

Concord Error Analysis Committed By 200 Level English University Students in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract:

This study seeks to investigate concord errors made by 200 level English students of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS) and Federal University Gusau (FUGUS) in their written production of English with a view to finding solutions to them. The data were obtained from fifty semester examination answer booklets written by students during first semester 2017 examination. The data collected were analysed using EA approach developed by Corder (1974). The findings of the study reveal that the errors can be grouped into ten categories out of which concord errors are the most committed by the students under study. Based on these findings, it is suggested that the teachers of English and the students should strive in handling such errors because English students are models of other students from other disciplines after graduation.

Keywords: analysis, concord, error, UDUS, FUGUS

Introduction

Grammar plays a very important role in the English language teaching and learning. Good users of every language (English language inclusive) are expected to be able to express themselves in both spoken and written language. Policy makers and implementers in Nigeria have been making efforts to increase the proficiency of learners in written production of English. That is why grammar is being widely taught as a subject in various stages of language learning. Indeed, Writing is sought of as a great challenge to both students and teachers as well. In their own part, the students view writing as a difficult task.

Concord according to Abdulmumini (2017) is 'a syntactic feature that establishes harmonious relationships between divergent grammatical elements in a sentence'. Concord is one of the important grammatical areas of English language. It has received much attention from various scholars and researchers.

The roles and functions of English language in our day to day activities cannot be under estimated. This is because of the increasing usage by different communities especially in Africa where most of the countries are multilingual in nature. On the other hand, grammar, which forms the basis of constructing acceptable sentences in the language, has a significant role to play in this direction. Unfortunately, from the researchers' observation, most of the sentences constructed by students in North-Western Nigerian universities are found to be faulty and shaky in terms of grammar. The reasons or factors responsible for this are many and depend on the circumstances.

In view of the above, this research is set to investigate these errors in with a view to finding dependable solutions to them which would go a long way in assisting the students who are future leaders of our great country, Nigeria. There are combinations of factors that are responsible for this problem and learning a language is not an easy task especially in a situation where less

efforts are being made to ensure that things work in order in the nation's educational sector. According to Chukuegu (2004:87) 'learning a second language is necessarily a difficult activity if the learners are taught with an appropriate approach'.

English language remains the language of instruction, with which all the academic activities are carried out in Nigeria. The roles English play in the life span of Nigerian students from the beginning to the end cannot be over emphasised. However, observations reveal that, students in our universities nowadays do not bother on the way they abuse grammatical concord in their write ups even during semester examinations.

This study will help create desired awareness among students of the two universities, and the need for developing ways of tackling the problem. Against this background therefore, this study investigates the grammatical errors in students' writings in two selected universities in the North-Western Nigeria. The universities are Federal University Gusau (FUGUS) and Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS).

The justification for the present research project is to help teachers of English especially at the university level search for a more effective way of helping their students improve their performance in English grammar so that the problem of poor performance in the language could be addressed. The poor performance of students especially in grammar in our universities has continued to be a source of concern to teachers, parents, students, applied linguists, education authorities, examination bodies, political figures and the general public who have not yet found a way out.

Literature Review

A number of researches have been conducted on students' grammatical errors. Hence, the need to review some related works.

Mireku-Gyimah (2014) analysed final year students' errors in English at the University of Mines and Technology, Ghana. She detected frequency of errors in wrong register, wrong choice of words, awkward expressions, ambiguity, wrong punctuation and capitalisation, wrong concord etc.

Ngadda & Nwoke (2014) conducted an analytical study of errors in the written English of Undergraduate Engineering Students in ATBU, Bauchi. Their research reveals that there are errors of grammar, expression, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and the use of connectives in students' writing.

Bodunde & Sotiloye (2013), have discovered that students have problems with almost all aspects of *isij-ijsssei*, (2018)

grammar – tense, punctuation, spelling, concord, abbreviation, preposition, and word amalgamation. At the 100 level, tense and spelling errors are the most frequent while in the remaining levels punctuation and tense errors are more prominent.

In addition, Hourani (2008) claims that 'writing is a difficult process even in the first language. It is even more complicated to write in a foreign language'. Many studies reveal that there is interference from first language in the process of writing in English. Writing in a foreign language often presents the greatest challenge to the students at all stages, particularly essay writing because in this activity, writing is usually extended and therefore it becomes more demanding than in the case of writing a short paragraph. In fact, Theodore (2013) explained that second language acquisition is a developmental process, in which the learners are inevitably making errors which should be treated as an integral part of learning. Error analysis therefore plays an indispensable role in understanding second language acquisition.

Error analysis has been conducted at the University context in Nepal, Jordan, Iran and so many countries of the world. Giri (2009) found that bachelor level students of English in Nepal produced all sort of grammatical errors in the use of the English language, and the seven most errors were on conditional mood, verb forms, tense, main verb, subject-verb agreement and question formation.

In Jordan, Abushihab et al (2011) studied grammatical errors produced by university students enrolled in paragraph writing class. They found out that the most problematic areas for students were preposition, morphological errors, articles, verbs, passivisation, and tense. While Abbasia & Karimnia (2011) studying students' errors in Iranian university re-classified errors into lexico-semantic and syntactico-morphological errors. In lexico-semantic categories, they found that the students produced false cognates (82%) and Cross association (18%). In syntactico-morphological categories, the seven most occurrence errors were word order, tense, there-existential, passivisation, word form, preposition, and question formation.

In view of these studies therefore, this research shall be investigating concord errors by 200 level English students in Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS) and Federal University Gusau (FUGUS) with the view to finding solutions to the problems.

Methodology

Fifty students studying English in their 200 level from Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS) and Federal University Gusau (FUGUS) in North-Western

Nigeria were chosen as the subjects for the study. Data were collected from their written essays conducted during the first semester examinations for the 2016/2017 academic session. Approximately, 200 sentences were collected from the examination scripts. The secret behind using this strategy was to get the natural data. If the students had known that their scripts were to be used for this purpose they would have adjusted in their expressions and constructions. The writers identified the errors, classified them and later corrections were made by the authors.

There were about 200 errors made by the students and over 100 were on concord. The identified errors were counted based on their frequencies. When the same error occurred twice, they were counted as two errors in the tabulation. The proportional stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure an equitable representation of the sample group members in order to avoid bias. This also ensures that each proportional stratum is as homogeneous as possible. Thus, from the study population of 100, a sample size of 50 was drawn and used for the research. According to Ellis (1994) an approach in the form of error analysis (EA) emerges in the early 1970's which regards errors as part of a language system which when properly managed can discover errors that neither textbooks

nor contrastive analysis can accurately predict, and hence provide more practical direct ways in which the interest of specific language classes can be catered for. In this approach, Corder (1974) suggests five procedures which include the selection of corpus of language, identification of the errors, the classification of the errors, the explanation of the errors and their evaluation. EA therefore served as the guiding theoretical framework for this study while statistical analysis was used to inform the findings of the study.

In the classification level, the errors were tabulated and classified into the following categories: concord, spelling, tense, capitalisation, preposition, tautology, ellipsis, determiner, number and auxiliary. Each error was identified by underlining in order to make it appear clearly to the readers. Then, from this tabulation, the frequency of errors and the percentage for each category was calculated to see their distribution and severity. For each error the correct version was provided by the researchers.

The choice of students of English department was due to the importance of grammar to them and they are in the best position to know the grammatical rules compared to their counterparts in other disciplines.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Frequency of Occurrence of Errors

S/N	Error Type	Error Occurrence (Udus)	%	Error Occurrence (Fugus)	%
1	Concord	37	60.65	22	50
2	Spelling	7	11.47	4	9.09
3	Tense	3	4.92	5	11.36
4	Capitalisation	6	9.84	4	9.09
5	Preposition	3	4.92	3	6.81
6	Tautology	3	4.92	0	0
7	Ellipsis	1	1.64	2	4.54
8	Determiner	0	0	2	3.27
9	Number	1	1.64	1	2.27
10	Auxiliary	0	0	1	2.27
TOTAL		61		44	

Fig. 1

Data analysis shows that there are ten categories of errors commonly made by the 200 level students studying English in the two selected universities. The distribution of those errors is shown in figure 1. The figure shows that the most severe errors regarding the occurrence is concord with 60.65% and 50% for UDUS and FUGUS respectively. The data also shows that the occurrence of errors is committed more by the students of UDUS even though UDUS is about 40 years older than FUGUS. Our target is not to discover which school commits more errors than the other. Rather, we want to know the peculiar reasons behind *isij-ijsssei*, (2018)

committing the errors in the two schools involved and find solutions to them.

The second place is errors on spelling with the occurrence of 11.47% and 9.09% in the first semester examination. Errors on tense occupy 4.92% and 11.36% of the errors tabulated. Meanwhile, errors on capitalisation are 9.84% and 9.09%. The fifth on the list is preposition with the occurrence of 4.92% and 6.81% respectively. It is followed by errors on tautology with 4.92% and 0%. Using the ellipsis has 1.64% and 4.54% for the two universities. While determiner occupies 0% and 4.54% of the total errors for the two schools surveyed. Number has the

occurrence of 1.64% and 2.27% respectively. The item with the least error is auxiliary with 0% and 2.27% occurrence.

Discussion and Interpretation

As shown in table 1, concord is the area where the students being studied made significant errors. The frequency table shows 60.65% UDUS and 50% for FUGUS respectively.

Concord is one of the big problems to students. It ranks first in the total errors committed by the sampled students in the two universities. This clearly indicates that the students have problem with regard to subject-verb agreement. This can also be as a result of the

Nigerian languages in which the subject-verb agreement do not much exist. See the examples below:

Most plant

With most, the noun should be plural = Most plants

It serve

With a singular pronoun, the verb should be singular = It serves

Many reaction

With a plural pronoun, the verb should be plural = Many reactions

See the table below for additional examples of the students' concord errors extracted from the research work:

Table 2:

For <u>stored</u> of indigested food where will be pass out	Grammar: incoherent construction. For storage of indigested food to be passed out
Are <u>release</u> in ATP	Grammar: wrong tense Are released in ATP
Enzymes are <u>protein</u> that catalyst the reaction	Grammar: faulty construction. Enzymes are proteins that are catalysts of the reaction.
Stomach is where food can store	Grammar: faulty construction. Stomach is an object that stores food.
Is the end point of protein digestion are amino acid	Grammar: reverse sentence. Amino acid is the end point of protein digestion
Are <u>break</u> down into glycerol and fatty acid	Grammar: wrong tense. Are broken down into glycerol and fatty acid.
Organism <u>captuve</u> food	Wrong spelling. Organism capture food.
ATP generation, oxidation reaction convert...	Grammar: omission of conjunction. ATP generation and oxidation reaction convert...
This process <u>generate</u> two ATP...	Grammar: wrong tense. This process generates two ATP...
When our body <u>got</u> injured they play their role	Grammar: wrong tense. When our body gets injured they play their roles, or, they play their roles when our body gets injured.
Plasma synthesized and <u>secret</u> them (antibody) to a specific antigen	Spelling mistake. Plasma secretes and synthesizes them (antibody) to a specific antigen.
This can be defined when a body produces antibody...	Grammar: wrong construction. This can be defined as a process of the body producing antibody...
Some of them you <u>can found</u> ...	Consider reversing the sentence. You can find some of them ...
Taxonomy is the science of classification of <u>organism</u> and goal of identifying <u>organism</u> and relationship among the organisms.	Grammar: wrong punctuation. Taxonomy is the science of classifying organisms, identifying their goals and the relationships that exist among the organisms.

Fig. 2

According to Gyimah (2014), it is not only disgraceful for a university student to commit errors involving this basic type of concord, whose rules are so clear (with few exceptions) but it creates a bad impression about the personality of the speaker as Yankson (1994) and Owusu-Ansah (1997) have also observed.

Spelling is another source of errors which ranks second in the frequency table. These errors arise mostly from the confusion of vowels and other related issues. This category comprises total wrong spelling, insertion and the omission of many letters. The speakers of English as a second language have difficulty in spelling words like 'clause', 'governing', 'first' 'lecturer' etc. Consider also the following wrong spellings:

Nitrition = Nutrition
 Occasion = occasion
 Pronunciation = pronunciation
 Argument = argument
 Grammer = grammar etc.

This finding confirms Haggan's (1991) idea that mispronunciation, lack of awareness of spelling rules and irregular spelling patterns strongly contributed to spelling errors. She found that this will be more among the more advanced students.

Tense is one of the important grammatical areas of English language. It has received much attention from various scholars and researchers. For example, Quirk and Greenbaum (1985, 1990), note that English tense is used to express time. According to these scholars, tense represents the changes that occur in the form of a verb to indicate the time in which an action takes place. They recognised three tenses in English language; present, past and future and these are respectively expressed using the various verb forms chronologically. This research discovered the following as some of the tense errors:

Is the study of how words are combine together to form (wrong)

Is the study of how words are combined together to form... (correct)

Are break down into glycerol and fatty acid (wrong)
Are broken down into glycerol and fatty acid (correct)

It is assumed that the above errors are being committed due to the students' insufficient knowledge of the rules of grammar as a result of poor foundation in the lower schools. Lack of commitment is another factor that contributed to the gravity of the errors because some mistakes are not expected to be committed by 200 level English university students.

Other errors (apart from the above) have been identified in the course of the research and their gravity have been identified in table 1 above. But, it needs to be stressed here that, our main concern is the concord errors which appear most in the students' scripts. This is the reason why we were not bothered to go into details in explaining them.

Recommendations

Many writers and scholars have conducted researches on students' concord and grammatical errors and provided a number of recommendations on the way forward in tackling the problem. See Mireku-Gyimah (2014), Ngadda & Nwoke (2014) and many other scholars for details. Our major recommendation is that the students should be more pro-active in handling

such errors by re-doubling efforts during their study period.

Conclusion

This study shows that there are ten major categories of grammatical errors committed by the 200 level English students of selected northern Nigerian university students in their semester examination writing – concord (60.65% and 50%) for UDUS and FUGUS respectively. The other errors are spelling (11.47% and 9.09%); tense (4.92% and 11.36%); capitalisation (9.84% and 9.09%); preposition (4.92% and 6.81%); tautology (4.92% and 0%); ellipsis (1.64% and 4.54%); determiner (0% and 4.54%); Number (1.64% and 2.27%); and auxiliary (0% and 2.27%). The errors were committed as a result of lack of commitment, forgetfulness, poor foundation among others. The article suggests that teachers of those students should devise a means of tackling the occurrence of those errors and make efforts in providing remedies to them. This can be done by introducing extra lessons and coaching/guidance for the students while the students should change their attitude in learning the language as future leaders. This paper also suggests that further research needs to be carried out for the same study population before they graduate from the university so as to make a balanced and adequate comparison of the findings.

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