The Teaching and Assessment of English Essay Writing in Zimbabwe: The Case of Sanyati Government High School

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Abstract

This paper examines the teaching and assessment of Zimbabwe's Ordinary Level ('O' Level) English essay writing. Spurred by poor performance of 'O' Level pupils in the essay paper (English Language Examination Paper 1), the paper analyzes the mismatches between the curriculum and the external assessment methods employed by the Ministry of Education. It also analyzes the types of material used in the teaching of essay writing, the recruitment system employed by the ministry and the time allocated to the teaching of essay writing in the classroom. We argue that these aspects largely contribute to the poor performance of pupils and, as such, improvement in these aspects is envisaged to result in great performance improvement. The paper is a case study of Form Four pupils' essays. Supplementary data were collected from some of the national 'O' Level English Language examiners and from the Sanyati High School's Form Four English Language teachers.

Key words: *second language learning; curriculum; assessment, English*

Introduction

Essay writing in the second language (henceforth L2) requires conscious effort and much practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. Students writing essays in L2 are faced with social and cognitive challenges related to L2 acquisition. Language proficiency and competence underlies the ability to write in the L2 in a fundamental way. Therefore, teachers of L2 essay writing should take into account both strategy development and language skill development when working with their students. It can be argued that a focus on the essay writing process as a pedagogical tool is only appropriate for second language learners if attention is given to linguistic development and if learners are able to get appropriate, sufficient, and effective feedback with regard to their errors in writing. This entails the need for efficiency in the areas of teaching, curriculum, and assessment; and if these are not properly handled, high failure rates become common in the subject as is the case with the Zimbabwean situation.

In Zimbabwe, English is the official and formal language of education and commerce, a lingua franca to various ethnic groups and a prerequisite to enroll for tertiary

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learning and seeking employment. It is spoken mainly as L2 or even as a third language by the majority of Zimbabweans (Thondhlana, 2000; Kadenge & Nkomo, 2009). English as a medium of instruction is introduced as early as 3rd grade in Zimbabwe. The content-based learning approach is used from 4th grade up to tertiary level. This is an approach to L2 learning in which the L2 is used as the medium of instruction to teach and learn curricular content (Davies & Elder, 2006). Bilingual immersion, that is, the best known form of content-based bilingual education, where fifty per cent or more of the curriculum is taught using L2, has been employed for years now. The English language is one of the core subjects at both primary and secondary school levels. The subject constitutes two main components, that is, essay writing and comprehension. These two components make up two examination papers at 'O' Level, that is, paper 1 and 2, respectively.

Although the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) is not at liberty to divulge the actual statistics on individual paper pass rates to researchers, it has become common knowledge that the poor performance in the 'O' Level essay paper is always resulting in the high failure rates of the subject on almost a yearly basis. The descriptive reports on candidates' performance in the essay paper and the comprehension paper indicate that more challenges are in the former than in the latter. The main focus of this paper is therefore on English Language Paper 1 (essay writing). English Language Paper 1 tests pupils' ability to put ideas on the table, describe, report, and argue clearly and logically. Specifically, skills such as originality, use of direct speech, paragraphing, use of discourse markers, balancing general points and examples, use of both sides of arguments, use of varied vocabulary, and an ability to sustain atmosphere and observation are tested. It puts more emphasis on grammar than on content as it is prescribed by the Zimbabwe English language syllabus. It has, however, been observed that pupils' performance in this paper is generally poor as evidenced by the data collected from ZIMSEC's Chief Examiners' reports on candidates' performance in the 'O' Level English Language Paper 1. This paper, therefore, seeks to analyze how the English Language Paper 1 is both taught and assessed in order to offer some possible linguistic solutions which can help improve pupils' performance.

Methodology
We used source and tool triangulation to collect data. This technique facilitates validation of data through cross-verification from more than two sources. As noted earlier, this is a case study of one school, namely Sanyati Government High School. This school is located in the Sanyati District of the Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. It is a High School with an enrolment of around eight hundred and fifty pupils, thirty teachers and it has four classes per stream, each class with approximately fifty pupils. This school was chosen for three main reasons:
- The majority of pupils at the school speak Shona as their first language, and this helped to contrast the two languages, Shona and English, without encountering the challenges that are often caused by differences in L2 learners' native languages.
- The school's setting is semi-rural in the sense that it is in Sanyati, which is a rural district but which has a large growth point with almost all urban facilities. The setting is neither too remote nor too urban. This reduces the influence of environment and/or exposure on pupils' failure in the subject.

- One of the authors was teaching the English language at the school at the time of research and this enabled unlimited access to relevant data during the teaching process.

We used four Form Four classes at the school. Since failure in the essay paper has become regular and the reports from ZIMSEC show that the errors found in pupils' essays are always similar year in and year out, we hypothesized that the problem might be in the way essay writing is taught in class. The Form Four classes were therefore chosen to find out how essay writing is taught in the classroom and how candidates are prepared for the final essay examination. Samples of pupils who are Shona native speakers were drawn from all the four classes and two main methods were used to collect data, namely document analysis and unstructured interviews. Documentary evidence was sought from a number of sources. Initially, an analysis of ZIMSEC's Chief Examiners' reports on candidates' performance in the 'O' Level English Language Paper 1 was done. This was done in order to find out if the problem of high failure rate in the essay paper was perverse or unique to the school under study. Reports from ZIMSEC were obtained from the school. However, the most recent reports could not be analyzed because ZIMSEC has since stopped sending such reports to schools and it does not issue these reports to individuals either. The report analysis involved the reports covering the period 2000 to 2002 (June and November examination sessions).

These reports have information on the performance of candidates on each question and the common types of errors noted on answers to each question. We also consulted the national English syllabus to assess if pupils' performance in the essays studied was capturing its requirements and meeting its aims and objectives. Furthermore, useful insights were drawn from it and used to formulate helpful recommendations. The syllabus has a number of aspects which candidates and teachers should take note of if good results are to be achieved in this examination paper.

We drew a larger portion of the data (tables 1 to 7 below) from the Sanyati Government High School Form Four pupils' written work, particularly essays. The data were based on pupils' performance in five essays. We approached the school administration and asked for permission to conduct the research. We explained the importance of the research to both the school and the pupils. On our behalf, the administration then asked the Form Four English language teachers to help us collect data. The Form Four classes, namely 4A, 4B, 4C, and 4D, were taught by two teachers, that is, Mr X for classes 4A, and 4D, and Mr Y for classes 4B, and 4C. Mr X has nine years' working experience and Mr Y has three years' working experience. For each class, which constituted an average number of fifty pupils, stratified random sampling selection was used to select ten essays for data collection.

We used formal conversational interviews to complement the above mentioned methods. We asked the interviewees various open-ended but structured questions on what they perceived to be the causes of poor performance in English Language Paper 1. We also asked questions to assess both the teacher's competence in teaching essay writing and the teacher's attitudes towards linguistic assistance. Questions on teachers' sources of assistance in teaching essay writing skills were also asked. The

teachers were also asked to give recommendations on what they thought should be done to help pupils improve their essay writing skills. The interviews proved useful because they allowed the researchers to capture physical impressions of the respondents by way of observable paralanguage. Schreuder and Weltens (1993) also note that interviews offer opportunities for a follow-up of interesting responses and for investigating underlying motives in a way that other methods cannot. Sanyati Government High School Form Four English Language teachers were asked questions on the general performance of pupils in the essay paper and the type of errors often made by pupils in their essays.

The interviews were complemented by two questionnaires. The questionnaires for Form Four English Language teachers had questions on the ways they perceived their pupils' performance in essay writing, the commonest types of errors they encountered when marking pupils' essays, and what they thought could be done to improve pupils' essay writing skills. Another set of questionnaires was administered to qualified teachers of 'O' Level English language who have been 'O' Level English Language Paper 1 examiners (markers) for more than ten years. These were drawn from Sanyati Government High School, and Jameson High School (Kadoma). These questionnaires had questions on the types of errors often witnessed by these examiners when marking candidates' essays, the pass rate in the paper, the distribution of the passes across the country, and what they thought should be done to improve the situation. These questionnaires were mainly meant to find information on whether the nature and amount of errors noted at Sanyati Government High School resembled those found across the nation. Six examiners were asked to complete this questionnaire.

All in all, we used a combination of two data gathering methods, document analysis, and interviews. The next section is a discussion of some of the errors made by the Form Four pupils in their essays and their possible causes.

The Findings
Interlingual Errors
Direct translations of Shona figurative expressions were common in the essays analysed. Below are a few examples of these translations and their Shona equivalents:

Use of L1 Proverbs

Table 1: Direct Translations of L1 Proverbs into L2

Students' sentence	Shona expression	Target language / appropriate sentence	Number of occurrence in the pupil's three essays	Percentage frequency of occurrence in the 30 essays from all subjects
1.* A plate goes where another one comes from.	Kandiro kanoenda kunobva kamwe.	One good turn deserves another.	2	61
2.* the chief's son is a slave elsewhere.	Mwana wamambo muranda kumwe.	One should not always expect to earn respect everywhere.	4	40
3.* A child who does not cry dies on his mother's back.	Mwana asingacheme anofira mumbereko.	People need to share their problems/ a problem shared is half solved.	3	57

The above examples constitute what is called 'ridiculous idioms' by 'O' Level English Language teachers and examiners. L1 figurative expressions are not permissible in English. However, this research revealed that pupils are fond of using these 'ridiculous idioms' as the examples in the table above indicate.

We gathered that this could be a result of the failure by the Ministry of Education to thoroughly assess the materials which it recommends for use in schools. Some of the materials used in schools constitute exactly the opposite of what the syllabus prescribes. For example, Chinodya's (1992) Form Three textbook has a section on these proverbs from various cultures and countries. It actually encourages the use of these proverbs in narrative essays. In this textbook, some narrative essay topics are in the form of the so-called ridiculous idioms. This then results in a lot of confusion in the event that the teacher discourages pupils to use such expressions in their essays.

An analysis of the essays reveals that there is no consensus as to whether the proverbs must be penalized or not. Some teachers are not penalizing the use of these proverbs and this is perhaps explained by the controversy surrounding the treatment of the kind of English spoken by Zimbabweans as a variety of English or not. This is also the argument being indirectly given by Chinodya (1992) by way of showing that this is not only found in Zimbabwe but in several African countries, where English is used as L2. Therefore, there seems to be a need for some

clarification on this issue and what is permissible in the classroom must also be permissible at ZIMSEC and vice-versa to avoid confusion and to reduce the amount of errors.

It was said earlier that ZIMSEC had stopped sending reports to schools on pupils' performance and the 'O' Level teachers pointed out that this was a major setback because the reports used to help them to identify areas of weakness in pupils' performance. They said this had resulted in pupils' performance remaining poor over the years.

Confusion of Homophones

The analysis of the essays also indicates that quite a large number of pupils have problems with the use of homophones. They tend to confuse homophones and this results in highly erroneous sentences. Below are a few examples of the homophones which were confused in the essays studied in this research:

Table 2: Confusion of Homophones

Student's sentence	Target language sentence	Confused homophones	Number of occurrence in the pupil's three essays	Percentage frequency of occurrence in the 30 essays from all subjects
4. *When I <u>walk</u> up, I realized that I was dreaming.	When I <u>woke</u> up, I realized that I was dreaming.	'walk' instead of 'woke'	2	35
5. *The clothes were on <u>sell</u>.	The clothes were on <u>sale</u>.	'sell' instead of 'sale'	2	54
6. *We then <u>head</u> a loud noise.	We then <u>heard</u> a loud noise.	'head' instead of 'heard'	3	50
7. *The dogs were let <u>lose.</u>	The dogs were let <u>loose.</u>	'lose' instead of 'loose'	5	68

According to ZIMSEC's assessment specifications, the above examples of errors fall within the category of 'gross errors', a term which is not congruent with error analysts' typology of error gravity. They therefore result in a loss of marks and a negative change of grade. This means effort should be made to correct these errors. The problem emanates from the way these homophones are pronounced by a number of L2 speakers of English. Although the words' pronunciation is similar, they are not exactly the same. To an L1 speaker, the difference is very significant. However, to an L2 speaker of English, the difference is very minor, if not non-existent. The L2 learner therefore needs knowledge of the appropriate way of pronouncing the words and they also need to take note of their differences in meaning. Unfortunately, in the

Zimbabwean setting, most of the teachers of English are L2 speakers of the language who were also taught the language by L2 speakers of the language. This implies that the poor pronunciation will always be found.

However, one way of reducing the amount of such errors is for teachers to emphasize the use of dictionaries since they are helpful in explaining the way words should be pronounced by way of phonetically transcribing them. These errors can also be reduced by having the English language teacher working together with a linguist. The lessons on homophones should also be adequately elaborative in both phonetic and semantic terms. Unfortunately, the research carried out reveals that the use of dictionaries is limited and the English language teacher's linguistic background is poor.

Teaching Methods and their Effects on Pupils' Performance

It was also noted that the studied 'O' Level teachers use the Grammar Translation method to teach English essay writing. This results in a number of errors, including the error of word-for-word translation, confusion of prepositions, and subject reduplication. The Grammar Translation method emphasizes reading, writing, translation, and the conscious learning of grammatical rules. Its primary goal is to develop literary mastery of the second language. As Davies and Elder (2006) note, memorization is the main learning strategy and pupils spend their class time talking about the language instead of talking in the language. When using this method, the curriculum requires the memorization of paradigms, patterns, and vocabulary, with translation being used to test the acquired knowledge. The role of L1 is quite prominent when using this method, hence the direct translations such as the ones shown below.

Word-for-word Translations

Table 3: Shona to English Word-for-word Translations by Form Four Pupils

Student sentence	Shona translation	Target language / Intended sentence	Number of occurrence in the pupil's three essays	Percentage frequency of occurrence in the 30 essays from all subjects
8*<u>others</u> came to help but others ran away.	Vamwe vakauya kuzobatsira asi vamwe vakatiza.	<u>Some</u> came to help but others ran away.	5	60
9*The car <u>refused</u> to start.	Mota yakaramba kumuka	The car <u>could not</u> start.	3	44
10*The bush had very tall trees and <u>tall</u> grass.	Sango raiva nemiti mirefurefu neuswa	The bush had very tall trees and <u>long</u> grass.	3	48

hurefu.			

The Shona lexicon sometimes uses the same word to refer to various entities. Where a language such as English has a distinct term for each entity, Shona sometimes lacks equivalent terms. This implies that the learners of English may not understand that English has different words to refer to different things, which sometimes is not the case with Shona. This results in the learners failing to understand the extent to which they can translate words. Consequently, they replace appropriate English words with what they feel are English equivalents of the Shona terms as indicated by the examples above.

The above examples of errors are a true reflection of what Kohn (1986) meant by 'semantic relativism'. He argues that the world contains too many things for us to have one word for each thing; we economize by using words in more than one sense, leaving context to disambiguate them. Unfortunately, different languages parcel up meanings into words in different ways, and so a word in language **A** may have various equivalents in language **B**, depending on what is meant. The above assertion by Kohn (1986) is true of Shona lexicon but not of the English one, especially when one considers such words as *vamwe* in example 8 above, which in English has two interpretations and formal equivalents which are 'some' and 'others'.

In example 8 above, the pupil directly translated the quantifier *vamwe* into English. The translation is however only appropriate in the subordinate clause. The pupil lacks the understanding that, in English, the quantifier 'some' (with the strong pronunciation /sʌm/) is used in the main clause to make a contrast and it is used in conjunction with the quantifier 'others', which is used in the second or subordinate clause. The error emanates from the difference in the two languages' structural rules and constraints. In Shona, it is permissible to use the same quantifier *vamwe* in both the main clause and the subordinate clause and it still maintains contrast as shown by the Shona sentence in example 8, but in English it is marked.

The same applies to examples 9 and 10, where, in example 9, the verb 'refused' is used instead of the phrase 'could not'. This emanates from Shona use of a single verb *ramba* to mean 'refuse', 'fail', 'cannot', 'deny', and 'reject'. The L2 learner who directly translates Shona terms into English can produce erroneous sentences if they just know one English equivalent of the Shona term. In example 10, the English L2 learner used the adjective *refu* 'tall/ long' to describe the trees and grass in the bush. The adjective *refu* in Shona is the only adjective used to describe length or height which is not short, and there is no any other adjective in Shona for referring to this attribute. In contrast, the English lexicon has the adjectives 'long' and 'tall' and have specific and different environments in which they are supposed to be used. They are not perfect synonyms; hence 'tall' cannot be used to describe grass and 'long' cannot be used to describe trees.

It is easy to explain that 'tall' is used with objects or entities like people, buildings, trees, and tower lights whose height is measured vertically, whilst 'long' is used to describe length which is measured horizontally like that of a snake, a bus, a train, a millipede, and various such entities. However, it is difficult to explain why grass (in the bush) whose height is measured vertically just like 'trees' is described by the

adjective 'long', and not by 'tall'. These semantic irregularities are only understood by the native speakers of English. As noted by Chomsky (1965) in his Universal Grammar Theory, one cannot acquire native speaker competence in an L2, hence such errors as the one in example 10 can be found in L2 utterances.

All the above examples of errors of direct translation support the claim made by Dulay and Burt (1974) that L1 influence is strong in syntactic structures which include word-for-word translations. Such errors are indeed a common phenomenon in pupils' essays. However, although it might be impossible to acquire native-like proficiency in the L2, the teacher can help reduce the errors stated above by discouraging pupils from directly translating Shona terms into English. Teachers may therefore be discouraged from using this method continuously and encouraged to use other methods such as the Natural Method and the Direct Method, which emphasize that learners should think in the L2 and communicate in it most of the time.

Teachers also need to be discouraged from teaching L2 in the pupils' L1 as has been reported by a number of subjects of this study. This results in pupils taking long or failing altogether to think of appropriate English terms to use in various contexts.

We have also noted that quite a large number of pupils borrow figurative expressions such as proverbs and idioms from their mother tongue and directly translate them into English, a 'skill' they copy from several African writers. In light of this, teachers need to discourage pupils from copying such styles of writing and encourage pupils to read novels and English material by English L1 speakers.

Confusion of Prepositions
The use of such methods as Grammar Translation, among other things, also results in errors such as confusion of prepositions. The data collected from pupils' essays shows that quite a large number of pupils have problems in using prepositions in sentences, reflecting a high degree of direct translation in the use of prepositions. Erroneous sentences such as the ones given below were noted in pupils' essays:

Table 4: Confusion of Prepositions

Students' sentence	Shona translation	Target language / appropriate sentence	Number of occurrence in the pupil's three essays	Percentage frequency of occurrence in the 30 essays from all subjects
11.* I could not sleep with that noise.	Ndakatadza kurara <u>ne</u>-ruzha irworwo.	I could not sleep because of that noise.	3	50
12.* I will try by all means.	Ndichaedza <u>ne</u>-pose	I will try all means possible.	6	72

	pandinogona.			
13.*I would like to thank you for the letter that you wrote for me.	Ndinoda kukutenda netsamba yawaka-<u>ndi</u>-nyorera.	I would like to thank you for the letter that you wrote me.	4	58
14* Tinaye had a talent of running.	Tinaye aiva <u>ne</u>-chipo chekumhanya.	Tinaye was talented in running.	4	56

A close scrutiny of the above sentences reveals that pupils tend to confuse English prepositions with those of Shona, especially in cases where the appropriate preposition in English does not have an equivalent form in Shona. It is important to note that several English prepositions have Shona equivalent forms and are used in exactly the same linguistic environments as those of Shona. For example, the English prepositions 'in', 'between', 'out', and 'under' are some of the several prepositions whose application and/or use matches that of Shona prepositions *mu-, pa-, ku-,* and *pasi.* In such cases, even if a pupil directly translates the prepositions, the sentences will still be grammatically correct, as the examples in Table 5 show.

Table 5: Shona versus English Prepositions

Shona translation	English translation	Prepositions
15. Ari mu-mba	she is in the house.	'mu-' is directly translated into the English preposition 'in'
16. Zviri pakati pangu newe	It is between you and me.	'Pakati' is directly translated to the English preposition 'between'.

Although the pupil might have arrived at the correct preposition by directly translating from Shona to English, there is no evidence for that because the prepositions are used in exactly the same way in both languages. However, there are certain linguistic situations in which the same prepositions are used in a different way in English, thereby resulting in ill-formed sentences each time one attempts to make direct translations. This is the source of errors such as those in examples 11 to 14 above. In example 11, the pupil uses the preposition 'with' because in his first language, Shona, the appropriate conjunction in that sentence, which is an adverb, is *ne-*. However, it becomes different in English because its rules are very much irregular. The appropriate conjunction here ceases to be a preposition but a conjunction like 'because of' or 'due to'. The same applies to example 12, a common error usually found in Zimbabwean L2 speakers of English. The use of the preposition 'by' is traceable to Shona because in Shona the same utterance reads *ndichaedza ne-pandinogona napo. Ne-* is, in most cases, used as the equivalent of the English preposition 'by' as in the following examples:

Table 6: Shona and English Adverbs

Shona translation	English translation	Adverbs
17. Vakaenda kuHarare <u>ne</u>-bhazi	They went to Harare <u>by</u> bus.	Shona *ne-* is equivalent to English 'by'.
18. Takaudzwa <u>ne-</u> murairidzi kuti tigadzirire bvunzo.	We were told <u>by</u> our teacher to prepare for the examination.	Shona *ne-* is equivalent to English 'by'.

In the above examples, the preposition 'by' is a perfect synonym of the Shona preposition '*ne-*' and it is the knowledge of such sentences which causes English L2 speakers to use the preposition 'by' in utterances such as those in example 12 above.

In example 13 above, a candidate wrote '…you wrote for me' because he knows that in his first language, Shona, the object morpheme *-ndi-* appears in the word *yawakandinyorera* 'you wrote me'. He thus inserts the preposition 'for' as is the case of statements like *aka-ndi-mirira* 'He is waiting for me', where *-ndi-* is represented by the prepositional phrase 'for me'. An element of over-generalization comes into play in that the Shona L1 speaker has learnt that it is possible to directly translate Shona prepositions into English but they have now over-generalized the idea into syntactic constructions where it does not apply. Thus, the English language teacher has to elaborate on the exceptional cases where the strategy of translating does not work. This might be very difficult, considering there is no clear explanation as to why the same preposition can be used differently in certain linguistic situations. This brings one to Chomsky's (1965) concept of native speaker and linguistic competence (a speaker's implicit, internalized knowledge of the rules of their language). Grasping such concepts might be difficult to second language speakers of a language, hence the failure to acquire native speaker competence. However, the use of other methods of teaching can help as highlighted earlier on.

Repetition due to Subject Reduplication
Although both Shona and English have Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order, some of the English sentences constructed by the informants of this study deviate from this order. Mesthrie and Bhat (2008) use the term 'left dislocation' to refer to this error, in which a construction preposes a topic and supplies a comment by way of a full sentence. This is reflected by the following examples extracted from the essays written by this study's informants:

Table 7: Subject Reduplication

Student's sentence	Shona equivalent	Target language sentence	Number of occurrence in the pupil's three essays	Percentage frequency of occurrence in the 30 essays from all subjects
19.* The headmaster, <u>he</u> announced that Mr Zororo was leaving the school.	Mukuru wechikoro <u>a</u>kazivisa kuti VaZororo vainge vosiya chikoro.	The headmaster announced that Mr Zororo was leaving the school.	1	30
20.* My sister <u>she</u> was getting married to Sam.	Mukoma wangu <u>a</u>inge owanikwa naSam.	My sister was getting married to Sam.	3	29
21.* The frightful dream <u>it</u> was very terrifying.	Chiroto chinotyisa ichi <u>cha</u>ityisa zvikuru.	The frightful dream was very terrifying.	5	56

The above sentences constitute subject topics (example 19, The headmaster; example 20, My sister; example 21, The frightful dream) and, unlike the norm in Standard English, pronoun appositions (which are underlined in the above table). This results in the error of repetition, that is, the subject is duplicated (*SSVO). For example, in example 19 above, the topic of the sentence is made up of the subject 'The headmaster' and the pronoun 'he' also introduces this subject for the second time (repetition). The sentence would be correct with either the subject only or the pronoun apposition only. Repetition of this type is explainable in terms of L1 influence. In Shona, there is the use of the subject topic and the subject prefix. For example, the Shona translation of example 20 above is *Mukoma wangu ainge owanikwa naSam. Mukoma wangu* 'my sister' is the subject topic and the *a-* in *ainge* 'she was' is the subject prefix which is referring to the subject topic *mukoma wangu. Ainge* is therefore being equated to 'she was', thereby resulting in repetition. In Shona, the subject prefix does not result in any repetition but when one directly translates the sentence into English, repetition occurs. Unfortunately, several pupils are not aware of this difference between Shona and English. They do not realize that, although the two languages have the same word order, their sentences may differ in terms of the smaller constituent parts of the subject, the verb and the object. For example, in example 21, the English verb 'was terrifying' can be further segmented into its constituent parts as follows:

      was------------past tense form of verb 'be'
      terrify----------verb
      -ing------------tense form (present participle)

On the other hand, the Shona equivalent, *cha-i-ty-is-a*, can be segmented into its constituent parts as follows:

      cha- -----------subject prefix
      -i- ------------tense form (past participle)
      -ty- ------------verbal root
      -is- ------------verbal extension (causative)
      -a -------------terminal vowel

The above segmentation of the verbal part of example 21 shows that the two languages are different and therefore one cannot directly translate Shona into English. The error of repetition in example 21 emanates from the attempt to have an English equivalent for the Shona subject prefix *cha-*. This error can only be reduced if pupils are discouraged from thinking in their L1 when writing their work in English. There is also a need to enlighten pupils on the structural differences between the two languages and there is a need to demonstrate that, despite some similarities which might be found between the two languages structurally and functionally, it is very difficult to have a one-to-one mapping of English structures on Shona ones. The seemingly minor differences usually result in noticeable errors. Teachers also need not adopt the style of ignoring the form and concentrating on the content only. Some of the teachers who were informants of this study feel that simultaneously correcting both the form and content results in the overburdening of the pupil, hence focus should be on content first and then on form. This, however, may result in delayed grammatical accuracy and, sometimes, the teacher might realize that the pupil has been using a certain incorrect structure for so long that he is unable to use the correct one.

Teachers' Expertise, Teacher-Pupil Ratio and Teaching Periods

The findings of this research indicate that, besides the inefficiencies in the teaching methods discussed above, errors in essay writing are also attributed to lack of expertise on the part of the teachers, insufficient time to learn the writing skills in the classroom as well as poor teacher-pupil ratio as will be noted in the following discussion.

English Language Teachers' Expertise
The teacher of a second language needs to have the knowledge of the developmental stages and the strategies involved in L2 learning. In the above cases, the teachers need to know that this might be a stage in the pupil's acquisition process. Also, there is a need to know the rule which has been grasped and those which still pose difficulties to the learners, and then focus on the latter, clarifying why one cannot avoid using them. Such knowledge can only be acquired if there is close interaction between the teacher and a linguist. However, it appears that there is a big gap between the teacher's perceptions of error analysis and correction, on the one hand, and the linguist's perceptions, on the other, as evidenced by teachers' responses to the questions asked during the interviews. Teachers have profound knowledge of

how to mark the errors and they are good at identifying various types of errors made by pupils in their essays. They also make some effort to correct the errors as noted by Machingaidze (1994). However, they lack the linguistic means of analyzing the errors to identify their sources. This then means that the English Language teacher and the linguist need to work together in finding solutions to the problem of poor performance in the essay paper.

The teacher cannot bear the burden of error identification and correction alone. The linguist can help the teacher with some enlightenment on various teaching methods to cater for pupils' individual differences. The research has revealed that the area of teaching methodology needs to be improved as some teachers tend to either overuse or misuse certain teaching methods, regardless of the type of pupils being taught. Through analysis of the essays written by the pupils who were respondents of this study, this research has further revealed that, while teachers are conscientious about marking pupils' essays, they are not ready to make persistent efforts to offer remedial lessons to correct the errors made by pupils. The best they do is mechanically indicating the errors and, in some cases, giving feedback to pupils on what was supposed to be done. However, there is no evidence to show that the teacher makes a follow-up to ensure that what was offered as a solution is being implemented by the pupils; hence pupils continue making mistakes which can be corrected.

Teaching Periods
The above-mentioned problem can be attributed to the limited time which is reserved for the essay lessons. At the school under investigation, the lessons are only thirty-five minutes long. There are four single periods and a single double period per week. Lessons on essay writing are therefore usually delivered when there is a double period. The 'O' Level English Language teaching policy also stipulates that essays should be written once per fortnight. This time is very limited considering the multiplicity of errors which need to be corrected. This has resulted in some teachers resorting to assigning essay work in the form of homework in order to comply with the policy. This has the negative effect that pupils may find other people to write the essays for them and, sometimes, to plagiarize other people's work, hence giving a completely different impression of their performance. It would be best for schools to consider the difference between teaching and learning an L1 and an L2. The time allocated for the teaching of English essays should be increased so that pupils may write the essays in class, thereby giving a true reflection of their performance. This helps the teacher to identify pupils' areas of weakness and to offer possible solutions. It may also afford the teacher an opportunity to exceed the policy's minimum requirement of giving one essay per fortnight, thereby allowing the pupils to practise essay writing more than they do now.

Teacher-pupil Ratio
We also noted that the teacher-pupil ratio might be contributing towards the poor performance by pupils in the paper in some schools. Generally, the role of the teacher of essay writing in Zimbabwe is defined by the situation in which he finds him/herself. The average ESL teacher has a minimum workload of thirty periods a week and he/she has five classes or more to teach as well as other extra-curriculum duties. Each of the classes has anything from forty to over fifty students. This

teacher/pupil ratio and the time factor determine the attention given to each individual pupil, the marking system the teacher adopts, and the effectiveness of the feedback given to the pupil. At the school where this study was carried out, each class has an average number of fifty-five pupils. This figure outnumbers the expected ratio of one teacher to thirty-five pupils, hence the teacher ends up failing to give each pupil adequate attention. This also means mechanical marking of the essay will be a highly strenuous task and that might be the reason why in some cases the teacher ends up crossing out the errors without indicating the error type or giving helpful comments to the pupil. The problem needs to be addressed by the Ministry of Education. The ministry needs to see to it that each school is neither understaffed nor overstaffed.

Conclusions

We noted that, among the errors often made by pupils, interference errors are often encountered, and so are errors resulting from overgeneralization, redundancy reduction, and several other communicative strategies. Our findings indicate that pupils often make errors which result from word-for-word translations, from confusion of prepositions, from direct translation of L1 expressions into English, from word order errors and confusion of articles, from possessive pronouns, and from homophonous words. The findings also indicate that these errors largely emanate from the ways in which essay writing is taught and assessed.

This study attempted to identify, describe, and diagnose the errors in Form Four English Language essays written by pupils from Sanyati Government High School. The findings of this study indicate that, although the errors can be attributed to both the influence of pupils' L1 and pupils' wrong application of English Language rules, there are a number of areas which the Ministry of Education needs to improve. Besides investigating the sources of the identified errors, the study also aimed at providing important linguistic insights to English Language teachers.

As noted earlier, English in this study is L2, and as such, errors are bound to be made. However, there is a need to keep them to a minimum. This study has just looked at one school and there is a need for further research on error analysis from other schools to corroborate the findings of this study. We strongly feel that further research can help to improve pupils' performance in the subject.

There is also a need to motivate students to speak in English both at home and with their friends in order to reduce the number of mistakes they make. It is also important to teach the rules and conventions of writing in English. However, when trying to solve these problems, it is necessary to bear in mind that L2 users' knowledge of an L2 is not the same as their knowledge of the L1, even at advanced levels. As noted by Chomsky (1965), it is impossible for an L2 learner to acquire the linguistic competence like that of an L1 in the L2. Trying to get students to be like native speakers is an exercise in futility; their minds and their knowledge of the language they are learning will inevitably be different. Therefore, English Language teachers need to know that effort is needed to keep errors to a minimum but they should not be disappointed if pupils fail to display native speaker competence in the language.

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