

THE MISUSE OF ENGLISH AUXILIARY VERBS BY NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF BAUCHI STATE UNIVERSITY, GADAU

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Abstract

The study is set to investigate the possible causes of the misuse or inappropriate use of English auxiliary verbs by Bauchi State University Students as a case study. The theoretical framework of the study is based on the theory of interlanguage. A total number of two hundred 200 students randomly selected were used for the study. An objective test and questionnaire were use in collecting data from the respondents. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study. Sample percentages were use in analyzing and interpreting the date collected. From the study, we found out that a number of factors accounted for the misuse or inappropriate use of auxiliary verbs by the subjects. These include; lack of knowledge about the rules of usage, faulty teaching, inadequate exposure to the grammar of the target language, poor learning strategy, complexity of the target language among others.

Keywords: Auxiliary Verbs, Tertiary Institutions, Errors/Mistakes, University Students

1.0 Introduction

Obviously, this paper work is not the first of its kind that discusses the grammatical error of many Nigerian students in the course of using English. Those who carried out studies in the use of English among Nigerian students include Jacob, Otor Aloba (2015), Ugoji, Stella C (2009). Olaofe (1986), Opata (1986), Oji (1988), Aichatou (1995), and Adjoze (1995) but they concentrate mainly on NCE, Poytechnic and Diploma students. Thus, the paper concentrates on University Students. Therefore, to be competent user of language, one need to know not only the rules of grammar but also know how the rules of grammar are used in real communication (Richards, 2002 quoted in Onyeakachi: 2007:51. In a country like Nigeria where English performed a major function as official language, the need for

proficiency is not only desirable but absolutely necessary (Kamal 2002). It is pertinent against this background that students at the tertiary level, especially university level should attain proficiency in English, as it will enable them to use the language correctly and efficiently. The researcher observes that most university students use auxiliary verbs inappropriately in both spoken and written forms. One of the problems with the use of English in Nigeria today is that students speak all kinds of what might be regarded as poor quality and uneducated English. While this appears to be an inevitable consequence of different speakers' competences in the language. It is against this Background to the Study the paper seeks to address many issues.

1.2 Research Questions

This paper is conceptualized to answer the following questions:

1. What causes the inappropriate use of auxiliary verbs by the University students?
2. What is responsible for the students' inability to differentiate the verbs 'have' from 'has' in their sentences?

1.3 Research Objective

The main aims of this research is

- a. to identify the possible causes of the misuse of auxiliary verbs by State University Students
- b. to find out if the students' inability to use auxiliary correctly is due to the factors as poor learning strategies, interference of mother tongue or faulty teaching.

2.0 Conceptual Review

2.1 Verb?

The verb in one of the eight parts of speech in which the parts of speech are in other word referred to as "the tribe of words". Oguiche, G. O. (2010:4) explain that there is always a verb in a sentence, if a subject in sentence is singular the verb is singular, if the subject plural the verb is also plural. Therefore verb is regarded as the most important part of speech, because it gives meaning to the sentence. Eteh, (2000:25) see verb as words which tell us what a pronoun or noun does. Quirk and Greenbaum (2000:26) describe verb as an action word in which it will be necessary to be classified in to lexical verb an auxiliary verb, and subdivided the letter in to primary and modal auxiliaries. They further explain that many English verb have five form: The base, the -s form, the past, the -ing participle, and the -ed participles. Juba, O., and Akindolire, N. A. (2003:148) sees verb, as an action word. It tells us what a noun or pronoun does in the sentence. The action or activities of person or things are made known through the use of verb. Some verbs according to this scholars take "-s" "-es" when used with the third person singular pronoun and singular nouns, and those that don't take any inflection example. He kicks

the ball, she always goes to school. It rains heavily in Kano. Aisha sings a song of praise.

2.2 Auxiliary Verbs

Many grammarians have contributed to the present study by giving descriptive insights on the use of auxiliary. It is based on this that we shall review some of the literature to see how the term, "auxiliary verb" apply to individuals. Bangbose (1990), Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), Young (1980) Oluwole and others (1996) among others. All share the same view on the English auxiliaries. To them, auxiliary verbs are words that occur along with a main verbs to make up a verbal group in a given clause.

According to Ogbulogu (1998:53), auxiliary verbs are those verbs that are used to complete the meaning of other verbs. In sentences (1-3), the verb in italics are usually called 'auxiliary verbs.'

- (1) It is raining.
- (2) You have been overcharged.
- (3) It must have been raining.

Based on this functions that auxiliary verbs perform, they defined them as 'helping'. Each of these grammarians identifies both the primary and modal auxiliaries. They argue that the modal auxiliaries which include; 'can', 'could', 'shall', 'should', 'may', 'might', 'must', 'ought', 'dare', 'need', and 'use to' in addition to the role of auxiliaries which they perform, also reflect the (possibility, necessity, etc) of the speaker. Example of primary auxiliary verbs function as main and auxiliary verbs

1. Anna is learning Spanish
2. They had two children
3. A soldier can stand at attention (Quirk et al 1983:129)

With regard to the argument above, sentence 1 and 3 show the English auxiliaries as helping verbs, while sentence 2 shows the auxiliary verb used as lexical verb.

Juba, O., O. and Akindolire (2003:15) are in the view that auxiliary verbs cannot stand on its own. It can only help the main verb to form a sentence. Auxiliary verb is otherwise known as a helping verb because of the role it performs in the sentence. That is to say it assists the main verb to form a complete sentence, example; I can drive a car now.

2.3 Type of Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs are group into some classes according to different linguists. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvit (1985:96) are in the view that verb, as a class of words, can be divided into three major categories, according to their functions within the verb phrase; we distinguish the open class of full verbs (or lexical verbs) such as ; TAKE from the closed class of PRIMARY VERBS (BE, DO, and HAVE) and MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS (can, could, may, might, shall, should etc) of these three classes, the full verbs can act only as a main verbs. Here, auxiliary verbs are of two kinds; primary and model. The major difference between the two kinds is that, while the primary auxiliaries can be used as main verbs the modal auxiliaries cannot. Example;

2.4 Primary Auxiliary Verbs BE

Quirk et al (1985) assert that the verb 'be' is main verb with copular function e.g;

- a. Lami is a happy girl
- b. . b. Is that building a hotel? (Ibid; 129)

It can also function as auxiliary verbs

1. We *are* students (main verb)
- We *are* studying English (auxiliary verb)

DO

Quirk et al (1985) opine that 'DO' like 'BE' can be use both as an auxiliary and main verb

- A. Charles *did* his homework (main verb)
- B. Charles *did* not attend (auxiliary verb)

HAVE

According to Quirk et al (1985) the primary auxiliary 'have' functions both as an auxiliary and main verb.

- A. I *have* an English textbook (main verb)

- B. I *have* read the book (auxiliary verb)

2.5 Model Auxiliary Verbs

These are; can, could, may, might, shall. Should, will, would, must, ought to, use to, need and dare. Example;

1. **Can/could** (used to express permission, possibility, ability, or capacity) e.g.
 - a. Awa *can* go if he likes.(permission)
 - b. Awa *could* go if he likes. (polite permission)
 - c. That river *can* be bridged.(capacity)
 - d. John *could* run fast when he was young. (ability)
2. **May/might** (use to express permission, possibility)
 - a. Ahmad *may* come with us if he like.
 - b. *Might* I accompany you to Lagos?
 - c. Tunde *may* arrive from Jos today.
 - d. It *might* rain this afternoon.
3. **Shall/will** (used to express simple futurity, determination, order, or willingness)
 - a. We *shall* attend the party.
 - b. I *will* attend the party.(determination)
4. **Should** (used to express obligation, condition and logical necessity)
 - a. We *should* eat the food.
 - b. I *should* travel abroad if I had the money.
5. **Would** (used to express habitual action, conditional sentence, polite request and possibility)
 - a. Every weekend we *would* visit our friends.
 - b. If I had a car I *would* travel often.
 - c. I *would* like to come with you.
 - d. That *would* be Sule coming.
6. **Must** (use to express obligation ,and logical necessity)
 - a. You must tell me the truth.
 - b. John must be mad to say that.
7. **Ought to** (used to express obligation and expectation)
 - a. Every student ought to study hard.
 - b. You ought to arrive by tomorrow.
8. **Used to** (used to express habitual action in the past)
 - a. We used to attend party when we were young.

Note: the following usage is acceptable in asking questions

- a. Used you to work here?
 - b. Didn't you use to work here(colloquial)
9. **Need** (as an auxiliary verb used in negative, question and necessity)
- a. Kunle need not accept that offer.
 - b. Need Kunle accept that offer?
10. **Dare** (as an auxiliary verbs and especially in negative sentence and questions)
- a. Nobody dare insult our lecturers.
 - b. You dare not eat that food.
 - c. Dare he fight that boxer?

2.5 Theoretical Frame Work

Based on what has been discussed in this study, the researcher explores the theory of inter-language as the as a theoretical frame work in investigating the students' performance in the used of modal verb as it deals with the study of the second language. Selinker (1972) perceives that inter-language is based on learner experiences with the second language. According to him, there is overgeneralization of the target language rules in process of inter-language formation. He further asserts that a theory of interlanguage account for the idiosyncratic (L1-L2), it simply refers to the systematic knowledge of a second language which is independent of both the learner of L1 and the target language. That is to say inter language theory is base theory that there psychological structure talent in a brain which is active when one attempt to learn the second language. Selinker (1972) is one of the first linguists who coined interlanguage. According to him, "inter-language is based on the learners' experiences which the second language. There is overgeneralization of the target language rules in the process of interlanguage formation. This study therefore, explore the theory of inter language as it mediate between the learned and the target language, hence the researcher relies on the background of this theory which believes that language are different and these different causes'

difficulties to second language (L2) learners.

Interlanguage, in leaning a second language, a system of rules usually develops in the mind of a learner, which mediates between learner's Native Language (NL) and the target language (TL). Chomsky (1965), refers to this system of rules as Language Acquisition Device (LAD) it is based on these rules that a theory known as interlanguage is formed. The term of interlanguage was coined by the selinker (1972). He assesses that fossilization interlanguage theory by the agent of 12 year. Someone vocal sounds are fixed such that if the learner begins to learn the second language theory, he learner with difficulties and interlanguage theory constitutes an attempt to error. Her further holds and view that a theory of interlanguage account for the idiosyncratic (L1-L2). It simply refers to the systematic knowledge of a language which independent of both the learner of L1 and the target language that is to say inter language theory is based on the theory that there is psychological structure talent in the brain which is activated when one attempt to learn the second language.

Yule, (2007:195) hold and view that interlanguage contains a large number of "error", which seem to have no connection to the form of either L1 or L2. Brown (1994:203) sees inter-language as "the separateness of a language learners system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native language and that the target language". This is why Mathews (1997) defined interlanguage as a system of rules that developed in the mind of someone learning in foreign language which is intermediate between his native language and the target language. Richards (1992:186) perceives that language learners' errors are caused by different factors which include:

- a. Borrowing patterns from the mother tongue
- b. Extending pattern from the target language

- c. Expressing pattern meaning using the words and grammar which are already known

Baker (1996) and Richards (1992) quoted in Doka, Z. M. (2012:51) also observe that errors are not a system of failure but a usual and important part of the language process. Inter-language is therefore an important theory that is valid in a analysis of the students' performance in the used of auxiliary verbs as it is used describe the developed stage of a grammar in second language learning. The research is thus to study the constraints or mistake in the used of can and could and their solution. Base on this finding therefore, there is need find ways to overcome or minimize the constraints. This is where the theory become useful in this study and the

researcher is of belief that it will be used to realize the intended objective.

3.0 Methodology

A population of two hundred 200 students were randomly selected for this study. Also twenty lecturers of different departments were used. They fill a questionnaire. Four groups of subjects of fifty students each were used to allow for easy calculation and presentation of results in percentages. The subjects were selected as: one hundred English major students and one hundred were non-English major who had already offered and completed the use of English course. The subjects who wrote the test and filled a questionnaire were picked randomly, that is, more than fifty students were invited for the test from each department of which only fifty scripts were randomly picked out for marking.

3.1 Data Presentation**Category A: primary auxiliary verbs**

Item no.	The Department of English	The Department of Education	The Department of Islamic Studies	The Department of Nigerian Languages
1	54	36	32	50
2	70	42	50	26
3	80	60	49	50
4	95	90	50	45
5	53	50	55	45
6	92	64	45	46
7	50	66	24	22
8	90	96	22	60
9	70	43	38	45
10	20	40	35	16
11	60	28	36	26
12	82	94	45	70
13	11	10	25	15
14	54	44	29	40
15	80	32	35	60
16	35	10	22	35
17	88	96	40	27
18	55	79	36	54
19	98	98	82	45
20	93	95	61	55
21	74	94	28	24
22	91	72	53	23
23	45	15	36	45
24	62	95	22	55
25	90	90	36	30
26	73	94	60	45
27	82	92	33	25
28	80	88	35	60
29	78	60	61	60
30	56	86	45	40
Average	68.5	63.2	38.6	41.7

Category B: Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Item No	The Department of English	The Department of Education	The Department of Islamic Studies	The Department of Nigerian Languages
31	90	87	55	50
32	92	90	45	55
33	95	96	60	65
34	94	95	35	35
35	34	50	57	50
36	88	86	45	45
37	60	82	55	65
38	75	55	45	60
39	46	66	37	55
40	38	44	52	42
41	94	96	45	43
45	15	42	46	60
43	93	88	49	45
44	66	82	50	35
45	52	33	51	50
46	86	95	52	55
47	90	92	60	60
48	83	95	61	60
49	48	91	55	55
50	62	96	35	50
51	70	91	40	45
52	86	89	55	33
53	92	88	61	50
54	18	44	45	60
55	66	92	50	47
56	70	96	51	50
57	62	42	47	35
58	94	84	45	65
59	90	95	50	55
60	72	33	65	37
Average score	70.7	77.2	49.6	50.4

As we have earlier pointed out, category A, which contains items 1-30, tested the use of the primary verbs in English. The table shows us the correct responses of 200 respondents in percentages. Since 40% is the pass mark in university, any of our respondents who scored less than this is regarded to have failed the test.

The overall average scores of the four departments

The overall average scores of the performance of the four departments on the use of English primary and modal auxiliary verbs are indicated in a table below;

Auxiliary Verbs	The Department of English	The Department of Education	The Department of Islamic Studies	The Department of Nigerian Languages
Category A: The primary auxiliary verbs	68.5%	63.2%	38.6%	41.7%
Category B: The modal auxiliary verbs	70.7%	77.2%	49.6%	50.4%

From the above result the column in category A which tested the use of auxiliary verbs in writing indicates that our respondents from the department of English scored 68.5%, those from the department of education 63.2%, while respondent from Islamic studies department scored 38.6%

and Nigerian languages 41.7% respectively. A close observation of this scores shows that students generally have difficulty with the use of primary auxiliary verbs. On average, 47%% of these primary auxiliary verbs were wrongly used by our subjects from the four departments.

The percentage of wrong usage of primary auxiliary from the three departments

Department of English language	-31.5%
Department of education	-36.8%
Department of Islamic Studies	-61.4%
Department of Nigerian lang.	-58.3%
Total	=188 divided by four
Average	47%

The column in category B also tested the subjects on the use of modal auxiliary verbs. The analysis shows that our respondents from the department of English scored

70.7%, while those from education 77.2% and Islamic Studies 49.6% and department of Nigerian languages 50.4% respectively.

Percentage of wrong usage of modal auxiliary verbs from the four departments below;

Department of English language	-29.3%
Department of education	-22.8%
Department of Islamic Studies	-50.4%
Department of Nigerian lang.	-49.6%
Total	=152 divided by four
Average	38%

Analysis and interpretation of Lecturers' responses to questionnaires

A total number of twenty questionnaires were administered to twenty lectures. Out of

these, eighteen were returned. The analysis is therefore based on the eighteen that were returned. As in the following tables:

1. What do you think is responsible for their misuse/misappropriate use of auxiliary verbs in writing and spoken?

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Poor linguistic (home) background	6	33.3
Lack of practice on students' part	6	33.3
Lack of knowledge about the rules of usage	6	33.3
Total	18	100

2. In your own opinion, what do you think are the sources of L² auxiliary verbs errors?

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Complexities of the target language	11	61.1
Lack of proper teaching	07	38.9
Improper guidance	00	00
Total	18	100

4. How do you rate your students in the use of English and in their use of auxiliary verbs in particular?

Options	No. of respondents	Percentage %
Above average	2	11.1
Average	5	27.8
Below average	11	61.1
Total	18	100

Findings

Based on the tables above which categorized our subjects into two; the English major and non-English major students. The analysis which reveals that a contribution of factors, such as poor linguistic (home) background, lack of knowledge about the rule of auxiliary verbs usage, complexity of the target language are responsible for the inappropriate use of auxiliary verbs by our subjects in both writing and spoken English. Lecturers who are the best judges of students rated our subjects below average in area of grammar generally, and in their use of auxiliary verbs in particular. About 61% of our respondents attested that. On the whole, the lecturers also attested that a combination of factors,

ranging from lack of practice of language skills by students and defective teaching are responsible for our subject's misuse of auxiliary verbs.

Summary and Conclusions

With the investigation carried out in four different departments of the institution, we are able to know that the students in the institution lack the knowledge of proper use of English auxiliary verbs and as such misuse them. Conclusively, taking a look at the result of the analysis we presented, almost all type of auxiliary verbs in English are problematic to our students, but the primary auxiliary verbs pose more serious problem to them than modals. They have limited knowledge of the use and proper application of the rules guiding auxiliary

verb usage. Therefore, we assert that if the language lecturers would strive hard to see that they can give their best to students, that is, teaches them basic use in all situations, the problem the students have with the use of English would reduce significantly.

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Appendixes

Institution _____

School _____

Subject Combination _____

Year of Study _____

Part A

Complete the following sentences with one of the options in the bracket that is appropriate

1. Neither Sani nor Hassan _____ completed the course work, (has/have/having)
2. Although his explanation of the ionization process _____ detailed and aided by charts, I was still confused (is/was/were).
3. Either my uncle or my aunt, _____ free to make the trip, (be/is/are).
4. There _____ several reviews of the book available (be/is/are),
5. Worker on the line and each supervisor in the plant _____ the power to halt production if a defect in quality is found. (has/have/having).
6. Only one of his objections _____ sensible. (be/was/were).
7. Where _____ Hassan and Audu? (is/are/was).
8. Measles _____ a kind of disease that mostly affects the children, (is/are/be).
9. Not only John but his uncle _____ also, involved in the accident. (was/were).
10. This set of plates _____ very costly, (is/are/be).

Part B

Underline one of the words in brackets that best, complete the sentence

11. If the boy's brother was here, he _____ not have been beaten (will/would/shall)
12. The car....have been wrecked by the long lorry, if an expert driver has not been driving it (must/could/can)
- 13 _____ you have hold this turkey for me? (could/may/can).
14. You _____ have done better, (used to/ought to/must to)
- 15 I _____ be waiting for you. (shall/will/can).
16. They _____ come to our house tomorrow, (will/shall/be)
17. We _____ invite him; he will certainly come. (needn't/daren't/haven't)
18. John _____ have come tomorrow (must/will/shall).
19. If the brakes fail _____ you be able to control the car? (can/will/shall)
20. My friends and I _____ bicycles, (use to ride/used to ride/use to)

Marking Scheme

Part A

- 1) Has 2) Was 3) Is 4) Are 5) Have 6) Was 7) Are 8) Is 9) Was 10) Is

Part B

- 11)Would 12)Could 13)Could 14)Ought to 15)Shall 16)Will 17)Needn't 18)Will 19)Will 20)Use to ride