IMPACT OF STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THEORY ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCES IN MECHANICAL ACCURACY AND TEXT ORGANIZATION SKILLS

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Abstract: Competence in written English is a skill that is both critical and challenging among the Nigerian learners of English as a second language. This study has investigated the relative impact of structural linguistics and communicative competence theory on performance in terms of mechanical accuracy and organization skills in the written English of senior secondary schools students in Kano State of Nigeria. Stratified probability method of sampling has been used to select the six sample schools for the study, and systematic method of sampling has been used to select the twenty sample scripts for the study. Analytic scoring system has been used to score the sample scripts and descriptive statistics using percentages has been used to analyze the data. The results indicate that employing the principles and provisions of structural linguistic theory in written English among the subjects enables better exhibition of mechanical accuracy and organization skills than employing the provisions and principles of communicative competence theory. The study recommends among others that both teachers of written English and textbook writers of written English should be incorporating the provisions and principles of structural linguistic theory in the task of inculcating mechanical accuracy and organizational skills among learners of English as a second language.

Key words: Mechanical accuracy, Text organization, Structural linguistics, Communicative competence, Written English

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

This research work has been designed to investigate the extent to which applications of the principles and provisions of structural linguistics and communicative theories of language enable public senior secondary schools students in Kano State exhibit mechanical accuracy and organization skills in written English. This has been done in recognition of the crucial roles that these important variables (mechanical accuracy and organization skills) play in one's ability to write effectively.

Interest for this study has been developed out of the following circumstances: -

1. The researcher's long-term exposure to senior secondary schools students' performance in written English in his capacity as WAEC (The West African Examinations Council) examiner in written English
2. The pivotal role that written English plays among the senior secondary schools students especially in formal settings
3. The "unnaturalness", challenging and complex nature of written English compared to the other macro language skills of listening, speaking and reading
4. The general Nigerian public outcry, the various WAEC, NECO (National Examinations Council) annual Chief Examiners' Reports on the candidates' written English and various research reports which describe the senior secondary schools students' performances in written English as poor
5. The researcher's interest in investigating the possible impact of the two selected language theories as they relate to written English skills among senior secondary schools students

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the comparative impact of applications of the principles and provisions of structural linguistic theory and communicative theory as they relate to mechanical accuracy and organization skills in written English among public senior secondary schools students in Kano state of Nigeria
2. To determine which between structural linguistic theory and communicative theory would be the preferred theory to adopt in imparting the skills of mechanical accuracy and organization among the subjects of the study

Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the study:

1. Do the applications of the principles and provisions of structural linguistic theory lead to better exhibition of mechanical accuracy skills among public senior secondary schools students in Kano state than the applications of the provisions and principles of communicative theory?
2. Which, between the applications of the provisions and principles of structural linguistic theory and the applications of the provisions and principles of communicative theory ensure better organization skills in the written English of public senior secondary schools student in Kano state?

Basic Assumptions

This study has been based on the assumption that public senior secondary school students in Kano state have poor competence in terms of mechanical accuracy and organization skills in written English. Furthermore, application of both provisions and principles of structural linguistic theory and communicative theory enable the students to achieve equal competence in mechanical accuracy and organization skills in their written English.

Delimitation and Scope of the Study

The study is written within the confines of applied linguistics and it is limited to public senior secondary schools in Kano State of Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to be very useful to the following:

1. Departments of English in various Colleges of Education in Nigeria in their role as those who train English language teachers. Guided by this study's findings, they can best train English language teachers with regard to written English
2. English language textbook writers because they play critical roles in the learning of written English
3. Literature on general knowledge in English applied linguistics useful to intending researchers
4. Students in both secondary and tertiary levels of Nigeria's education system because knowledge testing at these levels depends largely on students' ability in written English
5. English language teachers because the study's findings would be useful towards enhancing the skills of written English among learners of English as a second language.

Statement of the Problem

A lot of applied linguists have reached the consensus that writing to communicate effectively particularly in a second language is a skill in which students all over the world have one problem or another. Arapoff (1972), Nunan, (1989), Raimes, (1983) and Tribble (1997) have all pointed to this fact. Problems in writing, especially in a second language, defy geographical, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

One of the problems second language writers face is in the area of knowledge of the second language itself. Weigle (2002:35) calls it "limited second language knowledge" and Williams (1990:160) calls it "users" low level of maturity with regard to their control of basic lexis and structure in the target language". Weigle (2002) states three major negative consequences of the poor linguistic knowledge. The first negative consequence is that it makes the cognitive processes of text generation (encoding one's ideas into written text) more difficult. Secondly, higher order issues in writing such as content generation are given less emphasis because the writer is struggling with linguistic issues, which took the largest chunk of devotion in the writing task. Finally, limited linguistic knowledge in the target language makes the written product of second language writers not to match the original writer's intention; text generation may tax the writer's resources so completely that the idea is lost from working memory before it can be put down on paper. ,

Cultural intrusions into the style of writing are another problem confronting second language writers. This is to say that writing in a second language situation is influenced by the writer's socio-cultural underpinnings, because writing, like language in general, is a meaning-making activity that is socially and culturally shaped (Sperlin, 1966).

This being the case, a limited socio-cultural rudiments of the target language could have negative effects on the appropriate ways in which various functions are expressed or expectations of readers from the target language. These "cultural ways" through which second language writing is undertaken can have grave consequences. Since readers bring their cultural background knowledge and expectations, misreading of the authors' intended meaning is possible.

The Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2004) recognizes English language to be a core subject in all levels of education. This being the case, it is only logical for one to expect the written English of senior secondary schools students to be generally good. Unfortunately, the contrary in generally reported to be the case. Ringim (2005), Aliyu (2001), Samuel et al (1992), Abubakar (2003), Sunusi et al (1997) and many others reported a wide-ranging incompetence in the written English of Nigeria's senior secondary schools students.

Conceptualization

Mechanical Accuracy: This is the writer's manipulation of the "mechanics of writing" to convey the intended meaning in the written text. It is made up of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and grammatical sentences.

Spelling: This is the writer's ability to write the letters of a word in their correct order. Spelling is a very tasking exercise among writers of English as a second language. Shuaib (2011) has found that spelling is the least exhibited writing skill among the subjects of the study.

Although there are certain general rules about spelling that are worth learning, there are some three hundred common words which are frequently miss spelt but not covered by any English spelling rule (Forrest 1982).

This has clearly shown that spelling is the most critical aspect of mechanical accuracy skill which needs to be researched into with a view to coming up with a way out.

Punctuation: This is the ability of the writer to employ skillfully the use of both the internal and the end punctuation marks in the written discourse. Written English involves encoding words, phrases and sentences that transmit ideas, opinions, instructions, observations, etc. to the reader. This is not done anyhow, but is done in an organized and systematic way (Aliyu 2006). Correct punctuation of any written discourse is very essential for the intended meaning to be understood; poor or wrong punctuation could result in absurdity or awkwardness of the intended meaning.
According to Waldhorn & Zeiger (1985:96), the general principles governing the use of punctuation are that "if it does not clarify the text, it should be omitted and that in the choice and placing of punctuation marks the sole aim should be to bring out more clearly the author's thought". These general principles governing the use of punctuation suggest that punctuation is generally bound to communication, not rules.
According to Waldhorn & Zeiger (1985:96), there are two practices with regard to punctuation: formal and informal punctuation. In formal punctuation, the writer uses all punctuation marks not expressly forbidden, and in informal punctuation, the writer omits the punctuation marks not definitely required.

Capitalization: Capitalization is another important aspect of mechanical skill in written English. It is the ability of the writer to put a capital letter where it is appropriate.

According to Aliyu (2006:145) capitalization is required in three main areas: sentence beginning, proper nouns, proper adjectives and titles.

Waldhon (1985:118) states that capital letter is required in instances like races, ethnic groups and religions (and the people who belong to them), days and months, specific courses like economics, mathematics etc.

Grammatical Construction: - Grammatical construction of sentences in written English is the fourth essential part of mechanical accuracy skill. After spelling, capitalizing and punctuating the sentence, the writer must ensure that his sentences are grammatically correct.

According to Aliyu (2006:179) "grammar refers to syntax which is concerned essentially with the study of the order of words in sentences and the manner through which such relations among words are shown".

According to the West African Examination Council 2014, the following should be counted as errors in grammar:

1. The omission of an essential sentence element (e.g. subject, predictor, complement)
2. Wrong tense
3. Misuses of model operators (may/might, can/could etc.)
4. Misuse or omission of articles
5. Confusion or ambiguity in the use of pronouns
6. Misuse of countable/uncountable nouns
7. Wrong prepositions
8. Misuse of relatives, subordinators and conjunctions
9. Errors in concord
10. Misrelated participles
11. Intransitive verb for the transitive and vice versa
12. Active for passive, and vice versa
13. Errors in comparative constructions

Organization

Organization is the writer's ability to organize the written text into a beginning, a body and a conclusion, and employ the necessary formal or informal features. Furthermore, organization in written text entails the writer's ability to employ effectively linking (cohesive) devices in the text (WAEC, 2012, 2013, 2014). Hedge (2001:91) sees organization as "how the information is organized into paragraphs to form the whole text. Raimes (1983:116) considers organization in written discourse as "a process of moving back and forth from general statements to specific details, of finding appropriate and relevant details and arranging them in the most effective order". All these references indicate that there are "English ways" of handling a topic, of putting the sentence together, and of connecting the sentences. In English, the main idea/focus/point of view is stated and is followed by elaboration by adding supporting details such as facts, examples, illustration, reasons, causes, effects description, etc. By so doing, we show our readers that there is a basis for the statement we have made.

Theoretical Framework

This study has been predicated on two language theories: the structural linguistic theory and the communicative competence theory of language.

Structural Linguistic Theory

Structural linguistics is an approach to language study which treats language as an interwoven structure, in which every item acquires identity and validity in relation to other items in the system (Encyclopedia.com). This approach to language study originates from the post-humus publication of Ferdinand, de Saussure's Course in General

Linguistics in 1916 (Wikipedia.com). According to Eastman (1978:80), structural linguistics is based on the following principles:

1. The study of the structure of language
2. Viewing the relationships between the various units of language as more important than the units themselves
3. The assumption that the underling structure of language is systematic
4. Discovery of general laws of language

American structural linguistics began as an offshoot of anthropology and was motivated by the urgency of studying and preserving Native American Indian languages which were fast dying out (hbcse, 2008). Bloomfield is the linguistic scholar considered the major developer of 20th century structuralism in America. For Bloomfield, the structure of language was central object of linguistic study. He stressed the use of empirical data only. The grammarian task was to collect as much language data as possible and analyse and classify the data, and then on the basic of objective evidence alone, to reach conclusion. This "empiricists' methodology" in which sample language data is studied, analyzed and conclusion reached, is what this study has borrowed and adopted. In a more recent linguistic analysis, the approach is known as "genre analysis".

Communicative Competence Theory of Language

Communicative language theory dates back to the 1960s mainly as a result of changes in the British language teaching tradition (Richards and Rodger, 2001). The British applied linguists' challenge to the theoretical assumptions underlying Chomsky's theory of grammar serves as the basis for communicative theory of language. Furthermore, the functional and communicative potential of language and the changing education realities of modern Europe gave birth to communicative theory of language.

The term "communicative competence" was coined by the American sociolinguist, Dell Hymes in order to contrast communicative view of language with Chomsky's theory of competence which is captured vividly in Chomsky (1965:3):

> Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shift of attention and interests and error (random or characteristics) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.

Chomsky's linguistic theory can be summarized in three theses. The first is that natural language study should be pursued as a purely cognitive state rather than a type of behavior. Secondly language study should be pursued in abstraction from the socio-cultural matrix within which it is found. Finally, how humans acquire knowledge of language should be pursued within the theory of grammar.

Hymes considers Chomsky's linguistics theory as "sterile" because the theory has failed to view human language as part of a more general theory incorporating communication and culture (Richards & Rodgers 2001). Hymes's theory of communicative competence is a detailed definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community.

Canale and Swain, Canadian linguists, are perhaps two most famous with regard to landing support the Hymes's view of language. Canale and Swain (1980) could be claimed to be the most influential analysis of communicative competence in which four dimensions of communicative competence have been identified. Richards and Rodgers (2001:160) identifies the four components of communicative competence as discussed by Canale and Swain (1980).

1. Grammatical competence: This kind of competence corresponds to Chomsky's "linguistic competence" and Hymes's concept of "formally possible". It includes knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology and sentence grammar.
2. Sociolinguistic competence: This involves knowledge of socio cultural rules of language and of discourse, i.e. understanding of the social context in which communication takes place including role relationships, the shared information of the participants, and the communicative purposes for their interactions.
3. Discourse competence: This is the ability to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and form meaningful whole out of series of utterances. Richards and Rodgers (2001:166) sees this aspect of communicative

competence as the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire discourse or text.

4. Strategic competence: This includes the verbal and non verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdown in communication due to performance variable or due to insufficient competence. This aspect of communicative competence is mainly coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communicative.

Learning Styles

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Fifth Edition) definition of learning is 'knowledge obtained by study'; style is defined as 'a distinctive manner of doing, performing or presenting something.'

Psychologists' concept of learning is however somewhat different from the above dictionary or general meaning of the word. Psychologists' interpretation of learning goes beyond the acquisition of factual information or even the mastery of skills and means to aid further studies and understanding.(Mukherjee, 1978). Learning is viewed as a matrix that underpins the entire socialization process, the acquisition of behaviour patterns and even 'styles' or particular means of tackling issues or problems of everyday life.

Some psychologists have distinguished between 'style' and 'strategy'. According to Bruner (1956) and Pask (1969), a learning style could be an equivalent to some characteristic way of thinking. The term strategy on the other hand is more specific than style; it is a particular approach adopted to tackle a narrower range of problems. Common learning styles include convergent and divergent styles, field-dependent and field-independent styles, reflective and impulsive styles.

The convergent learning style (the convergent thinker)
A converger is defined as a person who scores more highly on an Intelligence test than on an Open-ended test. (Mukherjee, 1978:110). Such type of a thinker does better in science and mathematics and reads within his narrow subject area.

The divergent learning style (the divergent thinker)
A divergent thinker is defined as a person who scores more highly on an Open-ended test than on an Intelligence test (Mukherjee, 1978:110). An Intelligence test is the kind of test where only one correct answer is possible for every item of the test, whereas for an Open-ended test many answers would be possible for every item of such test.

Field-independent style (field-independent thinker)
Field-independent thinkers are relatively independent of the task figure as a whole (or the field) in their thinking. According to Witkin (1965), field-independent thinkers are more articulated, need less teachers' support and gain less incidental learning.

The field-dependent style (field-dependent thinker)
Field-dependent thinkers are relatively more dependent of the task figure (or the field) in solving a problem. According to Witkin, (1965), such thinkers are global, need teachers'' support and other external sources and gain more incidental learning than field-independent thinkers.

Reflective style (reflective thinkers)
Kagan (1966) isolates and studies this learning style. According to Kagan (1966), a reflective thinker is usually one who surveys the pros and cons of the problem before he acts.

The impulsive style (impulsive thinker)
According to Kagan (1966), an impulsive thinker acts first before he surveys the pros and cons of the problem.

METHODOLOGY

This study has been focused on impact of applications of principles and provisions of structural linguistic theory and communicative theory on public senior secondary schools students' performance in written English, with particular reference to mechanical accuracy and organization skills.

Sampling Technique

Stratified probability method of sampling has been used in selecting the six schools (three rural senior secondary schools and three urban senior secondary schools). Systematic sampling has been used to select the number of examination per school (after having jumbled up the scripts per school, the tenth scripts were selected).

Source of Data for the Study

Primary data in the form of written tests of the subjects is the source of data for the study.

Research Instruments

Two researcher-constructed written tests have been used to elicit the data for the study (the primary data). One of the tests has been constructed based on the provisions and principles o structural linguistics theory and the other test has been constructed based on the principles and provisions of communications theory.

Data Collection Procedure

(a) Preamble: After a short introduction, the subjects were given a popular topic on which they wrote an essay for thirty minutes. This is to ginger them for the forthcoming writing task.
(b) The subjects were exposed to the principles and provisions of the two language theories (structural linguistics in the case of rural senior secondary schools and communicative theory in the case of urban senior secondary schools). The basis of this is to obtain two different results each on the basis of application of the particular language theory under investigation, all with a view to arriving at a comparative basis of the impact of the two different language theories.
(c) The subjects were given a new topic on which to write another essay using structural linguistic theory (in the case or rural senior secondary schools) and communicative theory (in the case of urban senior secondary schools) which they have been exposed to in (b) above.
(d) The scripts were collected from the subjects at the end of the writing task.
(e) The scripts were sampled and marked by the researcher using analytic scoring system.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the data for the study.

Overall Performance of Urban Area Students in Mechanical Accuracy and Organizational Skills in Written English

The following table presents both the individual scores of the organizational and mechanical accuracy skills and the total percentage of each of the sample scripts.

Table 1 Scores for Mechanical Accuracy and Organizational Skills for Urban Senior Secondary Schools

School	Script	Mechanical accuracy (10)	Organization (10)	Total (20)	Percentage
1. GSS Naibawa	1	0	5	5	25%
2. G.S.S Naibawa	2	0	7	7	35%
3. G.S.S Naibawa	3	0	2	2	10%
4. G.S.S Naibawa	4	0	2	2	10%
5. G.S.S S/Kofa	5	0	2	2	10%
6. G.S.S S/Kofa	6	0	2	2	10%
7. G.S.S S/Kofa	7	0	2	2	10%

8. G.S.S K/Nassarawa	8	0	3	3	15%
9. G.S.S K/Nassarawa	9	0	1	1	5%
10. G.S.S K/Nassarawa	10	0	2	2	10%

Table 2 total scores and percentage of mechanical accuracy and organizational skills component in the written English of urban secondary school students

	Maximum marks	**actual marks scored**	**Percentage**
Mechanical accuracy	100	0	0%
Organization	100	28	28%

Tables 1 and 2 indicate that the performances of the urban public senior secondary school students in terms of mechanical accuracy and organization skills are quite poor. The maximum marks obtained in terms of organization by an individual script are 7 out of ten. Only one script has scored this mark. The second highest mark scored in terms of organizational skill is 5. The highest total mark in the two writing skills is 7 representing 35%, which is a below average feat; the least total mark is 1 representing just 5%, which is quite a poor performance. Six out of the ten sample scripts scored 10% of the total marks in mechanical accuracy and organizational skills.

The total score for the ten sample scripts in terms of mechanical accuracy skill is 0, representing 0%, which shows a very poor performance and the total score for the ten sample scripts in terms of organizational skills is 28, representing 28%, which indicates a below average performance.

Overall performance of rural areas students in mechanical accuracy and organizational skills in written English

The following table presents both the individual scores of the organizational and mechanical accuracy skills and the total percentage of each of the sample scripts of rural areas public senior secondary schools students.

Table 3 scores in mechanical accuracy and organizational skills in the written English of rural areas public secondary schools students

School	Script	Mechanical accuracy (10)	Organization (10)	Total (20)	Percentage
1. G.S.S. Bichi	1	0	6	6	30%
2. G.S.S. Bichi	2	0	6	6	30%
3. G.S.S. Bichi	3	0	5	5	25%
4. D/Kudu Sc. College	4	4	7	11	55%
5. D/Kudu Sc. College	5	0	6	6	30%
6. D/Kudu Sc. College	6	0	5	5	25%
7. D/Kudu Sc. College	7	3	5	8	40%
8. G.A.S.S. Kura	8	0	5	5	25%
9. G.A.S.S. Kura	9	3	6	9	45%
10. G.A.S.S. Kura	10	1	6	7	35%

Table 3 indicates that students' performance in the mechanical accuracy. Though the performance is better than that of the urban students, it is still weak. Six of the subjects scored zero; two candidates scored 4 marks each and one candidate scored 1 mark. The subjects have however performed better in their exhibition of organizational skills. The highest marks being $^{11}/_{20}$, representing 55%, which is above average performance; this is followed by 9 marks, representing 45%, which is below average performance and 8 marks representing 40%, which is also below average performance. The least mark scored in this regard is 5, representing 25%, which is a weak performance.

Table 4 Total scores and percentages of mechanical accuracy and organizational skills components in the written English of rural public senior secondary students

	Maximum marks	actual marks scored	Percentage
Mechanical accuracy	100	11	11%
Organization	100	68	68%

Table 4 indicates that the actual marks scored in the mechanical accuracy component in the written English of rural public senior secondary schools students is 11 out of the maximum mark of 100, representing 11%, which is poor performance. In the organization component, 68 marks have been scored out of the maximum 100 marks, representing 68%, which is a good performance.

Comparative analysis of urban and rural public senior secondary schools students' performances in mechanical accuracy and organizational skills in written English

The following table displays the comparative performances of the urban and rural public senior secondary schools students' performances in terms of mechanical accuracy and organizational skills in written English. This has been done with the aim of comparing, more easily, achievements in the two components of skills in written English between the two groups.

Table 5 comparative performances in mechanical accuracy and organizational skills between rural and urban senior secondary schools

	Urban secondary schools		Rural secondary schools	
	Total marks	Percentage	Total marks	Percentage
Mechanical accuracy	0	0%	11	11%
Organization	28	28%	58	58%

The above table indicates that in the mechanical accuracy component, the urban senior secondary schools students scored no mark at all, representing 0%, which is quite a very poor performance. The rural areas public secondary schools students scored 11 marks, representing 11%, which represent a poor performance. In terms of organizational skills, the urban senior secondary schools students scored 28 marks out of the maximum 100 marks, representing 28%, which represents a weak performance. The rural senior secondary schools students scored 58 marks, or 58%, which indicates a satisfactory performance.

Finding of the study

After treating the individual scores, the total scores for each group and the comparative scores for the two groups, it has been found that mechanical accuracy skills are the most difficult skills to exhibit among all the subjects of this study.

Summary, conclusion and recommendations

This study has investigated the relative impact of applications of the provisions and principles of structural linguistic theory and communicative theory in the achievement of mechanical accuracy and organizational skills in the written English of public urban and rural senior secondary schools in Kano state of Nigeria. To achieve this, the study has found answers to the research questions of the study by drawing the conclusion that using the provisions and principles of structural linguistic theory enables better exhibition of both mechanical accuracy skills and organizational skills among senior secondary school students in Kano state than using the provisions and principles of communicative theory.

In view of the problems, conclusions and inferences drawn from the study, the researcher recommends that a similar research to investigate impact of the two language theories, i.e. structural linguistics and communicative competence theory on students' performance in spoken English should be carried out.

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