



ANALYSIS OF ERRORS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE OF SELECTED SSCE STUDENTS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the errors in the English language usage of selected SSCE students in Oyo State of Nigeria through the theoretic foci of Pitt Corder's (1967) error analysis, Chomsky's (1965) communicative competence and Halliday's (1978) systemic functional grammar. The data for the study was gathered through an essay writing test organized for 120 randomly sampled SSCE students from 12 purposively selected secondary schools from the 6 Education zones from Oyo State and 15 objective test on the lexico-semantic and grammatical use and usage of the English Language. The frequencies of the performance ranges of these students were examined through the use of the simple percentage statistical tool. The findings revealed that the English language usage ssce Students in Oyo State of Nigeria is characterized by four types of errors: induced errors, communication – based errors interference errors and errors caused by overgericalisation of the linguistic rules. It was equally discovered that the aphasics among these students often used English language that is characterized by the developmental errors. Sampled errors from the data were selected for discussion and corrected. The paper concludes that for a L2 teacher of English in Nigeria, to increase students' proficiency in English, he or she should often use error analysis to know the area to teach.

Keywords: *Error analysis, linguistic competence communicative competence English Language Pedagogy.*

Introduction

English is a language that is used in different domains in Nigeria. It is the language of politics, religion, commerce, education as well as science and technology in the country. The English language became not only a medium of instruction in Nigerian schools, but it is also an important subject in the school

curriculum after the promulgation of Education Ordinance of 1926 in Nigeria (Adegbite, 2020 p. 172).

However, the standard of English used by Nigerian students has drastically fallen. The students, youths and some adults in Nigeria use non-standard Nigerian English which are full of the phonological, semantic and grammatical errors. This paper therefore examines the different errors flouted or committed by SSCE students in Oyo State of Nigeria with a bid to solve them and proffer possible ways of improving students' proficiency in the use and usage of the English language that is error-free and is closer to the standard or native-speakers' varieties of the language.

Errors in English Language Usage

An error in language usage signifies an unconscious breach or violation of the linguistic or language codes or rules (Adegbite, 2020). Error in language use differs from mistakes. Error in language usage occurs unconsciously as a result of the ignorance of the second language users about the rules controlling the grammatical, lexical choices and the structure of a particular language. Mistakes, on the other hand, occur in language use and usage as a result of carelessness or oversight of the second language user. (Corder, 1967, Adegbite & Gut, 2014).

In the English language usage in Nigeria, students often flout the grammatical, semantic and phonological rules of the language. The flouting of these rules often leads to errors. For instance, at the phonological level, certain words are often mispronounced by Nigerian students. The Hausa non-native speakers of English language in Nigeria often find it difficult to pronounce the voiceless labio-dental fricative sound /f/. They often mispronounce it as /p/- the voiceless bilabial plosive sound. Hence, the word people is often mispronounced as /fifl/ instead of /pipl/ by Hausa speakers of English language in Nigeria.

At the lexico-semantic level, different words are often misinterpreted and misused by Nigerian students while the word "cattle – egret" or 'egret' is often called "white bird" or "lekeleke" by Nigerian students. In the same token, the expression "close friend" is often called "tight friend" by Nigerian students. This often leads to the non-standard or mediolect called Nigerian English in

Nigeria (Fakoya, 2004). At the grammatical level, the rule of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations is often flouted by Nigerian students. Also, the rules of concord are equally often being flouted by many students in Nigeria. This poor use of grammar by Nigerian students has often led to their poor performances in the external examinations like WASSE, GCE, NABTEB and NECO. As a result, this paper is therefore focuses at examining the lexico-semantic and grammatical errors that are often committed by the senior secondary school students in Nigeria, with a specific reference to selected students from, Oyo State of Nigeria.

Significance of the study

This study is significant in examining some errors often committed in English language usage by Nigerian students. This paper is significant in expanding the terrain of research in the English language pedagogy in the Nigerian socio-cultural contexts. It is also significant in providing possible solutions to poor standard of the English language usage and poor proficiency of Nigerian students in English. The study will also be useful in providing recommendations to language and curriculum planners in Nigeria.

Theoretical perspectives

The theoretical base of this study revolves round Chomsky's (1965) concepts of linguistic competence and communicative competence as well as Corder's (1967) concept of error analysis. Chomsky (1965) in his *Aspects of the theory of syntax* explains that linguistic competence implies the ability of a second language user to master the codes or rules controlling the use and usage of a particular language. This has been termed "*langue*" by Chomsky (1965). On the other hand, the communicative competence refers to the ability of a second language user to be able to use a second language in all real life situations. This has equally been termed "*parole*" by Chomsky (1965) and linguistic performance by Canale (1983). Hymes (1972) gives the concept of communicative competence a full-blown explanation. According to Hymes (1972) and Carnale (1983) there are four components of communicative competences: Grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Aremu (2009) adds the concept called *pragmatic competence* as

a component of communicative competence. Ogunsiji (2004) states that communicative competence of a second language learner can be improved through the situational language teaching. The concept of error analysis was propounded by Pitt Corder (1967). According to Corder (1967), an error implied the impact use of a second language by a second language user as a result of the ignorance or lack of knowledge of a L2 user about the linguistic codes in the second language. Corder (1967) identifies different types error often being committed by a L2 user: *Induced error*, *communication-based error*, *interference error*, *developmental error* and *error caused by over-generalisation* of rules. Induced error implies the error often committed by a L2 learner as a result of internalising or copying wrong expressions used by L2 teachers. The induced errors are often difficult to correct because the L2 learner will find it difficult to shift from the wrong model that he or she has internalised from the speeches of some L2 teachers and speakers. Developmental errors in L2 usage are errors often committed by second language children at their development stage. Developmental errors are also flouted by the aphasic patients at their developmental stages. Such expressions like: “Daddy see”, “Mummy tea, tea”, heat, heat” are examples of expressions with developmental errors. Communication based errors are errors often committed by L2 users as a result of their ignorance of the lexical and semantic usage of some English words and expressions. Examples are the following:

- i. ‘Daddy, look at the ‘air-ball’ instead of ‘Daddy look at the balloon’
- ii. ‘Mummy, look at ‘white birds’, instead of ‘look at the cattle egret’
- iii. ‘Please, dress for me’ instead of saying ‘please, shift a bit for me’

Overgeneralisation of the linguistic rules often leads to errors (Corder, 1967; Adegbite & Gut, 2014). For instance, since all regular verbs often take “ed” suffix when they are used in past form e.g ‘kill/killed’, map/mapped, clap/clapped, etc, many L2 users of English in Nigeria often overgeneralise this linguistic rule. Hence, the past tense of go’ could be misused to be ‘goed’ instead of ‘went’. This is what signifies ‘overgeneralisation of rules’.

Corder (1967) states that interference errors in English as a second language usage are errors caused by interfering the codes of the mother-tongue or first language with the second language usage. For instance, the expression ‘Baba

mi so pe awon nbo' can influence the use of English in the Southwestern Nigeria, thus: 'My father said *they* are coming'. The use of the word 'they' in 'My father said *they* are coming' has made the expression to be an error. It is supposed to be: "My father said *he* is coming'. Adegbite (2020) gives the following mother-tongue interference in the English expression '*I am hungry*' thus: (a) **Hausa**: 'Ina jin yunwa (which means '*I am feeling hungry*') (b) **Igbo**: Agunu na agu ni' (which means, '*Hunger is beating me*' and (c) **Yoruba**: 'Ebi npa mi' (which means '*Hunger is killing me*'). the examples given by Adegbite (2020, p.24). are good examples of interference of mother-tongue with English as a L2 in Nigeria.

Halliday's (1978) concept of systemic functional grammar is also one of the theories applied in the analysis of data for this study. Systemic functional grammar (SFG) was originated by M.A.K Halliday. It is part of the socio-semantic approach to language. It defines language as a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning. SFG explains that language performs different meta-function: (ideational, textual and interpersonal). Halliday (1994) identifies system, meta-function, and rank as features that characterise language. Halliday's concept of lexico-grammar views grammar and lexis as two ends of the same continuum. For Halliday (1994), grammar is described as a system and not as rules. The grammatical structure involves a choice from a describable set of options.

Halliday (1994) sees language as meaning potential. To Halliday (1994), language is metafunctionally organised. He explains further that written and spoken language often construe meaning. SFG is a theory of language in use. Halliday's analysis of a simple sentence has 'SPCA' structure and this is often used in systemic functional grammar analysis instead of the classical traditional approach which has 'SVCOA' structure. Chomsky's *langue and parole*; Halliday's (1994) concept of systemic functional grammar (SFG) and Corder's (1967) concept of error analysis are tripodal eclectic theories used in the analysis of data for this study.

Methodology

The method used in gathering the data was an essay writing question given to a group of 120 randomly selected students from twelve purposively sampled

senior secondary schools from six Oyo State education zones. The total number of students that answered the question were 120. These students were randomly sampled from the following Senior Secondary Schools: Awe High School, Awe, Oyo; Ladigbolu Grammar School, Oyo, Anglican Grammar School, Ogbomoso; Ogbomoso Grammar School, Ogbomoso, Baptist High School, Saki; Iseyin District Grammar School, Iseyin; Iroko Community Grammar School, Iroko, Ibadan; Lagelu Grammar School, Ibadan; Igbo-Elerin Grammar School, Ibadan; Queen School, Apata-Ibadan; Obaseeku High School, Eruwa; and Igbo-Ora High School, Igbo-Ora.

The analysis of the lexico-semantic and grammatical errors committed by these students were made using the eclectic theoretical frame work of error analysis (Corder 1967) Halliday's(1978) SFG, as well as Chomsky's (1965). 'langue' and 'parole' as theoretical base of the study. The topic given to these students to write was *"You have witnessed a traditional festival in your town. Write an essay suitable to be published in a local newspaper in your area describing this particular cultural festival"*.

The question was given to the students and supervised by the researcher. Biscuits and sachet water were served as remuneration and motivator to encourage these students. These answered scripts were collected back after the exercise that took forty minutes in each school. The exercise took a period of three weeks to be completed. The answered scripts were marked by the researcher to award marks. The grammatical, and lexico-semantic errors in each scripts were identified and underlined. These were analysed by employing the theoretical underpinning of the study.

Data Analysis

Fig 1: Frequencies of students' performance in an essay writing questions among randomly selected 120 SSCE students from Oyo State Secondary Schools.

Mark Score Range	No of Students	Percentage
0-5marks	14	11.66
6-10marks	22	18.33
11-15marks	26	21.66
16-20marks	44	28.33

21-25marks	18	15
26-20marks	06	0.5
31-35marks	-	0%
36-40marks	-	0%
40-45marks	-	0%
45-50marks	-	0%
Total	120 students	100%

From ‘Fig 1’ it can be observed that 14 students (11.66%) got between 0-5 marks, 22 (18.33%) got between 6-10marks, 26(21.66%) got between 11-15 marks, 26 (21.66%) got between 16-20 marks, 18 (15%) got between 21-25 marks, while 06 candidates (05%) got above average marks i.e. between 26 – 20 marks in the essay writing question given to them. This implies that the general performance of those students in that examination was poor. This poor performances of students occurred as a result of students’ poor use of grammar or mechanical accuracy, poor use of expression or errors of lexico-semantic usage of expression as well as poor understanding of the question.

Fig 2: Question given to students to be able to pick or identify their errors in grammar and lexico-semantic usage of words and expressions.

Instruction: From the options lettered A-D, pick a word or an expression which best fills in the gap in each of the spaces provided in the following:

- Let us our work and go home (a) round up (b) round in (c) round off (d) take off
- The air-craft will at ten am tomorrow. (a) take up (b) take off (b) round up (d) round off
- I will be longing to You in our party (a) seen (b) see (c) welcome (d) seeing
- Had I I..... my time (a) know/ wouldn’t have waste (b) known/ will not waste (c) known / wouldn’t have wasted (d) known / will not wasted
- You better home now (a) should/be going (b) had/go (c) should/have gone 9d) had/ followed me

6. It's high time we Our salary (a) collected (b) collect (c) shall be collecting (d) collecting
7. The thieves had been (a) rounded off (b) round up (c) rounded up (d) round off
8. The car driver drove recklessly and allowed the car toand (a) summersault / enter the bush (b) have an accident / enter the bush (c) capsize / swerve into the bush (d) summersault / swerve in the bush
9. The man touched the live-wire and got (a) shocked (b) electrocuted (c) maimed (d) destroyed
10. All Cordially invited to our programme. (a) are (b) is (c) have been (d) were
11. I will be longing to your reply. (a) receiving (b) receive (c) collect (d) received
12. If I Mr. President. I develop this nation. (a) am / will have helped (b) were / would have helped (c) am to be / would have help (d) were / will have help
13. Charity at home. (a) begin (b) began (c) begun (d) begins
14. Had you that I you last year, you away. (a) realized / would helped / wouldn't have run (b) realize / will help / won't have run (c) realized / would help / wouldn't have ran (d) realized / would help / won't have run
15. She is a (a) young beautiful lady tall (b) beautiful young tall lady (c) lady beautiful young tall (d) tall, beautiful young lady.
16. Not only my parents but my brother also there (a) are (b) was (c) were (d) is

Fig 3: Frequencies of SSCE students' performances in questions given to test their errors in grammar and lexico-semantic usage of English language.

Range of Student's Marks	No of Students	Percentage
0-4 marks	26	66%
5-8 marks	54	45%
9-12 marks	30	25%
Total No of Students	120	100%

Discussion of Findings

An analysis of the answer scripts (results) of the essay writing and objective questions set to test students' grammatical and lexico-semantic errors in English language revealed that many SSCE students in Oyo State of Nigeria often commit four types of errors in their English Language usage. These errors are (i) induced errors, (ii) interference errors (iii) error caused by overgeneralisation of English language rules and (iv) communication based errors. Only the aphasia and the children often commit developmental errors in their English language usage in their English language usage in Southwestern Nigeria.

Communication-based Errors of SSCE students of English in Oyo State

The analysis of the answer scripts of students on the Essay writing question given to them revealed that many of these students often commit communication-based errors in their English language usage. Communication based errors in language usage which are often committed as a result of the ignorance of the second language learners on the lexico-semantic usage of the second or target language. For example, many students wrote these erroneous expressions in their essays marked and analysed by the researcher:

Ex 1: The rain felled on the day of our Egungun festival.

Ex 2: An accident take place when a driver *controlled the motor anyhow* and the motor enter bush

Ex 3: My second person hold my shirt when he saw the masquerade

Ex 4: Many white birds were on the trees in our town's palace when we went there to see the masquerade

Ex 5: One of my tight-friends escort me to our town to see our egungun dancing.

In 'Ex 2' the expressions '*an accident take place*' and '*a driver controlled the motor anyhow* and the *motor enter bush*' were grammatical errors caused by ignorance of the user in the lexico-semantic and grammatical usage of the English language.

The expression is supposed to be written thus:

Table 1: Wrong and correct expressions

S/N	Wrong Expression	Correct Expression
i	An accident <u>take place</u>	An accident <u>occurred</u> or <u>took place</u>

ii.	The driver controlled the <u>motor anyhow</u>	The driver <u>drove recklessly</u>
iii	The motor <u>enter bush</u>	The motor <u>swerved into the bush</u>
iv	He is my <u>tight-friend</u>	He is my <u>close-friend</u>

Also, the expression in Ex 1 is an example of a grammatical error caused by ignorance on the lexico-semantic usage of the English language. Likewise, the expressions in ‘Ex 3’, ‘Ex 4’ and ‘Ex 5’ above are full of the type of grammatical errors called ‘communication-based errors’. The following table 2 has the wrong and correct expressions

Table 2: Wrong and correct use of expressions

S/N	Wrong / Erroneous Expressions	Correct or Error-free expression
i.	The rain fell yesterday	It rained yesterday
ii	My second person hold my shirt	My friend / partner held my shirt
iii	Many white birds were on the trees... when we went to see the masquerade	Many cattle egrets were on the trees ... when we went to watch the masquerade

The students who committed communication based errors got poor marks such as $4/20$ or $6/20$ in their use of expression in the essay writing question given to them. The implication of this poor performance in the use of expression is that it led to their poor performance in content.

Hence, the English Language teachers in Oyo State and Southwestern Nigeria, in general, need to teach their students on how to avoid communication based errors.

Interference Errors of SSCE Students of English in Oyo State

The analysis of the marked scripts of easy writing and objective questions given to selected SSCE English Language students in Oyo State of Nigeria revealed that many of these students committed Interference errors. Interference errors

are errors caused by allowing the usage of mother tongues to affect English as a second language. The following are examples of the interference errors discovered from the findings

EX 6: I told my father that I want to go and watch the Egungun and they said I can go.

EX 7: The babalawo take out opele to speak to the Oracle.

Ex 8: All are cordially invited to our father’s burial outing ceremony.

In “Ex 6” above, the word “they” which was wrongly used should be “**he**”. This error was caused by the interference of Yoruba with the English language usage. Also, the expression “The babalawo.....speak, to the oracle” is an interference error. The correct expression is: “**The *babalawo (or witch doctor) consulted the oracle***”

Table 3: Wrong and the correct usage of interference errors discovered from the study.

Wrong Expression	Correct Expression
(i) The babalawo take out opele to speak to the oracle	(i) The witch doctor (babalawo) cast the opele to consult the oracle
(ii) I told my father, that I want to go and watch egungun, and they said I should go.	(ii) (ii) I told my father that I wanted to watch egungun and he said I should go.
(iii) All are cordially invited	(iii) All is cordially invited

In ‘Ex 6”, the expression “I told my fatherand they said I should go” is an interference from Yoruba expression “Mo so fun baba mi pe mo fe lo wo egungun, won si ni ki n maa lo. The plural “they” (i.e ‘won’) used in the Yoruba expression is often used to show honorifics or deference in Yoruba language. It is wrong to use word like that in the English, Language. In ‘Ex 8’, the word “**All**” is an indefinite pronoun which is often used as singular subject and must be followed with singular verb (and not plural verbs like are, were, etc).

From our findings, it was discovered that many students who used the words “All” and “Everybody” used them as plural pronoun instead of singular. This

error is caused by interference of their mother tongues with the English language usage.

Table 4: Wrong use of “All” and “Everybody” and their correct forms.

Wrong Expressions	Correct Expressions
(i) <u>All are now ready</u>	(i) <u>All is</u> now ready
(ii) <u>Everybody have arrived</u>	(ii) <u>Everybody has</u> arrived
(iii) <u>Everybody were welcomed</u>	(iii) <u>Everybody was</u> welcomed
(iv) <u>All are cordially invited</u>	(iv) <u>All is</u> cordially invited

Induced Errors in English Language Usage by SSCE Students in Oyo State

The findings from the SSCE students answer scripts of essay writing question given to 120 SSCE student of English in Oyo State of Nigeria revealed that the English Language usage of these students in Oyo State of Nigeria is characterised by induced errors. Induced errors are errors of second language usage often caused by the learners’ imitation or internalisation of the wrong use of the second language by second language teachers. Some Nigerian English language teachers are incompetent and not sound enough on the basic rules as well as the usage and use of English as a second language. For example, if an Hausa English language teacher pronounces “people /pipi/, he or she will pronounce it as /fifl/because that is the way the word is pronounced by many Hausa speakers of English in Nigeria. This is an example of induced error.

Induced errors are often difficult to correct because the learners of the second language will not easily accept such correction. Examples of expressions that can be categorised under induced errors in English language usage of Oyo State SSCE students are the following:

Ex 9: (a) *Everybody are around* (wrong)

(b) *Everybody is around* (correct).

Ex. 10: (a) *All are cordially invited* (Wrong)

(b) *All is cordially invited* (correct).

Note that the word “All” means “Each person. “Everybody” also means “each person”.

Grammatical Errors of SSCE Students Caused by Overgeneralisation of Rules

The findings in the analysis of the English Language usage in essay writing given to selected 120 SSCE students from Oyo State of Nigeria revealed that the English language usage of these students were characterised by errors caused by the overgeneralization of the linguistic rules. Errors caused by overgeneralisation of rules are errors caused by overgeneralising of some grammatical and lexico-semantic rules in a second language. For example, the rule of the English grammar states that all regular verbs should take “ed” suffix when they are used in past form. Examples *clap /clapped, kick/kicked, map/mapped*, etc. However, irregular verbs like “*weeps*”, *swim*’ “*build*”, “*say*”, etc. will not obey this rules. Examples from the gathered data for this study are the following:

Ex 11: The man has *builded* a fine house: (Wrong) Instead, the correct expression is “The man has *built* a fine house.

Ex 12: Given me the *binded* copy of that book (wrong)

This expression is wrong. The word “*bind*” is as irregular very and its past form is “*bound*”. Hence, the correct expression should be “Give me the *bound* copy of that book.

Also, it was discovered from the findings that some of the SSCE students who were aphasics were committing developmental errors. They were speaking like children who were at their developmental ages. This was caused by the damage done to the right hemisphere of their brain by diseases and accidents.

Pedagogical Implications

This study revealed that SSCE students of English often commit induced errors, communication-based, errors-interference errors and errors caused by overgeneralisation of linguistic rules. It was also discovered that few aphasic patients among SSCE students in Oyo State often commit the developmental errors because of the damage of their brain by accidents or diseases.

The teachers of English in Oyo State of Nigeria need to be aware of errors often committed by their students so as to know what to teach and how to teach their students.

Conclusion

Error analysis is a relevant tool to improving the teaching and learning of English as a second Language in Nigeria. Knowing the common errors which Nigerian second language learners of English often commit will make the teachers to know the trouble – sports of the English Language pedagogy in Nigeria. It will also improve the teacher’s teaching methods as well as developing the learners’ proficiency in English as a second language in Nigeria.

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