

Investigating Complement Clause Choice in Written Educated Nigerian English (ENE)

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Abstract : Inappropriate complement selection constitutes one of the major features of non-standard complementation in the Nigerian users of English output of sentence construction. This paper investigates complement clause choice in Written Educated Nigerian English (ENE) and offers some results. It aims at determining preferred and dispreferred patterns of complement clause selection in respect of verb heads in English by selected Nigerian users of English. The complementation data analyzed in this investigation were obtained from experimental tasks designed to elicit complement categories of Verb - Noun -, Adjective - and Prepositional - heads in English. Insights from the Government - Binding relations were employed in analyzing data, which comprised responses obtained from one hundred subjects to a picture elicitation exercise, a grammaticality judgement test, and a free composition task. The findings indicate a general tendency for clausal complements (CPs) introduced by the complementizer that to be preferred by the subjects studied. Of the 235 tokens of clausal complements which occurred in our corpus, 128 of them representing 54.46% were CPs headed by that, while whether - and if-clauses recorded 31.07% and 8.94%, respectively. The complement clause-type which recorded the lowest incidence of choice was the CP headed by the Complementiser, for with a 5.53% incident of occurrence. Further findings from the study indicate that semantic features of relevant embedding verb heads were not taken into consideration in the choice of complementisers which introduce the respective complement clauses, hence the that-clause was chosen to complement verbs like prefer. In addition, the dispreferred choice of the for-clause is explicable in terms of the fact that the respondents studied regard 'for' as a preposition, and not a complementiser.

Keywords : complement, complement clause complement selection, complementisers, government-binding

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