

TROUBLESOME WORDS IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Cuvinte problemă în predarea limbii engleze (Rezumat)

Componenta principală a oricărui curs de limbă este vocabularul. Indiferent cât de bine studentul învață gramatica unei limbi străine, indiferent cât de bine stăpânește pronunția limbii străine respective, comunicarea într-o limbă străină nu poate avea loc corespunzător dacă studentul nu este capabil să exprime în context și diferitele înțelesuri ale cuvintelor.

Cuvintele prezintă dificultăți în scriere, la nivel fonologic, morfologic și/sau sintactic. De aceea, studiul de față dorește să prezinte principalele erori întâlnite de profesorii români care predau limba engleză ca limbă a doua în învățământul primar și gimnazial. Scopul principal al acestei lucrări este prezentarea unor informații ușor accesibile în vederea corectării eventualelor erori în special în ceea ce privește „gramatica cuvântului”, aspectele fonologice, gramaticale, semantice și sintactice la nivelul vocabularului limbii engleze, aspecte importante în predarea acestei limbi străine.

It is the experience of most language teachers that the single, biggest component of any language course is vocabulary. No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of the second language are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in a second language just cannot happen in a meaningful way.

Ease or difficulty in the learnability of vocabulary is connected with the notion of frequency, since the most words will probably be absorbed and learnt simply because they occur regularly. But words may be easy or difficult for a variety of other reasons, and may need special attention or focus in teaching.

Words may present spelling difficulties. Even native speakers of English have difficulty remembering whether single or double consonants appear in words like *occurrence*, *parallel* and *beginning*.

Words may present phonological difficulties, either because they contain awkward clusters of sound, such as: *thrive*, *crisps*, or because spelling interferes with perception of what the sound is, as in *worry* which is regularly pronounced by learners as if it rhymed with *sorry*. Such words may be effectively learned in all other respects, but pronunciation may remain a long-term difficulty, especially where old habits are ingrained.

The syntactic properties of words may often make them difficult. In English, *want* presents fewer difficulties than *wish*; *want* is followed by a variety of verb patterns in that-clauses, as well as by the infinitive.

Words may be perceived as very close in meaning by the learner, and therefore difficult to separate one from another. *Make* and *do* or *lend* and *borrow* are notorious in this respect in English.

Students keep writing and saying quite a few word confusions which are nevertheless entertaining or interesting, such as: *abolishment* for *abolition*, *all goes well* instead of *augurus well*, *blessing in the sky* instead of *blessing in disguise*, or *copywrite* instead of *copyright*, to name only a few of them.

Children invent spellings eventually evidence silent letters accompanying long vowels, which indicate that they are beginning to attend to the pattern layer in English spelling (e.g., TAEK for *take* and PLAYN for *plane*). This leads to the understanding that spelling is not a strictly linear left-to-right match up of letters; some letters do not themselves correspond to sound but instead provide information about the pronunciation of other letters within the pattern.

With further development, spellings reveal closure on most vowel patterns in single-syllable words, and errors on stressed syllables of polysyllabic words reflect how these syllables would be spelled if they were single syllables (e.g., PARADING for *parading*); errors also occur at the juncture of syllables (e.g., HAPEN for *happen* or STRIPPED for *striped*). This type of spelling knowledge is characterized as *syllable juncture*. Other errors characteristic of this phase occur with the spelling of the schwa or reduced vowel in unstressed syllables (e.g., LOCLE for *local*, PILAT for *pilot*).

There are several ways to think about error in writing in light of what we know about second language acquisition and what we know about how texts, context and the writing process interact with one another. As mentioned, students writing in a second language generally produce texts that contain varying degrees of grammatical and rhetorical errors. In fact, depending on proficiency level, the more content-rich and creative the text, the greater the possibility there is for errors at the morpho-syntactic level. These kinds of errors are especially common among L2 writers who have a lot of ideas, but not enough language to express what they want to say in a comprehensible way.

Therefore, the present study focuses on the main errors encountered by Romanian teachers of English who teach English as a second language in primary and secondary schools. Its main purposes are to provide learners with easy access to information they need in order to correct their errors especially in “word grammar” and to look at what should be done about the vocabulary of a language like English phonological, grammatical, semantic and syntactic errors are involved, and to reflect on how this can be applied in language learning and teaching.

Many words sound alike but mean different things when put into writing. The examples given below will help students distinguish between some of the more common words that sound alike:

Accept, Except

accept = verb meaning *to receive* or *to agree*:

e.g. He **accepted** their present graciously.

except = preposition meaning *all but, other than*:

e.g. Everyone went to the party **except** Alison.

Affect, Effect

affect = verb meaning *to influence*:

e.g. Will lack of training **affect** your results?

effect = noun meaning *result* or *consequence*:

e.g. Will lack of training have an **effect** on your exam results?

effect = verb meaning *to bring about, to accomplish*:

e.g. Our efforts **have effected** a major change in university policy.

Advise, Advice

advise = verb that means *to recommend, suggest, or counsel*:

e.g. I **advise** you to drive carefully.

advice = noun that means an *opinion* or *recommendation* about what could or should be done:

e.g. I'd like to ask for your **advice** on this matter.

Idea, Ideal

idea = noun meaning a *thought, belief, or conception held in the mind*, or a general notion or conception formed by generalization:

e.g. Tom had a brilliant **idea** - he'd go to the library to ask for help with his papers!

ideal = noun meaning *something* or *someone that embodies perfection, or an ultimate object or endeavor*:

e.g. Jane was the **ideal** for parents everywhere.

ideal = adjective meaning *embodying an ultimate standard of excellence or perfection, or the best*:

e.g. Jane was an **ideal** student.

Its, It's

its = possessive adjective (possessive form of the pronoun it):

e.g. The crab had an unusual growth on **its** shell.

it's = contraction for *it is* or *it has* (in a verb phrase):

e.g. **It's** still snowing; **it's** been snowing for one week. (Pronouns have apostrophes only when two words are being shortened into one.)

Than, Then

Than is used: - in comparison statements: e.g. He is taller **than** I.

- in statements of preference: e.g. I would rather sleep **than** dance.

- to suggest quantities beyond a specified amount: e.g. Read more **than**

the first paragraph.

Then means: - a time other than now:

- e.g. He was healthier **then**. She will start her new job **then**.
- next in time, space, or order:
 - e.g. First we must finish our homework; **then** we can play.
- suggesting a logical conclusion:
 - e.g. If you've studied hard, **then** the exam should be no problem.

Their, There, They're

Their = possessive pronoun: e.g. They got **their** dictionaries.

There = that place: e.g. My house is over **there**. (This is a place word, and so it contains the word here.)

They're = contraction for *they are*: e.g. **They're** having fun. (Pronouns have apostrophes

only when two words are being shortened into one.)

To, Too, Two

To = preposition, or first part of the infinitive form of a verb: e.g. They went **to** the beach **to** swim.

Too = very, also: e.g. I was **too** tired to continue. I was thirsty, **too**.

Two = the number 2: e.g. **Two** students missed the class.

Two, twelve, and between are all words related to the number 2, and all contain the letters **tw**.

Too can mean also or can be an intensifier, and you might say that it contains an extra o ("one too many")

We're, Where, Were

We're = contraction for *we are*: e.g. **We're** glad to help. (Pronouns have apostrophes only

when two words are being shortened into one.)

Where = location: e.g. **Where** are you going? (This is a place word, and so it contains the

word here.)

Were = a past tense form of the verb *be*: e.g. They **were** walking side by side.

Another problem encountered by our students is whether the word is written in one or two words, as in the following examples:

All ready/already

all ready: used as an adjective to express complete preparedness

already: an adverb expressing time

e.g. At last I was **all ready** to go, but everyone had **already** left.

All right/alright

all right: used as an adjective or adverb; older and more formal spelling, more common in

scientific & academic writing: e.g. Will she be **all right** on her own?

alright: Alternate spelling of all right; less frequent but used often in journalistic and business

publications, and especially common in fictional dialogue:
e.g. He does **alright** in his job.

All together/altogether

all together: an adverb meaning considered as *a whole, summed up*:

e.g. **All together**, there were thirty tourists at the museum.

altogether: an intensifying adverb meaning *wholly, completely, entirely*:

e.g. His comment raises an **altogether** different problem.

Anyone/any one

anyone: a pronoun meaning *any person at all*:

e.g. **Anyone** who can solve this problem deserves an award.

any one: a paired adjective and noun meaning *a specific item in a group*; usually used with of:

e.g. **Any one** of those papers could be read.

Note: There are similar distinctions in meaning for *everyone* and *every one*

Anyway/any way

anyway: an adverb meaning *in any case or nonetheless*:

e.g. He objected, but she went **anyway**.

any way: a paired adjective and noun meaning *any particular course, direction, or manner*:

e.g. **Any way** we chose would lead to danger.

Awhile/a while

awhile: an adverb meaning *for a short time*; some readers consider it nonstandard; usually

needs no preposition: e.g. Won't you stay **awhile**?

a while: a paired article and noun meaning *a period of time*; usually used with for:

e.g. We talked for **a while**, and then we said good night.

Maybe/may be

maybe: an adverb meaning *perhaps*: e.g. **Maybe** we should wait until the rain stops.

may be: a form of the verb *be*: e.g. This **may be** your only chance to pass the exam.

Given the studies that have investigated the effect of examining words in the context of an active search for pattern, some general conclusions are strongly suggested:

- Significant amounts of reading and writing are critical if students are to advance in spelling ability.
- For all children in the early years of schooling, invented spelling should be encouraged. Once students begin to explore spelling on a regular basis, they should be encouraged to look for patterns; this reflects the importance of the visual comparison of words.

- For most students an inductive or exploratory approach is appropriate; for severely struggling spellers who are working at an appropriate developmental level, a more deductive, systematic, and direct approach often is preferred.

There should be an emphasis on the interrelatedness of spelling and phonics, morphology, and vocabulary as students move farther along in development. This emphasis should include the explicit presentation and discussion of how morphology or meaning is represented in the spelling system.

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