliday, 1985). Brown (2003) highlights the inappropriateness of requiring students to use complete sentences when they speak and points out why the notion of utterances rather than sentences are used for describing spoken discourse. Brown (2003) stresses that the grammar of spoken colloquial English does not impose the use of complete sentences, making utterances such as "Your family?" and "Yawanna come along?" appropriate.

A study by Guoala (1981) on the effect of native languages in Congo on English pronunciation and structure reports that students encounter difficulties in pronunciation and structure of English because of their native language. This shows that the student's native language affects their ability in acquiring English. Kembo-Sure (1996) also found out that mother tongue is one of the factors that influence a learner's speech in English. In a study



conducted by Njoroge (1987) on the effects of local languages on the learning of English, it was established that children's first language usually interferes with the acquisition of English skills. Other studies which are relevant to this study have been conducted by Maina (1991) and Chege (1996). Maina's study established that the transfer occurs at the lexical level while Chege's study found out that transfer occurred at the level of subject verb agreement. These studies are important since they provide indications of the possible errors that students using other languages make when they transfer errors to English.

Kaniu (2003) surveyed the patterns of language use and its effect on the acquisition of English oral communication skills among secondary school students in Kandara division. This study established that mother tongue preferences limit students' ability to practice the use of English in real life communication. These findings have an important bearing on this study since oral skills provide evidence for acquisition of competency in spoken English. According to Bartoo (2004) in a study on acquisition of English syntax among the Keiyo speakers, omission, disordering and misinformation errors occur in the process of learning English language. McCarrthy and O'keeffe (2004) have found out that communicating in an L2 is a cognitively demanding undertaking whose success depends on production quality. Speaking in L2 requires fluency, accuracy and a sufficient lexico-grammatical repertoire for meaningful communication to take place.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was based on the theories of inter-language and error analysis. The theory of error analysis was formulated by Corder (1974). According to Corder (1981) EA is a procedure that postulates a separation of errors into their constitute parts. Corder's model for identifying errors postulates that utterances by a learner can be transcribed and analyzed for errors. An error may vary in magnitude. It can include a phoneme, a morpheme, a word, a sentence or even a paragraph. Brown (2000) has noted that errors may be viewed as being either global or local. Global errors hinder communication. They prevent the message from being comprehended while local errors do not prevent the message from being understood because there is usually a minor violation of one segment of a sentence that allows the hearer to guess the intended meaning.

According to Hasyim (2002) error analysis may be carried out in order to find out how well someone knows a language, find out how a person learns a language, and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. In acquiring full communicative competence, L2 speakers must learn to speak not only grammatically but also appropriately. Speaking in conjunction with listening is a very important area of activity for L2 learners if they hope to use the language for interpersonal purposes. Some scholars such as Arnold (2003) believe that the nature of errors in L2 may be influenced by social contexts. Thus, success or failure in L2 performance may also depend on the motivation for speaking in Standard English. Motivation is variously defined. Claus and Gabrielle (1983) conceive it as a construct which includes the perception that learning L2 is relevant to fulfilling the goal or meeting the need and the belief in the likely success of potential outcomes or rewards.

It has been observed that different kinds of errors occur when L1 speakers communicate in L2 or the target language. The errors usually occur due to the differences in accent (O'Neil, 2011). Strange (1995) used the term perceptual foreign accent to refer to the significant difficulty which L2 speakers have in perceiving most phonetic contrasts that are not functional in their native language and notes that this can interfere with learning L2 phonology.

Corder (1972) introduced the distinction between *errors* (in competence) and *mistakes* (in performance). This distinction directed the attention of researchers of SLA to competence errors and provided for a more concentrated framework. Before Corder's work, transfer errors

were regarded as inhibitory; it was Corder who pointed out that they can be facilitative and provide information about one's learning strategies. According to Hagège (1999) transfer between L1 and L2 is observed in children as well as in adults. If there is sufficient exposure, then instead of reaching a point where they can no longer be corrected (as often happens with phonetics features), transfer features can be easily eliminated. Hagège (1999) has stressed that there is no reason for worry if transfer persists more than expected. The teacher should know that a child that is in the process of acquiring a second language will subconsciously invent structures influenced by knowledge he already possesses. These hypotheses he forms may constitute errors.

The methodology of error analysis follows six steps (Bennui, 2008). These include collection of data, identification of errors, classification into error types, statement of relative frequency of error types, identification of the areas of difficulty in the target language and remedy. While the above methodology is roughly representative of the majority of error analyses in the traditional framework, the more sophisticated investigations go further to include analysis of the source of the errors such as mother tongue transfer, overgeneralization, inconsistencies in the spelling system of the target language and the determination of the degree of disturbance caused by the error specifically the seriousness of the error in terms of communication (Bennui, 2008). The theory of error analysis was suitable for this study because it helped the researchers to identify, classify, describe and explain the errors in the spoken English occurring as a result of L1 transfer.

Inter language is a theory formulated by Selinker (1972). Inter-language is an emerging linguistic system that has been developed by an L2 learner who has not become fully proficient yet but is approximating the target language, preserving some features of L1 or over generalizing target language rules in speaking the target language.

Generally, inter-language is a theoretical construct which underlies the attempts of SLA researchers to identify the stages of development through which L2 learners pass on their way to L2 (or near L2) proficiency (Ellis, 1989). Making errors constitutes a strategy or attempt to master the target language. In this study, it is imperative to note that Tugen language is largely spoken in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub County and its structure can be transferred to the spoken English language thus influencing the spoken English.

### **Research Methodology**

The study employed the descriptive survey design. This design was appropriate for this study since it helped to thoroughly investigate the problem at hand by defining it, clarifying it and obtaining pertinent information for the study. In addition, several research specialists have recommended the descriptive survey design as the best for this kind of research (Orodho, 2003). The target population was all form two students in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub County. According to Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) (2001) syllabus, the form two students are continuously involved in the acquisition of competency in speaking skills as per the school curriculum. It is also in form two that the teaching of speaking skills is emphasized. This selection is also relevant for this study because the data obtained from the study helped to establish if L1 transfer influences spoken English and the students' communication competence in English. Mogotio Sub County has 24 secondary schools with a total population of about 2059 (MOE, 2010) form two students.

The researcher employed the purposive sampling technique to identify four secondary schools. To ensure representativeness and generalizability of the findings, the four schools selected represented the different categories of schools in the area. These were private, boarding girls, boarding boys and day mixed schools. The number of schools sampled constituted 17% of the total number of schools in Mogotio Sub County. Researchers such as Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) suggested that one may use a sample size of at least 10 percent

but for better and more representative result a higher percentage is better. The sample size constituted 279 form two students out of 2059 form two students in Mogotio Sub County.

### Data Collection Instruments

The instruments that were used in collecting data from the participants were a Reading Proficiency Test (RPT) and a Guided Composition (G.C). The guided composition required the participants to use pairs of homophones to fill in blank spaces. The pairs of homophones were selected because their misuse can affect communicative competence. Student respondents were allocated five minutes to fill in the guided composition writing. The guided composition was assessed and analyzed for errors. The Reading Proficiency Test incorporated words with troublesome sounds placed at different positions of the word, that is word initial, word middle and word final. These words included: *thought, mathematics, breathe, problem, replica, envelop, goat, agriculture honour, abhor, synonym, assume, abyss, jolt, largest, budge, kit, skiing and spook.*

The Reading Proficiency Test comprises the sounds in Table 2.

**Table 2: Sounds in the Reading Proficiency Test**

L1 Phoneme	L2 Phoneme	L2 Learner Pronunciation
-	/θ/	-
-	/p/	-
-	/dʒ/	-
-	/s/	-
-	/h/	-
-	/k/	-
-	/g/	-

The reading proficiency test was tape recorded to obtain the required data from the respondents. Each respondent was given 5 minutes to read the words in the reading proficiency test. The tape-recorded information was later transcribed for subsequent data analysis.

### Results and Discussion

The reading proficiency test was used to assess language acquisition which is a major component of literacy skills acquisition with respect to reading. The participants were required to read aloud 20 words which contained specific sounds placed at different positions of the words, that is, word initial, medially and word final.

Table 3 shows an analysis of words according to nature of errors made by the respondents in the reading proficiency test.

**Table 3: Distribution of Words According to Nature of Errors Made**

Word	Phoneme Deletion	Phoneme Addition	Syllable Deletion	Phoneme Segmentation	Phoneme Substitution
Thought					✓
Mathematics	✓				
Breathe					✓
Problem					✓
Replica				✓	
Envelop				✓	
Goat					✓

Agriculture					✓
Swag					✓
Honour		✓			✓
Abhor		✓			
Synonym			✓		
Assume					✓
Abyss	-	-	-	-	-
Jolt					✓
Largest	-	-	-	-	✓
Budge	-	-	-	-	-
Kit					✓
Ski-ing					✓
Spook					✓

The errors and their possible causes were explained in respect to known phonological realizations. For instance, phoneme deletion which involves removing a given sound in the word at the initial, middle or terminal level and reading the remaining word was evident in the results obtained from the study particularly in the reading proficiency test. The findings also show that syllabic deletion was evident in the data collected. Syllable deletion is the task consisting of a bi-syllabic word where the reader deletes a given syllable at initial or terminal level. Several instances of syllable deletion were evident in the study such as in the word *synonym*.

The other kind of error was phoneme identification which involves recognizing the same sound in different words. The nature of error was not evident in the data collected. However, there were instances in which the respondents were breaking a word into its separate sounds and saying each sound as it was tapped out, counted or signaled as was reflected in the words *replica* and *envelop*. This is referred to as phonemic segmentation. Phoneme addition and phoneme substitution were the other types of errors which appeared in the language corpus in this study. Phoneme addition which involved making a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word was evident in the words *honour* and *abhor* while phoneme substitution which refers to the substitution of one phoneme for another to make a new word was evident in the words *thought*, *breathe*, *problem*, *goat*, *agriculture*, *swag*, *honour*, *jolt*, *largest*, *kit*, *skiing*, *spook* and *assume*. It is apparent that phoneme substitution was more common than the other kinds of errors.

An analysis of each respondent's guided composition indicated that the respondents made some errors which could be traced to L1 transfer. The results are presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Errors in Homophones**

<b>Homophones</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Frequency of Incorrect Usage</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Bear, bare	<b>194</b>	42	22
Fair, fare	<b>194</b>	10	5
Come, calm	<b>194</b>	6	3
Tail; tale	<b>194</b>	7	4
Rare; rear	<b>194</b>	27	14
Dear; deer	<b>194</b>	16	8
Pail; pale	<b>194</b>	169	87
Heard; herd	<b>194</b>	7	4
Gait; gate	<b>194</b>	9	5

Source: Field notes



The study aimed at ascertaining the nature of learner errors attributed to L2 speakers by the use of guided composition. Based on the discussions and the data obtained from the study, it has emerged that English as L2 was problematic particularly at the phonemic level among students in secondary schools in Mogotio Sub County. In examining the frequency of occurrence of L1 errors in the learners' spoken English as revealed in the guided composition, it can be seen that more errors in language use occurred in the context of the use of the homophones *pail* and *pale* (87%) possibly due to the fact that the respondents might have mistaken the sound /p/ for the sound /b/. The other possibility was the nonexistence of /b/ in the Tugen language. According to Kurgat (1989) Tugen has 16 consonants including the plosive /p/, with its allophones [p] and [β] which occur freely in some words. Slightly more errors were observed in the homophones *rare* and *rear* (14%). Fewer errors occurred in the pairs *come* and *calm* (3%), *fair* and *fare* (5%) and *tail* and *tale* (4%), *hard* and *herd* (4%) and *gait* and *gate* (5%).

### Spoken English and Students' Written Communication Competence

In examining whether performance in spoken English influenced students' performance in written English, the respondents' performance on guided composition was used to see whether there were any differences in communication competence in both tasks. This section presents the results from the study in the context of whether performance in spoken English influences students' communication competence in written English. To determine whether L1 influenced communication competency among the respondents, a guided composition was presented to the respondents from where the researcher examined the specific mistakes as a way of assessing their communication competence. Homophones were used in this regard and the respondents asked to use the pairs of homophones to fill in blank spaces. To discover whether there was possible communication competency among the respondents the incorrect usages were counted and the results obtained are presented in Table 3.

**Table 5: Frequency of Incorrect Usage of Homophones**

Homophones	Frequency of incorrect usage(n)
Bear, bare	42
Fair, fare	10
Come, calm	6
Tail; tale	7
Rare; rear	27
Dear; deer	16
Pail; pale	169
Heard; herd	7
Gait; gate	9

**Source:** Field notes

As shown in Table 3, there were variations with different sounds on the guided composition. The respondents were presented with words whose pronunciations were similar but conveyed different meanings (homophones). The participants had a native language (Tugen) whose influence was considered to be uniform in the respondents' acquisition of a second language. However, the choice of homophones was deliberate as the words selected were in frequent usage among students in secondary schools. From the guided composition, it is evident that most incorrect usage of the homophones was registered where the homophones involved was *pail* and *pale*. In this case, 169 incorrect usages were reported compared to 25 correct usages. This implies that in situations where it was required to distinguish the pair but the respondents could not, communication competence would be ineffective. 42 incorrect usages with respect to the homophone *bear* and *bare* were reported compared to 154 cases of correct use.

In the other homophones there were slightly fewer in correct usages compared to correct usage. For instance, in *rare* and *rear* 27 instances of incorrect usages were reported compared to 194 correct usages. Slightly lower incorrect usages were reported in the *fair* and *fare* where ten instances of incorrect usages were reported compared to 184 correct usages. In the homophone *gait* and *gate* nine instances of incorrect usages were reported compared to 185 correct usages reported. In *dear* and *deer* 16 incorrect usages were observed compared to 173 correct usages. In the words *come* and *calm* only six instances of incorrect usage were reported compared to 188 correct usages. In both *tail* and *tale*, and *heard* and *herd* seven instances of incorrect usage were reported compared to 187 correct usages.

The similarity of sounds in the selected words could explain the difficulty all participants encountered when using such words for purposes of communication. In general, the participants correctly distinguished the other homophones in the guided composition. In English the phonemes /p/ and /b/ keep the integrity in the manner of production no matter where they are located within the word environment. The respondents could therefore not distinguish the phonemes in the words accurately thus bringing about the confusion in their usage. The participants seemed to be influenced by their L1. Usually, incorrect pronunciation is more common with /b/ than with /p/. The participants seemed to be more successful in the pronunciation task than in the guided composition writing. This could be because this task contained words with which the participants were unfamiliar. The relative accuracy in communication competence probably stems from familiarity with the target words.

The reading proficiency test had a greater number of unknown words that the participants may not have heard previously. They would have to rely heavily on decoding skills to correctly produce the words whereas with the guided composition they could easily identify and make a simple selection from the provided words without further being worried about accuracy of pronunciation. It has also been reported that Spoken English is affected by two main difficulties namely the mental difficulty of thinking of the English words to say and the physical difficulty of pronouncing the English words correctly. Speaking English by oneself helps train on the ability to put ideas into words. For instance, reading English texts out loud can help overcome the fear of being inaccurate.

Previous studies have established the challenges of effective communication based on the types of language errors commonly made by the students who are L1 speakers. However, these studies have not focused on the use of homophones and a troubling sound appearing in different positions of the word. Thus the findings in this study contradict the research findings by Kwoks (2009) which shows that more errors can be detected in longer essays than from shorter ones. However, the findings are consistent with those of Llach (2005) findings in a study of German and Spanish compositions which shows that lexical error production per composition was significantly higher for German participants whose compositions were less than half the length of the Spanish learners' essays. In this study, respondents, who participated in the guided composition, produced the least number of errors. This shows that language events which involved a listening audience seemed to determine the number of errors and that more errors were likely to occur if the linguistic corpus was relatively longer. In regard to the frequency of errors, it is apparent that there was a rate frequency of occurrence of the identified errors in the learners' L2 spoken work rather than in their written work. In this respect, the findings are inconsistent with those of Randall (2005) and Ilomaki (2005) who claim that L1 learners of L2 necessarily make the same errors in both speaking and writing tasks.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the objectives of the study were to identify the nature of errors in spoken English and establish whether performance in spoken English influences students' performance in written English in Mogotio Sub County. From the findings the study concludes that errors made

by the respondents in this study were phoneme deletion, syllable deletion, phoneme identification, phoneme segmentation, phoneme addition and phoneme substitution. More errors in language use occurred in the context of use of the homophones *pail* and *pale* compared to all the other homophones investigated in the guided composition.

The study also noted that the position of the sound in a word influenced the nature of errors made by the respondents in L2 language use. However, there was a mixed result in respect to the number of errors. Word-medially, frequency of errors recorded stood at 125 in pronouncing the sound /θ/ compared to recorded correct usage at 69. The frequency of errors in pronouncing /p/ was highest when the sound appeared word initially but relatively fewer errors were reported both word-medially and word-finally. Also, there were more errors in pronouncing /g/ word-finally and word-initially compared to word-medially. Few errors were made in pronouncing /s/ word initially as mostly correct usage was recorded. Concerning the sound /h/ the highest number of errors were reported when the sound appeared word-initially. The sound /dʒ/ had the highest number of respondents incorrectly pronouncing the sound at all the three-word positions.

In regard to communication competence the study concludes that most incorrect usage of the homophones was registered where the homophones involved were *pail* and *pale*. Thus in the environment that required users to distinguish the pair but the respondents could not, communication competence would be ineffective. Based on the data obtained from the guided composition, the study concludes that the respondents were more successful in written communication as opposed to spoken, thus rendering their use of spoken English incompetent. The similarity of sounds in the selected words explained the difficulty all participants encountered when using such homophones for purposes of communication competence. The respondents could therefore not distinguish the phonemes in the words accurately thus bringing about the confusion in their usage.

Generally, the study concludes that the participants were more successful on the guided composition than on the pronunciation task. This could be because the guided composition contained words with which the participants were familiar. The relative accuracy in communication competence probably stems from familiarity with the target words.

### **Recommendations**

Language learning is a step-by-step process during which errors or mistakes are to be expected. Errors are visible proof that learning is taking place and is a valuable aid to identify and explain difficulties faced by learners. Thus, L2 errors are potentially important in explaining and understanding the processes of language learning. Findings on error analyses can be used to determine what a learner still needs to be taught as they provide the necessary information about what is lacking in their competence. The findings of the present study point out the significance of learners' errors for they provide evidence of how language is learned and what strategies or procedures the learners are employing in learning the language as well as possible causes of errors. For instance, this study shows that L2 learners made more pronunciation errors than writing errors for the target group studied. Therefore, further research is recommended to establish better methods teachers can use to guide the learners to apply the right strategies to become better language users.

Findings from error analysis provide feedback; they also tell the teachers something about the effectiveness of their teaching. Thus, it is recommended that reliable feedback be provided on remedial teaching methods and materials. It is also suggested that teachers should view students' errors positively and should not regard them as the learners' failure to grasp the rules and structures of English, but the errors should be seen as a process of learning. Errors, if studied systematically, can provide significant insights into how a second language is actually learned

**References**

- Arnold, S. (2003). *Differences in content generating and planning processes of adult L1 and L2 proficient writers*. Ph.D Thesis, University of Ottawa, Canada.
- Avanika, S., Niroj, B., Ambalika, S. & Rajesh, K. S. (2009). Transfer of first language in the acquisition of second language. *Journal of Psychology and Counseling*, 1(7), 117-122.
- Bailey, B. (2009). Language and negotiation of ethnic/racial identity among Dominican Americans. *Language in society*, 29(4)555-582.
- Bamgbose, A. (2000). *Language and exclusion: The consequences of language policies in Africa*. LIT.
- Bartoo, J. P. (2004). *Acquisition of English syntax by Keiyo L1 speakers*. Unpublished MA Thesis. Egerton University.
- Bartram, J., & Walton, D. (2002). *Teaching pronunciation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bennui, P. (2008). Rethinking the teaching of pronunciation in the ESL classroom. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics*, 5: 1-15.
- Brock-Utne, B., Z. Desai & Qorro, M. (2003). *Language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa*. E & D Limi.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by Principles; an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Prentice Hall Legend.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Longman.
- Brown, J. D. (2003). Promoting Fluency in EFL Classrooms. *Proceedings of the 2nd Annual JATL Pan-SIG Conference*, Kyoto, Japan.
- Brumfit, L. (1984). *Bilingualism*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Canale, M. (2003). From performance to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards, & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and Communication*. Longman.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-47.
- Chege, M. N. (1996). *Morpho-syntactic errors in written English of first year undergraduate students in Kenya*. Unpublished M.A Thesis, Kenyatta University.
- Claus, F. & Gabrielle, K. (1983). *Strategies in inter-language communication*. Longman.
- Corder, P. (1974). The significance of learners Error. In Richards J. C (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). *Error analysis: perspective on second language acquisition*. Longman.
- Corder, P. (1981). *The significance of learners error (4<sup>th</sup> Ed): Perspective on second language acquisition*. MIT Press.
- Corder, P. (2002). A morphological approach to the absence of expletive pro. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 14, 2002: 291-319.
- Corder, S. P., (1973). *Introducing Applied Linguistics*. Pelican Books.
- Ellis, G. (1989). An acoustical basis for universal phonotactic constraints. *Language and Speech*, 35, 73-86.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Gacega, C. M. (1986). *A study of the factors that influence performance in English at the Kenya Certificate of Education in selected Schools*. Unpublished MED Thesis Kenyatta University
- Gall, D. M. & Borg, W. R. (2006). *Education research: An introduction*. Allyn and Bacon
- Hagège, C. (1999). *The child between two languages*. Polis editions.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *Spoken and written language*. Deakin University.
- Hasyim, S. (2002). Error analysis in the teaching of English. *Journal of Phonetics*, 4 (1), 42–50.
- Henry, A., & Roseberry, R. L. (2007). Language errors in the genre-based writing of advanced academic ESL students. *RELC Journal*, 38, 171-197.



- Ilomaki, A. (2005). Cross-linguistic influence -A Cross-sectional study with particular reference to Finnish-Speaking Learners of German.
- Kembo-Sure, (1996). *Language attitudes, use and proficiency. A sociolinguistic study of English in Kenya*. Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, Moi University, Eldoret.
- Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2001). *Secondary school syllabus*. Kenya Institute of Education.
- Kenya National Examination Council (2011). *The year 2010 KCSE examination report: Test development department*. KNEC.
- Kenya National Examination Council (2012). *The year 2011 KCSE examination report: Test development department*. KNEC.
- Kurgat, P. K. (1989). *Some aspects of Kinandi syntax-An analysis of transformations.*, Unpublished M.A Thesis UoN.
- Kwoks, H. L. (2009). Why and when do we correct learner errors? *An error correction project for an English composition class*. Retrieved from: <http://sunzi1.lib.hku.hk/hkjo/view/45/4500101.pdf>.
- Larsen, D. (1992). *An Introduction to second language acquisition research*. Longman.
- Laurell, G. C. (1987). *Contemporary linguistic analysis- An introduction*. Newbury House Publishers.
- Llach, M. P. A., Fontecha, A. F., & Espinosa, S. M., (2005). Differences in the written production of young Spanish and German learners: Evidence from lexical errors in a composition. *Studia Linguistica*, 61(1)1-19.
- Maina, J. W. (1991). *A Study of the grammatical errors in standard Eight Pupils Written Work in English in Four City Schools in Kenya*. Unpublished M.A Thesis Kenyatta University.
- Marotse S.V. (2015) *An analysis of the influence of L1 on spoken English in Secondary Schools in Mogotio Sub- County, Baringo County, Kenya*. Unpublished MA thesis, Laikipia University.
- McCarrthy, M., & O'Keeffe, A. (2004). *Research in the teaching of speaking. Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 26-43.
- Ministry of Education (2010). *Rift Valley Education Day*. Macmillan Kenya.
- Mugenda, O. M. & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). *Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. ACTS Press.
- Ngonga, B. (2002). *An Assessment of English language teacher education in the light of class room needs: a case study of Maseno University*. Unpublished PhD Thesis Maseno University.
- Njoroge, K. (1987). *The Acquisition of six morph syntactic structure of English by Kenyan Schools Children*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis University of Edinburgh.
- Nordhoff, S., Hammarstrom, H., Forkel, R., & Haspelmatch, M., (2013). *Tugen*. Glottolog. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.
- O'Neil, D. (2011). *Language and culture: Introduction*. Palomar College.
- Orodho, A. J. (2003). *Essentials of educational and social science research methods*. Masola Publisher.
- Randall, M. (2005). Factors affecting the spelling of primary school pupils in Singapore and pedagogic implications. *International journal of language learning* 1(4):26-30.
- Ransdell, S. (2003). The care and feeling of monolingual and bilingual University students in South Florida: Implications for assessment and training. *Psychological Journal of Learning and Teaching* 3(2):126-130.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Dictionary of language teaching and Applied Linguistics*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Selinker, L. (1972). *Inter language*. Oxford University Press.



- Strange, W. (1995). *Cross-language studies of speech perception: A historical review*. York Press.
- Yip, M. (2002). *Tone*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zaidan A. J., & Jassem, A. J. (1997). Towards better speaking in English major classes: A sociolinguistic approach. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 30(1): 23-37.