

Assessing Problem Areas in Senior Secondary Students' Use of the English Concord

Isaiah I. Agbo

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu, Nigeria

Goodluck C. Kadiri

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu, Nigeria

Blessing U. Ijem

Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University, Wukari, Taraba, Nigeria

Abstract—This research succinctly explicates the areas of problem in Senior Secondary Students' use of the English Concord in written texts. Language is a social property and has rules that determine how words should be matched to achieve effective communication. Concord in English deals with those rules that govern the co-occurrence of words in sentences. This work is a practical classroom experience and it x-rays the students' performance in the grammatical, notional and proximity concords respectively. The findings are clearly presented in statistical tables and each of the tables shows the students' performance in each of the areas. The result shows that the students performed fairly well in notional and proximity concords. The total results, however, led to the conclusion that the students are yet to attain competence in the English concord for good communication.

Index Terms—investigating, problem, English, concord, communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Language has become the widest medium of communication among people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds both at the local and international levels, and the need for mutual intelligibility is fundamental. The English language is the language of education, politics, government, media, advertising, law, commerce and interaction among people in Nigeria (Awunusi, 2004, p. 67). Therefore, it is of immense importance for the senior secondary students to master the English concord for effective communication and mutual intelligibility both within and outside classroom. Scholars, (Nzerem, 2008; Onuigbo, 2005; Oluikpe 1985; Ogbulogo, 2004) have put forward some valuable suggestions to guide the second language users on the English concord. Since students at senior secondary level have got to their terminal stage in secondary education, and are being prepared for the university education, it is therefore necessary to investigate their level of competence in the use of the English concord.

In teaching pedagogical grammar, that is, the grammatical analysis and instruction designed for second-language students which borders on a description of how to use the grammar of a language to communicate, we refer to concord as the agreement of a word with other words in a sentence; that is, a relationship between two grammatical units such that if one of them selects a given features, the other has to have the same features, especially with regard to their number-singular and plural. The rules that govern these relationships of the various parts of the sentence such as nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives and complements are called the rules of concord (Onuigbo, 2005, p. 96). We have the grammatical concord which deals with the agreement based on the number of subject and the verb, the notional concord which deals with the idea of singular and plural that the speaker or writer has in mind, and the proximity concord, which deals with the agreement based on nearness. We also have pronoun antecedent agreement, coordinated subjects *with* and coordinative appositive, agreement between personal adjective and verb, agreement of tense, agreement of voice, agreement in a sentence that relates to amount and measurement, names and titles, games and diseases (Oluikpe, 1985; Ogbulogo, 2004). However, it seems that many senior secondary students in Nsukka Education Zone are ignorant of these rules of concord which have consequently affected their performance in English language very badly at the senior secondary school examination hence the need to carry out this investigation. This study, therefore, sought to determine the extent to which senior secondary students violate these Rules of Concord in English since this kind of investigation is lacking in the available literature. The mismatching of the grammatical elements results in communication breakdown and semantic noise.

A. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are to: (i) describe the violation of the agreements and rules guiding the co-occurrence of the English verbs and other grammatical elements in sentences; (ii) describe the effects of the violations on language communication based on errors and deviant patterns or forms of the English verbs in sentences; (iii)

identify, clarify and analyse senior secondary students' concord rules violations and deviances involving the English verbs in written expressions; (iv) provide the acceptable forms of the expressions in English.

B. Scope of the Study

This research work is set out to examine the constraints imposed by the English verbs and other grammatical elements on sentence construction. The study is therefore limited to the identification, description, and analyses of the various violations of the rules of concord in English. The study relied on the collection of data from an objective-test instrument that was administered to randomly selected Senior Secondary School students in Nsukka Education Zone.

C. Research Hypothesis

There is no significance difference in senior secondary students' use of concord in English in Nsukka Educational Zone.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Evidence abounds to show that a lot of researches and investigations have been conducted on the various aspects of the English language usage for effective communication. There is also no denying the fact that some researchers have attempted studying concord in English. However, it is quite unfortunate to note that much is left underdone since no systematic and detailed research has been conducted to test senior secondary school students' competence in the English concord in Nsukka Education Zone. Oluikpe (1985) has observed that 'it is not enough to master the art of avoiding monotonous sentences'. It is of immense importance also for one to be aware of 'the most common grammatical errors that mar ones writing and speaking efficiently' (p. 84). There is the need for a consistent agreement in the combination of the grammatical elements that make up an expression. Concord is concerned with the agreement or rules which govern the relationship between the various parts of the sentence; it is not enough to speak or write, but of great importance is the meaningfulness of what is said or written. This implies that there should be some form of correspondence in person, number, gender, tense, voice and case among the different grammatical components of the sentence (Ogbulogo, 2004, p. 121).

Like human beings, words select the company they keep. For two persons to walk together, they have to first agree. In like manner, words must have certain characteristics in common for them to co-occur in a sentence. When words disagree, the tendency is that the functional purpose of language will be defeated as the intended meaning would be distorted. There is therefore the need to ensure that ambiguity and abnormality are avoided in the intended meaning (Akwayana, 2007, p. 98). Ambiguity and information distortion can only be avoided if we observe the linguistic code. Yankson (1989) notes that language is a code, a set of rules for generating what generative transformation grammarians call "well-formed" sentences (p.1). A breach of the code could therefore, result in illogical and ill-formed sentences. Concord therefore deals with the rules that determine the combinatory possibility of words for meaningful expression.

There are some mistakes in agreement caused by inconsistency in the use of (a) number as it involves (i) subject and verb of a sentence and (ii) pronoun and its antecedent, that is, the noun a pronoun replaces; (b) person, in terms of (i) pronoun and its antecedent and (ii) shifts from one person to another; (c) gender, as it relates to pronoun and its antecedent; (d) tense, as it involves shifts from one tense to the other; (e) voice as it applies to shifts from active to passive voice. It is therefore important for one to learn how to use number, person, and gender, tense and voice consistently because agreement is essential in forming correct sentences (84).

There are theories or approaches to the study of concord and they are grouped into three, namely:

- (a) Subject/verb agreement
- (b) Pronoun/antecedent agreement
- (c) Shifts in construction (sudden change from one number, person, tense, voice to another).

These theories are what we refer to as the rules of concord or agreement in English. The subject/verb agreement is the first rule of agreement and it states that a verb must agree in number with its subject. This rule has it that a singular subject must attract a singular verb while a plural subject must be followed by a plural verb. Total adherence to this rule makes for effective communication. The possible combinations of the rules of concord as regards subject/verb agreement are realized in following forms:

1. S_1V_1 (where S_1 = singular subject; V_1 = singular verb)

- (i) The news is terrifying.
- (ii) The phonetics is a difficult subject.
- (iii) The man loves to dance.
- (iv) Measles has been eradicated.

2. $S_2 V_2$ (where S_2 = plural subject; V_2 = plural verb)

- (i) His surroundings are dirty.
- (ii) Some people are unkind.
- (iii) The police take bribe.
- (iv) The students do their work conscientiously.

3. S_1 and $S_1 V_2$ (where S_1 and S_1 = compound subjects)

- (i) The boy and the girl are lazy.
- (ii) The president and his wife always have their launch here.
- (iii) Pleasure and hard work do not mix.
- (iv) The man and the woman are in love.

4. S2 and S2 V2 (where S2 and S2 = compound plural subjects)

- (i) Boys and girls are needed to do the work.
- (ii) Ladies and gentlemen were invited.
- (iii) Some fathers and mothers are strict (Eko (1999, p. 45-6; Oluikpe, 1985, p. 84).

We have to note, however, that there are exceptions to pattern (3). If **and** is replaced by such words as: **with, as well as, together with, in conjunction with, in the company of**, the verb to be used is obligatorily singular. The following sentences are used to illustrate this point:

- (i) The boy with his sister is here.
- (ii) The boy as well as his sister is here.
- (iii) The boy together with his sister is here.
- (iv) The man in the company of his wife has arrived.

In addition, when a compound subject joined by **and** gives the impression of a unit, the verb becomes singular also, as in:

- (i) Bread and butter is ready for you.
- (ii) Rice and beans is tasty.
- (iii) Trial and error results in success.

The third exception to pattern (3) is that when a compound subject is connected with correlatives, the noun nearer to the verb determines whether to use singular or plural verb. This is called the proximity concord where the noun nearer to the verb controls the verb. Here are some examples to drive home this argument:

- (i) Neither the teacher nor his student is here.
- (ii) Either the boy or the girl plays the piano.
- (iii) Neither the students nor their teacher is quite prepared.
- (iv) Neither the teacher nor his students are quite prepared.

Second language users should also look out for a problem that has to do with collective nouns. In order to avoid errors that are connected with collective nouns, one should limit oneself to one number in this regard since a collective number may be singular or plural depending on the notion. Such inconsistency results in a grammatical fault called shift in number (Oluikpe, 1985, p. 86). The following examples of collective nouns should be considered: Choir, team, army, committee, jury, congregation and audience.

- (i) *The choir is singing their song.

↓ ↓
Singular plural

- (ii) *The team is doing their best.

↓ ↓
Singular plural

- (iii) *The army are determined to probe its officers.

↓ ↓
Plural singular

There are obvious errors in the above sentences owing to shifts and inconsistencies in number. There is a mix up of singular and plural nouns and verbs.

The right sentences should read:

- (i) The choir is singing its song

↓ ↓
Singular singular

- (ii) The team is doing its best.

↓ ↓
Singular Singular

- (iii) The army are determined to probe their officers.

↓ ↓
Plural Plural

The second problem has to do with a collective followed by "of" and a plural noun, as in:

- a collection of paintings
- a case of instruments
- a flock of sheep
- a team of athletes

The above phrases usually attract singular verbs in Standard English. Attention is usually drawn to the collective which should be regarded as singular and not the plural noun that follows. Let us consider the following examples:

- (1) A collection of paintings is needed in this museum.
- (2) A case of instruments was bought for the construction.
- (3) A flock of sheep is expensive.
- (4) A team of athletes arrives Nigeria tomorrow (Oluikpe, 1985, p. 87; Ogbulogo, 2004, p. 125; Otagburuagu, 2002, p. 69).

Any deviation from these forms as shown above amounts to concord errors.

The third problem which every user of the English language should try to avoid also is the use of “one of” plus a plural noun. When “one of” is used in a sentence, the right verb to be selected must be singular. In order to avoid the distortion of the information one has to communicate to ones’ audience and consequently sounding illiterate, this rule should be strictly obeyed. Let us consider the following examples:

- (1) One of the boys has been arrested.
- (2) One of the students has handed in his assignment.
- (3) One of the teachers does not know the answer.
- (4) One of the cars has been stolen (Ogbulogo, 2004, p. 126).

The fourth problem area where caution is highly solicited is in the use of indefinite pronouns such as each, every, nobody, none, everybody, and anyone. Students and users of the English language usually find it difficult selecting the correct form of the verb that should go with the above indefinite pronouns. This could be because the indefinite pronouns refer to all the people in the group. It is not uncommon to find some expressions and sentences like:

- (1) Everybody know me very well.
- (2) Nobody understand your language.
- (3) None were present at the meeting.

The users of the above sentences are deficient in knowledge of the rules of concord that involve indefinite pronouns. The above sentences should therefore read:

- (1) Everybody knows me very well.
- (2) Nobody understands your language.
- (3) None was present at the meeting.

Periods of time, amounts of money, measurements, weight, diseases and games are generally regarded as a single unit and consequently take singular verb (Eko, 1999, p. 44).

Examples:

- (i) Twenty years is too long to be away from home.
- (ii) One thousand naira buys little these days.
- (iii) Six miles is too far for a child to walk to school

Eko (1999) argues that verb must always agree with its subject, not with a preposition or complement. She further argues that sentences that begin with here and there are a little tricky. “Here” and “there” may be either singular or plural. This can be illustrated with the following examples:

- There are many dangerous insects here (plural).
- There is a book on the shelve (singular)
- Here lies the remains of Major Bukar (singular)
- Here are the plates you sent for (plurals)

Eko (1999) agrees with Oluikpe (1985) that the most important type of concord in English is concord of number between subject and verb. According to her, a clause and prepositional phrase in the position of subject count as singular for the purpose of concord. She exemplified with the following sentences:

- i. How they got there doesn’t concern me.
- ii. After the exams is the time to relax (p.176).

She asserts that it is possible to generalize the rule as “A subject which is not definitely marked for plural requires a singular verb. They were also careful to note that apparent exception to the concord rules arise with singular nouns ending with “s” of the plural inflection such as measles, billiards, mathematics, physics etc or conversely plural nouns lacking the inflection –’s’ e.g. Cattle, people, clergy etc.

We may therefore have the following:

- Mathematics is an interesting subject.
- The clergy are meeting today.

Nzerem (2008) comments that there must be agreement of words according to their syntactic functions for there to be intelligibility in utterances. According to him, for a semantic noise to be avoided, the sender of a message must adhere to the rules of agreement. However, in his treatment of Notional Concord, he said that:

- i. The police is working hard and
- ii. The clergy is treated with respect are considered as singular nouns.

But in British English, the words Police and Clergy are obligatorily plural and require the use of plural verbs (Oluikpe, 1985 and Eko, 1999). The two sentences should therefore read:

The police are working hard.

The clergy are treated with respect.

Nzerem (2008) in agreement with scholars on the English Concord as it concerns the special types or areas of concord, advises that the following should be noted in the area of principle of proximity. He calls it the 'grey area':

(i) that majority and minority are singular words, but they accept plural verbs;

(ii) that though data is the plural of datum, it requires a singular verb;

(iii) that many a ... is always followed by a singular verb;

(iv) that means can either be singular or plural. When it is used to refer to someone's financial resources, it is plural: After her divorce her means are reduced; But singular in "this is the means to an end.

(v) That one and a half of anything takes singular verb;

(vi) That words like economics and politics may either be singular or plural depending on the usage. Examples: When "Economics" is a name for an academic theory or refers to the academic subject, it is treated as singular since it relates to "the science of economics" (a singular subject). We can have: Economics often provides solution to political problem. But when it concerns practical applications, it is usually plural. The economics of running a business are complicated (p. 257).

When politics represents an attitude or preference (incorporating various facets) of a political party or policy, it is treated as plural: What are his politics? But we have: Politics is a dirty game.

Yankson (1989) and final year language-stress students in the department of English, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, analysed one hundred General Studies (G.S. 101): 'The Use of English' end of year examination scripts. Yankson and student researchers found that concord errors constituted the highest percentage of first year undergraduate grammatical errors.

The research focused on concord errors from one thousand and one hundred (1,100) G.S. 101 end-of-year examination scripts written between 1977/78 and 1984/85 academic years, that is, errors covering a period of eight years, by first year undergraduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and similar concord errors made by their counterparts from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The students whose scripts were analysed consisted of all first year arts and science students.

Yankson (1989) observed that there are various kinds of concord errors committed by the students. They grouped these errors into six categories:

- a. Typical concord errors;
- b. Notional concord errors;
- c. Proximity concord errors;
- d. Memory limitation concord errors;
- e. Plural inflectional concord errors; and
- f. Inability to identify noun headword.

Under development errors are errors that are typical of all second language learners. Though the students are aware of the guiding principles, yet they commit the errors. The following examples are listed from their corpus:

- (i) As a child "grow" his ability... (grows)
- (ii) Life 'have' not been smooth. (has)
- (iii) No Nigeria University 'teach' carpentry (teaches)
- (iv) This proposition rather 'sound' repugnant. (sounds)
- (v) It is love or affection which 'prompt' ... (prompts)

Under Notional concord errors we have:

- (1) The society at large 'hold' the University students in a high esteem (holds)
- (2) The energy of the employed able-bodied men 'are' being wasted. (is)

Under proximity concord errors we have:

1. The reason for its fall in these areas are not far-fetched. (is)
2. A long discussion on the way of the colonist 'take' place. (takes)

Under memory limitation concord errors, the following examples was take from their corpus:

1. This set of underage students who don't know the difference between good and bad 'make' things difficult for the reader (makes).

Under plural inflectional concord errors we have:

- (1) Little emphasis were placed on certificates (was)
- (2) Mathematics have always been my best subject (has)

At the end of the whole analysis by the researchers, the following hierarchy of concord errors committed by the first year students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Cape Coast Ghana, were listed as shown below. This is a summary of the findings of the researchers:

1. Plural Nouns + singular verbs	-	443
2. Singular Nouns _ plural verbs	-	372
3. Plural Nouns + singular pronouns	-	69
4. Singular Noun + plural pronouns	-	34
5. Plural pronouns + singular verbs	-	29

Total Number of Errors = **947** (Yankson, 1989, p. 46).

Ogidefa (2010) in a research he conducted to identify the grammatical errors typical of advanced users and learners of English as a second language in Nigeria comments: "The most important type of concord in English is concord of number, that is, singular or plural between the nominal group that realizes the subject(s) and the verbal element: After analyzing some students' essays, he came up with the following result or evidence of concord errors.

1. I, Peter Ukpaka, wishes to inform you... (wish)
2. The Rector have made a promise ... (has)
3. Everything were done fast. (was)
4. During the riot, the police was invited. (were)
5. John and Kemi does not know what to do. (do)
6. Neither of the students were on campus. (was) (p. 6).

It is important to note that though Ogidefa (2008) recorded the above findings, he did not specify the number of subjects that were involved in his study as well as the location of his study. However, the finding shows lack of competence in the use of English by the second language users in Nigeria.

Anyanwu (1990) also carried out a research on the restriction of the English verbs. Subjects for the study were five hundred first year students of the Imo State University, Owerri. A section of the study was on the English concord. The researcher constructed some sentences and the students were asked to choose from the options lettered A – D the correct verb that agrees with subject of the sentence. The result of the research shows that the students had difficulty with choosing the appropriate verb based in number to fill in the gaps. (p. 31)

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *The Study Design*

The design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey research design. This study design is preferred to others for this study because it systematically collects data on a sampled population and analyses the data to arrive at the characteristics of a given population from a sample considered to be representative of the entire group. It describes certain variables like the central tendency, dispersion and variability in relation to the population by studying the responses of a sample population. The findings of the study are generalized to the entire population.

B. *The Study Population and Sampling Technique*

The senior secondary students are chosen because their level of study marks an important stage of language acquisition. The students are expected to have acquired enough knowledge on the nature and usage of the English words, especially the combinatory potentials of the parts of speech and the nouns and verbs in particular. The knowledge of the language acquired will enable them (the students) to use the English language for both specific and general purposes. The senior secondary students are, therefore, considered to be appropriate for us in a test of language competence.

We also chose a size that is large enough to be representative of the population. The sample for this study is made up of one hundred (100) students that are drawn from twenty-three randomly selected government and private secondary schools that make up Nsukka education Zone. In order to avoid bias and to achieve the set objectives, we have adopted a simple but systematic random sampling technique for the selection of the secondary schools from which the sample of the population was drawn. The systematic random sampling technique gives each element of the population an equal and independent opportunity of being part of the sample. The number of secondary schools selected from each of the local government was based on proportionate stratification random sampling. Proportionate stratified random sampling ensures that each stratum of the population is proportionately represented by the sample. Thus, each local government is classified as a stratum to ensure a proportionate representation of the sampled schools in relation to their population.

C. *Research Instrument*

The instrument for this study is the objective test instrument. This type of instrument is needed because the study hinges specifically on academic performance and the data needed should necessarily reflect learning and its environment. The instrument covered the three basic concord types in English – the grammatical concord, the proximity concord and the notional concord. The objective type of instrument has only one correct answer. The instrument has only forty objective questions, each of which tested the students' knowledge on a specific type of English concord. It is the need to test the students' competence that informed the choice of this type of testing instrument.

D. *Design of the Instrument*

The instrument for this study is competence motivated and is designed to restrict the freedom of the user or testee from avoiding the difficult areas of the English concord in order to determine the testee's competence in the language.

Each item in the instrument is made up of four options: A – D, because it is not performance-motivated test that allows the testee the freedom to choose his vocabulary, sentence and meaning. Thus, the instrument is designed to pin down the testee to a particular agreement between or among the elements of a sentence, especially the subject and the verbs to ascertain his competence.

E. Method of Data Analysis

We were driven by the need to adopt those measures that are simple and which would be appreciated by the readers who may not be statisticians. We have, therefore, chosen and adopted statistical measures for the analysis of the data collected. They included: the central tendency, dispersion and variability. The measure of central tendency included the mode which has the highest number of persons studied, the median which showed the score in a middle position, and the mean which showed the average performance of the population. It is only the mean that is so important in this study, because it is the arithmetic average which we have depended on to measure the performance of the population studied. We also made use of two measures of dispersion or variability to complement the statistical information the mean yielded: the range which showed the difference between the highest and lowest scores, and the standard deviation which showed the variability from the mean obtained.

The statistical analyses are presented in tables. In the table, we gave the class width showing the range of grouped scores. We also gave the mean required for competence to be established as existing. This is the condition upon which competence is statistically determined. At the end of the table, we listed the mean, range and standard deviation. Only the columns whose quotients are relevant to this study were summed up. The mean was reduced to the nearest whole number, and the standard deviation to the nearest two decimal points. A mean of 35 and above means complete mastery which is the competence we are concerned with in this study. Anything less than 30 is incompetence. The grades and values we made use of are given below:

1. 35 – 40 = A (Excellent)
2. 30 – 34 = C (Good)
3. 25 – 29 = D (Fair)
4. 20 – 24 = E (Poor) and
5. 19 and below = F (Very Poor)

We wish to state here that the letter grades and values attached to them were adopted from the Ministry of education, Enugu State grading system based on 100%. The scores here reflect the number of item in the study and have been grouped to reflect the standard set by the Ministry of Education, Enugu State. In order words, we classified A – C as competence, D as near competence, and E – F as complete incompetence when we presented the mean score.

The standard deviation concluded the statistical analysis. The following information was obtained at the end of the analysis: the class average (the mean), the difference between the highest score and the lowest score (the range, and the extent of variability from the average (standard deviation). These showed the competence or incompetence represented by the population on the English concord.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

The Population's Overall Competence

For competence to be accepted, we required a mean of thirty (30) marks from the population. The table below supplies the statistical observations.

TABLE 4.1:
THE OVERALL COMPETENCE
Maximum Possible Mark = 40, Required Mean = 30

Class interval	Class mark X	F	F _x	CF	$x - \bar{x}$	$(x - \bar{x})^2$	$f(x - \bar{x})^2$
30 – 39	34.5	4	138	100	18.2	331.24	1324.96
20 – 29	24.5	19	655	96	8.2	67.24	1277.56
10 – 19	14.5	68	986	77	1.8	3.24	220.32
0 – 9	4.5	9	40.5	9	-11.8	139.24	1253.16
		100	1,819.5				4,076

Mean = 16.3, Range = 30, Standard Deviation = 6.38

The statistical table shows the achieved mean of the population to be 16.3. This mean falls short of the required mean of 30 which is the competency level. A close examination of the scores shows that only four (4) members of the population are in the range of competence 30 – 39. The greater number of the population (96) is below the target. The mode of the population is 14.96. This reveals also that the majority of the population is found in the mean area which is below the level of competence.

Important to note also is the fact that no member of the population scored the maximum possible mark of 40. With the highest score as 39 and the lowest scores as 9, the population has a scoring range of 30. We have therefore established the statistical incompetence of the population with respect to their overall performance in the test.

Competence in the Divisions of the Concord Study

At this level of analysis, we are solely concerned with the competence of the population in the various divisions of the English concord. This analysis gives us a comprehensive view of the population’s standing in the concord test. It also clarifies the population’s best or worst area as the case may be.

Competence in the Grammatical Concord

In studying the population’s competence, we have 30 questions. The reason for having thirty (30) questions in the grammatical concord is because the grammatical concord has the widest coverage in the English concord. It includes all the special areas or types of concords that do not belong to either the proximity or the notional concord. The competency mean required is 20 marks. Anything less than this, is not accepted as competence.

The results are presented in the tables below:

TABLE 1:
THE COMPETENCE IN THE GRAMMATICAL CONCORD
Maximum Possible Mark = 30; Required Mean = 20

Class interval	Class mark X	F	Fx	CF	$x-x'$	$(x-x')^2$	$f(x-x')^2$
20 – 29	24.5	4	98	99	10.5	110.25	441
10 – 19	14.5	83	1203.5	95	0.5	0.25	20.75
0 – 9	4.5	12	54	12	-10.5	110.25	1323
		99	1355.5				1784.75

Mean = 13.7; Range = 20; Standard Deviation = 4.2

From the table above, it is observed that the population achieved a mean of 13.7 contrary to the set mean for competence. This score is below the required mean for competence. The population also has a standard deviation of 4.2. The achievement of the population here is still that of incompetence. The population under study is yet to master the rules of grammatical concord.

TABLE 2: COMPETENCE IN THE PROXIMITY CONCORD
Maximum Possible Marks 5; Required Mean = 3

Class interval	Class mark X	F	Fx	CF	$x-x'$	$(x-x')^2$	$f(x-x')^2$
2 – 4	2	51	102	100	0.49	0.24	12.25
0 – 2	1	49	49	49	-0.51	0.26	12.75

Mean = 1.51; Range = 2; Standard Deviation = 0.5

In order to determine the population’s competence, we have set five (5) questions. The competency mean required is three (3). From the table presented above, it can be observed that the population’s achievement is below expectation. We required a mean of 3, but the population’s mean is 1.5 which is below the required mean. The mean achieved by the population is just a half of the required mean. The standard deviation of the population is 0.05. The overall assessment here points to the fact that the population is far remove from the knowledge of the rules of proximity concord and the usage.

Competence in the Notional Concord

Here, we employed five questions only in order to determine the population’s competence. The notional concord does not conform to the rules of either grammatical or proximity concords.

Maximum Possible Mark = 5; Required = 3:

Class interval	Class mark X	F	Fx	CF	$x-x'$	$(x-x')^2$	$f(x-x')^2$
2 – 4	3	54	162	100	0.9	0.81	43.74
0 – 2	1	46	46	46	-1.1	1.21	55.65
		100	208				99.40

Mean = 2.1; Range = 2; Standard Deviation = 0.97

The population here has also displayed incompetence in the rules and usage of the Notional Concord. The table above clearly shows that the population achieved a mean below the required mean for competence. Whereas the mean required for competence is 3, the population achieved a mean of 2.1. The standard deviation of the population is 0.97. We wish to comment that the population performed fairly well here. They are more at home with the notional concord than other types of concords studied in this research.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overall analysis of the population’s standing in the English concord shows that competence is not a true mark of the population’s use of the English concord. The study population is required to score a mean of 40 in the entire test. On the contrary, they scored 16.3 which is far below the required mean for competence. We have also examined the three major types of concord in English; the grammatical, proximity and notional concords. The population has its worst performance in the grammatical concord.

The study further reveals that the population has its best result in the Notional Concord followed by the proximity concord. The population achieved the mean of 2.1 against the required mean of 3 and 2 as against the required mean of 3. The population performed fairly well here but is yet to master the rules.

We have also observed that the deviation of the population from the competency mean is highly significant in the grammatical concord but insignificant in the proximity and notional concords. Thus, the population's mean achievement in the notional and proximity concords is that of near competence. We have no option than to strongly reject the hypothesis earlier stated in this study. The students neither understood nor correctly used the English concord. They also failed to score the competence mean set and their deviation from the mean is highly significant.

The knowledge of grammar is essential for effective communication. The fact that there must be an agreement between or among the various elements of the sentence underscores the impotency of paying adequate attention to the rules of grammar in general and concord in English in particular.

This study has convincingly exposed us to the incompetency of the population in the English concord. The abysmal performance of the students in the English concord as revealed by this study gives us the reason to conclude that the population is yet to attain the level of competency in and mastery of the English Concord. The population also encountered a hierarchy of difficulty in the various types of concord in English under study. Though the population is near competence in the proximity and notional concords, the overall analysis shows the population to be entirely incompetent.

REFERENCES

- [1] Akwanya, A. N. (2007). *Semantics and Discourse: Theory of Meaning and Textual Analysis*. Enugu: Accena Venture Ltd.
- [2] Anyanwu, P. A. (1990) *Restriction on the English Verb and Implication for English as Second Language (ESL) users*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis
- [3] Awonusi, V. O. (2004). 'The Functions of Nigerian English in Relation to other Nigerian Languages'. In: *Nigerian English: Influences and Characteristics*. Dazie, A. B K. and Awonusi, S. (eds.). Lagos: Concept Publications. Pp. 67-82.
- [4] Eko, E. (1999). *Effective Writing*. Heineman Education Books (Nigeria) PLC.
- [5] "Noun-Number Concord and Countability". <http://www.uta. F:IFAST/BIE/NAC/PPIA ppia-lec.16htm>. Accessed 25 November, 2011
- [6] Nzerem, J. K. (2008). 'Rules of concord in English Language'. *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture*, vol.10, pp. 257 – 266.
- [7] Ogbologo, C. (2004). *Problem Areas in English Grammar and Usage*. Lagos: Sam Ironsi Publications.
- [8] Ogidefa, I. (2010). 'The Grammatical Errors Typical of Advanced Users and Learners of English as a Second Language'. <http://socyberty.com/language-user-and-learner-of-English-as-a-second-language/#ix2216iHvcYSA>. Accessed 12 November, 2011.
- [9] Oluikpe, B. O. (1985). 'Agreement. In: *The Use of English for Higher Education, (Second Reprint)*. Oluikpe, B.O. (eds). Awka: Africana –Fep Publishers Ltd. Pp. 84-102.
- [10] Onuigbo, S. (2005). *English Language: A Grammatical Description*. Nsukka: Afra-Orbis Publications Ltd.
- [11] Otagburuagu, E. J. (2002). 'The Sentence as a Grammatical Unit in English.' *Basic Grammar and Composition for University Students*, edited by Otagburuagu, E. J. et al. Snaps Press Nigeria Ltd, pp. 65-103.
- [12] "Subject-verb concord in English". <http://education.leeds.ACUK/~dist/inted/concord7htm>. Accessed 15 November, 2011.
- [13] Yankson, K. E. (1989). *Better English through Concord for West African Students*. Obosi: Pacific College and Press Ltd.

Isaiah I. Agbo is from Nigeria. He is a lecturer in the Department of English and Literary Studies and The Use of English Unit, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy Degree (Ph.D.) in English Language. He majors in Applied Linguistics, Discourse Studies and Teaching and Evaluation. He has published many articles in scholarly journals and also book chapters.

Goodluck C. Kadiri is from Nigeria. She holds a bachelor's degree in Education/English of the Department of Arts/Education and Masters and Ph.D degrees (1991, 1998, 2014-respectively) of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She lectures in the Department of English and Literary Studies and The Use of English Unit of the University. Her main interest is in English as a Second Language, Interlanguage, Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics and Textlinguistics. She has authored and co-authored books, articles and book chapters.

Blessing U. Ijem is a Nigerian. She is a lecturer in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University, Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria. She holds a Master's Degree in English Language. Her area of interest is Applied Linguistics and Discourse Analysis. She has published articles in scholarly journals and book chapters.