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An Analysis of the Communicative Skills of Undergraduate Students of the University of Cape Coast from a Linguistic Perspective, Ghana

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Abstract:

Research has showed that pre-university institutions have a culture and practices which are different from tertiary institutions. Engaging in academic pursuits at the university level goes with challenges. The Communicative Skills (CS) course, a form of Academic Literacy (AL) or English for Academic Purpose (EAP) program at the university level, exposes fresh students to techniques, methods, approaches and some orientation they will require to pursue their undergraduate studies with minimum difficulty. The CS course equips students with skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. It also emphasizes effective ways of gathering, organizing, recording and retrieving information. In view of the fact that English is the medium of communication in universities in Ghana, various aspects of its structure that may facilitate effective communication are highlighted in the CS course. The CS course equips students with skills that will help them pay attention to grammaticality and conventions of usage in English. In this paper, I focused on the linguistic aspect of the communicative skills of undergraduate students of the University of Cape Coast (UCC). I analyzed errors of grammar and other conventions of usage in the English of the students. The current study was underpinned by the Error Analysis (EA) theory due to its linguistic nature. The analysis of the errors of students revealed that they committed errors of grammar, syntax, morphology and collocation and these affected the communicative functions of the English they used.

Keywords: Communicative skills, English for academic purpose, error analysis, English, disciplinary communities, communication

1. Introduction

The institutionalization of English for Academic Purpose (EAP) and allied programs in English-medium universities and universities worldwide was due to the role of English as channel of instruction and interaction (Duszak, 1997). In the UK, EAP programs emerged due to the internationalization of tertiary education (Jordan, 2002), while in the US it sprouted as a response to decline in the quality of writing of students (Bazerman & Russell, 1994). Writing programs in the US took the form of Freshman Composition, Writing in the Disciplines, Writing across the Curriculum among others. Due to the international nature of universities, globally, EAP and similar programs were instituted in Europe, Latin America, Canada, Asia and Africa. The establishment of EAP and other allied writing programs in tertiary institutions is characterized by the assumption that writing at the pre-university stage is different from the kind of writing that is required at the tertiary level (Alfers & Dison, 2000). Writing programs at the university serve students from the various disciplinary communities to equip them with requisite skills in the pursuit of their academic work. Another assumption is that Students from the pre-university stage enter the university with skills, experiences and attitudes that are not suitable enough for the nature of academic work at the university (Martin & Peter, 1985). An EAP program prepares fresh students and ensures a smooth transition from the pre-university stage to the university level. While a number of foreign universities use labels such as English for Academic Purpose (EAP), English for Specific Purpose (ESP) or English for Communication Purpose (ECP) to depict the preparatory writing course for fresh students, Universities in Africa generally use names like Communicative Skills, Communication Skills or Use of English. In most of the tertiary institutions in Ghana, an EAP program is referred to as Communicative Skills (Afful, 2007).

In the Universities in Ghana, the Communicative Skills (CS) course constitutes a multifaceted set of skills which are required for first year undergraduate students to function effectively in their various discipline-specific areas and to pursue their academic work with minimum difficulty. The CS course is designed to help students in the pursuit of their academic goals throughout their undergraduate period in the university (Johns & Swales, 2002). At the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, CS is a university-wide course. It is designed to serve the different needs of the diverse groups of fresh students to equip them with requisite skills to undertake various academic tasks and to participate in university activities. When fresh students are admitted into the University of Cape Coast, they are required to take the CS course for two semesters. For the first semester, students are equipped with reading skills, listening and speaking skills, study skills, language skills, referencing and plagiarism. The second semester CS course at the University of Cape Coast, which is a

sequel to the first semester, equips students with skills on writing paragraphs, essays and functional discourses. Students are also taught language skills, editing, proof-reading and documentation.

In the current article, I focused on the language skills of fresh undergraduate students pursuing the CS course at the University of Cape Coast; I analyzed the errors or deviations in their use of the English language.

1.1. Research Problem

The errors that second language learners commit in their English have become the concern of research in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) or Error Analysis (EA) in Linguistics. From the literature, Vasquez (2008) analyzed the errors in the English of a female Spanish-speaking student. The results showed that there were omissions, additions and misplacement of English lexical items. The errors also demonstrated interference from the student's mother tongue (L1). Amiri and Puteh (2017) examined the different types of errors in the writing of international postgraduate students pursuing an intensive English course. The results of the study revealed six different errors in the English written by the students: Parts of speech, spelling, subject-verb agreement, punctuation, sentence structure and vocabulary.

Error Analysis in Linguistics helps researchers and teachers to identify, classify and determine the impact errors may have on students' academic performance and their ability to communicate meaningfully in writing. Errors have been categorized into interlingual, intralingual and developmental (Corder, 1974). Interlingual errors are caused by the influence of the mother tongue (L1) on the production of the target language (Schachter & Celce-Murcia, 1977). A number of linguistic researchers have attributed foreign language learners' errors to L1 influence: Richards, 1974; Lim, 2003; Noor, 1996; Mahmoud, 2005; Al-Khresheh, 2010, 2011 among others. Nemser (1974) postulated that the use of L1 is unavoidable while learning the second language(L2). Al-Nofaie (2010) observed that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners utilize their L1 as a tool to learn their L2. However, according to Richard et al (2002), mother tongue (L1) interference is not the only source of EFL learners' errors. Second language (L2) learners' errors can also be caused by the target language (TL) itself (Hashim, 1999); this type of error is called intralingual error. It might be caused by inadequate knowledge of the TL or misapplication of some TL rules. Developmental errors are results of the normal pattern of acquisition in the language learning process. They indicate that learners have commenced developing their linguistic knowledge but fail to apply the rules they have been exposed to in the target language.

The errors that EFL learners commit in their writing are many and varied. The problem the current study seeks to address is the type or nature of errors that the first-year undergraduate students pursuing the CS course at UCC commit in their writing of English, given that these students have received twelve years of tuition in English.

2. Review of Literature

Since its establishment, about three decades ago, the CS course at the University of Cape Coast had engaged the attention of a number of researchers. Given that the CS course offers a multifaceted set of skills that are required for students to function effectively in their discipline-specific areas in the university, the investigations that had been conducted on the communicative skills of undergraduate students were geared towards verifying the functionality and effectiveness of the CS course as a form of Academic Literacy or English for Academic Purpose program.

Afful (2007) advocated for a change in the CS curriculum at the University of Cape Coast. He advanced three reasons: The first was a shift in the notion of academic literacy. Hitherto, academic literacy was generic; it was designed for all disciplines. However, the current notion of academic literacy recognizes diversity in disciplinary communities. This entailed a transfer of knowledge and skills from a general linguistic perspective to specific disciplinary contexts. Secondly, as students contributed towards their own education, it would be expected that stakeholders (Government, Ministry of Education and University Management) would regularly evaluate the curricula at the Universities to make them functional enough for the benefit of students and to meet the needs of the society. However, the caliber of the students produced by the universities leaves much to be desired. The third reason was based on views of students and faculty from the Departments of English, Sociology and Zoology of the University of Cape Coast about the CS course (Afful, 2005). From the study, while some faculty members expressed their opinions about the usefulness of the CS course, others were skeptical. Some students also talked about the usefulness of the CS course but suggested modification of its curriculum and a critical assessment of the instructors and duration of teaching. These views according to Afful (2007) suggested the need for a gradual evaluation and restructuring of the CS curriculum.

Afful (2007) proposed a change in the CS curriculum of the University of Cape Coast. The proposed change was presented from three perspectives: First, the proposed curriculum should consider the foundational and remedial functions of the CS course. For the foundational function, the CS course should help students function effectively in the university community, especially, in the performance of their academic tasks. This is because the world of the university is new to fresh students; it is therefore necessary for them to be aided and equipped with appropriate skills to enable them to adapt to their new environment. With respect to the remedial function, the proposed CS curriculum should tackle the language deficiencies of students. The reason is that students use language in their diverse discipline-specific areas. The CS course should therefore assist students to acquire the needed language skills for university work. From a second perspective, the proposed CS curriculum should maintain a balance between generic approach and discipline specific requirements. According to Afful (ibid), the proposed CS curriculum can draw on the generic features of academic discourse to guide students along a more independent study path and awareness of discipline-specific features in their disciplinary communities. The third perspective of the proposed CS curriculum presents three pedagogical approaches: The skills-based, the theme-based and generalist-based/discipline-specific based approaches. The first approach proposes an integrative method involving the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). This is because

according to Afful (ibid) the CS curriculum places far more emphasis on reading and writing. The second approach in teaching the proposed CS curriculum (the theme-based approach) can draw on the social, cultural and historical context of Ghana in the selection of teaching materials. The third pedagogical approach that was proposed was that both the discipline-specific teacher and the academic literacy tutor should collaborate in teaching various aspects of writing. The CS instructor has to be complemented by the subject teacher in the discipline-specific context.

Gyasi, Nartey and Coker (2011) reported on a preliminary study of first year Communicative Skills students' knowledge of parts of speech in English at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The students were given two sets of tests (single sentences and a paragraph) and they were to identify the word classes of highlighted words. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis; the corpus was analyzed statistically and descriptively. The results of the study showed that first year students pursuing the CS course at the University of Cape Coast had inadequate knowledge of basic English grammar. There was no significant difference with reference to students' programs of study and their performance in identifying parts of speech; in other words, performance was poor across programs. Furthermore, another aspect of the findings also demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference between students' gender and their performance in the test; both male and female students did not have sound knowledge of parts of speech. From the preliminary report of Gyasi et al (2011), the students had low understanding of word classes; they lacked active knowledge of parts of speech. The overall students' performance in the grammar exercise was not impressive. The authors used the words 'abysmal' and 'gloomy' in their report to depict the weak performance of students. They recommend a needs analysis research to guide the restructuring of the CS curriculum. Parallel to Gyasi et al (2011) was the study by Dako and Forson (1997) on university students. The results of the study showed that students lacked adequate knowledge of grammar and idiomatic expressions. Edu-Buandoh (1997) also revealed the poor performance of the English of students. From her findings, a number of factors could be attributed to this: The nature of the English curriculum, inadequate time devoted to grammar, insufficient reading and improper attitude of both teachers and students in the teaching of grammar.

In another research, Gborsong, Afful, Coker, Akoto, Twumasi and Baiden (2015) reported on the academic needs of students of Communicative Skills at UCC. Using the questionnaire research instrument, the authors gathered information on CS students' needs and their lecturer's views concerning the needs of their students. The results of the study showed that students demonstrated great need for grammatical knowledge. Students also strongly agreed that the CS course is relevant to their education. They expressed the importance of the CS course as it helps them improve on their English. This need for grammar can be connected to earlier studies by Dako and Forson (1997), Dzameshie (1997) and Gyasi et al (2011) which revealed inadequate knowledge of grammar of university students. Having expressed their need for grammar, the students in Gborsong et al (2015) were of the view that aspects of the CS course such as note-taking, note-making, outline, skimming and scanning should be excluded from the course content because they were no more useful. From the findings of Gborsong et al (2015), it was realized that although lecturers regarded the CS course as relevant to university education, they felt that paragraph development and essay writing were not so useful. This opinion expressed by the CS instructors, the authors thought, would undermine one of the major attributes of the CS course which is equipping students with writing skills. Another aspect of the findings was that while the lecturers agreed to a discipline-specific approach to the teaching of the CS course, the students were not too enthusiastic. This need of the lecturers, the authors felt, would give rise to different course contents and techniques of delivery which would be suitable for the CS students who were drawn from different disciplines within the university academic community. However, both students and lecturers were of the view that the CS course should include topics such as oral communication, CV and proposal writing and power point presentation. From Gborsong et al (2015) it can be deduced that the students demonstrated a positive attitude towards the CS course. The study drew attention to the modification and restructuring of the CS course to meet the needs of students.

Torto, Boakye, Otchere, Yeboah and Owusu-Pepurah (2016) investigated the correlation between the performance of first year students of the University of Cape Coast in the CS course and their grades in English in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSSCE). The authors did a statistical analysis of students' entry grades in English and the grades they obtained in the CS course to establish the relationship between them. The results of the analysis of the corpus proved a positive relationship between the entry grades of students in English and the grades they obtained in the CS course. Some students had grades in the CS course that were similar to their WASSSCE English grades. In another instance, students' grades in the CS course went higher or lower than their WASSSCE English grades. Torto et al (2016) concluded that students' entry grades in English were predictable of their performance in the CS course at the university. Indeed, the educational background of students to a large extent has an impact on their academic performance, subsequently (Quansah, 2000). It is worth postulating that if a student scored grade 'A' in English at WASSSCE, he or she is likely to perform very well in an EAP program like the CS course at the tertiary level.

From the existing literature on the CS course at the University of Cape Coast, Afful (2007) proposed a change in the CS curriculum, Gyasi et al (2011) reported on first year CS students' knowledge of parts of speech in English, Gborsong et al (2015) did an analysis of the academic needs of CS students and Torto et al (2016) studied the correlation between the performance of first year students of UCC in the CS course and their grades in English in the WASSSCE. What still needed to be investigated was a whole linguistic analysis of the errors in the English of first year CS students of UCC as English plays a pivotal role in EAP and allied programs at the university level. The current paper analyzed the errors in the writing of first year students pursuing the CS course at UCC in order to fill the knowledge gap in the literature.

3. Theoretical Perspectives of the Study

Writing in English is normally a challenge to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and committing errors is an inevitable part of language learners' writing. According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), samples of learners' productive English comprise the best technique to investigate Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Corder (1967) and Brown (2000) stressed the importance of the study of the errors of the language learner since it demonstrated the state of the learner's linguistic knowledge. The analysis of the errors of learners helps researchers learn a great deal about the Second Language Acquisition process through the identification of the strategies that language learners employ (Corder, *ibid*).

The current study was underpinned by the Error Analysis (EA) theory which was introduced by Corder (*ibid*). The EA theory was an alternative to the Contrastive Analysis (CA) theory which had been the dominant approach employed in conceptualizing learners' errors in the 1950s. The key assumption of this theory was that second language (L2) learners' errors were the effect of interlingual interference from their native language (L1). In other words, the linguistic backgrounds of the language learners adversely affect the acquisition of the target language (TL). According to Fang and Xue-mei (2007), Contrastive Analysis hypothesis claimed that the main set-back to SLA is the interference of L1 system with the L2 system and that a technical, structural comparison of the two languages would enable linguistic researchers to predict and describe pertinent language learning problems. The CA theory was effective and well-known for its ability to compare the structures of two languages, L1 and TL, in order to identify the areas of similarities and differences between them (Al-Khresheh, 2013).

Although the CA theory was prominent in the field of SLA for the investigation of L2 learners' errors until the late sixties, it had some flaws. The CA theory explained errors committed by L2 learners by comparing two language systems, L1 and L2, of learners. In this context, similar structures of the two languages in question might be easy to acquire, but the different ones might be difficult and as a result might lead to different types of errors. The objective was to predict the areas of differences between the L1 and L2. Consequently, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) researchers were optimistic about the predictive ability of the CA theory approach. However, research in the field of Error Analysis showed that Contrastive Analysis was unable to predict a vast majority of errors. The main criticism of the CA theory was that interlingual interference from the L1 is not the only reason for the occurrence of L2 learners' errors in SLA (Al-Khresheh, 2015). As a reaction to this criticism, the EA theory occupied the mainstream in the field of SLA research. The EA theory had challenged the CA theory on the grounds that L2 learners' errors are not caused only by interlingual interference from the L1, but they might also occur because of intralingual interference from the TL itself. A key finding of the EA theory approach demonstrated that many L2 learners' errors were produced as a result of negative inferences about the rules that govern the new language (L2). Hence, there was the need for another approach in SLA to explicitly depict L2 learners' errors. This gave rise to the establishment of Error Analysis in SLA by Corder and his colleague linguists in the 1960s. As a branch of linguistics, Error Analysis was regarded as the most suitable instrument for analyzing L2 learners' errors.

According to Mahmoodzadeh (2012), Error Analysis is a framework that was employed to identify, categorize and explain L2 learners' errors. The Error Analysis (EA) theory provided a good methodology for investigating L2 learners' errors. The EA theory was instrumental in the current study as it played a fundamental role in the investigation, identification, description and explanation of the errors that first year students of the University of Cape Coast pursuing the CS course committed in their English

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

Research designs are plans and the procedures for research. Creswell (2009) presented three types of designs: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Qualitative design is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers interpret what they perceive, hear and comprehend. Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examination of documents, observation of behavioral patterns or interviewing of participants; qualitative researchers make interpretations of the meaning of the corpus. Quantitative research design, on the other hand, examines the correlation among research variables which are measured, normally on instruments, in order that numerical data can be analyzed using statistical procedures. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is framed in terms of the use of lexical items to interpret, describe or explain data (qualitative) rather than numbers (quantitative). Mixed methods research design incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a study (Creswell, 2009). The mixed methods design entails the use of both forms of research designs in a particular investigation so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Furthermore, the combined use of both qualitative and quantitative designs provides an extensive comprehension of the research problem.

The research design employed in the current study is the mixed methods approach. The qualitative design offered me the opportunity to study the linguistic behavior of my students who were EFL learners. With the qualitative design, the interpretation, description and explanation of the errors committed by my students in the Second Language Acquisition process were achieved. On the other hand, the quantitative design enabled me to measure the research variables. The frequency, distribution and illustration of the linguistic errors of my students were made possible by the quantitative design.

4.2. Research Participants

The research participants of the current study were two hundred and two (202) in number and they were first year undergraduate students of UCC that the author himself taught the CS course for a semester. The subjects of the research had been equipped with skills in the use of the English language for the pursuit of their discipline-specific programs. The research participants were selected on the basis of convenience. The researcher employed the availability sampling technique since the students were available for the study.

4.3. Analytical Procedures

The current study employed the five steps in Error Analysis research proposed by Corder (1974). The first step in Error Analysis, according to Corder, is the collection of a sample of learner language. The sample would enable the researcher to make explicit statements regarding the kind of error the learner produces and under what conditions (Ellis, 1994). After the data of the learner's language have been collected, the second step is identification of the errors. This depends on the deviations from the norms of the target language (TL). Identifying L2 learners' errors is fundamental in determining the standard against which a certain usage is considered erroneous. The error analyst should be aware of the mechanisms that trigger the errors. The third step in Error Analysis proposed by Corder (1974) is the description of errors. Description allows a detailed depiction of specific errors and a quantification of a data of errors. Description of errors helps in creating categories and subcategories for errors which could aid the process of development of a comprehensive taxonomy of EFL learners' errors (Al-Khresheh, 2016). The fourth of the steps of Error Analysis is the explanation of errors and this is fundamental in the process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Explaining errors entails determining their sources in order to account for the reasons why they were committed (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). The fifth step of Error Analysis proposed by Corder (1974) is the evaluation of errors. This step is motivated by the desire of linguists to improve language pedagogy. The evaluation of errors is based on the assessment of the errors in terms of grammaticality, semantics, comprehensibility, phonology, morphology and syntax. The evaluation is also influenced by the context in which the errors occurred.

4.4. Data Collection

The collection of data for the current study was done in line with the first step in Error Analysis research proposed by Corder (1974). I collected the sample of the language of the research participants through a test in English language which was part of the CS course end-of-semester examination. The students were instructed to rewrite a number of sentences which had errors created in them and they were told to correct any errors they could find. For the current study, I used a more specific technique in the collection of the sample of the language of my students as compared to a massive sample of language use from a large number of learners representing an entire population or a type of sample that is collected from a single learner.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

In the current study, the research participants were given sentences with errors in them and this was to test the students' knowledge and awareness of these errors. The students were to identify and correct the errors in the sentences that they were to work on. The test was based on the data of English the students had been exposed to in the first year of their Communicative Skills course at the University of Cape Coast.

A quantitative analysis of the data collected produced statistical information concerning the errors that were committed by the students who participated in the study. The quantitative analysis of the data collected has been depicted in a tabular form below:

5.1. Quantitative Analysis of the Data Collected

| Sentences | Type of Error | Frequency | Percentages |
|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | To-infinitive | 82 | 41 |
| 2 | Relative pronoun | 44 | 22 |
| 3 | Verb pattern | 109 | 54 |
| 4 | Idiomatic expression | 72 | 36 |
| 5 | Correlative conjunction | 124 | 61 |
| 6 | Morphology | 191 | 95 |
| 7 | Collocation | 129 | 64 |
| 8 | Vocabulary | 199 | 99 |
| 9 | Sequence of tense | 67 | 33 |

Table 1: Quantitative Analysis of the Data Collected

- Sentence 1: *I have no intention to intimidating students in my class.*

From the statistical table above, 82 (41%) of the 202 fresh undergraduate students pursuing the Communicative Skills course who participated in the test could not identify the error in sentence one. The sentence tested the use of the *to-infinitive* form of the verb. In the sentence, the word *to* is an infinitive marker; therefore, the verb *intimidating* should be in the infinitive form *intimidate*, the base form of the verb. In the context of the sentence above, the *to-infinitive* form *to intimidate* functions as a post-modifier of the abstract noun *intention*. There are other functions of the *to-infinitive* form of

the verb. It is used to express purpose: *Kwame closed the window to keep insects out.* It also comes after an adjective of quality: *The boy was too small to catch the ball.*

- Sentence 2: *I met the man who you asked to come to my office.*

Sentence two tested the students' knowledge on the functions of relative pronouns. The sentence has a problem of wrong choice of a relative pronoun. From the data analysis, 44 (22%) of the students could not identify the error. The use of the relative pronoun *who* is ungrammatical because it functions as subject. In the above sentence, the relative clause *who you asked to come to my office* already has a subject *you*; the clause does not therefore need another subject. The appropriate relative pronoun is *whom* which will function as object of the verb *asked* in the relative clause. The correct sentence is: *I met the man whom you asked to come to my office.*

- Sentence 3: *Had the students read their notes, they would have been performing well in the examination.*

Sentence three tested the students' knowledge on the verb patterns in conditional sentences. The data analysis proved that 109 (54%) of the students could not correct the wrong verb form in the main clause of the sentence. The subordinate clause has a verb in the past perfect *had read*. The main clause should have a verb phrase that comprised the past tense form of the modal *would* and the present perfect form of the main verb *have performed*. Sentence four has a structure like a conditional sentence: *If the students had read their notes, they would have performed well in the examination.* From the sentence, the expected outcome in the main clause was not met because the condition in the subordinate clause was not fulfilled.

- Sentence 4: *An important lesson in life is to learn not to cry over spoiled milk.*

Sentence four was a test on the idiomatic expression *cry over spilled milk*. The analysis of the data revealed that 72 (36%) of the students were not familiar with the idiom in the sentence. The word *spoiled* in the idiom is a wrong lexical item; the correct word should be *spilled* or *spilt*. This error changed the form and meaning of the idiom. An idiomatic expression has a meaning which is different from the meaning of the words in it. An idiom has a figurative meaning which is distinct from the literal meaning of the individual words. An idiomatic expression has a hidden meaning which must be learnt as a whole unit. The idiom in the sentence above *cry over spilled milk* means that we should not express remorse for something that has happened and cannot be remedied.

- Sentence 5: *No sooner had the police left the crime scene when the robbers bolted away.*

Sentence five was a test on students' knowledge on the use of correlative conjunctions. From the statistical analysis, 124 (61%) of the students could not correct the error with respect to the wrong use of the correlative conjunction. *No sooner* does not correlate with *when*; it functions together with *than*. As correlative conjunctions, *No sooner* and *than* work in tandem; there is a connection between them in a sentence. The correlative conjunction *No sooner...than* is used to suggest that one action or situation occurs immediately after another. In the above sentence *No sooner* introduces the first event which is the departure of the police and this is connected to the second event, the bolting away of the robbers which occurs immediately after the first event: *No sooner had the police left the crime scene than the robbers bolted away.*

- Sentence 6: *Our President seldomly tweets about the plight of his people lately.*

Sentence six has a morphological problem. It tested the students' awareness of the form of the word *seldom*. From the analysis of the data, 191 (95%) of the 202 students who participated in the study did not know about the correct form of the word *seldomly*. The lexical item *seldomly* functions adverbially but it does not end in *-ly* like many other adverbs in English. The correct form of *seldomly* is *seldom* which means rarely or not often. In the sentence above, *seldom* functions as an adverbial.

- Sentence 7: *The myth that men are superior than women in some parts of the world persists.*

Sentence seven has a problem of collocation. The analysis of the data revealed that 129 (64%) of the students could not identify the collocation problem in the sentence. The word in focus is *superior* and it is collocating with *than*. This is wrong because *superior* is an adjective which is comparing men and women. In this comparative function, *superior* should collocate with *to* and not *than*. The collocation of the adjective *superior* with the preposition *to* in the sentence above means men are better, stronger or greater than women.

- Sentence 8: *Unlicensed fishing vessels trolling the waters of the country will be impounded by the state.*

Sentence eight tested the students' repertoire of words. The word *trolling* is inappropriate in the context of the sentence. *Trolling* depicts normal or casual fishing that entails the use of a rod, hook and line. The suitable word is *trawling* which depicts a more extensive fishing method. *Trawling* entails the use of a large net with a wide opening which is dragged along the depth of the ocean by a boat. From the statistical analysis, 199 (99%) of the students could not correct the error in the sentence.

- Sentence 9: *The Minister said students on the gold track will report on the 10th of November.*

Sentence nine tested the students' grammatical knowledge on sequence of tense in reported speech. In the sentence, the first clause (reporting clause) has a verb in the simple past tense *said*. However, the second clause of the sentence has its verb in the present *will report*. For the sentence to be grammatical, the verb of the second clause should be in the past *would report*. The analysis of the data revealed that 67 (33%) of the students failed to identify the error in the sentence.

6. Conclusion

Writing programs at the university level serve the different needs of the diverse groups of students by equipping them with skills to undertake various academic tasks. The establishment of English for Academic Purpose (EAP), English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and allied programs in universities globally was due to the role of English as medium of instruction and interaction. EAP programs prepare fresh students and facilitate a smooth and gradual transition from the pre-university stage to the tertiary. As a form of EAP program in Ghana, the Communicative Skills (CS) course equips

students with study, writing and language skills. The CS course also concerns itself with the language deficiencies of students. The current paper focused on the communicative skills of fresh undergraduate students from a linguistic perspective by analyzing the errors they commit in their English. The study revealed errors of grammar, syntax, morphology and collocation. These errors are indications of incomplete learning and inadequate language knowledge which may enable students to avoid linguistic misuse. The errors also depict false application of certain target language rules. Although errors in English affect communication adversely, they provide researchers and instructors with evidence of how a foreign language like English is learned or acquired and also serve as devices the learners employ in order to learn.

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