

AN INVESTIGATION INTO ADHERENCE AND DEVIATION IN THE USE OF MODIFIERS

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Abstract

This study focuses on examining the instances of adherence and deviation in the order of modifiers (pre-nominal adjectives). It also investigates how unacceptable pattern of this aspect became hindrance to proper listening and to effective mastering of English grammar. The investigation is done on the writings of ND I students of Kano State Polytechnic, basically Second language (L2) patterns of adjective placement in their essays would be accounted and analyzed using inter-language theory of second language within the adjective order progression table by Parrott (2000). This is in line with what Parrott (2000) expounds that some processes of inter-language theory and insufficient exposure to English usage affect pattern of placing adjectives in the attributive functions by second language (L2) learners of English.

KEYWORDS: Adherence, Deviation, modifiers, Language.

INTRODUCTION

This research is on adjective order, an aspect of grammar that is important in learning and facilitating creativity in communication. Some scholars assert that the knowledge of grammar is important to second language (L2) learners of English. Indeed, according to Varghese (2007:45), an inadequate knowledge of grammar would lead to serious limitations on the creativity for communication. The rules and norms of grammar are crucial in achieving intelligibility, fluency and acceptability in language, specifically English. However, they pose some difficulties to some second language (L2) learners of English. While some L2 learners of English have problems with tenses, others have with concord of person or number. Order of attributive adjectives is among the obstacles that L2 learners of English encounter. Parrott (2000) contends that some L2 learners mistake English language rules and etiquettes in adjective order. This is what Parrott (2000) terms ‘over generalization’ of the target language (English) pattern of adjective placement. He also asserts that interference of first language occurs if adjectives mostly follow nouns in the learners’ first language. Hence, time and careful handling are required for familiarity with this aspect of grammar.

This study focuses mainly on examining the instances of conformity and aberration in the order of pre-nominal adjectives. It also investigates how unacceptable pattern of this aspect became hindrance to proper listening and to effective mastering of English grammar. The study equally examines why ESL learners find it difficult to observe “the rule of thumb” in adjective ordering. Researchers such as Sarah (2008) observes that adjective ordering is among the common grammatical problems ESL learners face which affects their listening and distorts cohesion and coherence in their writings.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Researches like Sarah (2008) reveals that adjectives placement and use vary between languages especially in two areas: position and order. English allows adjectives to come either before a noun or after it. Fulfulde on the other hand mostly allows adjective after a modified noun (Galadanci, 1976). These variations confirm that L2 learners of English are likely to encounter problems when ordering adjectives in English because order and position of adjectives in their first language differ to that of English. For example, many speakers of these Nigerian languages; Hausa and Kare-Kare would find no error by saying ‘small white beautiful lady’. In fact, according to Galadanci (1976), there seems to be a beno acceptable and unacceptable pattern of adjective order in Hausa.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study revolves around the following questions that serve as the guide in formulating the research problem.

1. What are the aberrated adjective orderings discovered in the students’ continuous writing?
2. How do we compare and contrast the instances of conformity and aberration of students’ adjective order?
3. Which measures do we adopt to manage this error?

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is another and possibly better way of classifying errors in English grammar especially that of the adjective order, but inter-language theory of second language learning is chosen as a framework for this research. The term inter-language was introduced by Selinker (1971). For Richards (1974), inter-language is “a form of language which is characterized by interference both internal and external to the language to be learned”. In his contention

Selinker (1971) hypothesizes that there is a latent psychological structure in the brain which is activated when one tries to learn a second language (L2) after acquiring meaning in a first language. The utterances produced by a second language learner would not be identical to those produced by the native speakers of the target language, nor would they be exact translation from the native language. Rather, a new separate system would be developed through the processes identified as inter-language behaviour:

- i. Language transfer
- ii. Transfer of training
- iii. Strategies of learning
- iv. Strategies of communication
- v. Overgeneralization of linguistic material

Within the inter-language framework, errors represent the second language learner's transitional competence and they should be accounted for in terms of the five central processes above. Therefore, the second language (L2) patterns of adjective placement in their essays would be accounted and analyzed using inter-language theory of second language within the adjective order progression table by Parrott (2000). This is in line with what Parrott (2000) expounds that some processes of inter-language theory and insufficient exposure to English usage affect pattern of placing adjectives in the attributive functions by second language (L2) learners of English.

2.0. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The instrument used in data collection for this research is essay writing. It is used because the study focuses on adjective order in second language (L2) learners' continuous writing and what possibly influenced the order of their placement. The researcher hopes that the instrument would help in providing quick and efficient method of data collection and analysis.

2.1 RESEARCH POPULATION

The population of this research is drawn from the National Diploma One students that take English as a General course at the School of Management Studies. There are two thousand one hundred and nine (2109) students who are taking the course from eight different departments. While considering time and other research constraints, it is almost impossible to easily make a stratified analysis on all the assessable population that would be generalized on the target population (second language learners of English). Therefore, using the simple random sampling five students were selected from each department

2.2 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

In collecting the data for the research, students are asked to write an essay of not more than a page on any of the following topics:

- a. Provide a detailed account on how marriage is conducted in your culture.
- b. Explain the central message in any film you have watched.

Evidently, the topics above reveal the desired item on discussion and would portray excessive use of multiple attributive adjectives in their writings. However, the subjects are given one hour for the essay. But before then, the researcher explained the purpose of the research to the sampled subjects and allowed them to ask questions and those that would not predetermine their responses were answered before administering the instruments.

2.3 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The selected forty (40) essays by the respondents were analyzed using Parrot (2000) adjective order progression table and the processes of inter-language theory. The simple percentage is used to categorize the instances of conformity and aberration in the multiple pre-modifiers by the respondents. The essays were photocopied five times making the sum of two hundred (200) copies. Forty (40) set of essays is given to each of the five seasoned English lecturers selected for marking and assessment. These five assessors had been in the teaching job from seven (7) to ten (10) years and their selection is to ensure that the students' continuous writing is evaluated properly on the handling of attributive adjective order. After their objective assessment answers in the sampled essays were classified into logically possible adjective combinations and given separate columns. This is important because it made the percentage of conformity and aberration for each combination as well as the analysis of the patterns easier to work on.

2.4 DATA PRESENTATION

The data for this research are extracted from the written essays of forty (40) Students. The essays are marked and those found containing clusters of adjective and attributive adjectives modifying nouns in sentences are presented below un-edited, numbered using extract numbers as means of identification. The sentences confirmed to be carrying wrong order in clusters of adjective are marked with asterisks and those following them are the reformulated versions observing Parrott (2000) adjective progression table. Then, discussion follows each selected essay part.

Extract I

1. I recently watched a new Nigerian film and it is the best film i ever watched.
- 2a* The Nigerian multiple-awarded actorie Ali Nuhu was the Prince of Mazulla kingdom who lost his father since when he was 13years old.
- 2.b The multiple awarded Nigerian actorieAliNuhu was the Prince of Mazulla who lost his father since when he was 13years old.
3. NadiyaBoaria brilliant elegant Ghanian lady from a high class family is living under the kingdom of Mazulla.
4. To summarize everything for you, Nadiya fall in love with the Prince of Mazulla while he was already engaged with the most beautiful black baby in the whole Ghaneewoodie Branda Alankeso

Discussion

The essay contains five clusters of adjective compressed in four sentences as enumerated above. Almost all the clusters in this essay have two adjectives each except the first cluster in sentence three which has three adjectives. And all these clusters were ordered conforming to the native speakers' pattern of placement except the one in sentence two that carries asterisk in the unedited version.

Extract II

- 1a *The festival involve wearing of beautiful new, clothes by Muslims marching to the large ancient eid prayer ground.
- 1.b The festival involve wearing of beautiful new clothes by Muslims marching to the large ancient eid prayer ground.
- 2.a * He normally rides a young big white horse during the durbars.
- 2.b He normally rides a big young white horse during the durbars.
3. Therefore, he appeared in a big new black American car.

4.a *On the second day of celebration, my kind, tall, middle-aged British friend paid me a visit.

4.b On the second day of celebration my kind tall middle-aged British Friend paid me a visit.

5.a *He was wearing a beautiful, long, red, European dress.

5b He was wearing a beautiful long red European dress.

6. I observed that he had a sleek black Japanese phone.

7.a * On his arrival, I asked him to sit on a big, new, red sofa.

7.b On his arrival, I asked him to sit on a big new red sofa.

8. a * I then gave him a hot creamy tea.

8. b I then gave him a creamy hot tea .

9.a *He spent about a week in our lovely, gigantic, new house.

9 b *He spent about a week in our lovely gigantic new house .

10 a * Before his departure, he gave me an interesting, old, British book.

10 b Before his departure, he gave me an interesting old British book.

Discussion

The essay contains eleven clusters of adjective embedded in the ten sentences enumerated above modifying different sort of nouns. Among these clusters, only two contain two adjectives i.e. first cluster in sentence one that was corrupted with comma intonation and the one in sentence eight where adjectives were swapped and ordered incorrectly. Then, followed by six clusters with three modifying adjectives each. They are second cluster in sentence one and clusters in sentence two, six, seven, nine and ten respectively. All these clusters of adjective were ordered wrongly with either inappropriate comma intonation or needless swapping of some adjectives except the one in sentence six. However, the other three clusters of sentences three, four and five contain four adjectives each and except the one in sentence three, all of them were corrupted with needless comma intonation. Despite their scanty uses, the essay contains considerable number of adjective clusters but mostly corrupted with comma intonation. Parrott (2000) observes that comma punctuation between adjectives is placed usually for emphasis and where emphasis is not intended, it is needless.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data encompasses the presentation of the table showing the frequency of appearance and the percentage of the types of used adjectival clusters and the errors associated with them. The errors identified in the enumerated clusters of these essays are related to:

- (a) Order of adjective
- (b) Wrong comma punctuation
- (c) Wrongful insertion of conjunction 'and'

Also discovered in these clusters are the cases of un-restricted adjective ordering where comma intonation (intonational phrase) and conjunction 'and' that lifted the order restriction appear.

In the subsequent discussion, the afore-mentioned categories of adjectival errors are analyzed across the forty (40) selected essays for this study. In order to do this, a working frame was established to show the significance or otherwise of these errors. Because the adjectives tend to be fewer and more intractable, they should be much easier to master than other word classes. Based on this, it is assumed that for every four clusters appearing in a script, one (1)

observed error representing 25 percent would not be significant. If observed errors are more than 25 percent they are upheld as significant.

However, after marking the set of essays by the five renown teachers of English, it was found that among these forty (40) scripts, only two essays carried no single cluster of adjective modifying a noun but rather cases of wrongly spelt adjectives. But the case is different in the remaining thirty - eight (38) scripts where a total number of sixty one (91) clusters of adjective were discovered. Out of this number, thirty eight (38) contain two adjectives in each cluster while eleven (19) have three adjectives in each. Only eight (27) clusters were used containing four adjectives in each while the remaining four (7) have five adjectives in each

It is evidently clear that wrongful insertion of coordinative conjunction ‘and’ is one of the problems that English as a second language learners encounter. Out of forty (40) respondents thirty- one representing 77.5 percent commit the error but going by the assumed working frame, the individual level of this error is significant among most respondents’ writing.

2.6 DISCUSSION

The discussion is based on the different categories of errors identified in the clusters of adjective and their possible causes. However, it is important to comment on the general grammatical order of the student’s essays. Most of the essays have in them a high incidence of deviant sentences characterized by simple mechanical errors to general incoherence due largely to the respondents’ lack of linguistic facility to communicate their thoughts and express themselves intelligibly. More so, the content of some of the essays lacked substances, indicating that the students were not able to generate ideas related to the task assigned. Also, such essays were characterized by the errors of content and functional categories such as verbs, prepositions and determiners but attention is not given to them since the concern of the study is to identify errors in adjective order restrictions that appear in the students’ essays, their causes and suggest ways of minimizing this grammatical predicament.

Question 1

What are the aberrated adjective orderings discovered in the students’ continuous writing?

Considering the presentation and the analysis of the data in the preceding sections, the most common clusters of adjective found in these essays are thirty eight (38) clusters of two adjectives each representing 62.3 percent, followed by eleven (11) clusters of three adjectives each representing 18 percent. Another segment is eight (8) clusters of four adjectives each representing 13.1 percent while the last set consists of only four (4) clusters of five adjectives each representing 6.5 percent of the total clusters in these essays. Expectedly, the clusters with more adjectives amidst are fewest in the essays and the number ascends to the clusters with less adjectives in their midst and the number of errors in these clusters depends on the number of their usage. Therefore, thirteen (13) out of thirty eight (38) two-adjective clusters representing 34 percent were ordered incorrectly. In the total of eleven (11) three-adjective clusters used, only one observed error representing 9 percent while two (2) representing 25 percent out of the total eight (8) four-adjective clusters were ordered wrongly. The last set of these clusters used consists of five adjectives each. They are four (4) and only one (1) representing 25 percent was ordered incorrectly.

However, some factors facilitate the commitment of these errors and they comprise the direct transfer of first language pattern of adjectives placement into the second language

and the poor reading culture by the students. These factors undermined their efforts of attaining grammatical competency and proficiency.

Question 2

How do we compare and contrast the instances of conformity and aberration of students' adjective ordering?

The interpretation and comment following every presented, unedited sentence(s) containing cluster(s) of adjective reveal some solutions to the students trapped by this grammatical predicament. In adjective ordering of two pre-modifiers, the aberrated clusters mostly contain either of these cases: age adjective preceding size adjective, colour adjective preceding opinion one or wrong insertion of the conjunction 'and' between the adjectives. In the three pre-modifiers clusters, the incorrect adjective cluster contains a derived adjective preceding the un-derived one which is not how it should be. The same case for adjective ordering of four and five pre-modifiers ordered wrongly. As seen before, the total number of sixty one (61) clusters of adjective were discovered in the students' essays. Of this number, eighteen (18) representing 29.5 percent were ordered incorrectly which is significant according to the set working frame.

Question 3: What are the measures to adopt in managing this error?

The findings clearly reveal that most of the respondents have problems in separating the un-intonational phrases with comma intonation, ordering adjectives and insertion of coordinative conjunction 'and' between the adjectives. These problems would certainly lead to unintentional pause in reading clauses, sentences and a particular piece of writing. As such, learners of English as a second language should explore the teachings of English on adjective word-class in all angles in order to avoid these un-necessary errors. To attain error free clusters of adjective that would make a particular clause, sentence and essay readable, students should imbibe the habit of regular practice on any aspect of adjective ordering learnt. Students should also inculcate the proper reading habit anywhere as reading in school would not suffice.

Findings

1. Second language learners of English rarely use more than one pre-modifying adjective.
2. With the scarce clusters of adjective used, those with relatively few adjectives amidst far outnumber those with many number of pre-modifying adjectives in their midst. And the number of clusters keeps decreasing as the adjectives increase.
3. The pre-modifying adjectives wrongly separated by comma intonation recorded the highest error frequency implying that it is the most problematic aspect of adjective ordering for second language learners of English.
4. The students were not conversant enough with the hierarchical order adjectives should follow when they co-occur in clauses. For instance *The young beautiful ladies, instead of "the beautiful young ladies".

5. The students wrongly insert coordinative conjunction ‘and’ *a small and beautiful car, instead of “beautiful small car.”

3.0 Recommendation

The concept of grammar has to do with the rule governing language use. This is in cognizant of the fundamental principle, which ensures proper, correct and acceptable use of such a language. The knowledge of grammar plays a vital role in the use of a given language, hence, its importance is very profound. The knowledge of the grammar of a given language ensures error free usage and also the ability to detect errors and correct them. Moreover, the knowledge of grammar makes one a master of a language who can confidently use it- a good grammar ensures effective and meaningful communication and this is because of the interaction of structure and meaning. Students must endeavor to know the basic tenets of grammatical structure, this will help in minimizing grammatical mistakes. English happens to be one of the languages strictly governed by rules guiding its proper and acceptable use at various linguistic levels. For instance, there are rules guiding the formation of words, use of punctuations and the uses of various parts of speech.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The study was undertaken to investigate the order restriction violation in adjective and what motivate it. It was carried out on students’ essays of Kano State Polytechnic. The study also sought to proffer some suggestions on how to arrest this menace. The analysis and interpretation of the obtained data revealed that second language learners of English encounter problems with order restriction of adjective and errors related to it like wrongful insertion of comma intonation and coordinative conjunction ‘and’. The research further revealed that students encounter more problems by over generalizing the rule of inserting comma between items, followed by error with ordering the adjectives and erroneously inserting coordinative conjunction ‘and’. However, the students lack appropriate control of some elements like: syntax, cohesion, good spelling, articles, prepositions, tenses and concord. The analysis also discovered that students use two pre-modifying adjectives more than clusters with three and four adjectives. The most scarcely used clusters with more adjectives are those of five adjectives which have the lowest percentage frequency of 6.5. Using interlanguage theory and Parrott (2000) adjective progression table, the identified errors were assumed to have been caused by the first language interference, overgeneralization of rules and inadequate exposure to English language.

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