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THE USE OF ARTICLES IN THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF VOCATIONAL STUDENTS OF COLLEGE OF EDUCATION IN PREPARATION FOR SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRENEURSHIP LIFE IN ILORIN, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

The major preoccupation of this paper is to identify the errors in the use of Article in the written English of vocational students of college of Education in Ilorin. This is in a bid to improve their written communication competence in preparation for training the young entrepreneur for sustainable entrepreneurship life. This study revealed that intelligibility and not grammaticality formed the bedrock of the learners' spoken English which eventually affect their written English. It was therefore suggested that English language teachers should intensify efforts in the teaching of writing skills with special focus on vocabulary related to entrepreneurship vocabulary with appropriate teaching methods and relevant instructional material.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is the act of being an entrepreneur or one who undertakes innovations, finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations into economic goods. This may result in new organizations or may be part of revitalizing mature organizations in response to a perceived opportunity. Entrepreneurship has been simply captured by Ikeme & Onu 2007as the use of human courage to seek investment opportunities and establish a profit-oriented enterprise. Also, entrepreneurship is generally viewed as a process of creating something new. Doing this involves a lot of time and effort devoted to ensure the tasks at hand. Above all it requires clear and vibrant channels of communication for all the processes involved to run smoothly Entrepreneur is an enterprising individual who builds capital through risk and for initiative. If Ojeifo (2010) definition of enterpreneur as the owner or the manager of business enterprise who through risks and initiative, attempts to make a profit is anything worthwhile, then the issue of language use should be considered as there can never be proper business management without communication.

Entrepreneurship education according to Paul (2005) is structured to achieve the following objectives.

1. To offer functional education for the youth that will enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant.
2. Provide the youth graduates with adequate training that will enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities.
3. To serve as a catalyst for economic growth and development.

   Offer tertiary institution graduates with adequate training in risk management, to make certain bearing feasible.
4. To reduce high rule of poverty.
5. Create employment generation.
6. Reduction in rural – urban migration.

7. Provide the young graduates with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a career in small and medium sized businesses.

8. To inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark on.

9. Create smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial economy.

In order to realize the above laudable objectives, vocational departments in the nation's colleges of education were established to train teachers who in turn would train the young future entrepreneurs. This paper therefore seek to consider one of the most important skills of communication which is writing. This is in a bid to improve the teacher trainee in written communication competence in preparation for training the young entrepreneur for sustainable entrepreneurship life.

Writing, which is one of the major basic skill of language is the most important form of communication. It involves critical thinking for organization of idea and information expressed using different types of sentence structure, correct spellings, relevant punctuation as well as appropriate style and registers (Raimes 1989). Writing is also expressive, recursive, generative and continuum, involving correct representation of words on paper. McCutchen (1988) asserts that writing is a product of thinking. Hedge (2000) believes that writing involves setting goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it.

Teaching of English is very important in secondary schools and most especially for a better acquisition and use of language especially in the modern world. Teaching English is also very crucial in the Colleges of Education considering the strategic roles they play in the Nigerian educational system. Writing as a literacy skill, demands that students be competent at using English language to express their thoughts. The students' linguistic competence is the vehicle for effective communication which forms the bedrock for mutual interaction between the teacher and the students in the classroom (Anderson 1972). Language is the major facet of development for students to achieve communicative competence in composition writing. However, before communication can take place intelligibly through writing, it requires a thorough knowledge of the language especially in a formal school system where English language performs communicative functions. Its functionality, however, depends on students' competence in grammar, orthography, punctuation, handwriting and structures owing to the fact that academic career rest on the ability to communicate effectively in writing to the understanding of the teachers or examiners.

Language teaching at the Ordinary Level (O'level) should revolve around the two literacy skills – reading and writing, as both are vital aspects of literacy skills and each requires its own instruction. Olajide (2010) opines that reading and writing are higher order skills – the acquisition of which requires formal teaching. Chijioke (1991) also observes that writing influences reading and reading stimulates writing. The latter believes it is artificial in practice to separate the two activities. Both scholars agreed that reading and writing are two side of the same coin of written communication which is the sum-total of the fact that any student who reads is likely to write well. Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) share the same view with Olajide (20100 and Chijioke (1991) that writing is a flip side of reading and every student who is a proficient reader will be a proficient writer.

Teaching of writing in the Nigerian secondary schools and also in colleges of Education should be for the purpose of improving the writing ability of the students to meet the stated

objectives, however, according to Ezeckeli and Adeotun (2008), secondary school students essay writing fall appreciably below the basic standard. This linguistic deficiency is true glancing through the usage of non-contextual words such as articles. Oyeyemi (1998) asserts that articles, whether definite or indefinite plays a vital role in resolving ambiguity. In essence, it must be noted that articles have grammatical functions to play as it gives sentences the desired meaning.

Different references such as Osuya (1984), Jolayemi (1991), Adegbite (1996) Oyeyemi (1998), Haruna (2001) show that L2 learners in secondary schools speak and write ambiguously due to misuse of articles. Based on the above revelation, this work sets out to actually investigate the use of articles in the written English of vocational students, College of Education, Ilorin. This will enable the lecturers to focus on those areas before the students finally sit for their final examination which will eventually contribute to their improvement in qualifying as a trained teacher.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Africa, and specifically in Nigeria English remains the most important language in all facets of life. It is one of the core subjects at all levels of education in Nigeria especially at the secondary school level where students must pass it to gain admission to tertiary institution level. Students need to gain mastery over the four language skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing before they can be regarded as competent speaker and user of language. Writing as one of these language skills is vital to school learning process and has remained the most important skill in communication era of information and feedback and every level of social, civil and educational systems. Apart from speaking, competency in written expression is the ultimate to all language skills though both are productive skills and two prominent ways of human communication, writing differs because it is more durable and permanent. Thus it is only writing that is usually used to provide a record of events. Listening and reading have various inputs on the writers. It is through receptive skills that writers gather raw materials for their writing.

Human communication is the most ethical of all human activities as it consists of several different elements in constant interaction with one another (Whench, Microsky & Rachmond 2008). Writing as a basic literacy skill of human communication requests thorough knowledge of the language before communication can take place intelligibly. Intelligibility of any piece of writing depends on the power of expression of the writer conforming to certain conventional and grammatical elements that govern writing as means of communication.

Graham and Perin (2007) state that writing plays two distinct roles in school. First, it is a skill that draws on sub-skills and processes such as handwriting and spelling, a rich knowledge of vocabulary: mastery of the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, word usage and grammar. Secondly it is the use of strategies such as planning, evaluating and revising text.

Grammar remain the fact and fundament principle needed for writing inner-free comprehension. The mastery of grammar of English language brings about efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness in unity. Incorrect and careless constructive of sentences distract the reader, introduce ambiguity and generally obstruct communication (American Psychology Association (APA) 2010:17)

Some of the grammatical elements that are crucial to aptness and effective communication usage from paragraphs, passages sentences structure (syntax) and choice

(vocabulary), usage, orthography, punctuation, capitalization and entire appearance of piece of writing (e.g. spacing indentation, page number and quality of handwriting.)

An understanding of grammatical structure leads to a sharper appreciation of how the total meaning of our utterance or a written piece is arrived at (Boadi 1981). Every language is a highly organized phenomenon. Invariably, the organisation of the whole English words can best be viewed in two major decisions i.e. content and structural.

The content words have dictionary meanings, generally such words have synonyms or near synonyms for them. Such words include nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs, on the other hand structural words are generally almost or wholly empty of dictionary meaning. In this case, operators, prepositions, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, subordinations, sentence connectors and relatives, etc. (se4 Boadi et. Al., 1981).

Articles

The articles "a," "an," and "the" are difficult for many non-native speakers of English to learn to use properly. Some of the rules that govern article usage are very subtle; only years of experience with the language will enable learners to understand and apply these rules considering the major preoccupation of this study which is the essence of articles in the written English of vocational students, the structural rather than the contextual words are given much emphasis from the onset, it is linguistically convenient to state that structural words such as articles within the constituency where they occur are of more semantic than syntagmatic signals. Therefore the sentences - **A** boy is here and **the** boy is here do not mean the same. In the first sentence, the article 'a' modifies the noun boy and pre limits its number. Besides, the noun 'boy' has not been particularised. In essence, the encoder does not present in any sense a known boy to the decoder.

But in item (ii), the article 'the' enlists the cooperation of the decoder as well as presupposes same to have a previous knowledge of the 'boy' from this simple analogy, one can draw the inference that whether definite or indefinite, articles can resolve ambiguity.

Stating in an unequivocal term concerning the wrong use of articles, Jowitt and Nnaomi (1985) observe wrong use of the articles in English will rarely cause you to be misunderstood...at the same time proper use of the articles may be regarded as one of the hall marks of the really careful speaker or writer wishing to bring his performance in English up to a high standard (pg. 78)

Commenting on the semantic implication of the definite article 'the', Haruna (2001) says

> *'the' is restricted in usage to something or knowledge that is shared by both the sender and the receiver of the message in most written texts the writer often assumes that the reader should share a particular knowledge with him (pg. 25).*

Expatiating on the use of the article 'the' he says that it has extra linguistic meaning. That is to say that the referent lies outside what is said with language. In such a case, the situation of utterance has to be put into consideration before actual referent known.

Earlier, Oyeyemi (1998) had pointed out that the article 'the' could be used to indicate the uniqueness of the word it precedes. For example, article 'the' can be used with-sun, moon, earth, sky etc. as part of the semantics strength of the article 'the' he further indicated that it could be used for instance:...

'the belt' mentioned in the third phrase is apparently the same 'black belt' in the first phrase.

Talk of the indefinite article 'a' it does not accommodate shared knowledge between the encoder and the decoder, in English, two forms of indefinite article are 'a' and 'an'

'A lecturer has eaten an egg'.

This implies that neither 'a lecturer 'nor 'an egg' is specific. Anybody who lectures and any egg could be said to intended in the content.

Another remarkable difference between the definite article and indefinite article is that while the former refers the latter describes:

Jane is a good teacher:

'A' in the sentence is used as an attribute of the subject of the sentence which is 'Jane'.

Other grammatical function of the indefinite article 'a'/'an' is restricted to a singular countable noun. So it is possible to have: a book, a pencil, an egg, an umbrella, etc.

Besides, it is also used before a predicative noun denoting a profession, trade, religion and class. For example:

i. Ade is a teacher (professional)
ii. Ade made himself a president (class)
iii. Ade is a Christian (religion)

it is essential to note that the indefinite article 'a' can pattern with any singular countable noun that starts with a consonant sound at the initial position such as a chair /tʃ/, a book, /b/, a pencil /p/, etc. on the other hand, 'an' will collocate with a singular countable noun that starts with a vowel sound at the initial position e.g. and object -/D/ an orange /ɔ:/, etc.

Finally, the realization of zero (Ø) article comes into focus where neither the definite o nor the indefinite article is appropriate. This is always the case where the noun is uncountable or in plural form. Stressing this point, Oyeyemi (1998) says that such nouns should also be in a generic sense and not limited (see Quirk 1973).

Example include:

i. Rice is nice for me.
ii. Sit on sand.

'Rice' and 'sand' are both used in generic sense, so no article is needed before any of the nouns.

According to Haruna (2001), zero article could be found in titles where a common noun is followed by a proper noun as in: Prince Oyeyemi, King Ademola, Professor Adesola. president Obasanjo. Other instance in this class of the use of zero article are those of seasons and festivals. For instance,

i. We should visit you at Christian
ii. It is dry season.

The review of both the grammatical function and semantic implication of article indicates that concerted effort should be made by any English user to employ them appropriately in both their utterances and writing.

Research Technique

In the process of this study 50 students from the school of vocational studies were randomly sampled. A cloze test containing 80 questions was technically structured based on definite article indefinite and zero articles.

English specialists in the department went through the questions and modified as appropriate.

The test was personally administered, collected and marked for analysis. Simple percentage was the statistical tools used analysis.

Presentation of Data and Discussion

Table 1 Performance Percentage on the Use of Articles by the Department in the School of Vocational Studies.

Depts.	Frequency occurrence of wrong use of article and % by each department	
	a/an, the zero (Ø)	%
Agriculture	179	19.9
App fine arts	181	20.1
Business Education	150	20
Home Economics	178	19.8
Tech. Education	182	20.2
Total	900	100%

Table, above reveals that a total of 900 error of articles were committed by the students of vocational studies. Out of this, the students of Agriculture Department committed a total 197 (19.9%). Applied and Fine Arts 181 (20.1%), Business Education 180 (20%), Home Economics Dept. 178 (19.8%) and Technical Education Dept. 182(20.%) error of articles.

Perhaps, the students of vocational studies committed a very high number of error of articles as a result of the fact that based on their disciplines, they are more analytical than being description. Hence, they place more emphasis on contextual words than structural words such as articles.

Table 2 Performance Percentage on the Use of Articles by both Males and Females in the School of Vocational Studies.

Sex	Frequency occurrence of wrong use of article by each sex	
	A the zero (Ø)	%
Female	44.7	49.7
Male	45.3	50.3
Total	900	100%

Table 2 above indicates that out of the total 900 errors of articles committed by the student of vocational studies, the female committed 44.7(49.7%) errors of articles while their male counterpart committed 45.3(50.3%) errors of articles.

Table 3 Performance Percentage on the Use of Definite Article by the Students of the School of Vocational Studies.

Depts.	Frequency occurrence of wrong use of article by each department	
	Articles Article 'the'	%
Agriculture	69	19.8
App fine arts	71	20.2
Business Education	70	20
Home Economics	68	19.7
Tech. Education	72	20.3
Total	350	100%

Table 3 show that the students of vocational studies committed a total number of 350 errors of definite article 'the' out of these, Agric. department committed 69 (19.8%), Applied fine Arts 71(20.2%), Business Edu. 70 (20%), Home Econs. 68(19.7%), Tech. Education 72(20.3%) errors of the definite article 'the'.

The students committed so high number of errors of definite article because in their L1 (Yoruba) the use of such article could be insignificant.

Discussion

RQ 1: Are the types of errors identified discipline specific?

The finding are shown in table 1 clearly indicate that the errors identified (indefinite article, definite article and zero article) are not discipline specific. For instance, Agriculture Department committed a total 197 (19.9%). Applied and Fine Arts 181 (20.1%). Business Education 180 (20%), Home Economics Dept. 178 (19.8%) and Technical Education Dept. 182(20.%) error of articles.

What is s evident is that the students generally are weak in the use of the identified articles. For instance, a student responded.

I have a information for you.

The article 'an' is not necessary in the sentence based on the fact that the noun 'information' is not countable. However, the respondent is probably applying the rule that states that 'an' should proceed a noun that started with a vowel at the initial position. Definitely, this is an interlingual error as a result of over generalization.

Anther responded wrote:

The president was honourable man

The above sentence is ungrammatical as a result of misuse of the indefinite article 'a' that modifies the adjective 'honourable'. The respondent could have written:

The president was an honourable man.

The respondent committed this error as a result of misapplication of the rule that says that article 'a' must precede a countable noun that starts with a consonant at the initial position. The emphasis here is that, 'honourable' starts with a vowels sound at the initial position /ɔu/.

Generally the students of Vocational studies committed the above and similar other errors of articles

RQ2.

Are the types of errors identified sex-specific?

Table 2 indicates that the females of vocational studies committed 44.7(49.1%) errors of articles while the male committed 45.3(50.3%) errors of article.

The findings have shown clearly that the types of error identified especially definite article, indefinite article and error article are not sex specific.

RQ3

Are the errors the direct result of mother tongue interference?

All the subjects used for this study speak Yoruba Language as their native language. In Yoruba language, the omission of article may not necessary destroy the structure of a sentence as that of English language.

As a result, the students generally got wrong the tasks that require the definite article 'the'

For instance, a respondent wrote:

I will study medicine at University of Ilorin.

Instead of:

I will study medicine at the University of Ilorin.

A direct translation of the sentence in Yoruba would be:

Mo ma keko isegun ni University of Ilorin

I will study medicine at University of Ilorin.

Another example as written by a respondent read this:

Boy is here

Instead of:

The boy is here:

Translation form Yoruba into English

Omokunrin na wa nibi (grammatical)

Boy is here (ungrammatical)

Based on the data gathered and analysed it is appropriate to conclude that the identified errors are the direct result of mother tongue interference.

Conclusion

Grammarians are of view that articles whether definite or indefinite play a vital role in resolving ambiguity. Therefore, from the analysis of the data presented in this study, one can rightly conclude that misused of articles really affects meaning.

This study revealed that the students of Vocational studies are generally weak in the use of articles: hence, they were ambiguously.

It is evidently clear also that Interlingua errors (mother tongue interference) were established.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, lecturers in schools of vocational studies should shift emphasis form intelligibility to grammatical of the written English of their students.

It is equally suggested that English for Specific Purpose (ESP) is introduce in the GSE syllabus. Such a syllabus will adequately cater for the teaching and learning of structural words such as articles.

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