Syntactic Errors In The Written English of Luganda-Speaking Public Secondary Students From Kampala-Entebbe Area

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed at investigating the nature, extent, and plausible causes of syntactic errors in the English compositions of Luganda-speaking male and female public secondary students from Kampala-Entebbe area in Uganda. These errors were identified, classified, and counted.

The sample of the study comprised 108 students (94 males and 14 females) of the academic year 1985, randomly chosen from four schools which were randomly selected from the 16 public secondary schools in the above area.

The independent variables of the study were the students' grade (first and fourth secondary grades) and their sex (male and female). The dependent variables were these types of syntactic errors:

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Which types of syntactic errors are predominant in the compositions of both first and fourth secondary students?

2. Are there any significant differences in the occurrences of each of the types of syntactic errors due to a) the grade effect b) the sex effect or c) the grade-sex interaction effect?

3. Are there any significant differences in the occurrences of the types of syntactic errors taken together due to a) the grade effect b) the sex effect or c) the grade-sex interaction effect?

4. What plausible causes may be postulated for the occurrences of these errors?

Univariate F-tests df (1,104) were applied to detect the above effects on each error type. Multivariate tests (Hotelling's T-squared, Wilks, and Pillais) were used to detect the same effects on the error types taken together.

The results of the study were as follows:

1. The predominant errors among male students in both grades were prepositions, pronouns, and tense. The least predominant were auxiliary, and third-person singular. The most predominant error type for females in both grades was preposition. The least predominant for first secondary
females were copula, subject-verb agreement, plus number and concord, whereas for fourth grade females they were: copula, word order, and auxiliary.

2. There were significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the two grades with respect to: prepositions, auxiliary, sentence structure, and word order. First secondary students committed more of these errors than fourth secondary students. However, the other syntactic errors were found to be non-significant. Regarding the total number of errors committed by each student, first secondary students committed significantly ($\alpha = 0.05$) more errors than fourth secondary students. Furthermore there were significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between the two grades when all the error types were taken together: first secondary students committed more errors than fourth secondary students.

3. There were no significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between male and female students on any of the error types analysed, nor on the total number of errors committed by each student. There were also no significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the sexes with regard to all the error types taken together.

4. There were no interactive significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) on any of the syntactic errors analysed, nor on the total number of errors committed by each student. There were
also no interactive significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ with all the error types taken together.

5. Attempt was made to plausibly attribute the students' errors to: ignorance of grammatical rules and their restrictions, developmental processes, and interlingual structures.

Recommendations for further research were made and the pedagogical implications of the results of the study were discussed.