



# Phonological Ambience and its Relation to Error Commission in Academic Writing: The Case of Shona

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**Abstract:** A standout contribution of this research is its contrastive study of the phonological system of the dialects of Shona, herein called the mother tongue ( $L_1$ ) and the phonological system of standardised Shona, herein called the second language ( $L_2$ ). The Phonological differences affect academic writing. An inventory of phonological errors learners commit was made. Knowledge of the phonological errors learners make direct teachers to adopt best practices to avert the spelling challenges. Teachers' practical exposure to learners' spelling challenges indicates to them where the challenges come from. This finds explanation in participating teachers claiming that the Standard Shona Orthography (SSO) needs reforming to become all-encompassing by tolerating dialect phonologies. The commission of phonological errors by learners is a sign of the inadequacies of the current SSO. However, the commission of the phonological errors is testament of an individual building his/her 'house of self-identity and self-consciousness since the language they speak identifies them. Oral or written communication circumscribes self-identity and self-consciousness. This study emphasises identity formation and self-consciousness through wider use of one's mother tongue. 'The mother' that is in all of us affects competence and fluency in the use of the Shona language in academic work. Of the many indigenous languages enshrined in the Zimbabwean school curriculum, this study examined how Shona language learners' competence in academic writing is affected by home language phonologies. The students' errors are due to their failure to realise the dissonance that exists between home languages herein coded ( $L_1$ ) and school language herein coded  $L_2$ .

**Keywords:** Interlingual, phonological awareness, phonological ambience, morphophonological, error, first language, second language

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## 1. Introduction

Phonological spelling errors can be a result of learners' poor grasp of the phonology of a language. This is particularly noticeable concerning the use of a second language at school (the standardised Shona language) that has dissonant phonological relationship with their mother language.

Phonological errors in Shona academic writing impede learners' fluent and competent spelling that is needed and necessary for effective communication albeit the words

are spelt differently but mean the same. Such errors by learners usually result from a mismatch or dissonance between dialect's and standard language's sound systems. This paper problematizes the type and impact of phonological errors learners commit when they write in Shona at school.

Phonological ambience denotes a linguistic setting or a distinctive linguistic environment in which phonological items exist. In short, it is the quality and character a sound assumes as defined by its setting or environment. The setting or environment is circumscribed by either standard Shona orthography parameters or Shona dialect