

A Linguistic Description Of Errors Attributed To Short Forms In Written English Composition

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Abstract : *The study is a Constructivist description of linguistic errors attributed to short forms in form three written English compositions in secondary schools within Kakamega Central Sub-County. The infiltration of errors attributed to short forms has been a major concern on the fate of the Standard English. This study therefore aims to assess the influence of social networking on short forms on students' written English compositions; precisely form three students in Kakamega Central Sub-County within the framework of the Constructivism theory. The study was guided by exploratory research design., The study target population consisted 28 schools, 70 teachers and 1,244 students. Simple random sampling was used to select 20 teachers, and 124 students while stratified simple random sampling was used to select 9 schools from the 28 secondary schools. The researcher used questionnaires, document analysis of student's written composition, checklist and interview schedules to allow for data triangulation. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools analysis so as to establish the associations of the study variables. The results are presented in form of frequency tables and cross tabulation tables. Qualitative data was analyzed as per the study themes. The research findings will assist policy makers and stakeholders in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in finding recommendation that would help to remedy the fate of Standard English.*

Keywords: *errors, short form, social network, standard English*

I. INTRODUCTION

Kenya like many other countries in the world uses English as the official language. In secondary school education in Kenya, English is a compulsory subject. It has been given this prominence because it influences many areas of life. It is important to produce individuals who are competent in their performance in the written discourse. The English language that is taught in secondary schools is used to facilitate communication in school and in life after school (MOEST, 2005). Fromkin *et al.* (1996) assert that linguistic competence – what a learner knows about the language – is different from linguistic performance – how they use this knowledge. In his earlier study, Corder (1967) points out that errors produced by learners can be distinguished either as competence errors or performance errors and that they should be named 'errors' and 'mistakes' respectively. He defines that an 'error' is a deviated learner language that occurs due to the lack of knowledge of the proper rule whereas a 'mistake' is a deviated learner language that occurs when learners fail to perform their linguistic competence.

The absence of this adherence impacts negatively on the performance of students in composition writing which is a significant part of the compulsory English examination. Over the years, it has been noted that Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) candidates have various omissions in their compositions. One such gap is the predominant use of shortforms. Such a shortcoming is a motivation to any examiner, to wish to carry out a research on the effects of shortforms on students written English composition with a ultimate objective of coming up with remedies. This study therefore stands on rare premise to examine the transformative impact of SMS text messaging on students written communication skills. The study examined how pervasive the use of SMS texting is among form three students in kakamega central sub-county; its possible effects on students' writing skills; and, what teachers and students themselves think about the phenomenon. This study therefore stands on rare premise to examine the transformative impact of short form errors on students written composition.

1.1 LINGUISTIC ERROR

An error is a deviation from accepted rules of a language made by a learner of a second language. In general terms, 'error' simply refers to 'mistake' (COBUILD, 1997). However in linguistic terms, the concept of 'error' seems to be more complicated. Although an error can also be defined as a deviation from the norms of the target

language (Ellis, 1994), there is doubt as to whether this definition is precise due to the vague use of the word 'norms'. As far as the English language is concerned, thousands of dialects have been developed in various parts of the world. Therefore, it seems to be fairly difficult to determine which variety of the target language should be used as the norm. In respect to this point, Ellis (1994) states that the standard written dialect is generally chosen as the norm particularly in language classrooms. Similarly, Fromkin *et al.* (1996) point out that the standard dialect is usually the most widely spread and is used to teach non-native speakers. They further assert that even speakers of different dialects use the standard dialect as the written form because it is "the accepted literary standard" (p.297)

Hendrickson (1980, p.169) defines 'error' from more of a teacher's perspective whereby he sees 'error' as "an utterance, form, or structure that a particular language teacher deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use or its absence in real-life discourse". Moreover, Long precisely defines an error as:

- (1) any phonological, morphological, syntactic or lexical deviance in the form of what students say from a standard variety of English which is attributable to the application by the learner of incorrect grammatical rules,
- (2) recognisable misconstrual of or lack of factual information,
- (3) a breach of rules of classroom discourse, and
- (4) a bit of student language behaviour treated as an example of (1), (2) or (3) by the teacher. (Long, 1977, p. 279)

1.2 LINGUISTIC ERRORS ON STUDENTS WRITTEN COMPOSITION

According to Goldstuck (2006) mobile phones were introduced to the youth market in the late 1990s. During 2004, 500 billion SMS messages were sent worldwide. In South Africa, 85.5 million SMS messages were sent during the 2004 festive season alone (Statistics & News, highlighting the increase in communication via mobile phones, 2004). A study conducted in the United Kingdom found that teenagers view text messaging as an additional means of communication, seeing that they have been exposed to it since childhood (Faulkner & Culwin, 2004). Thurlow (2003) also indicates teenagers' preference to use text messaging as a core feature of their mobile phones, and Goldstuck (2006) describes a new, dynamic English slang in development due to text messaging. The content of written compositions may also be influenced by learners avoiding the use of words of which the spelling is uncertain (Silliman and Wilkinson, 2007). Based on these facts, it is therefore, plausible to conclude that students who practice condensing their text messages will also apply this to their written school work.

Educators are informally debating the impact of text messaging on the written language skills of learners. Contrasting views on the impact of proliferating text messaging are expressed (e-School News, 2003). According to Lenhart *et al.* (cited in Weiss, 2009), several educators and observers are concerned that the abbreviated language style of text messaging is inappropriately filtering into official school writing. The use of SMS language has also been observed in examination scripts (Weiss, 2009).

Extrinsic factors consist of a child's family environment, socio-economic and cultural-linguistic environment, literacy opportunities, as well as home and school instruction (ASHA, 2001). If it is determined that SMS language has an influence on the written language skills, SMS language can then be viewed as an extrinsic factor which will influence the learner in the academic domain. It is, therefore, essential to determine whether educators are of the opinion that SMS language has either a positive or a negative effect on academic achievement of adolescent learners in their class rooms.

The Global Messaging Survey conducted by Nokia in 2002 revealed that text messaging has addictive tendencies. This finding was confirmed by a study undertaken at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium in 2004. Following these, another study at the University of Queensland in Australia found that text messaging is the most addictive digital service on mobile or internet, adding that the text reception habit introduces a need to remain connected. By this facility, a sense of connectedness of users is assured even in circumstances where voice calls may not be practicable or acceptable. It also provides users with the convenience of responding to messages when they deem fit (Global Messaging Survey, GMS, 2002).

Text messaging on language has generated a great deal of debate (Dansieh, 2011). While researchers like Russell (2010) are of the view that regular use of the service can impact negatively on the everyday language of "texters", linguistic experts like Crystal (2008) refute this stance. In an unscientific poll conducted by Edutopia.org, out of 1028 respondents, 50% were of the view that texting was harming students' writing and grammar. Twenty percent of respondents thought that text messaging could have some effect on students' writing; but did not consider it as a major problem; while 27% felt it did not have any negative influence (Russell, 2010). Therefore, these studies gave inconsistent results on the influence of text messaging on the students' written compositions.

1.3 Treatment of Errors

the terms 'error' and 'error treatment' have been reviewed in order to determine definitions pertaining to the current. A great body of literature has dealt with the issue of error treatment and numerous terms have been used in this area. For example, Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) use the term 'feedback', whereas Hendrickson (1984) and Hammerly (1991) use 'error correction'. According to Ellis (1994), the terms, 'feedback', 'repair' and 'correction' are often used to refer to the general area of error treatment. As the semantic restriction of each term is necessary for the current research, the review will briefly discuss some commonly used terms. Generally, the term 'feedback' represents various types of classroom interactions with the most extensive scope (Chaudron, 1988). Dulay *et al.* (1982) term 'feedback' as the listener or reader's responses provided to the learner's spoken or written production. Likewise, Keh (1990, p.294) defines 'feedback' "as input from a reader to a writer with the effect to providing information to writer for revision". Wajnryb (1992) recognises 'feedback' more specifically as the teacher responses given to what learners produce in the classroom. Moreover, Lalande (1982) terms 'feedback' as any kinds of procedure used to inform whether a learner response is correct or wrong. According to Nunan (1991), teacher responses can be distinguished by either negative feedback or positive feedback, and negative feedback is defined by Ayoun (2001, p.226) as "information following an error produced by the language learner". Broadly speaking, error treatment refers to this negative side of teacher feedback given to learner errors.

As mentioned previously, the term 'error correction' has also been used instead of 'error treatment' to refer to teachers' responses to learner errors. Chaudron (1986, p.66) explains that the concept of correction is "any reaction by the teacher which transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of, a students' behaviour or utterance". Moreover, Ellis (1994) asserts that 'correction' is defined as teachers' attempts to provide negative evidence to deal specifically with learners' linguistic errors. In Hendrickson's 1984 article entitled *'The treatment of error in written work'*, he uses the term 'correction' to refer to teacher treatment of errors throughout the study. Similar examples can also be seen in Hammerly (1991) and Plumb *et al.* (1994). Seemingly, these researchers do not make a clear distinction between 'error treatment' and 'error correction'. In other words, these two terms can be treated equally and used interchangeably. Some researchers, however, distinguish the terms 'treatment' and 'correction' clearly. Allwright and Bailey (1991), for example, consciously avoided the use of the term 'correction' in their study. They state that this is because the word 'correction' implies a permanent 'cure', which is different from impermanent 'treatment'. Allwright and Bailey argue that even if a teacher corrects an error and manages to get a right answer, it does not mean that the error has permanently been cured. Since the focus of their research was to investigate the immediate effects of teachers' responses on learner performance, the use of the term 'correction' was considered to be inappropriate.

Another example of the narrower concept of 'correction' can be seen in Ziv's study conducted in 1984 that investigated the effect of teacher comments on the students' writings. In Ziv's article, she does not use the term 'treatment'; instead, she introduces her own taxonomy of teacher comments: explicit cues, implicit cues and teacher corrections. The term 'cue' used in her study refers to a hint, a suggestion or an indication of errors written by the teacher to help the learners' self-correction, whereas 'correction' refers to the teachers' actual correction such as the addition, deletion or substitution of words. Therefore, the idea of 'correction' used by Ziv is more restricted, and it is only seen when the teacher provides a right answer to the students.

The term 'error treatment' in general has been discussed so far; however henceforward, the focus of the review will be shifted to treatment which deals more specifically with written errors. There are a number of treatment methods that have been introduced by the literature (see Hendrickson, 1980; Muncie, 2000). First of all, researchers such as Hyland (1990) and Moxley (1989) recommend tape-recording, which is the method whereby teachers record their comments to each learner's written errors on cassette tape, the learners are then able to remember these comments. Secondly, Fregeau (1999), Koshik (2002) and Lewis (2002) introduce an individual conference, whereby the teacher meets learners individually, to assist learners who have difficulties with correcting particular errors. The third type is an error illustration, which is the method in which the teacher uses learners' common errors as instances for class explanations (Harmer, 1991). The final treatment method is the most common type of treatment and involves the teacher directly writing their comments in learners' written texts. According to Ziv (1984), this is one of the most direct methods that affect learners' writing performance, and so, many studies focus on the effectiveness of different types of teachers' written responses to learner errors (Leki, 1990). Since the current study was primarily designed to investigate and analyse written comments, it is necessary to restrict the meaning of the term. Therefore, the term 'error treatment' henceforth will refer exclusively to any types of teachers' comments written in text in order to draw learners' attention to the errors.

Methods

A descriptive study was conducted involving 93 students of Kakamega Central sub-county schools in which 27 schools were selected for the study. Kakamega Central sub-county has both private and public schools, for this study only public secondary schools were used. The sample size was calculated using Kombo and Tromp (2006) formulae for descriptive study based on 30% to be a representative for the study population. The study used stratified sampling to identify sub groups in the target population. There were 27 schools in Kakamega central

sub-county where Lurambi division had 10 schools and the Municipality 17 schools. Purposive sampling was used to select the form three students that were used in the study, simple random sampling was used to select form three students of who in the researcher’s opinion was a representative of the target population. Simple random sampling was justified because every member of the target population had an equal and independent chance of being selected. To avoid bias, the sample included both sexes.

The researcher administered pretested closed and open ended semi-structured questionnaires, checklist and interview was also administered to the sampled population. Piloting was carried out in two schools outside the study area, the two schools were randomly selected before the actual collection for the study. To enable the researcher identify the problems that were bound to occur especially when it comes to filling of the questionnaires. The researcher used test and retest technique where the same data instrument was administered twice to the same respondent after a period of two weeks. Pearson Correlation Coefficient of 0.5 was taken to imply that the data instruments were reliable and a valid measure of 0.5 was acceptable as in Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient.

Results

Table 1: Frequency distribution of rate of questionnaire returned

gender of respondent(rows) by age of respondent(columns)					
	18-24years	25-34years	35-47years	above 48years	Total
male	4(4.444%)	7(7.778%)	23(25.556%)	7(7.778%)	41(45.556%)
female	0(0.000%)	30(33.333%)	16(17.778%)	3(3.333%)	49(54.444%)
Total	4(4.444%)	37(41.111%)	39(43.333%)	10(11.111%)	90(100.0%)

A total of 90 (100%) questionnaires issued to teachers were all returned. According to Kothari, C (1993) over 60% return rate was acceptable return for survey study such as this one. The results shows that female teachers (54.4%) were more than male teachers (45.6%). and majority of the respondents were between 35-47 years (43.333%).

To find out the type of short form errors the students commit in their written composition. A composition was given out to randomly selected form three students with the aim of identifying linguistic errors. From the marked composition, the linguistic description of errors attributed to short form was as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of linguistic errors attributed to short forms

G-clipping	Shortening and contraction	Number and letter homophone	Non-conventional spelling	Total
992	1375	1076	622	4065

A Chi-square test was used to find out whether there is any significant difference in written composition with errors and written composition without errors. The null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the Chi-square are shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Chi-Square Tests of Association for types of error encountered

Test Statistic	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-square	7.333	3.000	0.062

To find out whether there is influence of short form errors in the written composition of form three students. Data was analyzed and results shown in table 4 below.

Table 4 Influence of short form errors in written composition

Values indicating that short forms have an influence on the written English composition.		
Yes	No	Total
85(94.444%)	5(5.556%)	90(100.000%)

To find out whether short form error has influenced the students written composition, data was analyzed and results obtained as shown in table 5 below

Table 5: Influence of short form errors in written English composition.

	Vocabulary	Language	Written	Total
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	Vocabulary	Language	Written	Total
G-clipping	10(11.111%)	8(8.889%)	4(4.444%)	22(24.444%)
Shortening and contraction	6(6.667%)	18(20.000%)	7(7.778%)	31(34.444%)
Number and letter homophone	13(14.444%)	6(6.667%)	5(5.556%)	24(26.667%)
Non-conventional spelling	4(4.444%)	4(4.444%)	5(5.556%)	13(14.444%)
Total	33(36.667%)	36(40.000%)	21(23.333%)	90(100.0%)

This study employed the chi-square test to statistically prove the relationship between the type of error and its impact. The alpha level set in this research was 0.5 and is commonly chosen significance level for linguistic studies (Butter, 1985). Chi-Square Tests of Association for types of error encountered and how the short forms have influenced the written composition is shown in table 6 below.

Table 6: Correlation Values

Test Statistic	Value	Df	p-value
Pearson Chi-square	6.039	6.000	0.419

II. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The responses obtained in table 1 showed that majority of the respondents were between 35-47 years (43.333%). The data also showed that all teachers had experience of more than four years which helped them perform their duties effectively. From the analysis it is clear that there is no female teacher between the age of 18-24 years and the age of 25-34 years and there are more female teachers than male teachers. This implied that all teachers had experience of more than four years which helped them perform their duties effectively. The response obtained in table 2 showed that 87(96.667%) agree that there are errors in written English compositions. This findings concur with observation checklist that shows different kind of errors attributed to short forms in written composition of the form three students. The analyzed data also revealed different forms of linguistic errors attributed to short forms in student written English compositions. The response obtained shows that linguistic description of error exist in written composition among form three students. The most common error that exist among the students is shortening and contraction then followed by number and letter homophone. Non-conventional spelling is the least form of error that the students use in the written composition. It's now clear from the analysis that the form three students commit the linguistic errors attributed to short form in their written composition.

From the analysis in table 3, the chi-square test is 7.33 and the p-value is 0.062, this imply that there is a big difference between the observed data under the null hypothesis of no significance difference. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected since the p-value is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Thus we conclude that there is significant difference between the written English composition with linguistic short form errors and written English composition without linguistic short form errors. The results of the table 4 shows that 94.44% of the respondents agreed that short forms have influenced the written English compositions while 5.56% disagree that short forms has not influence the written English compositions. It is clear from the analysis that short form linguistic errors has influenced the written composition of the form three students. From the results of table 5, it is clear that that grammatical errors is the major areas that linguistic short form errors has influenced in the written English compositions. Interpretation of results in table 6: Accept the null hypothesis that linguistic short form errors has influence student's written composition. From the analysis it's clear that the written English composition has been influenced by the short form errors attributed to linguistic errors. The main areas that has been affected is the spoken language and vocabulary.

III. CONCLUSION

From this study, it was finally concluded that students commit linguistic errors attributed to short forms in written English compositions and this has greatly affected negatively there reading and writing skills, therefore remedial measures should be taken to avoid further damage of the English language. On the other hand, teachers should always examine the composition of the students so as to identify the mistakes before the students reach their third year or fourth year in high school. There were other loopholes such as internet that can influence negatively on learners if the learners are not well guided on its use. Lastly the study in its small scale nature has attempted to bring an understanding of the state of linguistic description of errors attributed to short form in students written composition in public secondary school; a case of Kakamega Central sub county. The immediate priority must be to sensitize students on prons and cons of social network.

IV. Acknowledgements

I take this opportunity to thank all the people who enabled me to successfully write this paper .They include Dr Bob mbori ,MrAtichiAlati,My wife Emma and our two children Naveen Muhavi and Ryan Giggsmwinamo

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