



Syntactic Adjectival Grading in English Grammar Via New Media: A Study of Students in Imo State University

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords : Syntax, Adjectival
Grading, New-Media, Flipped
Classroom, Digital
Technology

Received : 21 January

Revised : 23 February

Accepted: 23 March

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ABSTRACT

Despite the significant roles syntactic Adjectival Grading plays in both spoken and written English, it still poses a problem to the users of English Language. This study aims at explaining how the use of new media will facilitate and enhance teaching and learning of syntactic grading using Chomsky's, (1967) Transformational Generative Grammar Theory and Bergmann and Sams (2007) flipped classroom model. This study guided by two research questions, sampled 100 students from 3 departments in Imo state University, Owerri, using structured questionnaire. The results of the data were analyzed using simple percentages. The findings reveal that the students were not conversant with the use of adjectival grading. The researchers recommend that the teachers of English language should pay great attention to the teaching of the nuances of grammar, especially with regard to adjectival grading as this would enhance students' competence

INTRODUCTION

Syntax is an essential component of written and spoken language that determines the rules, principles or the processes that required in the construction of words, phrases and sentences. It is very crucial for one to structure one's words and sentences because it is in doing so that the individual effectively convey his intended meaning to the audience.

Bonvillain, (2011), contends that every language including English, has rules of syntax that describe possibilities of co-occurrences and orders of constituents that these syntactic partners are used to express case relation between words, like

The Goat Killed the Rat
The Rat Killed the Goat

The above sentences indicate the order of words, that is, the one that precedes the other.

Egbe, (2002), affirms that English syntax has four basic rules to adhere to, the most important being that a complete sentence must have a subject and a verb and should also express a complete thought. To avoid a run-on sentence, a separate idea requires a separate sentence. English word order must be maintained, and that embedded sentences are considered.

Syntactic rules are not far from grammatical rules because O'Grady et al., (2011), and Chomsky (1967) assert that grammar is the totality of knowledge of language in the person's mind. The sources assert that the rules of English grammar phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics are innately endowed in the heads of the native speakers but for the second language users of English (L2), it must be learnt.

For the second language users of English to actually grapple with the tenets of English grammar, especially with the use of syntactic adjectival grading, there is need to engage themselves in constant exercises and effective practices, as it is said, "practice makes perfect". Face to face classroom teaching and learning encounter alone will not be enough for them to achieve greater impact, therefore, the use of new media, which is the contemporary digital technology for disseminating information needs to be employed. Since the contemporary world is a global village where one can stay in his or her comfort zone, watch and receive information, the use of new media will enhance the effective teaching and learning of syntactic adjectival grading because it will avail the second language users of English the opportunities to observe the professionals speak. Through the observation, they will be able to listen, pronounce, speak and write effectively. They can as well impact the knowledge they have gotten to other people through the use of new media.

Objectives

This Study Aims to:

1. Examine the extent the second language learners of English have problems in the use of syntactic comparative grading of adjectives.
2. Investigate the extent the students in tertiary institution have problems with superlative grading of adjective.

Research Questions

1. What are the second language learners area of difficulties in the use of syntactic grading of adjectives, especially, comparative adjectives?
2. To what extent do second language learners of English have problems in the use of superlative adjectives?

Conceptual Review

English Grammar

The set of rules that controls how English language works is in the grammar. The knowledge of English grammar avails the second language learners of English (L2) the opportunity to comprehend, speak and write English language effectively. Obviously, grammar is very crucial in language learning, which English language is not left behind. This is because it detects rules on how words are used and when they should be used. Not only that, grammar also involves proper understanding of the language patterns, which enables the second language learners of English (L2) form sentences, comprehend other people's sentences when they speak English on television or read books aloud. Regular practice makes learners to be proficient in English grammar. They should use English regularly even in the classroom. The application of proper grammatical rules enhances their communication outside the country with the help of new media. As listening skill is more important than speaking skill, they should listen to professionals speak, listen to news, especially, British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) Programme and learn how words are pronounced.

Since the knowledge of English grammar enables the learners to express their thoughts adequately, communicate their ideas and feelings effectively, it also gives them opportunity to communicate and respond accurately. Egbe, (2000), asserts that English language is the backbone of all subjects. The knowledge of it will make them excel in all subjects.

New Media

New media has proven to be the bed rock of all technology breakthroughs. Through new media man has been able to expand his knowledge, exert pressure and exercise control over his environment. Prior to new media, was the print media which are often referred to as press media which involves prints, such as, bulletins, magazines, journals, newspapers and books. As time goes on, newspaper becomes most popular print medium. The ubiquitous nature of news paper was to the extent that they became agenda setters in Nigeria society that their geographical spread and coverage were very vital for effective management by the elites, Politicians, and even private groups and interested groups began to have their own especially as the need arise (Chinagorom 2019).

The contemporary digital technology new media is the order of the world today and it is interactive in nature. Unlike the old media, new media comprises websites, online video/audio stream, online forums, block, internet telephone, web advertisement, online education and others.

New media has transformed users from consumers of information to the providers of information. We can now share news, thoughts and opinions to global audience.

With the inception of blogs, social media and instant communication, elites and powerful could not hold a monopoly on mass dissemination information. The removal of the gatekeepers has made it possible for people not only to be information consumers but information producers. Internet connection has made it possible for people to air their opinion and beliefs to audience around the globe who want to listen without any hitch.

New media has created an avenue for teachers and students to interact. With the creation of Google classroom, teachers can teach the entire class, give assignment, mark and do corrections. New media create an avenue for students to ask questions and get answers immediately without face to face interaction. There is also opportunity for audio teaching and learning through WhatsApp. The inception of new media made it possible for information to be bought and sold.

With the help of new media, both learners and educators can enroll in global collaborative platforms to facilitate constructive learning. It also helps in skill improvement by fostering knowledge and creativity.

Although new media has some pitfalls such as misinformation spreading like wildfire, allowing children to access inappropriate information and the rest of the others, new media has changed the society significantly.

Adjectives

An adjective has been a very powerful element of English language. Syntactically, it is that word that gives more information about a noun, noun phrase or pronoun. Nwigwe, and Nwachukwu, (2015), opines that common and familiar adjectives express colour like, red, blue, yellow, black etc shapes as in, round, flat, oval, square age, like, old, young, middle age, size as in, small, in small, big, tiny, slim, then height like tall, short, etc. They strongly believe that any other word that describes or gives additional information about a noun, noun phrase or a pronoun is an adjective. For example, a blending machine, unbelieving situation, unwanted pregnancy. Etc.

Quirk and Greenbaum (2012) is of the opinion that an adjective cannot be dictated in isolation because the form alone does not necessarily share its syntactic function. This is because some suffixes are found only with adjectives, eg, -ous, more so, many adjectives have no identifiable shape, eg, little, more, good, hot. They argue that although many adjectives provide the base from which adverbs are derived by means of an -ly suffix like happy/happily but some do not permit such derivational process. We can say old-*oldly.

Omorodion (2011), contends that an adjective functions as attributive when it appears before the noun it qualifies in the sentence. Consider the following:

1. The Young Man is my Brother the tall Tree is in Front of my House

The initialized words above are adjectives that precede the nouns, [man and tree] they qualified. He goes on to say that adjective functions as predicative when it is placed after the noun it qualifies, that is, after the verb in the predicate side. It tandems with Quirk an Greenbaum (2012). The source go further to highlight that the predicative adjectives can be subject complements and this occurs when the adjectives come after the verb, Be and refer to the subjects. Consider these sentences

2. Your Son is Handsome i am Intelligent

The above predicative adjectives refer back to the subject- 'your son' and 'I' respectively. They also specify that the predicative adjectives can also function as object complements, especially when the adjectives compliment the object of the verb. For example

3. He Made his Friend Angry the Man Declared John Intelligent

The above predicative adjectives complement the objects- his friend and John respectively.

This study does not dwell into the numerous types of adjectives rather, it proceeds to discuss the grading/ comparison of adjectives which is the paragon of the study.

Gradability of Adjectives

Some English adjectives are either gradable or non-gradable. Adjectives are considered gradable when they have different levels of qualities. Consider the following sentences

4. The Water is a Bit Hot the Water is Very Hot the Water is Extremely Hot

The above sentences imply that, we can make adjectives weaker or stronger by using modifiers which convey the degree of intensity of the adjectives. Quirk and Greenbaum (2012) contend that all dynamic adjectives are gradable.

Non-gradable adjectives are absolute adjectives, in the sense, they cannot be restricted. They usually describe absolute qualities. For example, we cannot say a bit finished or very finished neither can we say a bit dead or very dead. In other to make non-gradable adjective stronger, we have to use modifiers like absolutely, totally, completely, etc, as in :

Her speech was absolutely perfect The plant was totally destroyed by pests The stress is completely over, so, I am now better

Gradability also includes comparison. Omorodion, (2011), affirms that adjectives have three degree of comparison they are positive, comparative and superlative.

Positive Adjectives

positive adjective according to him are words that are used to describe in positive light. The positive degree is the statement of quality and it implies no comparison it is that form that is seen in the dictionary. Such as: tall, small, fresh, brave, short, old, gentle, etc.

Comparative Adjective

A comparative adjective is used to compare two people or things. We use comparative adjectives to indicate that one person or thing is of higher degree of a quality than the other. For example

Mary is taller than Joy

John is smarter than James

Jessica is more beautiful than Jennifer

Superlative Adjective

Superlative adjective are used to describe an object which is at the upper or lower limit of a quality. For example

My child is the smallest of the three children

Mr. Johnson is the tallest man in the village
My mom is the most beautiful woman in the town.
We use superlative adjective when making comparisons of three or more people or things.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is adopting an eclectic approach is anchored on Chomsky, (1965), Transformational Generative Grammar an off shoot of Generative grammar and Bergmann and Sams (2007) flipped classroom model.

Bergmann and Sams (2007) flipped classroom is a type of blended learning approach that advocates that instructors / teachers' introduce recording and post lecture notes or materials online for students who missed class or needed extra lesson to study at their own pace and time thereby, maximizing class-time for interactions and hands-on-activities. In their book 'flip your class: reach every student in every class every day' the acronym 'flip' stands for F-flexible environment. L- a shift in the learning culture from the traditional, teacher centered to student centered learning, I- intentional content specifically to develop student cognitive ability and fluency and P-the professional instructor continuously observe, evaluate and provide feedback to the learners during the course.

Mambrol (2020) quoting Chomsky (1965), assert that in generative grammar the rules of the grammar build up the possible structures that are part of the language. Put it differently, it must identify those things that are permitted in the language and those that are not, it accounts for the structure of the language. For example, the numeration, like; the, dog, cat and chased:

The native speakers know which combinations are grammatical and which combinations are ungrammatical. Thus:

The dog chased the cat and

The cat chased the dog are grammatical

- The cat dog a chased and
- A chased dog cat are ungrammatical.

Chomsky strongly affirms that the native speakers know how to combine words together to form larger constructions like sentences and they know the relations that hold between words in such sentences. They are all aware of internal make up of words. For example, word such as known can change its meaning by the addition of the prefix un to give unknown. Its function in a sentence can change if -ingly is added, yielding unknowingly. Secondly, addition of suffix -s to bag and book indicates more than one, this is plural marker. The native speakers of a language articulate properly the sounds, the morphemes, the syntax, the meaning of their language and how they are organised.

The thrust of Transformational generative grammar is the recognition of two levels of linguistic construction and they are deep structure and surface structure.

The deep structure is the underlying construction. It is an abstract organization which defines all structural interpretation and formation of sentences. (Nwala, 2015). The surface structure is the output of deep structure in form of words and speeches: for example

Joy is a tall girl. Joy is taller than Mary. *Joy is tallest than Mary.

Chomsky claims that the native speakers of English language know that in sentence a, tall is in the positive form, that is, the root form, the sentence is grammatically accepted. In sentence b, the native speakers know that tall has gone into transformation in order to account for comparative adjective, as two persons are being compared to show that one is at greater degree than the other. So, number b sentence is grammatical. The native speakers of English know that sentence "c" is ungrammatical because the word, tallest is used in superlative form, that is, when comparing three or more people. The native speakers of English are aware of this transformation because it is innately hard-wired in their brain, so, they have the capacity to dictate which construction is grammatical and acceptable. For non native speaker, it has to be learnt. Therefore, the teachers of English will try to engage the learners with constant practice and exercises for them to have mastery of syntactic adjectival grading. Apart from the classroom face to face interaction, the teachers will engage them more by giving them enough exercises through WhatsApp teaching, Google classroom encounters and other technological blogs. They will as well encourage them to listen to professional speeches.

Research Design

This section explains the procedures adopted in the collection and the analysis of the research data. It contains issues such as research design, area of the study, population of the study, sample and sampling technique; research instrument, the method of data collection etc The study adopted descriptive survey, using syntax based questionnaire for the collection of data

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises 100 first year students which include male and female students from Imo State University, Owerri.

Instrument for Data Collection

Structured questionnaire based on syntax was used for the study. The research instrument tested the competence of the students in the area of adjectives, specifically in comparative and superlative adjective.

METHODOLOGY

Method of Data Analysis

The method of data analysis is simple percentage. The instrument is relevant because it is meant to test the receptive knowledge of syntactic adjectival grading on the students and its objective and therefore free from bias.

The formula for percentage is

$$\frac{F1 \times 100}{N \times 1}$$

Where Fl is frequent of respondent

N= total number of sample used

Data Presentation and Discussion

The data presentation and discussion was based on the research questions formulated for the study. It discussed score from adjectives precisely on comparative and superlative adjectival test given to 100 students in the School of General Studies. The result were summarized in two tables below.

Findings

Research Question 1

What are the second language learners' areas of difficulties in the use of comparison of adjective?

Table 1. Option A, Brighter, B, Brightest C, More Brighter, D, Most Brightest.
No 100

Options	No	%
A	24	24
B	18	18
C	26	26
D	32	32
Total	100	100

The table above implies that our subjects are not conversant with the use of comparative adjective, hence option A, was chosen by 24 subjects, yielding 24%, option B, was chosen by 18 subjects yielding 18%, option C was chosen by 26 subjects, which indicates that they have not learnt the appropriate use of comparative, it yields 26%, while option D was chosen by 32 subjects yielding 32%.

From the percentage above, the number of subjects who chose option A is quite low, even though it is the correct option. We affirm that, the inter-language restrict them to a large extent to identify the correct option. 18 out of 100 subjects chose option C which is double grading really indicate that they are not conversant with comparative adjectives.

Research Question 2

To what extent do second language learners of English have problems in the use of superlative adjectives?

Table 2. A, Tall, B, As Tall As, C, Taller, D, Tallest

Option	No	%
A	27	27
B	33	33
C	16	16
D	24	24
Total	100	100

From the table above, it could be seen that option A was chosen by 27 subjects reflecting 27%, option B was chosen by 33 subjects, yielding 33%, option C was chosen by 16 subjects, reflecting 16%, while option D, which is the correct answer, was chosen by 24 subjects, it yields 24%.

A great number of subjects chose option B, which is not correct option. This showed that our subjects get mixed up their choice of comparison of adjective. Out of 100 subjects who sat for the test, only 24 subjects chose option D, which is the correct option. This indicates that, they have not properly learnt the adjectival grading

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis, starting from table 1, it is obviously observed that one of the problems of the subjects is their inability to master English language at their early childhood

Table 1 and table 2 reflect the syntactic adjectival grading- comparative and superlative respectively. Table 1 showed the response of our subjects in the use of comparative adjective. Given the research question tested on comparative adjective.

Given the option: A, brighter, B brightest C more brighter D most brightest

From the analysis on the comparative adjective, the results showed that our subjects are not conversant with the grading of adjectives. They failed to understand that adjectives in English language are compared to show the degree in the grading being expressed. Option A, brighter is the most appropriate option that fits-in, in the slot. This is because we want to highlight that the degree of today's weather is greater than yesterday's in this comparison. Therefore, if brighter is inserted into the grammatical slot, it will fit-in because the sentence is grammatically okay. Option B, which is brightest, is out of place. This is because brightest, is the regular adjective of one syllable that takes superlative form of adjective. Superlative form is only used when compiling more than two things or persons. It is never used in comparing two things or persons therefore, it is ungrammatical to insert brightest in slot while comparing two things or persons.

Option C, which is, more brighter, cannot be accepted at all. The reason being that more and brighter are in the same degree and cannot be used simultaneously. More is an irregular adjective, which forms its comparative by a mark change in the form of the word. While brighter is among the group of regular adjective of one syllable which forms its comparative by adding -er to the lexical word. Since the two lexical words share the same degree of quality, they cannot fit-in when they are inserted in the same grammatical slot within a sentence. Although, the two lexical word -more and brighter are required in the comparative form of adjective, they are only required to compare two things or two persons. The English language prohibits the use of double comparison in one construction. So, going by the English comparison principles, brighter is the appropriate option in the above construction.

Lastly, option D, most brightest, will crash because most and brightest are in the same degree of quality being expressed. Both are used to compare more than two things or two persons. Most is among the group of irregular adjectives that

form their superlative by a mark of change in the form of words. Brightest is also among the adjective of one syllable that form their superlative by adding -est in the lexical words. Both are in the same degree of quality being expressed, therefore, they cannot be used in the same grammatical slot, otherwise, the derivation will crash, resulting to ungrammaticality. Therefore, brightest is preferable while considering English comparison principles

The same consideration is also applied to table 2 with research question thus: Looking at the options above, option A and B are in the positive forms of adjectives that express the simple forms they cannot be compared. If they are inserted in the above slot, the sentence will result to ungrammaticality hence they cannot be used in comparison. Option C is out because of the reasons given above. Option D, is the appropriate option that matches the slot.

The above agrees with Iyiola (2015), who studied the use of comparison of Adjectives among tertiary students in Awka. He contends that students are not conversant with the use of comparison of adjectives. In the same vein, the paucity of results above agree with his. The poor performance of the students in this area shows that, they fail to understand that the degree of comparison of adjectives in English language can be positive, comparative or superlative.

The positive expresses the simple form of adjective, the comparative degree is used with two things or two persons while superlative degree is used to compare more than two things or two persons.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analysis above, we observed that the problem of our subjects is that they are unable to grapple with the principles of adjectival grading. As a result, a great number of them made wrong choice of double grading in the clauses. Since the study had provided empirical evidence to prove that students possess low knowledge of syntactical adjectival grading, we conclude that if adequate attention be paid on proper teaching and learning of grammatical structure of English at the use of English classes, and if lecturers who handle the use of English at tertiary institutions should apply the use of new media such as Google classroom, WhatsApp classes, blogs, there will be a better result. Students who were absent from class would have access to materials used, study them and ask for clarifications where necessary.

Based on the investigation carried out on the area of syntactic phenomena with particular reference to syntactic adjectival grading, we recommend that adequate teaching and learning of syntactic adjectival grading should be emphasized at the level of the use of English classes for tertiary students. The lecturers who handle the use of English classes should employ the use of new media for effective and adequate teaching and learning. Parents should equally equip their children with smartphones or computers that would assist them to access the required apps for effective instruction and acquisition of English grammar. Furthermore, we suggest that the government implement the installation of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in all higher education institutions, granting students access to the internet for valuable information that aids in the effective instruction and acquisition of English

grammar. No doubt, if all these are adhered to, we believe there would be noticeable improvements as regards the use of syntactic adjectival grading.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has a delay, so it is necessary to conduct further research related to the topic of Syntactic Adjectival Grading in English Grammar Via New Media: A Study of Students in Imo State University to improve this research and add insight for readers

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