

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Most of us think that children learn spelling incidentally when we encourage them to write about their interest with the enlargement of vocabulary involved in such activities. However, spelling demands a greater skill. When one learns a language, one learns a coding system that goes beyond words. This coding system consists of the most probable combination of letters in words, the groups of letters that tend to go together. The good speller then has learnt the probable sequence of letters in words in his own language and he has learned this visually. But the young child without much experience of visual words has a long way to go before he can unhesitatingly select the correct sequence from the various possible alternative letters – sequence (Margaret, 1967).

Spelling is not an easy skill but it is necessary to be acquired by anyone who wants to learn the English Language. This is because whatever their language competencies are, they will face additional obstacles if their written work is incomprehensible and badly spelt and whoever reads the work is distracted from its meaning (Webster, 1987). The communication suffers if spelling is poor for

either the reader is constantly held up through having to puzzle out what a word is or else is positively misinformed. For example, in the sentence below:

“I want an apple” is spelt as “I won n epel.”

The sentence above gives a different meaning compared to the original need of the sentence thus miscommunication will undoubtedly take place. Hence, it is important to spell words correctly because according to Margaret (1967), not to speak clearly, not to write legibly and not to spell correctly are marks of discourtesy. Bad spelling is just as bad in this request as mumbling over a telephone.

In addition to this, Margaret (1967), added that spelling correctly can expand the skill of writing. Spelling gives the writer confidence in expressing his ideas precisely with no hesitation. She compares the importance of spelling to writing as musical notes to piano playing. Children are only able to write when they have learnt to spell correctly. This is compared to a pianist who can only interpret the music when he has reached the stage of muscular recall and no longer has to go via the medium of visual recognition. Only then he will not be worried by the intricacies of the written score or by the technicalities of fingering and the fingers move in sequence. He can attend not to the symbols but to the sound that emerges. In the same way, the writer who is unworried by the intricacies of spelling can write as freely as he can speak, can expand his ideas and can give examples and figures of speech confidently.

2.2 How Children Learn To Spell

Spelling is more than just stringing letters together into words since hyphen, apostrophe and even the spaces between words have an important role to play (Garney, 1997). The mature concept of word underlies a writer's ability to produce and to spell correctly the vast lexicon of English (Edmund, & James, 1981). Children learn to spell in a gradual process. Whilst children start out by using letter sound correspondences in order to spell, a shift in strategies occurs. Eventually, proficient spellers build up a visual store of word pattern, which can be retrieved automatically or by analogy (Marsh, 1980). This process builds up gradually until the children are ready to store the spelling of words and retrieve the sequence of letters in a correct order when the need arises.

The process of learning how to spell according to Piaget's 'Cognitive Theory' (1967) is an adaptive function mirroring the more inclusive biological paradigm of the adjustment of organism to its environment. The underlying process involves three levels and they are:

- i. assimilation of the new to old
- ii. accommodation of the old to the new
- iii. the achievement of a balance or equilibrium between the internal demands of the system and the constraints of external reality.

Therefore, growth is neither simply a matter of maturation nor one of absorption. It depends upon the interactions of several factors: internal maturation, the action

of objects, social transmission and equilibrium. From these levels, it is believed that to learn any new word, children have to get the right exposure and absorb the word into their system. If their existing system does not have any contradictory information in absorbing the new information, then that information will be accepted into the system.

There are four cognitive stages and they are 'sensorimotor', 'preoperational', 'concrete operational' and transition stage. Since the study is most concerned with children's spelling development, the focus would be more on the last three stages.

i. Sensorimotor

This stage focuses only on the use of any sensorial material to absorb information.

ii. Preoperational Stage

Preoperational stage is when children are bound by or 'center' on the perceptual states of objects. Though they are aware that these objects may be changed from state to state, they are unable to compare them across states without centering on perceptual cues of limited value (Piaget, 1973). Hence where spelling is concerned, children at this stage will rely on letter – name strategy initially, in any circumstances. Children at this stage learn spelling through sound - symbol strategy and move on trying this experience in every situation and in every word they encounter.

iii. Operational Stage

The second stage is the operational stage where, children now can approach problem from one or two different angles. Here, children learn to decenter from the perceptual state and mentally reenact the transformation involved. For the development of spelling, children can spell, using not only letter name strategy but also can take in other alternatives though not extensively. Children at this stage decenter away from strict perceptual correspondence that is away from sound letter relationship.

iv. Transitional Stage

The third stage is when children reach the stage of transition. Here, children can use various strategies in spelling.

Children start off by relying heavily on phoneme grapheme and thus when unsure of the spelling tend to create spelling errors like 'wot' for 'what', 'muny' for 'money' and 'tabul' for 'table'. They try to use their knowledge of phoneme - grapheme correspondences in these circumstances but English words in the main; do not yield to such a strategy. Relationship between sound and printed letters are largely unpredictable (Webster, 1987). This is the cause of spelling errors.

From these explanations, we can conclude that initially children rely on phoneme- grapheme relationship because we hear words before we speak them

and speak them before we write them down. The sound of words precedes the appearance by a very long way (Margaret, 1967). Only after this stage, children move on to other stages to vary the method of spelling.

2.3 Stages Of Spelling Development In Children

There are five stages of spelling development that a child progresses through to become correct speller (Gentry, 1978). The five stages are shown in figure 1:

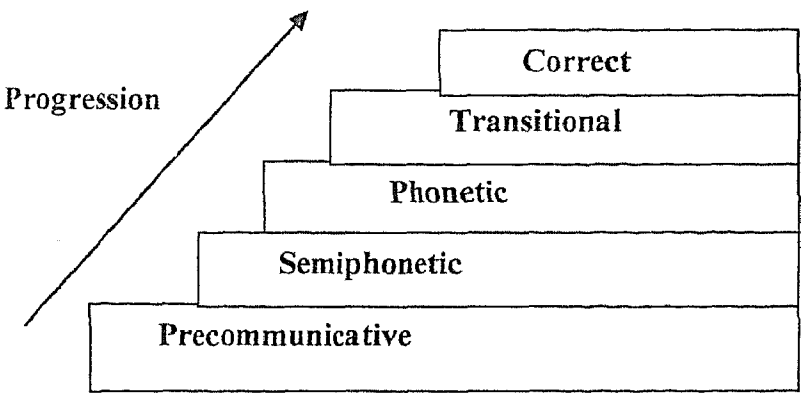


Figure 1
Stages of Spelling Development (Gentry,1978)

i. Precommunicative spelling

Children at this stage use scribbles and symbols from the alphabet to represent words. Gentry (1981) contended that children use letters that are familiar to them for example 'atb' for father. Children use letters that they have been exposed to and the ones that have meaning to them. Gentry (1981), described precommunicative spellers as spellers who:

- a. string letters, scribbles and numbers to write a message.
- b. use left to right progression on the paper.
- c. show no knowledge of phoneme — grapheme correspondences.
- d. use a few letters repeatedly or use a large number of letters in the alphabet.
- e. use both upper and lower case letters but prefer to use upper case letter.

Deidre & Miller (2001), said that the child's spelling may have one or two recognisable letter shapes but the word as a whole is not recognisable. Children at this stage are not able to read their writings back to anyone. The label used for this stage indicates that children are beginning to understand some of the basic concepts of the orthographic system (Gentry, 1982).

ii. Semi phonetic spelling

Children at the semi phonetic stage are starting to use phoneme grapheme correspondence when spelling words. Children use the names of letters they hear. Sometimes they may only write the beginning and the ending letters that they hear. Deidre & Miller (2001) claimed that there might be some influence

from a visual image of the word. Most of the words attempted are from the child's sight vocabulary. Examples are 'mmi' for 'mummy', 'dk' for dog and etc.

Hoskisson and Tompkins (1987) listed characteristics of a semi phonetic speller as spellers who use:

- a. letters to represent sounds which indicate an awareness of the alphabetic principle.
- b. one – two – three letter spellings for an entire word.
- c. the letter name strategy when spelling words.

iii. Phonetic spelling

Children use a systematic approach when spelling words. In general, children usually represent phonetically all the sound features in a word. In the phonetic spelling stage, children omit the preconsonantal nasals in their spellings but not in their speech for example 'stap' for 'stamp'. Gentry (1984) added that their spellings do not look like English spelling. The characteristics listed under this stage are that:

- a. spellers represent all the surface sound features of a word in the spellings.
- b. spellers develop particular spellings for long and short vowels and past tense markers.
- c. spellers select letters on the basis of sound, without regard for appropriate English letter sequence or other conventions.

iv. Transitional Spelling

Children write spellings that are the characteristics of English spelling for the first time (Gentry, 1984). In this stage, children start to rely on the visual and morphological representations and leave behind their dependence on phonetic spellings. Hence, vowels become more visible in their writings.

The characteristics of transitional spellers are, they:

- a. adhere to English orthography's basic conventions.
- b. add morphological and visual information in addition to phonics in spelling.
- c. may include all appropriate letters in a word but they reverse some of them.
- d. use alternative spellings for the same sounds but do not fully understand the condition governing the use.
- e. use more correctly spelled words.

v. Correct spelling

When spellers have established a solid foundation of the basic rule of English orthography, they are labeled as correct spellers (Gentry, 1982). Correct does not mean that students spell every word correctly. However, they spell a large number of words correctly. In this stage, students are still experimenting with the words.

The correct spellers:

- a. use the basic rules of English orthography
- b. extend word structure knowledge by accurately spelling affixes, contractions, compound words and homonyms.
- c. think of alternative spellings for the same sound and can visually tell when a word does not 'look right'.
- d. continue to refine the ability to use silent consonants and to double consonants before adding a suffix.

Correct spellers have good, strong foundation of the spelling systems and they are ready for formal instructions, the learning of English Language as a subject in school. Some students progress through the stages at a quicker pace and others may be slower (Gentry, 1982).

2.4 Spelling Errors Of Children

In Read's (1971) study about spelling errors among 20 children from the ages of three and a half to six, he made four major conclusions. First, he found that children's spelling errors are more in the usage of vowels than for consonants (e.g gryn for green). Second, the tense – lax (short – long) vowel pairs that have similar places in articulation tend to be spelled alike (e.g rile for really). Third, children tend to omit nasals from spellings when they are followed by a consonant (e.g agre for angry). Fourth, children omit the vowels in the schwa position and are spelled with the single letter 'm', 'n', 'l', 'r' (e.g. litl for little).

When spelling vowels, children usually represent the vowels using a single letter rather than digraphs and with a few exceptions, children used the six letters; a, e, i, o, u and y as described in the following:

i. Long – short vowels.

Children use short vowels to represent long vowels. Therefore their vowel representations are usually incorrect. Examples are, ‘bat’ for ‘bait’ and ‘dak’ for ‘dark’. Children also use phonetic relationships to pair short with long vowels.

ii. Omission of nasals

Children omit nasal sounds that appear before consonants. They use ‘eg’ and ‘ig’ in place of ‘ing’ endings for examples ‘moveg’ for ‘morning’ and ‘playig’ for ‘playing’.

iii. Schwa

Children also omit the vowel in the schwa sound as shown by the word ‘tigr’ and ‘litl’ since the consonant represents the sound they hear. Read (1975) extended his research by analysing the writings of 32 children. Children used their phonological knowledge in order to ‘invent’ spellings for words. They were making more or less similar types of spelling errors.

Stauffer (1976) conducted a longitudinal study of the language experience approach as it was applied to children from grades one to six. The study was on a written composition by first grade children. The cleverness of their

misspellings was seen here when the spelling for ‘built’ was spelt as ‘bilt’. They did not know how to spell ‘built’ but they know ‘bill’ so they spell the former as ‘bilt’. Of course, this is not how English spelling works but logically and phonetically it seemed to make good sense (Stauffer, 1976).

Children’s spelling errors can be categorized into 15 categories (Anderson & Lapp, 1988; Burns & Broman, 1983; DeHaven, 1983; Hennings, 1986; Norton, 1985; Rubin, 1985). Categories, definitions and examples are shown below in table 1.

Table 1
Categories, Definitions and Examples of Spelling errors

No.	Categories	Definitions	Examples
1.	Pronunciation	Students shorten or lengthen the words, substituted graphemes or shorten suffixes.	Spose for suppose
2.	Vowel pattern rule	Students used wrong vowel digraph or misused Silent ‘e’.	Speech for speech
3.	Homonym	Students used wrong homonyms for the meaning intended.	Main for mane

Table 1, continued

4.	Compounding	Students separated compound words or combined words which were not compound words.	A way for away and alot for a lot
5.	Plural and Possessive	Students omitted the apostrophe in possessives and added apostrophe in plurals.	Moms for mom's and make's for makes
6.	Omission of Pronounced letter	Students omitted a letter that was pronounced.	Aross for across
7.	Double Consonants	Students doubled a consonant when it was not needed or failed to double a consonant when needed.	Untill for until and peper for pepper
8.	Insertion of a Letter	Students inserted a letter Which was not needed.	Ugly for ugly
9.	Reversal of letters	Students reversed letters in Words.	Croner for corner
10.	Omission of Silent Letters	Students omitted silent letters which were not heard in the pronunciation of the word.	Vally for valley

Table 1. continued

11.	Affix	Students used wrong Prefix or suffix.	Sking for skiing
12.	Phonetic	Students spelled the words as it sounded	Brot for brought
13.	Vowel Substitution	Students substituted one vowel for another, used incorrect vowel to represent the schwa sound or substituted a vowel for a consonant.	Wint for went
14.	Semiphonetic	Students used several letters chosen phonetically to represent a word.	Peda for party
15.	Consonant Substitution	Students substituted one consonant for another or consonant was substituted for a vowel.	Sinch for cinch and fell for feel

According to Corder (1967), spelling errors are inevitable and the process of making errors as a language device also suggested that these spelling errors provide evidence of the language system they are using. They are using some

system although it is not yet the right system. This is a good indication that the children are following a system and progressing through slowly and experimenting words through trials and errors.

Read's (1986) research provided the foundation for the research done by Henderson & Beers (1971) in which he found that children progress through spelling stages as they learn to spell.

2.5. English Orthography

In the language in which there is nearly a one to one correspondence between a sound and its letter representation, the task of learning to spell is quite simple (Hanna, 1971). Hence one would only need:

- a. to determine which sounds are contained in a word and their order
- b. to know what grapheme represents each sound and
- c. to write the grapheme in the same order in which the sound occurs in the word.

However, the method of spelling in English spelling system is not that regular. For example, when spelling the word 'pretty' or even the word 'friend', the spelling is not similar to the pronunciation because children would spell 'priti' for pretty and 'fren' for friend as children are quite used to phoneme - grapheme. Here, there is a contrary to the letter – phoneme association. This creates a lot of confusion among the children. This task is even more difficult for children who

are weak and unable to master the correct spelling of the English words. They will have difficulty to encode and decode the words. Acquiring the skill of spelling is a gradual process that cannot be hurried. Orthographic knowledge is acquired systematically and not haphazardly. Children know how sounds are articulated and use that knowledge in their early spelling attempts as noted by Read (1971). According to the alphabetic principles, one to one correspondence exist between phonemes and their graphic representations; however the English spelling system does not follow this pattern and as a result of this, the spelling system is viewed as irregular and confusing (Bloomfield, 1933 and Pei, 1967).

These irregularities in English orthography create problems for beginners in spelling the words and also in writing them and result in spelling errors. English spelling is so indirect in the relationship between sounds and spelling. There are many instances where the patterning of letters creates written forms that have only an indirect relationship with the pronunciation. These include not only so – called silent letters which may have some symbolic value but do not directly correspond to a phoneme and also a pattern of sequential arrangements (Yallop, 1995) for example ‘ballet’ or ‘people’.

The irregularities in English spelling system occur because the 26 letters in English alphabet are used singly or in combination to represent the 40 or 50 phonemes used in speech. The combinations or spelling options used to represent these phonemes are numerous; in fact, more than 500 combinations are

used to spell phonemes. For example long / e / has been spelled in 14 ways (Horn, 1957). This is where the complexities of the English Language arise.

The English orthography suffers from a surfeit of optional graphic symbols to represent the phonemes of the language. As a result of this, many phonemes can be spelled in several ways, for example, the grapheme 'c' does not consistently represent a single phoneme. It may represent the phoneme /s/ as in city or /k/ as in case, depending on the letters which follow it. The grapheme 'q' does not represent a sound; therefore 'q' and 'u' are paired to represent /kw/ as in quick and queen.

Stubbs (1980) who observed that fish could be spelled as 'ghoti' in the English orthographic system. His rationale for this spelling was that the 'gh' represented /f/ as in rough, and the 'o' represented /i/ as in women and 'ti' represented /sh/ as in vacation. This example is outrageous but was used to show the irregularities in the English Spelling System.

Hence, the beginners in English language learning find English orthography as irregular since they have to choose the correct grapheme option for a phoneme. This is to be done among the several possible graphemic options for a particular sound and to encode any information that the decoder has. He may be able to determine which grapheme represents the word he deciphers. For example 'o' in 'go' is not similar to 'o' in 'women'. Other examples are 'bough' – two phonemes can be spelled in several ways as 'ou' as in 'out' or 'ow' as in 'now', 'e'

ough' as 'bough', 'u' as in 'through' and ' o ' as in although. Further complication occurs in the combination of 'ou' and 'gh' for different vowel consonant combination as in 'of' and 'uf'.

According to Hanna (1971), the mastery of graphic symbols is needed to set forth speech in writing – encoding or spelling and the ability to translate written or printed graphemes into the oral forms that they represent – decoding on reading.

It would be safe and reliable if the English language were entirely and unexceptionally phonemically regular. The English Language is largely but not wholly phonemically regular (Margaret, 1967).

Spelling is transferring knowledge and information from the known to the unknown and before a word is spelled as it is heard or imagined. If clues are given in an unknown word that has to be spelt, they are given in the form of sound but the same sound can be written in many different ways. For example, rice can be written as 'rise' or even rais'.

The alphabetic principle requires that each phoneme in a language shall have its own unique graphic counterparts and from the examples shown, it looks as though the English orthography is very inconsistent and that students need to memorize each and every word. Since English language orthography is so irregular in many different ways, children's attempts at spelling are thwarted at almost every turn. The irregularities of spelling in English can be traced by

studying the historical development of its spelling. It reveals that many interesting reasons have determined the way English words are spelled today: long abandoned pronunciation, blunders of poor scholars who wrote their language in a haphazard fashion and errors made by printers and their presses. The borrowing of words from other languages has also complicated spelling, particularly when pronunciation has been anglicized (Hanna, 1963).

Bloomfield (1933), believes spelling corresponds to the surface or spoken level of language and there is a fair degree of regularity between speech and print at this surface level. 'Word families' such as hat/ fat/ mat/ and cake/ lake/ brake/ illustrate this regularity. Words that do not follow such predictable patterns are deemed irregular. Bloomfield suggested that beginning instructions should take advantage of the regularity and fully acquaint the beginning readers with these highly predictable sounds to spelling correspondence while postponing the irregular until a later time.

Chomsky and Halle (1968) claimed that English is not that irregular. According to them, English orthography is nearly optimal for its purposes. There was more regularity in the spelling system, however one must look beyond the phoneme grapheme correspondence itself. A deeper lexical base level must be examined in order to find the regularity that exists in the English alphabet. The regularity of English Language can be looked at from two different angles and they are from the phonological theory and morphophonemical theory.

The English Orthography can be analysed from two perspectives and they are from the 'sound form' or the 'phoneme' and from the 'written form' or the grapheme.

i. Phonological Theory

Chomsky and Halle (1968) provided a phonological theory for the English spelling system. When suffixes or prefixes are added to any word in English, the sound or the phoneme of the new word is not similar to the original word or the root word. The pronunciation changes according to the new conditions. So the phoneme grapheme relationship is not rigid. For example, the word 'sane' if added with the suffix 'ty' will produce 'sanity' which shows the shift from the long vowel sound to the short vowel sound. There would be one lexical spelling for sane and a second for sanity. Hence the relationship between words would be ignored and each word is viewed as a separate entity.

ii. Morphophonemical Theory

Venezky (1967, 1970) who created the morphophonemic theory contended that the position, environment and overt markers determined the spelling of the base form of words in a word. Venezky (1967) and Weir (1968) examined the structure of English orthography. They analysed the spellings and pronunciations of the 20000 most commonly used English words.

Weir (1968) later concluded that there were two basic sets of spelling patterns in English Language. The first set contains the classes of letters and the letters that

can be sequenced together. For example, a word could not begin with the letters 'zt' and a word with the combination of 'mtpq' would not be found. Another example is the grapheme 'b'. 95 percent of the time it is in the beginning and middle position. While final 'b' is not very common and a final 'bb' is even less common. The grapheme 'b' is paired with 'r' and 'l' to form the initial cluster of 'bl' and 'br' (e.g. block and brick) and the ending clusters – 'ib' and 'rb' (e.g. bulb and curb).

The second set of spelling patterns relates spelling to sound. Phoneme – grapheme correspondences and morphemic boundaries are addressed and one example is the word 'uphill'. In the pronunciation of this word, 'ph' is not pronounced as /f/ because of the morpheme boundary between 'up' and 'hill'. Venezky (1967, 1970) concluded that 'ph' corresponded to /f/ when it was used in a single word; however when it is used in compound words, 'ph' is treated separately as the grapheme 'p' and 'h'. In some words, both the morphemic and phonemic qualities are used. For example, when a consonant is doubled before adding a suffix (e.g. cut – cutting) both qualities are used.

Venezky (1967, 1970) further examined the use of orthographic markers. Markers are letters that are not pronounced but influence the pronunciation of the other letters in the word. An example is the word 'ride'. The 'e' is the marker and is silent but affects the sound grapheme 'i' in the word. Another example is the word 'load', 'a' is the marker and it affects the sound of the grapheme 'o'. A

word never ends with a 'v' in the English spelling system so thereafter an 'e' is added and used as a marker (e.g. hav – have).

Venezky (1967, 1970) also examined the influence of vowels in the English orthographic system. He contended when vowels were viewed from the point of spelling to sound, they revealed no regularity. However, when morphemic structure and consonant environment were evaluated, one major pattern emerged. Venezky concluded there were still exceptions but they were not the rules. In the major pattern for primary vowels, Venezky listed examples for both free (long) and checked (short) vowels (e.g. mate – mat; athlete – athletic, site – sit; rude – rudder).

Another influence of vowels in English orthographic system is 'r'. R controlled vowel spellings depend on the environment following 'r'. Venezky (1970) listed three cases:

- a. 'r' followed by a vowel unit and then followed by another vowel unit or juncture (e.g. adore : bureau)
- b. 'r' followed by a vowel unit and then by a consonant or double 'rr' (e.g. arid : borrow) and
- c. 'r' and then a consonant or juncture (e.g. bird ; gargle)

The spelling patterns Venezky (1970) constructed help to answer questions about the English alphabet and show it to be more systematic than some believed. The

patterns help to show that spelling is more than just phoneme – grapheme correspondences.

Chomsky and Halle (1968) and Venezky (1967, 1970) viewed English orthographic system from two positions. However, they agreed that the system was more regular and orderly than many believed. While Chomsky and Halle viewed the system from the deeper, lexical level that is associated with word relationships and similarities, Venezky saw the spelling system as patterns with each phoneme and grapheme in relation to its position, environment and overt markers.

Children need to have experience with spelling words before they are able to see beyond the phoneme – grapheme correspondences (Chomsky and Halle, 1968 and Venezky 1967, 1970). This is possible if children are given much visual experience of words before the individual can select the right one of many possible alternatives for any unphonetic or phonetic but irregular English words (Margaret, 1967). The theories of phonemic and morphophonemic in English have clearly shown that spelling is not merely phoneme – grapheme correspondence and the spelling system is not rigid but flexible according to various variables. So the pronunciation of a word will not always help to spell words because some words do not have a one – to – one correspondence as in words like ‘plague’ and ‘choir’ and others. When children experiment with spelling words, they become more aware of the variety in English orthography system instead of analysing each word as an individual unit (Venezky, 1970).

2.6 Metalinguistic Competencies

Holden (1972) was one of the first to define metalinguistic ability as the ability to use language to discuss and analyse language. Read (1986) may have been the first researcher to use interviews as a research tool in the field of reading. Read (1986), found that students in the first year of school did not understand the reading process and did not know the concept- letters, words, numbers or sounds. The students did not know that written language had meaning. Dyson (1989) set up a writing center in a classroom so she could interview and observe kindergarten students as they wrote. The students were not required to come to the centre but she extended an invitation during their free time to 'come and write'. Students were free to pick what they wanted to write. Dyson found students started by drawing pictures and they put letters to go with them, but they did not relate what they were doing at the writing center. While Dyson did not have an interview schedule, her questions came in response to the children's activities. For example, she would ask children how they knew the words they had used. One girl responded that she used to sound the words out but did not like reading. When asked why she did not like reading, the girl replied that it was not fun. In order to ensure that child does not talk during reading, Dyson changed her line of questioning to how the child knew what the words looked like and the child responded that she made up what they looked like. Dyson found out that by interacting with students, they were expanding their writings and they were asking more questions.

Radebaugh (1985) interviewed 17 third and fourth graders, nine were identified as good spellers and eight were identified as poor spellers. Students were asked to:

- a. write two easy words.
- b. write an easy sentence.
- c. spell words in a sentence that would be difficult.

Students were asked to explain their thoughts as they wrote. All students could explain their spelling strategies, however students found it easier to explain their options for difficult words than for easy words. Poor spellers spelled out words letter - by- letter while the good spellers broke words into parts. At the same time, good spellers used visual imaginary while poor spellers did not give this as a spelling strategy.

Students' explanations were examined as to the strategy they used for their spelling. Radebaugh (1985) listed 5 strategies, students used to spell easy words and seven strategies used to spell hard words. The 5 easy strategies were a) memorized words b) meaning was visualized c) whole word visualized d) used small words within a word, and e) sounded it out. The seven hard strategies were a) thought of spelling for segments of a word b) sounded it out c) setting for word was visualized d) used comparisons e) small words within larger words f) spelling rules were used and g) contended they knew the word.

Hitchcock (1989) had interviewed 25 students from grades 1-5 to examine their metacognitive awareness of the spelling strategies they have used in their spellings. Students' explanations were classified into five categories: a) phonetic, in which students sounded the word out in segments for example 'leped' for 'leaped' b) strategic, in which students explained the spelling by using comparisons, smaller words or homonyms for example 'ant' for 'aunt' and 'applyances' for 'appliances' c) self – correction, in which students realized the mistake and corrected the spelling or by questioning, they knew there was another option and corrected for example 'tackled' for 'tackled' d) denial, in which students contended they had spelled the word correctly and could not see another spelling option; and e) unknown, in which students were unable to give reason for their spelling option for example 'tria' for 'trip'.

Gable, Hendrickson and Meeks (1988) said that teachers needed to see the relationship between the types of spelling errors students make and how to remediate the problem. The results from the interview would be indicators to the teacher of the children's strength.

2.7 Second Language Acquisition And Spelling

The complexities of learning the language are greater for children whose mother tongue is not English. Not only does the English orthography create a problem to the beginners in spelling but also the learning of English as a second language.

The target group in this research uses Bahasa Melayu, Tamil or Chinese as their mother tongue and none of them use English at home. English is only used in school when the subject is being taught. Second language learning is the study of how learners learn an additional language after they have acquired their mother tongue (Ellis, 1994). There are other problems that these children encounter in their attempt in spelling written words. Learners are usually more conscious of the grammar and structure when acquiring a second language as compared to their mother tongue. We have all been speaking our native language since we were between the ages of one and two but we have done so with little or no conscious thought on our part. Many of us would find it difficult or even impossible to explain what we do when we speak our mother tongue (Finocchiaro, 1974).

As learning the first language was done with no conscious awareness of its grammar pattern, they are just internalized in a learner's system. One does not realize that there is a grammar to a language until one begins learning another language. So to these children, despite all the problems in learning new rules and regulations, they too have to spell words correctly. Hence English is a second language to these children and learning a second language does not come tumbling from the lips of a non - native speaker. It is an uphill task. They have to grope desperately for words that they barely know. They have to perform mental gymnastic trying to remember bizarre grammatical rules. The emphasis is although students have very little to say but that little bit should be said correctly (Nair, 2000).

According to Margaret (1967), spelling conventions of one language are quite different from the spelling conventions of another. Children struggle through one stage to another to develop spelling abilities in English. In learning the sound system of a second language, one finds sounds that are physically similar to those of the native language are similarly distributed and learning of such phonemes occur by simply transferring without difficulty. On the other hand, one also finds sounds that are not part of the sound system of the native language are distributed differently and learning of these sounds occur more slowly (Lado, 1957).

Examples will be words like ‘pencil’ which is similar to ‘pensil’ in Bahasa Melayu , ‘bag’ which sounds similar to ‘beg’ and words like ‘mynah’, ‘book’ and ‘teacher’ similar to Tamil sound representations. Children when facing difficulties in writing or spelling out words, tend to transfer knowledge of their native language to the spelling of a second language.

Overall, this chapter tackles the spelling errors from few facades which are from the point of children’s cognitive readiness, their stages of spelling development, English orthography, English as second language and the metalinguistic awareness of children in explaining their spelling errors.