

The Use of Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement in Social Media Communication Among Nigerian Speakers of English

¹Josephine Eleanor Seriki, ²A. A. Chahur, PhD

¹Department of English
Nasarawa State University – Keffi, Nigeria.

²Directorate of General Studies
Mewar International University
KM 21, Keffi-Abuja Road – Nasarawa State.

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ABSTRACT

Investigation has shown that a good number of Nigerian users of social media communicate without paying attention to the appropriate usages, and this is the concern of this paper. The study aims to examine specifically those instances where such speakers of English break the rules of pronoun-antecedent agreement in English, irrespective of whether they lack the linguistic knowledge or do that out of negligence. The research is based on the theory of Competence and Performance as introduced by the American linguist, Noam Chomsky. The data was gathered within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The survey research design has been chosen as part of data collection procedure. Six groups or sets of Facebook postings are considered based on the six local councils that constitute the FCT administration. These are: Abaji, Abuja, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, and Kwali area councils. In each of them, five (5) posts have been selected to bring out a total number of thirty (30). The posts were collected using an Android phone. In taking note of the various posts from the concerned individuals, a pen and an exercise book were readily available for the making of notes on the concord errors for subsequent analysis. And each set of the 5 is presented in a separate table. The findings as analysed show the extent to which pronoun-antecedent errors are made by second language speakers of the English language.

Keyword: Use, Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement, Social Media Communication, Nigerian, Speakers, English

INTRODUCTION

It has become axiomatic to describe the Nigerian education system as defective, owing to the kinds of performance among students and even teachers in certain schools across the nation state. There are undoubtedly a number of complaints and lamentations in a number of works about poor performances in the education sector. Ansa (1), for example, believes in the existence of certain causes leading to poor academic performance in school which, if not handled, would lead to the continuous poor performance. In the second place, Olajire says: “Poor academic performance is one of the greatest concerns of parents over their children, and this has shown in the poor performance in WAEC results, NECO, JAMB, etc.

The poor academic performance being decried does not exclude the aspect of language use which is the concern of this paper. In the Nigerian state of nations, English is used as the general language of communication; an official language which serves the very good purpose of inter-ethnic communication among students and all other citizens from the manifold areas of human enterprise. This implies the significance of the English language in the Nigerian speech community, as well as the need for its

appropriate usage. Indeed, every aspect of the country's life depends greatly on the English language. To the majority of Nigerians, the yardstick for measuring the degree of one's level of educational attainment is one's performance in the English language. The first education ordinance of 1882 recognised only the English language as language of instruction. Since then, the language has been the barometer with which the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of our school curricular are measured (Eyisi 20). This is in line with the position that good performance in school subjects could be linked with good knowledge of the English language.

Just like any other language, English is full of rules and principles. One of such rules concerns the use of concord where the pronoun has to agree grammatically with its antecedent. Fundamentally, the use of concord generally has become an important communicative concept owing to its provision of the rules for arrangement of words in an appropriate order for effective communication.

Unfortunately the mastery of this very important and basic aspect of the language is confronted with a lot of challenges. Indeed, the poor quality of the use of the English language by Nigerian speakers, including social media users, is attributable to several factors including the speakers' ignorance of the rules governing the use of the language. It is based on this background that this study undertakes to examine how social media users within the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria communicate in the English language, with particular attention to pronoun-antecedent agreement.

The Word Class of Pronouns

A pronoun replaces a noun in a construction. It stands in a sentence to avoid repetition of a noun. For instance, instead of:

Alex said Alex was hungry,

One would rather be expected to say:

Alex said he was hungry.

The 'he' that replaces the second 'Alex' in that sentence is a pronoun. Others are *she, it, I we, they, you*, etc. which are some examples of pronoun. The various kinds of pronouns provide more examples as provided in the following definitions.

Types

Pronouns are described as *demonstrative, interrogative, possessive, personal, reciprocal, reflexive, indefinite and relative*.

Demonstrative Pronouns: A demonstrative pronoun points to persons or things as in the following examples:

This is a phone That is my car

These are my parents Those are my siblings

Interrogative pronouns: They are used in asking questions. Olaofe and Kasim define an interrogative pronoun as the type that "could be used for interrogative purposes (7). E.g.

What is your name?

Which was your answer?

Other examples are *Whom When* and *Who*

Personal Pronouns: They refer to persons or things, both of which are technically referred to as **persons**. Three kinds of persons have been identified under pronouns as *first, second, and third persons*. The first person refers to the speaker themselves (see I & we), the second person is who the speaker is addressing (i.e. you), and the third person refers to whom or what the speaker speaks about. Under the third persons are; *he, she, it, and they*.

Possessive Pronouns: These pronouns show possession or ownership.

The car is mine/it is ours

The trousers are his/the skirt is hers

Other examples are *yours, its, and theirs*, which are also referred to as possessive pronouns.

Reciprocal Pronouns: These can be defined as those pronouns that “involve two people or groups of people or things that express or have a mutual (give-and-take) relationship” (Chahur, 14). In the author’s example, if Aminu loves Amina, and Amina also loves Aminu, we would say, the two people love each other. The “each other” that is used to express the mutual feeling between these two people is referred to as a reciprocal pronoun. An alternative for “each other” is “one another”, both of which are reciprocal pronouns.

Reflexive Pronouns: A reflexive pronoun is used in a sentence to reflect self. i.e. the object of the sentence is the same person or thing as the subject. E.g.

I injured myself

You injured yourself

Similar examples are *yourselves himself, herself itself oneself ourselves themselves*

Relative Pronouns: A relative pronoun relates to, or stands for its antecedent. E.g

The man who is talking is a teacher.

The word ‘who’ as underlined in that sentence refers to the noun ‘man’. It is a relative pronoun. Others are, *that, which, whom, and whose*.

Indefinite pronouns: They are words *like one someone something, somebody, anyone, anything, and anybody*, which refer to non-specific nouns. We say they are indefinite pronouns because their names are not specifically defined.

Gender of Nouns and Pronouns

Gender is the classification of nouns and pronouns as masculine, feminine or neuter. Masculine gender refers to males, as in, ‘*man*’ and ‘*boy*’ or ‘*he*’ and ‘*him*’ for pronouns. Feminine gender refers to female names which would be replaced by ‘*she*’ or ‘*her*’ which are pronouns. Non-human nouns like book, pen, boy etc. belong to the neuter gender. The pronoun that stands for any or such nouns is ‘it’ as in,

The goat is hungry, and it is coming to eat the grass.

Where is the book? It is on the table.

Common gender may be included in the classification. It does not specify whether a named person is a male or female. Words like *speaker*, *student*, *teacher*, and *individual*, are some of the nouns under common gender.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

Having defined pronoun in the foregoing, it is important in the next step to know what an antecedent is, and how and when the two are said to have agreed. An antecedent of a pronoun is the noun that appears before it; the person or thing to which the pronoun refers. In the words of The *Learning Center's Online Writing Lab* (1), an antecedent is a noun or pronoun to which another noun or pronoun refers. White defines an antecedent generally as something that comes before, or precedes, something else. He specifies this in grammar as a word that comes before a different term that represents the original word. In his example, the sentence, "When **John** went out in the rain, he got wet," has John as the subject of the sentence, as well as the antecedent to the pronoun "he."

White also observes that pronouns are not the only option for replacing antecedents with other terms. Different nouns or noun phrases can also be used as exemplified bellow:

When **John** comes inside, the boy will dry off with his towel in his bathroom. (Here, the antecedent John is replaced with "the boy," in addition to being replaced with "his" later on.)

When **John** comes inside, the wet boy will dry off with his towel in his bathroom. (Here, the more vivid noun phrase "the wet boy" is used to replace John once within in the sentence, along with "his" later in the sentence.) With the above examples, an antecedent is redefined as a subject that can be renamed by another word later in a sentence.

According to *LEO: Literacy Education Online* (1), a pronoun must agree with its antecedent in person, number, and gender. It refers to Person as the quality of being; Number as the quality that distinguishes between singular (one entity) and plural (numerous entities); and Gender as the quality that distinguishes the entities as masculine or feminine. From examples provided by the *University of Houston – Victoria* (1), the following constructions show pronoun-antecedent agreement based on person, number and gender:

Ex: *I* should go home to finish *my* essay for ENG 3430 (first person).

Ex: *You* should go home to finish *your* essay for ENG 3430 (second person).

Ex. *She* should go home to finish *her* ENG 3430 essay (third person/feminine gender agreement).

Ex: Helen and Allie showed us *their* Easter hats (agreement of number).

An online source (guidetogrammar.org/grammar/pronouns.htm) shares a basic principle that "a pronoun usually refers to something earlier in the text (its antecedent) and must agree in number — singular/plural — with the thing to which it refers. It goes further with other important issues concerning the subject matter. One of them is that the indefinite pronouns *anyone*, *anybody*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *someone*, *somebody*, *no one*, and *nobody* are always singular.

This is sometimes perplexing to writers who feel that *everyone* and *everybody* (especially) are referring to more than one person. The same is true of *either* and *neither*, which are always singular even though they seem to be referring to two things.

The author also observes that the need for pronoun-antecedent agreement can create *gender* problems. If one were to write, for instance, "A student must see his counselor before the end of the semester," when there

are female students about, nothing but grief will follow. One can pluralise, in this situation, to avoid the problem:

Students must see their counselor before the end of the semester.

Or, one could say:

A student must see his or her counsellor. . . .

Too many *his*'s and *her*'s eventually become annoying, however, and the reader becomes more aware of the writer trying to be conscious of good form than he or she is of the matter at hand.

It is therefore widely regarded as being correct (or correct enough), at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to *say*:

Somebody has left *their* bag on the floor.

Summarily, pronouns are used in reference to, or to replace other words which are known as their antecedents or referents. And the connection between the pronoun and its antecedent must always be clear in order to avoid confusion; the two must agree in person, number and gender.

The Nature of Social Media Communication

Our global world of technology has grown expansively into several platforms for international network of communication. The most popular social media websites are: Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok among others. The concept of social media may be defined as a system of communication enabled by a network of social websites available on certain technological devices. Maya (1) defines Social media as “a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities.” According to the author, social media is, by design, Internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content, which includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Users then engage with social media through computer systems; tablets, or smart phones using web-based software or applications.

According to a source from Tufts University, social media is a means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (1). While social media is said to be ubiquitous in America and Europe, the source affirms that Asian countries like Indonesia lead the list of social media usage.

The original function of Social media is interaction among friends and family but it has now been adopted by businesses that wants to take advantage of a popular new communication method to reach out to customers. But the whole effect of this is the ability to connect and share information with anyone on earth or with many people simultaneously.

Social media may take the form of a variety of tech-enabled activities. These activities include photo sharing, blogging, social gaming, social networks, video sharing, business networks, virtual worlds, reviews, and much more. Even governments and politicians utilise social media to engage with constituents and voters. For individuals, social media is used to keep in touch with friends and extended family. Some people use various social media applications to network career opportunities, find people across the globe with like-minded interests, and share their thoughts, feelings, insights, and emotions. Those who engage in these activities are part of a virtual social network. And for businesses, social media is an indispensable tool for companies which use the platform to find and engage with customers, drive sales through advertising and promotion, gauge consumer trends, and offering customer service or support. It facilitates communication with customers, enabling the melding of social interactions on e-commerce sites. Its ability to collect

information helps focus on marketing efforts and market research. It helps in promoting products and services, as it enables the distribution of targeted, timely, and exclusive sales and coupons to would-be customers.

Social media has changed the way that communication takes place online; it has provided the communicator with the ability to discover what's happening in the world in real-time, to connect with each other and stay in touch with long-distance friends, and in order to have access to endless amounts of information at one's fingertips. In many senses, social media has helped many individuals find common ground with others online, making the world seem more approachable. According to a survey by Pew Research Centre, the use of social media is correlated with having more friends and more diverse personal networks, especially within emerging economies. The bottom line is that social media has taken the world by storm, capturing billions of users worldwide.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is linked with the grammatical theory of Competence and Performance as introduced by the American linguist, Noam Chomsky. As a notion in Linguistics, competence is simply seen originally as the natural and inherited ability of a speaker to understand and use correct forms of words and sentences in a language. It is, alternatively, "speakers' knowledge of their language, the system of rules which they have mastered so that they are able to produce and understand an indefinite number of sentences and to recognise grammatical mistakes and ambiguities" (Crystal 92). A competent speaker of Hausa, if an example must be provided, should be able to produce every possible sentence in the language, and can understand even the sentences they have never heard before a given time. Such is the same with speakers of English and those of the many languages of the world.

Chomsky considered competence as "the speaker's innate knowledge about his language, his tacit and unconscious knowledge of the systems of rules in his language that underlie his ability to produce, comprehend and interpret sentences in that Language" (Ndimele 86). His focus is the native speaker and his acquired excellence in the grammar of his language. This counts on the mastery of rule systems as well as the ability to produce and understand a vast number of novel sentences. It involves the knowledge of correct formation and pronunciation of words and sentences, with attention to meaning and appropriateness of context.

The idea of 'competence' was paired with 'performance' for the sake of making a distinction between the two. The author of the theory feels that what one is able to do at a time is not necessarily a manifestation of one's knowledge. Defining competence linguistically as the speaker's inherent ability of correct use of language structures, he describes performance as the practical demonstration of that skill in concrete situation. Competence is a property of the brain, while performance involves physical production. A writer would make us understand the two terms simply in terms of 'knowing' the language and 'doing' something with the language (Bilash 1), respectively for language competence and performance. This distinction, according to him, is important "primarily because it allows those studying a language to differentiate between a speech error and not knowing something about the language" (2). Indeed, speakers makemistakes in certain expressions even when they already have a mastery of their correct forms, and this is what Chomsky observed when he argued that competence (not performance) should be central in linguistic studies:

We thus make a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker –hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations)... the problem for the linguist as well as for the child learning the language, is to determine from the data of performance –the underlying system of rules, that has been mastered by the speaker–hearer... of the technical sense, linguistic theory is mentalistic... observed use of language or hypothesised disposition to respond, habits, and so on, may provide evidence as to the nature of this mental reality, but surely cannot constitute the actual subject matter

of linguistics (Chomsky 4).

Competence actually remains but performance can be obstructed, as it is claimed. Think, for instance, of someone who is either physically or emotionally unstable at a point, and is subsequently unable to bring out their real knowledge of what they really know about the grammar of their language. Of course it would be wrong to conclude that such a speaker lacks the grammatical knowledge, since they can display this competence when peace is returned to their life. Akmajian et'al provide for us an example from supposed fluent speaker of English who has undergone serious dental surgery which causes him temporary speechlessness. Such a person should certainly not be said to have lost his knowledge of the English language. Rather, his linguistic competence in English is maintained, with performance limitations, specifically resulting from the injuries. According to the authors:

Actual speech is characterised by false starts and stops, hesitations, lapses of memory, coughing, clearing of throat.... Although such details reflect the actual performance of a given speaker on a given occasion, they do not necessarily reflect the speaker's competence (152).

So, it could be that a competent speaker of a given language, at a given hour, is sick, bothered over the loss of a dear one, or any other heart-touching event. Yet, he/she might be suffering from intense hunger or inebriation. Any of such and other problems could temporarily affect the reasoning ability of the speaker, who would erroneously be attached with absence of competence. In relation to the existing study, it is expected that speakers of the English should have a degree of competence in the language, and should be able to show this in concrete situations such as social media communications.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, the survey research design has been chosen as part of data collection procedure. Survey research is a form of descriptive research that is aimed at collecting large and small samples from the populations in order to examine the distribution, incidence and interaction of educational and sociological phenomena. The results of the study have been generalised to represent the performance of the entire population. The researcher believes that since the subjects of the study are drawn from the local councils of the FCT, their performance would give an insight into the general usage of pronoun-antecedent by the entire users of Facebook in the area of coverage. Also, simple random sampling was used to get the population of the study. A total number of 5 Facebook users were selected from each of the 6 local government councils of the FCT, to represent the social media communication, with a single post selected from each of the selected users obtained randomly for analysis, thereby giving us a total number of 30 posts having their use of pronoun-antecedent concord examined. Attention was paid to postings from a population of users who are of the educated class; between secondary and degree levels of education. The posts were collected using an Android phone. In taking note of the various posts from the concerned individuals, a pen and an exercise book were readily available for the making of notes on the concord errors for subsequent analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

What appears below is a presentation and analysis of the information obtained in the course of the investigation. As stated in the methodology, the data was gathered within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). In the presentation therefore, six groups or sets are considered based on the six local councils that constitute the FCT administration. These are: Abaji, Abuja, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, and Kwali area councils. In each of them, five (5) posts have been selected to bring out a total number of thirty (30) postings. And each set of the 5 is presented in a separate table as follows.

Table 1: Pronoun-antecedent Agreement Errors in Selected Posts from Abaji Council Area

Text 'A'	Everybody should be mindful of what <i>he</i> posts on the social media.
Text 'B'	It is only in Nigeria that anybody can wake up any time and post anything that <i>he</i> wants to post.
Text 'C'	The Nigerian football team returned to <i>their</i> dressing room after it had finished <i>its</i> training.
Text 'D'	The Nigerian government announced its decision to ban twitter and yet they are using it.
Text 'E'	It is expected that the clergy lives exemplary lives so that <i>their</i> followers can copy their life-styles. Happy Sunday to all my face book friends

Source: Facebook Postings from Speakers within Abaji Council Area

In each of the texts in the above presentation, a pronoun was erroneously used in disagreement with its antecedent, and such pronouns have been italicised for easy identification. Apart from the point of grammatical inaccuracy in consideration, some of these disagreements are found to have implications on meaning as shown in the specific examples.

In text 'A', for instance, the pronoun 'he' which refers to 'everybody', an indefinite pronoun, was supposed to be replaced by the plural form – *they* which, in modern English grammar, is used to agree with a noun or pronoun without a definite gender. Generally, 'he' is the singular form of pronoun which refers to the masculine gender. Using it in agreement with such a non-specific gender therefore negatively affects the intended meaning. In its correct form, the sentence should have been that:

————— Everybody should be mindful of what *they* post on the social media

In the second text, the pronoun 'he' was used in company of the antecedent 'anybody'. This is still a disagreement between an indefinite antecedent and a masculine pronoun. The use of 'anybody' ordinarily suggests man or woman; 'he' should then be avoided in order not to injure the intended meaning. The construction would have been grammatically and semantically correct if the speaker had said:

————— It is only in Nigeria that anybody can wake up any time and post anything that *they* want to post.

The third issue has to do with the inconsistency in the use of pronouns in agreement with the antecedent. It is understandable that the speaker has the choice between singular and plural pronouns since the antecedent is a collective noun. But consistency is needed when more than a single pronoun is involved in a construction. Instead of using both 'their' and 'its' in reference to 'The Nigerian football team', just one of them should have been maintained an in:

————— The Nigerian football team returned to *their* dressing room after they had finished *their* training.

OR

————— The Nigerian football team returned to *its* dressing room after it had finished *its* training.

Text D is identified with the same error as text C; with the possessive 'its' referring to the Nigerian government, 'it' should have been used subsequently instead of 'they' as used in that construction to produce a better sentence as:

—————The Nigerian government announced *its* decision to ban twitter and yet *it* is using it.

In text E, the use of 'lives' after 'the clergy' suggests that the latter is a singular noun. The subsequent use of 'their' then has brought in a sort of grammatical contradiction in the sentence with implications on meaning. A grammatically appropriate construction would have adhered to the rule of concord that:

————— It is expected that the clergy lives exemplary lives so that *their* followers can copy their lifestyles. Happy Sunday to all my face book friends!

Table 2: Pronoun-antecedent Agreement Errors in Selected Posts from Abuja Municipal Area Council

Text ‘A’	The government is not doing anything to help their citizen.
Text ‘B’	The congregation was impressed by the Reverend’s opening remarks but they were dissatisfied with the sermon.
Text ‘C’	The army has assured the Kaduna state government of their commitment to finding a lasting solution to crime and criminality in the state.
Item ‘D’	Anyone who is not happy about my post should resign <i>his</i> friendship.
Text ‘E’	If anyone wants to progress in life, he should join politics.

Source: Facebook Postings from Speakers within Abuja Municipal Area Council

In text A of the above presentation, an error occurs with result from inconsistent use of ‘is’ and ‘their’ following ‘the government’ which could be regarded as the antecedent of the possessive (their). If the writer wanted to use ‘government’ as a singular entity, there would not have been the need for the plural possessive (their) but ‘its’. With such an inconsistency, one wonders whether the speaker uses ‘government’ to mean an entity or a group of humans. For a correct form of text A, one would have seen that:

————— The government is not doing anything to help its citizens.

Text B has a similar problem; with the use of ‘was’ following ‘the congregation’, the pronoun ‘they’ should be replaced with ‘it’. But with ‘they’, ‘was’ should be replaced with ‘were’ for an appropriate construction. The writer needed to be clear on whether the noun was used to mean a singular or plural subject. That post would have been grammatically correct if it had read:

————— The congregation was impressed by the Reverend’s opening remarks but it was dissatisfied with the sermon.

OR

————— The congregation were impressed by the Reverend’s opening remarks but they were dissatisfied with the sermon.

In yet a similar fashion, text C contains ‘has’, a singular verb, and ‘their’, a plural possessive, both in concord with the subject ‘army’. In its correct form, the sentence should have read:

————— The army has assured the Kaduna State government of its commitment to finding a lasting solution to crime and criminality in the state.

In text D, the writer should have taken note of the fact that the subject of that sentence is an indefinite pronoun. In such an instance, as mentioned earlier, the possessive ‘his’ which is masculine in nature should have been replaced with ‘their’ or ‘his/her’ to show some sense of neutrality. For a grammatically meaningful construction, the sentence could be corrected that:

————— Anyone who is not happy about my post should resign *their* friendship.

In text E also, the speaker should have employed ‘they’ rather than ‘he’ (a singular masculine pronoun) to

agree with its antecedent which is an indefinite pronoun. That expression should be restructured, therefore, as follows:

————— If anyone wants to progress in life, they should join politics.

Table 3: Pronoun-antecedent Agreement Errors in Selected Posts from Bwari Area Council

Text 'A'	Chelsea football club is committed to winning <i>their</i> match.
Text 'B'	The family has called on the government to come to <i>their</i> rescue.
Text 'C'	The team has its unique style of playing that is why they are hardly defeated.
Item 'D'	The congregation told its pastor that they were tired of paying tithe.
Text 'E'	If an individual wants to live a decent life, he should avoid watching pornography

Source: Facebook Postings from Speakers within Bwari Area Council

Text A of table 3 is found erroneous for the use of 'their' (a plural possessive) in agreement with the noun 'club' when there is already a singular verb 'is' following the subject. With such a verb, it is suggested that the speaker considers the subjective noun as a singular type. Therefore, the possessive should equally appear in the singular form to have the sentence read correctly as:

————— Chelsea football club is committed to winning *its* match.

For text B also, 'has' has been used to agree with 'family', a collective noun. The correct possessive to agree with its antecedent should therefore be a singular one. This would clearly mean that the speaker uses the word as a singular noun, as in:

————— The family has called on the government to come to *its* rescue.

In text C, the correct pronoun to agree with the antecedent is 'it' rather than 'they' since the speaker sees the noun 'team' as a singular subject, noticeable in their use of 'his' following the subject. In obedience to the rule of pronoun-antecedent agreement, the writer should have said:

————— The team has its unique style of playing that is why *it* is hardly defeated.

In text D, the writer should have 'it' in agreement with the antecedent since there is a preceding singular (its). To avoid that confusion, the sentence should have read:

————— The congregation told its pastor that *it* was tired of paying tithe.

OR

————— The congregation told *their* pastor that *they* were tired of paying tithe.

Text E is a question of 'individual' (a common noun) and 'he' (a masculine pronoun). For an agreement between the two, the masculine pronoun should have been substituted with a neutral type; either *they* or *he/she*. In its correct form, the sentence could be re-written as:

————— If an individual wants to live a decent life, *they* should avoid watching pornography

Table 4: Pronoun-antecedent Agreement Errors in Selected Posts from Gwagwalada Area Council

Text ‘A’	Somebody will just wake up and fabricate unverifiable news and post it on his twitter handle. What a country!
Text ‘B’	The government has cede <i>their</i> rights of ownership of property of Nelson Mandela street.
Text ‘C’	The management staff of the central bank of Nigeria has assured the Nigerian citizens that <i>they</i> will do its best to revive the value of the national currency.
Text ‘D’	Everybody is just doing what <i>he</i> want in this country.
Text ‘E’	If a person wants to succeed in life, <i>you</i> have to know the rules of the game.

Source: Facebook Postings from Speakers within Gwagwalada Area Council

Text A of the presentation above is marked with the concerned concord error between ‘somebody’ and ‘his’. Normally, the possessive ‘his’ suggests that the noun already used is of masculine gender; referring to a man or boy. But ‘somebody is a neutral form without gender specification. Even if the meaning can be implied from such a construction carrying the two words, the construction remains faulty, and should be corrected with:

————— Somebody will just wake up and fabricate unverifiable news and post it on *their* twitter handle.
What a country!

In text B, it is the question of:

‘the government has’ + ‘their’

which could be amended as:

—————The government has ceded *its* rights of ownership of property of Nelson Mandela Street.

The point is that a collective noun takes either a singular or plural verb depending on the speaker’s intended meaning; whether the noun is seen as a singular or plural type. But inconsistent use of both singular and plural verbs certainly creates confusion as to what the speaker means for the term.

In text C, just like in B, it is the question of:

‘The management staff ... has’ + ‘they’

which could be amended as:

————— The management staff of the central bank of Nigeria has assured the Nigerian citizens that *it* will do its best to revive the value of the national currency.

In text D, it is the question of:

‘Everybody’+ ‘he’

which could be amended as:

————— Everybody is just doing what *they* want in this country.

In text E, it is the question of:

‘a person; (a third person noun) + ‘you’ (a second person pronoun)

which could be amended as:

—————If a person wants to succeed in life, *they* have to know the rules of the game.

Table 5: Pronoun-antecedent Agreement Errors in Selected Posts from Kuje Area Council

Text ‘A’	The lady and her mother showed us <i>her</i> birthday gift.
Text ‘B’	Either the girl or her mother are celebrating <i>their</i> birthday
Text ‘C’	Every participant on this platform should be mindful of his words
Text ‘D’	My <i>parent</i> deserve their respect.
Text ‘E’	If a person want respect, you should also respect other people

Source: Facebook Postings from Speakers within Kuje Area Council

In text A of the above presentation, the disagreement is found in:

‘The lady and her mother’+ ‘her’. Every average speaker of the English language knows that a compound subject like ‘lady and her mother’ is plural in nature. It is then obviously wrong for one to use ‘her’ supposedly for a singular feminine gender in agreement with such a compound subject. Such a construction could be amended to give us a grammatically correct sentence as:

————— The lady and her mother showed us *their* birthday gift.

In text B, the disagreement is found in:

‘Either the girl or her mother...’+ ‘their’.

A correlative conjunction such as either ... or is considered to be a singular form. This means that any element to be used in agreement with it should be a singular type, and not something like ‘their’ as used in that sentence which could be amended to give us a grammatically correct form as:

————— Either the girl or her mother are celebrating *her* birthday

In text C, the disagreement is found in:

‘Every participant...’+ ‘his’

which could be amended to give us a grammatically correct sentence as:

————— Every participant on this platform should be mindful of *their* words.

As pointed out earlier, a neutral gender noun only agrees with a neutral form of a pronoun; neither masculine nor feminine.

For text D, the disagreement is found in:

‘My parent’+ ‘their’

which could be amended to give us a grammatically correct sentence as:

————— My *parents* deserve their respect.

For a clearer meaning to be achieved, a singular noun such as the above can only take a singular element. It could be observed that the speaker actually wanted to use the plural form of ‘parent’, and not the way it appeared.

In text E, the disagreement is found in:

‘a person’ (third person) + ‘you’ (second person)

which could be amended to give us a grammatically correct sentence as:

—————If a person wants respect, *they* should also respect other people.

Table 6: Pronoun-antecedent Agreement Errors in Selected Posts from Kwali Area Council

Text ‘A’	If someone do something good to you appreciate him.
Text ‘B’	If you reveal your friend’s secret to others you are betraying him.
Text ‘C’	Your real friend is someone that can give and will not expect you to give him back.
Text ‘D’	There can never be progress in Kwali if the people here refuse to love themselves.
Text ‘E’	It is my birthday today, any of my friend that will not celebrate me I will not celebrate him on his own birthday.

Source: Facebook Postings from Speakers within Kwali Area Council

In table 6, the following portions have been identified with concord faults:

someone ... *him* (text A).

friend... *him* (text B)

someone...*him* (text C)

people...their selves (text D)

friend...*him* (text E)

In the above expressions, the pronouns; *him* (in four place), *and their selves* disagree with their antecedents; *someone, friend, someone, people, and friend*. The sentences containing those erroneous portions could, in their correct forms, be written as:

————— If someone does something good to you appreciate *them*.

————— If you reveal your friend’s secret to others you are betraying *them*.

————— Your real friend is someone that can give you something and will not expect you to give them back.

—————There can never be progress in Kwali if the people here refuse to love *one another*.

—————It is my birthday today; any of my friends that will not celebrate me, I will not celebrate *them* on *their* own birthday.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis has shown some extent to which concord errors can be made by second language speakers of the English language; particularly the errors of pronoun-antecedent concord. It must be emphasised that this analysis strictly concerns concord, to the exclusion of any other error, be it grammatical or lexical. Hence certain errors in many of the selected posts were overlooked. Since this is a research based on facts, every post was lifted the way it came; without any effort to effect any correction of any error. Suggested versions of sentences are, however, made completely error-free.

It could be observed also that many speakers of English have problems in the application of pronoun-antecedent concord rules, particularly as it concerns collective and indefinite pronouns. The foregoing analysis supports this fact; almost all the errors presented emanated from these categories of pronoun. But this does not suggest that attention was restricted to certain kinds to the exception of some pronouns in the course of the investigation. In any case, the analysis represents the fact that maintaining the concord rules of pronoun-antecedent has been a problem to many speakers of the English language.

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