

Word Formation Problems in Some Senior Secondary Schools 111 (SSS3) Students' Essays in Three Local Government Areas of Osun State, Nigeria.

By

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Abstract

The major purpose of this paper was to identify the word formation problems in the written English of Senior Secondary Schools 111 (SSS3) students. The main grammatical description used as a basis for this investigation is drawn from Ouirk et al (1972). The data for the paper were drawn from the essays written by 300 SSS3 students in six selected secondary schools from Ilesa West Local Government, Ilesa East Local Government and Atakumosa West Local Government Areas in Osun State. The essays were then analyzed for evidence of word formation Problems in their written English. This study found out that the pupils had problems with the different morphological processes in English. There was however variation in the level of use and the problem that arose with each of the morphological processes highlighted. In conclusion, on the basis of the findings of this study, suggestions that can lead to improvement in the teaching of word formation processes in English to Nigerian Secondary School pupils have been provided.

Keywords: *Morphological processes, Millennium development goals, blending, Acronyms, Clipping*

1. Introduction

It was from the colonial era that the importance of English had been emphasized. Today, the English Language has become so indispensable in Nigerian life that, according to Bamigbose (1971:35) "It could perhaps be regarded as the most important heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British, at the end of the colonial administration". Efforts made by the colonial administration to encourage the teaching and learning of the English Language in Nigerian schools included the introduction of a system of certification into the country between 1882 and 1926 through a series of education codes. This system not only attracted Nigerians to lucrative jobs but also ensured that priority was put on English Language in all schools, for instance, a credit pass in the subject was a pre-requisite to obtaining a certificate in all examination.

In Nigeria today, English is the usual language of government, business and commerce, the mass media and inter-ethnic communication among educated Nigerians. Besides, it is the principal medium of formal education in the country. And it is perhaps in its role in Nigerian education that the importance of the language is felt most.

Creativity is a quality of good writing and since Nigeria is a Language two (L2) environment, formation of words and sentences have pose great challenge to the students. Hence, for the English Language to be domesticated in an L2 environment, calls for investigation in order to make teachers of English Language identify where the problems lie and how they can be tackled.

2. Background: Morphological Processes

Affixation is the addition of one or more affixes to a root, e.g derive + ation = derivation. The term covers prefixation and suffixation.

Prefixation: is the process of word formation that involves the addition of prefixes or bound morphemes to the root at the initial part. The prefixes come before the root. Quirk and Greenbaum (1972) gave ten semantic classifications of prefixes. They are as follows: (i) negative prefixes:- markers of negation in words formed as in dis- in disappointment, mal- in maladjusted, (ii) reversative prefixes:- makers of reverse action or deprivation of action as in dis- in dislocate, de- in decode. (iii) Pejorative prefixes:- markers of something done wrongly as in mal- in mal-administration, mis- in misinform. (iv) Prefixes of Degree or size:- markers of degree or size from the lowest to the highest or from the narrowest to the widest as in super- in super-story, out- in out-shine, under- in under-estimate. (v) Prefixes of attitude:- markers of attitudes of people to certain phenomena or issues as in counter- in counteract, anti- in anti-government. (vi) Locative prefixes:- markers of location within and outside as in inter- in international, trans- in trans-sahara. (vii) Prefixes of time and order:- markers of time and order as in pre- in pre-independence, post- in post-humus. (viii) Number Prefixes:- markers of numbers in the description of certain phenomena as in mono- in monocotyledon, bi- in bicameral. (ix) Conversion Prefixes:- are those when added to, change their word class to another as in 'en' + 'close' = 'enclose'.

Suffixation: is another criterion used in the analysis. When suffixes are added to the root words the class of the word will change. They can be classified in various ways using the word class of their base or using the word class newly formed or using both. E.g noun-noun suffixes: -dom as in kingdom, -ship as in friendship, verb-noun suffixes: -or as in actor, -al as in refusal, verb suffixes like -ize as in popularize, -ify as in simplify, noun to adjective suffixes: -less as in childless, -al as in criminal and so on.

Blending: is another word formation process. In its own case, there is creativity in that, part of one word is stitched onto another word without any regard for where one morpheme ends and another begins. E.g. br (eakfast + l) unch = brunch, trans (fer + re) sistor = transistor, car + hijacking) = carjacking, motor + hotel = motel, smoke + fog = smog. The blend is a perfect merger of form and content.

Clipping: is when we have a part of a word clipped off or subtracted from the rest of a word. But the word's meaning is not affected. In other words, it is a process in which a word is reduced or shortened without changing the meaning of the word. For example, 'hamburger' could be written as 'burger' clipping 'ham' off, 'telephone' could be written as 'phone' clipping off 'tele', examination – exam, gasoline – gas, influenza – flu, laboratory – lab, mathematics – maths, memorandum – memo, etc.

Acronyms: mean writing the first alphabet of a word. There are two types, viz: those pronounced by the alphabets, e.g O.A.U – Organization of African Unity, T.V- television, and those pronounced as words as in ECOWAS- Economic Community of West African States, RADAR – radio detecting and ranging.

Compounding, here we usually have the existence of two or more roots or base together. In other words, two or more lexemes combine into a single new word. Compound words may be written as one word or as two words joined with a hyphen. For instance, sun + rise = sunrise (noun-verb compound), head + ache = headache (noun-adjective compound), photo + graph = photograph (noun-noun compound), pick + up = pick-up (verb-preposition compound), pick + pocket = pick-pocket (verb-noun compound), high + light = highlight (adjective- noun compound), break + up = breakup (verb-preposition compound). Compounds may be compositional i.e the meaning of the new word is determined by combining the meanings in parts e.g 'headache' means the head is actually aching, or non-compositional, which means that the meaning of the new word cannot be determined by combining the meanings of the parts, e.g 'breakup' is not a relationship that referred to upward direction.

3. Research Procedures

Participants:

The subjects of this study are 300 Senior Secondary School 3 students drawn from Ilesa Grammar School, Ilesa, and St. Lawrences High School Ilesa, in Ilesa West Local Government Area, St. Magarets School, Ilesa, and Hope Grammar School, Ilesa, in Ilesa East Local Government Area, Atakumosa High

School, Osu and Ifewara Grammar School, Ifewara, in Atakumosa West Local Government Area of Osun-State. The subjects are thus drawn from two schools each, from the three Local Governments stated above.

Research Instrument:

Two essay topics were given to the students to write on: ‘Fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria’ and ‘Politics in Nigeria’.

4. Research Methodology:

The 300 SSS 3 students as stated above are drawn from six schools which were randomly selected from three Local Government Areas of Osun State. This random sampling was adopted in order to represent the broad spectrum of the various kinds of public schools in Osun-State. These schools are thus felt to be broad representative of the different schools in Osun-State. After the schools had been selected, fifty SSS3 students were randomly selected from across the various classes they have in these schools to form the subjects of the study. The students were given two essay topics out of which they were to pick one. Time was not allotted to the work and so the students had enough time to write and correct their errors. These topics were chosen because they are current issues and we feel the students should be able to discuss many ideas on the topics. We expect the students to write as many words as possible in order to achieve our aim of the study. The topics were also considered as being relevant and interesting for the age group of the selected students. In administering the test, the cooperation of the teachers of English was sought and they were indeed helpful in the proper organization of the classes for the assignment.

The aim of the analysis was to identify the words formed under the morphological processes in English i.e (prefixation, suffixation, conversion, compounding, acronymy, clipping and blending) as well as deviations arising from the application of these morphological processes.

5. Analysis of results

To arrive at the table, for each of the item or word process, the number of occurrence of morphological mistakes in each student’s scripts is counted and then added the total number of such items’ occurrences in the scripts of a whole school together, then divide the total number of a particular item’s occurrence in all the schools by the total number of occurrences of the same item in each school. The answer is then multiplied by 100 to get the percentage occurrence.

$$\frac{\text{Number of occurrence of items in each school} \times 100}{\text{Total number of occurrence of each item in all schools}}$$

Table 1: Shows the percentage usage of morphological processes by schools

Names of schools	Compounding	Blending	Clipping	Acronym	Prefixes	Suffixes
IlesaGrammar School, Ilesa.	20	0	16.6	21.4	20	20
St. Lawrences High Schl,Ilesa.	15.5	0	12.5	14.3	15	15.5
St.MagaretsSchool	20	0	25	28.5	22.5	20
Hope Grammar School, Ilesa	13.3	0	8.3	7.1	12.5	13.3
Atakumosa High School, Osu	17.7	0	20.8	21.4	17.5	17.7
Ifewara High School, Ifewara	13.3	0	16.6	7.1	12.5	13.3

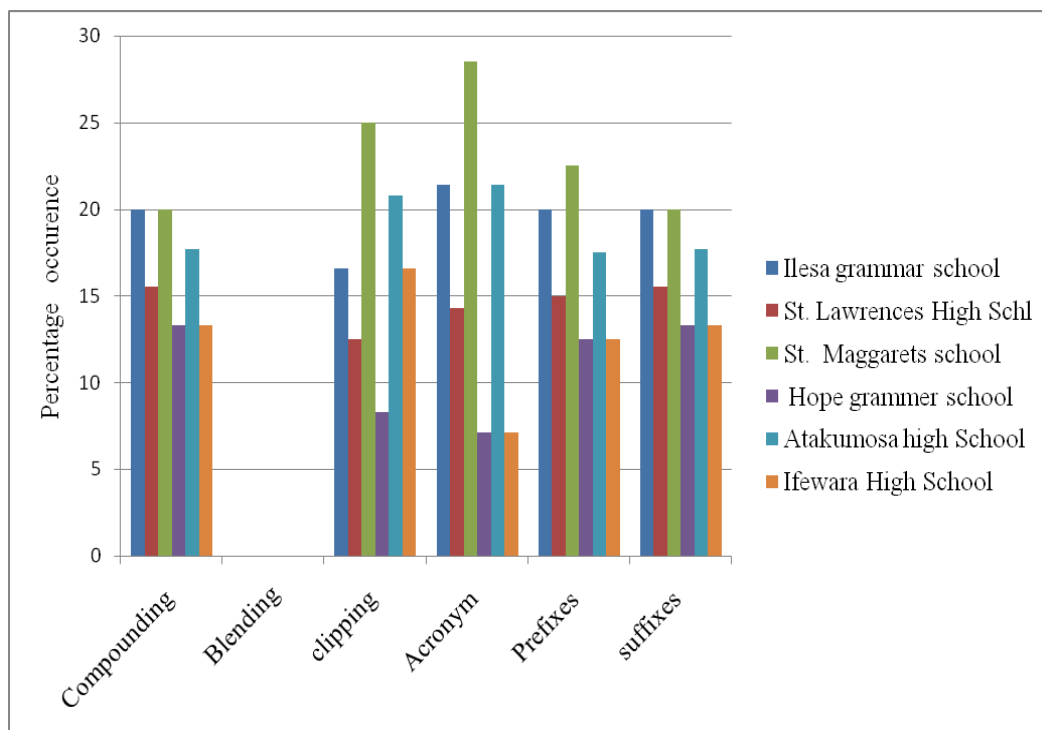


Figure 1 shows the occurrences of the morphological processes in each of the schools.

General discussions and observations on results

The smallest unit of language that has a meaning or a grammatical function and form words or parts of words is called morpheme. In writing, individual morphemes are usually represented by their graphic form, or spelling; e.g -es, -er, un-, re-, or by their graphic form between braces{ }; e.g., {-es}, {-er}, {un-},{re-} Zapata (2007). We discovered that functional or grammatical words (free lexical morphemes) which have no meaning on their own, but which show grammatical relationships in and between sentences gave serious problems to the students in their essays. These morphemes are represented by prepositions, conjunctions, articles, demonstratives, auxiliary verbs and pronouns. Checking through the notes of the students afterwards, we discovered that topics like the ones mentioned above were not taught in some of the schools and even those that were taught were not fully and well taught.

The analysis, moreover, reveals that the students in these schools had problems with bound morphemes or the dependent morphemes which are those that can never occur alone as words or as part of words, but must be attached to another morpheme.

The past tense form of the irregular verbs, as in:

- eat ate eaten,
- come came came,
- build built built,
- sweep swept swept,
- fight fought fought
- en past participle marker as in:
- weave wove woven
- speak spoke spoken
- drive drove driven

- **Students' error sample**

The president spoken to the nation on the first of Jan 2012

The apostrophe ('s) in singular and plural forms as in:

St Lawrence's Grammar School,
Eko Boys' High School,
the girl's choice (singular),
the girls' choice (plural) e.t.c also pose great challenge and

- **Students' error samples**

“At GaniFawehinmiParks’,Lagos”

“In front of Eko Boy’s High School”

The third person singular case is the worst of all. For example:

fight --- girl: (a) The girl fights. (b) The girls fight.

Pupil--- sing (a) The pupil sings (b) The pupils sing

Bleat--- goat (a) The goat bleats (b) The goats bleat

- **Students' error samples**

“The people gathereveryday to show their grievances”

“Politics in Nigeria is a dirty games”

The analysis also reveals that the students had problems with inflectional affixes which are morphemes which serve purely grammatical functions, such as referring to and giving extra linguistic information about the already existing meaning of a word, for example, number, person, gender case, etc. They had problems with how to express relations between words as in 'possession' as has been explained above, 'comparison' and 'plural markers'. For instance, in using Comparative adjectives as in:

good	better	best
long	longer	longest
short	shorter	shortest
fat	fatter	fattest

- **Students' error sample**

“theworst of all the problems is bokoharam”

Regular plural marker as in:

cup	cups
fork	forks
girl	girls
shoe	shoes

- **Students' error sample**

“Nigerian cried out to Mr. President after the announcements”

Various forms of plural markers as in:

ox	oxen
man	men
agendum	agenda

Regular past tense marker as in:

kill	killed	killed
slap	slapped	slapped
flog	flogged	flogged

-ing present progressive marker as in:

dance	dancing
sing	singing
dig	digging

Pluralization as in: different forms of plurals, which include:

Adding 's' to the base as in:

dog - dogs
girl - girls
book - books
shop - shops

Adding 'es' to the base as in:

box - boxes
class - classes
glass - glasses

Changing 'y' to 'ies' as in:

lady - ladies
baby - babies
candy - candies

Changing the form at the base as in:

ox - oxen
man - men
woman - women

Ones having the same plural forms as in:

scissors - scissors
trousers - trousers
sheep - sheep

Adding 's' to words ending in 'f' or 'fe' as in:

chief - chiefs
roof - roofs
hoof - hoofs

Student's errors: Fuel subsidy startered on the first week of January 2012, when the President Jonathan goodluck says he was going to increase the price of the petrol and this really affect the citizens because it was onexperted.

In compounding, most of the students did not understand the fact that compound words behave grammatically and semantically as single words. Since compound words behave as units between their component elements, no affixes (whether inflections or derivations) can occur; inflectional suffixes can appear only after compound words. For example school buses, passersby, brothers-in-law, e.t.c.. Most students could not differentiate among:

- the open compound words, as in: flower pot, chop board
- the hyphenated compound words, as in air- brake, sister - in - law and;
- the solid compound words which are without a space or hyphen between the component elements of the compound as in pickpocket, photograph, highlight, e.t.c.

The analysis reveals that most of the students did not use blended words at all, while a fair percentage of the students used clipping.

Also from our findings, we discovered that not all the morphological processes were taught in schools especially in the primary and secondary schools in these local government areas. A good knowledge of word formation processes will help students to develop vocabularies and getting the meanings to some words without actually checking through the dictionary. Although, with the advent of electronic dictionaries the inconvenience of carrying cumbersome paperback dictionaries is almost non-existence; therefore teachers are seeing more electronic dictionaries in the classroom. At least, in St Magarets School, two of the students have handsets with in-built dictionaries. These days it is not uncommon to

have mobile phones with electronic dictionaries installed inside. But as fine as this technological advancement is, it can also be detrimental to students' learning especially during lessons.

Discussions on the percentage usage of the word formation processes among the schools

In **compounding**, Ilesa Grammar School and St Magarets' School, both in Ilesa had the highest percentage of 20% while Atakumosa High School had approximately 18% in their own usage of compounding. St Lawrences had 16% in their usage of this same word formation process. On this, the result is generally low, this we think is due to the fact that compounding is one of the word formation processes that is a bit difficult in that it involves understanding the classes of words very well and usually we have the existence of two or more roots or base together as one word, and two or more classes of words together, as in pick + pocket (verb + noun).

In **blending**, no usage was recorded in all the schools, this we suggest, is because of the creative nature of this particular word formation process that makes it more difficult for the students to use.

In **clipping**, which was another word formation process assessed, St Magarets' School had 25%, which is the highest percentage usage here. Atakumosa High School, Osu had 20.8%, Ilesa Grammar School, Ilesa had the same percentage of 16.6% with Ifewara High School, Ifewara. This might be due to the technical nature of clipping. Here, we subtract or clip - off part of the original word as in telephone, where 'tele' is clipped off from 'phone' and meaning is not affected.

In **acronyms**, St Magarets School had the highest percentage usage of 28.5%, Ilesa Grammar School and Atakumosa High School, Osu had 21.4% and no other school had up to 15% afterwards. It is in this area that we have the highest percentage usage throughout the word formation processes usage. This, we think, might be due to the simplicity of its nature whereby the first alphabets of words are picked to form acronyms and some of them are even pronounced as words as in ECOWAS.

Affixation, which comprises prefixes and suffixes, is the addition of one or more affixes to a root either at the beginning (prefix) or at the end (suffix). Here, St Magarets School had 22.5%, Ilesa Grammar School had 20%, Atakumosa High School, Osu had 17.5% while St Lawrences Grammar School had 15% under prefixes, and the result was almost the same under suffixes. These are general phenomenon and this, we suspected, had caused the little differences that we had in the percentage usage among those schools.

6. Conclusion, observations and comments

Generally, these facts are considered as some of the remote factors that really affected the word formation processes in those chosen schools and secondary schools in general in the State of Osun and Nigeria as a whole.

- Location / site of schools:

This is a factor that had really influenced the teaching of word formation processes in schools. For instance, students in urban areas are more privileged than the ones in the rural areas in that they have access to internet facilities, library, funding from NGOs, more qualified teachers, more exposure to reading materials in classes etc. With all these facilities studying is made easy for students in urban areas. This is even reflected in the research carried out on those six schools. All the schools in the central places had higher percentage usage of the word formation processes. So, we want to suggest that social amenities should be well distributed and to the local / rural areas. These amenities include more exposure to the use of English language through radio, television, newspapers etc.

- The quality of teachers:

Most teachers posted to the rural areas in most cases are less qualified and even when they are qualified, they try to divert their attention to farming instead of dedicating much of their

time to teaching the students, and they even take the students to farms. This factor can be explained further as due to the low value given to the teachers. They are not well remunerated; they are the least paid set of workers in the nation. Imagine a situation whereby a cleaner in the federal civil service earns more than a principal in secondary school. So, we want to suggest that teachers should be well remunerated for us to have a good feedback on the academic performance of the students.

- Concentration of social amenities in the urban areas

We want to say that if a school is in a rural area and the area is having pipe borne water, electricity and well stocked library, the environment will be a serene environment and studying will be easier there.

Suggestions

Consequently, there is poor quality of writing from the primary level to the university level. If the government had risen to help in their own small ways by providing necessary amenities in all the necessary areas, rate the teachers high in terms of remuneration, fund the schools adequately by providing them with adequate stationeries like diaries, registers, chalks, text books for the students, etc, there will be improvement in the quality of the students, the output of the teachers and the development in the home, in the immediate community of the students and the nation as a whole.

In addition seminars and conferences should be organized; computer training should be made compulsory for every teacher, as a way of updating them to be able to meet up with the recent technological advancement and the Millennium Development Goals in the nation. Then, teachers should be highly valued; they will even want to go to such a school not minding whether it is located in a rural area.

Furthermore, as it was when the missionaries came to Nigeria with the gospel which brought about founding of schools in towns like Lagos, Abeokuta and Calabar, the Roman Catholic Mission stayed glued to the instruction of the missionaries that English Language should be the language of instruction and that vernacular speaking is prohibited in schools. If this is adhered to in our public and private schools strictly, since English Language is not our native language, there will be improvement in the word formation process situation of the students. This will even go a long way in equipping the students in understanding the four basic skills of language (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

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