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Spelling Mistakes Made by Korean Students on the Elementary Level of Learning Ukrainian as a Foreign Language¹

Iryna Zbyr²

ABSTRACT

Spelling is a basic literacy skill in any language as it is in communication. This research attempted to investigate the academic performance and spelling mistakes of the first-year students at the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in the Republic of Korea. The study included 20 students in the first semester and 18 – in the second. The finding of the study indicated that the students committed a number of spelling mistakes that affect the coherence of their academic written text. Also, the finding showed that these spelling errors may be attributed to mother tongue interferences in which they relate to the difference between the systems of both native language and foreign language. Data were collected through a battery of test on Beginning Ukrainian Grammar and Composition, which is taken by the students after their first and second semester. This study is aimed at singling out types of spelling mistakes and determining their reasons. Furthermore, this data allowed the author to come up with possible ways of avoiding or reducing the number of such errors. This research recommends that future investigations be conducted in the area to confirm the results of the current research in order to examine from other perspectives such as ages and grade. Due attention is paid to defining the term “spelling mistakes” in the process of learning Ukrainian as a foreign language on the elementary level. In addition, the effect of such mistakes on acquiring written communicative competence by the Korean students is examined. Types of mistakes that are referred to as “spelling mistakes” are defined in the article as well.

Keywords: Korean Students, Spelling Mistakes, Ukrainian as a Foreign Language, Ukrainian Spelling.

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1. Introduction

Modern methods of learning foreign languages presuppose mastering all types of language activities, i.e. reading, listening, speaking and writing. The latter is generally viewed as the hardest one. This is an

¹ This work was supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund of 2017.

² PhD Professor, Associate Professor, Department of Ukrainian Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. E-mail: ivtorak@gmail.com

active and productive kind of language skills within which methodologists distinguish such components as learning writing techniques and learning written competence.

Learning writing techniques requires mastering calligraphy (i.e. writing the alphabet correctly), graphics (writing correct images of letters and their connections), spelling (reencoding sounds of the language into adequate written signs), and punctuation (correct usage of punctuation marks), whereas the aim of learning written competence lies in correct, precise, logical and stylistically adequate expression of one's thoughts in the language that is being learned (see Chystiakova, 2010).

Therefore, spelling skills are one of the prerequisites for acquiring written communicative competence. However, it proves impossible to avoid making mistakes in the process of mastering a foreign language. As far as this study is concerned, writing makes very difficult skills for learners of Ukrainian language in the Republic of Korea. Many linguists and researchers treat writing as a process rather than a product. The main goal of this process is to generate a written work that will function as a tool of interaction between the writer and the reader according to the information they possess.

This language skill is very demanding process since successful writing needs an appropriate extent of organization in achieving ideas and knowledge and an adequate level of accuracy so that sentential constructs possess contain no vagueness of words meaning within sentences throughout a written text. The appropriate use of grammatical and spelling patterns choices and sentence structures will create a meaningful written work for the readers (Stankevych, 2009).

One of the fields that took the attention of the researcher in this study is writing-spelling problem. Writing-spelling is the process of writing words by using the letters conventionally established for their structure. It is a balance to communicate using the language, and its understanding of some grammatical components such as like: vocabulary, grammar and semantics. Some problems may encounter the learners in language acquisition in which the learners feel bored when they prepare for dictation (Tarnopol's'kyi, 2006).

Writing as an equal kind of speaking in the system of learning Ukrainian as a foreign language at the secondary school and university was studied by many researchers, especially K. Kus'ko, S. Lytvyn, S. Nikolaenko, O. Tarnopol's'kyi, I. Zimniaa, N. Hez, N. Stankevych and others. However, learning of Ukrainian as a foreign language by Korean students was not a subject of a separate study.

1.1 Research questions and methods

In the written papers by Korean students learning Ukrainian one can easily notice a large number of spelling mistakes and a low level of language proficiency. As a result, there are cases when the students get a sufficient number of points and a satisfactory mark. Analysis of typical spelling mistakes will allow us to determine the reasons why they appear and to develop strategies for reducing them. Altogether this will improve students' written communicative competence and help them pass exams successfully.

The subject of this paper is spelling mistakes of Korean students on the elementary level of learning Ukrainian as a foreign language. Spelling mistakes which were made by first-year students at the exam in *Beginning Ukrainian Grammar and Composition* after their first and second semesters constitute the object of the given research.

As a basis of our research we have selected written papers which were done by first-year students during their exam period in 2016.

The aim of this article lies in determining a general and average amount of spelling mistakes in the written papers as well as examining the reasons why they appear and offering strategies for reducing them. The given research employs methods of quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

2. Spelling mistakes

While mastering a foreign language, one cannot avoid making mistakes, no matter how hard one tries. Such mistakes in the process of learning a language are referred to as “deviations from correct usage of language units and forms as a result of the student’s erroneous action” (Azimov, & Shchukin, 1999). They are divided into:

- 1) according to the level of the language: spelling, lexical, phraseological, morphological, word-building, syntactic, punctuational, stylistic, orthoepic, and accentual errors (see Kurdiuk, 2006);
- 2) according to the type of language skills: mistakes in reading, writing, speaking and listening;
- 3) according to the type of language interference: interlingual (the impact of the native language on the foreign one) and intralingual mistakes (building wrong associations in the system of the language that is being learned);
- 4) according to the meaning: communicatively insignificant (the mistake does not affect understanding the message) and communicatively significant mistakes (the mistake complicates understanding the message or even makes it impossible) (see Balykhina, & Ignat’eva, 2006). Some other categories of mistakes are determined in many more research papers.

Yu. V. Krasikov claims that spelling mistakes include the following ones:

“Replacing letters or words with the other ones; omission of letters or syllables; adding extra letters in a word; omission of words; anticipation; wrong hyphenation, “wrong” print; omission of a line; wrong placement of the neighbouring lines; division of a word into separate parts and writing two words as one” (Bondarenko, 2001).

Some Ukrainian scholars divide spelling mistakes into spelling mistakes proper (i.e. caused by violating a certain rule) and mechanical spelling mistakes (replacing letters, misprints, omission of letters and other mistakes in words “whose spelling usually presents no difficulty”) (see Bondarenko, 2001). We believe that in the process of learning a foreign language (in our case – the Ukrainian language), particularly on the elementary level, most cases of wrong spelling of words should be regarded as spelling mistakes, since such errors, which are generally viewed by native speakers as rather simple ones, occur quite often.³

3. Analysis of spelling mistakes of Korean students on the elementary level of learning Ukrainian as a foreign language

We have studied written papers done by first-year students, in particular:

- the written part of the exam in *Beginning Ukrainian Grammar and Composition*, which was done by first-year students after their first semester in June, 2016;
- the written part of the exam in *Beginning Ukrainian Grammar and Composition*, which was done by first-year students after their second semester in December, 2016.

3.1 Spelling mistakes of Korean students after I semester

The students take an exam in *Beginning Ukrainian Grammar and Composition* after their first semester of learning Ukrainian as a foreign language. In this semester they learn the following topics: getting acquainted, my university, my family, my home, my room, languages, countries and peoples, appearance and character, jobs, daily routine, names of months, and major rules of etiquette; such grammar topics as the nominative, locative, ablative, dative and vocative cases of nouns, adjectives, pronouns, cardinal and ordinal numbers, present and past tense of verbs as well as various patterns.

³ However, it can be partly explained by such non-orthographical factors as inability to perceive oral language adequately, bad memory, insufficient vocabulary and grammar, language interference etc.

On the spelling lessons special attention is paid to correct mastering of the Ukrainian alphabet, usage of the apostrophe, the soft sign, correct spelling of я, є, ю, і, й, щ, дз, дж, differentiation between *i-u* and *r-z-x*. Besides that, within this subject the students get the chance to learn about Ukrainian phonetic system.

The written part of the exam in grammar consists of three types of tasks, namely lexical (to write a word on the basis of a picture and the context), grammar (to provide the corresponding grammar form of a particular word or to choose the correct option judging from the context) and lexico-grammatical tasks (the latter deal with answering or asking questions based on the context in the correct grammar form).

It seems necessary to mention that besides their final exam at the end of the semester students in Korea also do a mid-term exam on their eighth week of studying. The results of this exam influence the students' final (semester) mark.

We have examined written papers done by first-year students after their first semester. The total number of papers is 18. It allowed us to analyze spelling mistakes in terms of their types and reasons why they occurred.

Table 1: Spelling mistakes of students in the different types of tasks after I semester

Student	Grammar		Lexical		Lexico-grammatical		Total
	Mid-term exam	Final exam	Mid-term exam	Final exam	Mid-term exam	Final exam	
1	7	9	1	1	2	4	24
2	7	3	1	0	1	3	15
3	3	5	0	0	0	0	8
4	5	7	1	0	0	2	15
5	6	4	0	0	0	2	12
6	9	12	4	0	2	5	32
7	7	4	2	0	0	1	14
8	13	13	5	3	1	7	42
9	10	8	3	2	1	2	26
10	4	6	0	0	1	2	13
11	6	9	1	0	1	2	19
12	12	12	4	1	4	3	36
13	2	5	0	0	0	2	9
14	9	7	0	0	0	0	16
15	16	9	5	2	3	4	39
16	12	10	4	2	3	4	35
17	4	7	4	4	2	5	26
18	7	3	2	1	0	2	15
Total	139	133	37	16	21	50	396

Source: the author's own studies

The greatest number of mistakes was made in grammar exercises (individual use of theoretical material in practice leads to confusion and mistakes, as there is no chance to guess the correct answer from the context). There were fewer mistakes in lexical and lexico-grammatical exercises (this can be explained by the fact that the students are asked to use a word in its main or common form, which is equivalent to the one often used in class).

Analyzing spelling mistakes according to the criterion of their reasons and mechanisms, we can single out the following types of mistakes:

- mistakes caused by confusing words and notions (*буква* instead of *слово*, *тумба* instead of *шафа*, *кімната* instead of *дім/будинок*, *стілець* instead of *стіл*, *син* instead of *онук*, *дівчина* instead of *жінка*, *масло* instead of *сир* etc);
- mistakes in using graphemes *к-х*, *з-ж*, *ц-ч*, *б-в* and *дз-дж* (*кукар* instead of *кухар*, *мужей* instead of *музей*, *стілечь* instead of *стілець*, *вуква* instead of *буква*, *деребо* instead of *дерево*, *бдзола* instead of *бджола* etc);
- mistakes in declension and conjugation:
 1. alternation of vowels *i-o* in noun roots while making them plural and using in various cases (*стіли* instead of *столи*);
 2. *-i* instead of *-u* and *-u* instead of *-i* in the nominative case of masculine nouns in plural (*столи* instead of *столи*, *друзи* instead of *друзі*);
 3. *-u* instead of *-a* in the nominative case of neuter nouns in plural (*яблуки* instead of *яблука*, *місти* instead of *міста*);
 4. *-o* instead of *-u* in the nominative case of feminine nouns in plural (*шанко* instead of *шанки*, *сестро* instead of *сестри*);
 5. *-u* instead of *-i* in the locative case in singular (*у кімнати* instead of *у кімнаті*);
 6. *-ові (-еві)*, *-у (-ю)* instead of *-а (-я)* in the genitive case of masculine nouns in singular (*Це студентові зошит* instead of *Це студента зошит*, *Це Сергію авто* instead of *Це Сергія авто*);
 7. *-к* instead of *-ц* and *-х* instead of *-с* in the locative case of feminine nouns in singular (*в бібліотеку* instead of *в бібліотеці*, *на поверхі* instead of *на поверсі*);
 8. confusing inflections of the genitive case of masculine and feminine nouns in singular and plural (*студентів зошит* instead of *студента зошит*, *Сергіїв авто* instead of *Сергія авто*, *Оксан книжка* instead of *Оксани книжка*);
 9. *-ю* instead of *-у* in the first person singular of the present tense (*я пишу* instead of *я пишу*);
- misprints (*студенка* instead of *студентка*, *стілець* instead of *стілець*, *подруга* instead of *подруга*);
- confusing possessive pronouns (*її* instead of *його*, *ваш* instead of *наш*, *твій* instead of *мій* and vice versa);
- confusing similar constructions (*бути лікар* instead of *бути лікарем*, *зустрічаю з студентом* instead of *зустрічаю студента* etc);
- wrong usage of prepositions after certain verbs (*розмовляти з*, *говорити про*, *жити в/у* etc);
- wrong spelling of words as one word, with a hyphen and separately (*немаю* instead of *не маю*).

The majority of students' mistakes can be explained by differences in the principles of Korean spelling and phonetic peculiarities of the native language.

3.2 Spelling mistakes of Korean students after II semester

After two semesters of learning Ukrainian the students take an exam in *Beginning Ukrainian Grammar and Composition*, within which they revise the knowledge they already have and learn some new topics, namely food, shopping, where you live, relations between Ukraine and Korea, some new grammar items: the ablative and dative cases of nouns, adjectives, pronouns and numerals, the future tense, alternations in verbs, verbs of motion, degrees of comparison of adjectives, impersonal constructions etc.

We have analyzed 18 written papers. The exam in grammar consists of the same types of exercises as after the first semester (i.e. lexical, grammar and lexico-grammatical tasks), but they are more complicated with regard to the growth of the students' vocabulary and the material studied during two semesters.

Table 2: Spelling mistakes made by students in the different types of tasks

Student	Grammar		Lexical		Lexico-grammatical		Total
	Mid-term exam	Final exam	Mid-term exam	Final exam	Mid-term exam	Final exam	
1	4	6	1	2	1	4	18
2	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
3	2	4	1	1	0	1	9
4	3	2	1	2	0	0	8
5	1	2	1	1	0	1	6
6	3	8	1	0	1	0	13
7	4	8	2	3	0	0	17
8	1	9	1	2	2	1	16
9	10	14	10	3	1	1	39
10	7	13	9	3	0	0	32
11	8	16	12	2	2	2	42
12	6	3	2	2	0	0	13
13	4	6	3	4	0	1	18
14	2	5	2	2	1	0	12
15	4	6	4	1	0	1	16
16	0	4	4	2	1	0	11
17	6	10	1	3	0	3	23
18	6	15	4	0	0	2	27
Total	71	133	60	33	9	17	323

Source: the author's own studies

On the second stage of learning Ukrainian as a foreign language there appear more spelling mistakes in students' papers in grammar, whereas basic spelling rules become largely automatic.

Our study of the written papers on the second stage allows us to single out the following types of mistakes:

- mistakes in using graphemes б-в, л-р (*доврүй* instead of *добрий*, *холошим* instead of *хорошим*);
- mistakes in declension and conjugation:
 1. alternation of vowels *i-o* in noun roots while making them plural and using in various cases (*ріки/ріків* instead of *роки/років*);
 2. *-a* instead of *-y* and *-y* instead of *-a* in the genitive case of masculine nouns in singular (*текста* instead of *тексту*);
 3. omission of *-o* in the genitive case of feminine nouns in plural (*книжк* instead of *книжок*, *ручк* instead of *ручок*);
 4. *-им* instead of *-ом* in the ablative case of masculine nouns in singular (*столим* instead of *столом*);
 5. confusing inflections of adjectives belonging to different grammar groups (*синим* instead of *синім*, *третьому* instead of *третьому*, *домашного* instead of *домашнього*, *старшого* instead of *старшого*);
 6. *-ий* instead of *-ій* in the dative case of feminine adjectives in singular (*новий* instead of *новій*);
 7. confusing inflections of feminine adjectives in the genitive case in singular and plural (*легкої* *вправ*, *цікавої* *вправ*, *складної* *вправ* instead of *легких*, *цікавих*, *складних* *вправ*);
 8. confusing inflections of masculine and feminine nouns in the genitive case in plural (*книжків* instead of *книжок*);
 9. *-ю* instead of *-y* in the first person singular of the present tense (*нишю* instead of *нишу*);
 10. *-ем* instead of *-емо* in the first person plural of the present tense (*живем* instead of *живемо*);

11. alternation of *с-ш* in the roots of verbs in the present tense and wrong conjugation of verbs (*писаю/писаеш/писае/ ... пишут* instead of *пишу/пишеш/пише/ ... пишут*);
 12. wrong combination of cardinal numbers and nouns (*23 років/23 рік* instead of *23 роки, 51 років* instead of *51 рік*);
 13. wrong combination of *багато, мало, скільки* and nouns (*скільки автобуси/автобуса* instead of *скільки автобусів*);
 14. omission of prepositions *в/у, на* in the locative case (*першому поверсі, третьому курсі, вечірці* instead of *на першому поверсі, на третьому курсі, на вечірці*);
- misprints (*книжу* instead of *книжку, п'ятдеся* instead of *п'ятдесят, чорню* instead of *чорною, визька* instead of *визька*);
 - confusing similar constructions (*Іванові подобається твою сестру* instead of *Іванові подобається твоя сестра, Вчора у мене був багато вільного часу* instead of *Вчора у мене було багато вільного часу*);
 - wrong spelling of words as one word, with a hyphen and separately (*ЗЯким* instead of *З яким*);
 - wrong usage of the soft sign and apostrophe (*тонька* instead of *тонка, маленька* instead of *маленька, повільно* instead of *повільно* etc).

Before comparing types and frequency of mistakes on the first and second stages of learning a language it seems necessary to underline that the following factors could have had certain influence on students' mistakes: individual characteristics of the students who were taking the exam, or the choice of a teacher who compiled and checked the papers.

3.3 Summarizing

Therefore, comparative analysis of students' spelling mistakes during exams in *Beginning Ukrainian Grammar and Composition* has allowed us to single out the following tendencies:

- moving onto the next stage of learning the language students make less mistakes in tasks on grammar;
- the number of mistakes concerning confusion of graphemes *к-х, з-ж, ц-ч, б-в, дз-дж*, and *л-р* lowers, while the number of errors in alternations of consonants and vowels in the root within declension and conjugation grows;
- the number of mistakes that were caused by using a preposition in certain constructions (e.g. *в/у* instead of *на* and vice versa – *у стадіоні, на університеті; для мені* instead of *для мене* or *мені* etc.);
- the number of spelling mistakes related to wrong declension is relatively lower, whereas instances of confusing inflections of nouns and adjectives in various cases become more frequent and the variety of examples grows;
- the number of mistakes in spelling the words with the soft sign grows in comparison with the first stage;
- on the second stage there were more mistakes caused by limited vocabulary, in particular inability to answer questions not because the students do not understand them but because they do not know an appropriate word or phrase;
- communicatively insignificant mistakes occur more often on the second stage (i.e. confusing similar constructions);
- on the second stage mistakes in using the small and capital letter disappear, wrong spelling of words as one word, with a hyphen and separately is reduced, while these rules do not exist in their native (Korean) language.

4. Conclusion

Having analyzed spelling mistakes, their frequency and reasons why they occur, we can suggest the following activities which can, presumably, reduce the students' mistakes:

- systematic analysis of the number and types of spelling mistakes students make at the spelling lessons, in their homework, during tests and exams; controlling the progress and taking the results into account while compiling the spelling syllabus;
- careful attention to learning the rules of using letters and signs that the Korean language lacks (*apostrophe*, ь, б, з, ж, дж, дз, ц, цц);
- singling out complex pairs of graphemes (к-х, з-ж, ц-ч, б-в, дз-дж, р-л) and compiling exercises on mastering them;
- advanced study of the spelling rules concerning Ukrainian double consonants through using visual aids (presentations, tables and figures) which can improve systematization;
- preparing special materials on the orthography of Ukrainian as a foreign language with regard to the students' native (Korean) language and using these materials in class;
- paying special attention to spelling while learning grammar (in particular, in the process of learning inflections in various cases and suffixes);
- comparing and making clear differentiation between the constructions that are often confused by students (for example, *Я хочу бути лікарем, Іванові подобається твоя сестра* etc);
- using special types of tests with common spelling mistakes in class in order to correct and explain these mistakes, which will lead to better understanding and memorization of rules;
- systematic work on real-life mistakes, including spelling ones at the lessons (for instance, once a month);
- limiting the number of unknown words in exercises on the initial stage;
- taking into account students' individual peculiarities and needs (learning Russian (or another Slavonic language) and interlanguage interference; the problem of differentiating between pairs of vowels and consonants etc) and, if necessary, giving different homework, holding consultations etc.

This study investigated the effect of spelling errors on the development of academic writing skills of Korean students at the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. The main objective of this research was to examine and categorize these errors. The result of the study indicated that Korean students the spelling mistakes committed by students were categorized into three different categories. Also, the findings showed that spelling mistakes may be related to some plausible sources such as errors caused by non-phonetic nature of Ukrainian language and others resulted due to differences between the sound systems of Ukrainian and Korean languages. This study recommends further studies to reveal if there are significant difference in spelling mistakes due to the following criteria age, grade since teachers and students of the Department of Ukrainian Studies symbolize the model of accurate pronunciation, an investigation is proposed to appraise the training courses that intends to teach them on and how pronounce and spells Ukrainian words correctly.

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