



CONCORD ERRORS, CATEGORIES, SOLUTIONS; THE ROLE OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN THIS ERA OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

Some errors are more serious than others. Both the native English user and the educated African user of English can tolerate, for example, the second language learners prepositional errors –at least-some of them, because even native users sometimes have problems with certain prepositional structures. But there are some errors like concord rule deviances which tend to elicit very unfavourable responses from both the native and non-native users alike. Such errors reflect badly on the users personality, they tell us something about his educational background, they portray his use of language as a developing grammar' that borders on illiteracy. The noun verb agreement, for example, is very basic in an English sentence and it is, therefore, taught at a very early stage, the stage of the primary school. So for this type of error to persist in the use of English language teacher is a thing of concern. The language teacher graduates students who will not stand their grounds in work places, in public address situations and in society at large as far as concord is concerned.

Keywords: *Concord Errors, Categories, Solutions, Tertiary Institutions, Youth Empowerment*

DEFINITION:

James, Isaac and Soola (59) write that when a noun or pronoun occurs in the subject position, it determines our choice of verbs. That is, if the subject is singular, the verb should be singular but if the subject is plural, the verb should be plural. This pattern of agreement is the subject verb agreement or what in some grammar books is referred to as the subject predicator agreement. This is the oldest notion of concord known to pioneer grammarians and grammar books. It is this notion the guided Umeh (37) in defining concord as a perfect agreement between the subject and the verb having the same person and

number. The definitions above are a bit restrictive or narrowed down perhaps out of inadequate research and materials. To beef it up, Onwuka and Okoye (113) referred to Quirk and Greenbouam in Onigbo (96) where concord is discussed as a relationship between two grammatical elements such that if one of them selects a given feature, the other must select the same feature. It is not restricted to number and person. Gender, case and genitive are inclusive as well, all the elements. Concord is therefore, defined as the agreement among the various parts of a sentence. It is the agreement between words in number, person, case, gender, genitive or any other category which affects forms of words.

- Number: Singular and Plural
- Person: First, second and third persons
- Gender: Masculine, feminine, common and neuter
- Case: Subjective/ nominative, Objective/ accusative
- Genitive: Possessive

CATEGORIES OF CONCORD, THE ERRORS ASSOCIATED WITH THEM AND HOW TO DEAL WITH SUCH ERRORS

The layman's understanding of concord is that it is all about subject and verb agreements. So that to him there is one concord type. In the deem past, it was understood like that but research has been able to show that there many categories. The submission hereunder will show other categories as well as some examples and how to deal with them in our usages. Some cases will not attract much attention. Attention will be on the difficult areas, the areas that pose problems. Such areas need teaching and learning the rules that guide them. Ignorance of these rules even at the topmost level results in ungrammatical sentences, the sentences that jar at the ears of learned people. Have you been at a conference, a workshop, in a lecture situation, in a church congregation or any public address where a speaker consistently indulges in concord errors? Have you been a listener to a radio programme where the speakers continue to breach concord rules? Have you read a piece of writing, a story in a newspaper, journal or magazine, a novel, novella or short story, a prose work in which the writer shows ignorance of, the rules of concord? How do you react to it? As a college of education student, a polytechnic student or a university student at the undergraduate or post graduate level, how do you respond to concord errors?

As an English teacher at the level of the tertiary, how do you respond to concord errors?

Subject – Verb or Subject Predicator Agreement

The verb of a sentence is technically referred to as the predicator of the sentence. The term ‘predicator’ is taken from the role of the verb in predicating other items that come after the verb in a five – structure analysis of a sentences: Subject. verb, object (direct and indirect), transitively or intransitively, determines items such as objects, complements and adjuncts. This is by the way. The issue here is that subject verb agreement means the same thing as subject predicator agreement. One grammarian or grammar book may like to use one term while another uses the other term.

There are rules and they are many

1. A singular subject takes a singular verb, a plural subject takes a plural verb as in the following :
 - (i) The boy is here.
 - (ii) The boys are here.

In the first sentence, because ‘boy’ is a singular subject, the verb is ‘is’. ‘Boys’ in the second sentence is a plural subject and that is why the plural verb ‘are’ is required in the sentence. Other examples are

- (iii) Mary works in the farm.
- (iv) Mary, Joseph and Decency work in the farm.
- (vi) The students were working hard.

The examples so far given are simple, straightforward and understandable. But English sentences are not all simple and mathematical. A lot of sentences are unlike the above ones in the area of concord. Some subjects may look singular but are plural and vice-versa. Some items in some sentences may bring about confusion as to whether a singular or plural verb is required. For this reason, there are rules, rules that guide a user in coping with concord problems. The scope of this work is not large enough to take all the rules. The areas that are more problematic than others will be emphasized. Consider these sentences:

- (i) The traditional ruler and the president general are in-charge of the community.

- (ii) The traditional ruler and president general is in –charge of the community
- (iii) The president and commander in-chief of the armed forces is Muhammadu Buhari.

At the surface, the user might be tempted to understand that the three sentences have plural subjects. It is not true. Only the first sentence has a plural subject, the traditional ruler and the president general and that is why the plural verb ‘are’ comes into the structure. Take note that there is an article ‘the’ after the conjunction ‘and’. It is this article that makes the structure a plural subject. The grammatical import of this is that one person is the traditional ruler, another is the president general and that is why it is a plural subject. The article ‘the’ does not feature in the second sentence and in third. For this reason, one person is both the traditional ruler and the president general. The structure is a singular subject and a singular verb ‘is’ is required. The same verb is needed in the third sentence as it is also a singular subject. The meaning of the third sentence is Muhammadu Buhari is the president, he is also the commander-in-chief.

The use of ‘and’ in singular subject situations:

Users know that and as a conjunction is commonly used to bring two or more nouns or noun equivalents together in a structure and whenever it is used this way, the final result is a plural noun. Examples:

- (i) My son and daughter are in the sitting room.
- (ii) The pupils and their teachers are in class.

The above sentences feature ‘and’ as conjunctions in normal and understandable manner. There are, however, sentences in which ‘and’ is used to join some nouns, yet the end products are not plural nouns. That is to say that and may be used in sentences to join some nouns yet the structures realized are not plural nouns:

- (i) Bread and butter is in the menu.
- (ii) Bribery and corruption has done harm to society.
- (iii) Rice and beans is good for you.

In these sentences, ‘and’ has failed to bring about plural subjects as the subjects of the three sentences are all singular subjects. They are singular because the idea of bread and butter is one just as rice and beans. The notion of bribery and corruption is one hence the singular subjects. Each of them requires a singular verb as represented in the sentences.

(3) Nouns that look plural but are singular: There are nouns that look plural but are singular. Nouns like news, measles, mathematics, politics, orthographically look plural but in meaning, they are singular as in these sentences.

- (i) The news from France is bad.
- (ii) Measles is infectious.
- (iii) The statistics is with us
- (iv) Politics is a dirty game

(4) The Expression, ‘none of’: The expression ‘none of’ always takes a singular verb: Examples:

- (i) None of the boys is qualified to play.
- (ii) None of them is here.

(5) Nouns that always appear in the Plural: There are nouns that always take the notion of the plural. They are never singular. Nouns like arrears minutes, funds e.t.c look plural and are always used as plural nouns. Examples:

- (i) The minutes have been written.
- (ii) The arrears have been paid.
- (iii) Funds are needed for the project.

(6) Period of Time, Measurement or Quantity: Any subject that expresses quality, period of time, amount or measurement requires a singular verb. Three hours is a period of time just as thirdly cups of rice is a quantity. The cases require singular subjects.

Examples:

- (i) Six kilometers is a walkable distance.
- (ii) Two hours is the time for the assignment.
- (iii) Fifty cups of rice is needed for the occasion.
- (iv) There million naira is the cost of my Benze.

(7) Subordinate Clauses: When the subject of a sentence is a subordinate clause (a group of word with a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone to make

a complete sense) the verb is singular. The verb is considered singular because all the words in the group are understood as one idea. Examples:

- (i) What I do is my affair.
- (ii) How he got to know her is irrelevant.
- (iii) What I told you is the truth.
- (iv) Where he hid the money has been discovered.

(8) Modifying Phrases and Clauses: When a modifying phrase or clause comes between the subject and the verb, the verb agrees with the number of the headword. The reason is that it is only the headword that can replace the entire group of words without affecting the structure of the sentence. Examples:

- (i) The list of the qualified candidates has been made public.
- (ii) The advantages of the modern method have been discussed.
- (iii) The disadvantages of that approach are known.

(9) The Expressions, ‘the number of’ and ‘a number of’:

These expressions should be differentiated by reading and writing carefully. When it is ‘a number of’ the noun that follows is obligatorily a plural noun which must take a plural verb. Examples:

- (i) A number of students were in school.
- (ii) A number of applicants have applied for the job.
- (iii) A number of supporters were in the square.

The expression ‘the number of’ requires a singular verb. Example:

- (i) The number of people in the gathering is unbelievable.
- (ii) The number of the attendants is little.

(10) Nouns in Apposition: These are the nouns that refer to person or things earlier mentioned. When they are singular, they take singular verbs but when they are plural they work with plural verbs. Examples:

- (i) Cyprian Ekwensi, one of the pioneer writers in Nigeria, is dead.

The books in the African Writers Series, made up of books written by pioneer African writers, are mainly prose.

(11) When a Fraction Occupies the subject Position in a Sentence: For any sentence whose fraction occupies the subject position in a sentence, the verb agrees with the noun that comes after the fraction. Examples:

- (i) Half of his earnings are set aside for philanthropy.
- (ii) Fifty percent of the Nigerian youths are unemployed.

(12) Nouns with Special Plural forms: Some nouns were taken from other languages and adapted into English. Some nouns were borrowed from the French language, others from Latin, yet there are nouns borrowed from the Greek language. Some of these nouns are presented in their singular and plural forms:

Stadium/ Stadia, agendum/ agenda, memorandum/ memoranda, stimulus/ stimuli, syllabus/ syllabi, ovum/ova curriculum/ curricular.

Errors in the areas mentioned so far and many other errors in the areas yet to be discussed appear in the writings and speeches of our tertiary students- students of colleges, polytechnics and universities. Such errors are also discovered in the press, print and electronic. Post graduate students especially those who do not study English as their area of specialization are also victims of concord errors. I am sorry to write that some lecturers who did not study English as their major contend with concord errors. What a problem! Concord errors in Nigeria are mainly caused by the curriculum. At the primary and secondary school levels, skeletal attention is paid to this nagging problem. A curriculum developer may argue that it is due to the development stage of these students. That may be true to some extent. The lacuna it creates is so regrettable because at the tertiary level a student might have only one or two lecture opportunities to learn concord in an elective class. A lot of students, these days, do not attend lectures. A lot of students depend on buying books they hardly read. And if a student fails to attend lectures, the task of comprehending the rules is uphill. It is a statement of fact that a lot of students gamble through these elective courses in English without learning the rules of concord. It is also a statement of fact that in some polytechnics and colleges, lecturers of these elective courses are directed to give bonus scores so that many students do not fail. A lot of students who would have continued to fail until they master concord rules manage to pass because of bonus scores. So at the end of the day, a student can obtain a degree, a higher diploma or a certificate in education with no knowledge of the rules of concord. At the level of the masters and Ph.D, nobody has time to teach use of English, the supervisors devote time to correct the writings of their candidates so that concord errors are reduced in their final projects. That is why, these days, people parade doctorate degrees without mastery learning of concord rules. It shows in their speeches and writings.

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria should rise up to the challenges posed by concord errors at this period of youth empowerment. It is a stigma for concord errors to be discovered in the speeches and writings of students of English Departments in colleges and universities. How can this attitude or mentality be circulated to all other departments in colleges, universities and polytechnics so that every graduating student of a tertiary institution is insulated from concord errors?

It is a period of youth empowerment. Investors and industrialist are everywhere. Some investors mount radio stations here and there. Your area that used to have no radio station in the past ten years now has four or more. These stations employ young people. People employed in such stations should be masters in the use of English in concord. The industries around wherever you are in Nigeria has doubled over and over in the last ten years, the work force has also double. Employment goes on in numbers and on a daily basis. You may not feel it because of over population. The industries employ all categories of young people in different areas of specialization. Young people are employed as news writers, features writers, manual writers, writers of letters and correspondences of companies. People are employed as bankers, accountants, financial experts, computer engineers, accessors e.t.c as new banks and branches emerge in different parts of Nigeria. These employees should be masters in concord.

OTHER CONCORD TYPES:

The Notional Concord: Notional concord derives its root meaning from the root word ‘notion.’ Notion is an idea, a belief or understanding one has about something. In this context, it is the notion which the speaker or the writer has about the subject of the sentence they generate. Like in other concord cases, the subject determines whether the verb should be singular or plural. Notional concord specifically applies to collective nouns like committee, family, team, kindred, class, jury, country e.t.c when used as the subject of sentences in which they appear. Every collective noun has two notions. A collective noun has the notion of the singular; it also has the notion of the plural. A collective noun like kindred maybe used with either the singular notion or the plural notion as in these examples:

- (i) The kindred has voted in support of the court action.
- (ii) The kindred have voted in support of the court action.

The first sentence works with the notion of the kindred as a unit, so it is singular. The second works with the notion of the men who make up the kindred. It is

plural. Grammatically speaking, both sentences are correct but one who doesn't know the rules will be tempted to condemn one.

(iii) The class has won the competition.

(iv) The class have won the competition.

Every collective noun is like this is the sense that it is a singular noun or a plural noun.

Proximity Concord or Concord by Attraction: Proximity and attraction are the key words in this title. Proximity means closeness and in this context, it means closeness to the verb. For subjects that are two or more, one must be the closer or closest to the verb. The subject that is nearer or nearest the verb governs the verb. If this subject is singular, the verb must be singular but if it is plural, the verb will be plural. Consider this sentence.

Neither the businessman nor his customers are adversely affected by the decisions. Two nouns are mentioned in the subject. The first, 'the businessman' is singular, the second, 'his customers' is plural and because it is nearer the verb; it governs the verb, requiring the use of a plural verb as a compulsory element. That is how this kind of concord works.

The subject that is closer or closest to the verb is attracted by the verb, the verb is also attracted to the subject. This is how the issue of attraction comes into the matter.

James, Ode & Soola (60) noted that if one or two subjects connected by 'nor'; 'or' or 'but' is singular and the other is plural, the verb must agree with the part of the subject closer to it. Examples:

(i) Either the student or his parents are expected to attend the briefing.

(ii) Either you, your brothers or your father is expected to write the letter.

(iii) Neither Obi nor you are in the list of the candidates.

Concord with the Correlatives: Concord with the correlatives is a contrast to the proximity concord because while the verb is governed by the last subject, the first subject governs the verb in concord with the correlatives. The following words, expression and phrases commonly function as correlatives: as well as, along with, together with, accompanied by, in addition to, in collaboration with, in the company of e.t.c. Examples:

(i) The man in the company of his family goes to London tomorrow.

(ii) The auditors as well as the chairman have arrived in Nigeria.

(iii) Neither the coach nor his players were at the venue of the match.

In addition to some measures earlier suggested in this work the departments of English in universities and colleges should be made to know they are at the head of the crusade against concord errors in their institutions, not just in their

departments. In the polytechnics, the units that teach English in the General Studies Division should be made to understand the same fact. The Heads of these Departments should be provided with funds, materials and personnel needed in providing extra lectures and examinations across their institutions on concord errors. They should be given free hands and enough funds to organize workshop across their institutions in addition to their normal schedule of responsibilities. Additional lectures to all the schools and departments in a tertiary institution should call for additional examinations in this institution. The additional examination should be part of the terminal examination, should be one of the requirements for graduation so that if a student fails it, the student should repeat after one year. This should be implemented with the seriousness it deserves. The additional terminal examination on concord should not be rushed so as to achieve its objectives. It should be in both the oral and written forms.

The oral lectures and examinations should be in the form of public address. Topics should be assigned to students as individuals not in groups so that some students do not do the work while others remain spectators. A student should read up the topic assigned to them in textbooks, magazines, journal and other research sources. The student should browse if there is need for that and make contact with resource persons, also if there is need for that. The student should go on to write, proof read, type and produce.

Every student will defend their work on the examination day. It will be so easy to find out if concord errors manifest in the written paper. The examination will pay more attention to the oral defense, it will feature presentation to the panel of lecturers and students. A student whose presentation is marred by concord errors should be made to repeat the year until the student masters concord problems. Graduating a student like that is perpetuating concord errors in society.

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