

## Tautology in Written and Spoken English of Undergraduate Students of University of Calabar

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**Abstract:** This research on tautology in written and spoken English: A case of Nigerian users was carried out to bridge the gap in the widely used and accepted tautologies by Nigerian speakers of English with particular interest in proffering the standard usage of such tautologies, notwithstanding the fact that the English spoken in Nigeria is not totally standardised. To achieve this, thirty final year students of the department of English, Akwa Ibom State University were interviewed in written and spoken English. Every day topic of discussion was painstakingly selected and administered so that it could be discussed both in speaking and writing activities. Excerpts of discussions on social media platforms were also extracted. Austin's Speech Acts theory was adopted as the theoretical framework with particular attention to its taxonomies. Data obtained were analyzed and findings show that tautologous usages have become part of their language habit and other Nigerian users of English unconsciously as they pay little or no attention to it, given that it has been widely used. The paper thus suggests that tutors in classroom settings, media presenters, language teachers in all spheres should be on deck; seminars, and other means of enlightenment be conducted pointing out the errors and the standard versions.

**Keywords:** Tautology, Written and Spoken English, Undergraduate Students and University of Calabar.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of tautology and redundancy prevails in Nigeria given the status of second language. Whenever English leaves its original home to another environment it becomes Englishes since it takes over the features of the new environment. Tautology refers to the repetition of words or phrases (Eka, 2010). It is the use of different words to say the same thing twice in a statement therefore becoming a needless repetition of an idea. Language is a unique gift bestowed on man. Daramola (2004:23) captures language as that which does not exist like an organism, but occurs.

This means that language occurs and its function is put to use by man. No doubt, language is the expression of culture, the repository of culture and crucial mode of cultural transmission. This implies that every language captures its society or environment. After Nigeria's independence in 1960, the English language has been given dependent functions in various societal situations as language of official communication, language of business, language of transmitting knowledge, among others. The role of English language in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. According to Graddol (1996) in Akinjobi (2002:30) states; almost in all countries of the world, English is used as a first, second or a foreign language. Hanjo (2002:52) further affirms that, "the English language in Nigeria has assumed the status of a second language considering its unique role as the official language". From the foregoing, it is clear that the English language has gained recognition in Nigeria than any other Nigerian language hence, the language has developed a new variety different from the standard British English(SBE) which is captured as "Englishes".

However, some scholars refer to this process as notification or indigenization of English in Nigeria. Bamgbose (1995:9) observes that the present form and status of English in Nigeria are as a result of the contact between English and Nigerian languages in the socio-cultural, political and linguistic situations. From Bamgbose's notion, it implies that they are factors that affect English in a new environment, given the tendency of transliteration and interference which is often realized in lexis, syntax, semantics, phonology and in a broader sense, tautology, which is the thrust of this research work. This becomes necessary owing to the alarming rise in needless repetition of words or phrases by Nigerian users both in speaking and in writing. These errors are almost perfected by renowned writers, speakers, students, tutors and English experts.

The Nigerian bilingual mostly speaks English as a second language (L.2) with errors from the (L.1) or background language (Udoka 2022). Lado (1957) holds that;

*The Nigerian child tends to transfer the sentence forms, modification devices, the number, gender and case patterns of his background language owing to psychological and subconscious memorization of his MT or the markedly absence of some core features of the background language into English Language.*

Okono (2023) notes that tautology is an unnecessary repetition of a word or an idea and a defective writing behavior of a second language user. This habit produces a negative reaction in the reader of a given writing. This development according to Udoka (2022), not only distorts the intended output of effective communication, but also exposes a flagrant depletion of their low linguistic and eventual appalling communicative competence in English.

Examining the way people use language in different social contexts according to Holmes (1992), provides a wealth of information about the way language works; as well as about the social relationships in a community. Udoka (2022) is of the view that speakers of English globally employ numerous means to get connected between language and exact communication within a twinkle of the eye with little or no effect. This is a justification of the extent to which language and communication have made of the world. Some of these deviations are revealed in the subsequent sections of this research work where respondents engage in tautologous expressions as the case may be.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Since the departure of English in its original home to Nigeria, the language has adopted the features of the Nigerian environment which account for issues of tautology, interference and transliteration in areas like phonology, syntax, morphology, among of others. Nigerians including writers, speakers, and experts in the use of English and others have often tried to represent things in their indigenous language. However, this has often resulted in tautology and this is alarming as it has eaten deep into the language repertoire of Nigerians hence, the thematic thrust of this research work. Findings shows that this problem is almost not recognized by professional users of this language given its age long usage where people have come to accept it as standard versions both in writing and speaking.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SPEECH ACTS THEORY**

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) developed the theory of speech acts which clarifies what people do when they speak. Austin's (1962) "How to Do Things with Words" posit that the form of any sentence carries a message which requires an action from the addressee. The source further states that, speech acts are an attempt to do something purely by speaking. However, according to Searle, to understand language, one must understand the speakers' intentional behavior, which should be treated like a form of action. Thus, Searle refers to statement as speech acts. The speech act is the basic unit of language used to express meaning, an utterance that expresses an intention. Normally in speech act, there must be sentences, words or phrases whereby when one speaks one performs an act. Speech is not just used to designate something; it actually does something. Speech act stresses the intent of the act as a whole. To Searle, understanding the speaker's intention is essential in capturing the meaning.

Speech act's theoretical view in communication is therefore contextual, dynamic and goal-oriented because the speaker usually has an intention when communicating. Communication then can be successful, if the hearer grasps the goal and replies either in the affirmation or otherwise. Therefore, to communicate means to act. The following are ways speech acts can be analyzed according to Searle's taxonomies;

**(i) The locutionary act**

The concept of locutionary act is the performance of an utterance. The actual utterance and its ostensible meaning, comprising phonetic, phatic and rhetoric acts corresponding to the verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects of any meaningful utterance. Locutionary acts refer to the surface meaning of an utterance. Example: Don't go into the water. Locutionary act is the physical act of speaking. That means the speaker composed sentences in specific context. The locutionary act thereby is the grammatical structure of the utterance.

**(ii) The illocutionary act**

Illocutionary act is central to the concept of speech act. Illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another. Searle (1976:60). Searle's work on speech act is commonly understood to refine Austin's conception. An interesting aspect of illocutionary act is that which is performed in the utterance of what Austin calls 'performative'. Performative sentence is the action that the sentence describes.

**(a)** Assertive or representative acts are speech acts that commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. It states claims, tell and describe. It uses such verbs as assert, complain, report, state conclude etcetera.

**(b)** Directive acts are speech acts that cause the hearer to take a particular action like request, commands and advice. These are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something with such verbs as to ask, order, command, request, plead, beg, pray, etcetera.

**(c)** Commissive acts are speeches that commit a speaker to some future action. This type commits the speaker in a way that he promises. It reveals the intention of the speaker.

**(d)** Expressive acts are speech acts that express the speaker's attitude and emotions toward a proposition. Congratulations! Thank you! Are some examples.

**(e)** Declarative acts are speech acts that change the reality in accord with the proposition of declaration. Example: I pronounce you husband and wife.

**(f)** Directive acts express the speaker's attitude toward some prospective action by the listener. Searle (1975) set up these classes of illocutionary acts in order to illustrate how these actions are being considered in the concept of speech act. In a nutshell, Assertive or representative act describes an event, process, states or claims. Declarative acts pronounce, and Expressive acts perform the function of appreciation.

Other aspects of speech acts are performative act and felicity conditions. Performative act centers on the listener. It is the intended or unintended effect that an utterance can have. Here, it culminates into a direct or indirect speech act where the direct speech is an utterance that has direct relationship between the structure and the communicative functions of the utterance. While the indirect speech, there is an indirect relationship between the form and the functions of the utterance.

The performative acts also have to do with verbs which carry action. Example

I order you to leave.

I name this ship Shimack.

In felicity of conditions, certain things must be done to have a successful communication. It is divided into propositional content conditions, preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions and essential conditions (Renkema 1993:23).

Propositional content condition requires that the locution must exhibit conventionally acceptable words for erecting the particular speech act. Preparatory conditions require that specific requirement exist such as that the utterance is made by a person that has authority. Sincerity condition requires that the person performing the act must have appropriate beliefs or feelings to do the action. The essential condition requires that the speaker commits himself to speech act and takes upon himself the responsibility of carrying out the act. (Renkema 1993:23)

## **METHODOLOGY**

Thirty final year students of Akwa Ibom State University were selected as the case study along with few excerpts of conversation of people on social media. The interview covered both written and spoken English of the final year students. The following categories represent the data for this study; the RAS syndrome, semantic redundancies, double comparatives and superlatives and double negatives. These redundant errors in usage were noted and analyzed under the following, grammatical errors, redundant use of adjectives, over generalization of grammatical rules, interference, transliteration, emphasis error and by semantic extension on the grammatical intention and correct version intended by the user.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Language enthusiasts often believe that there is danger in paying attention to the errors of learners of language. However, to reduce errors, it is important to look out for errors and act upon them, for increase in language proficiency since the attainment of communicative competence is the goal of second language learning. Scholars like Josephson (1989), Brown (1987) observe that there has been a shift from preventing errors to learning from those errors. To Chomsky (1973:260) learning of language structures has moved from memorizing correct models to the application of communicative models. This has aroused the interest of scholars in identifying, analyzing and treating errors through error analysis. The first step is the identification of errors and tautology or pleonasm is one of them. Moore as quoted by White (1958:147) states that tautology is a faulty repetition of phrases, such as; me, myself and I'. Moore adds that the following items are related to tautology, showing that repetition comes in different forms:

1. Antanaclasis. The repetition of the same words in a different if not contrary signification, such as that's that or who's who
2. Paronomasia. A play upon words in which the same word is used in different sense: thou art peter (Rock) and upon this rock, I shall build.
3. Pleonasm is the use of syntactically unnecessary words as in "the man he said"
4. Redundancy. The use of more words than required by syntax repeat again

However, linguists have pointed out what could account for the reasons people deliberately use tautology as follows:

1. Acceptance or Resignation: people use tautology to accept or resign oneself to something. But war is war!
2. Intended vagueness: people use tautology to achieve ambiguity. Political demagoguery falls into this category. Carston (1989:51-66) explains that tautology, strategically, would be a way of saying something without actually saying much; I am that I am!
3. Denial of Difference within category: mostly this category is used in an argument or debate. The law's the law.
4. Derision: people also use tautology to neither strengthen or weaken a point but to ridicule. A quotation from Shakespeare in *Hamlet* as captured by Lott (1970:74) suffice;

*Polonius what do you read, my lord?*

*Hamlet. Words, words, words,*

5. Poetic Device: several tautologies can be seen in literary works as repetition, onomatopoeic words or even pun.

## **DATA ANALYSIS:**

### **Samples of written and spoken tautology by Nigerian users**

These samples of tautologies by Nigerian users are in written and spoken form.

They have been classified into four groups namely

1. The RAS syndrome
2. Semantic Redundancies
3. Double Comparatives and superlatives
4. Double Negatives

**1. The RAS syndrome:** The *RAS* acronym refers to Redundant Acronym Syndrome (*RAS*) it is deliberately repetitive to call attention to the errors it mimics. It is the tendency to repeat the last words of common abbreviations

Examples:

“Use this ATM Machine”

“Put your PIN Number”

“HIV virus”

“OPEC Countries”

“RAM Memory”

The RAM syndrome tautology mostly occurs in speech than in writing.

### **2. Semantic Redundancies**

These are expressions that are universally ridiculed as needlessly repetitive.

Examples

“Both the two of them”

“Return back”

“Adequate enough”

“Repeat again”

“Reverse back”

“New innovation

“Added bonus”

“Kill to death”

“Short summary”

“Joint collaborations”

“Fellow colleague”

“Loud bang”

“Speak out”

“Chart nap”

“New beginning”

“Extreme end”

“Free gift”

### 3. Double comparatives /Superlatives

Most tautologies could be found in repeating the degrees of adjectives and adverbs. Examples

“More Better”

“More Fatter”

“More Faster”

“Most Fastest”

### 4. Double Negatives

Like double comparatives and superlative double negatives amounts to tautology if it occurs when two negations are combined to talk about one thing in a sentence

Examples

“Not Nobody”

“Didn’t Nothings”

“I am not giving it to nobody”

### Semantic Implications

This category discusses the semantic implications of the grouped tautologies under consideration and proffers grammatical solutions.

#### 1. The RAS Syndrome

“Use this ATM Machine”

The ATM means Automated Teller Machine.

Abruptly saying ATM Machine refers to redundancy in machine. Many Nigerian speakers of English quickly say ATM machine not paying attention to the “Machine” in ATM

“Use this ATM” becomes appropriate

“Put your PIN Number”

This goes along with the explanation above. PIN means personal identification number and becomes tautology when used together with number. Put your PIN becomes suitable

*“HIV virus”*

HIV refers to Human immunodeficiency virus. It is already tautology to say HIV virus.

*“OPEC Countries”*

The acronym OPEC means Organization of petroleum exporting countries. Hence, including another “countries” by saying OPEC countries becomes tautologies.

*RAM Memory*

The acronym RAM refers to Random Access Memory. The inclusion of another memory renders it tautologies.

#### 2. Semantic Redundancies.

“Both the two of them” many users of English in Nigeria are guilty of the above tautology: both refer to two and becomes ungrammatical when used together.

“Return back” in a bit to stress a point, this phrase is often used. However, ‘return’ and ‘back’ connotes sameness and should not be used together.

“Adequate enough”, “repeat again”, “reverse back”, “new innovation”, “added bonus”, “kill to death”, “short summary”, “joint collaborators”, “fellow colleague”, “loud bang”, “speak out”, “short nap”, “new beginning”, “extreme end” etcetera all fall under this category.

### 3. Double Comparatives

Double comparatives like “more better”, “more fatter”, “more fastest” among others are tautologous. Comparatives have their positive, comparative and superlatives respectively. Example good, better, best. Fat, fatter, fattest.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The study set to examine tautology in the written and spoken English of Nigerian users with the aim of pointing out tautologous tendencies and metting out the standard versions. Thirty final year students of the department of English, Akwa Ibom State University were selected and interviewed orally and in written English. Few excerpts of conversations by online users on social media were also streamlined.

Findings have shown that people make use of tautology unconsciously and in minor cases consciously. Since the environment and culture play a key role in influencing language usage, users of English language in Nigeria have only emulated what is spoken in the immediate environment. For example, when pointing to tautologous usages, speakers would often say that they have come to speak and know it that way which goes on to tell about the influence of the immediate environment. However, those who have been exposed to the standard versions of such usages, still find it difficult using the standard version unless being highly conscious when speaking and writing and in most cases correcting themselves after making such errors.

## CONCLUSION

It has been shown in this paper that tautologous usages have been mostly used unconsciously and that the immediate environment plays a key role in its influence and transliteration. At such, it goes ahead to tell how low the acquisition of standard English is. This work has pointed to some examples of tautology and also proffered the standard versions of them. However, without a conscious effort to eradicate these errors, they would always remain in their stead.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Standard usages of English should be encouraged at all levels and in environments where English strives. Constant exposure to standard usage should be top priority of teachers to learners both at home and in schools. Seminars and conferences should be held periodically to checkmate the progress made in blotting out common errors. There should be a sense of awakening consciousness when speaking and writing English as a foreign language.

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