

Punctuation Errors Committed by Learners of the Igbo Language in Orumba North Local Government Area

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Abstract

Punctuation errors are mechanical errors which occur in the use of misuse of punctuation marks. This research study is concerned with punctuation errors committed by learners of the Igbo language who are native speakers of the language. The study aims at analyzing punctuation errors committed by learners of the Igbo language in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State, determining the causes and effects as well as suggesting remedial measures to overcome the errors. This study adopts the questionnaire technique which was administered to SS 2 students. 120

students were randomly selected from three selected secondary schools in the Local Government Area. Their responses were analyzed using mean. The result reveals that lack of knowledge or ignorance of the rules of punctuation marks in Igbo, insufficient explanation on punctuation marks using enough examples by teachers, lack of constant practices by the learners and inadequate materials on punctuation marks are some of the causes of punctuation errors by learners of Igbo. Having analyzed the data, the following remedies were made: enough explanation on punctuation marks using examples for illustration by teachers, constant practices by the learners and provision of enough materials on punctuation marks. In conclusion, the work shows that students have problems in the use of Igbo punctuation marks. Also, punctuation errors cause ambiguity in Igbo written communication to a great extent. Thus, errors are inevitable in learning of a given language and native speakers who are learners of a language can commit errors in the language. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that seminars, workshops, conferences should be organized for students to improve in the use of punctuation marks in the Igbo language. Also, parents and teachers should develop positive attitude towards the study of Igbo language.

Keywords: Punctuation errors, Errors, Writing, Punctuation marks

Introduction

Language is the primary means of communication and it can be used to interact. It means that if one is acquainted with one's language, one would be able to interact easily with others. It is when the language used is understood by the

learners that the content can be made more meaningful and relevant. The West African School Certificate syllabus provides that for students to excel in one of the three major Nigerian languages which are compulsory subjects for the native speakers, they must write a well punctuated essay. Failure to make correct use of punctuation marks leads to error. Though the Igbo language is recognized as one of the three major languages in Nigeria, yet, it is neglected by many of its speakers in schools and society at large. Most schools in Igbo land give more attention to the English Language and treat their language with no value. They use English as a means of communication while Igbo is prohibited. Parents are not left out towards the achievement level of students in the Igbo language. They take the language as a yardstick for measuring illiteracy. Thus, they do not use Igbo as a medium of instruction at home. The negative attitude of the people towards the Igbo language is not limited to the learners and teachers alone but it cuts across all segments of the society (Ugbor, 2009).

Although teaching Igbo language in secondary schools deals with punctuation teaching, punctuation marks have always been challenging the students/learners in writing Igbo works. Nowadays, students' essay writings are poorly written, especially in the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, as well as punctuation marks. In order to become good at punctuation, learners of the Igbo language need instruction and constant practice. Committing errors is one of the most unavoidable things in language acquisition, learning, and teachings. As Jekins, Jordan & Weiland (1993) put it that the effectiveness of any writing is determined by grammatical correctness as syntactic ambivalence leads to semantic ambiguity. This

means that a good and meaningful writing involves the correctness of the grammatical structures such as punctuation marks.

Though lots of works have been done on punctuation errors in the second language or target language especially, the English language but so far, none has been done on the analysis of punctuation errors committed by Igbo learners/students of SS 2 who are native speakers of the language. The present study is aimed at filling this gap. The present study looks into the analysis of punctuation errors committed by learners of Igbo language using SS2 students of three selected secondary schools. However, this study is aimed at examining these punctuation errors, determining the causes and effects of the errors and suggesting suitable solutions.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section introduces the paper while section two reviews some scholarly works on writing, punctuation marks, punctuation errors and error analysis. Sections three and four represent the method of data collection and the analytic core of the paper respectively while the final section summarizes and concludes the work.

Review of Related Literature

Meaning of Writing

The term writing, according to Hussain, et al. (2013:832) is the visual medium through which graphical and grammatical system of a language is manifested. According to them, the ability to write is not a naturally acquired skill. Rather, it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in

formal instructional setting. They further point out that writing is an outward expression of what is going on in the writer's mind. Byrne (1979) views writing as one of the language skills that tells writer's ideas into written form.

For Heryanti et al. (2017:84), not everyone can be a good author or writer, even in his or her own native language. Hence, everyone needs to learn about writing in depth in order to master it. Therefore, learners who learn any language should learn some aspects of grammatical structure as well as the mechanical structures such as punctuation marks in order to obtain a competency in using the language. With a good understanding in the grammar and the punctuation marks, the content of the writing can be understood and will be delivered properly.

Punctuation Marks

Adekola & Lawal (2017) define punctuation marks as the use of conventional signs and certain typographical devices as aids to the understanding of handwritten and printed texts. Punctuation is very important in written texts in order to disambiguate the meaning of sentences. For Aloba (2008) in Sani (2015), punctuation refers to an aspect of the mechanical skill of writing; any write up that is not properly punctuated is a write off. Punctuation prevents a piece of text from being just a string of words by breaking up the string of words into meaningful units and by making the text more fluent. Basically, punctuation marks can be seen as symbols which are used to separate and join units of language into cohesive text.

Punctuation involves the use of signs or marks to divide writing in sentences, clauses, phrases or into minimum unit of meaning in order to convey ideas or information clearly and accurately (Muhammad et al. 1997). They are essential for dividing up written language into units that convey meaning. The wrong use of them, or failure to use them, will easily lead to misunderstanding.

There are lots of punctuation marks commonly used in the English language. They include: full-stop, question mark, exclamation mark, comma, semicolon, colon, dash, hyphen, parentheses, caret, apostrophe, quotation marks and ellipses.

Functions of Punctuation Marks

Punctuation performs a number of functions according Ilchukwu et al. (1996). They include:

- a. They indicate pauses within sentence structures.
- b. They suggest the tempo for reading an extract, for example, in poetry.
- c. They indicate sentence types (?, !, .).
- d. They reveal the attitude or mind of the writer.
- e. They enhance the logic in every sentence.
- f. They limit thoughts and sentences by dictating their boundaries in their relationship within a given discourse

g. They guide the reader to a quicker and easier comprehension.

h. They handle external matter within the sentence adequately.

i. They shape and re-order the writer's thought.

Errors and Punctuation Errors

Improper use of punctuation marks leads to punctuation errors. For McCuen & Winkler (2000), punctuation errors occur with the omission or misuse of one of the punctuation marks. Corder (1967) notes that errors take place when deviation arises as a result of lack of knowledge. For instance, when a full stop or period is wrongly used, it results in fragment which is an error type. Example:

1a. The meeting would have been held. *Even if the chairman didn't come.

Error identified: Addition/wrong placement of full stop and the capitalization of the first letter of 'even'. In order of to rectify the error, the "full stop" after "held" should be removed and the "E" in "even" should be written in small letter.

1b. The meeting would have been held even if the chairman didn't come.

According to Brown (1994:205), errors are deviance caused by a lack of competence and "... a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker." The making of errors therefore, is a strategy employed both by children acquiring

their mother tongue and by those learning a second language (Corder, 1974). Since anybody can commit an error, errors do occur both in the first and second language learning. Hence, learners of a language who are native speakers of the language can commit errors and it is the duty of the language teacher to acknowledge and deal with them accordingly. Errors are unavoidable but also amenable to corrections.

Types of Errors

Corder (1981) divided errors into four types which include: omission of some required element, addition of some incorrect element, selection of an incorrect element, and misordering of element.

1. **Omission:** Omission is a type of error which is characterized by the absence of a required element that is actually needed in the sentence. Certain punctuation marks may be omitted by students because of their complexity in production. Omission of punctuation marks might occur, because students often leave out such marks due to their poor ability. Example:

2a. Before going to the church Ekene went to the market
(**Incorrect**).

2b. Before going to the church, Ekene went to the market
(**Correct**).

This omission however, might increase the ambiguity at the level of sentences. Moreover, omission of punctuation marks seems to make the written represented texts hard to be read or understood.

2. **Addition:** Addition errors are errors that are described by the presence of the punctuation mark that must not appear in a sentence. Students not only omit punctuation marks which they regard as redundant but they also add redundant punctuation marks.

3. **Selection:** students commit errors in punctuation due to the wrong selection of punctuation mark. Example:

3a. “Lock the door right now!” (**Incorrect**)

3b. “Lock the door right now.” (**Correct**)

4. **Ordering:** misordering can occur in punctuation level. misordering of punctuation in English is perhaps less frequent. The most frequent ones are omission, addition and selection. Example:

4a. “Watch Out”!, said the policeman. (**Incorrect**)

4b. “Watch Out!”, said the policeman. (**Correct**)

According to Abonyi (2007), errors are generally classified into two, namely, mechanical and expression errors.

1. Mechanical errors are the errors which occur due to the learner’s inability to adhere to the rubrics of the language: Examples of mechanical errors are: wrong use of diacritic marks (.), wrong use of apostrophe (’), wrong use of hyphen (-), wrong use of tones.

2. Expression errors concern with how the learner expresses his ideas. Some of the examples are wrong use of preposition, wrong paragraphing, wrong use of idioms etc.

Causes of Error

Norrish (1987) classifies causes of error into three types: carelessness, first language interference and translation. The three types of causes of error will be discussed briefly below.

1. *Carelessness*. It is often closely related to lack of motivation. Many teachers will admit that it is not always the student's fault if he loses interest perhaps, the materials and/or style of presentation do not suit him.

2. *First language*. Norrish states that learning a language (a mother tongue or a foreign language) is a matter of habit formation. When someone tries to learn new habits, the old ones will interfere with the new ones. This cause of error is called first language interference.

3. *Translation*. It is one of the causes of error. This happens because a student translates his first language sentence or idiomatic expression into the target language word by word. This is probably the most common cause of error.

Method of data collection

The data of this study are collected through questionnaire technique. The technique is designed and administered to the one hundred and twenty students chosen as a sample population. The questionnaires were collected immediately in order to ensure 100% success.

The students' questionnaire investigates the participants' perception and evaluation of their abilities in punctuating Igbo writings. It consists of 15 questions. The structural questionnaire is titled: punctuation errors in Igbo: types, causes and effects. The questionnaire has four sections and it will be based on a

4 points scale of strongly agreed

3 points scale of agreed

2 points scale of disagreed

1 point scale of strongly disagreed

This possesses equal number of positive and negative directed items. Information from textbooks, journals and other related literature dealings with the topic helped the researcher in structuring the items in the questionnaire. One hundred and twenty (120) SS two students of Community Secondary School, Oko, Community High School, Nanka and Community Secondary School, Omogho who are native speakers of Igbo were randomly selected. The students are both males and females.

Area of the study

This research study was carried out in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State, a state in South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Out of the thirteen (13) government secondary schools in the local government, three schools were selected. They include:

1. Community Secondary School, Omogho
2. Community High School, Nanka
3. Community Secondary School, Oko

Method of data analysis

For the data analysis, the researchers analysed the responses on the questionnaires using mean. The mean responses of the respondents were calculated using the formula below:

$$X = \sum fx/N$$

where

X = Mean of responses on each item

F = Frequency of each questionnaire

N = Total number of respondents on each item

x = Each of the rating scale point

Strongly Agreed (SA) – 4 points

Agreed (A) – 3 points

Disagreed (D) – 2 points

Strongly Disagreed (SD) – 1 point

Therefore, mean = $4+3+2+1 = 10$

Mean = 2.5

From the above calculation, it implies that every mean score exactly or above 2.5 agrees with the decision (positive response) while any mean score below 2.5 disagrees with the decision (negative response).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Below is the presentation and analysis of data for the purpose of answering the research questions. The findings were presented according to the research questions. Also, the presentation and analysis of data were based on the responses from the respondents (students).

Research Question 1

To what extent can punctuation errors cause ambiguity in Igbo written communication in Orumba North Local Government Area?

Table 1: Responses of the respondents on the extent punctuation errors cause ambiguity in Igbo written communication

S/ N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	S D	N	FX	X	REMARKS
1.	Omission of hyphen makes Igbo essays/writings inappropriate.	36 144	77 231	4 8	3 3	120	386	3.21	Accepted

2.	Misuse of comma makes a sentence hard to understand/read.	49 196	62 186	7 14	2 2	120	398	3.31	Accepted
3.	The use of sentences with punctuation errors causes ambiguity in written works.	75 300	40 120	5 10	0 0	120	430	3.58	Accepted
4.	Omission or misuse of full stop makes a statement difficult to understand.	69 276	50 150	1 2	0 0	120	428	3.56	Accepted
5.	Wrong use of apostrophe makes Igbo essay writing incorrect.	35 140	57 171	17 34	11 11	120	356	2.96	Accepted
6.	Misuse of punctuation makes may convey a different meaning.	80 320	40 120	0 0	0 0	120	440	3.66	Accepted

Data presented in table 1 above shows that on item 1, 36 respondents strongly agreed, 77 agreed, 4 respondents disagree while only 3 respondents strongly disagreed.

Item 2 above reveals that misuse of comma makes a sentence hard to understand. Here, 49 respondents strongly agreed, 62 agreed and 7 respondents disagreed while 2 strongly disagreed.

In item 3, 75 respondents strongly agreed, 40 agreed, 5 respondents disagreed while none strongly disagreed.

Item 4 shows that omission or misuse of full stop makes a statement difficult to understand. 69 respondents strongly agreed, 50 agreed, only 1 respondent disagreed while none strongly disagreed on that.

In item 5 above, 35 respondents strongly agreed, 57 agreed, 17 disagreed whereas 11 respondents strongly disagreed.

Item 6 reveals that misuse of punctuation makes may convey a different meaning. 80 respondents strongly agreed, 40 respondents agreed, none of the respondents neither disagreed nor strongly disagreed.

Hence, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 have mean values of 3.21, 3.31, 3.58, 3.5, 2.96 and 3.66 respectively which show that they are accepted. It means that punctuation errors cause ambiguity in Igbo written communication to a great extent.

Research Question 2

What are the causes of punctuation errors by learners of the Igbo language?

Table 2: Responses of the respondents on the causes of punctuation errors by learners of the Igbo language

S / N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	FX	X	RMARKS

1	Lack of knowledge or ignorance of the rules of punctuation marks in Igbo	70 280	46 138	2 4	2 2	120	424	3.53	Accepted
2	Insufficient explanation on the functions of punctuation marks using enough examples by teachers.	36 144	61 183	18 36	5 5	120	368	3.06	Accepted
3	Lack of constant practices by the learners	58 232	40 120	21 42	1 1	120	395	3.29	Accepted
4	Few materials on punctuation marks.	24 96	65 195	20 40	11 11	120	342	2.85	Accepted

Data presented in table 2 above showed that on item 1, 70 respondents strongly agreed, 46 agreed, 2 respondents disagreed and 2 respondents strongly disagreed. It has the mean score of 3.53 and it is accepted.

On item 2 above, 36 respondents strongly agreed, 61 agreed, 18 disagreed and 5 strongly disagreed. It has the mean score of 3.06 which is above the normal mean that is 2.5 and it is accepted.

On item 3, 58 strongly agreed, 40 agreed, 21 respondents disagreed and only 1 respondent strongly disagreed. It has the mean score of 3.29 and it is accepted.

On item 4, not having enough materials on punctuation marks, 24 respondents strongly agreed, 65 agreed, 20 disagreed and 11 respondents strongly disagreed. It has the mean score of 2.85 and it is accepted.

This implies that lack of knowledge or ignorance of the rules of punctuation marks in Igbo, insufficient explanation and functions of punctuation marks using enough examples for illustration by teachers, lack of constant practices by the learners and insufficient materials on punctuation marks are the causes of punctuation errors by learners of the Igbo language.

Research Question 3

What are the effects of wrong use of punctuation marks in the academic performance of students of the Igbo language?

Table 3: Responses of the respondents on the effects of wrong use of punctuation marks in the academic performance of students of the Igbo language

S / N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	S D	N	FX	X	RMARKS

1.	Students of Igbo fail in both internal and external examination (essay section) as a result of punctuation errors.	32 128	53 159	20 40	15 15	120	342	2.85	Accepted
2.	Wrong use of punctuation marks makes Igbo essays very ambiguous.	64 256	50 150	5 10	1 1	120	417	3.47	Accepted
3.	Punctuation errors lead to poor performance of students in essay competitions in the Igbo language.	45 180	73 219	2 4	0 0	120	403	3.35	Accepted

Data presented in table 3 above shows that on item 1, students of Igbo fail in both internal and external examination as a result of punctuation errors, 32 respondents strongly agreed, 53 agreed, 20 disagreed and 15 respondents strongly disagreed. It has the mean score of 2.85 and it is accepted

On item 2, wrong use of punctuation marks makes Igbo essays very ambiguous, 64 respondents strongly agreed, 50 respondents agreed, 5 disagreed while only 1 respondent strongly disagreed. It has the mean score of 3.47 which is above the normal mean that is 2.5 and it is accepted.

On item 3, punctuation errors lead to poor performance of students in essay competitions in the Igbo language, 45 respondents strongly agreed, 73 agreed, 2 disagreed while no respondent strongly disagreed. It has the mean score of 3.35 and it is accepted.

Research Question 4

What are the remedies in curbing Igbo punctuation errors among learners in Orumba North Local Government Area?

Table 4: Mean respondents of the responses on the remedies in curbing Igbo punctuation errors among learners in Orumba North Local Government Area

S/ N	Items Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	FX	X	REMARK
1.	Enough explanation on punctuation marks using examples for illustration by teachers.	82 328	38 114	0 0	0 0	120	442	3.68	Accepted
2.	Constant practices by the learners	47 188	73 219	0 0	0 0	120	407	3.39	Accepte
3.	Provision of enough materials on punctuation marks.	50 200	70 210	0 0	0 0	120	410	3.41	Accept

Data presented in table 4 above showed that on item 1, 82 respondents strongly agreed, 38 agreed, no respondent disagreed nor strongly disagreed. It has the mean score of 3.68 and it is accepted. Items 2 and 3 above have mean scores of 3.39 and 3.41 respectively and they are accepted.

Summary, Conclusion

Summary

This research study focuses on the analysis of the punctuation errors committed by learners of Igbo using SS 2 students of three selected schools in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State. It examines the causes, effects and remedies of punctuation errors in Igbo writings. Out of the thirteen government secondary schools in the local government, three secondary schools were randomly selected and the questionnaire technique was administered to one hundred and twenty (120) students chosen. From the data analysis, the researchers found out that wrong use of punctuation marks by learners of Igbo cause ambiguity in Igbo writings to a great extent.

It was discovered that punctuation errors are due to learners' lack of knowledge or ignorance to punctuation rules in Igbo, insufficient explanations/functions of punctuation marks using enough examples for illustration by teachers, lack of constant practices by the learners and insufficient materials on punctuation marks. Also, it was discovered that wrong use of punctuation errors by the students lead to poor performance as well as failure in Igbo writings. From the analyzed data, the findings of this research study indicate that learners of the Igbo language commit errors in punctuating Igbo writings which might be due to ignorance of punctuation rules or lack of constant practices. This needs to be tackled if the learners of the Igbo language need to master the punctuation of that language. Hence, they need instruction and constant practice.

Discussion of the findings

The results are discussed in line with the research questions that guided the research.

Research question one reveals the extent punctuation errors cause ambiguity in Igbo written communications in Orumba North Local Government Area. The results of this research question show that wrong use of punctuation marks causes ambiguity in Igbo writings to a great extent hence, it will be difficult, if not impossible to understand the meaning of a text or an essay in Igbo if the punctuation marks are wrongly used, since wrong use of punctuation marks hinders the flow of thought and idea of the writer.

Research question two examines the causes of punctuation errors by learners of the Igbo language. The findings indicate that lack of knowledge or ignorance of the rules of punctuation marks in Igbo, insufficient explanation on the functions of punctuation marks using enough examples by teachers, lack of constant practices by the learners and insufficient materials on punctuation marks are responsible for punctuation errors committed by learners of Igbo.

Research question three reveals the effects of wrong use of punctuation marks in the academic performance of students of the Igbo language. The result shows that wrong use of punctuation errors by the students lead to poor performance as well as failure in Igbo writings.

Research question four stated the remedies in curbing wrong use of Igbo punctuation marks among learners of Igbo in Orumba North Local Government Area. The result of this research question shows that three factors were identified as remedies such as: enough explanation on punctuation marks

using examples for illustration by teachers, constant practices by the learners and provision of enough materials on punctuation marks.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the research study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Seminars, workshops, conferences should be organized for the students to improve on learning and use of punctuation marks in the Igbo language.
2. Teachers should explain the rules of punctuation marks very well using enough examples.
3. There should be constant practices on punctuation marks by the learners of Igbo.
4. Students, teachers, parents as well as the society at large should not have negative attitude towards the Igbo language as a yardstick for measuring illiteracy.
5. Qualified teachers of Igbo language should always be employed to handle the subject in secondary schools in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State.
6. Government should organize secondary schools' competition in area of essay writing in Igbo in order to improve the written communication in Igbo among secondary school students in Orumba North Local Government Area.

Conclusion

This research study was carried out to analyse punctuation errors by learners of Igbo in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State. From the data analyzed above, the researchers deduce that most of the learners of the Igbo language have inadequate knowledge or practice on the correct use of punctuation marks hence, there should be constant practices by the learners of Igbo. Also, the researchers conclude that punctuation errors cause ambiguity in Igbo written communications in Orumba North Local Government Area to a great extent and it requires adequate attention for a better performance.

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