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Àkùngbá Journal of Linguistics and Literatures is published annually. However, the Editorial Board of the Journal has decided that the Journal will now have two issues per year due to the large numbers of quality papers received annually. Its focus is on the publication of recent findings in African Linguistics, Literatures & Cultures. Papers could be written either in quality English or Yorùbá language.

Authors are encouraged to submit their papers online to the Managing editors. The manuscripts should contain original material that has not been published in any form elsewhere. Manuscripts should be double-spaced and on single sides, with ample margins and bear the title of the contribution and the name(s) of the author(s) on a separate sheet of paper. The full postal address/phone/email details of each author including a short biographical note should be provided. The manuscripts should be in 12-point Time New Roman. Contributions should normally be between 10 (ten) and 15 (fifteen) pages. Any paper grossly exceeding this guideline will be subjected to an extra-charge. The manuscripts should include an abstract of not more than 200 words. The journal uses note where necessary. Footnotes are discouraged, only endnotes are allowed. Endnotes are signaled in the text by superscript. Papers should contain references at the end. The references should include all items referred to in the paper. References are cited in the text thus: author, date, page, an alphabetical reference page should follow the text (and endnotes if any). Contributions that do not conform to the requirements above may be rejected.

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ERROR ANALYSIS OF LONG ESSAYS AND THESES' ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS BY NIGERIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract

Grammatical errors which manifest as a result of poor mastery of the English language by Nigerians have been extensively discussed by scholars. Errors in different types of writings, including projects, long essays, dissertations and theses have equally been well discussed by scholars. However, to the best of our knowledge, these kinds of studies have not been extended to the analysis of errors in the acknowledgments of such works. This is exactly what this work addressed. This paper examined the acknowledgments of long essays of twenty students with the aim of identifying the errors that are commonly found among undergraduates and postgraduate students. Thirty-five faulty sentences were extracted from twenty projects for analysis. The basic concept of Error Analysis, which is an integral element of the Systemic Grammar formed the theoretical basis of the work. Acknowledgments pages of students are usually replete with different grammatical errors. These errors could be classified into five categories. The first few pages of the long essays which are usually trivialized by supervisees and supervisors are very important. This is because they can mar the quality of a work. Thus, we recommend that students should write them carefully and consciously, while their supervisors should take time to meticulously go through them in order to correct these errors. This will ultimately improve the quality of the use of English among undergraduates and postgraduate students.

Key words: Acknowledgments Page, Grammatical Errors, Error Analysis, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students, Long Essays

1. Introduction

Acknowledgment writing has become an integral part of projects, dissertations and theses in the university system. Even, in inaugural lectures, acknowledgment writing is an established practice. It is the part of the long essay in which benefactors of the authors are mentioned and appreciated for their contributions to the works and the lives of the writers. Usually, in the lists of benefactors, God, Allah, Jesus Christ, etc. are first acknowledged. After this come others – the supervisors, the parents, the spouses, the children, academic colleagues, friends and others. Even some acknowledge their dogs. In projects, dissertations and theses, the acknowledgments come before the body of the works, but they are usually written last, that is, after the work has been completed.

It has been observed that this aspect of the long essay is usually replete with errors of different kinds – spellings, tense, concord, mechanical accuracy, and so on. The reason for this is that it is usually written in a hurry and the supervisors are not usually able to go through it as he has done with the body of the work. The diagnosis and corrections of these errors are exactly what engage our attention in this work. The word project as used in this paper captures Bachelor of Arts projects, Master of Arts Long Essays, M.Phil. Dissertations and Ph.D. Theses.

2. Background to the Study

Eleven years ago, the researcher became a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His first sets of supervisees were allocated to him around that time. He tried as much as possible to do a thorough supervision. At the end of the process, he was commended by the external examiner for meticulous supervision. However, sometime later, he decided to flip through the acknowledgements section of the projects. To his dismay, he discovered a lot of unpardonable grammatical errors of different kinds. Thereafter, he made up his mind that in spite of his busy schedules, he would always go through every aspect of his supervisees' works, including the title page, the certification, dedication and acknowledgments, which supervisors usually take for granted and would not bother to go through before the final work is submitted. These errors when considered are capable of dwindling the quality of these works. If not for anything, this research is aimed at creating awareness. Students, teachers, supervisors and supervisees are expected to pay attention to these seemingly trivial aspects of the projects so that the quality of their writings will improve.

3. The English Language in Nigeria

From the colonial dispensation to our contemporary time, the English language has occupied a paramount position in Nigeria's linguistic terrain. Sequel to this, many roles have been assigned to it in the country – in practically, all domains of language use – government and administrative, education, the media, the judiciary, science, technology, and so on, the dominance of English is overwhelming. It is the official language of the country. It is the language of education from primary to tertiary level. Because of these important roles, a good mastery of it is a sine qua non for upward mobility in the country. As a result of the indispensability of the language in the country, scholars have devoted considerable attention to issues relating to the standard of the English language and the different varieties that are attested in the country. For a detailed discussion on English in Nigeria, see Adesanoye (2004), Babajide (2005), Bamgbose (1971), Ogunsiyi and Sunday (2010), Oluwadoro (2016) and so on.

4. Method of Data Collection

Data for this work were extracted from twenty acknowledgments written in ten Bachelor of Arts projects and ten Master of Arts long essays. These projects were purposely selected from four departments in the Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The departments are English, Linguistics, Communication and Language Arts, Theater Arts. These departments were purposely selected because of their emphasis on language teaching, especially English. From these twenty long essays, thirty-five (35) faulty sentences were selected for analysis. The errors identified were classified into five as follow:

- (i) Spelling – 6 sentences
- (ii) Mechanical Accuracy (Punctuation) – 7 sentences
- (iii) Concord – 6 sentences

- (iv) Tense/Aspect – 7 sentences
- (v) Wrong Selection of Words – 9 sentences

These errors were identified, analyzed and corrected.

4.1. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The basic aim of this research is to carry out an error analysis of grammatical errors that are commonly found in the acknowledgements of B. A. projects and M. A. long essays of students. The objectives are stated below:

- (i) identify the errors
- (ii) analyse the sentences in which they are found
- (iii) propose what the correct forms should be
- (iv) evaluate the impact of these errors on students' mastery of the English language.
- (v) point the attention of teachers, lecturers and supervisors to these errors with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of their teaching and supervision.

5. Theoretical Framework

Error Analysis is one of the key elements of the Systemic Grammar. Error analysis is the study of kinds and quantity of error that occurs, particularly, in the fields of Applied Mathematics (that is Numerical Analysis), Applied Linguistics and Statistics. It has its root in the Rationalist Theory of language learning. It involves the systemic interpretation of the unacceptable forms used by someone learning a language (Crystal, 1987). This approach plays a vital role in the cognitive dimension of language learning. The major proponent of this theory is S.Pit Corder. In his article titled: "The Significance of Learner Errors" (1967), he gave Error Analysis a new dimension by providing an answer to the question of whether L1 and L2 acquisition process are the same or not. Some scholars see error analysis as a special case of Contrastive Analysis. Stockwell (1968) identified two kinds of Contrastive Analysis (CA) – these, according to him, are – (i) a predictive variety and (ii) a diagnostic variety, which is used in the analysis of students' errors.

What we have done in this paper falls under the diagnostic variety of Contrastive Analysis. Cognitive approaches to second language learning have been on the increase since the 1970s. Error analysis has attracted a great deal of attention. Some errors are due to the influence of the mother tongue as revealed by contrastive analysis, others are the result of external influences, such as inadequate teaching or instructional materials. See Lado (1957) and (1964), Stockwell (1968), Duskova (1969), Fries (1945), Gleason (1968), Oluwadoro (2016) among others. Our observation in this study reveals that the errors identified could be traced to both sources.

6. Data Presentation and Analysis

The errors identified and analyzed in this work can be divided into five groups. These are:

- (i) Spelling
- (ii) Mechanical Accuracy (Omission of Punctuation)
- (iii) Concord
- (iv) Tense and Aspect
- (v) Wrong selection of words.

Let us look at these one after the other.

(i) *Spelling*

In the acknowledgments analysed, spelling errors are very rampant. Let us look at a few of them.

- (1.) *I appreciate your kinnes to me.

Here, the word 'kindness' was misspelt to read 'kinness'.

- (2.) *My esteeme gratitude goes to my supervisor.

The word underlined is supposed to be spelt as 'esteem'.

- (3.) *Many tanks for her constance assistance.

In 3 above, the words underlined are supposed to be spelt as thanks and constant respectively. So the sentence should read:

'Many thanks for her constant assistance.'

- (4.) *May God guide him to the right part.

In 4 above, the word path was misspelt as part. The sentence should read:

'May God guide him to the right path.'

- (5.) *Your children will find faviour before God.

Here, the word favour was misspelt as faviour. The sentence should read:

'Your children will find favour before God.'

- (6.) *I saw a big thank you to my father.

In 6 above, the word say is wrongly spelt as saw. The sentence should read:

'I say a big thank you to my father.'

(ii) *Mechanical Accuracy (especially Omission of Comma)*

This is another very common error encountered in the acknowledgments selected and analysed in this paper. Let us look at few of them. A dash '-' is put at the point where the comma should be inserted.

- (7.) *I acknowledge my father in Islam _ Sheik X.

A look at the above sentence shows that the punctuation mark, comma (,) was omitted at the point where we put a -. Properly punctuated, it should read:

'I acknowledge my father in Islam, Sheik X.'

Note that X is used to replace the name put there by the writer for anonymity.

- (8.) *I thank my mother – Mrs X_ whose death has been very painful to me.
In 8 above two commas are expected to be inserted at the marked points. The sentence should read:
'I thank my mother, Mrs X, whose death has been very painful'.
- (9.) *Above all – I really appreciate all my friends.
9 above should be punctuated to read:
'Above all, I really appreciate all my friends'.
- (10.) *I am grateful to X – a professor in the department.
10 should be re-written to read:
'I am grateful to X, a professor in the department'.
- (11.) *My gratitude – first of all – goes to God.
11 should be re-written to read:
'My gratitude, first of all, goes to God'.
- (12.) *I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor – Dr X.
12 should be punctuated to read:
'I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr X'.
- (13.) *I am grateful to my loving husband – Mr X.
13 should be punctuated to read:
'I am grateful to my loving husband, Mr X.'

As could be seen in the above, most of the errors arose as a result of students' failure to use a punctuation mark to separate noun phrases in apposition.

(iii) *Concord Errors*

A concord error is committed when there is no 'agreement' between the different elements that are used in a sentence. It is expected, for instance, that a singular subject should select a singular verb and a plural subject should select a plural verb. Let us look at some of the sentences below:

- (14.) *My gratitude go to the Almighty Allah.
Since the subject in the above sentence; 'My gratitude' is singular', the singular form of the verb 'go' which is 'goes' should be selected to read:
'My gratitude goes to the Almighty Allah.' It is also possible to have: 'My gratitudes go to Almighty Allah.'
- (15.) *My immense thanks goes to my backbone...
The subject 'thanks' is plural, so it should select the plural verb 'go' to read:
'My immense thanks go to my backbone...'
- (16.) *Everybody see it from different angles.
The indefinite pronoun 'everybody' should select the singular verb 'sees' to read:

'Everybody sees it from different angles.'

(17.) *My sincere gratitude go to my supervisor.

Since the subject, 'My sincere gratitude' is singular, the singular form of 'go' which is 'goes' should be selected to read:

'My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor...'

(18.) *My dearest siblings X, Y and Z (three specific names were mentioned) has always been there for me.

Since the writer is talking about three siblings here, the plural of 'has' which is 'have' should have been selected to read:

'My dearest siblings X, Y and Z have always been there for me.'

(19.) *His rare talent remain a challenge to me.

Since the subject is singular 'talent', the verb 'remains' should have been selected to read:

'His rare talent remains a challenge to me.'

(iv) *Tense/Aspect*

Tense relates to reference to the time of an action or event. Whether the action or event took place in the past, is taking place in the present or will take place in the future is reflected on the verb. When a wrong tense is used it results in a serious grammatical error. Let us look at some sentences containing tense errors.

(20.) *I thank God who give me inspiration to write this project.

In 20 above, the past form of the verb 'give', which is 'gave' should be selected to read:

'I thank God who gave me inspiration to write this project.'

(21.) *You are appreciate.

21 above is actually an error of aspect, instead of 'You are appreciated' (the present perfect), the writer wrote 'You are appreciate'. The sentence should be re-written to read: 'You are appreciated.'

(22.) *Mr X intervene when the road was rough.

The past form 'intervened' should have been selected to read:

'Mr X intervened when the road was rough.'

(23.) *I thank X who bear a lot with me in the course of this work.

The past form of the verb 'bear', which is 'bore' should have been selected to read:

'I thank X who bore a lot with me in the course of this work.'

(24.) *In spite of his busy schedules, he still finds time to attend to me when this work was on.

The past form of the verb 'find', which is 'found' should have been selected to read:

'In spite of his busy schedules, he still found time to attend to me when this work was on.'

(25.) *X deserves special thanks for stand by me throughout my academic sojourns.

The form standing should have been selected to read:

'X deserves special thanks for standing by me throughout my academic sojourns.'

(26.) *I am appreciate their kind gestures.

The error results from wrong use of tense and aspect. There are two possibilities here; the writer could expunge the auxiliary 'am' to read:

'I appreciate their kind gestures'.

Or, s/he could retain it and change the word, appreciate to 'appreciative' to read:

'I am appreciative of their kind gestures.'

(v) *Wrong Selection of Words*

This happens when a candidate selects an 'adjective' instead of an 'adverb' or a noun instead of an adjective. Let us look at some examples below:

(27.) *I appreciate all my lecturers, particular in the department.

Here, the adjective 'particular' was selected instead of the adverb 'particularly'. So, the sentence should read:

'I appreciate all my lecturers, particularly, in the department.'

(28.) *Their moral and financial support led to the successfulness of this work.

The word 'successfulness' is wrong, 'success' should have been used to read:

'Their moral and financial support led to the success of this work.'

(29.) *God, in his infinity mercy helped me to complete the work successfully.

Above, the word 'infinity', which is a noun was wrongly selected instead of 'infinite', which is an adjective. The sentence should read:

'God, in his infinite mercy helped me to complete the work successfully.'

(30.) *My quantified gratitude goes to my father.

The candidate selected a wrong adjective 'quantified' above instead of 'unquantifiable'. The sentence should read:

'My unquantifiable gratitude goes to my father.'

(31.) *I thank you for been there for me.

The candidate above selected 'been' instead of 'being'. The sentence should read:

'I thank you for being there for me.'

(32.) *I thank my supervisor, who is an understandable father.

The adjective 'understandable' was selected instead of 'understanding'. The sentence should read:

'I thank my supervisor, who is an understanding father.'

(33.) *This work would not have been the light of the day if not for his intervention.

The verb 'been' was wrongly selected instead of 'seen'. The sentence should be re-written to read:

'This work would not have seen the light of the day if not for his intervention.'

(34.) *Nothing good real comes easy.

The adjective 'real' was wrongly selected instead of the adverb 'really'. The sentence should read:

'Nothing good really comes easy.'

(35.) *He assisted me at very stage of the work.

In 35 above, the adjective 'very' was wrongly selected instead of 'every'. The sentence should read:

'He assisted me at every stage of the work.'

6.1. Statistical Calculations

As shown above, 46 sentences were extracted from the works examined. The errors highlighted fall into six categories. Let us present this in a table to examine their percentages:

Table 1:

SN	Errors	No of Sentences	Percentage (%)
1.	Subject Verb Concord	22	47.8%
2.	Compound Subject Errors	4	8.7%
3.	Auxiliary 'have' Errors	5	10.9%
4.	Copula 'is' Errors	7	15.2%
5.	Errors Associated with Specific Figures and Numbers	4	8.7%
6.	Pronoun Antecedent Concord	4	8.7%
Total		46	100%

Table 1 above reveals that subject verb concord constitutes 47.8%. This is overwhelming! Can such be overlooked? Definitely 'no'. When we add item 2 (compound subject errors = 4) to that figure, it gives us 26; that is 56.5%. The implication of this is that subject verb concord errors are more rampant than any other error in the analysis. This situation should be remedied. Of course every department has courses in field methods, in Linguistics, we have LIN 332 and LIN 374, Field Methods in Phonology/Introduction to Field Methods in Sociolinguistics. Error analysis should be incorporated into the teaching of these courses. The researcher has already done this at the postgraduate level in LIN 772: Field Methods in Sociolinguistics and this is working out well as planned. Other postgraduate teachers are encouraged to do the same thing.

7. Implications of this Study

We shall discuss the implications of these errors in two areas, (i) the quality of the theses, (ii) the quality of candidates produced by the university. Let us look at the implications on the quality of the thesis.

7.1. *The Quality of the Thesis*

The aspect of the work selected for analysis is the presentation/analysis of data. This aspect is selected because of its cruciality to the works under examination. Actually, errors are found all over the pages of the works examined, but we decided to restrict our scope to data analysis/data presentation. These errors actually marred the overall quality of the works. If they are not highlighted and corrected by the supervisor, the works would eventually get to the external examiners and this will be devastating. It would sound a wrong signal about the quality of work done in the department. Since the external examiners are from other universities, and they would eventually give their verdicts on the candidates, this will definitely affect their grading. On the part of the supervisor, the works were very boring as the errors recurred and reverberate all over the pages of the works. One, he felt disgusted and discouraged since most of these students were personally taught by him at the undergraduate level. The question he began to ask himself was whether he and his colleagues who have laboured in teaching and mentoring these students have done their jobs well. Those who had to be graded immediately (the five M. A. students) ended up scoring 60% (5 points), instead of 65 (6 points) and 70 (7 points). Even at that, the supervisor still considered himself too generous with marks. The external examiner recommended that three of them should be upgraded to 65% (6 points); obviously because the errors had been corrected before the works got to him). Of course, the supervisor gladly did that.

The effect of such errors, if left uncorrected on other students who have cultivated the habit of reading previous theses to guide in writing their own theses is damnable and misleading. This is because of the possibility of the fact that they might see them as models, which is not true at all.

7.2. *Implication on the Quality of Candidates Produced*

University of Ibadan is usually described as the premier university, the first and the best. How true is this assertion? Undoubtedly, it is the first in Nigeria. Whether it is the best or not is arguable. Though, we are aware of the fact that candidates who did their first degree elsewhere are anxious to come to Ibadan, obviously to validate the certificates they had collected elsewhere; and assess as well as to assert themselves. The researcher had a stint of teaching at the secondary school level as well as West African Examination Certificate examiner before coming to teach in the university. These were the kinds of errors that caused the failure of many candidates at that level. The same thing applies to GES 101 (Use of English) at the undergraduate level. The question is: 'should students still be battling with such errors at the postgraduate level? Even when we know that many of our students who claim they are on full time are actually working as English teachers in tertiary institutions, especially, colleges of

education; we become gravely concerned about the lamentable rate at which the standard of English is falling. What image of the university does this portend?

The researcher attended an interview in a well-paying reputable secondary school in Ibadan (Lifeforte International) shortly after completing his course work at the M. A. level. He had applied as a teacher of English. There, he met two other colleagues that had graduated from Ibadan who also came for the same purpose. The school needed just one teacher, so after the interview, the two other candidates were asked to leave while the researcher was asked to wait for his letter of appointment. In the process of waiting, he had a chat with the proprietress of the school, who herself was a lecturer in our Department of English Language before resigning. She lamented bitterly over the spoken English of those candidates who been asked to leave. She wondered what they would teach if they had been appointed. This is just a case in point. Must we fold our arms and do nothing to remedy the situation? Obviously no! What can we do? We make some recommendations at the concluding part of this paper.

8. Conclusion

This research work is an eye-opener. It opened the eyes of the researcher to the fact that acknowledgments writing should not be taken for granted. It has been observed that both students and lecturers do not devote serious attention to it in the writing of long essays. This is possibly because it is perceived to be a simple task which does not demand thorough academic rigours. This is very presumptuous. The fact that the acknowledgement is located at the opening pages of the work makes it important.

Even though, a casual reader may skip it, a more serious reader would like to flip through it. In the process of doing so, he would discover these errors. This will definitely create a negative impression in his mind about the work, the writer and even the supervisor. Therefore, it is very important for the writers and their supervisors to give adequate attention to acknowledgments writing.

Teachers of the Use of English, a general course in the University of Ibadan, should devote more attention and time to the teaching of the basic rules that guide the correct use of the English language. They should not assume that university students have mastered these rules at their level, such assumptions should be ascertained by revisiting what has been assumed to have been learnt. In most departments, certain courses are designed to aid students in project writing. For instance, in my department, there are two courses – LIN 374: Introduction to Research Methods in Sociolinguistics and LIN 772: Research Methods in Sociolinguistics. It is hereby recommended that the rules of grammar and good usage of English should be incorporated into the teaching of such courses. These common errors should be highlighted and how to overcome them should be emphasized by the teachers. By so doing, the quality of long essays that are submitted to the departments will improve. Ultimately, our graduates would master the art of writing and the overall standard of English in tertiary institutions will improve.

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