

Research Analysis of Spelling Errors in Reprint Requests Addressed to my 7-letter Surname, Onuigbo

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Abstract

As there is a great deal of interest in spelling errors, their careful quantification is not a mere exercise in precision. Therefore, this article examines the misspellings of my surname, Onuigbo, which is a nonsense word to many foreigners who requested for my reprints. The analysis of 76 errors revealed five possible classes, namely, substitution, deletion, transposition, interposition, and amalgamation of letters. These are systematic and seem indicative of inherent rather than trivial variations. In all probability, an appreciation of these basic elements of spelling errors will lead to corrective teaching and effective writing.

Keywords: *Writing; Spelling; Errors; Foreign name; Reprint requests*

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Introduction

The rate of change in all aspects of human life is due, as Kincaid (1976) hypothesized, to four unique innovations, all dealing with communications, namely, the spoken language, the written language, the printing press, and the electronic computer. Indeed, Kronick (1984) considered that the invention of writing was probably the most important technological advance that occurred in communication. Hence, as Finucci and her colleagues (1982) affirmed, "Careful quantification of reading skills is not simply an arid exercise in precision or a trivial refinement".

Hitherto, writing and spelling problems appear to have been studied greatly in terms of disease processes like cleft palate (Kommers and Sullivan 1979), linguistic disorder in dyslexia (Russell 1982), developmental verbal dyspraxia (Snowling and Stackhouse 1983), dynamic spelling alexia (Homer and Massey 1986), retardation (Share, Silva and Adler 1987), and astigmatism (Enoch, Heitz and Lakshminarayanan 1988). Moreover, emphasis seems to be placed on childhood difficulties (Hanna, Hodges and Hanna 1971; Vernon 1971).

In this context, Zamora (1980) dealt with detection and correction of spelling errors in a large data base. Therefore, I propose to consider another dimension. It is by classifying the spelling errors of writers who are both normal and adult with reference to reprint requests. I had previously used one example of such a spelling error to detect its source from the printing industry itself (Onuigbo 1982).

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Investigation

During the period from 1970 to 1981 inclusive, I published 68 articles on cancer, medical history, and epidemiology and received 2,049 reprint requests from outside Nigeria. My seven letter name, Onuigbo, was misspelled in 76 (3.7%) instances. The name itself is derived from the Igbo ethnic group, in whose language, as Iverson (1983) wrote, there is a voiceless implosive!

The accompanying Table shows that there were 20 varieties of my misspelled surname. Importantly, the errors are classifiable under 5 headings:

Substitution: This was the commonest error. A letter was substituted for one of the correct seven. In as many as half of the cases (Serial Numbers 1 and 4), b was the affected letter.

Deletion: In this group, a letter was deleted thereby contracting the name to six letters. Curiously, b was affected most.

Transposition: In this class, two neighboring letters changed places, the seven letter structure remaining. Only in 2 of the 19 instances was b involved.

Interposition: An additional letter was interposed between two, increasing the name to eight letters. Surprisingly, five of the six instances were related to b.

Amalgamation: In a single instance (Serial Number 20), the letter m seems to be due to the joining of n and u.

Discussion

My approach to analyzing spelling errors seems to be a novel one. Certainly, it differs from the standard set by Hanna, Hodges and Hanna (1971).

The misspelling of names was one of the three barriers to communication observed by Gammon (1980). This barrier should come down. As in the compositorial errors noted by Roth (1983), general inattention and downright carelessness are probably at its root. Therefore, it behoves teachers and learners to recognize the above basic classes of such errors.

There are some interesting generalizations apart from these classifications. Thus, the last letter, o, was throughout not written erroneously, while its capital, which was the first letter, was mistaken thrice. Likewise, b stood out in 4 out of the 5 classes, thereby becoming research worthy. In this connection, Vernon (1971) did point out that "there is a general tendency to confuse the reversible letters 'b' and 'd'". However, d is not present in the Onuigbo surname.

Russel (1982) mentioned the historical importance of the work of Pringle Morgan who, in 1896, noted the severe spelling errors of a boy, Percy. The lad wrote his name as "Precy" and English as "Englis." These instanced errors are classifiable as examples of transposition and deletion respectively.

The single amalgamation type, namely, Omigbo, has entered the world literature! I had written about appendicitis in the *South African Journal of Surgery* (Onuigbo 1977) and it was cited in the *British Medical Journal* by de Dombal and Hedley (1979) as work done by Omigbo. Surprisingly, Walker and Segal (1979), writing from South Africa itself, perpetuated the error by also quoting the nonexistent Omigbo! Accordingly, spelling errors are important not only in literary but also in scientific circles. This conclusion is bolstered by the citation of my work on cancer (Onuigbo 1962) as that of Onuiebo in the contribution made by Hazra, Mullins and Lott (1972) in the *Johns Hopkins Medical Journal*. In this instance, substitution, occurred, e taking the place of g.

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Regarding their work on children with developmental verbal dyspraxia, Snowling and Stackhouse (1983) remarked that, in their spelling of nonsense words, errors occurred more frequently on final consonants than on initial consonants. In my own analysis of adult requesters' errors, the respective totals of consonants b and n were each three. Such comparisons are open to research which will be richly fruitful with a more clearly complicated surname like that of the one author listed last (Enoch, Heits and Lakshminarayanan 1988). Indeed, as I pointed out elsewhere (Onuigbo 1982), the data from such surnames will be particularly numerous if research papers attract hundreds or thousands of requests and the receivers do not consign them to waste paper baskets.

Conclusion

The author's seven-letter surname served as a foreign or nonsense word for research purposes. The results can be verified by other authors. This will add to the sum of human knowledge in the intriguing field of spelling and its difficulties. In all probability, classification of spelling errors can lead also to both corrective teaching and effective writing.

Serial Number	Misspelled Surname	Individual Requests	Total Requests	Classification
1	Onuigbo	13		
2	Omuigbo	8		
3	Onnigbo	3		
4	Onuiglo	2		
5	Osuigbo	1	30	Substitution
6	Qnuigbo	1		
7	Aunigbo	1		
8	Unuigbo	1		
9	Onuibo	12		
10	Onigbo	4	20	Deletion
11	Onugbo	3		
12	Onuibo	1		
13	Oniugbo	13		
14	Onugibo	4	19	Transposition
15	Onuibgo	2		
16	Onuigblo	2		
17	Onuignbo	2		
18	Onuighbo	1	6	Interposition
19	Oniuigbo	1		
20	Omigbo	1	1	Amalgamation

Table of Spelling Errors

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