



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SIDAAMU-AFOO INTERFERENCE IN LEARNING WRITING IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF GRADE NINE STUDENTS OF SELECTED HIGH SCHOOLS AT ARBEGONA WOREDA, SIDAMA ZONE, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research was to study Sidaamu-afloo interference in learning writing in English. To be specific, the study was intended to identify the aspects of the language interference and to describe the frequency of the interference of the aspects. It is a descriptive type of research. Three secondary schools found in Arbegona Woreda were purposively selected. From each of these schools, one section of grade nine was randomly selected to give a total of 176 study participants. Data were collected by a writing test and analyzed by using contrastive analysis and error analysis approaches; moreover, the data were put in tables and quantified and changed into percentile. The findings indicated that aspects such as L1 (Sidaamu-afloo) induced spelling errors, structural interference, lexical interference, wrong word use, and omission errors were committed by the students' English language writing. The kind of transfer that dominated was spelling, structure, and omission errors. Accordingly, recommendations have been made.

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INTRODUCTION

The English language is a popular lingua franca. The people of the European Union member countries, for instance, use it besides their own languages. Moreover, international and continental summits are held mainly in English, and it has become the predominant language of the print and electronic media across the globe and has taken the leading position as a language of science and technology that many of the academic papers are published. The introduction of the English language into Ethiopia dates back to the introduction of modern education into the country around the turn of 20th century (Dejenie, 1990). The English language has played different roles (as a subject and medium of instruction) at different regimes in different levels of Ethiopian education. It is official taught in different levels with the aim of helping students develop macro skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and grammar and vocabulary as well. As stated above, writing is one of the four macro language skills that students learn. On a language teaching and learning process, providing students with opportunity to engage in variety of writing experiences can enhance their ability to learn the

subject matter of the course and to communicate their knowledge to others. Students can use writing for variety of purposes like to: communicate information to particular audience, learn about certain subjects, express themselves and to assess values in relation to the material they are studying. Specifically when it comes to academic setting, students' writing skill is directly related to their academic achievement. For instance, students those who have good writing skill can express their idea in a clear way and learn more than those who have poor writing skill (Brown, 2000). The nature of writing can be defined as both physical and mental activity that is aimed to express and impress (Nunan, 2003). It is categorized as the physical activity because a writer is required to be able to do the act of committing words or ideas. On the other hand, as a mental work the activities of writing focus more on the act of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express and organize them into clear statements and paragraphs that enable a reader to understand the ideas of the written work. In addition to this, Brow (2000) also states that writing is the written products of thinking, drafting, and revising that require specialized skills on how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers and rhetorical

conventions coherently into a written text, how to revise text for clearer meaning and how to edit text for appropriate grammar and how to produce a final product. In short, some stages of the text composition proposed by Brown involve the act of physical and mental, for example how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, etc. Furthermore, writing is also seen as a cognitive activity. With regard to this, Wolfersberger (2003) states that the process of writing involves three main cognitive activities: involving text interpretation, reflection, and text production. These activities are not only applied in the drafting process but also in the revising process. The first cognitive activity of writing is text interpretation. It is the process of creating internal representations derived from linguistics and graphics input, while reflection is the process of creating new representation ideas from the existing ones in the process of text interpretation. Text production is the last process in which new written linguistics' forms are produced. Nunan (2003) also states that writing is a complex cognitive process which requires the writer to perform control of a number of variables simultaneously both in the sentence level and beyond the sentence level. Content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, letter formation are variables that must be controlled by the writer in the sentence level. On the other hand, beyond the sentence level, the writers must be able to organize and integrate ideas into cohesive and coherent paragraphs. Being able to maximize the cognitive aspects in writing will lead the writer to deliver the clear message to the readers.

From its objective, writing is viewed as a means of communication which is commonly used to express and impress (Nunan, 2003). This means that when writers compose writing works, they commonly have two main purposes. Firstly, the intention or desires to express the ideas or feeling they have in minds. In other words, the written text is used to communicate a particular message. Secondly, the text is written to communicate ideas to the readers or audience. That is why writers need to have ability to communicate and express ideas in certain ways depending on the level of complexity. In conclusion, writing is a productive skill that must be learnt and mastered by the English learners that involves the process of thinking, drafting, and revising. Writing is a means of communication that enables students to synthesize the knowledge they have into an acceptable text that is appropriate with the English writing conventions, such as, using appropriate content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and letter formation and the like. At high school level, students are expected that they have understanding about basic writing conventions. For example, they can write error free paragraphs as well as short essays. Their text should be free from different errors, like wrong word order, misplaced modifiers, misplaced or omitted prepositions, tense, etc. Therefore, at high school level students are expected to write clear and attractive text. In an attempt to ensure well writing skills among the English language learners, many teachers place emphasis on writing problems in syntax, lexis and discourse aspects and tend to neglect the problem of students' native language and culture interfering with their foreign language writing (Latiff and Bakar, 2007). L1 interference is a crucial factor to consider in a second/foreign language writing instruction. L1 interference refers to the influence of native language structures on students' performance and development in the target language (Hashim, 1992).

When second/foreign language learners are writing in the target language, some of their L1 characteristics show up in their writing. Many sentences that they write are more acceptable in their native language than in a second/foreign language due to direct translation from L1 into the second/foreign language. In Ethiopia, there are more than 80 languages, and Sidaamu-afoo is one of these languages. Millions of Sidaama people spread across the Sidaama Zone speak it as their mother tongue. Sidaamu-afoo is the fifth populous language in Ethiopia (Kawachi, 2007, p.20). It is from a Cushitic language family and use Latin script for writing. The language is witnessing a rapid standardization and development in the last two decades. It has been used in many domains since 1991. In education, it is the medium of instruction for the first cycle in primary education. In the second cycle of primary education, and in the high school, including preparatory schools, Sidaamu-afoo is taught as a subject.

Statement of the problem: Despite the fact that the students are exposed to the English language since early ages at primary schools, at the end of the secondary level, they are still unable to write adequately in English. They continue to fail to master the basics of English writing skills. Through informal observations and discussions with colleagues, the researchers understood that students are even poor in writing some English words with correct spelling. In addition to this, they are unable to write structurally correct sentences and paragraphs. To be specific, the Sidaamu-afoo speaking students mix their Sidaamu-afoo knowledge in the English language writing. For example, the learners spell some words according to their mother tongue orthographic system and construct sentences that are structurally from the target language. This is may be due to the interferences of the L1, and it should be studied. Therefore, the researchers were inspired to study the interference of Sidaamu-afoo in learning writing in English.

In a country like Ethiopia where the English language is used as medium of instruction and one of the disciplines from primary to higher levels, there may be interferences of native languages. There were studies conducted to survey the interferences and using of L1 in English classes. For example, Owu-Ewie and Lomotey (2016) conducted a study on Akan interference in English writing. The study identified that the Akan interference error committed in the writing of Akan students were transliteration and wrong pronoun use. Kenenissa (2003) tried to see that Oromo language was used by English language teachers and their students in English language classes. He found out that both teachers and students have positive attitude towards the use of L1 (Oromo language). Another domestic work was conducted by Nuru (2008) in selected secondary schools in Addis Ababa. It was a survey of L1 use in EFL classroom. He concluded that L1 has pedagogical support in the English language classes. Another study conducted by Fitsum (2013) attempted to investigate the use of Wolaita language in grade five English classes. He found that teachers and students have positive attitude towards the use of L1. Still another study by Abiy (2013) discovered that the students' L1 experience in writing and their threshold L2 proficiency are significant predictors of their L2 writing. Similarly, students' reading skill in an L2 has impacts on their effective L2 writing. However, these studies are conducted on the use of L1 in EFL classes and the researchers did not get any study conducted on the

interference of Sidaamu-afoo in learning writing in English. Thus, this study was intended to explore the interference of Sidaamu-afoo in learning writing in English.

Objectives of the Study

General objective: The general objective of this study was to explore the Sidaamu-afoo interference in students' learning of writing in English.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- Identify the aspects of Sidaamu-afoo interference that occur in learning writing in English.
- Describe the most frequently committed L1 interference aspects by the Sidaamu-afoo speaking students learning English as a foreign language.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Research design: In order to achieve the objectives of this study, descriptive research design was employed. According to Best and Kahn (2004:123), "descriptive study is concerned with condition or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident, or trends that are developing." The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present.

Research setting, study population and sampling techniques: This study was conducted at three selected secondary schools, namely Bocheessa, Sumbura and Shafamo high schools found in Arbegona Woreda of Sidaama Zone in South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State of Ethiopia. The people of this woreda speak Sidaamu-afoo as their mother tongue. The only opportunity that students get to use Amharic and English language is in schools. The study population of this research was grade nine students of three selected secondary schools in Arbegona Woreda. In 2017/18 academic year, there were 880 grade nine students at the selected high schools. All the students speak Sidaamu-afoo as their mother tongue. Arbegona Woreda(District) was randomly selected for this study. The three secondary schools were selected by using purposive sampling technique because the researchers wanted to collect data from monolingual (only Sidaamu-afoo users at home) research participants (if they were bilingual or multilingual, it would have been a daunting task to study whether the interference errors were from Sidaamu-afoo or from another language). Three sections (one section from each school) were randomly selected to give a total of 176 study participants.

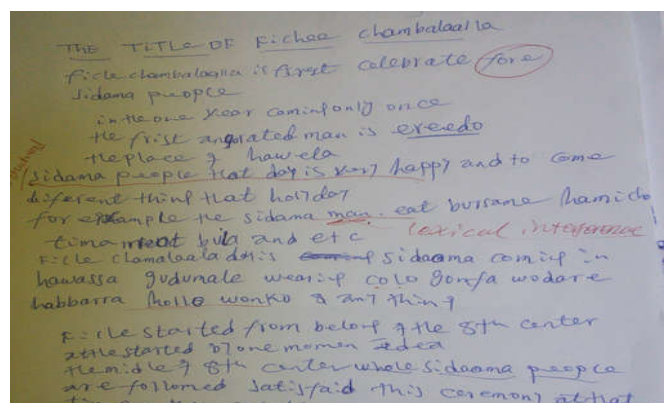
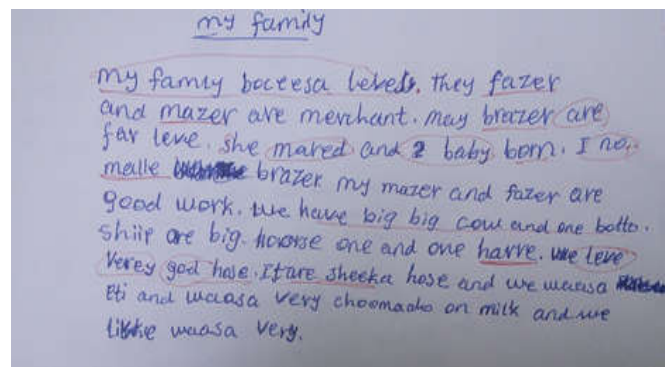
Instrument and procedure of data collection: The instrument of data collection employed in this study was writing test. The test was intended to obtain data on Sidaamu-afoo interference in learning writing in English. The study participants were asked to write a paragraph or an essay by choosing a topic among the topics given. Prior to administering the test, constructive comments were obtained from the researchers' most senior colleagues concerning the topics, instruction, and time allotted. As far as the administration of the test is concerned, a conducive environment was chosen.

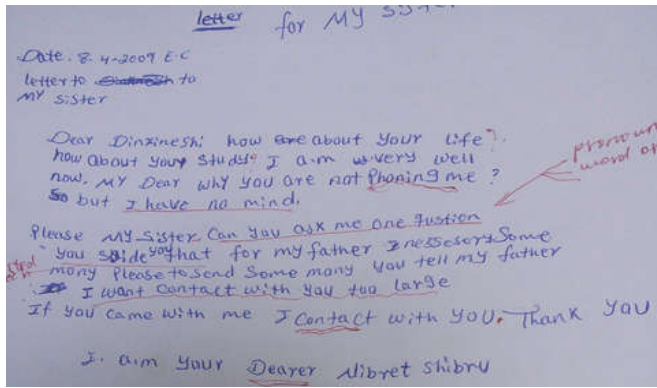
Moreover, before the study participants started writing, they had received a brief explanation about the research objective. The researchers obtained ethical clearance and letter of cooperation from their university and presented these to the principals of the selected schools to get permission and cooperation. Then, a teacher was selected at each school on the principal's recommendations to coordinate the data collection process.

Methods of data analysis: Contrastive analysis and error analysis approaches were employed to analyze data. An essay of each student was checked and each error committed was underlined. Then, the errors were categorized and labeled for different language aspects and put in tables according to the pre-prepared checklist that contain different language aspects. Finally, the data were quantified and changed in to percentile by using descriptive statistics and interpreted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Induced spelling errors: Most students spelt English words in the way they pronounce the words. That means their writing induced toward Sidaamu-afoo orthographic system. In Sidaamu-afoo, the alphabets are used to produce sounds, and their spoken and written systems are the same. According to Hassan (2014), cited in Owi-Ewie (2016), the way learners of a target language pronounce words to a large extent influences how the words are spelt or written. For instance, students have difficulty in pronouncing the inter-dental sounds /ð,θ/ (th) because these sounds are absent in Sidaamu-afoo. The similar sound in Sidaamu-afoo is represented by borrowed sound /z/. The study found that these sounds are replaced by the alveolar sound /z/and /t/. It was found that spelling errors like 'fazer' for 'father', 'birazer' for 'brother', 'tink' for 'think' which are L1 induced because of how the words are pronounced. The following are the sample compositions of the students:





some participants also omitted pronouns in their writing. The omission error is not confined for the above expressed linguistic aspects only; there was also omission of auxiliary verbs in some of the writings. The following are selected examples:

- *“My family boceesa leves” (Omission of “at”)
- * “Buursame very good food”. (Omission of verb “is”)
- *“I go school and.....” (Omission of “to”)

Wrong word use: Some of the learner errors in this category are derived from Sidaamu-afoo thinking flow. That is, students may directly translate some words from Sidaamu-afoo to English which looks odd to native speakers of English. This is a word-level error. Such an error occurs because one word (item) in Sidaamu-afoo becomes two or more in English. For instance, “Fichee cambalaalla is *high* Sidaama people’s *culture*” instead of Fichee Cambalaalla is the prominent new year festival of the Sidaama people. [Gaming male and females.....] instead of boys and girls play. “*This food is very native to eating.... This buurisame foods eats at ones ones days...*” These sentences are grammatically incorrect in English. When literally translated into Sidaamu-afoo, they are grammatically correct. The following is an example of students’ text.

Structural interference: The study participants also showed structural interference. For example, one of the students wrote this sentence: “*This Buurisame is very protein contains.*” This is to say Buurisame has too much protein content. He also wrote the following sentence: “My famly boceesa leves.” This is to say ‘my family lives at Boceessa’. The above example is ungrammatical in English. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that these errors are the result of Sidaamu-afoo interference.

English “This Buurisame very protein contains.”

Sidaamu Afoo: Tini Buurisame lowota pirotiine amaddino

English has its own structural pattern. It should be written in that pattern only. Sidaamu-foo has [SOV] pattern, but English has [SVO] pattern. Most of the participants did not notice this structural difference.

e.g... 1.

English- Bunta ate banana.

Sidaamu-afoo – Bunti Muuze itino.

2 . Ane maate boceessaho galtanno

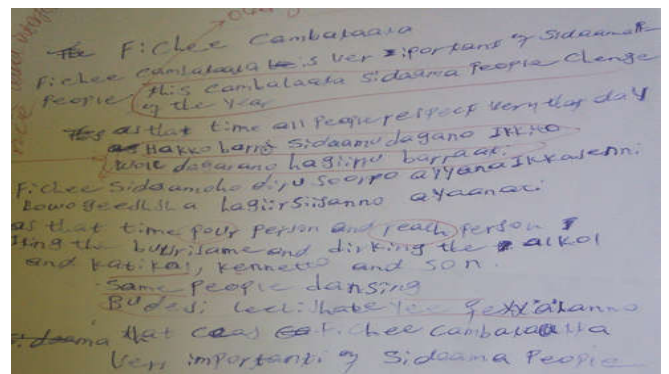
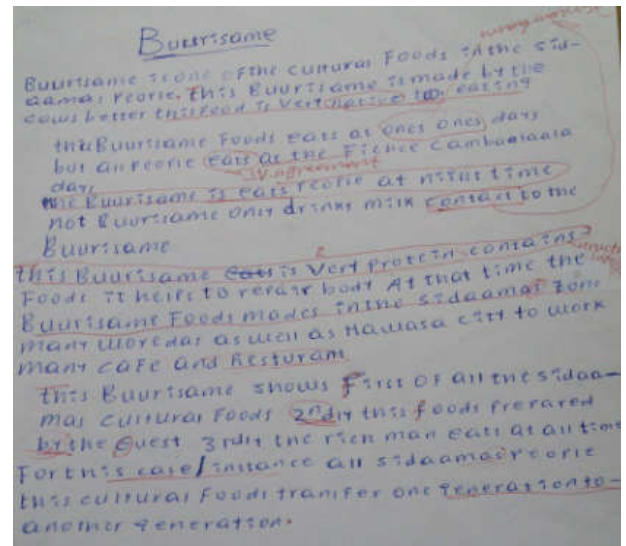
My family live at Bocceessa

3. Eng: ish_ “Sidama people that day is very happy.”

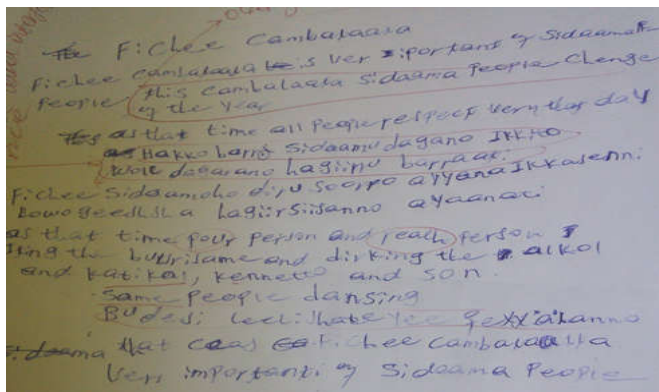
S. Afoo_ Sidaamu Manni hakko barra lowonta hagiidhanno.

The third example above shows that overgeneralization of rule of the language.

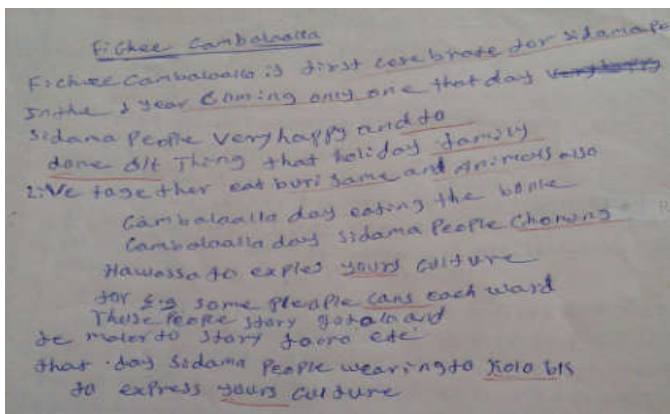
Omission errors: The study participants committed different omission errors in their English writing. The omission errors committed are related with the phenomena that do not found in Sidaamu-afoo. For instance, they omitted prepositions and articles repeatedly in their writing. This is because there is no preposition in Sidaamu-afoo. There is postposition in Sidaamu-afoo. So, it is argued that these errors were committed due to Sidaamu-afoo interference in learning writing in English. Although it is found in their mother tongue,



Lexical interference and sentential interference: Lexical interference occurs when students use their mother tongue words, which have equivalent words, in their target language writing. Such type of interference is derived from lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge in target language. As it is observed in the following example, the study participants included some Sidaamu-afoo words and sentences in English writing. That means, the study participants are making word and sentence level interferences.



Affixes and plural markers errors: English has its own rule in using affixes and plural markers. In this study, however, the study participants committed an error in making plural for some nouns. For example, some students wrote like this “Sidaamu *mans* that day eat burisame” instead of “At that day Sidaamu people eat burisame”. In this extract, the students used wrong word as well as incorrect plural marker. The above sentence is grammatically incorrect in English, but when it is literally translated into Sidaamu-afoo, it is grammatically correct. In addition to this, the students used affixation that deviated from the English language rules. For instance, most of the students added /s/ for any word when they wanted to make plural. The following is a sample text.



Summary of language aspects of Sidaamu-afoo interference

Language aspects	Frequency of Interference	Percent
1 L1 induced spelling errors	165	24.3
2 Structural interference	160	23.6
3 Lexical interference	74	10.9
4 Omission error	113	16.6
5 Affixes and plural markers error	87	12.8
6 Conjunctions and article use error	75	11.06
7 Sentence level interference	5	0.74
Total	679	100.0

The following table presents the summary of the Sidaamu-afoo interference occurred in the study participants’ writing in English. The interference was committed in different language aspects: spelling, sentence structure, lexis, prepositions and articles, affixes and plural markers, and conjunction. In general, as the above table reveals, there were 679 Sidaamu-afoo interferences identified: 165 (24.3%) L1 induced spelling errors, 160 (23.6%) structural interference, 74 (10.9%) lexical interference, 113 (16.6%) omission errors, 87 (12.8%) affixes and plural markers error, 75 (11.06 %) conjunction errors and 5 (0.74%) sentence level interferences.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions are made:

- Spelling, grammatical structures, and shortage of vocabulary are the most challenging areas for Sidaamu-afoo speaking students learning writing in English.
- Lexical interference and omission, affix and plural markers and conjunctions and article use errors were committed in the students’ compositions.
- L1 induced spelling error, structural interference, and omission errors are most frequently committed Sidaamu-afoo interference in students’ writing.
- The sound system, structure, and sentence pattern in Sidaamu-afoo are found to be contrary to that of English and causes difficulties in learning writing in English.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

- In order to improve their writing skill by minimizing mother tongue interference, students should practice writing in English continuously; through continuous practice, they can get perfection.
- The English language teachers should work to improve the students’ vocabulary knowledge and be able to determine the sources of errors in students writing.
- The English language teachers and Sidaamu-afoo teachers should make conscious efforts to teach the similarities and differences in the structures of the two languages.
- Opportunity should be given to students to practice structures learned in the English language.
- The English language teachers should motivate their students to speak in English language in the class because oral proficiency in a language enhances writing proficiency.

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