

Error Analysis of Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga Students’ Posts on Facebook

Verla, Hilda

*School of Pre-Degree and Allied Programmes
Gombe State University
hverla@gsu.edu.ng*

Mohammed, Adamu Baraya

*Department of General Studies
Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga, Gombe State, Nigeria
+2347060432013 baraya6043@gmail.com*

Abstract

This study analysed the errors made by students of Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga with respect to their postings on Facebook. The English language was used to identify and analyse the errors committed. These errors were classified based on omission, addition, misinformation and disordering. Descriptive method was used in conducting this research. After applying the theory of error analysis by Corder 1981 and considering the four types of errors by Dulay, Burt and Krashen’ Taxonomy of errors (1982) in James (1998), the study found out that omission errors were 89 covering (43.4%), Addition errors were 48 with (23.4%), and misinformation had 68 with (33.2%) and Disordering with zero errors. The highest number of errors made by the students was omission which had 89 (43.4%), and that with lowest number of errors is disordering 0 (0%).It concluded that although some of the students like writing in English, they still made errors in forming the sentences whether in present or past forms because they do not understand the structure of the grammar of the English language.

1.0 Introduction

The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks. It is a network system that consists millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks. The network may range from local to global. Nowadays, internet is easy to be found everywhere because most people use internet in their daily life. According to Deborah, (2004) about 64% of internet users say that their daily routines and activities would be affected if they could no longer use the internet. Hence, people consider internet as one of their primary needs. Hornby (2003) states that language is a system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people around the world. From that quotation, we can see that language is a very important thing in our lives. In addition, by using a language, people can communicate with each other as well as share ideas and information.

All countries in the world have their own languages identified with the local people within it to communicate with each other. English is one of the languages used to communicate internationally and it is used by almost all around the world. As a matter of fact, people use English for many reasons besides communication. For instance, in the field of science, information, culture and many others. In Nigeria, children start to learn English when they are in elementary school and it will be continued until they are in high school. Some reasons above make us to realize that it is very important for us to learn the English language and know it well.

There are four language skills learners or speakers of English should learn in other to communicate well as they are very important and related to each other. These skills include listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, they also need to have a good comprehension of language aspects such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, among others.

Every language in the world has its own structure which is called “grammar.” It is an essential part of the use of both spoken and written language. Grammar makes up the rules in a language which enables the formation of words and combining them into sentences, it is important in making good sentences. By understanding the grammar system of a language, it will be easier for people to express their ideas, messages and feelings (Hornby, 1995). However, students who are learning English often encounter problems with grammar. They make errors either in speaking or writing. For example, the learners make errors in sentence formulation. They sometimes do not use correct punctuations, subject of the sentence, and they also have problems using pronouns and modifiers. However, learning a language cannot be separated from errors. Errors are seen positively during the process of learning a second language (L2), and can be considered as a means of building learners’ ability because they learn from making errors. One type of error that is often produced by learners are grammatical errors. These errors may be found in students’ writings, for example, in expressing their thoughts in English on their Facebookwalls/timelines.

Corder (1981) argues that descriptions of errors are a linguistic operation. Errors are described by the application of linguistics theory to the data of erroneous utterances produced by a learner or a group of learners. There is a distinction between error and mistake; Corder in Sattayatham (2007: 1) differentiates errors from mistakes in the way that errors are systematic in nature being “errors of competence” which occur in the continuum of the learning process. They are the result of the learners’ transitional competence. On the other hand, mistakes are “errors of performance” which are not systematic. Based on *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (1992) in Erdogan (2005:1), a learner often makes mistakes in writing or speaking because of lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspects of performance. Mistakes can be self-corrected when attention is called.

On the other hand, an error is systematic. It is likely to occur repeatedly so it is not recognized by the learner as an error. Errors are sometimes classified according to vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, misunderstanding, of a speaker's intention or meanings, production of the wrong communication effect. For example, "Mr. Eddy *drive* a minivan", it should be "Mr. Eddy *drives* a minivan" because this is in the present tense and we need to add -s to the verb drive (*drives*) because the subject (*Mr. Eddy*) is singular.

Facebook is a social network service and website launched in February 2004 that is operated and privately owned by *Facebook, Inc.* As of May, 2022, *Facebook* has more than 2.936 billion active users. Users may create a personal profile, add other users as friends and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile, users may join common interest user groups, organized by workplace, school, or college, or other formal or informal groups.

Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow computer science students Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes in 2004. The website's membership was initially limited by the founders to Harvard students, but was expanded to other colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, and Stanford University. It gradually added other universities before opening to high school students, and, finally, to anyone aged 13 and over.

Updating status or making posts are some of the major activities for *Facebook* users. When the Nigerian *Facebook* users want to update English status, sometimes they do not realize the errors of the language they have made more especially when writing in English. Considering the above issue, the researchers became interested in conducting a study to find out the grammatical errors made by *Facebook* users in making their posts in English because the researchers are also *Facebook* users.

This paper discusses the result of a conducted study on grammatical errors made by *Facebook* users with focus on posts of students of Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga.

1.1 Literature

In this section, attention is paid to studies that have been conducted in the past similar to the focus of this research. This is done in order to ascertain what has been done and what is left to be done in this area of study. Destiny (2018) carried out research on lexical and syntactic errors in the written English text uploads and comments of Nigerian *Facebook* users. The study pays attention to the lexical and syntactic errors of Nigerian *Facebook* text uploads and this is in order to unravel these common errors and proffer solutions by correcting them through re-writing them. The study extracted ten (10) Facebook posts of Nigerians and marked the lexical and syntactic errors in them for analysis and correction. At the end, the study presents amongst other findings that most Nigerian Facebook users do not care so much about applying punctuation marks especially the full stop in their posts and that there is a high level of spelling errors emerging from two causes; the first being the auto correct feature in most mobile devices and the hastiness, laziness or laxity on the part of the users to edit before posting.

On the other hand, Nweze (2013) focused on a morpho-syntactic analysis of SMS texting among GSM users in Nigeria. The study recognized that there is a steady shift from the offline to online communication such as text messaging which invariably has given way to innovative language-short forms whose morph-syntactic aspects permit the linguistic characters of the texters. Nweze (2013) adopted a combination of Chomsky (1957) Transformational and Silverstein (1976) Meta pragmatic theories. Through the move-a rule and the pragmatic method of analysis, the study discovered that there are morpho-syntactic variations among texters which are problematic to

formal English. The study also revealed that movement of constituents from one slot to the other is a common feature in text messages though some of such movements violates move-a rules. Other syntactic differences are reflected in form of subject/agent, object, determiner, to-infinitive and deletions/omissions. At the end, Nweze (2013) posited that ‘morphologically, there is no hard and fast rule with regard to the users’ choice of letters in abbreviation. Texters use a combination of letters and numbers in their text messages and in some cases they use only numerals. The texters obviously down-play the orthographic and syntactic rules of the formal English language for their convenience’.

This study is important to us because it clearly highlights the way Nigerians communicate in an online form though the data for the present study is not from SMS. The space Facebook gives the users reduces the tendencies to abbreviate and shorten words unnecessarily as such we would not be meeting many of them in our data analysis.

In another instance, Bakare (2016) examined the lexical and syntactic errors in the English of social media users with a focus on Facebook and LinkedIn. This is the closest research in terms of data to the present study but the focus of Bakare (2016) study is not limited to social media users in Nigeria and it extends to Facebook and LinkedIn. The study recognized 12 categories of errors with a view to analyzing the frequency of occurrence and finding solutions to the errors or problems. At the end, the study presents as part of its finding that performance problems committed in this study were due to mother-tongue interference, misuse sentence fragment, overuse, and lack of grammatical knowledge, lack of proofreading and developmental errors.

Furthermore, Ngadda et al. (2012) carried out a study on analysis of errors in the written English of undergraduate engineering students of Federal University of Technology, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Bauchi. Error types, causes of errors, effects of

errors on their field of specialization and how the errors could be remedied were discussed. Data were collected from the engineering students' written materials in English. Three sets of materials were collected: examination scripts, tests scripts and term paper scripts. Error types were classified through careful reading of the scripts and marking them. Error analysis were presented graphically and discussed. It is observed that errors occurred most in grammar, followed by expression, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary and the least in connectives. Among the three test papers, analysis further revealed that less error occurred in the term paper. The general remedial measures as to how these errors could be minimized were listed. These remedial measures could be applied to all Nigerian federal universities since the students of each university are drawn from all over the federation.

In the same vein, Puspasari et al. (2011) carried out a study on the grammatical errors made by Facebook users in posting their English status and to find out the possible causes of the grammatical errors made by Facebook users in their statuses. They employed the descriptive method in conducting the research and the objects of the study were English statuses posted on Facebook by the students of Bina Dharma Palembang. The result of the study shows that there were four kinds of errors which are omission errors (13.2%), addition errors (10.5%), misinformation errors (72.4%), and disordering errors (3.9%) the highest number of errors made by the students was misinformation or mis-selection errors (72.4%). The lowest number of errors that the students made was disordering errors (3.9%).

In his paper titled "Grammatical Error Analysis of Students' Comment Writing Based on Facebook Game in English Intensive Class of STAIN JURAI SIWO METRO 2013" which described grammatical errors made by the students of English Intensive Class, Subandowo (2013) found out that the grammatical errors made by the students in English intensive class are the use of double auxiliary, confusion in the

application of nominal or verbal sentences, and making error of interrogative form pattern.

Several studies have been carried out on error analysis but little or no effort has been placed on grammatical analysis of errors and the *Facebook* posts of the students of Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga and other schools in Gombe State in general and this serves as a trigger to carry out a grammatical error analysis on the *Facebook* posts of the students of Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Error analysis is the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language (James, 1998). Meanwhile, Richard et al., in Sulistia (2008) stated that error analysis may be carried out in order to identify the cause of learner's errors and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid for teaching or in preparation of teaching material. Gass and Selinker (2008) define the concept as 'a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make'.

This suggests that data of spoken or written language of a learner can be collected and analysed in order to identify certain errors and why these errors occur; and what are the implications for pedagogical purpose and learner's target language development. Moreover, Ellis and Barkhuize (2005) claim that error analysis has three important implications: to serve research purpose, to serve pedagogical purpose, and to act as learning purpose where learners can discover the rules of the target language.

Furthermore, Corder (1981) is of the view that error analysis confirms or disproves the predictions of the theory lying behind bilingual comparison. In this sense, error analysis is an experimental technique for validating the theory of transfer. Error analysis can be the investigation of the students' errors by some techniques or procedures.

In analysing the students' errors, the researchers refer to the techniques or procedures offered by Corder in his book titled *Introduction to Applied Linguistics* (1973:275-294) and they are:

a. Identifying errors

The first step in analysing errors is to identify them by comparing the sentences learners produce with what seem to be the normal or correct sentence in the target language which corresponds to them.

b. Describing errors

The second step in analysing errors is describing and classifying them into types. There are several ways of doing this:

- i. To classify errors in grammatical categories. We should gather all the errors relating to verbs and then identify the different kinds of verbs, errors in our sample.
- ii. To try to identify general ways in which the learners' utterances differ from the target language utterances, such as omission, addition, substitution, misinformation and disordering.

c. Explaining errors

This step explains why the errors occur by identifying and describing them.

d. Evaluating errors

The purpose of error analysis is to help learners learn second language. Some errors can be considered more serious than others because they are more likely to interfere with the intelligibility of what someone says.

1.2.1 Type of Errors

The study will focus on the type of errors as stated by Dulay, Burt and Krashen' Taxonomy of errors (1982) as mentioned in James (1998) which are:

Omission Errors

Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. Language learners omit

grammatical morphemes much more frequently than content words. From the quotation, it informs that omission errors happened when the speaker or learners omit the grammatical morphemes which must be used in an utterance that they made. As we know that in linguistics a morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit in the grammar of a language. *For example:* Incorrect: **I am waiting you.* Correct: I am waiting for you.

Addition Errors

Addition errors are characterized by the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance. In this case, addition errors happens when the speaker or learners add the grammatical morphemes which must not be used in an utterance that they made.

For example:

Incorrect: **My girl is more beautiful than your's.*

Correct: My girl is more beautiful than yours.

Misinformation Errors

Misinformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong form of the morphemes or structure. In other words, misinformation errors happens when the speaker or learner uses the wrong form of structure in their utterance. *For example:* Incorrect: **The players is too tired to play football.* Correct: The players are too tired to play football.

Disordering Errors

Disordering errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. In a similar way, disordering errors do occur when the speaker or learner uses a grammatical morpheme or group of morphemes in a wrong place of sentence formulation.

For example: Incorrect: **You do not understand what is my question.*

Correct: You do not understand what my question is.

1.2.2 Sources of Errors

Gas and Seliker (2005) argue that ‘error analysis provides broader range of possible explanations than contrastive analysis for researchers and teachers to use to account for error’. They stress that there are two sources of error: the Interlingua error is concerned with transfer from mother tongue or native language interference, for example, in Hausa language the expression ‘Kabiru he went to market’ ‘Kabiru’ is personal noun and ‘he’ is pronoun. While intralingua error is associated with the target language, for example, overgeneralisation, simplification and so on. For example, ‘she didn’t *wrote* the letter’ this error is associated with overgeneralisation. Furthermore, Brown (2007) identifies another source of error, the context of learning on the premise that a learner may make some errors, for example, in a classroom a teacher or textbook may mislead a learner to make faulty hypothesis about language, for example presentation of concepts: *point at and point out*.

1.3 Methodology

The researchers applied descriptive method in this study. The researchers purposively selected twenty-five (25) posts by graduating National Diploma (ND) II students of Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga on Facebook to identify any grammatical error made in their posts on *Facebook*. The ND II students posted about their graduation and final exams and that is how the post were identified. In analysing the errors, the researchers did the error analysis anchored to the theory of error analysis proposed by Corder (1981).

The researchers read the data, screen shoot the data, and printed out the data collected to analyse the grammatical errors based on *Facebook* posts of students of Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga.

1.4 Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: the table below shows the number of errors recorded from the analysed students’ *Facebook* posts and the percentage that each error covers.

S/N	ERRORS	NUMBER OF ERRORS	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	Omission	89	43.4
2	Addition	48	23.4
3	Misinformation	68	33.2
4	Disordering	0	0
	TOTAL	205	100

The percentage was calculated using the percentage formula which is as follows:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{part}}{\text{whole}} \times 100$$

1.4.1 Omission error is an error that occurs as a result of leaving out an item that is required in an utterance to be grammatically correct or accepted. Under this type of error a total of eighty-nine errors were recorded representing (43.4%) of the total errors. Some of the omissions in the posts include leaving out a word or group of words, such instances can be seen in sentences such as; *I'm finish my diploma in Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga* **instead of** *I have finished my diploma in Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga*. The omission of *have* and *ed* makes the sentence a bit meaningless. Also in the following sentences:

*Whatever beginning must ended **instead of** whatever has a beginning must have an end.*

*..now I am graduated **instead of** now I am a graduate.*

*I would like to appreciate all my friend and family members always saying a special du'a to me **instead of** I would like to appreciate all my friends and family members for always saying a special du'a for me.*

This is to list but a few, by mere looking at the students' sentences, one will see how their omission of some elements affects the overall understanding of their utterances. Even though some of the omissions are minimal but every item is important in the construction of grammatically correct sentences.

1.4.2 Addition errors are characterised by the presence of a grammatical item appearing where it is not supposed to appear in a grammatically constructed utterance. This usually occurs in most learners with English as a second language, and as a result of the influence of their mother tongue (L1).

In the analysis carried out, a total of forty-eight (48) addition errors were recorded representing (23.4%) of the total errors recorded in the overall posts of the students. The addition errors were found in several sentences within the posts making some of the posts difficult to comprehend. Such instances include:

Everything that has a beginning their must have and ending. In this sentence the author added some items which tempered with the meaning of the sentence and the items are not necessary in the sentence.
We have been finished, the final semester examinations today. Here the addition of the verb *been* is not accepted likewise the comma after the word *finished*.

I thanks my parents that s takes my responsibility...
Now I am done with my final exams...

All the underlined items in the above utterances are insignificant as the utterances are clearly understood and grammatically correct without them but their presence makes the utterances ungrammatical.

1.4.3 Misinformation errors this type of errors occur when one grammatical form is used in place of a more suitable one. In this research misinformation has the second largest number of errors recorded sixty-eight (68) representing (33.2%) of the total errors, some of these errors as found in the posts are:

I have done with my final exams in GSP Bajoga, my friends and family I need your prayers instead of *I am done with my final exams in GSP Bajoga, my friends and family I need your prayers*. The placement of the verb *has* immediately after the subject instead of *am* misinforms the reader of what the author intended to say.

We thank God at any condition. In this sentence the word *in* will be more appropriate than *at* as used by the author.

We have finished the final semester examinations today. Here *our* will be suitable than the definite article *the* as used by the author.

Special thanks for my mom, dad and all my family members now I am a graduated. For this sentence *to* is the right item to be placed instead of *for* to make the information clear and for the last word of the sentence the author cannot be a *graduated* but rather a *graduate*.

1.4.4 Disordering error is the wrong arrangement of the various components of a sentence. In this study, the researchers could not record any form of disordering error from the posts.

Beside the above named errors, others were misuse of tenses, punctuations, wrong capitalizations, nonstandard acronyms such as *c u* (*see you*), *u2* (*you too*), *f & f* (*family and friends*), *4* (*for*), *blc&bcos* (*because*) etc. which are mostly used to communicate when writing text messages informally on social media platforms. A lot of mixture of the Hausa language and the English language in their constructions; such as *Alhamdulillah, Masha Allah, ina mana fatanalkairi, du'a, ya Allah*, etc.; all these to pass across their messages based on their perception and understanding of what they mean which does not conform with the norms of English language grammar.

Conclusion

The study discovered that the students of Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga made a lot of grammatical errors in writing their posts on Facebook. The study, through the use of the four kinds of errors which are omission errors, addition errors, misinformation errors, and disordering errors; found out that the highest number of errors made by the students was on omission (43.4%), and the lowest errors recorded was disordering (0%). Although some of the students like writing in English, they still made errors in forming their sentences whether in present or past forms because they do not understand the structure of the grammar of English language. The causes of these errors can likely be attributed to poor educational background, mother tongue interference and the impact of social media language amongst others. The issue of poor educational background is something that encompass a lot of factors like: lack of funds, lack of qualified teachers and teaching facilities, amongst others; these are beyond the researchers reach, while on the issue of mother tongue interference, parents should encourage the use L2 at home while teachers on the other hand should encourage the use of L2 at school as well. The researchers also recommend that students should avoid abbreviating words as much as possible, as this will affect their writings even in formal situations.

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