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An Error Analysis of English Verbs in Written Compositions of Students of Selected Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State

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Abstract

The main concern of this paper is to analyse errors of verbs in the written composition of students of selected tertiary institutions in Ogun state. To gather data for the study, written compositions of 150 year-one students of three tertiary institutions in Ogun state were received for analysis. 100 of the essays were purposively selected for analysis. The theoretical framework for the paper is Adebija (1995) view about error analysis. The selected errors of verbs identified were described, classified, and explained. It was found that students' errors are characterised by the wrong choice of verbs, wrong tense formation, wrong sequence of tenses, wrong formation of questions/negatives, and wrong use of modal auxiliaries. Others are errors of phrasal verbs such as wrong use of particles, omission of particles, unnecessary use of particles, and wrong use of phrasal/prepositional verbs. The paper concludes with the view that sociolinguistic factors such as problems of interference, wrong transfer, poor educational background of students, and others, led to the errors. To minimise the errors, language educators and students generally are advised to be involved in regular workshops and conferences where these problems are freely discussed for required solutions.

KEYWORDS: *Errors, Deviations, Error Analysis, Verbs, Verbs related errors.*

Introduction

Errors are deviations from the rules of a given language in phonology, syntax, lexis or usage. Errors of lexis and syntax have constituted the most serious problems confronted by many users of the English language, especially users in a second language situation (L2). The commonest of these errors are those that have to do with verbs. Being an essential aspect of an English sentence, any error of the verb is handled very seriously. The levels at which these errors are made and the academic qualifications of those who commit them have become a source of concern to language educators. To further expatiate the problems of errors committed by our undergraduates, what explanation do you give concerning a graduate or a holder of HND who cannot construct an error-free sentence in English? Adegoju (2013:135) observes that, in both speech and writing, undergraduates fumble a lot as regards how verbs are inflected for number and person to agree with the subject of the sentence, as an aspect of English grammar and usage that easily betray the poor or the careless user. Herawati (2020) emphasises the

need to have a full understanding of tenses to avoid the misconception that is involved in not doing it. He identifies errors of omission, simple present tense, simple past, and simple future tenses as errors made by first-grade students of Health information management in using tenses. These errors did not exclude individuals who are highly educated in their fields.

Error analysis is the collection of samples of learners' speech (written or oral), analysing, identifying, and classifying them to explain the source of each error type linguistically and psychologically (Adegbija 1995). Adegbija (1995) categorises textual errors into errors of addition of an element not usually added, admission of necessary constituents, the substitution of wrong constituents, and reordering of grammatical elements. The explanation of the errors tells the reason for making the errors and how they are made. This could be a result of the transfer, inter-language, over-generalisation, and other reasons. Narjanah (2017) studies the written subject-verb agreement errors made by students using error analysis techniques. The work concludes that the three types of errors experienced by the students are misinformation, omission, and addition errors. He explains that the errors are caused by the inter-lingual transfer, intra-lingual transfer, and misleading inputs. To solve the problems, the teacher needs to employ a breakthrough approach in their teaching. Adegbite (2013:2) emphasises the relevance of the Use of English as a course of study in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Among the functions he identified are to enhance the communicative competence of students, to enable them to perform well in both academic and social situations, to remedy the inadequacies of students arising from the shortfall in the mastery of English from secondary education.

Aims and Objective of the study

The aim of this study is to identify, analyse and correct the different categories of errors of verbs in the written communication of year one students of selected three tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The specific objectives are to determine the different errors of verbs made as a result of the wrong use of verbs, and wrong selection of the right type of verbs, tenses or particles. Finally, the study will provide remedies to errors of verbs made by students and offer suggestions towards improving on the level of competence of students in the use of verbs.

Methodology

The methods used to gather data is purposive. The instruments used for generation of data are written essays of one hundred and fifty students of the following institutions: Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu Ode (fifty students), Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye (fifty students) and Tai Solarin College of Education, Omu Ijebu (fifty students). One hundred out of the one hundred and fifty compositions written by the students were purposively selected for analysis. The scripts of the students were read and the errors of verbs in the written compositions were pointed out. The detected errors in selected compositions are classified. The corrected forms of each of the errors are placed side by side with the erroneous ones; with the comments given immediately after each of the corrected forms. The essay questions treat topics that reveal the general knowledge of students' current affairs. The following are the questions responded to by students:

1. Write an article for publication in one National Newspaper on why our National Football team has not been performing well in the recent period.
2. Narrate an experience you have had or heard about which illustrates the saying 'Honesty is the best policy.'

3. “The ‘Odua saga’ is a living witness that corruption has dominated the affairs of our society.” Discuss.
4. “The PDP victory in Osun State is a warning to APC.” Discuss.

Review of related literature

Even though the English language is used universally, one of the major concerns of its users, especially, as a second and foreign language, is how to attain the required level of competence in its grammar. However, we shall define some basic terms before we continue. An error, according to Awonusi (1985:32), is an unwanted form of deviation from the norms or the rules of a given language in phonology, syntax, lexis, or usage. A verb is also defined by Longman (1985) as “a word or group of words that is used to describe an action, experience or state; for example, come, see, be, put on. Longman goes further to define phrasal verbs as “a group of words that is used like a verb and consists of a verb with an adverb or preposition, such as *set off*, *look after*, *put up with*.”

Deducing from the definition of an error and verb given above, one should note that the major cause of the errors in the written essays of students of institutions of higher learning, in a second language environment, is as a result of imperfect learning. Many students are not versed in the knowledge of the rule of use and usage of the English language. In his attempts to relate competence to the use of different aspects of the English language, Egbe (1996:173), opines that competence in the use of English consists in thorough knowledge of many aspects of the language: its words, its phraseology, and its sentence structures. It is very important to note that language performance is important as suggested by Hymes (1972), yet grammatical competence, that is, knowledge of the rules of use of the English language is necessary as given by Noam Chomsky. In his attempt, Mohaam (1981: 26) supporting Chomskyan view says “a foundation course in linguistic competence is very important to all users of English”. This will not only serve as a base for the professional-oriented courses whose aims will be to impart communicative competence. It will also go a long way to fill the gap in the learning system.

The inability of many learners of English as a second language to use the correct stylistic variants of the language cannot be separated from Alabi (1984: 42) opinion that the users of English as a second language in mind when he says: “most Nigerian users of English suffer from the linguistic problems deriving from the acquisition of a second language from a non-direct, textbook-based language source ... which ... represents but a limited range in the kinds of variation which characterize the English language”. In accordance with Akere’s (1984) opinion above, an individual needs a sufficient knowledge of English as a second language; and the knowledge of a variety of functions which is inherent in the language before he/she can make correct use of the language in various contexts.

Adetugbo (1979:1-10) prescribes the various types and sub-categorization of English verbs. He describes the usual distinction made between lexical and modal verbs; between verbs that take animate objects, between those that are called regular (weak) and those that are irregular (strong), and between those that can normally be inflected for the progressive and those that cannot (Adetugbo 1979: 1). In the same work, he goes further into the functions of the various English verbs in relationship with other elements of the verb phrase. He also shows how each of the following grammatical elements is added to a verb to form a verb phrase: Noun phrase, Adjective, Adverb of place, Adverb of notion, NP + Adverb of motion, NP + Adjective, etc. He gives examples of active and passive sentences. E.g He *rang* the bell (active). The bell *was rung* by him (passive). He cites examples of verbs that appear as transitive but cannot undergo the passive transform. e.g. I *resemble* my father. The book cost ten naira. According to Adetugbo (1979: 1), the above sentences have direct object, but cannot undergo the

passive transform: *My father *is resembled* by me. *Ten Naira is cost by the book. The patterns in the two sentences above are not acceptable to the native speaker of English. Adetugbo also explains the usage of dynamic and stative verbs. The dynamic verbs are described as verbs which admit of the progressive aspect as ‘ing’ in “I am singing” (while) those which do not admit of the progressive aspect as *known* or *see are...stative*” (Adetugbo 1979:2)

Quirk and Greenbanm (1973:26) think that many English verbs have five forms: the base, the – s form, the past the – ing (participle), and the – en (participle). They also classify lexical verbs into regular (verbs in which the knowledge of base form can motivate the prediction of the other forms) – *call, calling, calls, called*. They also give the inflectional spelling of the three realizations. According to them, “/td/, (is used) after bases ending in /d/ and /t/ - *pad – padded, /d/, (is used) after the base ending in voiced sounds other than /d/ e.g. mow – mowed, /t/ after bases ending in voiceless sounds other than /t/ e.g. pass – passed.*” (p.29)

Jowitt and Nnamonu (1985), in their attempt to spell out the general rules of the formation of verbs, classify verbs into five major types.

- a. The infinitive and the imperative forms which are used to express a command.
- b. The present tense form which is the same for all persons except the third person singular: e.g. *I go, you go, we go, they go*. The third person singular has an added ‘-s’ or ‘es’ *He goes, she goes, it goes*.
- c. The ending ‘-ing’ and -d or -en is added to the dictionary form to produce particles. e.g. *Loving* (present) *loved* (past).
- d. Most verbs are regular: That is, “The tense and the past participle are formed by adding –d, or –ed to the dictionary form” (p.54).
- e. Various auxiliaries: (*be am is, are, was were being, been, have, has, has had, having, do, did, does*) combine with the participles according to certain rules to produce any forms.

Jowitt and Nnamonu (1985) also try to define phrasal verbs. According to them, “A phrasal verb (e.g. *take up, look after, tall through*) consists of an ordinary verb plus one of a small group of adverbs (p. 113). They stressed further the major cause of errors in verb formation. According to them, “Failure to observe these rules accounts for a great many common errors in verb formation. Verbs are found in statement form, question form, or imperative form, and for each of these, there is negative form” (p.54-55).

Examples of errors identified by them are:

- 1a. *She *speak* with a strange accent.
- b. She *speaks* with a strange accent.
- 2a. *We *likes* reading.
- b. We *like* reading.
- 3a. *I am *knowing* that you are my best friend.
- b. I *know* that you are my best friend.
- 4a. **Much has* been said about Shale’s achievement.
- b. *Many things have* been said about Shale’s achievement.

- 5a. *I have just *open* a bank account.
b. I have just *opened* a bank account.
- 6a. *I am much *influence* in my idea by my father.
b. I am much *influenced* in my idea by my father.
- 7a. **Did* it always rain much at this time?
b. *Does* it always rain much at this time?
- 8a. *They were advised to apply, *isn't* it?
b. They were advised to apply *weren't* they?

Bamgbose (1990) identifies the importance of verbs in English structure, according to him, without verbs, we cannot have sentences. Bamgbose(1990) further opines that many facts about actions, feelings, time, attitude, etc, are expressed through verbs. Apart from some rules that guide the structures of verbs that he gives, he goes further to explain the importance of verbs in tense formation. He explains that in the sequence of tenses, there must be agreements among them when more than one tense occurs in a sentence” (p.67), An Example is “He said that he *is* going”. He says further that it is possible to break the rules of sequence of tenses in some cases, for example, when reporting a statement that is always true. E. g. “He said that two plus two make four”. Bamgbose says further that, “several errors occur arising from the improper mastery of verb forms and tenses (p.76). Some examples of these errors are: **“It will enable me take the examination”*, instead of *“to take the examination”*. **“I don’t mind to going”*, instead of *“I don’t mind going”*. **She has been teaching in the school since five years*, instead of *“She has been teaching for five years”*. **She cannot be able to do it*, instead of *“She cannot do it”*”.

Bamgbose (1990) also describes phrasal verbs as bearing a resemblance with combinations of verbs plus prepositions. Phrasal verbs are idiomatic in nature. They contain special meanings that are different from the meaning of the verb and preposition they represent (p.90). Hudson (1990) attempts to relate adverbial particles/prepositions with a verb in the passive forms, which he names “prepositional passive”. According to him, “the term prepositional passive is generally used to refer to any passive in which a preposition is stranded because its complement has been removed for use as the subject.” (p.346). He further refers to them as “pseudopassives” He gives examples of prepositional passive as:

1. This bed was *slept in* by Queen Elizabeth.
2. Fred was *looked after* by Mary.

Hudson (1990) also proposes what he calls some constraints that are relevant to prepositional passives as follows:

- i. The preposition is part of the verb’s lexical valency
- ii. The combination of verb and reposition is idiomatic, or at least semantically like a single word.
- iii. The preposition is immediately next to the verb.
- iv. The promoted phrase refers to one of the short list of semantic relations, such as ‘locative’ ‘instrument’ and ‘accompaniment’ as well as affected:
- v. The promoted phrase refers to the ‘affected’ (alias patient).

Hudson (1990) explains further that if the preposition is lexically selected, it does not matter. That is, there must be ‘a bond’ between the verb and the stranded preposition which may be based either on lexical selection or on proximity. In support of Hudson’s opinion, it should be noted that a preposition does not exist alone. It is selected lexically according to the structure of the verb that precedes it. Therefore, the fact that the preposition or particle is lexically selected automatically guarantees that it is part of the verb's lexical valence and that it has no dependent meaning of its own.

Okoro (1992:174) in his explanation about subject-verb concord and tense concord defines concord as the relationships that all the parts of a sentence contract with one another”. He further classifies concord into four types – subject-verb concord, pronoun-antecedent concord, tense concord, and noun-head determinant concord. The focus of this paper is on subject-verb concord and tense concord. According to Okoro (1992:177), subject-verb concord requires a verb in the present tense to agree with its subject in number. For example:

1. The *boy is* a student (singular)
2. The *boys are* students (plural)

He shows different situations in which the rule of subject-verb concord can be applied. Some of them are the following:

- a. A multiple subject usually takes a plural verb e.g.
3. Her *fine acting* and *eloquent singing* usually *attract* a large audience.

However, he says

- b. “When the double subject is seen as expressing a singular idea, the verb is usually singular, not plural...” (p.178)

For example

4. *Bribery and corruption is* an age-long social vice.
5. *Bread and butter is* all I need.

Also, he says,

- c. “When two singular subjects are conjoined by the correlative conjunctions, *either... or* and *neither nor*, the verb is also singular” (p.178)
6. Either *Olu or Ade sweeps* the hall.
- d. “If one or both of the subjects in the correlative are plural, the verb is also plural.
7. Neither the *Students nor the teacher know* the answer.
- e. In a situation where there is a difference in person between the correlated subject, the verb agrees in person with the subject nearest to it. e.g.
8. *Neither you nor Musa is* willing to do the job.
- f. Also, Okoro (1992) opines further that, the verb must be in plural if the conjunction linking the subject is both...and, then, the verb must be plural, as in:
9. *Both the man and the woman want* to leave.

- g. Correlative nouns may take singular or plural verbs; depending on whether they are viewed as a single whole or in terms of the individual numbers.
- 10. A *committee* was set up.
- 11. The *committee* has not all agreed on the point.
- h. Words like *one, each, either, neither, and all* forms ending with “-one”, or “-body”, all of which often function as subjects, take the singular verb when they do so:
- 12. *Neither* of them is here.
- 13. *Everyone* is here.
- 14. *Everybody* is here.

On tense concord, Okoro (1992: 181) says that “the tense concord of a verb is determined by the concept of time concerning the state, event or action which it expresses”. According to him, if two or more conjoined predicate clauses function as a compound subordinate clause in a complex sentence, then the form of the tense in each clause must be the same. For example:

- 15. He ordered his servants *to sweep* his room and *(to) dress* his bed and *(to) feed the dog*.
- 16. It is no good *saying* the truth and *pleading* anonymity.

Some examples of concord errors noted by Okoro (1992) are:

- 17. *The fact that it rained heavily last night and the side streets got flooded *is* responsible for this traffic jam. (*is*)
- 18. *The first prize of a silver trophy and one-thousand-naira cash go to Ibrahim. (goes)
- 19. *Olu as well as his sister *know* the hiding place. (*knows*)
- 20. *Two buckets of water *are* all we need. (*is*)
- 21. *The building *was completed* and all the flats *were rented* out before we knew. (*.....were rented out...*)
- 22. *The language laboratory *has been* broken into and two video cameras *removed*. (*.....have been removed*)

Okoro also makes reference to many errors committed by users of English language as a second language at the level of phrasal verbs. Examples of the errors are:

- 23. *We will not take the matter *lying low*. (*...lying down*)
- 24. *They could not *put off* the fire. (*put out*)
- 25. *If you insult me, I *will beat* you. (*...I will beat you up*)
- 26. *At the centre, we were requested to fill some forms. (*...to fill in some forms*).

Cowie and Mackin (1975) attempt to make a compilation of the lexicon of English idiomatic and non-idiomatic usage of “verb + particle/preposition”. Apart from the rule of use spelled out in their introductory section, they also give the different basic patterns of the idiomatic and non-idiomatic verb elements. They say An idiom is a combination of two or more words that function as a unit of meaning... if a verb + particle expression is a semantic unit, we should be able to substitute for it several single words of equivalent meaning (pp viii-ix)

Theoretical Framework

According to Adegbija (1995), Error Analysis is the collection of samples of learners' speech (written or oral), intending to analyse and classify them to explain the source of each error linguistically and psychologically. To make error Analysis, Adegbija (1995) gives three stages that must be followed. They include recognition, description, and explanation: At the level of recognition of the errors, learners' intentions are interpreted correctly through samples of their texts. At the level of description, learners' errors are classified into:

- a. errors of reference (the use of inapplicable terms),
- b. errors of register (the use of wrong words),
- c. social errors (inadequate knowledge about social realities and context of use),
- d. and textual errors which concern the choice of wrong structure.

Adegbija (1995) further categorises textual errors into errors of addition of an element not usually added, admission of necessary constituents, the substitution of wrong constituents, and reordering of grammatical elements. The explanation of the errors tells the reason for making the errors and how they are made. This could be a result of the transfer, inter-language, over-generalisation, and other reasons. The model of error analysis adopted by Adegbija (1995) above is adopted for the analysis.

Analysis

The number of errors committed and the level at which the errors were made by the respondents explain the situation of second language education in our society. This attests to debates, about whether the level of education is falling or rising. Observing it from the point of view of linguists, scholars have also shown that many factors stand in the way of learners in their attempts to learn a second language. Many of these factors lead to errors of various kinds. In this section, we want to examine how students' incompetence in the mastery of verbs has affected their constructions, grammatically.

Wrong choice of verb:

We want to see at this level, how wrong choices of verb types and verb forms have affected English syntactic construction. Students tend to assume that another verb form could be substituted for the right type in a sentence structure. Apart from that, many students also fail to observe the rules of grammar as it affects regular/irregular verbs, main/auxiliary verbs, etc.

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| 1. *I believe he <i>suppose</i> to show a very good example in this regard. | I believe he is <i>supposed</i> to be a very good example in this regard. |
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'Suppose is used when saying what someone should or should not do. You are supposed to ask the teacher if you want to leave the classroom. "Suppose" is wrongly spelled and used in the above construction.

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| 2. *On his <i>resumption</i> he was early to work and other practices he exhibited to show that honesty is the best policy. | On his <i>assumption</i> of duty, he was early to work and he put up other practices to show that honesty is the best policy. |
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‘Resumption’ is not applicable in the above construction. It means to start again.

‘Assumption’ is more applicable in that it means to start to have control or power.

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| 3. *Looking close, one will see that at the critical point these footballers would have meet <i>together</i> at the goal post. | Looking closely, one would see that at critical point these footballers would have <i>converged</i> at the goal post. |
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‘Meet together is not appropriate here, it is replaced by converged.’

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| 4. *In the aspect of footballing, they have <i>loose</i> their interest. | They have <i>lost</i> interest in football. |
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‘Lost’ is required after the verb ‘have’ to show present tense.

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| 5. *The case of misappropriation of fund is a bid reduced if not radicated finally. | The case of misappropriation of fund is a <i>bit</i> reduced if not <i>eradicated</i> totally. |
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The verb ‘eradicated’ is wrongly spelled in the above construction.

Tense wrongly formed:

The different errors committed at this level have to do with wrong tense forms basically in the simple, complex, and compound statements. Some of the errors have to do with wrong omission or placement of ‘-s’ in the third person singular and plural verbs respectively. Apart from the above, there are wrong uses of the verb ‘be’ – (*am, is, are, was, and were*) in the present and past tense forms. There are wrong uses of tenses; especially, the general misuse of past instead of present tense, and vice versa. Failure to observe the rules of present perfect tense (etc) are also noted here.

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| 6. *Honestly <i>ensure</i> the acquisition of relevant knowledge which is essential to mankind. | Honesty <i>ensures</i> that individual acquires relevant knowledge which is essential to mankind. |
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‘Ensures’ is required to express what is always true (Simple present tense).

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| 7. *Honesty <i>determined</i> the influence of a man no matter the perception. | Honesty <i>determines</i> the influence of a man no matter the perception. |
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Simple present tense of verb ‘determine’ is required here, to show that the sentence expresses what is always true.

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| 8. *Honesty also <i>focus</i> on the nature of the truth. | Honesty also <i>focuses</i> on the nature of the truth. |
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‘Focuses’ is required here.

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| 9. *It is due to the improper handlers of the team. | It <i>was</i> due to the improper handling of the team. |
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The past form of the verb 'is' is required here – 'was'.

10. *The experienced and the specialize in the area *where* not put in place. The experienced players and the professional ones *were* not put in place.

The use of 'where' an adverb of place, instead of 'were' left much to be desired.

The rule of sequence of tense says, if a verb in the main clause is a present

Wrong sequence of tense: tense, the verb in the subordinate clause must also be in the present tense form. And, if the verb in the main clause is a past tense, the verb in the subordinate clause must also be a past tense. For example, in the sentence, "He knows that John likes him", two verbs are used, *knows* and *likes*. Both are in the present simple tense.

The same rule must be observed when forming indirect speech, especially in direct questions. Apart from that, there should be consistency in the use of tenses. Stories can be told in the present or past tense, but the two tenses should not be mixed up. A frequent source of error results from failure to obey the rule of grammar, especially when the main verb is in the past tense. A user of English as a second language should identify the tense forms of each of the verbs (regular or irregular) as well as the auxiliary or modal verbs.

11. *Ever since, he has *proof* to be a competent leader. Ever since, he has *proved* to be a competent leader through his actions.

The sentence was not completely written. Apart from that, the nominal form of prove is written instead of the verb form.

12. *If God *permit*, he hope to rule for four years. If God *permits* him, he hopes to rule the country for four years.

The subject is supposed to agree in person with the verb.

13. *If someone whom we looked up to *enjoy* merry making, what do we expect of him. If someone who we looked up to *enjoys* merry making, what do we expect of him.

The subject did not agree in person with the verb 'enjoy'.

14. *Nigeria seems to look better than the citizens have experienced passed thirty years Nigeria seemed better than it was thirty years ago.

There is the need to follow the rules of sequence by changing all verbs to the past form.

15. *At times, there was scarcity of fuel, a thing we produced and refined here. At times, there is scarcity of petroleum products, what we produce in our country.

The verb 'produce' should be in the simple present form to follow the rule of sentence sequence since we are still producing and refining petroleum products presently.

Wrong formation of questions and negative:

Failure to correctly apply the general rules of question and negative formation resulted in some errors. Some of the errors include the misuse of *do*, *does*, and *did*, the failure to drop '-s' and '-ed' when the past form of 'do' is used; the non-formation of proper tag and the non-inversion when inversion is required.

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| 16. *Does it means that when other do it they will be penalized for do it? | Does it <i>mean</i> that when other people do It, they will be penalized for committing the same offence? |
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No '-s' is required after the verb that follows 'does' in the question.

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| 17. *The reasons why she gave us the money was that she did know whether they will re-allocate us to another school. | She gave us the money because she did not know whether they would be re-located to another school. |
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In the above the negative not is omitted.

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| 18. *Honesty is the best policy in I had told him lies the appointment would possible. | Honesty is the best policy in that, had I told him lies, the appointment would not have not been have been possible. |
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There is inversion of subject and verb 'I and had'. The verb must change with the first auxiliary that followed the subject.

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| 19. *He decided to tell them to go away that he don't have money anymore. | He decided to tell them to go away that he did not have money to give anymore. |
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There is an error of the use of verb do after the third person singular pronoun.

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| 20. *One day, they did something that made mummy to come and said that I should not stayed with them. | One day, they did something that made Mummy to move me away from staying with them. |
|---|---|

The sentence is not well arranged. It can also be 'One day, they did what made my mummy to ask me not to stay with them any longer.'

Modal auxiliaries wrongly used:

Modal auxiliaries are used to express a speaker's attitude, prediction, desire, permission, instances, etc. The wrong choice of a modal auxiliary can completely alter the way a speaker wishes to be understood; errors in the use of modal verbs cause much of the misunderstanding. Among the errors of modal verbs here have to do with the wrong choice of one modal instead of another.

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| 21. *If it were during the Abacha regime, nobody will be bold to discover such an atrocity and announce it. | If it were during the Abacha regime, nobody would have been bold to publicize it after it was found out. |
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Will is used instead of 'would' in a reported speech.

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| 22. *He did not believe that I can returned the huge amount of money | He did not believe that I could return that huge sum of money.. |
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Can was used instead of 'could.'

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| 23. *She shouted at them and frightened that she will kill them if they refuse to confessed. | She shouted at them and threatened that she would kill them if they refused to confess their sin. |
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'Will' was used instead of 'would'

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| 24. *They instructed me after the burial I will no more stayed with my mummy, that I will have to come with them. | They instructed me after the burial that I would no more stay with my mummy and I have to come along with them. |
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| 25. *To me, I think it will be more better. | To me, I thought it would be better. |
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'Thought it would be better should be used.

Wrong constructions following a verb:

A lot of the errors in English sentences result from failure to select the right pattern of words to use after a particular verb. Some of the groups of verbs according to their patterns are: Linking verbs with one or two objects, verbs with object and object complement, and verbs with no object at all. All these structures are expected to be carefully observed, where an article or a determiner is required in the object, it should be placed correctly. Failure to take note of this results in errors.

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| 26. *The celebration of a hundred day in the office is not justifiable because there are some many things or project to be embarked upon. | The celebration of a hundred days in the office is not justifiable, because there are many projects to be embarked upon. |
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'One of either 'some' or 'many' is needed here'

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| 27. *No sooner he left for Lagos in search of white collar job | No sooner had he left for Lagos in search of white collar's job than... |
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The use of 'no sooner' requires the use of 'than.'

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| 28. *Because of his honest acts he was a recipient of unspeakable reward. | Because of his honest acts, he became a recipient of a great reward. |
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'Unspeakable' means extremely bad or feelings that are impossible to describe.' So, great reward or award is required here to express a positive act.

29. *It looks as if Nigerian has no remedy. It looks as if Nigerian situation has no remedy.

There is the need for a noun which the adjective Nigerian qualifies.

30*It is a thing of sadness. It is a sad thing.

‘Sad’ is required as a qualifier to noun.

Error of phrasal verbs

This section will concern errors of phrasal verbs and other errors as they affect different verb forms. The errors include those that have to do with the use of particles without verbs, wrong use of particles, wrong analogy, unnecessary use of particles, omission of particles, and wrong use of verb form of phrasal verbs.

Wrong use of particles:

A wrong adverb or preposition is placed after a verb to form a phrasal verb.

1. *President Obasanjo now becomes a president that heads of other countries upon. President Obasanjo now becomes a pace-setter for heads of other countries. now take interest in his activities. (They take interest in his activities.)

‘Take interest upon’ is not meaning as ‘take interest in.’

2. *They have brought Africa to focus. They have brought Africa into focus.

‘Bring something into being’, means to make something start to exist.

3. *They should be made to report at camp on time. They should be made to show up at the camp.

‘Report is not used in this context in English language.

4. *Obasanjo has just succeeded to cancel the sanitation day. Obasanjo was successful in cancelling the Saturday’s Environmental sanitation.

‘Succeeded to’, means to take title. It is not used in the context.

5. *He should have think on how to organize it. He should have thought about organizing it.

‘There is nothing like ‘think on’ one can ‘think back on’ think about doing something or think of.’

Wrong analogy:

This involves the violation of often subtle co-occurrence restrictions which the speaker is unaware of. It could also be explained as forms of re-casting, adaption, or re-interpretation of the standard forms/expressions.

6. *He behaved like a gentle boy he later turned to be rascally. He behaved like a gentle boy but later turned out to be rascally.

‘He turned out to be’ means his correct identity was revealed as... On the other hand, ‘turn to’ means ‘adopt as a different course of action. He was once very careful with money and everyone was surprised when he *turned to* a life of extravagance.

7. *The member of the house met to draw a new time table. The numbers of the house met to draw up a new time table.

‘Draw up’ means compose, when referring to written documents, ‘draw’ without ‘up’ means ‘compose’ in the sense of ‘make’ a picture. Dr Emi drew my portrait while I sat still.

8. *I do not approve your going out with that girl. I do not approve of your going out with that girl.

‘In the above, approve means ‘like or support’, ‘think good of’ It must be followed by ‘of’. ‘Approved’ without ‘of’ means give formal sanction to ‘as. He did not approve the students claim for a feeding allowance.’

9. *They were asked to pool together their resources. They were asked to pool their resources.

10. *He reported to camp early enough. He arrived at camp early enough.

‘Reported to is not used in this context, but arrived at.’

Omission of particles in phrasal verbs:

Particles are wrongfully excluded where they should be used. Many of these omissions are glaring. They are analysed as follows:

11. *He called me and apologized indirectly. He called on me and apologized to me indirectly.

‘Called without on can be used at this context only when it means ‘to telephone’. The original intention of the speaker is to visit. Therefore, ‘on’ is required after ‘call.’

12. *We were both called. We were both called upon.
Call on/upon means to visit someone for short time, e.g. why don’t you call on my sister while you are in Lagos.

Call on also means to formally ask someone to do something e.g. The UN has called on both sides to observe the cease fire.

13. *The river has already dried. The river has already dried up.

‘Dry up’ means when water disappears from a river. Dry something up, the sun has completely dried up the soil and the crops are dying.

14. *I did not wake until about five I did not wake up until about five minutes later.
minutes later.

‘Wake is not used without ‘up’ to indicate ‘to stop sleeping’, or to make someone to stop sleeping.’

15. *He was kicked from the job because He was kicked out of the job because he
the man let his secret. let out the company’s secret.

Unnecessary use of particles:

Particles are used where they are not expected to be used at all. This can be explained as a result of wrong analogy as treated above.

16. *It started again after eight months of It started again after eight months of
returning back home. returning home.

‘Return’ means the act of going back or returning from somewhere or your ‘arrival back’ in the place where you started from. ‘On his return from Liberia, he was promoted to colonel.’

17. *He used the remaining money to pay He used the remaining sum to pay his
for his school fees. school fees.

‘The correct meaning of pay for is ‘to suffer for’ be punished for omission or failure.’

18. *The experience is the main pivot on The experience is the main pivot on
which his write up is based on. which his write up is based.

‘On’ is repeated here.

19. *He came up to contest for the election. He came up to contest the election.

‘Contest means to compete for something or try to win.’

20. *He was sponsored for by some people. He was sponsored by some people.

‘Sponsored’, means to give money to a sports’ event or to agree to give someone money for charity.

Phrasal verbs used in the wrong tense form:

A verb shows the different times within which an action is performed. Being regarded as a nucleus of a sentence, a verb used in a wrong tense form misplaces the intended meaning of such a sentence. Verbs should agree in person with the subject. This also includes the use of verbs in phrasal verbs.

21. *He was trying to hands down his He was trying to hand down his
counterparts. counterparts.

‘Infinitive ‘to’ do not take an ‘s’ in the verb.’

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| 22. *They tends to go out of hand at times. | They tend to go out of hand at times. |
| 23. *They have suddenly turn to an object of ridicule. | They have suddenly turned an object of ridicule. |
| 24. *He should have think about what it used to be. | He should have thought about improving upon what it used to be. |
| 25. *He has done much to reckon with. | He has done much to be reckoned with. |

‘Be’ is needed here to make it meaningful.

Verbs wrongly used in phrasal/prepositional verbs:

This is a situation where the lexical verb within the phrasal verb pattern is wrongly selected or wrongly used. That is, a wrong verb is substituted for a right type.

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| 26. *I was not the one who did what she was accusing me of. | I did not do what I was being accused of. |
| 27. *Fuel crisis is the first thing he stepped into. | The issues of fuel crisis, is the first thing he looked into. |
| 28. *Babangida’s regime came up with frauds, bribery and corruption. | Babangida’s regime brought up fraudulent practices. |

‘Brought up is the required phrase.’

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| 29. *They will be injured with various harmful weapons under their possession. | They will be affected with various harmful weapons within their possession. |
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‘Within their possession is required.’

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| 30. *I was sent packing out of their house. | I was sent out of their house. |
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‘Sent out is the required phrase.’

Conclusion

So far, this paper has carefully studied and analysed errors related to the use of the verb in the written composition of students of selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Among the various errors detected and analysed are errors related to the use of particles, wrong analogy, particles wrongly placed, use of wrong lexical verbs, and others. The source of some of these errors has been traced to some sociolinguistic factors, such as interference, transfer of features of mother tongues, poor educational background, and over generalization of rules of English. Some of the students received insufficient instruction from some teachers who were not well-skilled in the use of the language.

The following recommendations were made:

- i. There is a need for a general re-orientation and re-training of teachers after appointment. This will go a long way in reducing the number of errors that characterize the written communications of students.
- ii. Conscious efforts need to be made to teach the rules of the use of English by scholars. many users cannot differentiate between formal and informal use of English. Some language users, even at the higher levels, are not versed in the rules of use of the grammar of the language.
- iii. Regular use of standard dictionaries is recommended to all language users.
- iv. Individual scholar needs to improve their reading habit. It was discovered also that our reading habit is very low in this part of the world.

It is believed that with improvement in the reading habits of students and scholars, the use of standard dictionary, taking time to learn the rules of language use, regular retraining of educators, and other factors, right and appropriate words as well as grammatical structures will be constructed.

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