

Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Nigerian Newspapers: The Examples of the Tide Newspapers

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Abstract

This paper examined the grammatical blunders in Nigerian Newspapers drawing its data from the Nigerian Tide Newspaper. It is anchored on the Error Analysis Theory (EAT). This study adopted the content analysis design which involves the examination of the manifest content of the Tide Newspaper. All the online and offline versions of the Tide Newspaper published within the month of August 2023 constituted the population of the study. But the data for this study were gathered from the twelve (12) offline version of newspaper published within the said month (August 2023). This study observed few tense errors in some of the newspapers. It was also noticed that punctuation errors were more than the sentence errors. Another dominant error observed is wrong capitalisations which is as a result of the in-house style of the newspaper. The initial letters of function words (closed class) were written in capital letters in the headlines of the newspaper. It was further observed that some words were either misspelt or misused in the newspaper. It was recommended that the management and editors of the Nigerian Tide Newspaper should modify their in-house style to reflect the convention of writing function words with small letters in the title of an essay.

1. Introduction

Language and communication are in symbiotic relationship. In other words, language and communication need each other to be effective. For instance, without language (spoken or sign), communication cannot take place and without communication, language is useless. No wonder, scholars generally affirm that the primary aim of every natural language is communication (Badom & Isaac, 2019). This implies that language is the chief medium

through which humans within a given speech community interrelate or interact. Thus, every journalist and editor, who is burdened with the responsibility of informing and educating the citizens about current issue(s), is either consciously or unconsciously aware about the grammar of the English language which is the language of the media in Nigeria. This is because like other natural languages, the English language does not permit the construction of grammatical structures by stringing words

arbitrarily. Accordingly, every proficient user of the language must master its structures and at the same time, intuitively understands individual expressions such as words, phrases, clauses and sentences in the language as well as interpret and categorize the meanings of the expressions. It is noticed that the English language is systematic, and rule governed. That is, the English language has its system of arrangements; or the language is organised. Even though proficient users of the language may not be able to elucidate the rules that govern the grammar of the language, they (competent speakers) can promptly judge words, phrases, clauses and sentences or constructions that are grammatical in the language and the ones that are ungrammatical. The violation of these grammatical rules can distort the communication process or the message. In view of the foregoing, this paper analyses the grammatical errors in Nigerian newspapers drawing its examples from The Tide Newspaper.

1.1 The Tide Newspaper

According to the information on Wikipedia (2023) and the official website of the Tide newspaper, the Tide Newspaper is owned and founded by the Rivers State Government, which is managed by the Rivers State Newspaper Corporation. It started operation on the 1st December, 1971. The paper has both online and offline versions. It is noticed that the offline version of the newspaper is usually published thrice every week. On the other hand, the online version is published daily. The paper publishes business, sport, politics and crime news. The head office of the Tide Newspaper is number 1 Ikwerre Road, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The English language performs a very significant function in Nigeria. It is the language of administration, judiciary, education, media, etc. Hence, like other professionals, every journalist and editor must have good command of the English language to effectively inform and educate the general public. For that reason, a news editor in Nigeria needs to uphold a very high standard in the use of the English language since the majority of the mixed reading public may see the newspapers and journalists as models of linguistic excellence. The incorrect use of the English language by the journalist(s) or editor(s) can mislead the general public who

may depend on the newspaper as a linguistic model. It can also distort the message of the newspaper. On the other hand, the correct use of the language can extremely be a useful learning tools to the general public especially the students. Unfortunately, "less than 5% of the population" of Nigerian (including the journalists and editors) has good command of the English language (Ndimele, 2014, p. 26). This suggests that grammatical errors such as misspelling, wrong punctuation, wrong capitalization, etc. may be observed or seen in the newspapers. Thus, this paper investigates the grammatical errors in Nigerian newspapers drawing its examples from The Tide Newspaper.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Error Analysis Theory (EAT). It was propounded by Pit Corder and his colleagues in the 1960s (Akidi, 2016). In agreement with Mathews (2007) and Nwachukwu, et al. (2007), Akidi (2016) asserts that the error analysis was developed as a technique of studying second language acquisition. The theory was used to identify types and manner of errors as well as sources and causes of errors. Similarly, Madu (2019) avers that one of the significant findings of the error analysis is that many learners or users of English as second language (L2) make faulty inferences about the rules of the new language. She notes that the theory makes distinction between errors and mistake. The distinction is that errors are systemic while mistakes are not. This indicates that errors can be analysed while mistake cannot be analysed. Error analysts gather and identify data from the target language. Akidi (2016, p. 167) insists that "error analysts class errors according to types such as omission, addition, substitution or related word order. Errors can also be classified into global and local errors." A global error is an error which affects the whole structure/sentence thereby rendering the construction unintelligible, while a local error is an error which affects a particular part of the construction. Both the global and local errors may not lead to extinguish meaning of the construction. From the foregoing assertion, it is clear that the error analysis theory is very relevant to this study since it can aid the researchers to identify and classify the grammatical errors in the Tide Newspaper.

2.1 Conceptual Review

The significance of newspapers in human society cannot be overstressed. For that reason, communication scholars generally insist that from time to time, the press, especially the newspaper plays an important part in the running of the society. Uche (1989) and Udoudo (2010) assert that the earliest newspaper in Nigeria was the “Iwe-irohin”, which is a Yoruba language newspaper. According to Uche (1989) and Udoudo (2010), the paper was founded in Abeokuta in the year 1859 by an English missionary, Rev. Henry Towns. The primary reason for the establishment of the newspaper is to help the people to read and develop the habit of seeking information through reading. The paper also aimed at helping the general improvement of literacy among the Egba people. It combined both socio cultural and political commentaries with religious reporting in an effort to reach its readers. In the same vein, Nwosu (1990) agrees with the claim of Uche (1989) that the first newspaper in Nigeria was the Iwe-Irohim. He opines that the second newspaper in Nigeria was the Anglo African, a weekly paper established by Robert Cambel in 1963. The contents were local and foreign stories, criticism and analysis of the problems of the time. Okakwu (2017) supports the claims of Uche (1989) and Nwosu (1990) that the earliest and the second newspapers in Nigeria are the Iwe-Irohim and Anglo African respectively. He maintains that the Anglo African was a small newspaper equated with the Iwe-Irohim. He also notes that Anglo African was established to promote the interest and welfare of Lagos and its people. Those two newspaper brought awareness of publishing newspaper in Nigeria. On the other hand, Ndimele and Innocent (2006) assert that “a newspaper is a particular mass media channel that carries current information on societal happenings.” They also say that in recent time, there are online and offline (traditional) newspapers. They further differentiate the online newspaper from the traditional newspaper. Once more, they observe that the traditional newspaper uses ink and paper while the online newspapers are published through digital means. Additionally, Ndimele and Innocent (2006) say that online newspapers are not limited by space and number of pages as is the case with the traditional newspaper. This study derives its data from offline (traditional) version of the Tide newspapers.

2.2 Empirical Review

Nsereka (2012) studied the grammatical blunders in Nigerian newspapers: causes, consequences, countermeasures with the aim of probing into the causes of the errors, determine their effects on the perception and behaviour of audience and gauge the possible effects of the errors on the media themselves. The study employed the error analysis method to analyse the data for the study. It was found out that while too many grammatical errors in a medium constitute a nuisance to the educated audience member, they pose a threat to the affected medium’s patronage. In view of the foregoing, the study recommends that without prejudice to the peculiar language and tradition of journalism, English grammar be taught by well qualified hands in mass communication or the equivalent departments in the institutions offering them, from the students’ first year in the programme to their graduation year; and refresher courses be conducted periodically for editors and reporters by media houses. Similarly, Madu (2019) analysed the grammatical errors in three selected Nigerian Newspapers with the aim of identifying grammatical errors in The Sun, The Vanguard and The Guardian newspapers. The Transformational Generative Grammar of Noam Chomsky was adopted, and the error analysis method was used to analyse the data for the study. It was affirmed that grammatical errors in the newspapers were as a result of personal native language habits (patterns and rules), socio-economic influences and outright abuse. The study recommended that English language (Grammar) should be made a compulsory course in journalism and Mass Communication; editors should wake up to justify their primary duty of gate-keeping and policing of both content and presentation of information; and that print media organizations should adopt good feedback mechanism for improved and error free expressions.

3. Methodology

This study adopted the content analysis design which involves the examination of the manifest content of the Tide Newspaper. All the online and offline versions of the Tide Newspaper published within the month of August 2023 constitute the population of the study. However, the data for this study were gathered from the twelve (12) offline version of newspaper published within the said month (August 2023).

The researchers read through all the news stories, editorials, articles, letters to the editor, advertisements, etc. in the newspapers to identify grammatical errors.

4. Result and Discussions of Findings

The dominate error observed in the Tide Newspaper is capitalisation error which is as a result of the in-house style of the newspaper. It was noticed that the initial letters of function words (closed class) were generally written in capital letters in the headlines of the newspapers. The conventional method of writing the initial letter of function words in the title of an essay, which is commonly referred to as headline in the register of media (newspapers) is the small letter. This study affirmed that this error or blunder was maintained in all the editions of the Tide Newspaper. For example:

Datum Set 1a: "Fubara Tasks Youths On Nation-Building" (The Tide, August 2, 2023, p. 1). **Datum Set 1b:** "Reappointment Of Green Excites Former Sports Director" (The Tide, August 21, 2023, p. 21).

Datum Set 1c: Wike Makes APC Campaign Council For Bayelsa Guber Election (The Tide, August 30, 2023, p. 1).

Datum Set 1d: Assembly Has Right To Reject Commissioners-Nominee (The Tide, August 30, 2023, p. 16).

In the data set 1a-d, the initial letters of the prepositions: On, Of, For and To respectively are supposed to be written in small letters. This violates the convention of writing the initial letters of grammatical or function words with small letters. This paper attributes this error to the in-house style of The Tide Newspaper. This study insists that this error can have negative effect on L2 learners of the English language who may likely see the media (in this case, The Tide Newspaper) as a model. This study also notes some punctuation errors in the newspaper under investigation. It was noticed that some appositive nouns or noun phrases were not correctly marked off with a comma from their referent. For instance:

Datum Set 2: "... Mmesoma Ejike and her parents argued that she their daughter remains a brilliant student..." (The Tide, August 4, 2023, p. 9).

The expression or sentence in datum set 2 is clumsy because of the erroneous omission of a

comma in-between the pronoun "she" and the noun phrase "their daughter", and in-between the noun phrase (their daughter) and the verb "remains". This type of error was common in the editions of the newspaper under review. Also, this paper noticed the omission of subject which is an obligatory grammatical constituent of a sentence in the newspaper. For example:

Datum Set 3: "Consequently, lauded the Governor of the State Sir Siminialayi Fubara for putting round peg in the round hole" (The Tide, August 21, 2023, p. 21).

There are two grammatical errors identified in datum set 3. The errors are the omission of the subject before the verb "lauded" and the omission of a comma in-between the phrase "Governor of the State" and the name "Sir Siminialayi Fubara". Additionally, this study identified the omission of the definite article (the) in the newspaper. For instance:

Datum Set 4: "Harry who was one of most successful Sports council Directors the State has ever produced..." (The Tide, August 21, 2023, p. 21).

The datum in set 4 is clumsy and ungrammatical because of the omission of the definite article "the" before the word "most". It is also noted in the datum in set 4 that the comma in-between the noun (Harry), the relative clause (who was one of most successful Sports council Directors the State) and before the verb "has". It was further observed that some words were either misspelt or misused in the newspaper. For instance:

Datum Set 5a: "The statement also contained the 45 ministers and their portfolios" (The Tide, August 18, 2023, p. 1).

Datum Set 5b: "... his appointment as Sports commissioner could be ascribed as the best thing has happened in Rivers State..." (The Tide, August 21, 2023, p. 21).

In datum set 5a, the expression "names of" is omitted before the 45 minsters. On the other hand, the grammatical errors observed in the datum in set 5b are the wrong use of the word "ascribed" and the omission of the clause marker (complementizer) before the introduce of the subordinate clause (has happened in Rivers State). The study noted few tense errors in some of the newspapers. For example:

Datum Set 6: "The President said the appointment of the new board and management

took immediate effect" (The Tide, August 30, 2023, p. 1).

The datum in set 6 illustrate error in the use of tense in The Tide Newspaper. The verb "took" is supposed to be in present form. The phrase "immediate effect" makes the sentence to stand out as a present action.

5. Conclusion

This paper has been able to examine the grammatical errors in Nigerian newspapers drawing its examples from The Tide Newspaper which is owned and founded by the Rivers State Government and managed by the Rivers State Newspaper Corporation. It started operation on the 1st December, 1971. The paper has both online and offline versions. It is noticed that the offline version of the newspaper is usually published thrice every week. This study is anchored on the Error Analysis Theory (EAT) which was propounded by Pit Corder and his colleagues in the 1960s. The content analysis design, which involves the examination of the manifest content of the Tide Newspaper, was adopted for the study. The online and offline versions of the Tide Newspaper published within the month of August 2023 constitute the population of the study. The study was restricted to the twelve (12) offline version of newspaper published in the month August 2023.

The grammatical errors identified in this study are capitalization, punctuation, the omission of subject, the omission of the definite article, misspelt or misused tense errors. The study affirmed that the most dominate error observed in The Tide Newspaper is capitalisation error. The initial letters of function words (closed class) were generally written in capital letters in the headlines (titles) of the newspapers. This violates the conventional system of writing the initial letter of function words in the title of an essay with the small letter. This study confirmed that this error or blunder was maintained in all the editions of the Tide Newspaper. The wrong use of capital letter was attributed to the in-house style of the newspaper. The punctuation errors resulted in clumsy expressions. This type of error was common in the editions of the newspaper under review. This study corroborates the claim of Nsereka (2012) that grammatical errors in a medium can constitute a nuisance to the educated audience. In view of the foregoing, this study posits that the grammatical errors in The Tide Newspaper

may distort the message or information in the medium.

6. Recommendation

This paper recommends that the management and editors of the Nigerian Tide Newspaper should modify their in-house style to reflect the convention of writing function words with small letters in the title of an essay.

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