

ASYMAL USE OF VERBS AND ADVERBIAL PHRASES IN THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

The study “Absymal use of verbs and adverbial phrases in the written english of secondary schoolstudents” was carried out to determine the major areas of difficulty experienced by the one hundred (100) level students of the Kogi State University. One hundred (150) samples of composition written by the one hundred (100) level students of the Kogi State University were analysed. These samples were selected from the Departments of English Language, Biochemistry and Business Administration. Four questions were raised and the simple percentage formula was used to answer the four questions. The findings show the following grammatical errors as common: omission of the -ly suffixes, wrong syntactic usage, wrong order of adverbs, misuse of preposition of place and time, wrong use of pronouns for adverbs e.t.c. The study suggests that Students should read standard books in the target language after normal classroom teaching in order to improve their writing skills. Teachers should try and use adequate and suitable learning materials. This will help students have a better understanding and good mastery of the language.

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**CHAPTER ONE
GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The research focuses on abysmal use of verbs and adverbial phrases in the written English of secondary school students. Various works have been done in the area of study referred to as Error Analysis, some of which examined the students' spoken errors and inappropriate structure of language. Attention has also been paid to wrong choice of words with particular interest in the spoken ability. This work however, investigates the misuse of adverbs among the undergraduate students in their written work.

Adverbials are morphologically and syntactically the most diverse grammatical structures in English, (Freeman, 1999:491). They can perform a wide variety of purposes: show time and space relationship, emphasize or de-emphasize information, indicate frequency or manner, or link ideas together. They can occur initially, medially and finally in sentences and before

nouns, adjectives or verbs. Observing such a variable word class gives the researcher the opportunity to observe variability in the language development of the one hundred (100) level students of the Kogi State University. How they choose and place adverbs in their sentences, gives the researcher a valuable insight into their language proficiency.

Altenburg (2010:103) states that "if you don't know what else a word is, then it is probably an adverb" by implication, adverbs are one of the most difficult word classes to define as different grammar books examined have slightly different definitions and focuses for adverb. Larsen-Freeman (1999), Biber (1999), Azar (2002), Freeman (1999:491). For the purpose of this study, adverbs are words or phrases that modify adjectives, verbs, other adverbs, or whole clauses. They show relationship such as time, place, manner or certainty. However, the scope of this study is somewhat pre-limited to the conservative form that is, single word adverbs that can occur only as adverbs for the purpose of expediency. For example, adverbial clauses, multi-word adverbs and any adverb that could also function as another part of speech are excluded.

In determining if these students under investigation make errors in choosing and placing adverbs, it is necessary to look at error analysis as this would help in indicating what the students get right, what they underuse and what they overuse. Learners' accuracy should not only be measured by their grammatical accuracy but also by the way their lexical choices align with those of the native speakers. It is unrealistic to reckon on language learning without errors. However, it shows that errors do occur in the second language learning and for this reason, it should be acknowledged and dealt with.

The interest in error analysis has been awakened by the need to correct deviant, ill formed sentences, in the sense that they are not fully describable in terms of the grammar of the mother tongue or target language. Since languages are dynamic and productive, inferences drawn from linguistic researches would remain ineffective if new vistas are not opened in the areas of Applied Linguistics. Furthermore, the poor performance of students taking English Language examinations has continued to impact negatively on the nation's educational objectives. This is predicated on the fact that the English Language occupies a central position in Nigeria, Banjo (1981), Bamgbose (1982), Odumuh (1985).

Error analysis means deviation from the expected models that should be aimed at or against which constructions can be viewed. The written and spoken English of second learners (L2) of English Language are full of grammatical errors of different types. The misuse of adverbs as modifiers in speech or writing is not an exception; second language learners from different linguistic backgrounds make similar errors in learning the target language. The possible general sources of errors include: language transfer, transfer of learning, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and over generalization.

It is unrealistic to reckon on language learning without errors. However, it shows that errors do occur in the second language learning and for this reason, it should be acknowledged and dealt with. The second language learners (L2) are never competent in the target language, this is on the premise that languages are different and because of these differences, the second language learner will encounter language difficulties. The brain seems to have difficulties in storing the data of different languages separately, if there is a degree of overlapping between the languages in bilingual communities (Lado, 1970:8). The inter-language hypothesis of second language acquisition, error analysis lies with the second language learners in the process of trying to produce the target language. The errors made are analysed and classified to see if there is any commonality between them. If the cause of errors can be explained, then one can adopt this information to the second language pedagogy. For errors to be prevented, they have to be identified, classified, explained and plan strategy to eliminate them. Errors are bound to occur in one form or the other depending on the varying degrees of frequency. In the analysis of Omujowa (1979:178), errors could be classified linguistically and psycho-linguistically. The errors classified linguistically look at the language usage, to what area does the error belong, is it tense agreement, spelling infinitive or other misuse of grammatical rules such as the one

the work is looking at, „The Misuse of Adverbs. Errors classified psycho-linguistically look at what stage the errors occur in the process of language learning, is it the hypotheses formation stage, hypotheses testing stage or application stage? This is because some errors occur because the learner has not yet understood the appropriate grammatical rules that generate the correct form.

Linguistic classification is essential for error correction and most language teachers are familiar with this method. For instance, some language teachers underline the faulty language item or items (identification) and in the left or right hand margin of the paper, put a symbol to signify the language area which the errors belong. Symbols generally vary from one teacher to the other and it is not important that they are uniform just as long as both the teacher and the pupils know what the particular symbol adapted means. Psycho-linguistic classification is essential for error explanation which in turn determines the instructional strategy required for the error to be distinguished. The need for a psycho-linguistic classification of error quite often escapes the attention of the majority of the language teacher, with the result that marking becomes unnecessarily wearisome and correction unrewarding and time wasting for both learner and the teacher.

Corder (1977), error analysis is the study of learners inter-language in order to improve understanding of the processes of the second language learner acquisition. Error analysis further differentiates between errors, mistake and lapses. The difference in these categories lies in the ability of the native speaker to make correction. Such errors are seen as transposition, substitution or addition of speech sound word, complete phrase or some sort of blend of these. Some ill-formed utterance appears to be false starts of restructuring of what the speaker wants to say, since these lapses could be as a result of stress, indecision or fatigue. It is also presumed that the second language learner will demonstrate similar lapses during pronunciation.

Corder also opines that “errors are seen as a breach: if we regard a language as a set of rules for generating syntactically, phonologically and semantically well-formed sentence”. As one sees, native speakers do not normally commit such breaches but however, commit errors in the use of the code. By this, we mean that they may produce well-formed utterances which are contextually or situationally inappropriate. Error of appropriateness may however, be generally classified into referential errors, where the speaker uses a term with intention of referring to some features of the world to which it is conventionally inapplicable.

Researches have shown that studying learners errors help to provide learning processes which help teachers, curriculum planners and developers know which area of the target language, learners have most difficulties and provide possible solution to alleviate the problems, (Ajayi 1998). This consequently informs the emergence of this work.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Although many studies on the use of English among students have been carried out by different writers in order to improve the students proficiency in English Language, however not all the loopholes leading to grammatical errors have been dealt with. This therefore has motivated this research on the misuse of adverbs among the 100 Level students of the Kogi State University. It was discovered that many of the 100 Level students do not have the barest notion of how to place adverbs in their written work. It is the poor attitude and orientation from the secondary school that probably account for the poor placement of adverbs the students present, judging from their essays. Over the years, scholars have focused attention on the weaknesses in the communicative ability of the learners, such as in the areas of poor spoken grammar, wrong choice of words, and inappropriate structures. Hence, this study focuses on the difficulties of the use of adverbs in the students written work. This identifiable problem prompted the work to investigate the extent and types of error made by the one hundred (100) level students of Kogi State University.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research therefore seeks to answer the following questions:

i. To what extent is the misuse of adverb rampant?

- ii. What type of adverbs do the students usually misuse?
- iii. To what extent do the adverb errors committed by the students of English Language differ from the Biochemistry students?
- iv. To what extent are the adverb errors committed by the Business Administration students differ from the Students of English?

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to analyse the students adverbial errors in their written work in order to find out the extent to which they could identify and place adverbs correctly in a piece of writing. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. ascertain the extent of the misuse of adverbs among the select first level students of Nigerian University.
- ii. investigate the type of adverbs misused by these students.
- iii. investigate and document the differences in the adverb errors made by the students of the English Language and the Business Administration students.
- iv. investigate and document the differences in the errors made by the students of the English Language and the Biochemistry students.

1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The need for this research came up when it is observed that the rate of grammatical errors being committed by Nigerian students is growing. With the subjects in focus who would become useful to the society in future, if these students cannot construct grammatical sentences containing the use of correctly placed adverbs then, there is a problem. The students need to master the rules guiding the application of English adverbs in sentences so as to use the knowledge in their written English. Although, other studies may have been carried out on grammatical errors of this kind in either secondary or tertiary levels, there is a need to be carry out the work in a tertiary institution like Kogi State University, particularly among the one hundred (100) level students.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that this research will help teachers in knowing how to eliminate many errors that pertain to the use of adverbs among students and also stimulate teachers to adapt new methods geared towards improve teaching and learning of the target language.

1.6 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

This research focuses on grammatical errors as it applies to the “absymal use of verbs and adverbial phrases in the written english of secondary school students”. Arguably, modifiers such as „Adverb exist in almost all the open class system (Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs). Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, for empirical and objective analysis, this work is concerned with “adverbs”, thus, this research does not intend to investigate all kinds of grammatical errors. As a result, this work is delimited to examining the study of the misuse of adverbs in the selected written essays of one hundred and fifty (150) First Level Students of Kogi State University. The subjects for the study are limited to students from three Departments of the University namely: Department of English in the Faculty of Arts, Biochemistry Departments, in the Faculty of Sciences and the Department of Business Administration in the Faculty of Social Sciences. As a result of this delimitation, the generalisation of the result is limited to the First Level students of the University.

ABSYMAL USE OF VERBS AND ADVERBIAL PHRASES IN THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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