

**English Participle Problems in Written Essays as Global
Challenges in Language: A Syntactic Assessment of the
Students of Akwa Ibom State University in a Second Language Situation**

By

Susanna T. Udoka

Department Of English

Obio Akpa Campus. Akwa Ibom State University

Abstract

This paper focused attention on English Participle Problems in written essays of the students of Akwa Ibom State University as global challenges in language education in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general in their Use of English course. It also tried to find out how teaching and learning of participle as a major close class item can be improved upon In order to check the constraints they face and the possible ways of helping them to overcome such difficulties. To achieve this goal, essays were administered on 200 students who were selected by simple stratified random sampling technique from five out of the seven faculties of the university. The participle problems are to be identified based on the assumption that in a second language situation, learners (the students) are bound to face difficulties in studying the grammatical units of the language. The theoretical framework used in this work is Error Analysis Approach because errors will always be made, in that, by their nature, they are systematic infringements on the normal rules of the language; and are important in learning process, being a pointer to the extent to which learning has taken place. Based on their performance, conclusions were drawn and generalisations made, Recommendations were also offered with a view to providing solutions to the problems posed by these aspect of grammatical elements through the application of open educational resources for development and expansion in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general in a second language situation.

Key Words: *English Participles Problems, Global Challenges, Higher Education, Second Language Situation, Africa*

Introduction

In countries like Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Britain, English is used as first language (L), whereas it is used as a second and official language in many of the former British colonies. Nigeria is one of such countries that use English as a second and official language (Eze, 2010). The present geographical location or landmass called Nigeria is a conglomeration of many ethnic nationalities varying in sizes, practising as many cultures as possible, having an extended speech community and a dominant language- Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, Edo, Anaang and among others.

According to Uzozie cited in Eze (2010) "the origin of English Language in Nigeria is shrouded in obscurity". The colonial masters had a very poor regard for the background languages which to them were not extensive or of any quality to merit any form of rating (i.e.

Low or high that period merely witnessed the institutionalisation of English language learning in Nigeria's educational institutions. The result of this posture was the imposition of their English language on Nigerians Omelewa (1984) cited in Exe (2010) explained that the missionaries who came to Badury near Lagos in 1842 Introduced English into Nigeria. Schools were opened and pupils were taught in English language. These schools, churches and government institutions were established to aid the governing of the native Africans.

The English language in Nigeria has acquired new forms of manifestation in Nigeria following the multilingual posture of the geo-political environment that make up Nigeria. The very English that loft England and touched down the shores of Nigeria as far back as 1842 cannot be said to be the same English language today largely because it has undergone series of changes which have made scholars to come to a consensus that English language is a "multi-coloured one language". That is why a diachronic study of a language has tended to reveal the changes that occur over a period of time in the life of that language. No scholar can embark on a diachronic study of English language in Nigeria in isolation from its synchronic development if at all language could be seen as a product of history. This is because a valid diachronic analysis of any language should be based on an effective synchronic (descriptive) study (Eze, 2010).

In the words of Ubabakwe (1979) concerning the synchronic linguistics state of English in the Journals of Nigerian English: "The state of English is no longer in a cross road in Nigeria. English in Nigeria connotes English as a second language". Following the result of the interplay between English and the background or indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria, a new variety of English has emerged variously referred by scholars either as standard (educated) or non-standard (uneducated) English. A great many Nigerian users of English are not well informed in English grammatical rules. This category of Nigerians includes those who have little formal exposure to the use of English and the illiterate stocks who become exposed to some fragments of English in areas where pidgin variety does not flourish well. Consequently, they are confronted with the difficulties posed by errors in the use of the language, (L.e. breaking the native speaker's norms). On the Status of English in Nigeria

In England itself, English was long neglected mainly because it did not have any "grammar. Writers such as Dryden of the later half of the 17th century was said to have complained of the barbarity of the English tongue, by which he meant the absence of 'grammar in the form of set rules which were to have been patterned after the Latin grammar of the day, (ef. Bondi, Today, English is used by more speakers than its native speakers. This development has called for a reassessment of the status of English. The rate at which English spreads has brought a number of consequences upon it:

Its status has changed so considerably that it can no longer conveniently be referred to as the language of England. English has justifiably undergone a metamorphosis, a nativization characterizing the different cultures of the world (cf. Udodata, 2004).

The nativization process, normally, will take some time before the full emergence of the new variety. Nigerian English can not all of a sudden be said to have evolved all that is required for its grammar, as a settled rule or an established standard. That is to say that Nigerian English

presently has restricted registers which vary according to use. It is an agreed fact that the Nigerian ser of English speaks and writes the way he does, not only because of the influence of the written and spoken words but also because he in the main transfers us English the language bubits or devices of his first language (1.1)at all the linguistic levels.

Review of Literature

Researchers have found out that while some scholars noted that misplacement of participle in sentence technically referred to as dangling participle could pose problems, others hold the opinion that the poor quality of many of the teachers of English in ours schools constitut problem, Yet, other scholaes contend that linguistic change and the varieties of English spoken in Nigeria greatly affect the effective performance of students in their written csays tha been noted also that mother tongue interference is one of the major factors responsible for absence of proficiency in written English whereas learners of English as a second language tend to substitute the phonemes of English language with the sounds of their first language (L₁).

Dunstan (1989) puts up a different stand that "a strong tendency on the part of anyone learning a second language is to use sounds, syllable structure and rhythm of his mother tongue in place of the sound, syllable structure and rhythm of the language he is learning". To this stand by Dunstan, Atonwu (1976) and Obemata (1985) fully agreed. According to Broughton (1980) "by learning a foreign language, we see our own in perspective, we recognize that there are other ways of saying things, other ways of thinking, other patterns of emphasis.

It was noted that Nigerian languages and English language belong to different linguistic families. Following the point above, our secondary school teachers who laid the foundation in these students (now in the university), are bound to have superimposed the speech pattern of their first language on the English language they taught the students. Above all, many of these secondary school teachers of English did not have enough exposure to the language. Worse still, is the insufficiency of the teachers of the language and because of this, all sorts of teachers are assigned to teach in our secondary schools, hence, they lay the foundation in these children within the capacity of what they carry as far as teaching and learning of English in a second language situation is concerned.

Commenting on the competence and performance of students in a research, Enang (2015:13) carried out on the problems of English concord agreement encountered by first year students of Akwa Ibom State University, Enang cited Eze (2010) who pointed out that: Common sense tells us that children are like yam tendrils by the way they are directed. The teacher, like a farmer, directs the way of the children and moulds their character. In fact, the role of the teacher in the character formation, including the way they speak and write is enormous. That is, the linguistic input they acquire during their secondary school years constitutes the output (performance) we see in their first year. This is the level where all the stuffs they received from their teachers of English manifest by leaps and bounds.

Eze (2010) further commented in agreement with the above position by Enang who earlier on had cited him. He says: "It is true that most of the teachers of English language in our secondary schools are mere 'teachers' of the subject rather than "masters' of the subject, they impart to the students what they think is correct and not what they know is correct". In his book, Obiora (1976) opined, "the complexity of language learning demands the teacher to

have different methods at his finger tip and a number of skills in his command", but regretted that such teachers are still rare.

Many scholars have at various researches identified another source of problem that hinders students' effective performance in essay writing to be dangling 'participles. For instance, Damen (1997) noted that "dangling participle can cause serious misunderstanding in academic writing whenever participles are misused in speaking and writing". Anything that dangles is said to hang loosely without secure attachment. A participle dangles when there is no word in the sentence which it could properly qualify or when it seems to be related to a word which does not convey the meaning intended. Sometimes, dangling participle or modifier gives a ridiculous or humorous tone to meanings of most expressions. Enang (2012) identified two major positions in a sentence which participle or participial clause can conveniently occur for optimum functionality. These are: the beginning of a sentence or at the end of a sentence and is usually attached to a subject or object. For instance, in the sentences below:

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Walking down the street,
(Present Participial Clause) | Dr. Luke saw a
(Subj.) | mad man.
(Obj.) |
| 2 Dr. Luke (Subj.)
(Subj.) | saw a mad man,
(Obj.) | walking down the street
(Present Participial Clause) |
| 3. Disappointed by her behaviour,
(Past Participial Clause) | the family members
(Subj.) | left the court sadly.
(Obj.) |
| 4. The old man
(Subj.) | shouted loudly for joy.
(Obj.) | Surprised by his daughter's
performance.
(Past Participial Clause) |

However, there are cases when the subject is missing, or the very participle meant for a particular subject or object attaches itself to another case in a sentence, the string will seemingly "hangs" on nothing or on entirely a wrong nominal element (noun or pronoun). It thus becomes a dangling participle as in the following constructions:

5. Looking up the sky, the rain began to fall.
6. Entering the room, the odour of a burnt food came alive.
7. Trekking through the long tunnel, a wallet was picked up.

Reacting to a case such as expressed above, Donald (1992) noted that: Sometimes, there is a word in a sentence which the participle phrase properly modifies but the participle is not placed correctly as a result, the meaning is ambiguous and confusing. This error is commonly referred to as misplaced modifier. It shows that a participial phrase is wrongly placed in the sentence a result of which we see confusion and misunderstood expression which was not the initial intention in the sentence.

Cliff (2000) defines participle as "yet another verbal, a word derived from a verb". There are three verb forms in English that are known to be verbal. These are participles, gerunds and infinitives. They belong to the group of verbs called non-finite verb. They are verbal because they are derived from verbs and retain many of the characteristics of a verb.

Participle is a verb that acts as adjectives. It is a form of verbs that has undergone a change of form which lexically qualifies it for a time-based functionality. Two major participles are identifiable in English language; the past and the present participles which also function as verbal adjectives. On the other hand, a gerund is verbs withing also referred to as the present participle or the progressive participle, largely because it is used in the expression and or description of an action that takes place at the time or moment of speaking while infinitive is a verb in its basic or original form and is capable of serving as a foundation on root since it has not yet undergone any form of change.

This category of verb which is multivariate in nature has been one outstanding source of problems to most non-native speakers of English whenever they come face to face with construction of sentences that may require the use of this simple looking but complex lexical category in a second language situation. Commenting on this point, O'Connor (1967) affirmed that "it is well known that a child of ten years old or less can learn a language perfectly if he is brought up surrounded by that language, no matter where he was born or who his parents are". Guthrie (2003) and Eze (2010) agreed with Donald et al above to further show that the ever increasing size of English vocabularies results from two processes: the process of growth through which words enter the language and the process of change whereby words already in use in the language undergo alteration/s and or change/s in meaning. Words after entering the language continue to have a history. They change just as people do.

Indeed, statements about linguistic change in Nigeria cannot be made without recourse to existing description of the language in at least two varieties of development namely: Standard and non-standard usage. Large corpuses of English speakers in Nigeria are uneducated and are usually confronted with the difficulties arising from cosmopolitan norms. The solution at the disposal of these Nigerian bilinguals is what they offer as a substitute which is neither socially acceptable nor internationally intelligible. Our secondary school students mingle these class of Nigerian bilinguals, some of whom are the "teachers of English" from whose stuff they pick these wrong impressions. In addition, there is the influence of the society which does not provide our secondary school students adequate exposure to written English.

Broughton (1980) Argues

However good the teaching and however effective the learning, there will always be a place for remedial work of one kind or another because it is beyond the capacity of a human being to absorb perfectly and retain indefinitely everything he is presented with.

Broughton's postulate is adequate and timely. This is because the handicaps which the child experienced in the primary and secondary schools are inevitably carried forward to the tertiary institutions. It is at this level that Open Educational Resources will be harnessed for adequate remedial programme that will enhance Development and Expansion in Africa. On the Theme of Global Challenges in Language Education in Africa, the challenges to teacher educators in Nigeria and indeed, Africa are acute. Open Educational Resources (OER) makes documents media that useful for teaching, learning and assessing as well as for research purposes. The idea for open educational resources has numerous working definitions. The term was firstly coined at UNESCO's 2002 Forum on Open Courseware and designates "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions".

Historically, the term learning object was coined in 1994 by Wayne Hodgins and quickly gained currency among educators and institutional designers, popularising the idea that digital materials can be designed to allow easy reuse in a wide range of teaching and learning situations. The major aim of this programme is to give education free and at the bare minimum cost if any to our children and to the generation yet unborn. Going by the OER policy. Open educational resources policies are principles or tenets adopted by the governing bodies in support of the use of open content and practices in educational institutions. The availability of resource material for teaching and learning of virtually all the subject must not be treated with levity. That is why the problems posed by this aspect English language grammar to non-native speakers as far as participles are concerned would be a thing of the past if properly attended to. Equally, with the introduction of Open Educational Resources Centres in almost all the federal institutions across the globe, adequate room is made available for remedial programmes to be enacted with a focus on the areas of difficulties experienced by learner/users of English especially in a second language situation.

On Descriptive Study of English Participial Verbs:

In linguistics, a non-finite verb (or verbal) is a form of verb that is not limited by a subject and more generally is not fully inflected by categories that are marked inflectionally in language such as tense, aspect, mood, gender and person. As a result, a non-finite verb cannot serve as a predicate and cannot be used in an independent clause except if it is combined with an auxiliary verb as in the sentence:

8. Joe can speak. (or Joe speaks).

9. Uduak to write. This is not a well-formed sentence and as such it is ungrammatical to be considered as a sentence.

There are some cases where a non-finite verb operates in a dual capacity, serving as a verb first and as another syntactic category or part of speech. (e.g. gerunds and past participles) as in: "an unbudgeted expenditure", "the visiting King", "a stolen car", "a bastardised philosophy", "and an epileptic operation an unending enmity". The participles "-visiting". "stolen" and "unending" are each preceded by the article. Both participles (present and past participles) are verbal adjectives. This means that they first serve as verbs and then as adjectives, hence, the name verbal adjective.

Kinds of Participle and their Morphological Processes

There are two participles: the present participles and the past participles. They can both be used as adjectives as shown above. With regard to the formation of participles, it is reasonable to consider it under separate headings:

Present Participles:

The present participle is formed by adding "-ing" to the base of a verb and it is used in:

1. Continuous or Progressive verb forms. E.g.

10. I am leaving in the next five minutes.

11. The girls are swimming in the pool now.

2. As an Adjective E.g.

12. This is a dying patient of the time. 13. My late mother was a charming woman. 3. As a gerund operating as a nominal (both as subject and object) Noun: 14. Dr. Usen is afraid of flying. 15. I like dancing. 16. We love public speaking.

It should be noted that a present participle expresses an action or states a simultaneous action with that which is expressed by the predicate of the sentence. For instance,

17. The woman dancing in the risiti is crazy. 18. The girl shouting as down is a fool Note the exceptions in spelling when adding the "-ing" as in the following examples

(a) the final e drops as in ('come in "coming) wherem's do not drop as in ('Agr in Agrecing) while some verbis rather add or double the final consonant as in (si in sitting, 'cob in 'robbed). (b) final consonant L after a vowel is always doubled as in ('refer in 'referred', 'cancel" in cancelled)

Past Participles

Enang et al (2013) say that "a past participle is a verbal group or phrase which combines with the auxiliaries like "have", "has" and "had" to form the perfect form of the verb". E.g.

19. Uduak has gone home. (Present perfect tense using "has with past participle form of the verb 'gone'). 20. The boys have repaired the fans. (Same as No. 19 above)
21. My wife had driven the car to and from Calabar this moming (Same as 20 above). i. The past participle is formed by adding "-ed" or "-en" to the base form, except where it is an irregular verb.
22. A bastardised people.
23. The tired congregation,
24. Spoken words cannot be ignored. ii. It is combined with the verb "be" to form the passive.
25. The Irish lecturer was robbed in our airport a couple of days ago.
26. The two rooms were swept at the same time. iii. It is combined with the auxiliary verb "has", "have" to form the "perfect" aspect.
27. The registrar has closed for the day. 28. We have arrived safely.

Participial Phrases and Functions

1. Participial phrase as a subjective gerund as in the following examples
29. Looking through the window, Dr. Mensah saw the man and the woman kissed each other.
30. Running across the road, the madman was killed by a reckless bus driver.
2. Participial phrase as adjective
31. Dr. Udom cares for the dying and the wounded in his village (dying and the wounded persons).
32. Barr. Akpabio is the visiting Governor. 3. Functions as Verbal: where a participle does what ordinary adjectives hardly do. E.g. (i) Can take an object as in: you can
33. Receiving the news, *Chief Duroudo fell to the ground.*
34. Reading the letter, *Mr. Edmond sat in silent amazement.*

Conclusion

This paper focuses attention on getting reliable information on how to apply Open Education Resources in solving the problems posed by English participles in written essays of the students of Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria in particular and Africa in general in their Use of English course. It also tries to find out how teaching and learning of participle as a major close class item can be improved upon in order to check the constraints they face and

the possible ways of helping them to overcome such difficulties. The participle problems are to be identified based on the assumption that in a second language situation, learners (the students) are bound to face difficulties in studying the grammatical units of the language. Based on the findings made in this study, the following conclusions are arrived at: A greater number of second language users of the English language operate at a low level of competence in the area of participles, as could be seen in the subjects' performance in the test. Most user learners' problems in concord is on the aspects that have to do with verbs (pure, modal and main), especially, where the need for a careful manipulation of number disparity amongst subjects is a necessity. It has also been concluded that some of the concord errors committed by second language user/learners arise from the subject-verb rules that are conflicting, troublesome and confusing, especially, when the various exceptional rules are disregarded.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. The language curriculum used currently should be reviewed by designers to bring in extensive topics on participle principles; more grammar topics, mostly those that have to do with the verbal group for inclusion in the scheme of work and syllabuses. This done will bring about the expected concern for such aspects.
2. Painstaking and thorough teaching of topics on participles should be carried out by teachers of English to ensure adequate and wider exposure of the learner in that area.
3. Our teachers of English at the secondary schools and the lecturers of the Use of English in tertiary institutions should, as a matter of necessity, employ the interactive/question- answer method in their lessons not only to make the class lively and interesting at each point in time, but also to get the learners involved. By this, the user/learners' areas of weakness will easily be identified and promptly attended to.
4. Before and after each lesson on participles, exercises comprising increased number of objective questions on it should continually be administered to the learners, and subsequently backed up by comprehensive corrections to show, not only the answers, but also how the answers are arrived at.

Finally, to ensure that research findings, conclusions and recommendations are incorporated into the Use of English course curriculum to make teaching and learning of English in a second language situation meaningful and realistic, researches should be carried out by pure scholars/ academics, not academic politicians, in order to bridge the gap between teaching and research for a reflective Nigerian society.

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