

An analysis of the causes of English grammatical errors in communicative genre: A case study of mathematics students at Gombe State University, Nigeria

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Abstract. This study was aimed at investigating errors used among mathematics students of Gombe State University, Nigeria. Also, the study explored students' attitudes towards English. The researchers selected a sample that consisted of 100 Hausa first language speakers, covering different educational backgrounds. The instrument of the study was a sociolinguistics questionnaire. Results indicated that the respondents had both positive and negative attitudes towards the target language – English. They freely used Hausa language in the domain of home and with family members. Also, the results indicated that a total number of 86 errors were committed and most of these students were less proficient in the use of prepositions which was one of the main grammatical aspects. The major causes of the errors were due to new attitude towards English as the users of English in this part of the world have become less proficient in English because Hausa has become 'the other tongue' of some speakers who may not have originally come from the Hausa land. The results have also shown that Hausa has constructed a social structure in which those who used the language enjoy privileges in local transactions in trade, religion, instructions, etc. So, due to incessant need for every day communication, a change of 'new' rules of English by Hausa users were apparent.

Keywords: Error, grammar, religion, culture, communication, communities.

INTRODUCTION

Most parts of Nigeria and indeed the whole world are inhabited by diverse linguistic families and communities. This diversity of language within a given community also means that people have linguistic choices as regard which language to use in a given context. Diversity of a language leads to the unavoidable concept of multilingualism among speech communities. It is expected that people either partially or completely shift in their speech. An individual choice of language is determined by different factors: who is spoken to, what is the topic of discussion, where is the place of discussion, etc. these are some of determining factors for language shift.

Language shift refers to a process in which the speakers of one language begin to use a second language for more functions. Anthony (2007) explained that language shift can be understood based on a social strategies through which an individual or group compete for positions of linguistic prestige. Similarly, Baker (1996) said that language shift is used in the literature to refer to a downward movement. That is, there is lessening of the number of speakers in a population, a loss in language proficiency, or decreasing use of that language in different domains. Whether a language is being shifted or not, one needs to be at least near efficient in order to communicate perform credibly well in the language of

instruction. Achieving effectiveness in communication requires communicative competence which is the mastery of the knowledge of language and the ability to use the knowledge in actual communication (Canale, 1983; Canale and Swain, 1980). The knowledge of the language or linguistic competence encompasses mastery of lexis, grammar and the sound system of language. While linguistic competence needs to be complemented by sociolinguistic strategy and discourse competencies for effective communication to take place.

A search of literature on error analysis of spoken texts in English indicated a near-absence of attention in this domain. Studies on spoken English tend to deal with areas such as speaking skills (Lourdunathan and Menon, 2005; Ramesh *et al.*, 2006), student's reluctance to speak in English classes (Jassem and Jassem, 1997). Linguistic accuracy of spoken language may be more difficult to study because of the nature of speech. McCarthy (1998) wrote about real dialogues which do not look neat with well-formed sentences. According to Bartram and Walton (2002) accuracy in spoken English refers to "utterances as near to a native speaker's as possible". Brumfit (1984) referred to the accuracy of the language content to include: grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. However, the grammatical accuracy in spoken language is different from written language. Beattie (1983) stated that "spontaneous speech is unlike written text; it contains many mistakes, sentences are usually brief" cited in Halliday (1986). Brown (2003) highlighted the inappropriateness of requiring students to use complete sentences when they speak and points out why the notion of utterances rather than sentences are used for describing spoken discourse. Brown (*ibid*) went on to stress that the grammar of spoken colloquial English does not impose the use of complete sentences, making utterances such as "Your family?" and "Ya wanna come along?" appropriate. Despite the adjustments which need to be made in studies in grammatical and social causes of errors in spoken language, such research would serve a pedagogic purpose by showing educators what learners have learned and what they have not yet mastered in spoken English. Similarly, this research will be a source of counseling to many Nigerian students especially those with negative attitude towards English since failure to communicate efficiently in the language of science and technology is tantamount to a total failure in other areas of human endeavor.

Statement of the problem

English plays an important role in the educational system of Nigeria and it is crucial at the level of learning. It is the language of formal instruction in schools. Therefore, an individual who wishes to reach the peak of his/her educational career in Nigeria needs to have proper knowledge of English language. Yet a look at the performance in the written English by the students in

higher institutions in Nigeria has been rated low. In most developing nations in general, and Nigeria in particular, the educational system is not well developed as to ensure that students are properly trained to use the language appropriately with regards to their ability to accomplish intelligibility from primary to even tertiary level. It is obvious to hear in their conversations being characterized by a lot of problems in the use of grammar, thereby affecting their overall performance in school. If the quality of English spoken by mathematics students is still poor, there will be a downfall in the scientific and technological development of the country. To this extend, this work will examine the particular problem of misuse of grammar emerging from inadequacies of English language acquisition.

Objective of the study

This paper focuses on errors in students' communicative genre typical of English as second language users. Specifically, the paper addresses language proficiencies with regards to English grammatical categories, that is, nouns, verbs forms and preposition which are the important aspects of communicative genre. The paper is restricted to speech produced in a live setting by some mathematics students undertaking studies in a university in a northern city of Gombe, Nigeria. Gombe is one of the six states in the north east Nigeria where is Hausa language is predominantly used. Similarly, the research intends to briefly provide some of the social, cultural, and historical causes of errors among many students despite the significant role English plays in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers designed a questionnaire which was created to fulfill the needs of the current study. The questionnaire was written in English with a covering letter that explained the objective of the questionnaire and how to fill it. The questionnaire comprised two sections: the first one deals with language choice which aimed to find information about the respondents' choice of language in different domains. The second section included question on language attitudes which the respondents' attitude towards English plays a role in the process of language learning. Finally, the questions on factors that support the choice of Hausa as against English was aimed at identifying the reasons behind the respondents' preference of Hausa over English. For example, the respondents were asked to choose which language expresses their nationality, identity and ethnicity.

Population sample

The targeted population of this study consisted of mathematics students at Gombe State University. All

participants were Hausa speakers from different parts of the northern Nigeria. Two research assistants, who belong to the discourse community, helped the researchers to distribute and collect the language questionnaires.

A sample of 100 participants was selected to be the focus of this study. The research problem relates to a specific population and the population encompasses the total collection of all units of analysis about which the researchers wish to make explicit conclusion. Practically, it is difficult to involve all members of the population in a research assignment. So, the researchers have to rely on the data obtained from a sample of the population.

The sample showed a wide range of several important demographic variables, that is, gender, place of birth, religion, mother tongue, first language and second language. The sample also covered a wide range of educational levels, as 52% were in part two, while 42% of the population was in parts one, three and four. Also, 33% held National Certificate of Education, while 67% possessed Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations.

Instrument

The researchers used quantitative method of data analysis. Quantitative research is concerned with investigating things which could be observed and measured. It tells the researchers how often for instance a respondent has committed an error. For this reason, quantitative technique is considered the most suitable method of data analysis since it accounts for the explanations of communicative events of this nature.

The calculation of percentage was done in the following format: $F/N * 100$, where 'F' is the frequency or number of errors committed and 'N' is the total number of the respondents. Frequencies and percentages were shown on tables.

The erroneous phrases and clauses were marked with asterisks * followed by their corrected versions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Kleiser (2012) defined communication as the heart and soul of human experience. The process of communication mainly includes speaking, listening and writing. When one comes to learning a new course or subject in English language, one needs to study its grammar as the importance of grammar cannot be neglected. For good or bad, one has to contend with the importance of English as a world language. The knowledge of the world is helpful for career advancement or widening the learning of many disciplines. It is the kind of knowledge that many people today cannot afford to be without. As a result of its rise, and as a world language, English language no longer 'belongs' to the English.

According to Cribb (1999), 'it belongs to everybody who can gain access and is owned by no one', (p.119). Although, there is no freedom for this tongue to take roots in the socio-cultural soil of the country, speakers and writers of the language generally try to conform to the standard of English spoken and written by the native speakers in England, United State of America, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, etc. in terms of grammar, vocabulary and even pronunciation. This self-imposed constraint made the medium inflexible for any meaningful creative effort.

Most attitudes towards the English language tend to be influenced by people's contact with the language in the classroom in an attempt to study "grammar" or the structure of the language (syntax). This gives impression that there are only two/three possibilities: the correct and incorrect; the standard and non-standard; the acceptable and unacceptable. This results in the concept of language as "grammar". That is, the belief that what is not grammatical. Consequently, the learners of English language must be prepared to develop their linguistic competence both oral and written for the effective use of the language. Brown (2002) defined language learning as a conscious process in which learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process. With this, the learners acquire language through a subconscious process during which there are unaware of the grammatical rules. This is similar to the way they acquire their first language since English language is used throughout the educational stages in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Learners and users of English are expected to have thorough grasp of grammar as an important aspect of English language and use them correctly in spoken communications. Yet, it is common to hear teachers expressing a lot of concern regarding the state of grammar in the written and spoken English of their students. English grammar is the body of rules describing the properties of English language and grammar is the building blocks of the language. Many speakers of English as a second language have acquired some level of inter-language that is adequate for most informal uses. However more often than not, their English depicts errors and infelicities. In some cases, the problems are barely noticeable until the learner gets to the higher level of learning when the errors often become fossilized and takes special effort to unlearn. Typically, many of these students attend bad schools with ill-trained teachers. As a result, they find it difficult to overcome their errors emerging from their inability to master the grammar correctly. Based on the experts' definitions of grammar above, it can be concluded that grammar is rules of how words and their component parts are combined to make sentences.

Grammar is very important for English language learners since it is one of the important aspects to master communicative skills. A learner can be said to have a

mastering of language (having competence) if he/she fulfills the main requirements, namely: accuracy (correctness), which refers to the mastery of grammatical structures, and fluency, which indicates that the learners can use the target language. Padadewi and Myartawan (2006) stated that, understanding of grammar plays an important role in order to be able to communicate well. Besides, it is also proven by the fact that in writing, speaking or scoring, there must be grammar aspects as one of the scoring criteria. Grammar is the basis knowledge and skills for understanding and using the language naturally.

Socio-cultural and historical factors of students errors in northern Nigeria

While English gains global recognition each day, it is apparent that the language is losing its standardized usage as many second language speakers of the language especially those from northern Nigeria are less proficient. This is because the ways the students relate to English vary from one person to another. Most Nigerians are multilinguals in many languages including English and Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, etc.

Nigeria is located on the western bulge of Africa, with its coast on the gulf of Guinea. Nigeria has a total population of over 175 million people; 27 million of them are the Hausa. Hausa (autonym) for singular; Bahausha (male); Bahaushiya (female); plural Hausawa and general: Hausa.

Hausa are the largest ethnic group in West Africa. The main Hausa speaking people are in northern Nigeria and Niger. Also, Hausa is also widely spoken in Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and Ivory Coast (Abraham, 2008). From the ongoing, it is important to consider that languages have different vitality especially in a multilingual setting like Nigeria.

The vitality of a language is highly related to a variety of factors. Giles *et al.* (1977) argued that the vitality of a language is based on its demography, its institutional control and its status. Psychologically, Giles *et al.* (ibid) said that the vitality of an ethno linguistic group is, 'that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in inter group situations' (P. 308). The implication of this is that the more vitality a group has, the more chance it has surviving and thriving as a group. So, individuals want to be identified with a strong and healthy group.

Three factors can influence a group's vitality: status, demography and institutional support. The status variables are those which pertain to a configuration of prestige variables of linguistic group in the inter group context' (Giles *et al.*, 1977: 309). So, this implies that the more status a group has the more vitality a group and more desirable the group may become. Status has four variables which includes economic variable to which a group has over the material and financial goods in its community. Another status variable includes the social

status which refers to the image this group has both on its own view and the view from other group. The third status variable is the sociolinguistic variable which reflects shared cultural history of a group or famous persons. When a group has many of these events and persons, it binds the group.

The last status variable is the history of the group, prestige value and the degree to which their own language has changed into the language of the dominant group. For the people of Hausaland, trade is always been a very crucial factor in their existence. Internal trade is carried out among the Hausa from the earlier time and is one of the key factors in the emergence of the urban centres of commerce. Hausa people benefited greatly from commercial contacts with their neighbours and itinerant merchants travelling to and fro the land. The Fulbe (Fulani) developed themselves symbolic relationships with the Hausa by selling their dairy products, meat, and manure while purchasing the Hausa agricultural products. This interpersonal relationship caused the growth and development of the Hausa language.

A second factor which influences the vitality has to do with demography and can be divided into two sub-factors: group distribution factor and group number factor. So, how much territory does a group have and how the group is concentrated within this territory. Also important are how many members a group has. How high is the birth rate? The third factor that influences the vitality is the institutional support a group has. This refers to the amount of help a group gets from institutions in their nation or region.

Academic training and chain of knowledge from scholars of the western Sudan and the Middle East enabled the customs and language of the Hausa people gain wide recognition. The frequent visits by Islamic scholars over five hundred years and social activities have necessitated the translation of Islamic teaching and publications into Hausa language. Lord Lugard, first British colonial Governor General said:

I consider it an important matter to maintain a balance of merely of races but of Muhammadans and Pagans in the corps. Indeed, though I have a great respect for the Muhammadan religion... I do not consider it politic to enlist too great a number... It is a religion which renders Africans liable to wild burst of religious frenzy in which those who are indifferent are carried away by the visionary dreams if enthusiast. Our recent experience has taught us that the Pagans, Gwaris, Kedaras and other tribes yield to none in brevity. They speak Hausa...

It is evident that the colonial state imposed the Hausa language as a lingua franca through areas of northern

Nigeria which include Adamawa and Borno. In fact, Anglican missionaries from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1848 adopted a modified Roman alphabet for use with Hausa. Lugard asserted that he preferred 'national development' using Hausa to Arabic.

I hope that in course of time, this policy may result in the formation of a class of people who can read and speak Hausa in the Roman character, though unable to speak English.

For this Lugard wanted to missionary schools not teach English but only Romanized Hausa. Consequently, in 1904, a missionary school was established in Bida in which Hausa was the language of instruction.

The Hausawa meet up the vitality based on demography. This criterion has many factors which led to the growth of Hausa language in Nigeria. One of the main ones appears to be the growth of cities in strategic locations. These cities developed as a result of the influx of diverse people from the outside as opposed to inner growth from a population explosion. They also appear to be primarily founded in areas of fertile land as in the case of Kano which rests on some of the most productive land in Nigeria or strategic position for trade. The most significant aspect of the evolution of Hausa authority is the development of political authority. Also, urban life in Hausaland with diversity and size demands a more complex form of government plays a significant role in the expansion of language.

Perspectives on errors

What this paper is concerned about are not mistakes but rather errors of competence, which result from ignorance. According to Eyisi (2003), there is a world of difference between an error and a mistake. You can readily correct your mistakes but not your errors. All learners and users of a language, native speakers and competent users inclusive are prone to mistakes which are slips of the tongue or pen due to negative physical and psychological conditions such as fatigue, haste, memory lapses, strong emotions, nervousness or uncertainty or when our attention is divided or we are absorbed in some non-linguistic activity. Errors are deviant structures or unacceptable utterances which are signs of imperfect knowledge of linguistic code. Native speakers and competent users of language hardly commit errors.

The mentalist's school of thought stands on the view that it is necessary that a learner makes an error since errors are not avoidable and they are direct because there is no learner who can be perfect in the use of grammar, even the native speakers of a particular language. Therefore, errors are not as bad as one might think but rather a clear proof that learning is taking place.

The behaviorists are of a contrary view with the mentalists. They view errors as bad and as signs of breakdown in the learning and teaching situation. To them, learning is a formed habit and emphasis is laid on the massive manipulative practice of the language and such practice should be structured and administered in ways that enable correctness.

From the mentalists and the behaviorists views discussed above, the mentalists view tend to be more acceptable than the behaviorists view. Here, it is not meant that errors should be made intentionally, but learning cannot occur without errors. Errors are used for corrections in the target language. Similarly errors can also be used to show or know the levels at which learners are learning.

Classification of errors

According to Omojuwa (1979), errors can be classified along two main dimensions, both of which are essential for slightly different reasons:

1. Errors are classified linguistically, that is in terms of language to what area does error belong (tense agreement, spelling infinitive, etc).
2. Errors are also classified psycho-linguistically, that is, in terms of what stage in the process of language learning the error has occurred (e.g. at the hypothesis formation stage, hypothesis testing stage or application stage).

Under psycho-linguistic classification of errors, further categorize errors into three categories:

- (a) Errors which the learner-maker can by himself/herself detect and correct if he/she is given the opportunity to do so. These invariably are random, unsystematic errors caused by memory failure, emotional upset, brain fatigue, slip of the pen, carelessness and so on. These errors are not indicative of any (serious) deficiency of knowledge of language rules and their application, since they are easily detected and corrected by the maker him/herself.
- (b) Errors which the learner cannot by him/herself detect but can alone correct once they have been identified for him/her by someone else. Such errors do not affect the knowledge of rule but the application of rule. In other words, the errors occurred at the expression level and not at the rule formation level. The rule is known, but there has been a deficiency at the communicative use level, which makes the application of the rule irregular.
- (c) Errors which the learner cannot by him/herself detect and cannot by him/herself correct when his/her attention has been drawn to their occurrence. These errors involve both competence and performance. The learner does not know the language rule and therefore cannot apply it. In other words, the errors have occurred at the rule formation

level.

Errors can also be classified as interlingua or intralingua. Interlingua errors can be identified as transfer errors which result from learner's first language features, for example, grammatical, lexical or pragmatic errors. On the other hand, intralingua errors are overgeneralizations in the target language, resulting from ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete applications of rules and false concepts hypothesis. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) stated that overgeneralization errors occurs when learners yield deviant structures based on other structures of the target language, while ignorance of rule restrictions refers to the applications of rules to inappropriate contexts. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) further claimed that incomplete application of rules arises when learners fail to develop a structure fully, while false concepts hypothesized occur when learners do not completely understand a distinction in the target language.

Reasons of errors

There are many reasons for errors such as, mother-tongue interference, overgeneralization and errors due to the effect of teaching, omission, redundancy and so on.

Mother-tongue errors

One of the reasons for errors is that the mother tongue (MT) intervenes in the organization of foreign language learning which can cause proactive inhibition of the learning features of English. The learner most of the time transfers the features of his/her first language usually the MT to the target language thereby causing errors. Quite unfortunately, most Nigerian users of English are either bilingual or multilingual. This trend of language is due to the significant roles the language plays in day-to-day affairs of most Nigerian at all levels of communication. For instance, English is the official language of Nigeria, language of trade and commerce across state boundaries especially north-south of the country, language of the media, judiciary, instruction, politics, etc. Despite these great roles English plays, recent changes in social functions of English have affected the way and manner English is used especially among students from the northern Nigeria.

Overgeneralization

Some errors are attributed to overgeneralization. According to Littlewoods (1984), this type of errors result from the fact that the learner uses what he/herself already knows about the language but decides to make sense of new experience. In other words, the learner's previous knowledge of the second language could be the

root cause of the error.

Errors due to the effect of teaching

Poor teaching could be an attributory reason for errors. These are circumstances beyond the teachers' control, which produce a remedial situation. If a learner is taking part in a formal instruction, some errors will be a direct result of misunderstanding caused by faulty teaching or materials. Behaviorism says error is evidence of failure, or in effective teaching or lack of control.

Error analysis

Error analysis is an invaluable source of information to teachers. It provides information on students' errors which in turn helps teachers to correct students' errors and also improves the effectiveness of their teaching. Error analysis has been conducted to identify strategies which learners use in language learning, to track the causes of learner's errors, obtain information on common difficulties in language learning or on how to prepare teaching materials. Similarly, the systematic analysis of students' errors can be of great value to all those concerned, that is, teachers, students and the researchers. Scholarly presentations claims that errors if studied could reveal a developing system of students L2 language and this system is dynamic and upon to changes and resetting of parameters Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005).

Errors are 'systematic', that is, likely to occur repeatedly and not recognized by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or the researcher would locate them, the learner would not. It is in this light that the researcher chose to focus on students' errors in spoken English. The technique of error analysis is to group and categorize the errors as they are identified and collected into particular grammatical, syntactic and semantic areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results reported to question one

Results reported in the [Table 1](#) showed the respondents' responses to factors that supported the students' choice of Hausa. When the respondents were asked on which language strengthens their social relationship, they unanimously chose Hausa, with 86% while 16 chose English. A positive correlation was found between the role of home and family on one hand and religion and ethnic identity on the other hand as being supporting factors for the choice of Hausa. The respondents confirmed that home and family played an important role in using Hausa and supported the use of Hausa in their religion.

Table 1. Factors that supports the choice of Hausa and English.

| Factors | Hausa (%) | English (%) |
|---|------------------|--------------------|
| Family and home play a role in using... | 64 | 14 |
| Social instructions strengthen the use of ... | 81 | 19 |
| Ethnic identity is expressed in ... | 74 | 26 |
| Religion aids in language choice | 99 | 01 |

Results related to question two

What are the attitudes of the respondents towards Hausa and English?

The respondents were asked a set of questions. They reported positive attitude towards both languages. Results showed that out of 100 respondents, 56% gave positive attitude towards English for being the more useful language of science and technology, while 46% preferred Hausa to be used to teach mathematics. On the other hand, 71% indicated that English was their national identity while 29% argued that they do not want English to symbolize their identity.

Based on the ongoing discussions, most of the respondents tend to shift to the language of the majority of the region as their regular vehicle of communication since this provides them with upward mobility and economic success - the phenomenon which reduces both economic and social functions of English. As a result, the users of English in this part of the world have become less proficient in English. This is because Hausa has become 'the other tongue' of some speakers who may not have originally come from the Hausa land. Observation has shown that Hausa has constructed a social structure in which those who use the language enjoy privileges in local transactions in trade, religion, instructions, etc. So, due to incessant need for every day communication, a change of 'new' rules of English by Hausa users are apparent. Nowadays, Hausa begins to enjoy institutional support as the Hausa is taught in many schools, colleges and universities in the northern Nigeria.

Questions on psycho-linguistic factors of errors

Do you forget linguistic topics you were taught in General English Courses?

64% respondents indicated that they easily forgot most topics on grammar, while 36% said they did not forget, but could not know how to apply certain linguistic rules appropriately.

Why do you have difficulty in using English content words (nouns and verbs)?

The result showed that 71% of the respondents could not

differentiate between past and present tenses, while 29% indicated that they could draw a line between stative and dynamic verbs.

Interlingua causes of errors

Question: To what extent does your knowledge of Hausa affect English?

Out of 100 respondents, 66% indicated that they over generalized some linguistic rules in the target language which resulted in ignorance of rule restrictions.

Errors in the use of nouns

1(a) * When I become lawyer, I will have many customers. (b) When I become a lawyer, I shall have many clients.

2(a) * I am learnt electrician. (b) I am learning electrification.

3(a) * My sisters is doctors. (b) My sisters are doctors.

4(a) * If I finish speak,... (b) If I finish speaking, ...

Errors in the use of verbs

5(a) * I am hearing you. (b) I am listening to you.

6(a) * I am hearing pains in my head. (b) I have a headache.

7(a) * She like reading. (b) She likes reading.

Errors in the use of preposition

8(a) * The man was found dead on the street. (b) The man is found dead.

9 (a) * I will sit in the home. (b) I shall sit at home.

Table 2 indicates that the students committed 96 errors. Based on the Table 2, errors in the use of prepositions constituted an overwhelming majority. There are forty-two occurrences manifesting on both clausal and phrasal levels. Similarly, this error may be attributed to overgeneralization and mother tongue interference. According to Thomason (2001), language contact is the use of several languages in the same place and at the

Table 2. Results of the three error types in the study.

| Types of errors | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Errors in the use of nouns | 228 | 229 |
| Errors in the use of verbs | 226 | 227 |
| Errors in the use of prepositions | 442 | 444 |

same time usage would cause language change in terms that one language may affect another. Once a new language is learned, it becomes available as part of a speaker's stylistic repertoire. Similarly, over generalization may be caused due to speaker's attitude towards a particular language.

Analysis of error types

Clause (1) is considered erroneous due to wrong application of register. The respondent was expected to use the word, 'client' but erroneously substituted it with 'customer'. In (2a), the respondent used the 'Be' verb, 'am' plus the past form of the verb, 'learnt'. Usually, the choice of the 'Be' verb would have necessitated the use of the -ing participle but respondent failed to do so. Additionally, the respondent would have used a noun, 'electrification' which expressed a state of being, but wrongly used a noun which stood for a person, 'electrician'. In (3a), the cause of error was as a result of subject- verb mismatch. The subject of the clause is 'my sisters' which appears in plural form. Therefore, its verb should be in plural. Clause (4a), the respondent used the lexical verb, 'speak' in place of the gerund, a noun in the form of present participle ending in -ing, 'speaking'. In (5a), the clause is considered faulty in view of the wrong application of the stative verb, 'hear'. The respondent could not differentiate between dynamic and stative verbs. Dynamic verbs indicate actions while stative verbs express a state of being. Also, dynamic verbs describe actions and can be used with progressive tense. The following are examples: run, cry, jump, swim, walk, etc. Stative verbs include: feel, have, understand, know, hear, etc. The correct verb is 'listening' which is one of the four language skills. Similarly, in (6a), the respondent made the wrong choice of word, 'hearing'. The root of the word is 'hear' and as explained above, it is a stative verb. Therefore, it should not be used progressively. This kind of error was as a result mother tongue interference. The respondent is a Hausa native speaker and in Hausa, 'Ina jin ciwon kai', meaning, 'I have a headache'. The verb, 'ji' could mean both 'feel' and 'hear', but the two verbs cannot be used interchangeably. Like in (6a) clause (7a) was constructed as a result of mother tongue interference. In Hausa, 'Tana sun karatu', mean 'She likes reading'. The subject, 'she', 'ta' which is singular does not inflect for number as in the case of English. Again, (8a) was constructed as a result of the mother

tongue interference. In Hausa, the preposition, 'a' can be used to connect different types of nouns which include: For instance, 'Ina zama a Gombe' mean 'I live in Gombe'. 'A makaranta' mean 'at school'. It is clear that the preposition, 'a' in Hausa has more than one meaning. It can mean, 'in' and 'at' in English. Consequently, speakers of Hausa will have difficulty in differentiating 'at' and 'in'. Similarly, in (9a), 'I will sit in the home', 'Zan zauna a gida' and 'I will sit at home' can still be translated as, 'Zan zauna a gida'. Basically, Hausa does not draw a line between the prepositions, 'at' and 'in'.

CONCLUSION

This study has presented findings and discussion of causes of grammatical errors among mathematics students at Gombe State University, Nigeria. From the findings, it can be concluded that the respondents had positive attitudes towards their mother tongue – Hausa as the respondents' choice of their language at home and school was one of the causes of their less proficiency in English. This is because the feeling people have towards a language will dictate their preference regarding the choice. Another cause of the students' errors was due to interference of mother tongue. This is because certain verbs in Hausa language do not inflect for number and gender.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the study, the following recommendations may be important. Since most of the errors were as a result of mother tongue interference, the respondents should be encouraged to learn both forms and structures of the native speakers' English. This is because a piece of an utterance is considered correct based on the native speakers' assessment.

English plays an important role in virtually every aspect of Nigerian students. Therefore, students of all levels of education should develop a positive attitude towards English.

Practice makes perfect; students should develop the habit of speaking English both within and outside the classroom.

When errors are repeatedly committed, they tend constitute speakers' idiosyncrasies. Teachers are advised to spend adequate time with their students and

make teaching interactive and learners' based instead of teachers' oriented.

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