AN INVESTIGATON OF TENSE, ASPECT AND CONCORD USAGE PROBLEMS OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, MAKURDI

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NASARAWA STATE UNIVERSITY
KEFFI

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BEING A Ph.D THESIS PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES, NASARAWA STATE UNIVERSITY, KEFFI, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D) IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my original work and that it has not been submitted to any institution for the award of any degree.

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Date 02/03/2016

Certification

I hereby certify that this research thesis has been read and approved as satisfying the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in English Language in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

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ABSTRACT

English is intensively learnt as a compulsory subject and used extensively as instructional medium from pre-primary school to university level in Nigeria. However, studies on undergraduates' written English have indicated misuse of several grammatical items, though no such study exists on the students of University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The chief aim of the study was to investigate the nature and causes of tense, aspect and concord usage problems of first-year students of the university. A structural grammar description of tense, aspect and concord in modern English usage was provided as theoretical basis for discriminating deviant cases of tense, aspect and concord in the students' written productions. Essay-writing and multiple-choice tests were administered to 286 randomly sampled subjects. The results of data analysis showed that the students' written English communication is marred with incorrect uses and forms of verb tenses, wrong tense-shifts in reported speech, wrong tense-patterns in conditional sentences, deficient aspectual constructions and different concord errors. These findings suggest that elementary grammatical items like tense, aspect and concord still impede some undergraduates' effective communication in English due to imperfect learning. The study concludes that some university students who have had the last formal exposure to English language teaching and learning for academic purposes in Nigerian school system are yet unable to use correct tenses in written communication; they employ wrong tense-patterns in expressing real and hypothetical propositions in conditional sentences; they use incorrect verb forms in reporting other people's language; they generate aspectual constructions with incorrect structures as well as use them in wrong communicative contexts; finally, they write sentences devoid of subject-verb agreement and other concord relations. It is, therefore, recommended that these problematic grammatical items should be integrated into use of English course syllabus as topics for re-teaching and accompanied with copious practices so as to improve undergraduates' written English competence.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

English is a world language. From its earlier home in United Kingdom, English has spread across the world. So it is now spoken around the globe. English is well established in all six continents. An impressive variety of facts support its widespread use. One out of every four persons in the world can be reached through English (Shankar 77). English is an influential means of communication, permeating many human spheres. It is, for example, the principal language of books, newspapers, airports and airtraffic control, science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, commerce, academic conferences, pop music, law and advertising. Eight percent of all the information in the world's electronic retrieval system is stored in English (Crystal 358). English, along with Arabic, Chinese, French, Russia, and Spanish, is an official language of the United Nations (NU). Though Chinese is spoken by a greater number of people, English has a wider dispersion (Finegan 77). A conservative estimate as at 1991 suggested that overall total of English users is well in excess of 1,000 million (Crystal). English users are of three categories: mother-tongue speakers, those who use it as second language and others who use English as a foreign language.

English is a native language to more than 300 million people who live mostly in North America, the British Isles, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean and South Africa (Finegan). However in several of these countries English is not the sole language: Afrikaans or Bantu languages, for example, are used in South Africa, while many Irish and Welsh people speak Celtic languages. But those whose mother tongue is not English, use it as a second language (Quirk, *et al*.3-10). English has well over 300 million people who use it as a second language in many countries. Some of these countries are India, Singapore, Malaysia,

Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, Vanuatu, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Botswana, Cameroon, Gambia, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Marshall Island, Swaziland, Pakistan, Rwanda and several others, just to mention a sample (Obafemi 185-222). In some of these countries such as Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Liberia, English is designated as an official language because no one native language is generally acceptable while in others such as India, it shares that status with one or more local languages (Quirk, *et al.* 4-5). As a second language in these countries, English is used chiefly for international purposes.

The third group of the English-using world consists of countries where English is a foreign language, serving principally as the medium of communication with speakers from other countries. So Germany, Russia, China, France, Japan, Taiwan and Thailand, for example, use English as a foreign language, facilitating contact between them and foreign nations.

The focus of the study is on the use of English in a second language context (being Nigeria in this work).Quirk, *et al.* (4) has pointed out that English plays regulative, communicative, occupational, creative and instrumental roles in a second language context. English, for example, regulates the government administration and law courts in Nigeria; it facilitates interpersonal communication between Nigerians who speak different native languages; English makes it possible for the people to engage in commerce, science and technology intranationally and internationally; it enhances non-technical writing such as fiction and political works about the country. Some famous authors such as Wole Soyinka, Chinue Achebe, Zainab Alkali and a host of others have popularized the country in the literary world through their fictional works written in English.

English is instrumental to formal schooling in Nigeria, from pre-primary to tertiary level. In primary schools, English is taught as a core subject to give pupils adequate competence in it to enable them learn the other subjects in its medium. Also, English is taught

at this level to make the pupils capable of using the language in the entire communicative situation in which it functions as the country's official language. Although the national policy on education directs that the initial medium of instruction in the primary school should be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and that English be used at a later stage, what operates is that English is used as a medium of instruction from even pre-primary school level. Pre-primary education in Nigeria is mostly a privately owned elite institution and it is the wish of the proprietors and elite parents of the pupils that only English be used as medium of instruction (Akindele and Adegbite 106-134). So English is used as a major instructional medium in pre-primary and primary schools. At these levels, core aspects of English language are taught in the most simplified form to help the pupils acquire basic linguistic and communicative competence in it (Coates *et al).* Despite the emphasis on English Language teaching and learning at this level coupled with the availability of numerous resource materials, the speeches and writings of some pupils who have had primary education show poor knowledge and use of English. The deficiency is possibly caused by several factors induced by parents, teachers, the government, private primary school owners, the society and the pupils themselves.

At the secondary school level, English is also taught as a compulsory subject and used as the sole medium of instruction. The secondary school English course syllabus as designed by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), aims at improving and raising the proficiency level of students' written and spoken language. Grant (70-71) has itemized the following as objectives of English language study at secondary school level in Nigeria.

i. To enable students to acquire sufficient proficiency in the four language skill areas of English to be able to progress in the schools curriculum where English is required;

ii. To enable students to acquire proficiency in the language to be able to learn, either formally or informally, in both the spoken and written modes, once they have left their secondary institutions;

iii. To enable students to communicate in all social situations in Nigeria in which English may be deemed necessary;

iv. To equip students with a brand of English which is both nationally acceptable and internationally intelligent;

v. To reinforce so far as necessary and compatible with foregoing such as cognitive and psychomotor processes as are thought necessary for an educated person by the designers of the curriculum;

vi. To enable the students to pass the West African Examination Council (WAEC) or Nation Examination Council (NECO) 'O' level English language examination.

To achieve those goals, students are exposed to the core areas of English, namely, lexis, structure, composition, reading comprehension and oral skills (Oluikpe, *et al:* Banjo *et al*). There is no doubt that English is comprehensively taught at secondary school level, yet it is the most failed subject in senior school certificate examination (SSCE) organized yearly by WAEC and NECO. Students' difficulties with the language coupled with some non-linguistic factors account for the perennial mass failure in the WAEC or NECO English paper.

The study of English is also compulsory at first year level in all higher institutions as an ancillary use of English course, variously referred to as *General English* in college of education, as *Use of English* in polytechnics and as *Communication in English* in universities.

Though a pre-university credit pass in English Language is a pre-requisite for entry into university, fresh undergraduates are made to undergo a mandatory use of English course. Some basic assumptions justify the integration of the course into all undergraduate degree programmes. The first is the argument that the level of language competence achieved before

entry into university does not adequately meet the exerting linguistic demand for university education. It is not sufficiently high a standard for several practical communication purposes. The second valid assumption is that language is the most important tool for learning and that competence in the language of instruction helps effective learning. Simmons and Baines (3) emphasize that a student can learn nothing more valuable in school than a mastery over language. The third thinking is that English is both a second language and the medium of all official communications including teaching, and all students should be proficient in it. Again, the students come to the university with some deficiencies in English which should be remedied. Thus the use of English course is, conceptually, both remedial and developmental in content.

The broad aim of the course is to improve undergraduates' performance in the use of English in writing and speaking. More specifically, the course is designed to advance students' knowledge and use of English. Beyond that, the course also exposes them to note-taking, reading and study skills required for university academic work.In addition, the course aids the students to learn about common errors in the use of English and to recognize their language needs for further private study. Students who have participated in the course are supposed to use English acceptably both in writing and speech. Nevertheless, the spoken and written English of some undergraduates is fraught with signs of imperfect knowledge of basic grammatical elements.

The need to improve the proficiency of these learners in English is a great concern for parents, teachers and educational institutions today. The search for solution to this language problem has currently made the spoken and written English the subject matter of academic research. Consequently the undergraduates' written English has attracted numerous academic studies. Some specific previous studies such as the ones conducted by Ogungbe, Anasiudo, and Alagbe have proved that the students manifest different language problems which include

wrong word choice, wrong collocation, bad punctuation, spelling problem, poor knowledge of concord rules, misuse of auxiliary verbs, incorrect use of phrasal verbs and many other linguistic errors. The findings of these previous works, therefore, justify the need for more research works on the written English of university students.

Besides, all the researches so far have not exhausted the students' English language problems. For instance, no study has been undertaken on the English language problems of undergraduates of University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The present study fills this clear gap as it investigates tense, aspectual and concord usage problems of the students. Again, some of the research works are broad spectrum inventory of linguistic errors rather than detailed investigation of specific linguistic problems. Some studies such as Ogungbe's, Alagbe's and others studied particular English grammatical problems of university students. The present study toes the same path of specificity as it focuses on only three linguistic categories (namely, Tense, Aspect and Concord) which, from the experience of the researcher as teacher of English at tertiary education level for over a decade, are constant grammatical problems of undergraduates.

Tense is a linguistic device that indicates the correspondence between verb form and time. It relates verb form to the time of action, event or state of affairs referred to in a sentence to the time of utterance (being now). Tense in English language is strictly treated as a linguistic category realized by verb word inflection to reflect the tense implied in the context. The investigation of tense here seeks to find out if students use verb forms that convey the tense applicable in the context of their expressions.

Aspect, as a grammatical category, concerns the manner in which a verbal action is experienced, as either complete or in progress. The investigation of verbal aspect here focuses on whether verb forms within sentential contexts appropriately specify 'perfective' or 'progressive' meaning.

Concord, which is also called Agreement in English grammar, is a property of both intra-sentential and inter-sentential analyses. It is the relationship between two grammatical elements such that if one of them contains a particular feature (say. plurality) then the other must have that feature (Quirk, *et al 755-768.*). The study therefore investigates whether grammatical concord holds between various elements within sentences in the students' written expressions.

Summarily, the investigation of tense, aspect and concord in the students' written works focuses on the correlation between linguistic forms and contextual meanings. i.e. the extent to which students' use of linguistic forms with particular reference to English tenses. aspect and rules of concord cohere with intended meanings within sentence structures. So the grammatical model chosen for the analysis of tense, aspect and concord in the students' works is the structural grammar of present-day English (Quirk, *et al;* Ansell; Azar; Leech). The grammatical model gives deep insight into the grammatical forms and communicative functions of tense, aspect and concord.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A two-semester use of English course called *Communication in English* is mounted for the first-year students of University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The programme receives tremendous support from the university administration. Relevant instructional materials are provided to facilitate effective teaching and learning. The course is also taught by professionally qualified teachers. The programme has been considerably assisted by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) of British Council, Educational Tax Fund (Nigerian), and the university in the form of training and development of course lecturers. To minimize the phenomenal adverse effect of large class problem on effective teaching, the course participants (fresh students) are categorized into groups with each class being taught by a teacher or two.

iii. to find out the students' difficulties with English concord.

iv to recommend remedial measures that could solve the identified grammatical problems.

1.4 Research Questions

Some research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What are the students'problems with English tenses, tense-shift in reported speech and tense-pattern in basic conditional sentences?
2. What are the students' deficiencies in English aspectual consructions?
3. What are the students' difficulties with English concord?
4. What remedial measures should be taken to solve the grammatical problems identified in the study?

1.5 Justification for the Study

A study as this in the area advanced learners' usage problem must have been motivated by some factors.The factors are elaborated below.

1. The first was the desirability or necessity to solve some basic grammatical problems of some undergraduates so as to improve their linguistic competence which is itself instrumental to effective communication in English (Sinclair).

2 Another reason was to initiate research work on the written English problems of the students (of University of Agriculture, Makurdi) as no academic study had investigated their poor English which both academic and administrative staff members complain about.

3 A significant motivation for this study was to commence a language database relevant to the university's use of English course. For example the findings of this investigation could significantly be incorporated into the course syllabus as topics for greater emphasis in form of intensive drills, constant exercises, remedial work or even re-teaching (Corder 265 – 268). The advantage would be that the course syllabus would not only specify *what should be learnt* but also *problem areas for specific drills*.

4 Another factor was the need to do a study that is a departure from some previous studies which undertook broad inventory of grammatical errors rather than detailed investigation of specific English language problems of undergraduates. The present study toed the path of specificity as it focused on only three grammatical categories, namely, verb tense, verbal aspect and concord.

5 Finally, a great motivating factor was the inquisitiveness to investigate the nature and causes of the problems students encounterr with tense, aspect and concord in writing. These linguistic categories are constant problems of undergraduates' written English.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of the study would benefit students, teachers, university administrators, English textbook writers, curriculum planners and researchers.

The study is directly relevant to the language needs of university students. The study has provided information which the students could utilize to raise their proficiency level in the language to a level where they can gainfully participate in learning activities such as attending lectures, participating in academic discussions, studying materials, writing essays, reporting experiments, and so on. The subjects of this research study science and technology courses in the medium of English and method of scientific enquiry involves them in various language operations such as describing, predicting, hypothesizing, and speculating on cause and effect, accounting for observed results, concluding and so on. They would find these tasks easy to do if they can correctly use tense, aspect and concord in written English. Therefore, the findings of the study have made known the students' deficiencies in these items and suggested how they could improve their proficiency.

The study is also relevant to English language teaching. The findings of the study have exposed the weak points of the students in tense, aspect and concord. The information

would help instructors to devise effective methods of teaching these grammatical items so that students' difficulties will be significantly reduced.

The management of the university where the study was conducted as well as those of other universities would find the study important to the implementation of the use of English curriculum. Knowing that undergraduates are still deficient in elementary grammatical items like tense, aspect and concord should goad the university administration to identify and eliminate factors that inhibit effective teaching and learning of the course. If a pragmatic step as this is taken, then the information provided by the study would have helped to make the use of English more effective.

Another importance of the study is that its findings could help English language textbook writers to become acquainted with the difficulties students have with tense, aspect and concord, and they may use such facts to develop books that can minimize learners' problems with the items.

Designers of use of English syllabus would find the study significant to their work. The findings of the study show that undergraduates have genuine problems with tense, aspect and concord at the point they enter the university and that the nature of the difficulty demands that the items are repeatedly taught, revised and examined so as to improve students' performance. In other words, the information provided by the study may be used by language curriculum designers to reconstruct appropriate syllabus and teaching materials for the use of English course.

All scholars who are concerned with English language education in a second language context as Nigeria's would certainly find the study of immense importance to their work.

Finally, the study will also serve as a source of reference to researchers who are concerned with improving the quality of English spoken and written by our undergraduates.

The findings of the study would be made accessible to the beneficiaries through academic seminars, conferences, journals and as a research work in some libraries. Also, a soft copy of the study would be uploaded on the internet for beneficiaries.

5.1 The Scope of the Study

Three English grammatical categories called tense, aspect and concord constitute the scope of the study. The focus is solely on the grammatical forms and the communicative functions of the selected categories, and the extent to which the students' use of them deviates from standard English usage. The forms and functions of selected types of tense, aspect and concord were firstly described purposely to provide grammatical basis for discriminating deviant uses of the categories in the students' written English. Then the students were examined on the forms and uses of the categories to determine their proficiency.

The work has some limitations. Though there are more grammatical categories which pose problems to the students, the scope was limited to the three because of the need to do an exhaustive work. In spite of this shortcoming, the study still makes its modest contributions to knowledge. Besides, the limitations could serve as springboard for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

The chapter commences with a discussion of current theoretical perspectives on the usage problems of second language learners. The review further discusses structural grammar model as the relevant theoretical framework for the study; it also provides the structural grammar description of tense, aspect and concord in contemporary English as reference grammar with which to discriminate deviant uses of tense, aspect and concord in the students' works. Also, included in this section is a review of specific relevant empirical studies so as to situate the current research effort in the continuum of previous studies on the problem area.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Second Language Learners' Usage Problems

This work belongs to the field of second language learning research (Krashen). The subjects of the study are university students who learn and use English as a second language so the work is primarily a study of learners' language. In applied linguistics, where the study of learners' language is a core subject matter, some general approaches have been developed purposively for the investigation of problems associated with learners' use of a second language. Prominent among these theoretical approaches are Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis (Corder 256-294). The thrusts and practices of these approaches are discussed here. In addition, the particular approaches to which the present study aligns is specified and justified.

2.1.1 Contrastive Analysis (CA)

CA hypothesizes that the main barrier to effective second language use is the interference of the first language system (mother tongue or native language,) with the second language system (the target language). So, to eliminate the linguistic barrier a scientific

analysis of the two languages in question should be undertaken to produce taxonomy of contrasts between them. These differences would enable the language teacher to predict the difficulties a learner would encounter. The predicted contrasts which transform as the learners' difficulties become emphatical topics in language syllabus design, material development and classroom teaching (Littlewood 18).

The CA hypothesis as explained above is greatly influenced by the behavouristic psychological notion that learning is principally a process of habit formation (Littlewood 17). Consequently errors occur when first language (L1) habits interfere with the learners' attempts to acquire new linguistic behaviours. This essentially is the view of Robert Lado, a pioneer of CA (Corder), in his book called *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957), one of the earliest serious applications of CA to teaching. He argues that errors produced by second language (L2) learners result from interference from their mother tongue (Lyons). The term interference was first introduced by Uriah Weinreich who used it to mean "deviations from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language" (Brown 146-167). Interference, in the conception of CA, is, therefore, the cause of all negative deviations bilinguals make. All problems of learning or using an L2 are understood as mother tongue (MT) interference whereby L1 system has an overwhelming negative effect on the L2 system. Lado affirms this theoretical position when he opines that the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language (NL) will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult (Corder). When first language features are helpful to acquisition of second language features, a positive transfer results but a negative transfer occurs when first language habits impede the learning of the new language. As a result, differences between the two languages lead to interference which is the cause of errors. Thus second language

learning consists in overcoming the differences between the first and second language systems.

In practice, CA involves six different procedures (Littlewood 17-21). The first of these is description; the linguist or language teacher uses the tools of formal grammar to explicitly describe the two languages in question.

Second, a selection is made of certain linguistic forms (items, rules, structures, etc) for contrast since it is impossible to contrast every possible facet of two languages. Most often, the selection process reflects the assumptions of the investigator which in turn affects the forms that are selected. The third stage is the *contrast* itself, the mapping of one linguistic system into the other and a specification of the relationship of one system to the other which depends largely on the validity of the researcher's reference points. This activity is usually called the *contrastive analysis*. From the differences that emerge from the contrastive activity, the language teacher predicts the language items that will cause difficulty and the errors that the learner is prone to make. This is referred to as *contrastive analysis hypothesis*.

The fifth step is the use of the predictions to decide which items need particular treatment in the teaching of course, designing of syllabus and developing of materials. Finally, the linguist recommends or the language teacher can use intensive techniques (such as repetition or drills) to teach the difficult items in order to overcome the interference and establish the necessary new language habits. In practice, using CA to investigate the usage problems of second language learners is cumbersome and complex. For a teacher of English in a language classroom pupiled with learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, for example, as in Nigerian unity colleges, a contrastive analysis of English and every indigeneous language represented in the situation may have to be carried out. This is certainly tasking and wearying.

Also, in practice, teachers and researchers have found out that errors predicted by contrastive linguists have not often occurred whereas much actual errors would not have been predicted. For example, in one particular empirical study carried out by two linguists, namely, Randal Whiteman and Kenneth Jackson in 1972, four different contrastive analyses of English and Japanese were made in order to predict the errors that would be made by Japanese learners of English (Littlewood). They compared their predictions with the actual errors made by the learners in a series of tests. Their conclusion was that CA was limited in prediction of the linguistic items which proved difficult in the tests.

It also has been noted that the CA assumption that errors are reliable indicators of difficulty in second language learning is questionable. It is possible that some difficult aspects of language can stimulate the learner to draw on extra resources so as to avoid making errors (Littlewood 20).

In conclusion, CA hypotheses cannot reliably predict learners' difficulties and errors but can, however, sufficiently explain the errors which are due to transfer (Brown). This, by implication, makes CA part of the wider undertaking of Error Analysis to which the discussion now turns.

2.1.2 Error Analysis

Error Analysis (EA) is the study of second language learners' error. EA supercedes CA by its examination of errors attributable to all possible sources, unlike CA which restricts its focus to errors which result from negative transfer from the native language. EA recognizes that errors can arise from several possible sources: interlingual errors of interference from the native language, intralingual errors within the target language, the sociolinguistic context of communication, psycholinguistic strategies and countless affective variables (Brown168-196). An error, in the conception of the EA theory is a noticeable deviation from the overt grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the inter-language

competence of the learner (Brown). An error therefore, reveals a portion of a learner's competence level of target language.

CA stresses the interfering effects of the first language on second language learning and claims that second language learning is basically a process of acquiring the items that are dissimilar to the first language. This view recognizes the inter-lingual factors but ignores the intralingual effects. In the perception of EA, second language learning is a creative process of constructing a system in which learners are knowingly testing hypotheses about the target language from some sources of knowledge, namely, limited knowledge of the target language itself, knowledge about the native language, about language in general, about life, human beings and the universe (Brown). Learners are therefore not regarded as producers of malformed, imperfect language but as intelligent beings creatively acting upon their linguistic environment as they encounter its forms and functions in meaningful contexts. By gradual process of trial and error, learners eventually establish closer approximations to the system used by native speakers of the language. Some terms have been coined by applied linguists to describe the perspective which stresses the legitimate existence of learners' second language systems. A popular term is *interlingual* (Brown). It implies that the second language learners' system has a separate and intermediate status between the native and target language. It is also called *approximative system* (Brown). This stresses the successive approximation of learners' system to the target language. The same general phenomenon in second language learning is called *idiosyncratic dialect* to connote the idea that the rules of the learners' language are particular to the language of that individual (Corder 151). Though each of these designations stresses a particular notion, they share the concept that second language learners are forming their own self-contained linguistic systems. The system is neither that of the native language nor the one of the target language but it falls between the two languages. The

system is the product of the attempt by learners to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them.

In practice, analyzing an inter-language involves studying the speech and writing of learners because production data, it has been argued (Brown), presumably reflect a learners' underlying competence. Competence in a second language cannot be easily observed so it must be inferred by overt verbal and non-verbal responses, through artificial instruments of the teacher or researcher. In studying the oral and written productions of the learners, the focus is on the learners' errors because the 'correct' production only yields information about the target language system which the learners have already acquired successfully. But errors provide feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching materials and methods. Errors help the teacher identify the parts of the syllabus that have been inadequately learned or taught and therefore need further attention. Also errors aid language teachers to decide to move on to the next topic in the syllabus or he should devote more time to a previous topic which was either imperfectly learned or improperly taught. Errors provide the information for designing a remedial syllabus or a programme of re-teaching for a group of learners.

Studies in Error Analysis are of types.Three different types of EA studies have been identified: they are proportion study, quasi-proportion and occurrence study (Ndjoze-Ojo). The proportion study is one in which errors in an entire body of a speech or a piece of writing are classified and counted so that the research states in quantitative terms the relative proportion of each error type. In quasi-proportion study, the errors are analyzed and classified but not counted; this allows for only qualitative but not quantitative statements about the proportion of interlingual and intralingual errors. Occurrence study accounts for particular interlingual or intralingual errors but the proportion is not said.

The CA and, particularly, EA have dominated the study of advanced students' use of language in Nigeria. There are error analyses of the written and oral English of students of

polytechnics, colleges of education and universities. There is however none on the students of University of Agriculture, Makurdi. This is a clear gap which the present study seeks to fill. The present work is an error analysis but focuses on only intralingual errors associated with the linguistic categories of tense, aspect and concord in the written English of some first-year students of the university.

Intralingual errors have been selected because the students' difficulties with the selected grammatical items can be described by direct reference to the target language. In fact, this perception has been collaborated by Halliday *et al.* (119) who argue that any error in a learners' written or spoken English can be accurately described by referring solely to the description of English without necessarily considering or knowing the student's native language. This is possible because each error can be stated as a specific deviation from a described English feature. The EA approach adopted here is an eclectic model as it slices the three types of EA study explained earlier. The study dwells on intralingua errors of Tense, Aspect and Concord but it still investigates the nature, proportion and causes of the errors.

2.2 Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework chosen for analysis of Tense, Aspect and Concord problems in the students' written works is the structural grammar of modern English language. The key concept of structural grammar is its emphasis on structure, from which it derives its name. Structure, for structural grammarians, means the forms of words and arrangement of words to construct sentences. Structural grammar makes a basic distinction between form and meaning. Words and sentences have both form and meaning, though it is very difficult and perhaps ultimately impossible to precisely define meaning apart from form. Meanings cannot exist independently of the forms with which they are associated, and vice-versa (Lobner 197-216; Lyons 218-223). These basic ideas of structural grammar originated from the theory of language propounded by the great Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure

(1857-1913). The outlines of the theory were published in 1916 under the title. *cours de linguistique general* ('Course of General Linguistics'), a compilation of material from lectures Saussure delivered at the University of Geneva, between 1907 and 1911(Lyons).

The structural grammar approach holds the view that every language at a given time constitutes an integrated system of relationships. All linguistic units (sound, vocabulary, etc) of a particular language have significance or existence only because such units interrelate with one another in a particular given language system. This 'relational' or 'structural' view of language is, historically, a shift from an earlier 'word-centered' traditional grammar thinking about language (Hawkers 11-58)). Language therefore should be studied not only in terms of its individual parts but also of the relationship between those parts.

In addition, the structural approach makes a number of theoretical points which offer useful guide to this study.

Some of Saussure's most significant ideas were expressed in the form of pairs of concepts, namely, "diachrony" versus "synchrony", "Langue" versus "parole", "Signifiant" versus "signifie", and finally, "syntagmatic" versus "associative", (or paradigmatic. in later studies, (Lyons). These conceptual and terminological distinctions introduced by Saussure into the study of language offer a fruitful direction to the present empirical study. The main ideas of the technical terms and their relevance to this study are discussed here.

Structural grammar makes a distinction between 'diachronic' (historical) and 'synchronic' (non-historical) approaches to language study. The former approach considers language as a continually changing medium; the latter method considers it as a living whole, existing as a 'state' at a particular moment in time. The diachronic study of a particular language therefore means the description of its historical development, while the synchronic study of a language means the description of a particular 'state' of that language. For example, a diachronic study of the English language might trace its development from the time of earliest records to the

present day or might cover some more limited period of time. On the other hand, a synchronic study could be an investigation into the variety of meanings associated with the current English usage of the modal system of the verbal group.

The present study is synchronic. It investigates the use of English Tense, Aspect and Concord in the written expressions of some advanced-level students, using modern English usage of the items as a yardstick for judging deviant cases. Ferdinand de Saussure himself proposed that a language should be studied as we actually experience it now. Saussure's insistence on the importance of the synchronic as distinct from the diachronic study of language is based on the fact that language as a total system is complete at every moment, no matter what happens to have been altered in it a moment before. That is, each language has a wholly valid existence apart from its history, as a system of sounds issuing from the lips of those who speak it now, and whose speech in fact constructs and constitutes the language in its present form.

Again it is even significant to carry out some degree of synchronic work before undertaking a diachronic study because before we can say how a language has changed from state x to state y, we need to know something about x and y. Accordingly, a synchronic study can be carried out without reference to history. Nevertheless, a series of synchronic studies is, at times, required do an effective diachronic study.However, the present study is a synchronic one.

Another theoretical point that makes the structural approach suitable to this study is that it considers language as a phenomenon that exhibits two fundamental dimensions, namely, the abstract-language system which in English we call 'language' and its manifestation which we call speech. This two-fold notion of language as consisting of a structure which makes its performance possible originates from Saussure's three-fold set of terms about language: 'langage', 'langue' and 'parole'. The last two are central to his theory.

'Langage' is the faculty of speech latent in all human beings due to heredity. This refers to the ability of human beings to talk to each other. This faculty is composed of two aspects, 'langue' (the language system) and 'parole' (the act of speaking). 'La langue' is the system of a language. The language is a system of forms, whereas' parole' is actual speech, the speech acts which are made possible by the language. 'La langue' is what the individual assimilates when he learns a language, a set of forms or a grammatical system. 'Parole', on the other hand, involves the combinations by which the speaker uses the code of' the linguistic system in order to express his own thoughts. De Sausurean distinction between langue and parole coheres with Chomskyan differentiation between *competence* and *performance(Berry 23-24)* This theoretical distinction between 'langue' and 'parole' is relevant to this study which investigates both the grammatical forms and communicative appropriateness of tenses, aspects and rules of concord in the written English of some first-year bachelor's degree students.

A theoretical point of the structural approach that is relevant to this study is Saussure's 'signifiant' and 'signifie.' De Saussure defines language as 'a system of signs that express ideas' (Culler 38-39). The sign is the union of a form which signifies (the signifiant) and an idea signified (the signifie). The linguistic sign is arbitrary because there is no intrinsic link between signifier and signified. A particular combination of' signifier and signified is an arbitrary entity. For example, in English, the signifier represented by 'goat' is used to talk about an animal, 'the signified', but this sequence of sounds is no better suited to that purpose than another sequence. 'Sheep', 'dog' or 'cat' would serve equally well if they were accepted by members of' the English speech community. There is no intrinsic reason why one of these signifiers rather than another should be linked with the concept of 'goat'. Since there is no reason for one concept rather than another to be attached to a given signifier, there is therefore no defining property which the concept must retain in order to count as the signified

of that signifier. The fact that the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary means, then, that since there are no fixed universal concepts or fixed universal signified, the signified itself is arbitrary, and so is the signifier. The above theoretical approach to the study of meaning in language is relevant to this study which is an investigation into the forms and meanings of tenses and aspects in the written English of the subjects of the study. From the above, Saussurean concepts of 'signifier' and 'signified', verb words in English are 'signifiers' and the ideas they signify are 'signifieds'. Changes in the forms of verb words and the ways they are used indicate different concepts or 'signifieds': tense, aspect, mood, person and number. Since tense and aspect are inflectional categories, they are 'signifieds' resulting from changes which verb words undergo to facilitate communication. The study focuses on the grammatical form of verbs and the ideas of tense and aspect which they signify in the written communication of the subjects of the study.

A defining characteristic of modern structural linguistics is the interdependence of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. A general structural principle is that every linguistic unit has a certain place in a system of relationship. According to the Saussurean theory of language, a sentence is a sequence of signs and each sign contributes something to the meaning of the whole. When the signs are seen as a linear sequence the relationship between them is called syntagmatic, as in, *'John + sells +daily+ newspapers'*. When a sign that is present is seen as contrasting with other possible signs in the language, the relationship is called associative (or paradigmatic, in later studies), as in, *'John/Mary + sells/reads + daily/weekly + newspapers/magazines'*. Linguistic units therefore have no validity interdependently of their syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations with other units. These two dimensions of structure obtain at all levels of language, and they are therefore, relevant to this study. For example, we expect the subjects of the study to construct sentences in which the constituent words are in structural bond (or syntagmatic relationship), according to rules of

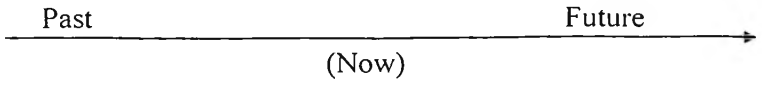
sentence formation in English. In addition, a chosen verbal word (in contrast to other choices) within a sentence must be a verbal form that syntactically fits into the linguistic environment. It is only in this way that the tense or meaning ideal in the context can be clearly expressed. The interdependence of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations is therefore a basic structural grammar principle germane to this study.

At this juncture more may not need to be said about the basic ideas of Sausurean structuralism which have influenced structural description of present-day English grammar except to recapitulate the key concept of structural grammar. A structural description of language tells us how all the components fit together. To Saussure, a language is an abstract complex system of relations and rules that underlies all regularities to be observed in actual language use. The system is formed by signs which are related in multiple ways. A sign, for example, a word, consist of two parts. One part is its sound form; the other part is its meaning. The association between the form and meaning of a sign (a word) is fixed by conventions of language use. The association is however arbitrary: a word could as well have a different meaning and the meaning could be associated with a different expression. More importantly, Saussure emphasizes that the sign and its parts use real entities in the minds of the speakers (Lobret 127-129). Deductively then grammatical categories have both forms and meanings: forms embody meanings and meanings are associated with forms; the two are interrelated and inseparable. This grammatical perspective applies to the study of the linguistic categories of tense, aspect and concord undertaken here, and the application has earlier been proved. The full implication of the above treatise is that structural grammar of modern English provides detailed description of the grammatical structures and communicative functions of English tense and aspect, in addition to the provision of relevant concord rules (Close 184-254; Leech 1-130; Svartvik and Leech113-139,273-277;Quirk *et al*

2.3 Structural Grammar Description of Tense, Aspect and Concord in Modern English Usage

Here, basic syntactic and semantic facts about tense, aspect and concord, as described in structural grammar of English language are provided as reference grammar base for discriminating deviant uses of the grammatical categories in the written language of the study subjects (Quirk and Greenbaum; Jackson 8-22; Woods and Mcleod 17-153; Ansell 14-184; Azar 4-112, 276-301; Huddleston and Pullum 71-212, 947-1030, etc.)

To begin with, a clear distinction needs to be made between time and tense. The two terms are not at all synonyms; in fact, they have different referents. Time is a universal concept, independent of any particular language with three semantic divisions of past, present and future (Quirk *et al* 175-233) This three-fold distinction can be illustrated with an infinitely long line on which is located the present moment (The moment of speaking or writing):



Anything before the present moment is in the past and anything ahead of it is in the future.In other words, we have past time, present time and future time.

Tense on the other hand is a verb category that relates the time of action, event or state of affairs referred to in a sentence to the time of utterance (being now). Put another way, it is the form of a verb that indicates the time of action, event, or state that the verbal item denotes in relation to the time the sentence was made (Aremo 58-70). Tense has been described as the representation in grammar of the distinction between past, present and future (Jackson 7o-106). For a reference point in this work the view adopted is that tense is a term used to refer to the morphological opposition between present and past forms of the finite verb (Quirk, *et al.* 189). This perception has been collaborated: that tense refers to a verb form so present

tense is given to a verb form like '*jump'* and past tense is the name given to a form like *jumped* (Close 11). Tense varies from language to language. In English, Tense is a basic verb category that shows the correspondence between verb form and human concept of time. Time is realized in English grammar by the systems of Tense and Aspect (Jackson). However, the referential interpretation does not have one-to-one correspondence in English Tense system because it treats Tense strictly as an inflectional category. So whereas the distinction between past and present is encoded in different forms of verbs, an English verb has no morphological form for future expression, though grammatical constructions exist in the language for expression of future time.

Consider these examples:

Ai. The babies *had* measles (past)

ii. The babies *have* measles (present)

iii. The babies *will have* measles (future time but present tense)

In these sentences, the verb word *have* is inflected as *had* for past; but retains its present form, *have*, for both the present and the future. This illustrates that the semantic triad of past, present and future in human concept of time is reduced to past and present in English grammar. English therefore has only past and present tenses even though there three kinds of time. But English has some constructions for expressing future time.The basic ones are discussed below.

A. Will/Shall + Infinitive

The modal auxiliary construction with *will* is commonly used with future meaning with subjects of all three persons (I, we; he, she, it, they; you). Shall, though infrequent, is used to indicate futurity but limited to the first person subject (I, we).

(1) We *will travel* on Monday

(2) I shall visit next week unfailingly

B. Be going to + infinitive

The construction has two specific meaning:

(i) Future fulfilment of present intention:

(3) Mom is going to convey us in her car to the concert

(4) Where are you going to spend your summer vacation?

(ii) Future result of present cause:

(5) It is going to be windy

(6) You are going to get a transfer

C. Present Pregressive

It is basically used to indicate a *future arising from present arrangement, plan or programme:*

(7) She is taking the children to an amusement park

(8) The president is leaving for London tonigh.

(D) Simple Present is a common means of referring to future actions as will shall construction:

(9) What will you do if you candidate is defeated at the polls

(10) The Prime Minister leaves for Cairn tomorrow

(11) The train takes off at 18:80 tonight

E. Will/shall + Progressive infinitive.

(12) I will be taken a two-week vocation

(13) The next train to Kano will be arriving at platform four.

The above five constructions are the most important methods of referring to future time.

2.3.1 Verb Forms

This section considers first of all, how tense and aspect are manifested in verb forms and finally, it examines in detail the meanings associated with tense and aspect, and the verb forms with which the meanings are realized (Woods and Mcleod).

There are two types of verb: main verbs and auxiliary verbs. Main verbs are either regular or irregular. The vast magority of English verbs are regular (Leech and Svartvik 316). Verbs have forms. There are five basic verb forms: BASE FORM (e.g: *call*, *speak*), S-FORM (e.g: *calls*, *speaks*), -ING PARTICIPLE (e.g: *calling*, *speaking*), past form (eg: *called*, *spoke*), and –ED PARTICIPLE (eg: *called*, *spoken*).But the verb BE has eight forms (*be, is, are, was, were, being, been).* The symbols, examples and functions of these verb forms in Tense and Aspect are outlined below.

(a) The BASE FORM (V) is used in the Present Tense with all grammatical persons and number except 3rd present singular which has the *s-form.*

Examples:

1. *I / You / We / They* } take breakfast every day

(b) The –S FORM (V-S) occurs in 3rd person singular Present Tense:

2. Jumai *sings* well

(c) The –ING PARTICIPLE (V-*ing*) functions in the Progressive Aspect following the verb BE:

3. He is *taking* a walk down the street

(d) THE PAST FORM (V-*ed*$_1$) functions in the Past Tense:

4. The manager *travelled* abroad yesterday.

(e) THE –ED PARTICIPLE (V-*ed*$_2$) occurs in the Perfective Aspect:

5. The dog *has leaked* up the milk spilled on the carpet.

Now attention is turned to the shades of meaning that these verb forms express in Tense and Aspect.

2.3.2 The English Tenses

2.3.2.1 The Present Tense

The form of the verb used with the Simple Present Tense is the base form, i.e. the basic uninflected form which is given as the entry form in dictionaries. However, the 3rd person singular subject takes the S-*form*. These forms are illustrated by sentences 1 and 2.

The Simple Present Tense has both present and non-present meanings. With reference to present time, the Simple Present Tense has three distinct meanings which are referred to as 'state present', 'habitual present' and 'instantaneous present' (Quirk, *et al.* 179-183; Leech 1-135). These three central uses of the Simple Present are discussed with examples here.

A. (i) The state present use of the Simple Present Tense is found with verbs expressing states. The present is here used to make timeless statements, that is, sentences that make no reference to specific time. The state present always refers to what obtains at the time of speaking. There is no inherent limitation on the extension of the state into the past and future time as in these examples:

6. *Honesty is* the best policy

4 War *solves* no problems.

5 John *lives* in Abuja.

However, limits to the duration of the state may be implied by an adverbial expression that stresses the 'presentness' of the period in question, thereby indicating a contrast with some other period:

6 Violence *is* the best policy *these days.*

7 War *no longer solves* any problems

8 *At present*, John *lives* in Abuja.

(ii) The state present use of the Simple Present is suitable for expression of 'eternal truths' as found in scientific, proverbial, mathematical or geographical statements:

9 Water *consists* of hydrogen and oxygen.

10 A rolling stone *gathers* no moss

11 Two and three *make* five

12 The Nile *is* the longest river in Africa.

(iii) Also, the state present is used to express a state which the time span, from our knowledge of the world, is to a greater or lesser degree restricted. In other words, the Simple Present expresses ideas and facts that are perceived to be objectively true (Sinclair 80-98):

13 John *is* short

14 This soup *tastes* salty.

B. The most common meaning or use of the Simple Present Tense is the 'habitual present' which is confined to 'event verbs'. 'The habitual present', like the 'state present', is suitable for expression of timeless statements.The habitual present represents a whole sequence of events, repeated over the period in question:

15 I often *buy* shirts at Kingsway

16 He *cycles* to work most days

17 I *buy* shirts at Kingsway

18 He walks to work.

In 15 and16, the adverbial expressions *often* and *most days* reinforce the notion of repetition (habit). Sentences 17 and 18 lack adverbial expressions but the verbs permit habitual interpretation. *I buy shirts at Kingsway*, for examples, makes one think of an established habit (a series of repeated events, not just of a single event). The same habitual sense exists in *He walks to work*.

C.(i) 'The instantaneous present' occurs with verbs expressing events, not states, and is a common meaning of the Simple Present Tense (Leech 1-130). In the instantaneous use of the Simple Present, the verb refers to a single action began and completed simultaneously with moment of speaking. It implies that the event has almost no duration so it normally occurs only in restricted situations as in commentaries, demonstrations, exclamations and performatives:

19. Kanu *passes* the ball to Omakochi, who heads it straight into the goal!

20. Now I *put* the cake mixture into the bowl and *add* a drop of vanilla essence.

21 Here *comes* the train! Up we *go*

(ii) The instantaneous use is also found in asseverations such as these:

22. I *beg* your pardon.

23. I *say* that you are wrong

24. We *accept* your offer

In all these cases of the instantaneous use of the Simple Present form of the verb, there is simultaneity between the event described and the speech event itself, that is, the thing said and the act of saying it are identical.

(iii) In addition to the uses with reference to the present, the Simple Present has some non-present uses(Quirk *et al)*. The Simple Present may refer to future time exclusive of the present:

25. The new clerk *assumes* work next Monday.

26. The plane *leaves* for London at seven o' clock tonight

(iv) Also, the Simple Present Tense may be used in reference to the past. The use is generally known as 'historic present' (Leech 18), because it describes the past as if it is happening now:

27. At that moment in *comes* a messenger from the colonial office, telling Okonkwo the Whiteman *wants* to see him.

The utterance conveys something typical of an eye-witness account.

(v) A different use of the Simple Present Tense in reference to the past is found with 'verbs of communications' as in these sentences:

28a. I *hear* that the poor teacher has gone into hospital

28b. The nine o'clock news *says* that there is going to be a heavy rain.

29. Tom *tells* me that you are getting a new car

30. I *understand* that Mrs. Jane has lost her laptop.

The verbs *hear*, *say*, *tells*, *understand* here refer to the initiation of a message in the past so the sentences should come with the Past Tense or Present Perfective Aspect:

31. I *have heard* that the poor teacher has gone into hospital (Present Perfective)

32. The nine o'clock news *said* that there is going to be a heavy rain (Simple Past Tense).

But the implication of the Simple Present Tense appears to be that the verbal meaning has been transferred from the initiating end to the receiving end of the message. The information communicated is still operative for the recipients so the Simple Present Tense is allowed (Leech 11).

(vi) Two other uses of the historic present are found in photographic captions and historical summaries and tables of dates:

33. Abraham *wants* to sacrifice his son, Isaac (a photographic caption)

Here, also, the Present Progressive Aspect is an alternative:

34. The President *arrives/arriving* for the state opening of the 4th National Assembly.

Examples of historical summary or table of dates:

35. (a) 1950: Achebe *starts* his first novel.

(b) 1955: He *completes* his first novel

(c) 1956: He *publishes* his second novel

(vii) Also, the Simple Present can be used in sentences referring to writers, composers, artists, etc and their extant works:

36. The central theme of *Things Fall Apart is* conflict of culture.

The Simple Present Tense is used here because the work and, through it, the artist are still 'alive'. The work of a painter, a writer or a musician can in fact be viewed as timeless. However, the Past Tense, not the Sample Present, is used to account for purely biographical facts of an artist.

(viii) The Simple Present is preferred to the past tense or perfective aspect in announcing recent events in newspaper headlines:

37. A Nollywood actor *dies*.

This 'headline' is possible in modern usage even through it contrasts with the Past Tense that is found in the corresponding prose account of the death incidence.

(ix) Another use of the Simple Present is fictional narrative. The Simple Past tense is conventionally used by writer of fictions to describe past, present or imaginary happenings. Thus the use of the Simple Present Tense seems as a deviation from convention. Nevertheless, some story-tellers use the Simple Present in narrative. This puts the reader in the place of an eye-witness of the events as they are described:

38. The protesting workers *swarm* around the gateway of the Labour Ministry and *seethe* with delighted anticipation; excitement *grows* as suddenly their leader makes his speech.

This use of the Simple Present has been referred to as 'fictional historic present' (Quirk, *et al* 183; Leech 25). A good example is the use of the Simple Present in stage directions:

39. The manager *enters*. The receptionist *pretends* to be working hard. The boss *sits* in executive chair, *assumes* a business like air, *picks* two files and *makes* for the door.

(x) Before closing the examination of Simple Present, it is relevant to mention the uses of the Simple Present in travelogue itinerary instruction booklet and verbal directions:

40a. To reach Abuja from Makurdi *make* your way to any motor park in Wurukum. immediately after the roundabout on your way to Gboko.

40b. You *test* an air leak by disconnecting the delivery tube at the caurburettor and pumping the fuel into a container.

41. You *take* the second turning past the immigration office. then you *cross* a bridge and *bear* right until you *see* the High Court of Justice.

(xi) Finally, the Simple Present may be used in reference to a later part of a book.

42. In the next section. we *examine* uses of the Past Tense.

2.3.2.2 The Past Tense

There are two features of meaning involved in the common use of the Simple Past Tense. One fundamental element of meaning is that the happening must have taken place in the past with a distinct gap between its completion and the present time. This implies that the present is wholly excluded:

43. I *used* the car for ten years (past, unconnected with the present).

The sentence makes it clear that I no longer use the car as opposed to:

44. I *have used* the car for ten years (past related to the present: meaning that I still use it).

Another basic element of meaning is that the speaker or writer must have a definite time in mind at which the event or state took place. Here the definite time in the past is characteristically identified by an adverbial expression accompanying the past tense verb.

45. We *visited* Jos 200 *last December*.

More specifically, there are at least six distinct uses of the Past Tense in modern English (Quirk, *et al.* 183-188; Leech 35-54). These are situational, anaphoric, cataphoric, event, state and habitual uses.

(a) The Past Tense is suitable for the expression of immediate past situation as illustrated by this sentence:

46. *Did* you lock the back door?

In domestic situation where it is known security measure that the back door is locked before leaving the house.

(b) The anaphoric use of the Past Tense occurs where the Past Tense referred to is already indicated by an earlier use of the Past Tense:

47. NAFDAC *closed* down the bakery. It *took* us completely by surprise.

48. *Last Saturday*, we *attended* a musical concert.

In (47), *took* is anaphoric, while in (48), the anaphoric reference is the adverbial of time. *last Saturday*.

The cataphoric use of the definite past occurs when the adverbial follows the Past Tense:

49. We *attended* a musical concert *last Saturday.*

(c) The use of the Past Tense in both main and subordinate clauses is permissible with temporal conjuctions such as *while, as soon as*, etc:

50. John *left* as soon as the train *arrived.*

The three other meanings of Past Tense can be simply identified as *event past*, *state past* and *habitual past* (Quirk, *et al.*).

(d) The *event past* refers to a single definite past in the past:

51. A volcanic eruption *burnt* the arable land

The dynamic verb sense of *burnt* in (51) identifies a single event but the verb *was* refers to a state in (52) so it is an example of *state past*:

52. Wrestling *was* a common sport in many Nigerian rural communities.

(e) The *habit past* expresses events even state of affairs which persisted through a period in the past:

53. In ancient times, the Olympic Games *were held* in southern Greece.

The Past Tense is not solely confined to past time reference. There are three meanings of the past tense with reference to present and future times. These are found in indirect speech, attitudinal and hypothetical expressions.

(f) In *indirect speech*, the backshift phenomenon (the tendency for past tense in reporting verb to make the verb of the subordinate clause past tense as well) can result in the use of the Past Tense for present time:

54. John: did you say you *have* had no money

Paul: Yes, I'm completely broke.

It is also possible to have a different kind of backshift when a sentence describing a speech in future contains a reported speech clause referring retrospectively to the present:

55. My mother will be sorry that she *missed* seeing you (an uncle) this evening.

(g) The *attitudinal past*, when used with verbs of volition or mental state, reflects the temporary attitude of the speak rather than past time:

56. Daughter: D*id* you *want* me?

Mother: Yes, I *hoped* you would give me a hand with the sewing.

In the dialogue above, both the present and past tenses refer to a present state of mind but the past makes the request indirect and therefore more polite.

(h) The *hypothetical past* is used in certain subordinate clauses, particularly *if*-clause, to express what is not expected by the speaker:

57. If the man really *loved* her, he wouldn't do such a thing.

58. Amina wishes she *had* a husband like Jummai's.

59. It's time the students *took* a holiday.

The *hypothetical past* as in 57-59 implies the non-occurrence of some state or event in the present or future. For example, the implication of (57) is that the man does not love her.

The form of the verb used with the Simple Past Tense is the past form (not the past participle):

60. He *wrote* to me one week ago but I only *answered* the letter yesterday.

2.3.2.3 Tense-shift in Reported Speech

In English, other people's language may be reported through either direct speech or indirect (reported) speech (Quirk *et al* 1020-1032; Azar 420-431; Huddleston and Pullum 947-1030; Leech 105-111; Leech and Svartvik 137-139). The direct speech claims to give the exact words of a speaker or writer while the indirect speech conveys in a report what the original speaker or writer has said or written. Direct speech is usually enclosed in quotations while indirect speech, typically, takes the form of a nominal *that*- clause. The distinction between direct speech and indirect speech is illustrated in these two sentences:

1a. Jane said, 'I need more money'. (direct speech)

b. Jane said that she needed more money (Indirect speech)

Whereas sentence (a) specifies the actual words spoken by Jane, sentences (b) reports the fact that she uttered them. Each of these sentences has a structure that consists of two parts: a reporting clause and a reported clause:

	Reporting clauses	reported clauses
(a)	Jana said	' *I need more money.* '
(b)	Jana said	that she needed more money.

In direct speech, the reporting clause may occur before, within or after the utterance itself:

1. He said, 'I am very hungry'.

2. 'I need more money', Jane exclaimed.

3. 'That woman', he said, 'is a pugilist'.

The reporting clause in indirect speech makes explicit reference to the following modes of

(i) The speaker and the act of communication, e.g:

4. *Mr. Brown announced* that the lecture had begun.

5. *She wrote* that she had resigned her appointment with the bank.

(ii) The person or persons spoken to, e.g:

6. *The doctor told us* that our father had a malignant cancer

(iii) The manner of speaking, e.g:

7. *The beauty queen said reluctantly* that she would contemplate getting married after her reign.

(iv) The circumstances of the speech act, e.g:

8. *The officer explained* the major components of the programme to the trainees.

In converting a direct speech to indirect speech, certain reporting verbs are used. The most common of the verbs is *say.* others include: *add, admit, announce, answer, argue assert, ask, beg, boast, believe, claim, comment, conclude, confers, cry (out), declare exclaim, explain, feel, insist, imagine, know, maintain, mention, note, object, observe, order promise, protest, realize, recognize, recall, remark, repeat, reply, report, say, shout (out) state, suppose, tell, think, urge, warn, whisper, wonder, write.*

When a report is conveyed through indirect speech some changes in wording are required because the situation of the utterance by the speaker may differ in some respects from that of the utterance by the original speaker. The differences affect features of language that relate to the time and place of the utterance and to the persons referred to in the utterance. These features include:

A. Tense forms of the verb

B. Other time references such as *yesterday, new last week, next Monday*, etc

C. Place reference, e.g: *here, there*

E. the demonstratives, *this* and *there*

To preserve the focus of this work only the changes that pertain to time or tense are discussed below:

A. Changes in tense forms of the verb

The choice of verb form in the reported clause depends on the time reference of the verb. When the time reference of the original utterance no longer obtains at the time that the utterance is reported it is necessary to change the tense forms of the verbs. Such a change of verb forms in indirect speech is called *backshift* (Quirk, *et al 1026.* and Leech 105). In terms of meaning, backshift implies that 'the time of the original speech which is 'now' for direct speech becomes 'then' for the indirect speech, and all times referred to in the speech accordingly become shifted with respect to that point of orientation' (Leech 106). There are both mandatory and optional cases of backshift.

The obligatory cases of backshift in reported speech are itemized, discussed and demonstrated below:

i) Simple Present is backshifted to Simple Past

10(a) 'My children *eat* rice with fish stew every Sunday', the woman said

(b) The woman said her children *ate* rice with fish stew every Sunday.

(ii) Present Progressive changes to Past Progressive

11(a) 'I *am studying* English at the moment', the student said

(b) The student said he *was studying* English at the moment.

(iii) Present Perfective backshifts to Past perfective

12(a) 'The fraudsters *have deceived* me', the manager told the guardman.

(b) The manager told the guardman that the frandsters *had deceived* him.

(iv) Present Perfect Progressive changes to Past Perfect Progressive

13 (a) 'I *have been studying* English', he said.

(b) He said he *had been studying* English.

(v) Simple Past remains Simple Past.

14 (a) 'I *travelled* to London last December', she said.

(b) She said she *travelled* to London last December.

(vi) Simple Past backshifts to Past Perfective necessarily when Simple Past in the indirect speech may be misinterpreted as representing a Simple Present:

15 (a) He said, 'I *was married* (but my wife died last year).

b) He said that he *had been* married

Contrast 15(a) with where there is no possibility of misinterpretation:

16 (a) He said, 'I *was married* in the court'.

(b) He said that he *was married/had been married* in the court.

17(a) 'The art exhibition finished last week', explained James

(b) James explained that the exhibitation *finished/had finished* the preceding week

The choice in (17 b) represents the common choice of a Simple Past in place of a perfective when the context makes the relative time references clear, in this case by the use of *the preceding week.*

The hypothetical past is backshifted to hypothetical Past Perfective if there is a change in time reference:

(c) If John *were* here, he would vote against the motion', she said

(d) She said that if John *had been* there, he would *have voted* against the motion.

(vii) The Past Perfective remains Past Perfective because the Past Perfective already expresses 'past in the past' and no further backshift to 'past in the past in the past' is possible in English (Quirk, *et al.* 1027)

18(a) 'John *had* already *gone* when I phoned him this morning', Jacobson said.

(b) Jacobson said that John *had* already *gone* when he (had) phoned him that morning.

19(a) 'I *had* studied Chinese for five years a school', I said.

(a) I said that I *had* studied Chinese for five years at school.

(a) Since sentences 18a ad 19a contain the Past Perfective, no backshift is possible as English has no means of expressing 'before – before – then' by tense or aspect (Leech 106). The backshift from Simple Past or Present Perfective to Past Perfective may be waived: I *once met Nelson Mandela* can be rendered in indirect speech as either, *He said he had once met Nelson Mandela or He said he once met Nelson Mandela.*

Backshift is optional when the time-reference of the original utterance still applies at the time of the reported utterance. Some of the optional cases are discussed here.

(viii) The reporting verb may be in Present Tense for communications in recent past time:

20. Jane *tells* me she was going to attend a meeting in an hour's time

21. He *says* he was too busy to join us last night.

(ix) The Present Tense is also used for reports connected with famous books or authors which have present validity.

22. The Holy Book *says* there is no end to learning

23. Shakespeare somewhere *writes* that a coward dies many times before his death.

Here are more examples where the Simple Present Tense may be retained in indirect speech:

24. Shehu told us last night that he *is* now a British Citizen

25. I heard him say that he *is studying* Law.

26. A structural Engineer has said that the old Benue Bridge *is* the most ancient embodiment of colonial relic on the Nigerian road.

27. The new Interior Minister thought that prison conditions *have* improved.

28. I didn't know that the entrance examination *is* next Saturday.

29. John said that the foreigners *are* being discriminated against.

30. The cook told us that breakfast *is* now being served

By optional application of the brackshift rule, the past forms of the verbs italicised in all the sentences may also be used. The verbs in the sentences have a limited time reference. The suitability of the present forms in 24-30 depends on their reference at the time of reported utterance. For instance, if at that time Shehu had changed his citizenship, an appropriate form of 24 would be, for example:

Shehu told us in 1980 that he *was then* a British citizen.

(x) Another instance where the concord between the reporting verb and the reported verb may be broken is in timeless statements (e.g of proverbial, scientific nature):

31. The Geography teacher told the students that the earth *moves* round the sun

32. Socrates said that virtue *is* knowledge.

These statements are timeless: they were valid at the time of utterance, still valid today and valid for all times.

(xi) Backshift rule can be ignored in habitual uses of the Simple Present:

33. He said that he *visits* the orphanage home every Saturday morning to help with the laundry.

(xii) Bachshift is optional if the proposition in the indirect speech is still valid:

34(a) 'If I *were* in Jos, I would visit the current NOK culture exhibition at the museum' he said

(b) He said that if he *were/had been* in Jos, he *would visit/would have visited* the current Nok culture exhibition at the museum.

(xiii) Auxiliaries in indirect speech.

A modal auxiliary is backshifted from present tense form to past tense form. The past tense forms *could, might, would* and *should* are used as past tense equivalents of *can, may, will* and *shall*

35(a) 'You *may* do as you wish', she said

(b) She said you *might* do as you wished

36(a) 'The King *can* do no wrong', they argued.

(b) They argued seriously that the King *could* do no wrong.

37(a) 'The plan *will* succeed', the detective assured them

(b) The detective assured them that the plan *would* succeed

38(a) "*Shall* I open the window", the visitor offered.

(b) The visitor asked if he *should* open the window.

(xiv) Even if the past tense forms do not indicate past time in direct speech, the past tense forms are yet used in indirect constructions:

39(a) We *won't* pay another kobo', they said.

(b) They said that they *wouldn't* pay another kobo.

(xv) The past tense forms of the modal auxiliaries in direct speech retain the same past tense forms in indirect speech:

40(a) 'You *shouldn't* smoke in the lecture hall', he told the new students.

(b) He told the new students that they *should not* smoke in the lecture hall

41(a) 'I *could* speak French when I was young', I said.

(b) I said that I *could* speak French when I was young.

42(a) 'When I was in secondary school I *would* study till three in the morning', he recalled.

(b) He recalled that when he *was/had been* in secondary school he *would* study till three in the morning.

(xvi) The modals *must, ought to, need* and *had better* have no present past distinction so the verbs remain unchanged in indirect constructions even where they refer to past time.

43(a) 'The babe *must* be hungry', the minder said.

(b) The minder said that the babe *must* be hungry.

44(a) 'You *had better* not say anything about it', she warned the son.

(b) She warned the son that he *had better* not say anything about it.

B. In addition to tense shift, other time references are changed differently according to the time of the reported speech:

45(a) 'I went to the cinema *yesterday*. Jane told me

(b) Jane told me that she went to the cinema *the day before yesterday.* '

C. Place references are changed if the places of original and reported utterances are different:

(i) T*here* to *there*

(ii) T*here* to *here*

(iii) Or the places may need to be specified by names.

D. Demonstrates are also changed if the relative distancing has changed:

(i) *This* to *that*

(ii) *These* to *those*

2.3.2.4 Tense-patterns in Conditional Sentences

A conditional sentence is one that contains conditional clause. A conditional sentence consists of two clauses: a *main (matrix) clause* and a *subordinate clause* that is a *conditional clause* which is also called *if-clause (Quirk, et al 1088-1096; Leech 112-134; Huddleston and Pullum 1273-1361; Close 59-62).* A conditional clause is a type of adverbial clause (Close 58). A conditional sentence states the dependence of one circumstance or set of circumstances on another (Quirk and Greenbuam 323).

A conditional sentence expresses both direct and indirect conditions. The chief uses of conditional sentences express a direct condition which conveys that the situation in the matrix clause is directly contingent on that of the subordinate conditional clause. Put differently, the truth is a result of fulfilment of the condition in the conditional clause (Ogundipe). Here are some examples:

(1) If it does not rain, we will go to the concert.

(2) If we finish early enough, we will be ready at six o'clock.

(3) If the work is not too difficult, I will not need your help.

(4) If John comes tomorrow, I will be happy.

In uttering (1), the speaker intends the hearer to understand that the truth of the proportion, *we will go to the concert,* depends on the fulfilment of the condition of, *If it does not rain.* The hearer also in reality infers that, *if it rains, we will not go to the concert.* For the other three examples, the respective hearers in practice infer these implications:

(2) *If we do not finish early enough we will not be ready at six o'clock*

(3) *If the work is too difficult I will need your help*

(4) *If John fails to come tomorrow, I'll be very displeased.*

More peripheral uses of conditional sentences express an indirect condition in which the situation in the conditional clause is not related (nor a precondition) to that of the matrix clause. This means that the truth of what is said in the matrix clause is not dependent on the condition expressed in the if-clause. Here are some examples:

(5) Jane and I are just good friends, if you understand me

(6) The lecturer is far too considerate, if I may say so

(7) If you don't mind my saying so, your hair is unkempt.

In (5), the fact of John and the speaker being friends is not dependent on the hearer's understanding of the utterance. Rather, the speaker warns the hearer that the correct interpretation of the utterance, *Jane and I are just good friends,* depends on the hearer understanding what the speaker means by the utterance: *'I'm telling you that on the assumption that you understand me correctly'.* In uttering (6), the speaker does not intend the truth of the assertion, *'The lecturer is far too considerate',* to be dependent on obtaining

permission from the hearer. Rather the condition is dependent on the implicit speech act of the utterance: *I am telling, if I may, that the lecturer is far too considerate.*

Also, in (7), the speaker only means this: *If you do not mind my saying so I am telling you that your hair is unkempt.* So in indirect conditions, the conditions are not related to the situations in the matrix clauses. The conditions are dependent on an implicit speech act of the utterance so they (if-clauses) are mere style disjuncts.

Common subordinators used in conditional clauses are: *if, unless, as long as, so long as, assuming (that), given (that), in case, on condition (that), provided (that), providing (that), supposing (that),* etc.

Examples:

8. The old woman had to watch where she puts her feet *in case* she fell
9. I'll lend you the book *on condition* that you return it within two weeks
19. *So long as* they had plenty to eat and drink, the workman seemed to be happy
20. *In case* of emergency, the simplest thing is to flick off the switch
21. *Unless* John improves his work, he will fail the final examination.

Of these conditional subordinators, *if* and *unless* are the most common. *If* is particularly most versatile so it is frequently employed to demonstrate the various uses of conditional clauses here. The section focuses on the uses of conditional sentences to express a direct condition because of their characteristic backshift of verb forms and variety of tense patterns.

A direct condition sentence is either an *open* (*real*) condition or *hypothetical* (*unreal*) condition. In other words, conditional sentences discuss the consequence of something which may or may not be a real event. Consider these examples:

22. I will lend Jeff the money because he needs it.
23. I will lend Jeff the money if he needs it.

The speaker of sentence (22) knows that Jeff needs the money, while the speaker of (23) does not know whether he does. A sentence like (23) expresses what is called an *open* condition because the truth or falsehood of what the sentence describes is *open*, that is, unknown. It is leaves unresolved the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the condition and hence also the truth of the proposition in the matrix clause (Leech and Svartvik 110-114). In the *unreal* or *hypothetical* condition, the speaker assumes the falsehood or unlikelihood of what is described:

24. I would lend Jeff the money if he needed it.

25. I would have lent Jeff the money if he had needed it.

The speaker's assumptions are:

(24) *He doesn't need the money* and (25) *He didn't need the money* (on some past occasion).

The various meanings associated with the two types of conditional sentences, namely,open (or real) condition and hypothetical (or unreal) condition are discussed below.

A. Open (Real) Condition

Open conditions have also been termed *real*, *factual* and *neutral* conditions (Quirk, *et al.*). The open condition has been also termed the *possible conditional* (Woods and McLeod 121). The open condition expresses the real possibility that an event or action might occur in the present, future or could have occurred in the past:

25. If he arrives at the office late, everyone knows it's going to be difficult day (present)

26. If she saw even the smallest fly trapped in a jar, she would be upset (past)

27. If two more people join, we can run the course (future)

Two basic meanings are associated with open condition (Sinclair 128):

(i) It is used to express a general truth or a frequent occurrence. Possible tense patterns are

a. Same tense in both clauses;

28. If the wind *blows* from the north, this room *is* very hot

29. If the goats *lose* weight during an illness, they soon *regain* it afterwards.

30. If the wind *blew* from the north, we *moved* into the other room.

31. If he *came* home after seven, he always *brought* some flowers.

b. Present Progressive Aspect in the conditional clause and the Simple Present in the matrix clause or vice-versa:

32. If the babe *is crying,* it *is* possibly hungry.

33. If an advertisement *does not tell* the truth, the advertiser *is committing* an offence

c. Present Perfective Aspect in the matrix clause and the Simple Present in conditional clause:

34. If the pupils *have lost* any money, they *report* it to me.

35. If *he has finished, ask* him to leave quietly.

(ii) The open condition is also used to express what is likely to happen (in the future) if the condition is fulfilled. Here what is said in the main clause is contingent on the condition in the if-clause. There are three possible tense patterns:

a. Simple Present Tense in the conditional clause and *will + infinitive* in the matrix clause:

36a. If Jones *marries* Mary, they *will need* the money.

b. If the rain *stops* I *shall go* for a walk.

c. If she *posts* it today, you *will get* it by Saturday.

(b) The Present Perfective Aspect in the conditional clause and *will + infinitive* in the main clause or vice-versa

36. He *is going* to visit some friends in Rome if he *has* the time

(c) The Present Perfective Aspect in the conditional clause and *will + infinitive* in the main clause:

38. If he *has done* the windows, he *will want* his money.

B. Hypothetical Condition

The hypothetical is also called '*closed unreal, rejected, nonfactual, counterfactual* and *marked condition'* (Quirk, *et al.*). It is also termed *impossible conditional* because it expresses an imagined situation which could not occur or did not occur (Woods and McLeod 128). In hypothetical conditional clauses, the verbs are back-shifted so that the past tense form is used for present and future time reference and the past perfective form for past time reference.

Verb forms that have such hypothetical implications are tagged *hypothetical past perfective* (Quirk, *et al.* 1010). In hypothetical conditions, there are three basic references: present, future and past. Each reference has its distinct belief with its tense patterns. Attention is now turned to the discussion of the references.

(i) Present reference

The meaning commonly associated with present hypothetical condition is: what is unlikely to take place because it is not likely the condition is fulfilled. Here, the speaker's belief is that the condition is not fulfilled. The condition is contrary to assumption (Quirk, *et al.*). What is said in the matrix clause is an imaginary consequence of a present non-fact.

Examples:

39. The professor *would be* here with us if he *had* the time

40. If I *was* rich, I *would buy* a jeep

41. If he *insulted* his mother, everyone *would blame* him

The conditions in 39-41, are impossible now. From these illustrative sentences, the tense pattern of the present hypothetical condition is evident: *past* in the conditional clause

and *past modal + infinitive* in the matrix clause. The past *would* is the modal most commonly used in hypothetical conditions. But other past modals (*should*, *might*, *could*) are possible:

42. If you *parked* your car there, (now) I *could* keep an eye on it.

43. If the student *could* type, he *might save* a lot of time

44. If I *were* the king, you *should* be queen

45. If our train *were* to arrive punctually, we *should* have time to visit your sister

(ii) Future reference

Here the hypothetical condition conveys the meaning or the speaker's belief that the condition will not be fulfilled. The condition is contrary to expectation (Quirk, *et al.*). The idea of futurity in hypothetical condition is also expressed by the same grammatical construction as used for the present hypothetical condition, sometimes with a time adverb or phrase (Eckersley and Eckersley 347-354). The tense pattern is therefore *past* in conditional clause and *past modal (would, could, should, might) + infinitive* in the matrix clause:

46. If Joan *worked* harder next term, he *would* pass the examination (The speaker expects Joan won't work harder).

47. If Joan *were* to work harder next time, he *would* pass the examination

48. If you *went* there, you *would* see what I mean.

49. If Jack *changed* his alcoholic habit, he *would* be a more likeable person. (The speaker expects that Jack won't change his habit)

Future hypothetical conditionals are also expressed in two other ways particularly in formal context by:

(i) *Was to* or *were to* followed by the infinitive:

50. What would you say if I *were to* tell you that Mary is going to be married?

51. If it *was to* /*were to* rain, the ropes would snap as they are far too tight

(ii) *Should* followed by the infinitive:

52. If a fuel scarcity *should eventuate,* the public would have to be told of its full repercussions.

(iii) Past Reference

Here, what is said in the matrix clause is now construed as an imaginary consequent past of non-fact-something that did not occur. It conveys the speaker's belief that the condition was not fulfilled (Close and Quirk, *et al.*). The tense pattern is *past perfect* in the conditional clause and past *perfective modal (would/could or should/might + past perfective)* in the matrix clause:

53. If you *had started out* earlier, you *wouldn't have been* so late

54. If she *hadn't been* ill, she *would have gone* to the concert.

55. If he *had realized* that, he *would have run away*

The situations in 53-55, might have happened in the past but did not.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that subject-operator inversion may signal conditional relationship without using a subordinator. The common uses of this inversion in conditional clauses are found with these operators, *had*, *were*, and *should*:

56. *Were* this enterprise to fail, it would be a disaster for us all

57. *Were* I in your place, I would be very worried

58. *Should* it be necessary, I will go.

59. *Should* she be interested, I will invite you.

60. *Had* you asked me, I would have helped you

61. *Had* we not been delayed, the accident would never have happened.

The review of meanings and tense patterns of basic conditional sentences done here provides grammatical basis for investigating students' problems with variety of tense patterns in conditional sentences in their written expressions.

2.3.3 Aspect

Aspect is a basic grammatical verb category which reflects the manner in which a verb action is regarded or experienced with respect to time (Quirk, *et al.* 175-237:Leech 18-54; Ansell 1-121; Azar 84-112). Unlike Tense, Aspect is not relative to the time of utterance. English has two aspectual constructions: the perfective and the progressive. The Perfective Aspect views the verbs action as complete, while the Progressive Aspect views the verb action as incomplete, on-going, that is, in progress. Compare these two sentences:

1. The lecturer *is proceeding* on a sabbatical leave (the progressive)
2. The lecturer *has embarked* on a sabbatical leave. (the perfective)

2.3.3.1 The Perfective Aspects

The Perfective Aspect indicates anterior time, that is, the time preceding whatever time orientation is signaled by the context or tense or other elements in the sentence. However, the primary concern of the Perfective Aspect is not with the time of the action but rather with the fact of its occurrence and its result. Consider these sentences:

3. Amina *has been* to Dubai four times
4. The gardener *has mown* the lawn
5. The professor *has bought* a new car.

In these sentences the attention is directed not on the time in the past when these actions were done but simply on the fact *that Amina's visits have taken place, that the grass is cut and that the professor now has a new car*. If attention were on the time of that action, a past tense and possibly an adverbial that indicates definite past time should have been used:

3a. Amina *went* to Dubai in *2003, 2004, 2006 and 2008*

4a. The gardener *mowed* the lawn *this morning*.

5a. The professor *bought* a new civic Honda car on *Monday*.

Thus while the Simple Past Tense and even the Simple Present Tense are used to express the time of action, the Perfective Aspect is used for a past happening which is seen in relation to a later event or time.

The Perfective Aspect which is also called Perfect Aspect has both present and past forms: the Present Perfective and the Past Perfective. Attention is now turned to the discussion of each type.

2.3.3.1.1 The Present Perfective Aspect

Generally, the Present Perfective relates a past event or state to a present time orientation. This means that the Present Perfective refers to past time with current relevance. That current relevance is the common semantic implication of the Present Perfective is illustrated by the difference between the meanings of sentences (6) and (7)

6. Jones *lived* in Nigeria for ten years (Simple Past)
7. Jones *has lived* in Nigeria for ten years (Present Perfective)

The two sentences indicate a past state of affairs. In the first, Jones' period of residence has ended whereas in the second, the residence has continued up to the present time and may even continue into the future. These examples affirm that the present perfective relates past action more directly to the present time. Essentially, the present perfective focuses on *now* in its use

The Present Perfective is formed with the present tense of the verb *to have* (*has have*) + *a past participle.* Examples:

8. He *has been* here for two hours
9. They *have lived* in Lagos since 1920

There are three different uses of the Present Perfective:

(i) A state continuing from the past up to the present moment, i.e. state-up-to-the-present. The state extends over a period lasting up to the present moment:

10. The University *has been closed* for two months

11. *Have* you *known* the professor for long?

12. He *has worked* here since 1980.

(ii) Indefinite events in a period leading up to the present. Here the Present Perfective makes reference to some indefinite happening in the past:

13. All the children *have had* polio vaccination.

14. *Have* you *been* to Rome?

15. She is a woman who *has experienced* suffering.

The 'indefiniteness' here means that the number of the events and the time are unspecific so the meaning of the Present Perfective here is 'at-least-once-before-now' (Leech 37)

This particular meaning of the Present Perfective is associated with three connotations:

a. That the time leads up to the present moment:

16a. *Have* you *seen* the Nok Art Exhibition?

b. I *have complained* about the traffic before.

b. That the event is recent.

17a. The Pope *has resigned.*

17b. *Has* the postman *called*?

c. That the result of the action is still operative at the present time.

18a. My uncle *has recovered* from his illness

18b. The mangoes *have* all *been eaten.*

But not all of the three implications necessarily apply in every given instance.

(iii) Habits or recurrent events in a period leading up to the present. The habitual use of the Present Perfective is illustrated by:

19. I *have* always *walked* to work.

20. Mercy *has sung* in this choir ever since she was a girl

21. The car *has been serviced* every month

The habitual may continue through the present moment into the future, and an adverbial of duration is usually required. *Mercy has sung in this choir* without the adverbial phrase becomes an instance of the indefinite past meaning. The habit element is often emphasized by an adverbial of frequency:

22a. The children *have grown* such a lot *since I last saw them*

22b. Prices of new cars in Nigeria *have increased* sharply *over the past three decades.*

Present Perfective has tendency to co-occur with time adverbials such as *recently, just, already, yet, up to now, since Monday, so far, hitherto, ever, up to, etc.*

23. That Spanish family *has lived* in Nigeria *since 1950.*

However, the following adverbials are associated with only the Simple Past Tense: *yesterday, a week ago, earlier, this week, last Monday, the other day, at four o'clock, in the morning, on Tuesday*, etc. because they refer to a definite time in the past:

24. I *met* the professor *last Monday*

But both the Simple Past Tense and the Present Perfective Aspect use the following adverbs *today, this morning, this year, recently, for, already, before, this month, once, just, yet, this June:*

25a. She *lived* in Abuja for *ten years*

25b. She *has lived* in Abuja for *ten years*

26a. I *have never been* to Jamaica

26b. I *never liked* going to the cinema when I was a teenager.

2.3.3.1.2 The Past Perfective Aspect

The Past Perfective has the meaning of 'past-in-the-past'; it denotes 'any event or state anterior to a time of orientation in the past' (Quirk, *et al.* 196). The Past Perfective has

been plainly described as 'a time further in the past, seen from the view point of a definite point of time already in the past' (Leech 47). Thus the Past Perfective expresses two past time orientations, namely, *before then* (time before a point in the past), and *then* (time before in the past), in addition to *now* (time now, i.e, moment of utterance). These time orientations can be symbolically designated as T_3 (before then), T_2 (then) and T_1 (now) as diagrammed in the chart below (Hewings 18):

Time orientation	T_3	T_2	T_1
Meaning	*Before then* (time before a point in the past)	*Then* (time at a point in the past)	*Now* (time now)
Example	• Joe discovered that Julie had lied to him T_3 T_2 T_1 Julie had lied Joe discovered Now		

Fig. 1: The Meaning of the Past Perfective.

The structure of the Past Perfective is made up of *had + a past participle*:

27. She walked into the station only to find that the train *had left*.

The Passive form is made up of *had + been + a past participle*:

28. Two robbers *had been clubbed* to death by some angry residents in the neighbourhood who had dispersed before the arrival of the police.

The Past Perfective can refer to states, events and habits as shown in these pairs respectively.

29a. No wonder Mr. Okafors Chinese was excellent – he *had lived* in China since

b. When Okafor bought the house, it *had been* empty for several years.

30a. When I arrived, you *had left*

b. She married a man who *had* once *killed* a lion.

31a. It was foolish to sack the manager because the company *had made* more profits in two years than any other previous officer.

b. Residents in the estate *had complained* about the state of the roads for three years before it was repaired.

The Past Perfective is associated with time expressions such as *after, as soon as, before, by the time (that), when, once, until, just, already:*

32a. It was not *until* I *had received* your phone call that I understood the true state of affairs.

b. *After* we *had found* the money, I told my mother about it.

c. *When* the cheering had died down, the trader union leader began his speech.

The main purpose of the Past Perfective is to put events or states into a chronological order so as to make clear which event or state in a sequence preceded which. Often, the Past Perfective is used for the first event and the Simple Past, for the second:

33. When we *got* to the field (*2nd event*), the match *had* already *started (1st event)*

But to emphasize that the second event is the result of the first, the Past Simple is used for both:

34. She *became* famous after she *appeared* on the TV programme

35. When the teacher *came* in, the pupils *stood* up

2.3.3.2. The Progressive Aspects

The Progressive Aspect is also referred to as the *durative* or *continuous* Aspect. It indicates a happening *in progress* at a given time (Quirk, *et al* 199). The progressive therefore conveys the idea of activity which has begun but is not completed (Close 245). This

incomplete activity can be continuous as in (36), or it may comprise an uncompleted series of acts. as in (37):

36. His children *are growing* older

37. Hurry up. The Teacher *is closing* the gate.

Importantly, the progressive is concerned with the uncompleted part or temporary duration of the activity or series. The progressive expresses three distinct meanings: that the happening has duration; that it has limited duration and that the happening is not necessarily complete (Quirk, *et al.*). Stative verbs do not normally occur with the progressive. Some of the stative verbs are discussed below:

(a) Verbs BE and HAVE

The primary verbs, BE and HAVE are preeminently used to introduce quality; they can also introduce less permanent states:

38. Jeff *is* an American (quality)

39. Jeff *is* tired (state)

But such stative verbs do not occur with the progressive:

40.* Jeff *is being* American

41.* Jeff *is being* tired.

However, there is an exception. BE and HAVE can combine with progressive when the verbs have interpretation other than the temporary meaning of the Progressive Aspect. If BE interprets as 'act in a certain way' and HAVE has interpretation other than 'possess', the verb can be used in the progressive:

42. Wait for your younger sister. You *are being* impatient. She *is having* her breakfast.

(b) Verbs which contain the idea of '*being' or 'having*': *apply to, belong to, compare, concern, contain, cost, depend on, deserve, possess, resemble, stand for, weigh*

Examples:

43. This rule *applies* to every undergraduate in this university

44. My flowers do not *compare* with yours

However, there are exceptional uses of some of these verbs in the progressive. particularly when they refer to activity:

44. I *am applying* to a bank for a job (making application)

44. In this book, the author *is comparing* living with non-living things.

(c) Verbs of perception such as *see, hear, smell, feel*, and *taste*. These verbs can express stative meaning either by placing the *receiver* in subject position or placing the *percept* (the thing perceived) in subject position:

45a. We can see the house (perceiver at subject position)

45b. The house looks old (percept at subject position)

To express continuing perception these verbs are used with '*can*' or '*could*':

45c. I *can* see the visitor through the door but I *can't* hear what he is telling the gateman

The verbs refer to an involuntary reaction of the senses so they do not normally occur with the progressive. However, where *feel, smell* and *taste* refer to voluntary, deliberate act. they are used with the progressive:

46a. What is she doing?
- She is *feeling* for the light switch
- She is *smelling* the flower
- She is *tasting* the soup

But *see* and *hear* do not normally occur with the progressive:

47a. What is she doing?

* She is *seeing* the photographs

* She is *hearing* a new record

Rather:

She is *looking* at the photographs

It must be noted that exceptional use of *see* and *hear* with the progressive is possible, particularly where *see* and *hear* focus on the process of perception:

48. Grandmother needs spectacles. She is not *seeing* things so well these days:

49a. A: A bell rang! Did you hear it?

B: No. I can't hear it

A. There it goes again!

B. { I am *hearing* now
   { I can *hear* it now

(d) Verbs of intellect, emotion or attitude: *know, believe, think, wonder, support, imagine, realize, understand, intend, wish, want, like, dislike, disgrace, pity, assume, care, consider, desert, expect, envy, hate, hope, forget, find, fear, love, mean, mind, notice, prefer, regret, remember, suggest, supposing, think.* These verbs can occur with the progressive only where a special meaning is implied as demonstrated in these pairs

50a. The party *considers* (believes) the chairman to be disloyal.

b. The manager *is considering* (studying) your application

51 (a) Do you *mind* (object) if I open the door ajar?

(b) *Is* anyone *minding* (looking after) the baby while you are away at work?

Finally, stative verbs do not normally occur in the progressive. But it is possible for any of them to take the progressive provided the idea of an uncompleted involuntary act or incomplete physical or mental state is being emphasized:

52. I am *forgetting* (beginning to forget) my Chinese

53. How much was the water tank *containing* when you last inspected it

54. Your stew is *tasting* better every day

The list of stative verbs above is inexhaustive but meant to illustrate that stative verbs are essentially non-progressive verbs because the notion of something 'in progress' cannot be easily applied to them.

There are both present and past progressive apectual constructions. The grammatical form and the communicative uses of each type is discussed below.

2.3.3.2.1 The Present Progressive Aspect

The structure or form of the Present Progressive is the simple present form of the verb BE + a present participle:

The windscreen wipers *are* not *working* properly.

The major use of the present progressive is to emphasize the idea of activity in progress: the activity began in the past and will terminate in the future, but which at the moment of speaking or writing is incomplete and is still continuing:

55. 'The sun *is shining*, the bees *are humming*, the birds *are singing*. the fruit *is ripening*. Summer is here. What *are* you *doing*? I *am resting* in a deck chair' (Eckersley and Eckersley 168). The activity may not necessarily be literarily in progress at the present time:

56. He is *writing* a new novel.

The author may not be writing actually at present moment of speech but that the art is on, having begun but not yet completed.

More specially, the following meanings are associated with the present progressive:

(a) Temporary states:

57a. we are living in Lagos
(a) It is raining again } temporariness

Contrast 57a-b with 57c-d:

(b) We live in Lagos
(c) It rains heavily in August } statements of facts

(b) An event that has duration and has not yet come to an end:

58. The manager *is taking* tea breakfast with his business partner

59. The referee *is blowing* his whistle.

(c) Habits: the Present Progressive here implies that the repetition takes place over a limited period

60. The director *is typing* his letters while his secretary is ill.

61. She *is taking* dancing lessons this August

(d) Anticipated happening in the future

62. My husband *is buying* me a new car for my birthday

63a. I hear you *are moving to* a new job

(e) An on-going annoying habitat

64. The clerk *is* always *putting* your mails in my box

65. Angela *is always finding* fault with her younger sister.

(f) Special idiomatic meaning

66. Day by day man *is getting* nearer to death

2.3.3.2.2. The Past Progressive Aspect

Structurally, the Past Progressive is formed by using *was/were* and *the present participle*. The Past Progressive is used for past habits, activities and states just as the Present Progressive is used for the present. The Past Progressive conveys the following meanings

(a) The event or state continued for sometime

67. John *was* not *taking* notes in the morning lecture.

68. He *was thinking* about the test tomorrow

(b) The duration (time) of the state or event is limited:

69. When we *were having* breakfast Paul turned up.

Sentence (69) suggests that having breakfast continued for some time and was of limited duration but the context reveals that it is now complete: they are no longer having breakfast

(c) The state or event is not necessarily complete or finished:

(d) It expresses actions that were going on for a period when another event occurred:

71. While the man *was looking* at the stature, a thief stole his watch

72. As I *was driving* along the street, a car mounted the pavement and crashed into a shop

(e) The concurrence of two actitvties that were going on at the same time in the past:

73. The robbers took precautions against surprise; while one *was working* on the safe. the other *was keeping* watch for policemen

2.3.3.3 The Perfective Progressive Aspects

The perfective and progressive aspects can combine to form complex verb phrase:

74. The movies industry *has been developing* rapidly in Nigeria (Present Perfect Progressive)

75 Your eyes were all red yesterday. *Had* you *been crying* when I saw you? (Past Perfective Progressive)

The Perfective Progressive has meanings that derive from its components and others that are not predictable from its components. The grammatical form and meaning associated with each type of the Perfective Progressive are discussed below.

2.3.3.3.1 The Present Prefect Progressive

The Present Perfect Progressive is formed by: the present form of HAVE (*has/have*), the present perfect of BE (*been*) and a present participle (*-ing*): *has/have + been* + a present participle. Examples:

76. Kalu *has been building* up the business all his life

77. The children *have been watching* television since breakfast

The Present Perfect Progressive conveys the following elements of meaning:

(a) Temporariness: Here the present perfect progressive express the idea that the happening has duration or limited duration:

78. She *has been writing* a letter to her mother

79. The Mathews *have been living* in that house since marriage

The verbal form in the first sentence conveys the meaning of a temporary situation leading up to the present moment. Also, the second statement describes a situation which the speaker regards as temporary; it therefore hints that the Mathews have not been married very long

(b) Possible incompleteness:

80. The trader *has been losing* money for years.

The incompleteness element of the Present Perfect Progressive contrasts significantly with the Present Perfect which specifies that the conclusion has already been reached;

81. The construction company *has been widening* the road (the company is still at work)

82. The construction company *has widened* the road (the job is finished)

(c) Effects of the activity are still apparent:

83. She *has been fighting* again (I can tell that from her torn blouse)

84. The baby *has been crying* again (look, her eyes are red)

In these examples, the activities do not continue up to the present moment. The sentence gives the understanding that the activity has recently stopped. Therefore, the meaning components of 'effect still apparent' and 'recently stopped' are closely connected.

(d) Present Perfect Progressive is also used to express temporary habits up to the present:

85. The player *has been scoring* several goals this season

86. The nurse *has been working* on the night shift for several weeks

The meaning of the present perfect progressive may combine with those of modal verbs:

87. The taxi *will have arrived* by the time you finish dressing

88. In another year or so, we *will have forgotten* all about him.

This use of the Present Perfect Progressive is termed 'Future Perfect Tense' in traditional grammar of English (Eckersley and Eckersley 179). In the sentences (89, 90), the Present Perfect Progressive is used to imply an action that may be completed before a certain time or another action in the future:

89. On December 20th, we *will have been married* for 30years

90. It is six o clock, they *will have arrived* home by now.

2.3.3.3.2 The **Past Perfect Progressive Aspect**

The Past Perfect Progressive is formed by: *had been + present participle ('-ing')*:

91. Hundreds of passengers waited for hours at the airports in Nigeria last month. The air traffic controllers *had been striking* for two weeks.

92A: You were very tired when you arrived in Abuja at 2 am.

B: I *had been driving* for ten hours.

The Past Perfect Progressive is used primarily to refer to continuing events, habits or states in a time before a particular time in the past. Due to the stress on the duration (temporariness) a time expression *with, for* or *since* is normally included:

93. The builders finished the house last week. They *had been working for* twelve months.

94. Amina bought a dishes washer and a micro wave oven last month. She *had been saving for* seven months.

95. Bulus passed his driving test last month. He *had been taking* lessons *for* six month.

The Past Perfect Progressive can be also used in all the ways exemplified earlier with the Present Perfect Progressive. The reason is that the Past Perfect Progressive is essentially an application of progressive aspect to the Past Perfect (as the Present Perfect Progressive is to the Present Perfect):

96a. 'It has been raining' (Present Perfect Progressive)

96b. I told you that it *had been raining.* (Past Perfect Progressive)

97A. 'I have been driving for three hours and I'm tired'.

B. I told you I *had been driving* for three hours and was tired.

2.3.4. Concord

Concord has also been termed agreement. It is defined as the relationship between two grammatical units such that one of them displays a particular feature that agrees with a displayed feature in the other (Quirk, *et al 755-771;* Ansell *221-245;* Quirk and Greenbaum *176-182*). The displayed concord feature can be syntactically explicit or semantically implicit. A concord feature or rule is based on one of three linguistic principles: grammatical, notional and proximity. The principle of grammatical concord is the agreement of verb with the subject; principle of notional concord is agreement of verb with subject on the basis of notion of number rather than with actual presence of grammatical marker for notion; the principle of proximity concord, also termed *attraction,* is the agreement of the verb with a closely preceding noun phrase in preference to agreement with the head of the noun phrase that functions as subject. However, these principles do not all have the same level of acceptability in formal usage. The principle of grammatical concord has the sanction of formal usage, teaching and editorial tradition. National concord is common to colloquial English; while proximity is relevant in cases where the two other principles fail to provide guidance, yet it lacks validity on its own as it is mostly supportive to notion concord in colloquial speech. The description of concord rules here is anchored on principle of grammatical concord because it is most acceptable of the three in formal English.

However, the other two are employed to provide alternative concord rules which are not unallowable in formal usage. Some types of concord are discussed below. To facilitate reference and differentiation, each concord rule is assigned a numeric figure.

2.3.4.1 Subject-verb Concord

Rule 1: A singular subject takes a singular verb.

(1) Mr. Brown *is* a Briton

(2) He *lives* in Lagos

(3) He *was* in Abuja yesterday

(4) He *has* no intention to spend the vacation there.

Rule 2: A plural subject requires a plural verb.

(5) The girls *are* Britons.

(6) They *live* in London

(7) They *were* in Jos on Sunday

(8) They *have* visited Jos Museum and Wild Life Park.

Rule 3: A noun phrase that functions as the subject of a sentence, counts as singular if its head is singular:

(9) *The change* in female actors' roles *is* most glaring in Nigerian movie industry

(10) *The changes* in female actors' roles *are* glaring in Nigerian movie industry

Rule 4: Finite and non-finite clauses normally count as singular:

(11) How the maid gets to the motor park *doesn't* concern the mistress.

(12) To treat the strangers as spies *is* wicked

(13) Smoking weeds *is* harmful to your fragile health

Rule 5: Prepositional phrases and adverbs that function as subject count as singular:

(14) In the morning *is* best for the lecturer

(15) *Carefully*
Slowly } *does* it
Gently

Rule 6: In nominal relative clauses with the determiners *what* and *whatever*, the concord depends on the number of the determined noun. Contrast (16) with (17) and (18) with (19) below:

(17) What *ideas* the king has *are* the queen's.

(18) Whatever *book* you see *is* yours to take.

(19) Whatever *books* I have in this office *are* borrowed from the university library.

Rule 7: The pseudo-subject *there* in existential sentences counts as either singular or plural depending on the number indicated in the entire proposition whose existence it serves to bring to the attention of the listener:

(20) There *is a car* blocking my way.

(21) There *are many students* in financial trouble.

Rule 8: The invariable noun *news* always counts as singular:

(22) Have you *any* news?

(23) Here *is* the news from NTA

Rule 9: Nouns ending in *–ics* denoting subjects, sciences are counted as singular:

(24) Mathematics *is* the science of quantities.

Other example of such nouns include: *classics, athletics, ethics, economics, politics, statistics, acoustics, gymnastics, physics, linguistics*, and *physics*.

Some of these words can be either singular or plural particularly when such words are used to denote one's knowledge of the subject and the practical application of knowledge.

(25a) Politics *is* the science of government.

(25b) The senator's politics (political views) *are* rather conservative.

Some of these nouns can be used without *-s* for special uses:

(26) *Statistics* is a branch of mathematics.

(27) There is a surprising *statistic* in your latest research findings.

(28) *Tactics* is a core subject in military training.

(29) Has the new coach found a *tactic* that works?

Rule 10: Nouns of certain diseases ending in *–s* are usually counted as singular: e.g. *measles, mumps, rickets, shingles:*

(30) Measles *is* sometimes serious.

Rule 11: Names of certain games ending in *–s* take singular verbs*: billiards, checkers, draughts, craps, darts, dominoes, fives, ninepins:*

(31) Darts *is* an unpopular spectator sport in Nigeria.

Rule 12: Nouns that are summation plurals require plural concord. Summation nouns refer to tools, instruments and articles of dressing that are made up of two parts which are joined together. Common summation plural nouns are given below:

(i) Tools and instruments: *billows, glasses, spectacles, binoculars, scales, clippers, forceps, pincers, scissor, shears, tongs, and incezers*

(ii) Articles of dressing*: braces, breaches, britches, briefs, flannels, jeans, knickers, pants, pajamas, shorts, slacks, suspenders, tights, trousers, and trunks*

Examples:

(32) How much *are those* clippers?

Rule 13: Some nouns that in certain sense occur only in the plural ending *–s* take plural concord. Example of such nouns include *accommodations, commends, annals, archives, arrears, ashes, arms, auspices, banns, bowels, entrails, intestines, trains, clothes, clubs, diamond,s hearts, spades, communications, congratulations, contents, credentials, customs, dregs, dues, earning, (proceeds, reforms, riches) funds, goods, grassroots, guts, heads, heavens, honours, humanities, letters, lodgings (Quirk,et al), looks, means, manners, minutes, odds, outskirts, pains, particulars, premises, regards, relations, remains, saving, spirits, stairs, surroundings, systems, thanks, troops, tropic, valuables, wages, wits and writings.*

(33) Achebe's *writings are* widely known

(34) What *are* Joan's *wages*

(35) Are *my valuables* safe in this house?

Rule 14: Collective nouns take either singular or plural verbs. Some collective nouns are *army, association, audience, board, cast, clan, class, club, college, commission, community, company, corporation, council, couple, crew, crowd, department, enemy, faculty, family, federation, firm, flock, gang, generation, government, group, herd, institute, jury, majority, minority, opposition, party, population, staff, team and university.*

Examples:

(36) The security committee *has* met and *it has* rejected the report

(37) The security committee *have* met and they *have* rejected the report

The difference between (36) and (37) essentially shows a difference in point of view: the singular emphasizes the non-personal collectivity of the group and the plural stresses the personal individuality in the group. So a collective noun takes a singular verb if the entire group is meant but a plural when the individual members are referred to.

(38a) The *couple are* happily married

b. Each *couple was* asked to complete a form.

In 38a, *couple* refers to two persons while in 38b, it denotes a unit.

If the collective noun occurs in the plural, the verb is of course plural:

(39) The different committees *are* now meeting to discuss your proposal

Names of commercial firms are collective nouns:

(40) Julius Berger $\begin{Bmatrix} has \\ have \end{Bmatrix}$ increased $\begin{Bmatrix} its \\ theirs \end{Bmatrix}$ sales abroad

Rule 15: Unmarked plural nouns have plural concord. These are nouns that lack plural inflection but are used as plurals (Quirk, *et al.* 750): *people, cattle, clergy, police, poultry (farm yard birds), livestock (animals kept in a farm) and vermin*

(41) How many people *are* in Nigeria today?

(42) The police *have* caught the robber

(43) *These* vermin cause disease.

Rule 16: Plural phrases (including coordinate phrases) count as singular if they are used as names, titles, and quotations:

(44) *The Old Man and the Medal* is Ferdinand Oyono's masterpiece.

(45) *Men* is an irregular plural in English

Such noun phrases can be regarded as appositive structures with an implied singular head: The book, *The Old Man and the Medal,* is Ferdinand Oyono's masterpiece.

Rule 17: Titles of some works that are collections of stories, essays, etc may be treated as either singular or plural:

(46) *City tales* {*decries* / *decry*} social evils in modern Nigerian city

Rule 18: Nouns with equivocal number can be treated as singular or plural:

(47a) That *barracks is* old

b. Those *barracks are* old

(48a) Language *is a means* of communication

b. The detectives used *all means* available to apprehend the burglar

(49a) A large *steelworks was* built in Ajeokeuta in the eighties

b. A number of *steel works were* built in Nigeria in the eighties.

More examples of such nouns include *crafts, crossroads, data, dice, gallows, headquarters, innings (as a cricket term), kennels, (a collection of kennels where dogs are kept), links, mews, oats, offsprings, series, species, works (factory, plant) with compound like water works.*

Rules 19: Subjects that are plural noun phrases of quantity or measure take singular verbs (by the application of the principle of notional concord). The entity expressed by the noun phrase is viewed as a single unit

(50a) Thirty dollars *is* all it costs.

b. Twenty years *represents* a long period of her life

c. Forty miles (kilometers) *is* a long distance to walk daily for bodily exercise.

d. Two thirds of the area *is* flooded.

e. Seventy people *means* a huge party.

Each of the five sentences (49a-e) takes a singular verb because the plural noun phrase counts as a single unit (singular):

50a. *That amount* is all it costs

b. *That period* is a long period of her life

c. *That distance* is long distance to walk daily for bodily exercise

d. *That area* is flooded

e. *That number of people* means a huge party.

Rule 20: *A few* and *many a* count as units:

(51) Few days *is* adequate for the reconstruction of the collapsed animal pen.

(52) A good many friends *is* not dependable when one is in dire financial need.

Rule 21: A subject realized by a number phrase that begins with '*more than*' and '*many a*' is treated as either singular or plural depending on the number implied in the head of the noun phrase:

(53) More than a thousand parliamentarians *have* endorsed the petition

(54) More than one member *has* protested against the proposal

(55) Many a member *has* protested against the proposal

In 54 and 55, the subject is notionally plural but the singular is preferred because *member* is analyzed as the head of the noun phrase, Contrast 56 and 57:

(56) More members than one *have* protested against the proposal

(57) Many members *have* protested against the proposal

Rule 22: A subject that comprises of two or more noun phrases or clauses coordinated by '*and*' requires a plural verb even if each conjoin is singular:

(58) Paul and John *are* now ready to go to school

(59) What the old man says and what he thinks *are* his own affair

Rule 23: Asyndetic coordination (a coordination without a coordinator) requires a plural verb

(60) The journalist's camera, his mobile telephone, his recorder were seized by the policeman.

Rules 24: Conjoins that expresses mutual relationship also takes a plural verb.

(61) Your answer and mine *are* similar

(62) What the preacher says and does *are* two different things

Rule 25: A singular noun phrase that is followed by *etc*, *and so on*, *and so forth* and similar abbreviatory expressions takes a plural verb:

(63) The height, etc, *are* less important for our purposes.

Rule 26: Preposed *each* or *every* has a distributive effect and requires a singular verb:

(64) Every woman and every girl *was* holding placard.

(65) Each senator and parliamentarian *was* allocated two plots of land in the city.

Contrast 66 with 67:

(66) Each of them *has* accepted the allocation.

(67) They *have* each paid for the plots.

Rule 27: When a subject consists of two conjoins that are names of a single thing, a singular verb is required:

(68) (a)The white and green *was* flying from the flagpole

(a) Tea and bread *makes* a good solid English breakfast

(b) The Park and Shop *sells* good shirts.

Despite the coordination, the subject names a single flag, a single meal and a single shop respectively. Arithmetical sums may take a singular or plural verb:

(c) Two and three $\left\{\begin{matrix} is \\ are \end{matrix}\right\}$ five.

Rule 28: A singular noncount noun head pre-modified by phrases coordinated by *and* takes a plural verb:

(69) Benue and Taraba honey *are* both thicker than Lagos honey

The noun phrase that realizes the subject implies two separate sentences:

a. Benue honey *is* thicker than Lagos honey.

b. Taraba honey *is* thicker than Lagos honey.

Conversely, a singular verb is required when the phrases are post –modifying:.

(70) Honey from Benue and Taraba *is* thicker than Lagos honey

Rule 29: A subject that consists of a generic noun phrase with a singular count head requires a plural verb when the head is pre-modified and the pre-modification contains coordination by *and*:

(71) The short-term and (the) long-term loan *are* handled very differently by the commercial bank.

Rule 30: When a subject is made up of two coordinated units and each unit makes the same reference, a singular verb is required if each noun phrase is singular.

(72) This statue of sadness and memorial to civil war *was* erected in 1970

Here the two noun phrases both refer to one entity (statue). However, example 73 could have either a singular or plural verb:

(73) His intelligent wife and the mother of his children $\left\{\begin{matrix} was \\ were \end{matrix}\right\}$ with him at hospitalbed.

Singular *was* is used if the wife and the mother are the same person, and plural *were* if they are two different people. The same latitude applies to the interpretation of abstract nouns:

(74) a. Jane's fairness and impartiality $\left\{ \begin{matrix} has \\ have \end{matrix} \right\}$ been much appreciated

b. Law and order $\left\{ \begin{matrix} has \\ have \end{matrix} \right\}$ been restored in the hitherto chaotic city

The use of either singular or plural depends on whether qualities are seen as separate or as a complex unity. But repeated determiner biases the choice to plural:

(75) Her fairness and her impartiality *have* been much appreciated.

Rule 30: When a subject consists of noun phrases that are apposed without a coordinator, a singular verb is obviously required if the noun phrases themselves use singular:

(76) The statue of sadness, a memorial to the civil war, *was* erected in 1970.

Rule 31: A subject realized by noun phrases linked by quasi-coordinators (*as well as, as much as, rather than, more, than etc*) requires a singular verb if the first noun phrase is singular:

(77) Jacques, *as much as* her sisters, *was* responsible for recovery of the lost item

(78) One parliamentarian *after another has* protested against the new regulation.

(79) The head prefect, *as well as* the other prefect, *was* tired.

Quasi-coordinators are linking items that behave like coordinators, and at other times like subordinators or prepositions. Contrast sentences ***a, b and c*** below

a. He publishes *as well as* prints his own books (as a coordinator of two conjoins)

b. *As well as* printing the books, he publishes them (as a subordinator)

c. One speaker *after another* was complaining about the inadequate water supply (as a preposition)

In addition to the one listed in rule 31, other quasi-coordinators are *if not, not to say* and *not so much as*

Rule 32: When two conjoins (phrases or clauses) constitute the subject of a sentence and the second conjoin is an interpolated element (i.e., behave as if it is inserted, as a parenthesis

in the middle of the clause), the subject-verb concord is unaffected by the interpolated conjoin:

(80) James –and Jack, too- *writes* excellently well.

Contrast (79) with (80):

(81) James *writes* excellently well, and Jack, too

But:

(82) James and Jack *write* excellently well.

Rule 33: If an adverbial is attached to the second of two noun phrases linked by *and.* the verb agrees with the first noun phrase (because the entire construction is parenthetic).

(83) a. A writer, and sometimes an artist, *is* invited to address the students.

(83) b. The president-and perhaps his wife too- *is* likely to be present.

(84) The legislative arm, (and) not the executive, *approves* government expenditure in Nigeria.

Rule 34: Subject phrases or clauses coordinated by *either* ……. *or*, take singular or plural verb according to the number of each member of the coordination. When both members are singular, the verb is singular and if they are plural, the verb is plural. But when both members have different number, whichever member comes last determines the number of the verb:

(85) Either the Registrar or his deputy *is* bound to attend the induction ceremony of the new teachers.

(86) What the labour minister says or what he thinks *is* no business of the union leaders.

(87) Either the teachers or the pupils *have* forgot the National Common Entrance Examination day.

(88) Either the car's brakes or the driver's eyesight *is* at fault.

(89) Either the driver's eyesight or his car's brakes *are* at fault

Rule 35: When *or* is employed for coordinative apposition, the verb number agrees with the first appositive if the two appositives differ in number:

(90) The hero, principal protagonist, of *Things Fall Apart is* Okwonkwo

(91) The thieves, or corrupt officers, *are* in the ascendancy in government parastatals.

Rule 36: The concord of *either* ..... *or* as stated in rule 34 above applies to the negative correlatives *neither* ..... *nor* in formal usage:

(92) Don neither *loves* Maggie nor *wants* to marry her.

(93) Neither the doctor nor the nurse *is* here

(94) Neither the doctors nor the nurses *are* here

(95) Neither the doctors nor the nurse *is* here

Rule 37: For the coordinating correlatives *not.....but* and *not only/just/merely*.... but (*also/even*), the rule on *or* applies (i.e. rule 35)

(96) Not only Joan but her husband *has* arrived

(97) Not (only) James but all of us *are* invited to the concert.

(98) Not just the pupils but even their teacher *is* participating in the event

Where the noun phrases differ in number, the noun phrase that comes last determines the number of the verb.

Rule 38: The mixed expressions *one or two* and *between one and two* take plural verb:

(99) One or two measures *were* suggested.

Rule 39: *One and* plus a fraction or percentage requires plural verb because the term plural applies to more than one.

(100) One and a half years *have* passed since I visited my home town

But:

(101) A year and a half *has* passed since I visited my home town

In (101), the conjoint phrase (*A year and a half*) is construed as *'a period of a year and a half'*, though the preceding *a half* may have reinforced the use of the singular verb.

Rule 40: Present or implied non-count nouns of amount or quantity with the determiners and with the pronouns *no, none, all, some, any,* and fractions such as *half*, take singular verb:

(102) Since last year no money *has* been spent on the construction of the bridge

(103) None (of the money) has been spent on the construction of the bridge

(104) Some cement for the construction *has* arrived.

(105) Some (of the cement) for the construction of the bridge *has* arrived

On the other hand, plural count nouns (present or implied) take plural verb:

(106) No people of that name *live* here

(107) Some books have been placed on the library shelves

(108) $\left\{\begin{matrix} Some \\ Hardly\ any \\ All \\ Half \end{matrix}\right\}$ (of the books) *have* been placed on the library shelves

Indefinites such as *each, every, everybody, anybody* and *nobody* or indefinite phrases such as *everyone, anyone* require singular.

(109) Nobody, not even the teachers, *was* present.

(110) Every member of the large crowd of 30000 labour union people *was* glad to see the president.

Rule 41: In a sentence where the subject is noun phrase that contains open-class phrasal quantities such as *plenty of, a lot of, a great/good/deal of, a large/small quantity/amount of, a good/good/large number of,* preceding a non-count or count noun, the verb has number concord with the head of the noun phrase:

(111) A large amount of money *was* in the chest.

(112) A great number of students *were* in the hall.

The heads of the subject noun phrases in examples (111) and (112), are *money* and *students* respectively while the phrasal quantifiers, *a large amount of* and *a great number of* function as determiners (Quirk, *et al.* 204)

Rule 42: If a relative clause follows a subject noun phrase containing *one of* plus a plural noun phrase, the choice of singular or plural verb depends on whether attention is directed to the generality or the uniqueness. Compare:

(113) *Coup is* one of the many words in English that are of the French origin [=Of the many words in English that are of French origin, *Coup is* one]

(114) Prostitution is one of the common vices that *is* particularly contemptible. [Of the common vices, prostitution is one that *is* particularly contemptible]

From examples 113 and 114, the concord rule is evident: the verb in the relative clause agrees with one (i.e. singular verb) if attention is directed to the uniqueness as in example (114) but the verb in the relative clause agrees with the plural noun (i.e., plural verb) if attention is directed to the generality as in (113).

2.3.4.2 Concord of Person

Rule 43: The verb in the present tense has person concord with the subject- 1st and 3rd concord with BE and only 3rd person concord with other verbs:

(115) I *am* your colleague. (1st person singular concord)

(116) He *is* your colleague

(117) She *knows* you

While 115 demonstrates 1st person singular concord, sentences 116 and 117 illustrate 3rd person singular concord. The past of BE manifests concord distinctions, also:

(118) I *was* your colleague

(119) He *was* your colleague

} 1st and 3rd person singular concord

'*Were* ', a past form of BE ,is used with 2nd person singular and all the plural persons.

Rule 44: In a coordinate subject that has *or, either..... or*; *neither ..... nor*. as coordinators, the last noun phrase determines the person of the verb:

(120) Neither you, nor he, nor anyone else *knows* the route

(121) Either my wife or I *am* going

Rule 45: In a relative clause and cleft sentences, a relative pronoun subject is mostly followed by a verb in agreement with its antecedent.

(122) It is I who *am to* blame

(123) It is she who *is* in command

(124) It is they who *are* opposing the ban

2.3.4.3 Subject-complement and Object-complement Concord

Rule 45: There is number concord between subject and subject complement:

(125) My son *is* a saint

(126) My sons *are* saints

The concord in these sentences (125) and (126) is conditioned by the semantic role of the two complements. But there are exceptions:

(127) My only hope at retirement *is* my business investments. (also, are)

(128) More teachers *is* the next item on the agenda (also, are)

(129) Our principal crop *is* yams.

The complement in (128) appears condensed with possibly an implied preposition: *My only hope at retirement is in my business investments.* The subject of (129) can be said to have also been condensed from something like: *the question of more teachers* or may be considered as a title. In (129) the subject complement is a generic noun phrase which could equally be singular: *Their principal crop is the yam.* The complements in (127-129) have the

potentiality of subject-complement reversal: *My business investments are my only hope at retirement. The next item on the agenda is more teachers. Yams are their principal crop.*

It must be noted that pseudo-cleft constructions with a fronted object *what* may have a plural subject –complement:

(130) What the school needs most *is* books

But since *what* is ambivalent in number, it is often interpreted as equivalent to either *'the thing that'* or *'the things that'*, there can be a plural verb in agreement with the subject *What*-clause:

(131) What the schools need most *are* books

It must be stressed too that there is no subject-complement with the idioms *be all ears* , *be all elbows*, *be all fingers and thumbs*:

(132) a. We are *all ears* (we are listening with all our attention)

b. I am *all ears* (I am listening with all my attention)

2.3.4.4 Distributive-number Concord

Rule 46: The distributive plural is used in a plural noun phrase to refer to a set of entities that are matched individually with individual entities in another set:

(133) Have you all brought your *examination cards?* ('each has an examination card')

(134) Submit your essays next Wednesday (each has to submit one essay)

Though the distributive plural is the norm, the distributive singular may also be used to focus on individual cases:

(135) Some men have { *an* understanding wife / understanding wives }

(136) The pupils raised their *hands hand*

The singular is compulsory or preferable with idioms and metaphors:

(137) They are *keeping an open mind*

(138) They *vented their spleen on him*

(139) We can't *put our finger on evil*

Not:

(137) *They are keeping open *minds*

(138) *They vented their *spleens* on *him*

(139) *We can't put our *fingers* on evil

2.3.4.5. Pronoun-antecedent Concord

Rule 47: Pronouns agree with their antecedents in number, person and gender; between subject and object or complement if the second element is a reflexive pronoun:

(140) *They* helped *themselves*

(141) *She* allowed *herself* a rest

(142) *He* is not *himself* today

(143) *We* couldn't come *ourselves*

(144) *The Café'* pays for *itself*

(145) *I* wrote to the governor *myself*

The concord relation may be with an element other than the subject, for example, an object

(146) *He drove them in their own jeep car.*

(147) *I wrote to my sister about herself*

The collective noun subjects allow plural concord:

(148) *The army* congratulated *themselves* on, if not victory, at least an avoidance of defeat

Rule 48: The relative pronouns *who, whom* and *which* agree with their antecedents in gender

(149) *Joseph* is a guardsman *who* should know

(150) This is the *Librarian whom* you spoke to.

(151) *The car which* you ordered last month has arrived

Who and *whom* are used for personal reference, while *which* is used for non-personal reference. But *whose,* unlike *who* and *whom*, has both personal and nonpersonal references:

(152) The woman *whose* daughter you met is Mrs. James

(153) The house *whose* roof was damaged by the rainstorm has now been fixed

There is however, a reluctance to use *whose* for nonpersonal antecedents probably because of its morphological link with *who* and *whom*. However its use in relative clause as in examples 152 and 153 is not outrageous (Quirk, *et al.*) Speakers or writers who wish to avoid the use of *whose* for nonpersonal reference resort to the use *of which*, though with some awkwardness:

(154) The house *which* roof was damaged by the rainstorm has now been fixed

Or:

(155) The house the roof *of which* was damaged by the rainstorm has now been fixed

Rule 49: Personal and possessive pronouns in the 1st and 3rd persons agree with their antecedents in number. Also, the 3rd person pronouns (*he*, *she*, *it*) agree with their antecedents in gender:

(156) Martinet and I have finished *our* work. Can *we* start lunch now?

(157)a. This is *my* book and that is *his* book

b. This is *mine* and that is *his*

(158) Mark hurt *his* right toe

(159) Juliet knows *she* is weak in sums

(160) The chairs were too heavy so I left *them*

Rule 50: The pronoun *they* is gender neutral so it is commonly used as a 3rd person singular pronoun. Thus to avoid gender partiality, *they* is used in preference to the indefinite pronouns *everyone, everybody, someone, anyone, no one, nobody*:

(161) *everyone* thinks they have the answer

(162) Has *anybody* bought *their* lunch

(163) *No one* could have blamed *themselves* for that mistake

A similar use of the plural occurs with coordinate subjects referring to both sexes as in (164) and with a singular noun phrase that has a personal noun of indeterminate gender as head as in (165).

(164) *Either he* or *she* is going to have to change *their* practice

(165) *Every* student had to submit *their* assignment paper this afternoon

In formal usage, '*he*' is used as the unmarked form for indeterminate gender:

(166) *Everyone* thinks *he* has the answer.

But the tendency is increasingly *being* ignored now (Quirk, *et al.*).

A more laborious alternative is the use of both masculine and feminine pronouns:

(167) *Every* student has to submit *his* or *her* assignment paper this afternoon.

In fact, this usage becomes clumsy if the pronouns have to be repeated for any reason:

(168) If *a student* fails to submit *his* or *her* assignment this afternoon, *he* or *she* will lose the allotted score.

To avoid the clumsiness, the subject can be made plural:

(169) *All students* have to submit *their* assignment paper

A similar method can be used for the indefinite pronouns as well:

(170) *All of them* think *they* have the answer

Rule 51: The indefinite pronoun *one* is followed by the same pronoun for subsequent references:

(171) *One* should choose *one's* spouse thoughtfully

Rule 52: It has been noted earlier (see rule 14) that singular collective nouns take plural verbs where the individual members of the group are referred to; the same rule holds for pronoun concord:

(172) The committee *are* reducing the number of *their* meetings

(173) The committee *is* reducing the number of *its* meetings

The use of personal pronoun *who* to refer to the group as a set of individuals as opposed to the use of nonpersonal *which* for the group as a unit can reflect number even though there is no number contrast in relative pronouns:

(174) The committee, who *are* reducing *their* meetings, reconvene next month

(175) The committee which *is* reducing *its* meetings reconvenes next month.

2.4 Empirical Studies

To improve the poor English standard of some Nigerian undergraduates, researches have been conducted on their written language so the present study both complements existing studies and fill a gap in such studies of which none is on the students of University of Agriculture, Makurdi. This section therefore reviews a number of such previous studies so as to situate the present work among existing ones.

An error analysis of the written English compositions of Lagos University students has been carried out (Olagoke). The study sample was drawn from different academic programmes and levels (first second and third year in particular) in the institution. The study subjects were two hundred students made up of one hundred Yoruba and one hundred non-Yoruba speakers of English. The students wrote an essay on: 'A typical busy day of my life in the university'. Their written expressions revealed several grammatical problems such as tense, concord, aspect, fragmentary sentences, misused words, misspelling, errors of adverbials, wrong word-formation, tautological errors and deviant idiomatic expressions as in the following extracts from the research work:

1. His dress got bathed with *oil-soup* (malformed word)

2. *I dressed up straight to the auditorium and I saw our invitees who had been arriving* (direct translation from mother tongue: transliteration and wrong tense)

3. We sit everywhere *we see today* (transliteration)

4. I made *some* remarkable *achievement* (disconcord)

5. The way that a person engages himself *will* make it busy or not for him (tense problem)

6. .....took *shower* bath (tautology)

7. I do not *measure to* standard that day (deviant idioms)

8. I had some *snaps* with my friends (wrong word resulting in meaningless utterance)

Olagoke's study is a broad inventory of linguistic problems in the students' written works: no one particular problem was given a detailed treatment, though the research work unveiled grammatical difficulties inherent in the students' compositions.

Again, researches have been conducted on the written English of undergraduates of University of Nigeria Nsukka. One of them is Anasiudu's; he sampled one hundred compositions from 1980/81 sessional examination conducted for first-year students. The examination medium latently provides the appropriate condition for the students to demonstrate their competence. Anasiudu's work uncovered language problems such as mechanics, verb forms, word usage, number, prepositions, unidiomatic expressions, repetition, articles, and meaningless expressions. Anasiudu's work is broad-based as Olagoke's.

An academic study too has been conducted on the written English of pre-degree and final year students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (Ofuokwu). The survey examined the grammatical errors in the written language of the students. The purpose of the research was to find out the grammatical errors that were present in the written English of the students at the

points they entered and graduated from the university. Of the three sources of errors normally identified in error analysis, the research was concerned with intralingual or developmental errors. The interview and the essay methods were used to gather data for the survey. Apart from these, there was also the *Usage and Vocabulary Test* which had thirty-one questions on lexis and structure.

The survey sought to determine whether exposure to language and level of academic advancement can reduce grammatical errors in the students' written expression. The errors were categorized on the basis of grammatical units into five classes: the sentence, the noun, the verb phrase, adjective and adverbs. The lexis had twenty-one groups which consisted of 58 fifty-eight error units. The frequencies of errors committed by the two groups of students were contrasted and the pre-degree students (Group A) were found to have almost twice the number of errors committed by the final-year students (Group B). Apart from frequency count method, error occurrence per two thousand unit of words was also used and Group A had 128 (approximately six errors in every one hundred word unit) while Group B had seventy-seven (approximately four errors in every one hundred word unit). The survey noted that virtually all the fifty-eight error units were present in the *Usage and Vocabulary Test*, the final year students had fewer errors, and altogether they had more errors in the use of tags. The study noted that one of the reasons for the existence of some of the errors is the fact that apart from a few items learnt 'incidentally' the Nigerian undergraduate is not very much exposed to formal grammar lessons.

The study proved that the subjects' exposure to use of English course and personal study of the language, if any, have not pruned off all grammatical errors in the written English of the Nigerian undergraduate at the point of graduation. Being a survey, it only listed the grammatical errors but did not give a detailed account of the grammatical categories which constituted great barriers to their use of English and would possibly inhibit their

communicative competence as graduates. Also, being a survey not all grammatical errors present in the English of the subjects would have been identified.

These earlier studies embarked upon a broad spectrum of grammatical or language problems in the students' written English without adequate attention to particular linguistic difficulties. The present study undertakes an investigation of students' problems with the grammatical categories of tense, aspect and concord in their written English.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Descriptive survey was the research design. It is typically appropriate for a research work that describes the nature of existing condition or identifies standard against which existing condition can be compared (Cohen and Manion 97). The descriptive survey was therefore found suitable for the present study which aimed at finding out if students' uses of tenses, aspect and concord were congruent with standard contemporary English usage (Quirk *et al*). Deviant uses of tense, aspect and concord in the students' written expressions constituted the linguistic problems which the study investigated.

3.2 Study population

The study population comprised all first- year students of 2012/2013 academic session in University of Agriculture, Makurdi. There were 2947 students who registered for a compulsory two-semester use of English course termed *Communication in English*. First-year students were used as the study subjects because it is appropriate to identify their language problems at the foundation class so that the problem could be tackled before they graduate

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 286 students was drawn from the study population using simple random technique because it offered every member of the study population opportunity of being selected (Afonja 35-71,161-167). During the 2012/13 session in the university all the first- year students were categorized into six large instructional groups for effective teaching of the use of English course. A group was indiscriminately selected as a research study group. It had 388 students out of which 286 students who fully participated in the two-day administration of the research instruction were used as the study subjects.

3.4 Instrument for Data Collection

A diagnostic *Use of English Test* designed by the researcher and validated by the supervisor, was used to generate the study data. The test instrument had two broad sections on essay-writing tasks and multiple-choice tests. The composition part contained five essay topics on common youthful experiences. The students were instructed to answer all the 110 objective test items which had 40 items on tense, 18 items on aspect and 52 on concord. The research instrument was standardized to elicit responses which would reveal the students' strengths and weaknesses in the use of tense, aspect and concord in written English communication (The British Council ELT Document).

3. 4 Method of Data Collection

The test instrument was administered by the researcher. The data-gathering exercise spanned two days; the essay was held on a day of two-hour lecture period and the multiple-choice was conducted on another day of similar lecture time duration. There were 388 students in the selected lecture group for the use of English course but only the scripts of 286 students who successfully participated in the two-day test were used as data sources.

3.5 Procedure for Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with frequency count and percentage score statistics purposely to depict the magnitude of tense, aspect and concord errors in both the written essays and the multiple-choice responses. In addition, extracts were made from the essays and the multiple-choice responses to discuss types and causes of the students' problems with tesnse, aspect and concord

The 286 written productions of the subjects were studied and all misuses of tense, aspect and concord were isolated, counted and tabulated. Also, the 110 responses of each of the 286 students to the multiple-choice questions were scored and the percentage of correct responses of the entire subjects per an item was determined and tabulated. A question item in

which the subjects scored less than 50% was discriminated as problematic while a score that ranged from 50% to 99% was regarded as less problematic but a 100% score in an item was regarded as not problematic. Two reasons accounted for the three criterion–decision yardsticks. Tense, aspect and concord are basic grammatical items taught in primary and secondary schools and only repeated in university use of English course as linguistic categories that students have not gained mastery of, yet they require it for effective communication(Allen; Banjo and Bisong; Oluikpe; Hewings). Also, the university minimal passes mark (of 40%) was not considered here because the test of proficiency in tense, aspect and concord at the level of university use of English course is not a test of advanced knowledge as other undergraduate courses where the least pass mark is pegged at 40%.

The discussion of findings focused on the failed (problematic) items and less problematic items on the tables for both the essay tasks and multiple- choice questions. Extracts from the students' works were used to buttress discussion of problematic items. The discussion critically examined the characteristics and causes of the students' problems with the failed items using the data of English grammar provided in the literature review.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The chief aim of the study was to investigate tense, aspect and concord problems in the students' written English. The specific objectives were to determine the students' difficulties with tenses, tense-shift in reported speech, tense-patterns in conditional sentences, aspectual constructions and concord. The results of data analyses are therefore presented below on the basis of the objectives and followed by a discussion of the findings.

4.2 Data Analysis and Findings

The students' difficulties with tense, aspect and concord can be described by direct reference to English grammar. Halliday *et al* (119) argue that any error in a learner's written or spoken English can be accurately described by referring solely to the description of English without necessarily knowing or considering the student's native language because each error can be stated as a specific deviation from a described English feature.

Accordingly, the discussion of students' tense, aspect and concord usage problems here identified each failed grammatical item in the objective test, and explicated the linguistic cause of the failure using the data of English grammar. Unedited extracts from their essays were used to buttress arguments in the discussion.Extracts that depict wrong usage are asterisked and correct versions of such misuses are provided. The results of data analyses on the students' difficulties with the aforementioned grammatical categories and the discussion of findings are classified into five sections on the basis of the research objectives.

4.2.1 Tense Errors in the Students' English

The tense errors found in both their responses to the objective test on tense and in the written essays are shown in the tables here.

4.2.1.1 Table 1: Tense Errors in the Students' Responses to the Objective Test on Tense

S/NO	Tense-types with Test items	Students' performance (n=286)		
		X	%	Rating
	I. Simple Present Tense			
1	I do lots of advertisements,	83	29	problematic
2	including the Panda for a new airline, but you never _____ me as I really _____(be)'	78	27	problematic
3	Geese ____(fly) south every fall	71	24	Problematic
4	At the end of the film, the hero _____(find) the hidden treasure	83	29	Problematic
5	He always____(reply) promptly.	132	40	Problematic
	II. Simple Past Tense			
6	Jane has *just left/left just* a few minutes ago	173	60	Less problematic
7	I *have got/started to get* the pains three weeks ago	155	54	Less problematic
8	Scientists *have made/made* some fundamental discoveries in the 18th centuries	142	49	Problematic
9	Timso *made/has made* 13 films before she was tragically killed in a car accident	165	57	Less problematic
10	Lee *has represented/represented* his country on many occasions, but was forced to retire after an injury	122	42	Problematic

Keys to symbols: x = raw score. % = percentage score. n = sample size

4.2.1.2 Table 11: Tense Errors in the Students' Essays

S/No	Tense-types	Students' Performance (n =286)		
		Frequency	%	Rating
1	Simple Present	73	7	Less problematic
2	Simple Past	961	93	Problematic
Total		1034	100	

4.2.1.3 Discussion on Tense Errors in the Students' English

English language strictly treats tense as an inflectional category so it has two tenses: the simple present and the simple past tense.

The tenses have both communicative functions and grammatical forms. The research instrument examined the students on the functions and the forms. The discussion here therefore focuses on those two aspects, beginning with the present tense and concluding with the past tense

4.2.1.3.1 The Students' Difficulties with the Simple Present Tense in the Objective Test.

Five multiple- choice questions examined the subjects on the uses of the tense to make statement, express 'eternal truths', to refer to habits and discuss fiction. The students were to fill some gaps in some sentences with the correct present forms of some given verbs but they supplied wrong verb forms as presented below:

*1. I do lots of advertisements … but you never *saw* me as I really *been*

*2. Geese *flew* south every fall

*3. At the end of the film, the hero *found* the hidden treasure

*4. He always *replied* promptly

The sentential contexts prove that the italized verb forms are wrong. The base forms (see, am, fly, find) are reguired in sentences (1), (2), (3), while the *s-form* (*replies*) is mandatory in (4) where the subject is a 3rd person singular pronoun (He). The present tense of the verb BE (*am*) is required for the first person singular subject (*I*) in sentence (1) above. The corrected versions of the above wrong productions are provided below:

1. I do lots of advertisements … but you never *see* me as I really am

2. Geese *fly* south every fall

3. At the end of the film, the hero *find* the hidden treasure

4. He always *replies* promptly

4.2.1.3.2 The Students' Problems with the Simple Present Tense in the Essays

Similar problems of using wrong verb forms for the simple present and the present verb in wrong contexts existed in the essays. Such errors are listed below:

1. The present progressive aspect was used in a context that required the simple present:

*(a) *Student* who cannot defend the result they *are carrying* (carry, instead).

Correction: *Students* who cannot defend the certificates they *possess*.

2. The simple present was used for the past tense and vice-versa.

*(b) So we *blend* in and we *dance* and *drink* but didn't smoke.

Correction: So we *joined them, danced* and *drank* but didn't smoke.

*(c) She did not *allowed* me to break the news

Correction: She did not *allow* me to break the news

3. The S-form was wrongly used for the base form.

* (d) It will also *leads* to industrialization…

Correction: It will also *lead* to industrialization…

*(e) Literate scholars who can *represents* the nation anywhere in the world

Correction: Literate scholars who can *represent* the nation anywhere in the world

(f) There were instances of omission of the S-form:*When one door closes another *open.* Correction: When one door closes, another *opens.*

4. Wrong structure of the passive form of the simple present existed in the essays

*(g) These are *view* as major problems

The correct formation for the simple present passive is a present form of *BE* + *a past participle of the verb*: These are *viewed* as major problem

5.Misuse of the simple present as adjective was also found in the compositions

*(h) We know that with the knowledge *gain* in school through education can be *use* for infrastructure of roads and many other things.

Correction: We know that the knowledge obtained in school can be used to provide infrastructural facilities like roads and others

6. The *S-form* replaced the simple past tense of the verb in the passive form of the simple present.

*(i) The mass of the people *are yet to be mobilizes* in the fight against corruption.

Correction: The masses are *yet to be mobilized for* the fight against corruption

7. The uses of the simple present in travelogue itinerary, instruction booklet and verbal directions proved problematic to the students:

*(j) … *add* a desired quality of water, *mixed* your ingredients, allow it *to boiled* for sometime then you *boiled* your meat and add some *leaf.*

Correction: … *add* a desired quality of water, *mix* your ingredients, allow it *to boil* for sometime then you *boil* your meat and add some *leaf.*

8. The essays showed incorrect use of the modals with the simple present of a verb. All modals except *ought* are followed by the base form of a verb, that is, the simple present (Sinclair 118 – 143). The following extracts from the essays failed to demonstrate that fact.

*(k) … that I should *used* the money and do my registration and *processed* some of my school activities.

Correction… that I should *use* the money and do my registration and *process* some of my school activities.

9. The simple present was also used for past progressive aspect

*(l) I was so much happy that I *was go to* live secondary school and *was to go* into a university

Correction:I was so much happy that I *was going to* live secondary school to a university

10. Nominals derived from verbs were used as 'to-infinitives' in the simple present:

* (m) My visit to the popular Niger bridge made me to *development* more interest in technology.

Correction: My visit to the popular Niger Bridge made me to *develop* more interest in technology.

11. The simple present passive form was wrongly used for the passive of the past perfect aspect.

*(n) I received a phone call ... telling me that *I am given* admission in the institution I applied for

Correction: I received a phone call ... telling me that *I had been given* admission in the institution I applied for

The analyses of both the responses to objective test and written productions showed that the students had problems with the various uses of the simple present in communication, culminating in using it in wrong sentential contexts. Also, there were problems with the uses of the S-form, the base form of a verb and the structure of the simple present passive.

4.2.1.3.3 The Students' Problems with the Past Tense in the Objective Test

The research instrument had five multiple-choice questions which assessed the students' on the immediate past, event past, state past and habitual past uses of the past tense. In table II, items (6) and (7) examined immediate past situations; items (8), the state past; (9) assessed event past and (10) evaluated habitual past uses. The students' responses revealed that they found items (8) and (10) problematic and the others less problematic. But basically they had problems with all items because of the relative high degrees of percentages of wrong responses (ranging from 40% to 50%). The unacceptable responses are:

*1. Jane *has just left* a few minutes ago

*2. I *have got t*he pains three weeks ago

*3. Scientists *have made* some fundamental discoveries in the 18th century.

*4. Timson *has made* 13 films before she was tragically killed in a car accident

*5. Lee *has represented* his country on many occasions, but was forced to resine after an injury.

The semantic context of each sentence limits the happening to a definite past time with a distinct gap between its completion and the present time so the use of the present perfective aspect in each context is incorrect. This implies that the students had not ingrained the various communicative functions of the Past Tense. The correct versions of the sentences are given below:

1. 1.Jane *just left* a few minutes ago
2. I *got* the pains three weeks ago
3. Scientists *made* some fundamental discoveries in the 18th century.
4. Timson *made* 13 films before she was tragically killed in a car accident
5. Lee *represented* his country on many occasions, but was forced to resign after an injury.

Conclusively, the analyses of the students' responses to the objective test on the past tense showed that they had particular difficulties with the situational, event, state and habitual uses of the Past Tense.

4.2.1.3.4 The Students' Problems with the Past Tense in their Essays

The essays were analysed for the students' difficulties with the past tense. Some of the problems are presented here.

1. The 'to-infinitives' forms of verbs were wrongly inflected to indicate past time:

*(i). The card took my interest then I decided *to stayed* and watch for sometime…

Correction: (i). The card took my interest then I decided *to stay* and watch for sometime…

There were several cases of such a misuse:

*(a) … to go to school *to acquired* knowledge …;

* (b)… . my father… a great politician of our time *to baled* me out of police custody:

*(c)….to go to bank the next day *to wildrawed* the money;

*(d) She had no option than *to expelled* us from the school.

The corrected versions are given below:

(a) … to go to school *to acquire* knowledge …;

(b) …. my father… a great politician of our time *bailed* me out of police custody:

(c)….to go to bank the next day *to wildraw* the money;

(d) She had no option than *to expell* us from the school

2. There was the use of past tense for the past progressive aspect and vice-versa

*ii). In the year 2001, I started my jamb… I kept on *tried* till year 2012 to 2013 I finally made it.

* iii). I *rejoicing* the Lord that *make* every thing possible

The corrected versions are:

*iv). In the year 2001, I started my jamb… I kept on trying till year 2012 to 2013 I finally made it.

* vii). I *rejoiced* that the Lord *had made* every thing possible

3. The past tense equivalents of the modal auxiliaries (*will, can*, etc) were not used in sentential contexts that required them:

*iv). I vowed to God that if he *can* help me out of the unpleasant situation. I will serve him all they days of my life.

*xi). I came out from my room and he *shaked* my hand…

*xii). Then from there I *agreeded* with what he said

*xiii). John even *clinged* himself to a girl

The correct sentences are:

xi). I came out from my room and he *shook* my hand…

xii). Then from there I *agreed* with what he said

xiii). John even *clung* himself to a girl

Other wrong conjugations of irregular were *grinded, catched, graved, lefied, grainded, shoke, beated, gaved, wented, granded; grinded, splited,*and others. The Correct past tense forms are: *ground, caught, gave, left, ground, shook, beat, went, ground, ground, ground, split.*

9. Phonologically-induced tense problems. Due to weak pronunciation of English verb words wrong past forms of verbs were generated:

*xiv). ... so the police *cut* all of them and they *where* kept in prison

*xv). The uncle believed her because he never *shaw* her since she was small…

The correct clauses are:

xiv). ... so the police *cut* all of them and they *were* kept in prison

xv). The uncle believed her because he never *haw* her since she was small…

10. A wrong participle of the verb BE was used as a main verb.

*xvi). It was the first day of my life *to been* to the large city like Abuja

Correction: xvi). It was the first day of my life *to be* in a large city like Abuja

11. The students generated wrong structure for the passive form of the past tense.

*xvii). Then food *was serve* around to those present

*xviii). I *thank* God I *was not been droven* from the school

Corrections:

xvii). Then food *was served* around to those present

xviii). I *thanked* God I *was not driven* from the school

12. The passive form of the simple past was used for that of past Progressive Aspect

*xix). We walked into the church smiling while beautiful songs *were played*.

Were played (simple past passive), incorrectly substituted for *were being played* (the passive form past progressive aspect).The corrected version is: xix). We walked into the church smiling while beautiful songs *were being played.*

13. Past form equivalents of modals were unacceptably used with past form of verbs.

*xx). I ran as fast I could *got* a tax and *arrived* at home.

*xxi). Provided my parent did not *quarreled* me

Corrrections:

xx). I ran as fast I could *get* a tax and I *arrived* at hom

xxi). Provided my parent did not *quarrel* me

Evidently the analysis of the students' responses to the objective test on the past tense and their written essays demonstrated their weaknesses in the uses and forms of the Past Tense.

4.2.2 Wrong Tense-patterns in Conditional Sentences in the Students' Works

Wrong tense-patterns in conditional sentences in the students' responses to the objective test on the items and in the written essays are shown on the tables here.

4.2.2.1 Table III: The Students' Performances in the Multiple-choice Test on Tense –patterns in Conditional Sentences

S/NO	Types of Conditional Sentences with test items	Students' performance (n=286)		
		X	%	Rating
	Type I			
1	If the wind blew from the north, we *move/moved* into the other room.	112	39	Problematic
2	If the pupils *lost/have lost* and money they report it to me	119	41	Problematic
3	Dan might help you if you had *asked/ask him*	122	42	Problematic
	Type II			
4	If the ceiling *falls/fell* on top of you, you would be killed	95	33	Problematic
5	If he *dies/died* tomorrow, he would soon be forgotten	50	17	Problematic
6	If I *see/saw* a ghost, I would run away	111	28	Problematic
	Type III			
7	If I *knew/had known* about it, it wouldn't have mattered	216	75	Less problematic
8	If Mrs. Madu *hasn't been/hadn't* been there, I would not have come	187	65	Less problematic
9	If *has not done/had not done* his work, he would have been punished	228	79	Less problematic

4.2.2.2 Extracts of Wrong Tense-patterns in Conditional Sentences from the Students' Essays

The students' compositions recorded 42 errors of tense-patterns in conditional sentences found mostly in the argumentative essays. Only few of them attempted the essay topic. A sample of the wrong tense-patterns in conditional clauses in the essays are listed below and asterisked as wrong sentences.

1. If education is free there be no respect

2. if education is free many people could have the knowledge in country but education is very difficult in every generation

3. If these young citizens were provided a free educational system it would have saved the society from such criminal act

4. If they were given another chance they would have stopped the act

5. This would have not been so if they only education was made free

6. If education is free the would have been better than this today

4.2.2.3 Discussion on Wrong Tense-patterns in Conditional Sentences in the Students' Works

4.2.2.3.1 Wrong Tense-Patterns in Conditional Sentences in the Responses to the Objective Test

Open (real) condition and hypothetical condition are basic conditional sentences. The sentences have both communicative functions and grammatical forms that facilitate their usage. The multiple-choice test assessed the study subjects on the functions and verbal patterns of basic conditional sentences. Items 1 – 3 on table III examined the students on open conditions; items 4 – 6 tested them on the present reference of the hypothetical condition while items 7 – 9 evaluated the past time reference of the hypothetical condition. The students found all the items problematic.

In particular, they failed all the items on open condition. The students' wrong responses produced grammatical structures which in turn generated meanings inapplicable to the sentential contexts. The students' wrong responses are isolated below:

*(1) If the wind blew from the north, we *move* into the other room

*(2) If the pupils *lost* any money they report it to me

*(3) Dan might help you if you *had asked* him

The items examined the use of the open condition to express a general truth or a frequent occurrence. But the students'responses uttered the intended meaning. Unlike the

students' response, the correct response to item (1) has the same verb tense in the matrix and subordinate clauses:

(1) If the wind *blew* from north, we *moved* into the room.

In item (2), the correct verb pattern is *Present Perfective Aspect* in the matrix clause and the *simple present* in the conditional clause:

(2) If the pupils *have lost* any money they report it to me

The 3rd item (3) here examined the use of the open condition to express what is likely to happen (in the future) if the condition is fulfilled. The proposition in the main clause is contingent on the condition in the *if-clause.* The verb tense pattern applicable to the context is *the simple present* in the conditional clause and *will + bare infinitive* in the matrix clause. However, other modals are possible substitutes for *will*:

(3) Dan *might help* you if *ask him*

Furthermore, items (4), (5) and (6) assessed the students on the common meaning associated with the present hypothetical which is this: what is unlikely to occur because it is not likely the condition is fulfilled .In other words, what is said in the matrix clause is an imaginary consequence of a present non-fact. This clause was indicated by the contexts of the items, yet the students produced wrong responses which had wrong syntactical structures that impeded the intended meanings of the hypothetical sentences.

*(4) If the ceiling *falls* on top of you, you would be killed

*(5) If he *dies* tomorrow, he would soon be forgotten

*(6) If I *see* a ghost, I would run away.

The student's responses unsuccessfully (and ungrammatical too) attempted to convert these hypothetical statements into open conditions. But the matrix clauses give the clues that the propositions are currently impossible as the following correct responses show:

(4). If the ceiling *fell* on top of you, you *would be killed*

(5). If he *died* tomorrow, he would soon be forgotten

(6). If I *saw* a ghost, I would run away.

The conditions in (4) – (6) are impossible just now so the verbal pattern for each sentence is: *Past* in the conditional clause and *past modal + infinitive* in the matrix clause.

The last set of three test items (7 – 9) examined the students on the past time reference of the hypothetical condition. The common reference is to a situation that might have happened in the past but did not. The students had less problem with the test. However, the percentages of wrong responses (25%, 35%, and 21% for items 7, 8 and 9 respectively) make it pertinent to discuss the problems inherent in their wrong responses. The students generated the following wrong tense patterns for the items:

*(7) If I *knew* about it, it wouldn't have mattered

*(8) If Mrs. Madu *hasn't been* there, I would not have come

*(9) If he *has not done* his work, he would have been punished.

The choice of *knew, hasn't been*, and *has not done* for the conditional clauses in (7), (8) and (9) respectively negates the past hypothetical conditions imposed on the sentential contexts by the non-fact belief conveyed by the matrix clauses. The correct responses therefore are these:

(7). If I *had known* about it, it wouldn't have mattered

(8). If Mrs. Madu *hadn't been* here, I would not have come

(9). If he *had not done* his work, he would have been punished.

The constituent verb pattern for each sentence is: *past perfect* in the conditional clauses and *past perfective modal* (*would/could/should/might*) + *past perfective* in the matrix clause.

4.2.2.3.2 Wrong Tense Patterns in Conditional Sentences in the Students' Essays

The students' essays were also investigated for wrong tense-patterns in basic conditional sentences. 42 errors were found: the number is statistically low possibly because

only few subjects attempted the essay on education in which most of the errors were manifested. Some of the errors are listed below:

*(1) If education is free there be no respect

*(2) If education is free many people could have the knowledge in country but education is very difficult in very generation

*(3) If these young citizens were provided a free educational system it would have saved the society from such criminal act

*(4) If they were given another chance they would have stopped the act.

*(5) This would have not been to if only education was made free

*(6) If education is free the world would have been better than this today

The incorrectness of the sentences is evident from the contextual meanings and tense patterns

Based on contexts, sentences (1) and (2) are open conditional sentences which convey that the situations in the matrix clauses are directly dependent on those of the subordinate clauses.In terms of meaning, the sentences construe that tuition –free education would result into disrespect (for what or whom?) and mass education. Therefore the sentences with the suitable tense patterns are reconstructed below:

1. If education is free there *will be* no respect

2. If education is free many people (in the country) *will* acquire knowledge

Sentences (3) and (4) tilt more on present reference of hypothetical condition. Here in the extracted sentences, the situations in the matrix clauses (3... it *would have saved the country from such criminal act and.* 4... *they would have stopped the act*) are unlikely to obtain because of the impracticability of fulfilling the condition at the time of utterance. (The contexts of the extracts described unaverted criminality leached on a society for which

the perpetrators were being clubbed to death). With that proposed meaning, the correct sentences are:

3. If these young citizens *had access* to free educational system it *would save* the society of such criminal act.

4. If they *had* another chance, they *would stop* the act.

Finally, sentences (5) and (6) are clear instances of non-existent past due to unfulfilled condition. But the students generated wrong tense-patterns in the subordinate clauses:

*5. This would have not been so if only education *was made* free.

*6. If education is free, they would have been better than this today.

The acceptable pattern is *past perfect* in the conditional clauses and *past perfective modal* in the matrix clauses:

5. This would have not been so if only education *had been* made free

6. If education *had been* free, the world *would have been* better than this today.

In conclusion, the analysis of the students' responses to the objective test on tense - pattern of basic conditional sentences and their written compositions showed they had difficulty with expressing real and unreal propositions with the correct tense-patterns in written English communication.

4.2.3 The Students' Difficulties with the Tense-shifts in Reported Speech.

The students'difficulties in both the essays and the objective test are shown below:

4.2.3.1 Table IV. The Students' Performance in the Objective Test on Tense-shifts in Reported Speech

S/N		Direct utterances to be rewritten as reported speeches	Students' Performance (n = 286)		
			Score (x)	(%)	Rating
1	(a)	"My children eat rice with fish every Sunday", the woman said			
	(b)	The woman said that her children *ate* rice with fish stew every Sunday.	80	28	Problematic
2	(a)	"I am studying English at the moment", Joseph said			
	(b)	Joseph said he *was studying* English at the moment	5	2	Problematic
3	(a)	"The fraudsters have deceived me", the manager told the guardsman.			
	(b)	The manager told the guardsman that the fraudsters *had deceived* him	126	44	Problematic
4	(a)	"I have been studying English", he said			
	(b)	He said that he *had been studying* English	88	31	Problematic
5	(a)	He said, "I was married (but my wife died last year)".			
	(b)	He said that he *had been married*	20	7	Problematic
6	(a)	"If John were here, he would vote against the motion", she said.			
	(b)	She said that if John *had been* here, he *would have voted* against the Nation	10	4	Problematic
7	(a)	"Jane had already gone when I phoned her this morning", Jacobson said.			
	(b)	Jacobson said that Jane *had* already *gone* when he *(had) phoned* her that morning	8	3	Problematic

S/N		Direct utterances to be rewritten as reported speeches	Students' Performance (n = 286) Score (x)	(%)	Rating
8	(a)	"Shakespeare somewhere writes that a coward dies many times before his death" , the teacher told the students.			
	(b)	The teacher told his students that Shakespeare somewhere *writes* that a coward dies many time before his death.	12	4	Problematic
9	(a)	"The earth moves round the sun", the Geography teacher informed the students.			
	(b)	The Geography teacher informed the students that the earth *moves* round the sun	137	48	Problematic
10	(a)	"If I were in Jos, I would visit the current Nok culture exhibition of the museum", he said			
	(b)	He said that if he were in Jos, he *would visit* the current Nok culture exhibition at the museum.	34	12	Problematic
11	(a)	"You may do as you wish", she said.			
	(b)	She said you *might* do as you *wished*	12	4	Problematic
12	(a)	"The King can do no wrong", they argued.			
	(b)	They argued seriously that the king *could* do no wrong	57	20	Problematic
13	(a)	"The plan will succeed", the detective assured them.			
	(b)	The detective assured them that the plan *would* succeed	114	40	Problematic
14	(a)	"Shall I open the window", the visitor offered.			
	(b)	The visitor asked if he *should* open the window	107	37	Problematic

S/N		Direct utterances to be rewritten as reported speeches	Students' Performance (n = 286) Score (x)	(%)	Rating
15	(a)	"We won't pay another kobo", they said			
	(b)	They said that they *wouldn't pay* another kobo.	60	21	Problematic
16	(a)	"You shouldn't smoke in the lecture hall", he advised the new students.			
	(b)	He advised the new students that they *should not* smoke in the lecture hall.	191	67	Not Problematic
17	(a)	"The babe must be hungry", the minder said			
	(b)	The minder said that the babe *must be* hungry	104	36	Problematic
18	(a)	"You had better not say anything about it", she warned her son.			
	(b)	She warned her son that he *had better not say* anything about it.	78	27	Problematic
19	(a)	"I could speak French when I was young", I said			
	(b)	I said that I *could speak* French when I was young	109	38	Problematic
20	(a)	"When I was in secondary school I would study till three in the morning", he recalled			
	(b)	He recalled that when he *was* in secondary school he *would study* till three in the morning.	72	25	Problematic
21	(a)	"I travelled to London last December", she said			
	(b)	She said she *travelled* to London last December	169	59	Not problematic

n = sample size

The tables clearly unveil the students' deficiencies in using correct verb forms when converting direct speeches into indirect ones. In the given conversion tasks, only two items (16 and 21) were correctly done. The verb words in the others (items 1-15, 17-20) were incorrectly shifted. So the use of correct verb forms in reported speech is a main constraint to the students' communication.

4.2.3.2 Faulty Tense-shifts in Reported Speech Extracts the Students' Essays

Wrong backshifts were found in the essays particularly the narratives. One hundred and sixty eight (168) errors were recorded. Most of the errors were associated with the tenses, progressives, perfectives and the modals. The following excerpts with italicized, incorrect backshifts affirm the findings:

*(a) I told him that I *have being trying* for several years could not succeed but now God *has showing* his wonderful job*

*(b) ... so I said I *will* never *write* JAMB again

*(c) The boy *starts telling* me that *am wearing* his trousers.

*(d) My uncle said the next place his (sic) *is taking* me to is for chopping.

*(e) Knowing that I *gain* admission I went straight to daddy and mummy and told them that I *got* admission

*(f) My parents took me to explain to me the difficulties and challenges I *may* likely face due to the fact that I had never been away from home for a long time.

*(g) My mother asked how *is* the city. I said the city *is* fine.

*(h) On December 24th 2013 my dad told me that I *can go* out but I *am* not allowed to stay out till 10:30pm.

*(i) She told the mum that she *have fall* in or in love with a boy

*(j) ... He told I *have been given* to study crop production...

*(k) During the strogun (sic) many people wrote letter to me about how I *have been*doing with life and the content was well understood.

The above extracts are all wrong indirect constructions as indicated by the asterisks (*)

4.2.3.3 Discussion on the Students' Difficulties with Tense-shifts in Reported Speech

The discussion of students' difficulties with verb forms here identifies each failed task in the objective test and explicates the linguistic cause of the failure using the data of English grammar. The same procedure is followed in the analysis of the wrong sentences extracted from the essays. The discussion proceeds with the objective test, then the essays. An asterisk (*) is used to indicate an ungrammatical sentence.

4.2.3.3.1 The Students' Performance in the Objective Test on Tense-shifts in Reported Speech

In item (1) the verb word *eat*, in simple present tense, is to be backshifted to *ate* the simple past tense, but the students failed the task as they produced various incorrect sentences, including these two:

*1 The woman said that her children *eats* rice with fish stew every Sunday

*2 The woman said that my children *eated* rice fish stew every Sunday.

Correction: The woman said that her children ate rice with stew every Sunday.

Item (2) presented the task of changing present progressive aspect (*am studying*) to the past progressive (*was studying)*, but the students' productions were incorrect:

*3. Joseph said he *had been studying* English at the moment.

*4. Joseph said he *studies* English at the moment

Correction: Joseph said he was studying English at the moment.

Item (3) requires that the present perfective aspect *have deceived* be backshifted to past perfective (*had deceived*).

The students failed the task as the following extracts illustrate:

*5. The manager told the guardsman that the fraudsters *has deceived* him

*6. The manager told the guardsman that the fraudsters *deceived* him

Correction: The manager told the guardsman that the fraudsters had *deceived* him

The item (4) task demands that the verb phrase *have been studying*, a present progressive, be changed to *had been studying*, the past perfect progressive, but the students failed it:

*7. He said that he *is studying* English

*8. He said that he *is been studying* English

Correction: He said that he *is had been studying* English

In item (5), the simple past backshifts to past perfective (instead of simple past) necessarily because a simple past in this context is susceptible to misinterpretation as representing a simple present (Quirk *et al.*). But the students' responses did not reflect this fact:

*9. He said that he *married* (but his wife died last year)

*10. He said that *is married* but his wife is late

Correction: He said he *had married* but his wife died last year.

In item (6), the hypothetical past (*were ... would vote*) backshifts to hypothetical past perfective (*had been ... would have voted*) on the assumption that there is a change in time reference. The students' attempts were ungrammatical:

*11. If John *was* here he *would had voted* against the motion.

*12. If John *is* here, he *will vote* against the motion.

Correction: If John *had been* here, he *would have voted* against the motion

The past perfective in the direct utterance of item (7) remains as past perfective in the indirect speech because the past perfective already expresses *past in past* and no further backshift to *past in the past in the past* is possible in English (Quirk, *et al.* 1027). But the item proved problematic to the students as these excerpts demonstrate:

*13. Jane *was* already *gone* when he *called* that morning.

*14. Jane *has* already *gone* when he *phone* her *this* morning.

Correction: Jane *had* already *gone* when he *phone* her *this* morning.

Item (8) illustrates the use of the simple present tense for reports connected with famous books or authors which have present validity so the verb word *writes* remains unchanged even in the reported speech but the students' answers did not portray this knowledge.

*15.The teacher told his students that Shakespeare somewhere *wrote* that a coward dies many times before his death .

*16.The teacher told his students that Shakespeare *wrotes* (sic) somewhere that a coward dies many times before his death.

Correction: The teacher told his students that Shakespeare *writes* somewhere that a coward dies many times before his death.

The item (9) illustrates an instance where the concord between the reporting verb and the reported verb may be broken (as in timeless statement e.g. of proverbial, scientific nature). The statement here is timeless because it is valid at the time of utterance, still valid today and valid for all times. Nevertheless, the students' responses lacked that basic grammatical knowledge:

*17.The Geography teacher informed the students that the earth *is moving* round the sun.

*18.The Geography teacher informed the students that the earth *moved* round the sun.

Correction: The Geography teacher informed the students that the earth *moves* round the sun.

Backshift in item (10) is optional if the proposition in the indirect speech is still valid: otherwise, it changes to hypothetical past perfective (*had been ... would have voted*). But the students demonstrated stark ignorance of that fact:

*19.He said that if he *was* in Jos he *would visit* the current Nok culture exhibition of the museum.

*20. He said that if he *goes* to Jos he *would visit* the current Nok culture exhibition of the museum.

Correction: He said that if he *had been* to Jos he *would have visited* the current Nok culture exhibition of the museum.

The auxiliary *may* in item (11) backshifts to *might* in the reported speech (Hewings). But the students failed the task:

*21. You *may do* as you *have wished*.

*22. You *can do* whatever you *want*.

Correction: You *might do* as you *wish*

In item (12), the modal auxiliary *can* in the direct speech becomes *could* in the indirect construction but the students failed the test:

*23. They argued seriously that the king *can never do* wrong.

*24. They argued seriously that the king *does* no wrong.

Corrtection: They argued seriously that the king could no wrong.

In item (13) the students had problem with the auxiliary *will* which should change to *would* in the indirect speech:

*23. The detective assured them that the plan *will* be a success.

*24. The detective assured them that the plan *shall* succeed.

Correction: The detective assured them that the plan *would* succeed.

The *shall* in item (14), backshifts to the past tense *should* in the reported speech. However the students' productions did not show it:

*25. The visitor asked if he *can* open the window.

*26. The visitor asked if he *could* open the window.

Correction: The visitor asked if he *should* open the window

In item (15), *would*, contracted as *won't*, is retained in the indirect construction but the students' responses were incorrect.

*27. They said that they *will not* pay another kobo.

*28. They said that they *cann't* pay another kobo.

Correction: They said that they *wouldn't* pay another kobo.

The students' responses to item (17) showed imperfect learning of the grammatical fact that the modals *must, ought to, need* and *had better* have no present-past distinction so the verbs remain unchanged in indirect constructions even where they refer to past time. However, the students' productions for item (17) were deficient:

*29. The minder said that the babe *is* hungry.

*30. The minder said that the babe *was* hungry.

Correction: The minder said that the babe *must* hungry.

Also, item (18) was problematic to the students. The correct form of the modal auxiliary (*had better*) was not used in the indirect speech as revealed by these extracts from their works:

*31. She warned her son that he *should not* say anything about it.

*32. She warned her son that he *better not* say anything about it.

Correction: She warned her son that he *had better not* say anything about it.

In item (19), the students failed to use the past tense form of *can* required in the reported speech as illustrated by the following sentences:

*34. I said that I *can* speak French when I was young.

*35. I said that I *spoke* French when I was young.

Correction: I said that I *could speak* French when I was young.

Finally, item (20) was difficult to the students; *will* (rather than *would*)was used in the indirect construction:

*37. He recalled that when he was in secondary school I *will* study till three in the morning.

*38. He recalled that when he was in secondary school he *could* study till three in the morning.

Correction: He recalled that when he *was/had been* in secondary school he *would* study till three in the morning.

The analysis of the students' responses to the objective test demonstrated incompetence in backshift of verb forms in simple present tense, progressive aspects, perfective aspect and modal auxiliaries.

4.2.3.3.2 Faulty Tense-shifts in Reported Speech in the Students' Essays

The above extracts (a-k, listed in section 4.2.3.2) from the essays are indirect constructions with evident incorrect backshifts. In (a), the present perfect progressive aspects (*have been trying*...have *been showing*) ought to have been backshifted to past perfect progressive (had *been trying ... had been showing*); even then the sentence is yet faulty. In (b), (f), and (h), the modal auxiliaries *will, may, can* should have been changed to past tense forms: *would, might and could* accordingly. In (c), the simple present tense *starts* and present progressive aspect, *am wearing* should be shifted to simple past tense (*started*) and past

progressive (*was wearing)*, respectively. Sentence (e) reads correctly with the simple past *gained* and the past perfect aspect: *had got*.

Extract (g) is clearly a failure to backshift the simple present (*is ……..is)* to the simple past (*was ...was*).

The supposed present perfective in (i) should have been rewritten as past perfective (*had fallen*). In (k), the present progressive aspect *(is going*) and simple present (*leads*) ought to have been recast as past progressive *(was going*) and simple past *(led*) accordingly. The last example (k), should have been transformed as past perfect progressive (*had been doing*) and not present perfect progressive (*have been doing)* as it obtains.

The corrected versions of the extracted in (a-k) are provided below:

(a) I told him that I *had been trying* for several years could not succeed but now God *had done* his wonderful job

(b)... so I said I *would* never *write* JAMB again

(c) The boy *told* me that *was wearing* his trousers.

(d) My uncle said the next place he *was taking* me to *was* for a meal.

(e) Knowing that I *gained* admission I went straight to daddy and mummy and told them that I *had got* admission

(f) My parents took me to explain to me the difficulties and challenges I *might* likely face due to the fact that I had never been away from home for a long time.

(g) My mother asked how *was* the city. I said the city *was* fine.

(h) On December 24th 2013 my dad told me that I *could go* out but I *was* not allowed to stay out till 10:30pm.

(i) She told the mum that she *had fallen* in or *had been* in love with a boy

(j)... He told me that I *had been given* admission to study crop production...

(k) During the struggle many people wrote letters to me about how I *had been* doing with life and the contents were usually well understood.

The analyses of the students' responses to the objective test and the essay-writing tasks showed that changing verb forms in direct speech to correct forms in indirect constructions was a constraint to their communication in English

In conclusion, the results of data analysis clearly revealed the students' poor backshift skill. There were outright incorrect transforms of verb tenses, the progressive aspects, the perfective aspects and modals in both the objective test and essay-writing tasks. The conclusion is that some first-year university students who have had the last formal exposure to English Language teaching for academic purposes in Nigerian schooling system are yet unable to use correct verb forms in reporting other people's language.

4.2.4 Incorrect Aspectual Constructions in the Students' Written Productions.

Incorrect aspectual constructions in the students' responses to the objective test on aspects and those discovered in their essays are tabulated below:

4.2.4.1 Table V: Incorrect Aspectual Constructions in the Students' Responses to the Objective Test on Aspect.

5	Types of Aspects with Test items	Students' Performance (n=286)		
		X	%	Rating
	I. Present Progressive Aspect			
1	A report of a weatherman on a television programme: the sun *shines brightly/is shinning* at the moment but if we are looking at satellite picture we can see ...a depression which is coming in	161	56	Less problematic
2	From the Atlantic....This depression *brings/is bringing* in a lot of rain....	73	33	Problematic
3	Dialogue: Jef: that was a dangerous thing to do Jak: you are *constantly criticizing/constantly criticize*	92	32	Problematic
	II Past Progressive Aspect			
4	Just as I *got/was getting* into the bath the fire went off	133	46	Problematic
5	The gardener *cut/was cutting* grass all yesterday afternoon	116	40	Problematic
6	A hundred years ago queen Victoria *reigned/was reigning*	51	17	Problematic
	III Present Perfective Aspect			
7	Science *made/has made* many advances this century	189	66	Less problematic
8	Since 1990, I *lived/have lived* in a small house near the coast	173	60	Less problematic
9	Since I *lived/have lived* here, I *did not see/have not seen* my neighbours	134	46	Problematic

S/NO	Types of Aspects with Test items	Students' performance (n=286)		
		X	%	Rating
	IV. Past Perfective Aspect			
10	Neil believed Roy *stayed/had stayed* behind	136	47	Problematic
11	I *meant/had meant* to call my parents but I couldn't find a phone box	105	36	Problematic
12	She had *wanted/wanted* to leave the meeting early but she felt that she ought to stay to find out what was decided	115	40	Problematic
	V Past Perfect Progressive Aspect			
13	The builders finished the house last week. They *have worked/had been working* for eighteen months	151	52	Less problematic
14	Joan bought a dishwasher and microwave oven last week. She *has been/had been saving* for six months	114	50	Less problematic
15	Joe finished his thesis in June. He *has been/had been* researching for years.	136	47	Problematic
	VI Present perfect Progressive Aspect			
16	The pollution problem *has got/has been getting* worse over the last decade	152	53	Less Problematic
17	I *want/have been wanting* to meet you since I saw your concept	207	72	Less problematic
18	The protesters *are campaigning/have been campaigning* for same months now to prevent the new road being built.	217	75	Less Problematic

4.2.4.2. Table VI: Incorrect Aspectual Construction in the Students' Compositions

S/No	Type of Aspectual constructions	Students Performance (n =286) Frequency	%	Rating
1	Present progressive Aspect	34	18	Less problematic
2	Past Progressive Aspect	34	18	Less problematic
3	Present Perfective Aspect	68	36	Less problematic
4	Past Perfective Aspect	39	20	Less problematic
5	Present Perfect Progressive Aspect	06	3	Less problematic
6	Past Perfect Progressive Aspect	10	5	Less problematic
Total		**191**	**100**	

4.2.4.3 Discussion on Incorrect Aspectual Constructions in the Students' Essays and Multiple-choice Responses

The study sought to establish the students' difficulties with aspectual constructions in written English so some items in the multiple-choice test examined the students' competence in the use of aspectual constructions, namely, present progressive, past progressive, present perfective, past perfective, present perfective progressive and past perfect progressive aspects. The thrust of the test was the semantic context in which each verbal aspect is utilized. In addition, the essays situated the students in imaginary communicative contexts in which they used aspectual constructions and in effect manifested their incompetencies. The analysis proceeds with the responses to the objective test and concludes with the essays.

4.2.4.3.1 The Present Progressive Aspect.

With reference to table V, items (1) to (3) assessed the use of the Present Progressive Aspect to emphasize the idea of activity in progress, to express anticipated happening in the future and to state an on-going annoying habit. The students found item (1) less problematic but

the others were problematic; essentially they have a cardinal problem with the Present Progressive Aspect. In item (1) the sentential context implies an activity in progress at the moment of speaking so '*is shining*' applies here more than *'shines brightly'*. In (2), the context denotes an anticipated on-going happening in the future so *'brings'* cannot substitute for *'is bringing'*. Finally, item (3) is the context in which the present progressive is used to express the speakers' disgust for an annoying habit of his interactant. Therefore the verbal participle *criticizing* is preferred to 'criticize'

The written essays also revealed the students' problem with the grammatical form and communicative functions of the present progressive aspect. Some of the problems are discussed here.

1. Wrong structures of the passive form of the present progressive were found in the essays:

*(i) The country *is been* tagged with a label name *were* jobs are granted to the upper class in the society.....

Correction: The country *has been* tagged a place *where* jobs are granted to the upper class in the society.....

2. Wrong formations of the Present Progressive Aspect existed in the essays:

*(ii) "Teach me how to fish, instead of *given* me fish"

Correction: "Teach me how to fish, instead of *giving* me fish"

3. The Present Progressive was used for the past progressive:

*(iii) To my surprise he asked me to help him.... That the wheel *is making* two much noise.

Correction: To my surprise he asked me to help him.... That the wheel *was making* two much noise.

The analysis has identified two principal problems associated with. the present progressive, namely, wrong formation of its structure and its use in wrong contexts

4.2.4.3.2 The Past Progressive Aspect.

Items (4), to (6) in table V, examined the students on the sOme uses of the past progressive in communication. Item (4) examined the use of the past progressive to express actions that were going for a period when another event occurred. Items (5) and (6) assessed them on the use of Past progressive to express a state or an event that continued for sometime in the past. The students failed all the items, the simple past, (*got*, cut and *reigned*) was incorrectly used for the past progressive (*was getting*, *was cutting* and *was reigning*), required in the contexts of items (4), (5) and (6) respectively. This only implies that the students confused the communicative context of simple past with that of the past progressive. They had not learned the usage contexts of past progressive.

The students' essays also exhibited wrong use and formation of the past progressive as discussed here.

1. The present progressive was used for the past progressive

*i) When I went to city thing *are not going* well so at last I left for home.

Correction: When I went to city things *were not going* well so at last I left for home.

2. There were wrong formations of the passive form of the past progressive aspect.

*ii) I thought she *was been* hard on me and was preventing me from having a good life with my friends.

Correction: I thought she *was being* hard on me and was preventing me from having a good life with my friends.

3. The passive form of simple past was used for the past progressive:

*iii). He told me that he *was headed* to Lafia that he will drop me in Makurdi.

Correction: He told me that he *was heading* to Lafia that he will drop me in Makurdi

4. The Past Progressive was wrongly used for the present progressive and vice-versa

*iv). ... now my family and I *were benefiting* from it, even my young ones are now in school system because of the income from the business.

Correction: ... now my family and I *are benefiting* from it, even my young ones are now in school system because of the income from the business.

*v). My uncle and wife *is taking* me to go and know Governor Captain Idris Wad.

Correction: My uncle and wife was *taking* me to meet Governor Captain Idris Wad.

The analyses of the essays as well as the responses to the objective test revealed that the students had difficulties with the formation of the past progressive (a past form of BE + an *–ing* form of a verb) and its passive form (*was/were+ being*); also, the past progressive aspect was used in wrong sentential contexts.

4.2.4.3.3 The Present Perfective Aspect.

Items (7), (8) and (9) on Table V examined the students on the use of the Present Perfective Aspect to express a state continuing from the past up to the present moment, i.e. state-up-to-the-present. The state extends over a period lasting up to the present moment (e.g. *Nigerians have elected a new president*). The students found two items less problematic and one problematic. Essentially they had difficulties in all the items. They rather used the simple past for grammatical environments that required the Present Perfective Aspect:

*7. Science *made* many advances this century

*8. Since 1990, I *lived* in a small house near the coast

*9. Since I *lived* here *I did not see* my neighbours.

The italicized verb words or phrase should have been replaced by these aspectual options provided: *has made, have lived* and *have not seen* respectively because the contexts express past

states and events that have present relevance. The students' wrong responses affirm that they did not recognize communicative contexts in which present perfective aspect applies.The correct options are given below:

7. Science has *made* many advances this century

8. Since 1990, I *have lived* in a small house near the coast

9. Since I *have lived* here *I have seen not see* my neighbours.

The students' essays also showed their difficulties with the present perfective. Of the six aspectual constructions studied, the present perfective recorded the highest number of errors in the essays. Some of their deficiencies are isolated below:

1. A chief error was wrong formation of the present perfective (The structure is formed with (*has/have* + a *past participle*;e.g: He *has been* here for two hours):

*(1a) It's the best time of the year *I have* ever *experience.*

*(1b) They *have being* cases of official misuse of resources for personal enrichment.

Corrections:

(1a) It's the best time of the year *I have* ever *experienced.*

(1b) They *have been* cases of official misuse of resources for personal enrichment

2. Another glaring problem was the use of the present perfective for the past perfective:

*(iia) This was shocking news to me because I *have* never *attended* such a party in my life.

*(iib) My joy knew no bounds because *I have saved* the life of a boy

Corrections: (iia) That was shocking news to me because I *had* never *attended* such a party in my life.

(iib) My joy knew no bounds because *I had saved* the life of a boy

3. Also, the present perfect was used for simple present passive:

* iii)... till the meat and stockfish *has been* well *cooked.*

The correct version is:

iii)... till the meat and stockfish *are* well *cooked.*

4. The present perfective was wrongly used in the context of simple present.

* iv) Before the cooking, you *have grinded* your egusi and cut your vegetable.

In the context here, the correct verb prase is the simple present:

iv) Before the cooking, you *have to grind* your egusi and cut your vegetable.

The analysis of the students' productions for the present perfective showed that the students could not generate the correct structure for it. In addition, it was used in the wrong contexts, e.g, of simple present and past perfective. They therefore did not know when to use the present perfective in communication

4.2.4.3.4 The Past Perfective Aspect.

The past perfective proved to be a particular difficulty to the students (see Table V). They failed all the objective question items on it and grossly misused it in the essays. The thrust of the objective test was the use of the past perfect to express an activity that was completed before a particular time in the past (e.g. *I had eaten* before the death news *came*). The first past (in order of occurrence) is cast in the past perfect while the second past event is expressed with the simple past. But the students used the simple past in both events as shown below:

*7. Neil *believed* Roy *stayed* behind

*8. I *meant* to call my parents but I *couldn't* find a phone box.

*9.She *wanted* to leave the meeting early but she *felt* that she ought to stay to find out what was decided.

The correct versions are:

7. Neil *believed* Roy *had stayed* behind

8. I *had meant* to call my parents but I *couldn't* find a phone box.

9. She *had wanted* to leave the meeting early but she *felt* that she ought to stay to find out what was decided.

The semantic implication of the wrong responses is that the students used the aspectual construction in wrong contexts. The simple past was wrongly used in contexts that required the past perfective; a similar blemish and wrong formation of the aspectual constructions were evident in the essays as discussed below

1. The Present Perfect was misused for Past Perfective

*(i) I felt so bad and told my parents what *has happened* between us.

The correct sentence is :

(i) I felt so bad and told my parents what *had happened* between us

2. The simple past was wrongly used for the past perfective

* (iia) ...I was happy that I passed (it should be: *had passed*).

* (iib) Before they (six policemen) would reach where were the boys *ran* away .

The corrections are:

(iia) ...I was happy that I *had passed.*

(iib) Before they (six policemen) would reach where the boys' were, they *had ran* away.

3. The simple past passive was incorrectly used for the past perfect passive.

*(iii) Someone who knew me ... found out that I *was withdrawn* a year before that time

Correction:

(iii) Someone who knew me ... found out that I *had been withdrawn* a year before that time

4. There were wrong formations of the past perfective and its passive form.

* (iv)... the direction in which the man *had ran* to ...

*(v) John was happy despite that he *had being given* admission to the university to study medicine...

The corrections are:

(iv)... the direction in which the man *had run* to ...

(v) John was happy despite that he *had been given* admission to the university to study medicine....

5. The past perfective passive was incorrectly used for the present perfective passive:

*(vi) The kind of pleasure I do have for immoral things I no more have and I *had been* drown closer to God since then...

The sentence should read with the correct aspectual construction as follows:

(vi) The kind of pleasure I had for immoral things I no more have. I *have been* drawn closer to God since then...

The analysis of the objective test and the essays showed that the students used the past perfective in wrong communicative contexts and also generated wrong grammatical form for the aspectual construction and its passive form.

4.2.5.3.5 The Past Perfect Progressive

Items (13), (14) and (15) in TableV, examined the students on the use of the Past Perfect Progressive aspectual construction to refer to a continued action in the past that was already completed by the time another action in the past took place (Ansell) The students found item (13) problematic and the other two items less problematic though with high percentage of wrong responses of 48% and 50% for items (13) and (14) accordingly. For the two items, the students wrongly used the Present Perfect in (13) and Present Perfect Progressive in (14) and (15) whereas the Past Perfect Progressive is required in the contexts.

*(13) The builders finished the house last week. They *have worked* for eighteen months

*(14) Joan bought a dishwasher and microwave oven last week.She *has been* saving for six years.

*(15) Joe finished his thesis in June.He *has been researching* for years.

The correct constructions are:

(13) The builders finished the house last week. They *had worked* for eighteen months

(14) Joan bought a dishwasher and microwave oven last week. She *had been* saving for six years.

(15) Joe finished his thesis in June.He *had been researching* for years.

There were also errors of the past perfect progressive in the essays, as well as these extracts illustrate the errors:

1. The students generated wrong form of the past perfect progressive:

*(i) He *had being processing* my admission into Kukansk State Medical University in Ukrain.

The past perfect progressive is formed with *had been +ing*, so the correct sentence is:

(i) He *had been processing* my admission into Kukansk State Medical University in Ukrain..

2. The present perfect progressive was incorrectly used for the past perfect progressive:

*(ii) I told him that I *have being trying* for several years couldn't succeed…

Though a wrong form of the present perfect progressive is used in the sentence, (the writer meant *has been trying)*, yet it is inapplicable in the context that requires the past perfect progressive:

(ii) I told him that I *had been trying for several years but couldn't succeed*…

The analysis of the essays and the objective test showed that the students' main difficulties with the past perfect progressive aspect were wrong usage context and grammatical

form. On the whole,verbal aspects were constraints to the students' written English communication.

4.2.4.3.6 The Present Perfect Progressive Aspect.

The present perfect progressive has its meaning and form. It expresses "the duration (length of time) of an activity that began in the past and is in progress right now" (Azar 98). Its form is: *have/has + been + - ing.*

Though Table V shows that the students had fewer problems with the present perfect progressive, there were some usage problems in the objective test and the essays. In the objective test the students used the present perfect, the simple present and the present progressive in the contexts of items (16), (17) and (18) that required the present perfect progressive as illustrated by the italicized aspectual constructions in the following wrong responses.

*7. The pollution problem *has got* worse over the last decade.

*8. I *want* to meet you since I saw your concert

*9. The protesters *are campaigning* for some months now to prevent the new road being built.

The correct aspectual constructions are *has been getting*, *have been wanting* and *have been campaigning for* items (13), (14) and (15) respectively as rewritten below:

7. The pollution problem *has been getting* worse over the last decade.

8. I *have been wanting* to meet you since I saw your concert

9. The protesters *have been campaigning* for some months now to prevent the new road being built.

In the essays there were both usage and structural problems with the present perfect progressive which are itemized below:

1. There were wrong formations of the present perfect progressive.

*(i) As a young girl I *have being trying* to project myself from the opposite sex...

Correction: *(i)* As a young girl I *have been trying* to project myself from the opposite sex...

2. The Present perfect progressive was used in wrong communicative context.

*(ii) I quickly called some of my friends who *have been praying* for me and tell them how happy I was.

In the sentence the present perfect progressive, h*ave been praying,* is wrongly employed for past perfect progressive, *had been praying:*

(ii) I quickly called some of my friends who *had been praying* for me and toldl them how happy I was.

In conclusion, the students had problems with the usage context and the grammatical form of the Present Perfect Progressive Aspect.

4.2.5 The Students' Difficulties with English Concord

The students' concord usage problems are presented below:

4.2.5.1 Table VI1: The Students' Performance in Concord Multiple-choice Test

Item No.	Concord features examined	Students' Performance (x)	(%)	Rating
I.	**Subject-verb concord**			
1	He live/lives in Lagos	239	83	Less problematic
2	Cherubim is/are invisible *beings/being*	123	43	Problematic
3	The change in female actors' roles *is/are* most glaring in Nigerian movie industry	128	44	Problematic
4	Smoking weeds *is/are* harmful to your fragile health	203	70	Problematic
5	Carefully do/does it	48	16	Problematic
6	What ideas the king *have is/has are* the queen's	157	54	Less problematic
7	There *are is* a car blocking my way	214	74	Less problematic

8	Have you *some/any* news. Here *are/is* the news from NTA.	132	46	Problematic
9	The senator's politics *is/are* rather conservative.	92	32	Problematic
10	Measles *is/are* sometimes serious.	176	61	Less problematic
11	Darts *are unpopular spectator games/is an unpopular spectator sport* in Nigeria.	144	50	Less problematic
12	How much is *that jeans/are those jeans.*	75	20	Problematic
13	What *is/are* John's wages .	105	36	Problematic
14	The faculty *have/has* met and its decision will soon be made known to students.	78	28	Problematic
15	*These/this* vermin *cause/causes* disease.	25	9	Problematic
16	'Men' is *an irregular plural/are irregular plural* in English.	166	58	Less problematic
17(a)	Two thirds of the area *is/are* flooded.	171	59	Less problematic
(b)	Forty dollars *is/are* all it costs.	198	69	Less problematic
18(a)	A good many friends *is/are* dependable when one is in a dire financial need.	102	35	Problematic
(b)	Few days *are/is* adequate for the reconstruction of the collapsed animal pen.	123	43	Problematic
19 (a)	More than a thousand parliamentarians *has/have* endorsed the petition.	171	59	Less problematic
(b)	More than one member *have/has* protested against the proposal	102	35	Problematic
(c)	Many a member *has/have* protested against the proposal.	113	39	Problematic
20	What the old man says and what he thinks *is/are* his own affair.	70	24	Problematic
21	The journalists' camera, his mobile phone, his recorder *is/were* seized by the policeman.	185	64	Less problematic
22	Your answer and mine *is/are* similar.	176	61	Less problematic

23	The height, etc *is/are* less important for our purposes	87	30	Problematic
24	Every woman and every girl *were/was* holding *placard/placards*.	84	29	Problematic
25	Tea and bread *make/makes* a good solid English breakfast.	154	53	Less problematic
26(a)	Benue and Taraba honey *are both/is* thicker than Osun honey.	130	45	Problematic
(b)	Honey from Benue and Taraba *are/is* thicker than Osun honey.	141	49	Problematic
27	The short-term and (the) long-term loan *is/are* handled very differently by the commercial bank.	144	50	Less problematic
28(a)	This statue of sadness and memorial to civil war *was/were* erected in 1970.	153	53	Less problematic
(b)	Her fairness and her impartiality *has/have* been much appreciated.	122	42	Problematic
29(a)	Jacques, as much as her sisters, *were/was* responsible for recovery of the lost item.	109	38	Problematic
(b)	One parliamentarian after another *have/has* protested against the new regulation.	106	37	Problematic
30	James – and Jack, too – *write /write*s excellently well.	111	38	Problematic
31	A writer, and sometimes an artist, *are/is* invited to address the students.	130	48	Problematic
32(a)	Either the car's brakes or the driver's eyesight *are/is* at fault.	180	62	Less problematic
(b)	Either the teachers or the head teacher *has/have* forgot the National Common Entrance Examination date .	123	43	Problematic
33(a)	Financial corruption, or corrupt officers, *is/are* is ascendancy in government parastatals.	110	40	Problematic
34(a)	Neither the captain nor the players *is/are* here	109	38	Problematic

(b)	Neither the doctors nor the nurse *is/are* in the surgical team.	137	47	Problematic
35(a)	Not only James but his wife *has/have* arrived .	119	41	Problematic
(b)	Not just the pupils but even their teacher *are/is* participating in the event.	114	39	Problematic
36	One or two measures *is/are* suggested.	140	48	Problematic
37	One and a half *year has/years have* passed since I visited my hometown.	134	46	Problematic
38(a)	None of the money *have/has* been spent on the construction of the bridge.	154	53	Less problematic
(b)	No people of that name *live/lives* here.	85	29	Problematic
(c)	Nobody, not even the teachers, *were/was* present.	118	41	Problematic
39(a)	A great number of students *was/were* in the hall.	180	62	Less problematic
(b)	A large amount of money *were/was* in the chest.	199	69	Less problematic
40	*Coup* is one of the many words in English that *is/are* of French.	72	25	Problematic
	II. Concord of Person			
41	I do lots of advertisements but you never see me as I really *is/am.*	181	63	Less problematic
42	Neither you, nor he, nor anyone else *knows/know* the route.	153	53	Less problematic
43	It is I who *is/am* to blame.	64	22	Problematic
	III. Subject-complement and Object-complement Concord			
44	Our principal crop *is/are* yams.	134	46	Problematic
	IV. Distributive-number Concord			
45(a)	They vented their *spleens/spleen* on him.	113	39	Problematic
(b)	We can't put our *fingers/finger* on evil.	69	24	Problematic

	V. Pronoun-antecedent Concord			
46	They helped *theirselves/themselves.*	197	68	Less problematic
47	The car *whom/which* you ordered last week has arrived.	174	60	Less problematic
48	This is *my/mine* and that is *he's/his.*	146	51	Less problematic
49(a)	Everyone thinks he *has/they* have the answer.	54	18	Problematic
(b)	Either he or she is going to have to change *her/their* practice.	165	57	Less problematic
50	One should choose *one's/his* spouse thoughtfully.	160	57	Lessproblematic
51	The committee is reducing the number of *its/their* meeting.	168	58	Less problematic

The table shows that the students had difficulties with all the types of concord examined, though at varying degrees. The subject-verb concord was most problematic, while others proved less difficult with few failed items. The students' essays also manifested errors in the five concord-types as the table below displays:

4.2.5.2 Concord Problems in the Students' Essays

Table VIII: Frequency of Concord Errors in the Students' Compositions

S/N	Concord Types	Error	Percentage Score (%)	Performance Rating
1	Subject-verb	179	73	Problematic
2	Concord of person	15	6	Less problematic
3	Subject-complement and object-complement	15	6	Less problematic
4	Distributive-number	4	2	Less problematic
5	Pronoun-antecedent	32	13	Less problematic
Total		245	100%	

Table VIII affirms that the subject-verb concord constituted the greatest problem to the students; it had as many as 179 errors of the total 245 concord blemishes found. The other concord-types, as the table displays, are less problematic.

4.2.5.3. Discussion on the Students' Difficulties with Concord in the Ojective Test and the Essays.

The discussion of students' concord problem here identifies each failed concord feature in the objective test, and explicates the linguistic cause of the failure using extracts from the essays as illustrations. The discussion is classified into five sections on the basis of the types of concord examined.

4.2.5.3.1 Subject- verb Concord

Of the forty subject-verb concord features examined, the subjects failed 27 items numbered as 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19b-c, 20, 23, 24, 26, 28b, 29, 30, 31, 32b, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38b-c, and 40.The students' deficient repertoire of English vocabulary accounts for the failure in (2) because 'cherubim' is a plural noun so it requires a plural verb (*are*). In (3) the plural noun *roles* determined the students' choice of *are* instead of *is* but it is the singular nominal head(*change)* of the subject noun phrase that decides the subject-verb relation. Item (5) is a simple sentence, making a statement but the students misconstrued it as an imperative sentence: *(you must) carefully do it*. But the sentential context does not support the misinterpretation (of a speaker issuing an order to a listener); therefore, the adverb *carefully* that functions as the subject counts as singular: *carefully does* it. In (8), the students are bereft of the grammatical fact that the invariable noun *news* always counts as singular (Quirk, et al). The students' failure in item (9), arises from the faulty thinking that the noun *politics* here denotes academic subject as *Statistics, Physics, Mathematics* in which case it counts as singular but it

counts as plural particularly when it denotes one's knowledge of the subject and the practical application of knowledge, and it is in the latter context the *politics* is used here.

The errors in 12, 13, 14, 15, 18 emanate from faulty knowledge of English number system; for example, *jeans*, in (12) is a summation plural so it requires a plural verb. *Wages, in (13)* belongs to a group of some nouns that, in certain sense, occur only in the plural ending *-s* and take plural concord. *Faculty*, as all collective nouns, takes either singular or plural but here (14) its use is singular as implied by the possessive pronoun *its*. *Vermin in (15)* is an unmarked plural noun that has plural concord: *These* vermin *cause* disease. The expressions *many a* and *a few* in (18) are considered as units so each takes a singular verb.

For items 19b-c, 20, 23, 24 and 26 the problems are traceable to imperfect learning of basic grammatical elements. In 19b or 19c, the subject is notionally plural but the singular is preferred because *member* is analyzed as the head of the noun phrase therefore, *has* is preferred in the sentences. In 20, the subject comprises of two clauses (*what the old man says and what he thinks...)* So a plural verb is required even though each conjoin is singular but the students' ungrammatical construction was induced by the singular number of each conjoin. The students' production for item (23) is ungrammatical because a noun phrase that is followed by *etc, and so on, and so forth* and similar abbreviatory expressions takes a plural verb. The neglect or lack of knowledge of the semantic import of the enumeration implied by the abbreviation, *etc.* is the cause of the students' difficulty with the item. The preposed *each* or *every* in the compound subject noun phrase in (24) has a distributive effect and requires a singular verb. The students' wrong choice of a plural verb (*were)* and plural noun *(placards*) neglects the grammatical implication of the preposed items. In the items (26a) and (26b), the students' responses are wrong because a singular non-count head premodified by phrases coordinated by *and* takes a plural verb. The noun phrase that realizes the subject implies two separate sentences: *Caribbean*

honey is thicker than Lagos honey.(b) Taraba honey is thicker than Lagos honey. On the other hand, a singular verb is required when the phrases are post-modifying: (26b) *Honey from Benue and Taraba is thicker than Lagos honey.*

Items 28b, 21a, 30, 31 and 32b elicited wrong responses from the students .The subject of sentence (28b) comprises two coordinated units and each is singular and makes the same reference. However, a singular verb is unsuitable here because the repeated determiner. *her*. biases the verbal choice to plural. In (29a) and (29b), the subjects are realized by noun phrases linked by quasi-coordinators (*as much as, after another)* so each subject requires a singular verb because the first noun phrase is singular (Quirk, et al).Items (30) and (31) have conjoins as subjects and the second conjoin in each subject is an interpolated element so the subject-verb concord, unknown to the students, is unaffected by the interpolated conjoin. In (32b), the subject phrases (... *the teachers.....the headteacher....)* are coordinated by *either.... or*. But both members have different number so the member that comes last determines the number of the verb (*has).*

In sentence (33), *or* is employed for coordinative apposition but the two appositives differ in number so the verb number agrees with the first appositive.

The concord of *either..... or* as explained in 32b above applies to the correlatives *neither..... nor* in formal usage entailed in items(34a) and(34b) so *are* and *is* are the correct verbs in the contexts.

Also, for the coordinating correlatives (*not only.....but, not.....but*), the rule on *or* as discussed in (33) above applies to 35a-b: *has* and *is* are the choice verbs. The mixed expressions *one or two* and *between me and two* take plural verb. That was the test in (36) which the students failed. The expression *one and a half* in item (37) requires plural verb (*have*) because the term *plural* applies to *more than one*. Finally, the students' problem with(38b) arises from the

grammatical fact that present or implied non-count nouns of amount or quantity with the determiners and with pronouns *no, none, all, some, any* and fractions such as *half* take singular but the plural count nouns (present or implied) take plural verb (*live*) which is required in the item.

In (38c), it is unknown to most of the students that the indefinite pronoun, *nobody*, the subject of the sentence, as well as other indefinites such *each, every, any body* and *nobody* or indefinite phrase such as *everyone, anyone* require singular verb *(was)*

In addition to the weaknesses of the students in subject-verb in the multiple-choice test, table VIII further exhibits that subject-verb concordit recorded 179 errors of the 245 concord found in their essays. The excerpts below unearth the nature of the problem:

*1. Abuja is the *place* that *have* mass number of people

*2. ... *they* normally *comes* school in a car because the school is distance from our place

*3. *the numerous causes* of corruption *has* left us with those regular and bitter consequences

Those sentences reveal genuine cases of subject-verb concord problem. Sentences (1) and (2) have singular noun phrases as subjects so they take singular verb but the students used plural verbs.The correct versions are these:

1. Abuja is the *place* that *has* mass number of people

2. ... *they* normally *come* school in a car because the school is distance from our place

3. *the numerous causes* of corruption *have* left us with those regular and bitter consequences

4.2.5.3.2 Concord of Person

Of the three items on concord of person in the multiple-choice test the students failed one, representing 67% pass or 33% failure. Yet something does have to be said about the

students' difficulty with the failed item which is (43): **It is I* who *is* to blame. There is no concord between the first person singular (I) with its verb. In a relative clause and cleft sentences, a relative pronoun subject is followed by a verb in agreement with its antecedent.So the correct sentence is this:It is *I am* who to blame..There are instances of errors of concord of person in the students' essay as is shown in the sentences below:

*1. Corruption is the act of embezzling what does not belong to *you*

*2. *anybody* that *commit* crime and *he/she* is brought to the police station, *he* will issue money as bribe and the policemen will set free the person

There are clear wrong uses of *person* as italicized. (1) reads better with the replacement of the objective case *you* with the impersonal indefinite pronoun *one*. There is inconsistency of person in (2), resulting in the elimination of gender neutrality initiated by the indefinite pronoun *anybody* and the introduction of gender bias with the second use of *he*. The sentence is better off without the third person singular *he* and *she*.The correct sentences are provided below:

1. Corruption is the act of embezzling what does not belong to *one*

2. *Anybody* that *commits* crime and is brought to the police station, *he/she* gives bribe and the police sets the person free

4.2.5.3 .3. Subject-complement and Object-complement Concord

The students failed the lone item that examined them on this concord feature which is the forty-fourth item in the multiple-choice test: *Our principal crop are yams*. The students' response is ungrammatical because it is an exceptional case in which subject and its complement have different numbers and so the subject-complement does not determine the concord relation. The subject-complement here is a generic noun phrase which could be singular: *Their principal crop is yam.* The complement also has the potentiality of subject-complement reversal: *Yams are*

their principal crop. There were also numerous concord errors of this sort in the students' essays as shown by these extracts:

*1. *These are some of the question* I do ask myself, if it will start from the top which is our leaders who can make them change?

*2. *Corruption* in Nigeria is the *abnormalities* that characterize the attitudes, thoughts and actions of *Nigeria*

The sentence (1) lacks subject-object concord and an apparent instance of incongruent subject-complement concord displays itself in item (2). The corrections are given below:

1. *These are some of the questions* I do ask myself, if it will start from the top with our leaders who can make them change?

2. *Corruption* in Nigeria is the *abnormality* that *characterizes* the attitudes, thoughts and actions of *Nigerians*

4.2.5.3.4 Distributive- number Concord

Only two items examined this concord-type and the students failed them as reproduced below:

*1. They vented their *spleens* on him.

*2. We can't put our *fingers* on evil.

The plural subjects (*they* and *we*) induced the wrong usage but in modern English, the singular is mandatory or suitable with idiomatic and metaphoric expressions. The correct versions, therefore, are these:

1. They vented their *spleen* on him.

2. We can't put our *finger* on evil.

This concord problem exists in the students' composition as is displayed by this excerpt:

* Not all that *glitters are* gold.

Correction: Not all that *glitters is* gold

4.2.5.3.5 Pronoun – antecedent Concord

Items 46-51 in the objective test were of pronoun-antecedent concord but the students failed item (49a) as shown below:

*Everyone thinke *he has* the answer

The correct version is: Everyone thinks *they have* the answer.

To avoid gender partiality in (49a), *they*, being gender neutral, is used in reference to the indefinite pronouns *everyone, everybody, someone, anyone, no one, and nobody*. Though the students failed only one item of the 6 items here, errors of pronoun-antecedent concord ranked second in the students' essays(see table 2).Examples of such errors are these:

*1. On this fateful day they attacked a women and *his* husband, collected some of their things.

*2. I asked myself "what if *you* were the one?"

Arbitrary pronoun- antecedent concord manifests in the sentences: the subjects are not in agreement with their antecedents, as italicized.The correct sentences are give below:

1. On this fateful day they attacked a women and *her* husband, collected some of their things.

*2. I asked myself "what if *I* were the one?"

Finally, it is evident from the discussion of the results that the students had problems with all the five types of concord studied. The subject-verb concord constituted their weakest point with the pronoun-antecedent concord ranking second. In the others, the students' problems were quantitatively low. The main difficulties of the students with the subject-verb concord were that plural subjects had singular verbs (instead of plural verbs) whereas singular subjects had plural verbs rather than singular verbs in their works. The difficulty with concord of person was that

relative pronoun subjects were not followed by verbs in agreement with their antecedents. Also, there were cases of unacceptable concord relations between subject and complement as well as between object and its complement. Instances of wrong distributive-number concord existed.

4.3 Summary of Findings

Conclusively, the analysis of the essays and the multiple-choice responses proved that the students had difficulties with the uses and forms of verb tenses, backshifts (in reported speech), tense-patterns in conditional sentences, aspectual constructions, and concord.

Specifically, the simple present tense was not used in the required sentential contexts; also, there were several instances of the use of the tense in contexts where it did not apply.In addition, the required verbal forms (the base form or the s-form) were not used in many cases. The past tense is a one-verb word tense, i.e, the past tense of a verb. In the students' works, many verb words were not inflected to Summaryindicate past time; also, unacceptable verb word inflections were found in the students' written productions. Finally, the past tense was used in several wrong communicative contexts.

Verb forms were misused in the students' reported speeches. They could not backshifts verb tenses, the progressives, the perfectives and the modals in reported speech.

The students also had difficulties with tense-patterns of basic conditional sentences. They were unable to use correct tense-patterns in sentences that express real condition, present and past hypothetical conditions.

Furthermore, the study established students' incompetencies in the uses and grammatical formations of basic aspectual constructions namely, Present Progressive, Past Progressive, Present Perfective, Past Perfective, Present Perfect Progressive and Past Perfect Progressive.

Finally, the study revealed that the students had difficulties with all the five types of concord examined: subject-verb, concord types of concord of person, subject-complement and object complement, distributive-number concord and pronoun-antecedent concord.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The chief aim of the study was to investigate the nature and causes of tense, aspect and concord problems in the written English of first-year students of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi.The literature review discussed theoretical perspectives on second language learners' usage problem, and adopted error analysis approach. In addition, it examined the key concepts of structural grammar model and its description of tense, aspect and concord in contemporary English usage as theoretical basis for discriminating deviant cases of tense, aspect and concord in the students' written productions. The model explored in details the communicative functions and grammatical forms of the two tenses of English; it also explained the types, uses and forms of the two aspectual constructions of English (the progressive and the perfective).Tense-patterns in conditional sentences and tense-shifts in reported speech were explored. Finally, it discussed fifty-one concord features categorized into five types: subject-verb concord, concord of person, subject-complement and object-complement concord, distributive-number concord, and pronoun-antecedent concord.

Based on the theoretical framework of the study described above, a research instrument, made up of five essay-writing tasks and one hundred and ten multiple-choice questions, was developed for data collection. The test instrument, called *Use of English Test*, was administered as an end-of-semester continuous assessment at the close of the second semester in the 2012/13 academic session to 286 study subjects selected from among first-year students through simple random sampling technique. The results of data analysis, using extracts from the students' works,frequency count and simple percentage statistics, showed incompetencies in verb tenses,

aspectual constructions and concord usage. Some of the main incompetencies are recapitulated below:

A. Verb Tenses

1. The simple present was used in sentential contexts where it did not apply and where it applied. it was not used. These extracts illustrate the deficiency:

*(a) Geese *flew* south every fall

*(b) So we *blend* in and we *dance* and *drink* but didn't smoke

The correct versions are:

(a) Geese *fly* south every fall

(b) So we *joined* them, *danced* and *drank* but didn't smoke

2. There were scores of problems with the use of the s-form of the verb in the simple present. e.g:

*(c) It will also *leads* to industrialization...

Correction: (c) It will also *lead* to industrialization...

3. The students lacked knowledge of the various shades of meaning the simple present is used to communicate. For example, the uses of the simple present in travelogue itinerary, instruction booklet and verbal directions proved problematic to the students:

*(d) ... *add* a desired quality of water, *mixed* your ingredients, *allow* it *to boiled* for sometime then you *boiled* you meat and add some *leaf.*

Correction :(d) ... *add* a desired quality of water, *mix* your ingredients, *allow* it *to boil* for sometime then you *boil* you meat and add some *leaf.*

4. The students' essay showed incorrect use of modals with the simple present:

*(e) ....that I should *used* the money and do my registration and *processed* some of my school activities.

Correction: (e) ....that I should *use* the money and do my registration and *processed* some of my school activities.

5. There were wrong uses of *to-infinitive* as simple present and wrong formation of the passive form of the simple present.

*(f) My visit to the popular Niger Bridge made me *to development* more interest in technology.

Correction: (f) My visit to the popular Niger Bridge made me *to develop* more interest in technology

6. The uses of the simple past tense were problematic to the students, for example, it was not used in required sentential contexts:

*(g) Scientists *have made* some fundamental discoveries in the 15th century.

Correction: (g) Scientists *made* some fundamental discoveries in the 15th century.

7. The to-infinitive forms of verbs were inflected to indicate past time:

* (h) ... I decided *to stayed* and watch for sometime....

Correction: (h) ... I decided *to stay* and watch for sometime....

8. The past tense equivalents of the modal auxiliaries (will, can, shall, etc) were not used in sentential contexts that required them:

*(i) I vowed to God that if he *can* help me out of the unpleasant situation. I *will* serve him...

Correction: (i) I vowed to God that if he *could* help me out of the unpleasant situation. I *would* serve him...

9. Present verb forms were not inflected to indicate past time:

*(j) I ate and ate until I *confess* with my mouth that *am* satisfied

Correction: (j) I ate until I *confessed* with my mouth that *was* satisfied

(10) There were numerous wrong inflections of irregular verbs, e.g: *cutted, shaked, clinged,* etc.

B. Tense- patterns in Conditional Sentences

The students could not generate the correct tense-patterns for the three types of conditional sentences examined as illustrated by the extracts below:

1. Real condition, e.g:

*(a)If the pupils *lost* any money they *report* it to me (wrong tense- pattern)

Correct tense-parttern: If the pupils *have lost* any money they *report* to me.

2. Present hypothetical condition, eg:

*(a) If I *see* a ghost, I *would run* away (wrong)

(a) If I saw a ghost, I would run away (correct)

3. Past hypothetical condition, eg:

*(a) If I *knew* about it, it *wouldn't have mattered* (wrong tense- pattern)

Correct tense- pattern: (a) If I *had known* about it, it wouldn't have *mattered.*

C. Tense-shift in Report Speech

The students were unable to use verb forms correctly in indirect speech. They demonstrated backshift incompetence in English tenses, progressives, perfectives and modals.

D. Aspectual Constructions

The students misused the six English aspectual constructions: either they were used in wrong contexts or were not used where they were required. Also, incorrect grammatical forms were generated for each of the six aspectual constructions studied.

E. Concord.

The students' works showed errors at varying degrees in the five concord-types studied: subject-verb concord, concord of person, subject-complement and object-complement concord, distributive-number and pronoun-antecedent concord. On the difficulty with the subject-verb

concord, plural verbs had singular verbs (instead of plural verbs) whereas singular verbs took plural subjects in the students' works. The difficulty with concord of person was that relative pronoun subjects were not followed by verbs in agreement with their antecedents. Also, there were cases of unaccepted concord relations between subject and complement as well as between object and its complement. Instances of wrong distributive-number concord existed.Finally, there were several cases of wrong pronoun-antecedent concord.

5.2 Conclusion

The study has found out that basic grammatical item such as tense, aspect and concord are constraints to some undergraduates' effective communication in English due largely to imperfect learning. The conclusion of the study is that some first-year university students who have had the last formal exposure to English language teaching for academic purposes in Nigerian school system are yet unable to

(i) use the verb tenses correctly in written communication,

(ii) use correct tense-patterns in expressing real and hypothetical propositions in conditional sentences

(iii) use correct verb forms in reporting other people's language.

(iv) generate correct grammatical forms of English aspectual constructions as well as use the constructions in appropriate communicative contexts.

(v) write sentences that exhibit correct subject-verb agreement and other concord relations.

The findings of the study have some implications for the teaching and learning of English for academic purposes in Nigerian universities.

The incompetence of the first-year university students in the use of tenes, aspect and concord in communication as exhibited here indicates their poor English language background from lower school levels.

The students manifested the grammatical problems after they had had the use of English course which is the final component of mandatory English language study programme in Nigeria school system; this suggests that they would continue beyond the first-year level in their degree programmes with the deficiency which would engender incomprehensible expressions as often exhibited in their speeches, essays and project reports.

Having obtained pass grade in the university use of English course examination, the students, though deficient in basic grammar items germane to effective communication, are unlikely to engage in private English language study to improve their proficiency. Consequently, they would probably graduate with deficient use of English. Usually the quality of university graduate spoken and written English serves an index to the standard of education in a country where English is used as a second language.

That university students who have had use of English course are yet weak in tense.aspect and concord could have been caused by the current use of English syllabus that is basically developmental in conception devoid of adequate focus on learning of problematic grammatical elements.

The concluding implication of the findings of the study is that the teaching of English language for learning purposes at primary, secondary and tertiary levels should be made more communicative in orientation.

5.3 Recommendations of Remedial Measures for the Identified Gammatical Problems

To surmount the grammatical problems identified in this study, the following suggestions are made:

(i) Grammatical elements such as tense, aspect, concord and others which researches have proved to be problematic to undergraduates should be marked in the university use of English

course syllabus as topics that require re-teaching and accompanied with copious exercises that would groom students in the use of the items in writing.

(ii) The teaching and learning of English language for learning purposes at university level should be accompanied intensive drills

(iii) The attitude of teaching use of English course for the purpose of generating examination questions should be jettisoned because it would not inculcate communicative competence in the learners. English language teaching at any school level should be aimed at changing students' weak language base (Lester 333-366).

(iv) English Language teachers should develop remedial self-study books in essential aspects of English grammar which cover concord, tense, aspect and others for the use of undergraduates.

(v) Finally, subjecting students to constant essay-writing would gain them mastery of tense. aspect and concord as they are grammatical items that unavoidably feature in every piece of writing.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Study

A similar study should be conducted among final-year undergraduates to determine the extent to which learning in the medium of English has proned off their errors in verb tenses. verbal aspects and concord. To achieve this, the competence of the students in the items at the close of the use of English course should be compared with that at final-year. Also, a study on the effect of use of English course on the linguistic competence of undergraduates could be attempted.

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APPENDIX

Resarch Instrument

Use of English Test

Instruction: Write only one essay from part I and answer all questions in part II.

Part I

1. Describe*: How to prepare a favourite Nigerian dish*
2. Write a story, real or imagined, which illustrates: *It was a bitter experience but I learnt my lessons.*
3. Write on*: Corruption in Nigeria: causes, consequences and solutions*
4. Write for or against*: Education should be free at all levels.*
5. Narrate: *A happy day in my life and how I spent it.*

Part II: Multiple-choice Questions

Section A: Tenses

Instruction: Read the following sentences and fill each gap with the correct (present simple) form of the verb given. The contexts suggest the correct verbal forms required.

1. 'I do lots of advertisements, including the panda for a new airline, but you never _____ (see) me as I really 2. _____ (be).
3. Geese _____ (fly) south every fall.
4. At the end of the film, the hero _____ (find) the hidden treasure. .
5. He always _____ (reply) promptly.

1. Jane *has just left / left just* a few minutes ago.
2. I *have got / started to get* the pains three weeks ago.
3. Scientists *have made / made* some fundamental discoveries in the 18th century.

4. Timson *made / has made* 13 films before she was tragically killed in a card accident.

5. Lee *has represented / represented* his country on many occasions, but was forced to retire after an injury

Section B. Tense-patterns in Conditional Sentences

Instruction: Choose and underline the correct tense in each sentence.

1. If the wind blew from the north, we *move/moved* into the other room.
2. If the ceiling *falls/fell* on top of you, you would be killed.
3. If I *knew/had known* about it, it wouldn't have mattered.
4. If the pupils *lost/have lost* any money, they report it to me
5. If Mrs. Malu *hasn't been/hadn't been* there, I would not have come..
6. If I *see/saw* a ghost, I would run away.
7. Dan might help you if you had *asked/ask* him.
8. If he *has not done/had not done* his work, he would have been punished.
9. If he *dies/died* tomorrow, he would soon be forgotten.

SectionC: Tense-shifts in Reported Speech

Instruction: Rewrite the following direct speeches (in quotations) as indirect utterances. An example is given as a guide.

1(a) Jane said, "I need more money".

(b) Jane said that she needed more money.

2(a) "My children eat rice with fish stew every Sunday", the woman said.

(b) The woman said that _____

3(a) "I am studying English at the moment", Joseph said

(b) Joseph said he _____

4(a) "The fraudsters have deceived me", the manager told the guardsman.

(b) The manager told the guardsman that the fraudsters _____

5(a) "I have been studying English", he said.

(b) He said that he _____

6(a) He said, " I was married (but my wife died last year)".

(b) He said that he _____

7(a) "If John were here, he would vote against the motion", she said.

(b) She said that if John _____

8(a) "Jane had already gone when I phoned him this morning", Jacobson said.

9(a) "Shakespeare somewhere writes that a coward dies many times before his death", the teacher told the students.

(b) The teacher told his students that Shakespeare somewhere _____

10(a) "The earth moves round the sun", the Geography teacher informed the students.

(b) The Geography teacher informed the students that the earth _____

11(a) "If I were in Jos, I would visit the current Nok culture exhibition of the museum", he said.

(b) He said that if he _____

12(a) "You may do as you wish", she said.

(b) She said you _____ do as you _____.

13(a) "The King can do no wrong", they argued.

(b) They argued seriously that the King _____ no wrong.

14(a) "The plan will succeed", the detective assured them.

(b) The detective assured them that the plan _____ succeed.

15(a) "Shall I open the window", the visitor offered.

(b) The visitor asked if he _____ open the window.

16(a) "We won't pay another kobo", they said.

(b) They said that they _____

17(a) "You shouldn't smoke in the lecture hall", he told the new students.

(b) He told the new students that they _____

18(a) "The babe must be hungry", the minder said.

(b) The minder said that the babe _____

19(a) "You had better not say anything about it", she warned her son.

(b) She warned her son that he _____

20(a) "I could speak French when I was young", I said.

(b) I said that I _____

21(a) "When I was in secondary school I would study till three in the morning", he recalled.

(b) He recalled that when he _____

Section D: Aspectual Constructions

Direction: Select the correct option

1. A report of a weatherman on a television programme. The sun *shines brightly / shining* at the moment from the satellite picture we *can see*... a depression which *is coming* in from the
2. Atlantic.... This depression *brings / is bringing* a lot of rain....
3. **Dialogues:** Jef: That was a dangerous thing to do! Jak:You *are constantly criticizing / constantly criticize* my driving.
4. Just as I *got / was getting* into the bath the fire went off.
5. The gardener *cut/ was cutting* the grass all yesterday afternoon.
6. A hundred years ago Queen Victoria *reigned / was reigning.*
7. Science *made / has made* money advances this century.
8. Since 1990, I *lived / have lived* in a small house near the coast.
9. Since I *lived / have lived* here, I *did not see / have not seen* my neighbours.
10. Neil believed Roy *stayed / had stayed* behind.
11. I *meant / had meant* to call my parents but I couldn't find a phone box.
12. She *had wanted / wanted* to leave the meeting early but she felt that she ought to stay to find out what was decided.
13. The pollution problem *has got / has been getting* worse over the last decade.
14. I *want / have been wanting* to meet you since I saw your concert.

15. The protesters *are campaigning / have been campaigning* for some months now to prevent the new road being built.

16. The builders finished the house last week. They *have worked / had been working* for eighteen months.

17. Joan brought a dishwasher and a microwave oven just last week. She *has been / had been* saving for six months.

18. Joe finished his thesis in June. He *has been / had been* researching for three years.

Section E: Concord

I. Subject-verb Concord

1. He *live / lives* in Lagos
2. Cherubim *is / are* invisible *beings/being*
3. The change in female actors' roles *is /are* most glaring in Nigeria movie industry.
4. Smoking weeds *is / are* harmful to your fragile health
5. Carefully *do / does* it.
6. What ideas the King *have is / has are* the queen's.
7. There *are / is* a car blocking my way.
8. Have you *some / any* news. Here *are / is* the news from NTA.
9. The senator's politics *is / are* rather conservative.
10. Measles *is / are* sometimes serious.
11. Darts *are unpopular spectator games / is an unpopular spectator sport* in Nigeria.
12. How much *is that jeans / are those jeans* ?
13. What *is / are* John's wages
14. The faculty *have / has* met and its decision will soon be made known to students.
15. *These / this* vermin *cause / causes* disease.
16. 'Men' *is an irregular plural / are irregular plurals* in English.

17a. Two-thirds of the area *is / are* flooded

b. Forty dollars *is / are* all it costs

18a. A good many friends *is / are* dependable when one is in a dire financial need.

b. Few days *are / is* adequate for the reconstruction of the collapsed animal.

19a. More than a thousand parliamentarians *has / have* endorsed the petition.

b. More than one member *have / has* protested against the proposal.

c. Many a member *has / have* protested against the proposal.

20. What the old man says and what he thinks *is / are* his own affair.

21 The journalist's camera, his mobile phone, his recorder *is / were* seized by the policeman.

22. Your answer and mine *is / are* similar

23. The height, etc, *is / are* less important for our purposes.

24. Every woman and every girl *were / was* holding *placard / placards.*

25. Tea and bread *make / makes* a good solid English breakfast.

26a. Benue and Taraba honey *are both / is* thicker than Osun honey

b. Honey from Benue and Taraba *are / is* thicker than Osun honey

27. The short-term and (the) long-term loans *is / are* handled very differently by the commercial bank.

28a. This statue of sadness and memorial of the civil war *was/were* erected in 1970.

b. Her fairness and her impartiality has / have been much appreciated.

29a. Jacques, as much as her sisters, *were / was* responsible for recovery of the lost

b. One parliamentarian after another *have / has* protested against the new regulation.

30. James – and Jack, too – *write / writes* excellently well.

31. A writer, and sometimes an artist, *are / is* invited to address the students.

32a. Either the car's brakes or the driver's eyesight are / *is* at fault.

b. Either the heahteacher or the teachers *has / have* forgot the National Common Entrance Examination date.

33. Financial corruption, or corrupt officers, *is / are* in ascendancy in government parastatals.

34a. Neither the captain nor the players *is / are* here.

b. Neither the doctor nor the nurse *is / are* in the surgical team.

35a. Not only James but his wife *is / have* arrived.

b. Not just the pupils but even their teachers *are / is* participating in the event.

36. One or two measures *is / are* suggested.

37. One and a half year *has/ years* have passed since I visited any hometown.

38a. None of the money *have / has* been spent on the construction of the bridge.

b. No people of that name *live / lives* here.

c. Nobody, not even the teachers, *were / was* present.

39a. A great number of students *was / were* in hall.

b. A large amount of money *were / was* in the chest.

40. Coup is one of the many words in English that *is / are* of French origin.

ii) **Concord of Person**

41. I do lots of advertisements but you never see me as a I really *is / am*.

42. Neither you, nor he, nor anyone else *knows / know* the route.

43. It is I who *is / am* to blame.

iii) **Subject-complement and Object-complement Concord**

44, Our principal crop *is / are* yams.

iv) **Distributive-number Concord**

45a. They vented their *spleens / spleen*

b. We can't put our *fingers / finger* on evil

v) **Pronoun-antecedent Concord**

46. They helped *theirselves / themselves*

47. The car *whom / which* you ordered lost week has arrived.

48. This is *my / mine* and that is *he's / his*.

49a. Everyone thinks *he has / they have* the answer.

b. Either he or she is going to have to change *her / their* practice.

50. One should choose *one's / his* spouse thoughtfully.

51. The committee is reducing the number of *its / their* meeting.