

UNGRAMMATICALITY IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL IGBO ESSAY:  
AN EXAMPLE OF INLAND GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL ONITSHA

**ABSTRACT**

This research aims at ascertaining the written grammatical errors of students of Inland Girls' Secondary School, Onitsha who are Igbo LI speakers. The purpose of this study is to identify, analyze and explain the common written grammatical errors committed by the Igbo LI speakers of Inland Girls' Secondary School, Onitsha in Anambra State, and to suggest the ways in which these errors can be corrected. Thus, a descriptive survey design was used for this study. Thirty-five (35) Igbo L1 speakers who were students from SSI (14) and SSIII (21) class formed the sample population for this study. The data for the study were generated using the students' written essays on the topics: "Edemede maka onwe m, Edemede maka ụlọakwụkwọ m, Edemede maka onyenkuzi m, Edemede maka obodo m na edemede maka onyeisi ụlọakwụkwọ m". The data collected were organized using a simple percentage method, and was analyzed using Corder (1967) theory of error analysis. It was discovered that the students committed many errors ranging from Omission of punctuation mark (52.01%), , English language interference (1.62%), wrong use of the article 'na' (13.13%), spelling errors (7.35%), omission of pronouns (1.39%), Wrong use of punctuation marks (15.35%), wrong use of verbs (0.18%), wrong use of pronouns (1.29%), omission of nouns (2.3%), omission of pronouns (0.14%), wrong use of nouns (2.14%), dialect interference (4.53%), word order displacement (1.03%), omission of the article 'na' (0.69%), and incomplete words/sentences (1.29%). In conclusion, we recommended among others that students should be engaged in competition with reward and also Igbo language teachers should be trained occasionally. All these will constitute to the developing of Igbo language.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Language is a sole medium of communication. The Igbo language is one of the three main Nigerian languages (the others being Hausa and Yoruba). Majority of the native speakers of the language are located in the South Eastern part of Nigeria,

precisely in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states; while a few other speakers reside in Delta and Rivers states. It also belongs to KWA language family. It is noteworthy that Igbo language is the first language acquired by the speakers in an Igbo cultural setting. This language has expanded with the evidence of being taught in schools, and lots of books written in it for the sole purpose of studies. Igbo language is becoming less frequently spoken or used as the world is becoming a global village and only globalized languages can sustain its tempo. Many languages already have global recognition and influence which English, French, etc of which Chinese is on the great boost currently. Unfortunately, the rate of the growth of Igbo language is very slow as a result of poor language attitude of majority of the speakers. In Igbo natural environment, it should be obviously known that Igbo language is the first language of the inhabitants, but of recent, it is certain that right in Igbo natural setting, English is becoming the first language of the Igbos. As the language gradually loses its authenticity, the younger generation is getting rid of the language at any slight opportunity. Due to the lack of good language attitude, many errors are being made at the course of the language use especially in writing aspect.

Error, in the words of Richard *et al* (2002) is the use of a word, speech act or grammatical items in such a way it seems imperfect and insignificant of an incomplete learning. As people are no longer much interested in Igbo language like the earlier years which has caused incomplete mastery of the language. Therefore, a lot of errors are presently being made by the speakers in the production of Igbo language. These errors can be as a result of some linguistic and non-linguistic factors such as incompetency, English language interference, etc.

When concluded, this research will create awareness on the part of the student on their common grammatical errors, and enable them make conscious efforts to improve on their Igbo grammar and correct such error and it will be a torchlight to the teachers in the areas of their teaching that need improvement. Lastly, this research will be useful to all Linguists, Igbo language researchers, scholars, textbook writers, publishers, curriculum planners, who are interested in developing Igbo language.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive survey design was used by the researcher for this study. In the words of Osuji (2012: 75), descriptive survey are all those studies which aim at collecting data, analyzing them and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about given population. Purposive sampling technique is to be used by the researcher to select the sample population for this study. In the words Osuji (2012: 53), purposive sampling technique is “necessitated when the researcher is interested in certain specified characteristics”. Purposive sampling "ensures that only those that meet such required purpose, attributes or characteristics are selected" (Osuji, 2012: 53). The major instrument for the collection of data is by administering Igbo essays to the sample population to the Igbo L1 students. The researcher will analyze the grammatical errors made by the students from the data she collected using the Corder's (1967, in Elis and Barkhuizen, 2005: 51) approach of conducting error analysis. This approach of conducting error analysis includes the following steps: collection of a sample of the learner's language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors and error evaluation. She is then to organize the data using frequency and percentage tables to show the common errors made by the students

### **Population of Study**

Population of students in Inland Girls’ Secondary School, Onitsha for 2018/2019 academic session.

**Table 1: Population of students**

Class	Number of Students
JSS1	160
JSSII	102
JSSIII	89
SSSI	95
SSSII	136
SSSIII	86
TOTAL	868

The target population for this study is students of Inland Girls’ Secondary School, Onitsha who are Igbo LI speakers. The table above shows that the total number of students in Inland Girls’ Secondary School, Onitsha for the 2018/2019 academic

session is 668 students. So the size of the target population for this study is 181 students. As a result of constraints in time and resources, a sample population will be drawn to be the Igbo LI speakers of SS1 and 3 classes. The Igbo L1 speakers of SS1 and 3 classes are to represent the target population of study.

### 3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Our data is presented using table whereby the common errors committed by each students would be spelt out.

**Table 2:** Shows the common errors committed by the students.

Sources of errors committed by the students	Omission of punctuation mark	English language interference	Wrong use of verb	Wrong use of pronoun	Wrong use of the article 'na'	Wrong use of punctuation mark	Spelling errors	Dialect interference	Incomplete word/sentence	Word order displacement	Omission of pronoun	Omission of the article 'na'	Omission of noun	Numbers of errors by each students
Participant A	32	01	--	--	07	03	01	--	--	--	--	--	--	44
Participant B	74	07	--	03	05	09	07	07	02	01	--	01	--	116
Participant C	89	--	--	--	07	02	07	04	--	--	--	--	--	109
Participant D	25	01	01	--	02	05	08	01	02	01	02	--	--	48
Participant E	39	01	--	--	13	19	06	02	--	01	--	01	--	82
Participant F	23	--	01	05	17	05	05	--	--	01	01	--	--	58
Participant G	19	--	--	--	06	01	06	--	--	--	01	--	--	33

Participant G	09	--	--	--	03	04	04	01	--	--	--	--	--	21
Participant H	04	--	--	--	10	07	--	--	--	--	02	--	--	23
Participant I	69	02	--	--	12	16	06	--	--	02	02	02	--	111
Participant J	38	--	--	--	10	13	10	04	--	01	--	--	--	76
Participant K	54	01	01	08	19	17	03	02	--	--	03	--	--	108
Participant L	24	02	--	02	06	05	08	03	--	01	05	--	--	56
Participant M	32	01	--	--	12	09	04	02	--	01	07	05	--	73
Participant N	28	01	--	--	07	13	--	15	--	03	--	--	--	67
Participant O	24	--	--	--	09	09	01	02	--	04	01	01	--	51
Participant P	42	01	--	--	06	07	11	01	--	--	--	--	--	67
Participant Q	28	03	--	--	12	08	08	01	02	--	--	02	--	64
Participant R	32	05	--	--	11	21	01	06	--	01	--	--	--	77
Participant S	29	--	--	--	02	12	04	01	--	--	--	--	--	48
Participant T	25	--	--	04	08	05	03	--	03	--	01	--	02	51
Participant U	20	--	--	--	06	06	06	03	04	01	--	--	--	46
Participant V	29	--	01	--	06	04	06	04	--	--	--	01	--	51
Participant W	42	--	--	--	04	22	--	01	02	--	01	--	--	72
Participant X	33	02	--	--	04	10	02	--	02	--	--	--	--	53
Participant Y	37	--	--	--	07	08	02	02	01	--	--	01	01	59
Participant Z	24	01	--	05	09	13	06	04	03	--	01	01	--	67
Participant Ai	44	04	--	--	14	12	04	08	02	--	--	--	--	88
Participant Bi	26	01	--	01	07	10	10	06	--	--	--	--	--	61

Participant Ci	21	--	--	--	08	08	04	03	02	--	--	--	--	46
Participant Di	19	01	--	--	04	06	02	03	01	--	01	--	--	37
Participant Ei	28	--	--	--	06	14	--	--	--	01	--	--	--	49
Participant Fi	12	--	--	--	07	12	03	01	--	--	01	--	--	36
Participant Gi	20	--	--	--	04	09	03	02	02	02	01	--	--	43
Participant Hi	31	--	--	--	14	08	08	09	--	01	--	--	--	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,125</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>2,163</b>

Table 3 Shows the frequency and percentage of the sources of errors committed by the students as presented in the table 1 above. The simple percentage method was used as it was gotten by ‘the number of the error, multiplied by 100 and divided by the total number of the errors’. Example of participant A:  $\frac{1125 \times 100}{2163} = 52.01\%$

Table 3: Frequency And Percentage Of The Sources Of Errors Committed By The Students

2163

S/N	Sources of Errors	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
1	Omission of punctuation mark	1,125	52.01%
2	English language interference	35	1.62%

3	Wrong use of verb	04	0.18%
4	Wrong use of pronoun	28	1.29%
5	Wrong use of the article 'na'	284	13.13%
6	Wrong use of punctuation mark	332	15.35%
7	Spelling errors	159	7.35%
8	Dialect interference	98	4.53%
9	Incomplete word/sentence	28	1.29%
10	Word order displacement	22	1.03%
11	Omission of pronoun	30	1.39%
12	Omission of the article 'na'	15	0.69%
13	Omission of noun	03	0.14%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,163</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 4.2 Data Analysis

We will analyze the data by spelling out the common error and stating few examples from the students' essays to back up the argument.

### 1. Omission of Punctuation Mark

a. Data: aha onye nkuzi m bu Adadu

Correct version: Aha onye nkuzi m bu Adaku

English translation: The name of my teacher is Adaku

b. Data: Amutalam otutu Ihe dika ya

Correct version: A mụtala m otutu ihe dika ya

English translation: I have learnt many things like it

c. Data: Ahurum ya n\_anya nke ukwu

Correct version: Ahuru m ya n'anya nke ukwu

English translation: I love her so much

Punctuation marks were omitted as seen in the examples above with underline.

From the data we presented in (1a-c), it is observed that 52.01% of the errors identified were as a result of omission of punctuation mark. Though carelessness abound among students not dotting their 'I's, but the high level of the omission here is a statement that the students still lack mastery in punctuation.

### 2. English Language Interference

a. Data: Onyeisi ulo akwukwo aha ya bu Mrs. Omakwuo

Correct version: Onyeisi ulo akwukwo aha ya bu Odoziaku Omakwuo

English translation: The principal whose name is Mrs. Omakwuo

b. Data: .....ma igu otutu novel nke m huru n'anya

Correct version:.....Ma igu otutu akwukwo akuko nke m huru n'anya

English translation:...include reading many novels which I like

c. Data: I ji hu na umu akwukwo ya na edebe iwu sukulu ya

Correct version: I ji hu na umu akwukwo ya na-edebe iwu ulo akwukwo ya

English translation: To make sure that her students obey the rules of her school

English language interference occurred in the essays of the student as shown above in the underlined words.

From the data we presented in (2a-c), it is observed that 1.62% of the errors identified were as a result of English language interference. Students' knowledge in Igbo grammar is not sufficient in mastering Igbo equivalence of some English

words. By this, they intentionally place the English term in order to keep their thoughts flowing.

### 3. Wrong Use of Verb

a. Data: Adimu ogologo

Correct version: Etoro m ogologo

English translation: I am tall

b. Data: o di oge o mara mma

Correct version: E nwere oge o mara mma

English translation: There was a time she was beautiful

Inappropriate verbs were used in the above examples.

From the data presentation in (3a-c), it is observed that 0.18% of the errors identified were as a result of wrong use of verb. Even though this aspect is not rampant, but it does exist. The students tend to use any verb form they assume that fit in, which could be as a result of insufficient grammar consciousness.

### 4. Wrong Use of Pronoun

a. Data: Aha mu bu Nwada Ogor Chidera

Correct version: Aha m bu Nwada Ogor Chidera

English translation: My name is Miss. Ogor Chidera

b. Data: Ahuru m onwe mu nanya

Correct version: Ahuru m onwe m n'anya

English translation: I love myself

c. Data: Ana mu agu akwukwo mu nke oma

Correct version: Ana- m agu akwukwo m nke oma

English translation: I read my books very well

Wrong use of pronouns were also observed from the examples above.

From the data we presented in (4a-c), it is observed that 1.29% of the errors identified were as a result of wrong use of pronoun. Many students simply place any pronoun which seemingly sounds or looks compatible in the sentence. This is as a result of not being acquainted with rules of grammar.

### 5. Wrong Use of the Article 'na'

a. Data: Abu m nwa na erube isi

Correct version: Abu m nwa na-erube isi

English translation: I am an obedient child

b. Data: onye nkuzi m huru na anya nke ukwu

Correct version: Onye nkuzi m huru n'anya nke ukwu

English translation: The teacher whom I love so much

c. Data: Obu ulo akwukwo di na Anambra

Correct version: O bu ulo akwukwo di n' Anambra

English translation: It is a school situated in Anambra

Wrong use of the article na were observed in the above examples as shown in the underlined words and the correct forms were written below each.

From the data we presented in (5a-c), it is observed that 13.13% of the errors identified were as a result of wrong use of the article 'na'. The intense of the wrong usage of 'na' among students is alarming. This is a proof that grammar has not been mastered by the students.

## 6. Wrong Use of Punctuation Mark

a. Data: Aha obodom bu Ihechiowa

Correct version: Aha obodo m bu Ihechiowa

English translation: The name of my town is Ihechiowa

b. Data: Nwaanyi bu ezigbo Omumaatu

Correct version: Nwaanyi ahụ bu ezigbo omumaatu

English translation: That woman is a good example

c. Data: Onyenkuzi mara ihe nke ukwu, o bu onye esi ama atu

Correct version: Onyenkuzi m maara ihe nke ukwu. O bu onye eji ama atu.

English translation: My teacher is wise. She is being proud of.

Wrong use of punctuation marks were observed in the above examples as shown in the underlined words.

From the data we presented in (6a-c), it is observed that 15.35% of the errors identified were as a result of wrong use of punctuation mark. It is one thing to know all the punctuation marks; it is another thing to rightfully place them in a statement.

## 7. Spelling Errors

a. Data: Nmeme iwa oji

Correct version: Mmemme iwa oji

English translation: Ceremony of breaking of kola

The spelling of the word *nmeme* was not rightly spelt.

b. Data: ayi wekara mmiri

Correct version: Anyi nwekwara mmiri

English translation: We also have stream

The spelling of the word ayi wekara was not rightly spelt.

c. Data: na ofe ogusi na okoro

Correct version: Na ofe egwusi na ọkwurụ

English translation: And melon soup and okro

The spelling of the word ogusi was not rightly spelt.

From the data we presented in (7a-c), it is observed that 7.35% of the errors identified were as a result of spelling errors. This is mostly cause through the carelessness of students. Also, negligence to excellence causes such as well. Lastly, none mastery of Igbo right spelling of words put a student in such a quagmire.

### **8. Dialect Interference**

a. Data: Ihe ndị anyị na-amacharo

Correct version: Ihe ndị anyị na-amachaghị

English translation: Things we do not know

b. Data: ....mana m aburo komputa ma ihe nile

Correct version:...Mana m abughị komputa ma ihe niile

English translation:...But I am not a computer that knows all things

c. Data: adiro m eme okacha mara

Correct version: Adighị m eme okacha mara

English translation: I do not behave like I know it all

Dialectal negative marker ro was used instead of the standard form ghi in example (8a-c).

From the data we presented in (8a-c), it is observed that 4.53% of the errors identified were as a result of dialect interference. It is not a gainsay that dialect interference is a daily battle being fought in achieving standard language form. This is not exempted in Igbo language as we see dialects interfering here and there in students' essays. This could also be the fault of the teachers who failed to give the students the accurate standard forms of the words.

### **9. Incomplete Word/Sentence**

a. Data: ọ bụ onyenkuzi ma\_ ra akwukwọ nke ukwu

Correct version: Ọ bụ onyenkuzi maara akwukwọ nke ukwu

English translation: She is a very brilliant teacher

b. Data: onye isi uloakwukw\_ m bu nwaanyi

Correct version: Onyeisi ulokwukwọ m bu nwaanyi

English translation: The head of my school is a female

In the above instances, it was observed that certain words were incomplete as shown in underlined words.

As we can see from the data presented in (9a-b), 1.29% of the errors identified were as a result of incomplete word/ sentence. The insufficiency in the knowledge of Igbo language could be attributed to this error whereby a student is choked up in a word or sentence and decide to jump it and continue with others.

### **10. Word Order Displacement**

a. Data: di nime Anambra steeti

Correct version: Dị n'ime steeti Anambra

English translation: In Anambra state

Word order displacement was observed in the above example.

b. Data: Enwere m ihu okirikiri

Correct version: Enwere m okirikiri ihu

English translation: I have a round face

Word order displacement was observed in the above example.

c. Data: Abum onye Abia steeti di n'okpuru ochichi Bende Local Government Area.

Correct version: Abụ m onye okpuru ochichi Bende nke di na Steeti Abia

English translation: I am a native of Bende Local Government Area of Abia State.

Word order displacement was also observed in the above example.

From the data we presented in (10a-c), it is observed that 1.03% of the errors identified were as a result of word order displacement. Lack of knowledge of Igbo syntax or rules of grammar is the cause of this error.

### **11. Omission of Pronoun**

a. Data: Onyenkuzi \_ mara ihe nke ukwu

Correct version: Onyenkuzi m maara ihe nke ukwu

English translation: My teacher is very wise.

b. Data: adi \_ oji

Correct version: Adị m oji

English translation: I'm dark in complexion

c. Data: obodo \_ bu obodo buru ibe nke ukwu

Correct version: Obodo m bụ obodo buru ibu nke ukwu

English translation: My town is a very big town

It was observed that the pronoun I was omitted in all the instances.

From the data presentation in (11a-c), it is observed that 1.39% of the errors identified were as a result of omission of pronoun. The percentage of this error could be said to be as a result of none mastery of rules of grammar and its application.

## 12. Omission of the Article ‘na’

a. Data: otutu ndi nkuzi m \_ uloakukwo m huru m n’anya

Correct version: Ọtụtụ ndị nkuzi m n’ụlọ akwụkwọ m hụrụ m n’anya

English translation: Some of the teachers in my school love me

b. Data: ahuru m ulo akwo m \_ anya

Correct version: Ahurụ m ụlọ akwụkwọ m n’anya

English translation: I love my school

c. Data: ulo akwukwo m bu sonso umu nwanyi bu ndi na agu \_ ya

Correct version: Ụlọ akwụkwọ m bụ naanị ụmụ nwaanyị bụ ndị na-agu na ya

English translation: My school is girls’ school

It was observed that the article na was omitted in all the instances.

From the data we presented in (12a-c), it is observed that 0.69% of the errors identified were as a result of omission of the article ‘na’. Though this error is not rampant, it could be said that non mastery of Igbo grammar is the cause of the error.

## 13. Omission of Noun

a. Data: o bu \_ Enugu state

Correct version: Ọ bụ onye Enugu state

English translation: She is from Enugu state

It was observed that the noun onye was omitted in the above instance.

b. Data: obodo udo na achi \_\_\_ ihe na agakwara n’ihu nke oma

Correct version: Obodo udo na-achị na ndị ihe na-agakwara n’ihu nke oma

English translation: A town where peace reigns and things are working well for the inhabitants.

It was observed that the noun ndị was omitted in the above instance.

From the data we presented (13a-b), it is observed that 0.14% of the errors identified were as a result of omission of noun. This could be basically due to

negligence or unconsciousness to excellence. Not having the knowledge of Igbo grammar is a little cause of this error.

#### **4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This research tends to check out the errors in Igbo grammar by the students of Inland Girls' Secondary School Onitsha; through the parameters of omission of punctuation mark, English language interference, wrong use of verb, wrong use of pronoun, wrong use of the article 'na', wrong use of punctuation mark, spelling errors, dialect interference, incomplete word/sentence, word order displacement, omission of pronoun, omission of the article 'na' and omission of noun. From the data collected and analyzed, it is observed that the commonest error by the students is omission of punctuation mark which has 52.01% of the errors. Igbo language, being filled with diacritics should not be ignored as an omission of a single dot could change the meaning of a word. Wrong use of the article 'na' having 13.13% would not be overemphasized.

Thus, this error can be said to have occurred as the students do not have mastery in Igbo grammar and then write what seemed right to them.

##### **4.1 Conclusion**

The research explored the errors as committed by the students using Inland Girls' Secondary School Onitsha as an example. The sources of such errors and also the solution to the problems; were presented. The study has been able to create awareness to the students towards the errors they commit which will enable them make more efforts in improving on their grammar in Igbo language. Secondly, the research also provides data to language for the teachers to know the area of weaknesses of their students and to help them to improve in those areas. Thus, we do not only explore the errors, we also pose the necessary and recommendable solutions.

##### **4.2 Recommendation**

In order to improve the knowledge of Igbo language by the students, few recommendations should be helpful;

- i. There should be regular award winning event or competitions among the students which will spur them in seeking the knowledge of the language.

- ii. There should be regular training for the Igbo teachers as to equip them with the necessary tools for effective teaching; as it has been said that ‘a man cannot give what he does not have’.
- iii. Government should set a committee that will foresee the implementation of Igbo speaking and writing in various schools in the region, as this will put the consciousness of the language in the heart of every student.
- iv. Comprehensive study materials should be made available to the students as this will aid their learning.
- v. Lastly, the teacher should always call the attention of the students whenever there is error and also give them the right ones.

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