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GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN THE EXPOSITORY ESSAYS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS OF ADAMAWA STATE UNIVERSITY, MUBI

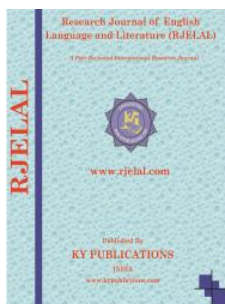
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ABSTRACT

The quality of language use by students in tertiary institutions has deteriorated over the years as a result of poor background in the formative years of primary and secondary education. It is for this reason that this study analyses the grammatical errors in the expository essays of Public Administration Students of Adamawa State University, Mubi using the theoretical framework of Error Analysis (EA). 100 randomly selected 400 level students wrote an expository essay on a task in their content area. After marking the essays, errors identified were classified into nine categories, namely: verbs, spellings, wrong words, nouns, punctuation/capitalization, pronouns, articles, abbreviations/ coinages and prepositions. Descriptive statistics (percentage and mean scores) were used to analyse the data. Based on a set criterion, three error categories; verbs, wrong words and spelling were found to be significant with mean scores of 2.0 and above. The remaining six were not significant but are nevertheless, indications of the students' poor grasp of the English language. With regard to Ellis and Barkhuizen's (2005) surface structure taxonomy, most of the errors can be categorized into those of omission, addition, misformation and misordering. Following from the underlying assumptions of EA, they can be said to be the result of overgeneralization of rules, interference from the mother tongue, extra lingual factors and inadequate learning. Among other things, it is recommended that functional teaching of English should be encouraged to improve the communicative competence of the learners.

**Key words:** Error Analysis, Expository Essays, Grammatical Errors, Students, Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The English language is undeniably the world's most important language being widely spoken, especially outside its original home. The roles of the language in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. It is predominantly used in formal contexts: the language of government, of

commerce, of press, of the legislature, and not of least importance of communication among Nigerians from different ethnic backgrounds and between them and the external world (Banjo, 2012). The dominant status of the language in the country has attracted comments from various scholars among whom are Adeyanju (1983), Adekunle (1985), Bamgbose (1994) and Fakaye (2012). For instance,

Adeyanju (1983) observes that; “not only does English dominate our public and social life as the most extensively used language across the country, but it also reaches our homes through all media and some of our children even speak it as their first language” (P.10). This requires that a sound knowledge of the English language that should be manifested in the learners’ communicative competence is of paramount importance. In spite of the much needed proficiency in the language, it has been observed for too long that the spoken and written English of products of Nigerian education at all tiers has become an embarrassment to the system.

Today, more than ever before, there is a growing need for the English language to be taught and learnt very properly at all the levels of the educational system. This is because there is a steady decline in the proficiency level of the language in our educational system as our students’ English, both spoken and written is replete with grammatical errors. The poor performance of students is glaringly evidenced by their mass failure in public examination such as Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) and other similar examination bodies. This poor performance of students which is attributable to a variety of factors has continued to pose enormous challenge to teachers and other stakeholders in the business of education (Dipo, 2007).

The fact that considerable efforts have been put into research on Error Analysis (EA) in second language learning is incontrovertible. However, the bulk of earlier studies concentrated on secondary schools students. Consequently, this study intends to examine learners at the post secondary school level whose performance in the English language have been observed to be below expectation.

In attempting to explain the causes of errors in the learning of English as a Second Language (ESL), Error Analysis (EA) is one of the techniques usually employed. EA is “a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically

interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics” (Crystal, 2009, P.173). Proponents of EA are of the view that errors are likely to emerge when learners make wrong deductions about the nature of the second language, such as assuming that a pattern is general, when in fact, there are exceptions. Many errors are explicable or analyzable in terms of overgeneralization within the second language and many are traceable to improper learning and interference from the mother tongue (MT).

Brown (2006), posits that an error in grammar is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of the native speaker reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner. This confirms an earlier assertion by George (1972) who is of the view that “an error in grammar is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker made by learners who have not mastered the rules of the second language.” (P.2).

Since the English language is extensively used in Nigeria for administrative purposes, the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing is very essential. Hence, it is of paramount importance for Public Administration students to have a particularly strong competence in writing, especially Report Writing. In order to do this, they need to be proficient in their use of English.

This paper is designed to examine the English language use of students in tertiary education in Nigeria with a particular focus on the use of English by students of Public Administration at the Adamawa State University, Mubi. The work seeks to identify the peculiar linguistic problems of this category of students with a view to identifying them as means of improving English language teaching in Nigeria.

#### **AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this study is to analyse the grammatical errors made by Public Administration Students of Adamawa State University, Mubi. Specifically, it is undertaken with the following objectives in mind:

- i. to determine the extent to which the communicative competence of the learners meet the standard of language for administrative purpose.
  - ii. to identify and examine the linguistic features that characterize the language use of Public Administration students;
  - iii. to identify and examine the factors that constrain the use of English by this category of students; and
  - iv. to offer some suggestions that would be useful in improving the communicative competence of the learners.
- ii. Regularization: e.g. \*eated for ate, childs for children.
  - iii. Simple addition: e.g. \*The fishes doesn't live in water.
3. Misformation Errors: These are characterized by the use of wrong forms of the morphemes or structures. They include:
    - i. Regularization: e.g. \*The dog eated the meat.
    - ii. Archi-forms: e.g. \*Her danced with my brother.
  4. Misordering Errors: Errors of misordering result from incorrect placement of morphemes or group of morphemes in a sentence/utterance. e.g. \*I don't know what is that. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, P.138).

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is approaches from Error Analysis (EA). Error Analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that is concerned with the identification, description and explanation of language learners' errors in either the spoken or written form. Linguists such as Bamgbose (1994), James (1998), Celce-Murcia and Larsen – Freeman (1999), Eyisi (2004), Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) and Brown (2006) have made useful contributions towards EA as a theory of second language acquisition (SLA).

In order to analyse the grammatical errors identified in the students' essays, Ellis and Barkhuizen's (2005) Surface Structure Taxonomy of error categorization is adopted in this study. This error annotation device deals with how surface structures of a language are changed by the learner in especially the written medium. Accordingly, Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), categorize errors into:

1. Omission Errors: These are the absence of an item which must appear in a well formed sentence e.g. \*There is ^ cat in my room.
2. Addition Errors: These are the presence of items which must not appear in a well formed sentence. In this category, they identify three types of errors, namely:
  - i. Double marking: e.g. \*He did n't stood up.

Resorting to the underlying assumptions of this, and other error annotation devices, the identified errors were analysed.

### METHODOLOGY

One hundred (100) randomly selected 400 level students of Public Administration Department during the 2016/2017 session wrote an expository essay, the task of which was formulated as follows:

**Discuss the factors responsible for the increasing rate of graduate unemployment in Nigeria and suggest ways of reducing it.**

This group of students was selected based on the fact that they must have been taught *Communication in English*: a General English course, at the lower levels and are expected to be fluent in the language. The expository type of essay was chosen because it provides opportunity for clarity of expression, freedom in the choice of vocabulary and the benefit of presenting facts clearly (Olusoji, 2013).

The essays were marked paying attention to erroneous sentences and/or parts of sentences. In this process, some scripts were discarded because the learners could not write meaningfully either because they were incompetent or they did not understand the task assigned. The identified improper uses of the English language were

classified into various categories based on the linguistic components affected such as verbs, spellings, wrong words, etc. in tabular form. Descriptive statistics (Measures of Central Tendency), particularly percentage and mean scores were used in analyzing the data. The mean score for each category of error was calculated by dividing the product of the error by the number of scripts in which the errors were identified. In order to establish the significance or otherwise of each error category, a criterion was obtained. This was got by dividing the sum of the mean scores of the errors by the number of error categories. The errors were explained by reference to the underlying

assumptions of EA, such as interference from the MT, overgeneralization of rules and ignorance of rule restriction. However, James (1998) stresses that identifying the underlying causes of errors can be inexact and problematic.

**FINDINGS**

After marking the essays, the following areas of grammar were identified as containing erroneous uses: verbs, spellings, wrong words, nouns, punctuations/capitalization, pronouns, articles, abbreviations/coinages and prepositions. They are presented and analysed in the following tables:

Table 1. Category and Frequency of Error in the Students' Essays

Script No.	Verbs	Spellings	Wrong Words	Nouns	Punctuations/ Capitalizations	Pronouns	Articles	Abbreviations/ Coinages	Prepositions	Total
1	6	1	2	1	3	1	-	1	1	15
2	6	1	3	-	3	2	-	-	1	17
3	5	1	3	1	3	-	1	-	-	14
4	6	1	2	1	3	1	-	-	1	15
5	7	1	3	2	2	1	1	1	2	20
6	5	1	2	-	2	-	2	-	1	13
7	5	2	5	3	3	-	-	-	-	18
8	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	-	14
9	3	4	2	-	2	1	1	-	2	15
10	3	4	5	1	2	1	-	-	1	17
11	5	-	2	1	1	1	1	-	-	11
12	4	-	4	2	1	2	-	-	1	14
13	4	2	3	3	2	1	2	-	1	18
14	2	4	3	4	1	1	1	-	1	17
15	5	2	2	-	2	-	2	-	-	13
16	1	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	1	06
17	4	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	08
18	4	1	2	2	2	2	1	-	-	14
19	5	2	6	1	2	-	-	-	-	16
20	5	1	4	-	2	1	1	-	-	14
21	4	3	3	3	2	1	2	-	1	19
22	5	3	3	2	2	2	-	-	-	17
23	6	1	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	11
24	4	1	3	2	2	3	1	-	1	17
25	3	2	1	4	2	1	-	-	-	13
26	4	1	5	1	2	1	1	-	1	16
27	6	1	1	1	2	2	-	-	1	14

28	4	1	3	-	1	-	1	-	1	11
29	4	3	3	-	1	1	1	-	-	13
30	5	2	2	1	2	-	1	-	4	17
31	5	3	5	1	2	1	-	2	-	19
32	3	8	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	17
33	5	1	3	-	2	2	1	-	1	15
34	2	2	3	1	2	-	-	-	1	11
35	4	2	3	2	2	-	-	-	1	14
36	5	7	4	1	2	-	1	1	2	23
37	5	2	3	1	2	1	-	1	-	15
38	2	1	2	1	1	-	1	-	1	09

Table 1 Contd.: Category and Frequency of Error in the Students' Essays

39	6	3	2	-	2	1	1	-	-	15
40	5	2	4	2	3	2	-	-	1	19
41	5	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	10
42	5	3	3	-	1	1	-	-	1	14
43	3	1	2	1	1	-	-	-	1	09
44	5	2	3	2	1	-	1	-	-	14
45	3	1	3	-	1	-	-	1	1	10
46	6	2	4	1	4	1	-	-	1	19
47	5	1	2	-	2	-	2	-	1	13
48	4	1	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	10
49	6	2	2	1	1	1	2	-	1	16
50	6	2	-	-	2	1	3	-	-	14
51	7	2	2	1	2	-	1	-	1	16
52	5	2	1	-	2	1	1	-	-	12
53	4	2	2	1	2	1	1	-	1	14
54	4	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	1	13
55	5	2	1	1	3	-	-	-	-	12
56	4	3	1	1	2	-	-	-	1	12
57	6	3	2	2	2	1	-	-	1	17
58	4	1	2	1	1	1	1	-	1	12
59	6	2	1	2	2	2	1	-	1	17
60	5	3	4	1	2	1	-	-	-	16
61	6	4	3	1	1	-	-	1	-	16
62	4	1	3	2	2	2	1	-	1	16
63	3	2	2	1	2	-	-	-	1	11
64	7	2	3	1	2	1	2	-	-	16
65	4	3	2	-	2	1	2	-	-	13
66	5	3	3	1	1	1	-	-	-	14
67	6	5	2	1	2	2	1	-	2	21
68	5	2	3	2	2	2	2	-	1	19
69	8	3	2	1	3	1	-	-	1	19
70	5	4	3	1	2	2	1	-	-	18
71	5	2	1	-	1	-	2	-	1	12
72	6	2	2	1	3	-	1	-	-	15
73	6	4	3	-	2	1	-	-	1	17

74	5	3	2	4	-	1	-	-	16	
75	5	4	5	-	2	-	2	-	19	
76	6	2	7	1	3	2	2	-	24	
77	3	2	4	-	3	-	2	-	18	
78	7	3	2	1	2	1	1	-	17	
79	6	3	3	1	2	1	-	-	17	
80	5	2	2	2	2	1	1	-	15	
81	4	3	3	2	3	1	2	-	19	
Total	395	175	215	92	155	65	60	10	58	1225

The data on table 1 indicate that 81 scripts put at 100 percent were found to contain the 9 categories of errors slated for analysis. The table shows that the students made a total 1,225 errors of various categories. 395 of such errors are associated with verbs generally. Errors of spelling had a frequency of 175 in the students' essays. In the table, it can be seen that wrong words accounted for 125 of the errors made, followed by errors related to the use of punctuation marks, with 155 cases. With the exception of errors of abbreviation which had the lowest frequency, of 10 errors, the remaining error categories seem to appear

uniformly in the students' essays. Thus, pronouns, articles and prepositions appeared 65, 60 and 58 times in this order.

As information on table 1 shows, errors related to the use of verbs, spellings and wrong words were found in all the scripts that were sorted out as containing erroneous use of language by the samples. The rest of the error categories were not found in some of the learners' scripts as revealed by the data in table 1. For instance, there was only a scripts that had errors of abbreviations and coinages or short forms, while 45 and 48 scripts had errors of articles and prepositions, respectively.

Table 2: Cumulative Total Frequency and Mean Scores of Error Types

S/N	Error category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
1	Verbs	395	32.2	4.9
2	Spellings	175	14.3	2.2
3	Wrong words	215	18.6	2.7
4	Nouns	92	7.5	1.1
5	Punctuation	155	12.6	1.9
6	Pronouns	65	5.3	0.8
7	Articles	60	4.9	0.7
8	Abbreviations	10	0.8	0.1
9	Prepositions	58	4.6	0.7
	Total	1225	100	

Table two shows the cumulative total frequency and mean score of error types made by the students. The table reveals that 9 error categories were identified in the corpora for analysis. They are verbs, spellings, wrong words, nouns, punctuations/capitalization, pronouns, articles, abbreviations/coinages and prepositions.

The mean scores of these error categories were calculated as means of determining their level of significance. The mean score for all the error categories is 2.0. If an error category has a mean score of less than 2.0, it is considered as not being significant. By the same token, if a variable or error

category records a mean score of 2.0 and above, it is considered significant.

Following from this criterion of error significance, it can be seen from table 2 that the errors in the domain of verbs with a mean score of 4.9, is significant. With regard to error of spellings, a mean score of 2.2 was recorded, indicating that this error category is significant in the essays of the students. With reference to errors of wrong forms of words used by the learners the mean score is 2.7, indicating that this variable constitute a significant proportion of the errors identified. The errors of nouns and punctuations had mean scores of 1.1 and 1.9, respectively. They are therefore, not considered significant going by the set criterion. As regards the error categories labeled pronouns, articles, abbreviations and prepositions, their mean scores were 0.8, 0.7, 0.1 and 0.7 in this order. Hence, based on the set criterion, they are considered not significant.

#### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

An attempt is made in this section to interpret the data presented and analysed. The causes and/or sources of the errors are stated using the theoretical underpinnings of EA. Although other forms of grammatical errors may be noticed, attention is given only to the 9 categories of errors that were identified. Accordingly, they are discussed below using few examples from the essays.

#### Errors in the Use of Verbs

This category of error recorded the highest frequency of occurrence, totaling 395, put at 32.2 percent with a mean score of 4.0. It is adjudged significant going by the set criterion. The following ill-formed sentences extracted from the learners' corpora exemplify the wrong uses of verbs:

1. \*Many people have the skills, but do to fatherism the have not be opportuned to be employed.
2. \*These graduates seeking the job must have to be give bribe before been consider
3. \*Nigeria is having few industries to employed workers.

The error in sentence (1) lies in treating as verb the word "opportunity", which is a noun by coining the past participle "opportuned". In fact, there is no verb "be opportuned" in English. Second language learners tend to treat as verbs, words which belong to other word classes such as nouns, adjectives and adverbs by adding "-ed" and putting auxiliaries in front. In the literature, these are called "false verbs" (Jowitt & Nnamonu, 1985, Eyisi 2004). Such errors fall within the category which Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), refer to as errors of "misformation." When the wrong expression is corrected, it should run as follows:

4. *Many people have the required skills but due to godfatherism, they do not get the opportunity to be employed.*

In sentence (2), the error is with using "must" and "have to" together. A future obligation should be expressed by the modal verbs "must" or "will have to be" but not by a combination of the two. Allowing both of them to co-occur causes a problem of redundancy. The correct construction is either

- 5a. *These graduates seeking for jobs have to give bribes before being considered. Or*
- 5b. *These graduates seeking for jobs must give bribes before being considered.*

Sentence (3) is erroneous because the stative verb "to have" is wrongly accorded a progressive form. The expression in good English is:

- 6 *Nigeria has few industries to employ workers.*

It is obvious that the foregoing ill-formed sentences are as a result of inadequate grasp of the rules of the grammar of English.

#### Spelling Errors

The errors of spelling identified in the students' essays had a frequency of 184 occurrences. They constitute 5.8 percent of the total errors (1,225). Their mean score is 2.4, which is considered significant. Below are few examples of

deviant sentences with wrongly spelt words underlined:

7. \*Therefore in regards to the above mazor factors both government and applicant have roll to play.
8. \*Any nation that want to develope must provide zorb for her citizens.
9. \*Govt is not ready to employed workers due to bad governonce.

One of the causes of spelling errors identified by researchers (Omoruyi 1984, James 1998 & Dada 2015), is mispronunciation. Some of the underlined words in the above extracts; "goverment" instead of "government" and "develope" instead of "develop" may have been mispronounced and therefore spelt wrongly. Mispronunciation can result from inconsistencies and complexities in English pronunciation and students' failure to master them. (Bodunde & Sotiloye, 2013). It can also result from interference of the MT. Although the students studied is linguistically heterogeneous, it is possible that the words "major" and "job" respectively spelt as "mazor" and "zorb" may be so linked. Some dialects of Chamba in Southern Adamawa State of Nigeria are observed to articulate the consonant /dʒ/ as /z/, thus influencing the production of /meizɔ/ and /zɔb/ instead of /meidʒə/ and /dʒɔb/ (Lagu, 2005, P.87).

#### Errors in the Use Wrong Forms of Words

These are basically errors of word choice and forms, amalgamation of words and malapropisms. From the data presented and analysed, a total of 215 errors representing 18.6 percent with a mean score of 2.7 were in this domain. In line with the set criterion it is considered significant.

The following extracts exemplify them.

10. \*Unemployment cab be seen as a problem of underdevelopment country today.
11. \*Conclusively, politicians and administrators must be people who truly have the fear of God.

12. \*There will incontunity in the administrative system.

The errors in sentence (10) result from misselection. The learner's misselected the noun "underdevelopment" instead of the adjective "underdeveloped." This suggests improper learning of the different English word-classes. The correct version of the sentence is:

13. *Unemployment can be seen as a problem of underdeveloped countries today.*

The use of the adverb "conclusively" in extract (11) is erroneous because it has no semantic correlation with the root word "conclusion." (Eyisi, 2004). Thus, "conclusively" does not denote "in conclusion", rather it means "without doubt." To conclude a piece of writing as intended by the writer, write:

14. *In conclusion, the politicians and the administrators must be people who truly have the fear of God.*

The word "incontunity" used in sentence (12) does not exist in the English lexicon. It may have been coined wrongly as the leaner made wrong analogy to the process of derivational morphology. He affixed "in-" to the stem "continue" and the suffix "-ity" to form the non-existent word "incontunity." The required word in that slot is "discontinuity." Therefore, the sentence should be corrected as follows:

15. *There will be discontinuity in the administrative system.*

It is speculated that these errors are as a result of the leaners' poor grasp of the vocabulary and syntax of English.

#### Errors of Noun Forms

Noun form errors recorded 92 occurrences, representing 7.5 percent with a mean score of 1.3 and is considered insignificant. Although adjudged insignificant, it is an indication of inadequate learning. Some of the errors involved singular and plural forms of nouns that were incorrect, omitted or unnecessary. In the following malformed sentences, the aberrant uses of nouns are underlined.



16. \*The civil servant they are suppose to have responsibility of implementing governmental policy (civil servants, policies)
17. \*By these recommendations and advices the increasing rate of unemployment will definately decrease (advice)
18. \*The elites makes policy to suit them (elite, policies)

In the above erroneous sentences, the learner either omitted the pluralization morpheme or added one where it is not required. The sentences should be restructured as follows:

19. *The civil servants are supposed to be responsible for implementing government policies.*

20. *By these recommendations and advice, the increasing rate of unemployment will definitely decrease.*

21. *The elite make policies to suit themselves.*

For Richards (1974), these errors are the result of incomplete application of rules and ignorance of rule restriction within the target language (TL). It is clear that the learners failed to apply the rules of forming plurals of the nouns or wrongly applied the rules where they were not required.

#### Errors in the Use of Pronouns

This category had 65 occurrences put at 5.3 percent and a mean score of 0.8, which is found insignificant based on the reference criterion. These errors manifested in the incorrect use of possessive pronouns in place of personal pronouns, inability to differentiate between the use of relative pronouns for animate and inanimate antecedents, the use of redundant subject pronouns and using singular demonstrative pronouns and vice-versa. These are exemplified below:

22. \*These is one of the major facto that increases unemployment in Nigeria.
23. \*Politicians and administrators should be fair and honest in the way their exercised their powers.

24. \*The youth which graduated from universities, polytechnics and colleges are running about in the country without jobs.

These sentences are malformed in many respects, but the underlined pronouns are focused on. The error in sentence (22) is traceable to pronunciation problem – inability to differentiate between the long and short high front vowel /i:/ and /i/ in “these” and “this.” In sentence (23) “they” (subjective personal pronoun) and “their” (possessive case of personal pronoun) were not differentiated. Sentence (24) abuses the use of the relative pronoun “which” that usually precedes non-human antecedents.

The sentences should be recast thus:

25. *This is one of the major factors that increases unemployment in Nigeria.*
26. *Politicians and administrators should be fair and honest in the way they exercise their powers.*
27. *They youths who graduated from universities, polytechnics and colleges are roaming about in the country without jobs.*

#### Errors in the Use of Articles/Determiners

This category of error constitutes 4.9 percent with a mean score of 0.7 which is found insignificant. Errors identified are mainly the omission of the definite article (the), some of which are contained in the following incorrect sentences and their reformulated versions:

28. \*The distribution of income between △ rich and △ poor have a wider gap.
29. *There is a wide gap in the distribution of income between the rich and the poor.*
30. \*Unemployment should be reduced to △ bearest minimum.
31. *Unemployment should be reduced to the barest minimum.*
32. \*The rate of unemployment on African countries is always on △ increase.
33. *The rate of unemployment in African countries is always on the increase.*

The wrong sentences are deviant in many respects, but the concern is with the use of articles. As the sentences reveal, there are rampant cases of the omission of articles. Reasons for this may not be unconnected with interference of the subjects' mother tongues, since most Nigerian languages do not possess any separate morpheme for the article system (Eyisi, 2004).

#### Errors in the Use of Prepositions

There were 58 errors of preposition, representing 4.6 percent with a calculated mean of 0.7 indicating that such were not significant. The data revealed that the learners were uncertain on the correct usage of preposition. Oji (1988) observes that many Nigerians do not know when and why they should use a particular preposition. This is buttressed by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) who posit that prepositions are generally troublesome to learners for whom English is a foreign or second language. The following deviant constructions exemplify preposition abuse by the learners:

34. \*However, it has also led to corruption and poverty to the graduates.
35. \*The policies of government does not make provision of graduates to have their job.
36. \*With regards to that both government and Applicant have role to play.

Sentences (34) and (35) involve the use of inappropriate preposition. The error in sentence (36) lies with the use of the prepositional phrase "with regards to." In good English, "regard to" is used in three various expressions viz:

- a. With regard to ...
- b. In regard to...
- c. As regards to...

These phrases show that whenever it is preceded by the preposition "with" or "in", it discards the "s" and retains it when preceded by "as." The use of the "s" in the contentious sentence mars it. The above erroneous sentences are indications of poor learning of the grammar of English. The correct versions of the sentences are:

37. *The policies of government do not make provision for graduates to have jobs.*
38. *However, it has led to corruption and poverty among the graduates.*
39. *With regard to that, both the government and applicants have roles to play.*

#### Errors of Abbreviation/Coinage

The use of abbreviation and coinages in a formal write-up is an indication of the students' carelessness and laziness. This is because the note-taking skill of abbreviations and short messages system (sms) are transferred into formal writing. There were only 10, representing 0.8 percent with a mean score of 0.7. Few of them with their corrected versions are presented below:

40. \*Govt. is not ready to employed workers do to bad governonce.
41. *Government is not ready to employ workers due to bad governance.*
42. \*I belief dat unemployment will be reduce to the bearest minimum.
43. *I believe that unemployment will be reduced to the barest minimum.*
44. \*Sme even become a menace and joint bad companies.
45. *Some even become a menance and join bad companies.*

#### Errors of Punctuation and Capitalization

Errors of this category recorded 155 occurrences, put at 12.6 percent with a mean score of 1.9. Although very close to the criterion mean, it is considered not significant. Punctuations and capitalizations are important ingredients in essay writing. This is because a badly punctuated piece of writing distorts the author's intended message (Oji, 1988). In the text which follows, observable punctuation and capitalization errors can be noticed:

46. \*because he/she doesn't has resources to pay their way in ^

47. \*However ^\_it has also led to corruption and poverty to the graduates.

48. \*In Nigeria today ^\_employment are not base on merit or base on field of study^\_

These few sentences reveal the absence of commas and full stops where they are required and breaking the rule of capitalization at the beginning of a sentence. The wrong use of capitalization and the absence of full stop might be due to carelessness. As for the absence of commas, they may be due to inadequate knowledge of when they should be used.

The above sentences should be corrected thus:

49. *Because he/she does not have the resources to pave his/her way in.*

50. *However, it has led to corruption and poverty among the graduates.*

51. *In Nigeria today, employment is not based on merit or field of study.*

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the group of students studied performed poorly in their written English as they were unable to write meaningfully on a task related to their content area. This was demonstrated by their response to the writing task given to them as means of eliciting the data for this study.

#### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is carried out with the aim of analysing grammatical errors in the essays of Public Administration Department students of Adamawa State University, Mubi. Based on the data collected and analysed, it can be concluded that the students made grammatical errors in their use of verbs, spellings, word forms, nouns, punctuation/capitalization, pronouns, articles, abbreviations/coinages and prepositions. Errors of verbs, spellings and word usage were found to be significant, having attained a mean score of 2.0 and above. The remaining error categories were insignificant because their mean scores were below 2.0. Although they are adjudged not significant, they affect the grammaticality of English, hence

evidences of the students' poor grasp of the language.

Resorting to the theoretical underpinnings of EA, the identified errors were assumed to have been caused by overgeneralization of rules, interference from the mother tongue, extralingual factors and inadequate learning. Furthermore, considering Ellis & Barkhuizen's (2005) Surface Structure Taxonomy of error categorization, some of the errors are the result of omission, addition, misordering and misformation. In view of this conclusion, the following recommendations are made as means of improving teaching and learning of English in our educational institutions.

1. Teachers of English should try as much as possible to engage in functional teaching of the language so as to improve the communicative competence of the learners. In other words, teaching and learning processes should be interactive in nature. This can be achieved if only the unusually large classes in our educational institutions are reduced to give room for individual attention.
2. Pronunciation, spelling and syntactic functions of different classes of words should be effectively taught in order to avoid confusion in usage.
3. Students should be encouraged to imbibe the culture of reading extensively so that they will be familiar with different usages and functions of different grammatical items.
4. More teachers of English should be trained and employed in the educational system, particularly, at the secondary school level.
5. Constant evaluation and feedback should be given to the students because language is a skill-based activity which can be improved with constant practice and evaluation.
6. More effort should be devoted to the teaching of "Communication in English" in Universities.

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