

SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE AMONG SELECTED PG STUDENTS OF ENGLISH, COOU, IGBARIAM CAMPUS

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ABSTRACT

Second language learning is shrouded with problems culminating in error, the crux of this study. This paper examines syntactic analysis of English language usage among selected PG students of English, COOU, Igbariam campus, with emphasis on concord agreement. 12 post graduate students of English Department 2021/2022 session, COOU form the population for this study. The researcher used Purposive Sampling to draw a working population of ten respondents. Data is generated using survey method by directly administering an essay on the sample to draw out their concord errors through critical assessment. The study used Descriptive Grammar by Ndimele as method of data analysis. Eclectic theoretical method involving Error Analysis by Corder, and Feature Percolation Theory by Liesber was used. Results showed that all the respondents fall short in one or two rules of concord beside other errors like omission, addition, disordering and spelling that abound in the students' essays. It was discovered that concord errors tend to affect meaning as a result of disagreement between the noun and the verb. From the findings, researcher recommended that further researches should be carried out on general error analysis among post graduate students. The researcher was concluded with a reiteration on the need to take grammar study seriously especially concord agreement, so as to attain the expected near-native-speaker proficiency in English language usage in our higher institutions of learning.

INTRODUCTION

English is an inherited language by Nigeria through colonialism. It is a language that many struggle so hard to acquire and use due to its prestige and the vast formal functions it performs in Nigeria. To become proficient in English for academic success in competence and performance poses great linguistic challenges for second language learners both in their spoken and written forms within and outside English-speaking communities. Pointing to this fact, Scarcella (2020) opined that L2 students in the America tend to acquire fundamental communication skills early, but it takes longer time for them to acquire proficiency for their academic success in schools mostly in area of concord. If this is the case with language competency acquisition in English speech communities, one could imagine how much effort and time could be sufficient to attain near-perfection in countries like Nigeria that English is not their mother tongue. These challenges result in error, a major challenge in language second language learning.

The researcher becomes motivated to embark on this research after listening to Anambra state governorship debate on 12th Nov; 2021 between senator, Andy Ubah, comrade Valentine Ozigbo, and Prof. Chukwuma Charles Soludo. The researcher was disappointed to hear the three great scholars articulating words in opposition to concord agreement. Language is a system of human communication by means of structurally arranged sounds or written representation (Richards et al 2020). The asserted system of human communication is rule-governed: there are specified ways the language is supposed to be structured and articulated to effectively communicate. To accurately comply with these rules of language use is challenging even to native speakers of English. Despite significant efforts made and intensified by theorists, researchers and linguists, error still remains unsurmountable and inevitable in second language learning. To Akidi (2021), errors are deviation from or violation of the language rule or code.

This study has this error as a targeted scope in relation to concord agreement. Error analysis is used to identify, classify and systematically interpret and correct the concord errors made by post-graduate students of English department, Igbariam Campus.

Grammar deals with the study of how words/morphemes join together to form meaningful sentences (Syal and Jindal, 2019). They emphasised that grammar tells us the distinctions between sets of sentence structures: the grammaticality or ungrammaticality of a structure. Thus, 'the principal and English teacher are here', and 'the man kill the dog' are both ungrammatical. The two sentences fall short of concord agreement, the crux of this work. The above and lot more grammatical errors are on the increase presently in English language usage due to lack of awareness and decline in grammar conscious study. This as a matter of fact affects both linguistic competence, communicative competence and academic achievement evident in mass academic failure in most of our learning institutions including post-graduate students. Grammar of a language involves the rules governing the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of that language. Syntax is the most vital part of grammar as only beautiful sounds with odd structure is meaningless thus useless. Syntax, to Crystal (2012), is a traditional term for the study of rules governing the way words are combined to form sentences in a language. It is the study of the interrelationship between elements of a given sentence. This combination and interrelationship are guided by concord that most, by lapse or ignorance find it hard to adhere to in language use. Concord appears to be the most problematic and records higher error, even among the educated, evident in peoples' daily interaction.

Adeyeye and Nwabuwe (2021) are of the view that the concept of concord, agreement, government, or cross reference is used to explain the relationship and harmony betwixt the inflectional forms of different elements within a sentence. In relation to the above definition, concord deals with the subject and verb of a sentence which can be inflected. To Hefferman and Lincoln (2022) concord emphasizes that a verb has to agree with its subject because a verb has more than one form: there is a specific form that matches with a particular kind of subject. In a similar way, Aremo (2022) sees concord as a term used to describe the relationship between two grammatical items whereby a certain feature in the form of one requires a corresponding feature in the form of the other. This means that for a singular subject to be grammatical must be accompanied by a singular verb, likewise a plural subject should go with plural verb. It is the attachment of the only appropriate verb to a subject at a given context that brings about the much insurmountable problem that triggers this research: syntactic analysis of English language usage among selected PG students of English, COOU, Igbariam campus.

Statement of the Problem

Failure is on the increase in Nigeria's academic world lately, especially in English language in our secondary schools, colleges, and universities as a result of incompetency in syntax and concord agreement. Many writers, researchers, and teachers have put much effort to curtail the rate of mass failure and poor performance of students at various academic levels in English Language but counter-productive. Adeyanju (2022) asserts that it could be due to the fact that many students at secondary and tertiary levels, as well as others in various professions have not mastered the English language mechanics, structure, and usage, thereby performing poorly in both spoken and written English. Wrong use of concord leads to lack of clear direction in students' expressions in essays and causes distortion and wrong interpretation of messages in any written and spoken discourse. This problem is compounded by lack of constant awareness on the forms of regular concord errors, their corrections and the negative effects on students' performance in both spoken and written English.

The general purpose of this work is to do a syntactic analysis of English language usage among postgraduate students of English in COOU, Igbariam campus. This research has specific objectives to: identify and classify various concord errors, explain, evaluate and correct the errors identified; and present the effects of concord errors on English language usage through feature percolation principle by Liesber.

This study is significant in so many ways. It is useful to students by providing the appropriate ways of concord application and correction. They would find this work as an aid to efficient and effective communication within and outside the classroom. The study is useful to teachers of English language. It is a good material for teaching students how to adhere to concord rules. It will also be of great relevance to English language textbook writers and those with grammar problem will find it as a useful guide in communicating the areas students need exposure and more explanation. This would facilitate easier understanding of concord by students. Finally, this work is useful to researchers on concord and error analysis thus, it is a rich language investigation source for further research.

This study is guided by three research questions: How are concord errors identified and classified? How are concord errors explained, evaluated and corrected? What role does feature percolation principle play in exploring the effects of concord errors on English language usage?

This study is delimited to concord part of syntax. It focuses on concord errors and not all forms of grammatical errors like spelling, punctuations, and so on, in the written essays sourced from a population of twelve postgraduate students of English department in COOU. Ten out of the twelve students are sampled purposefully. This research focuses on concord errors identification, classification, explanation and evaluation or correction. It also touches on the effects of concord errors on English language use.

Review of Related Scholarship Language

Crytal (2012) asserts that language is a universal human behavior; a biological faculty that enables individuals to learn and use language in a given environment. This points to the fact that language is universal, human and community based. Olaoye (2019) sees language as purely human and non-instinctive way of communicating ideas, emotions and desires, by means of voluntarily produced symbols. The words non-instinctive and symbols make this definition so vital to the present study. It establishes the fact that language is rule-governed. Adegbite and Akindele (2019) observe that language is characterized by a set of vocal sounds which are decodable. They further reiterate that the vocal sounds produced in are used in various systematic and rule governed way. The researcher sees language as a communicative system of rule-governed sounds combination that could be associated with meanings.

Grammar

Syal and Jindal (2019) opine that every language has its grammar, a system in which words join to form meaningful sentences. It is a rule or pattern that determines language structure and use. In an elaborate way, Tomori (2020) variously describes grammar as the quality of knowledge of a language a speaker possesses inferred from the nature of his utterance; a book that carries the morphological and syntactical rules of a language; a body of prescriptive rules about the acceptability and unacceptability of language use. The views above relay acceptable way of English language usage, opposite to this, forms the base of argument for this study: error analysis, identification classification and correction bearing on syntax-

concord errors. To the researcher, grammar is simply the rules that determine correct language use.

Syntax

Murthy (2017) simplified syntax as the study of the structures of a language. It encompasses phrases and sentences. To put it straight, Shadia (2020) maintains that syntax is the study of the relevant components of a sentence, describing the parts grammatically and their relationship. In the same way, Yule (2015) explicates that syntax is a setting out together or arrangement. It concentrates on the structure and ordering of sentence components. The two last definitions are apt for the study as they emphasize on the arrangement and the relationship that exists between the components: concord agreement, the focus of this study. To the researcher, syntax is the scientific study of well-formedness of linguistic structures in obedience to certain approved language norms.

Concord

To Allerton (2022), explains that concord focuses on number, case, gender, voice and aspect. Robins (2018) asserts that concord is the requirement for the forms of two or more words of specific word classes that stand in specific syntactic relationship with each other shall also be characterized by the same paradigmatically marked category. The relationship spoken in the two definitions above twigs the route this study plods on to ensure correct English language usage. Asap (2021) maintained that concord is an agreement between the subject and the verb or agreement between a verb and other elements of clause. This definition appears best for this study because it captures the various laws of concord.

Uchegbu and Okongor (2022) proposed three forms of concord: grammatical Concord Which they see as the most important type of concord in English. It is the subject-verb agreement. it involves mainly, number and person. Notional concord, to them is a type of semantic agreement between the subject of the sentence whose form is singular but whose meaning involves more than one entity. Notional concord is agreement based on the idea of number rather than the singular form of the noun. In other words, if the individuals are considered as a unit, a singular verb is used but when the group is treated as a collection of individuals, a plural verb is used. For example: The congregation has taken the decision. The congregation have taken the decision. They called the third one proximity concord, in which the verb agrees with the noun or pronoun that precedes it. In other words, if one of the two subjects is singular and the other is plural, the verb agrees with that subject which comes after it. These three types of concord are quite instrumental to this work but are just three from the twenty-four original rules of concord.

Asap, U (2021) proposes about twenty-four laws of concord. They include, subject and verb concord which states that once the subject in a sentence is singular, the verb should also be singular, for example, she (singular subject) goes (singular verb), not: She go (plural verb). When the subject is plural: Subject and Object concord which states that when everybody, everyone, and so on. are used; the object must be singular not plural, for example, everybody knows his or her name, not Everybody know his name; Mandative subjunctive concord: when wish, prayer, suggestion, recommendation, demand, or resolution is used in a sentence, the verb that follows should be plural, whether the subject is singular or plural. For example, it has been suggested that she go (not goes away); The board recommended that the director resign (not resigns); we Pray that God save me on my upcoming examination (not God saves). Proximity concord: if there is a list of nouns or pronouns at the level of the subject, it is the nearest noun or pronoun to the verb that will determine the choice of the verb. For example, If

James fails his examination, his teachers, his parents, his friends or John (is) to be blamed; and so on. These 24 rules form the backbone of this research. This study is focuses on assess the students' essays against this background.

Empirical Review

Adamu (2019) carried out a study on the effects of concord errors in the essays of students in selected senior secondary schools in Kaduna metropolis. One hundred and twenty scripts were collected. Thirty concord errors were analysed using structuralist paradigms of SVCOA. The research revealed that students have problem in subject verb concord. The study above is related to the present study on effects of concord and error analysis. However, they differ on sources of data, scope and geographical area of study. Uchegbu and Okongor (2020) icunducted a research on concord and problems associated with Nigerian learners of English. Error analysis was used as theory. Written works of 200 level students sampled randomly. Results revealed that most sentences made by some of the students contain more than one error. This study is different from the current study on theoretical framework, methodology and area of study. They however relate on subject matter: concord error.

Theoretical Framework

Error Analysis

The theory was formulated by Corder in (1916) Akidi (2021) asserts that error analysis is a branch of Applied Linguistics that concerns itself with the study, compilation and analysis of errors made by second language learners. It covers written, spoken, and reading manners. He further reiterates that error analysis is a method of studying second language acquisition in the 60s. It is used to identify types and manners of errors as well as sources and causes. Error analysis is credited to Corder (1967) as proponent. To Corder, error analysis is a diagnosis different from mistakes: errors are not easy to dictate and correct by the learner but mistakes are. Akidi (2016) claims that error is due to mother tongue interference. Corder (1967) gave four steps to error analysis: Error Identification: either Pre-systematic (having no knowledge of grammar but apply that of MT); systemic (have basic knowledge of grammar but misapply it); or post-systematic (native-like competence); global or local (stands for pre-systematic and systematic); overt and covert: systematically correct but pragmatically incorrect. The second and third steps are Error Description and Classification: wrongful addition, omission, misordering and substitution. Here, the researcher classifies the errors into the various laws of concord agreement. Error explanation is to determine whether the error is inter-lingual or intra-lingual. The last is error evaluation/correction: errors are evaluated and corrected in agreement to the norm of usage. The researcher uses the steps as discussed above in sourcing and analysing data for this study but classifies the errors not according to overall error analysis of omission, addition, misordering, but into the various rules of concord.

Feature Percolation Theory

Percolation is a structure formation guideline proposed by Liesber (2017), modified and redefined by Matthews (2017), as a theory that expresses the agreement of the morpho-syntactic or semantic feature of a phrase with the corresponding feature of its lexical head. In a similar way, Haspelmath (2012) asserts that all syntactic features of the head node (noun) are shared thus extend to the phrasal node (verb) to avoid misunderstanding the message. This is what percolation is all about; it is the syntactic cooperativeness within a structure. The researcher uses this theory to showcase the level of percolation and deviation that exist between

the head (mostly subjects) and phrasal node (verbs) as found in the data for this study, pointing at their semantic implications.

METHODOLOGY

Data was generated by administering an essay on PG students of English department, 2021/2022 session, Igbaria Campus on the topic, problems Confronting English language usage in Nigeria'. Ten essays were selected using purposive sampling by Bernard (2002). Descriptive Grammar by Ndimele (2008) is used as method of data analysis. A table of five columns is employed to effectively analyse the data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research question one: How are concord errors Identified and classified?

Research question two: How are concord errors explained, evaluated and corrected?

Various Errors	Error identification	Error Classification	Error Explanation	Error Evaluation/Correction
Sample 1: Okoye Ifeoma				
I. When using English language, users articulates many grammatical errors	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 1: verb must agree with the real noun. Users, plural noun, ought to carry vomit, plural verb.	Inter/intra-lingual error.	When using English language, users articulate many grammatical errors....
Sample 2: Okparaeke Chizoba C.				
I. Many igbos tend to pronounce wrongly when articulating some, English words because it is a second language.	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 1: verbs must agree with the subject (noun) in number and person; English words' here is a plural noun that ought to be followed by 'they are second language words' not it.	intra-lingual error because no element of mother tongue (MT) is reflected in the expression. The student is also deficient in English language.	Many Igbos tend to pronounce wrongly when articulating some English words because they are second language words.
Sample 3: Igbokwe Onyekachi Some people pronounces words in a way.				
	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 2: 'some' has to agree with pronounce.	Inter/inter-lingual error due to absence of singular and plural verb in MT.	Some people pronounce words in a way.....
Sample 4: Asoegwu Ijezie				
I. The second language learner....find himself...	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 2: The second language learner should agree with finds not find.	Inter-lingual error due to transfer of Igbo syntactic freedom.	The second language learner...finds himself....
Sample 5: Nwanya Juliana				
I. So many people sees....	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 2: so many people should agree with See not sees.	Inter/intra-lingual error of transfer.	So many people see....

Sample 6: Juliet Nwosu

1. The language require a specific accent..	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 1: the languages should agree with requires not require.	Inter/intra-lingual error of transfer.	The languages requires a specific accent....
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Sample 7: Juliet Ezenebugo

1. It is a country that take pride in the culture.....	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 2: a country should agree with takes not take.	Inter-lingual error.	It is a country that takes pride in its culture .
2. Mother tongue are counted as challenges...	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 1: 'mother tongue' should agree with is not are.	Inter-lingual error.	The learning skills of Mother tongue is counted as one of the challenges....

Sample 8: No Name

1. English language functions in Nigeria has brought so many....	Systematic, local and overt error.	Breach to concord rule 2: 'functions' ought to agree with have not has.	Inter/intra-lingual error.	English language functions in Nigeria have brought so many....
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Research Question 3: What role does feature percolation principle play in exploring the effects of concord errors on English language usage?

Every linguistic structure communicates meaning. A slight change in a given structure in area of concord agreement leads to meaning shift, alteration and change or misunderstanding. In sample 9, the excerpt '...so many factors that poses a problem', there is syntactic and concord incongruity that affect comprehension and twigs chaos in the reader trying to relate the writer's mind to a specific meaning. percolation, which stands for syntactic and semantic cooperation is lacking here making one to wonder If the factor is one, to connote what the verb carries? This in turn affects the real intent of the speaker. Here, the subject is speaking one thing while the verb is speaking another. This means that concord disagreement leads to disagreement in meaning. In the same way, the excerpt 'English language users vomits many grammatical errors' lacks percolation and syntactic cooperation. It leaves the reader wondering between the verb and the noun, on which to follow to get the right message convey. Also, in sample 10, the excerpt 'Igbos use words because it is not their words', the reader wonders if the writer is still talking about English words or has started another sentence with 'it'. This deviation and inconsistency leaves the reader to wander across two lines of meaning between the subject and the verb. In sample 3: The excerpt 'some people pronounces words in a way', is ambiguity as all the features are not percolated especially the verb and the subject – 'some' and 'pronounces'. all these concord disagreements, deviations from feature percolation principles and inconsistencies bring about meaning discord as the reader, in order to be certain is caught between two chains of meaning, one from the subject direction, the other from the verb perspective.

Discussion of Findings

From research question one, results reveals that ten students out of the respondents under investigation committed errors related to concord agreement. The is discovered that other errors abound such as spelling errors: 'bean' for 'beans' in sample 8; 'interternational' for 'international' in sample 1; 'There' for 'their' in sample 9; 'two' for 'too' in sample 5. There are errors of omission, addition and misordering as found in 'call' instead of 'called', 'use' instead of 'used' in line 2 of sample 1, 'the' unnecessarily inserted in line three, second paragraph of

sample 4; 'This is the one of the cankerworms'; misordering is also found in line six, paragraph 2 of sample 5. Coming to error classification, result reveals that the respondents faulted only the first and second laws of concord, not that they are post-systemically competent in the rest 22 laws of concord, it is due to the fact that their argument never reached those areas. If they are examined on the other areas, the outcome would be hear-blowing. On error identification, the researcher discovers that systemic, local and overt error are higher.

From research question 2, result shows that, in error explanation, inter-lingual error predominates due to Igbo language influence on the respondents' use of English. The researcher discovers that the respondents committed more concord errors because singular and plural verbs do not exist in our local languages which the respondents attempted to transfer such freedom into English culminating in concord errors. From the third research question, it is discovered that concord errors bring confusion, ambiguity and indifference in meaning generation.

CONCLUSION

Error analysis is a vast inexhaustible linguistic area as it touches on varieties of errors emerge anew daily in English language usage. Concord agreement among them sticks out as most crucial because of its negative ability to define both spoken and written English. Concord seems to be the base for English language classification among users in relation to competent speakers and incompetent speakers, standard and non-standard. this work points to areas of concord errors, classifies the errors, explains them, and as well corrects them. Concord errors and meaning making are juxtaposed to showcase how breaches to the rule of concord affects meaning making. The researcher thus concludes with a resounding emphasis on the great negative effects of breaches to the rules of concord on formal communication, thus the need to put more efforts on the study of concord agreement to ensure the mastery of both spoken and written English. This is because, just a breach to any of the rules of concord will reduce a speaker's worth especially in a formal setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Hinging on the findings made, the researcher recommends for a research to be carried out to cover other areas of errors inherent in PG students' English usage.
2. It is recommended that research that will oblige the students to plod over all the 24 rules of concord enumerated by Asap (2015) should be carried out.

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