OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY

DISCOURSE IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF PUNCTUATION IN SELECTED INAUGURAL LECTURES IN TWO UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA

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DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to God Almighty, the sourceof wisdom and success who kept me throughout this programmeand in His benevolence, gave me the grace to complete this research. I owe Him my deepest gratitude. May He continue to watch over meand take me beyond my desired height in life.

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ABSTRACT

This study identified the uses of punctuation marks in the selected inaugural lectures and analyzed the specific punctuation marks deployed in the lectures. This study also discussed the meaning and discourse implications of the use of punctuation marks in the selected lectures. This was with a view to demonstrate the importance of punctuation marks in every written academic discourse, including mature academic writings like inaugural lectures.

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary data comprised 10 selected printed copies of inaugural lectures from two southwest universities: Obafemi Awolowo University and the University of Ibadan. Five inaugural lectures were selected from five different faculties in each of the institutions – Arts, Sciences, Health Sciences, Education and Law. Inaugural lectures were chosen as the data for this study because they are works of knowledgeable experts in various fields who should be role models in writing that is free from errors or blunders. The secondary data included books, journal articles, and the Internet. The inaugural lectures were analysed using insights from Quirk et al's categorisation of punctuation marks: specification and separation.

The results showed that the use of punctuations in the selected inaugural lectures varies; some were commonly used while some were rarely used. Punctuation marks that were commonly used in all the inaugural lectures are: comma, full stop, quotation mark, hyphen, colon, brackets, apostrophe and bold print; while some marks were not used in all the lectures but used in most of them, these marks are: semi-colon, question mark, slash, ellipsis, exclamation, dash/dashes, italics and capitalization; and the mark that is scarcely used by the selected lecturers is underlining. The study also found that exclamation mark and question mark

are marks that are used for specific purpose because they usually indicate the style and mood of the writer. Exclamation mark was used mainly to express emotion and mood of the writer. Also, some marks function to foreground some grammatical items in order to call the attention of readers to such items; these marks are: quotation marks, italics, underlining, bold print and capitalization. The study also showed that some marks were not used where they ought to be used, most especially the omission of full stop, comma and colon at the point in a sentence where their use is important. Also, it was discovered that some lecturers deviated from the conventional usage of ellipsis which is three dots; some lecturers are irregular in their use of the mark by using more than three dots; this is a misuse of the mark. There are instances of misuse of semi-colon too in the selected inaugural lectures.

The study concluded that punctuation marks are important in every written discourse and errors in the use of punctuation marks are not restricted to writings of students at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions alone, but can be found in mature academic writings as well.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0   PREAMBLE

This chapter presents the introductory background to this study. It also presents the statement of

the problem, the aim and objectives of the study and the expected contribution to knowledge.

1.1   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Some years in antiquity, the act of speaking was the common way of communicating and it is

also the medium to pass information from one generation to another. Cultural values, beliefs,

custom and tradition of a people, their knowledge and information were passed on orally to

coming generation. After sometime, the written form was developed and through this means, it

became easier for important information, values, beliefs, customs and traditions of a group of

people to be documented and kept for other generations to have an idea of what has happened in

the past. As civilization evolved, the written language was developed in its own distinct

functional context of book keeping and administration, but it was never a just 'speech write

down' until after the very recent advancement in technology (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; 7).

However, the two (spoken and written language) have continued to occupy a complementary

position or domain. It is a fact that written language was invented as a way to represent spoken

language using symbols that must be taught and learnt for proper understanding and use. Also

the abilities to communicate in both oral and written form greatly help to pass across information

without the recipient or listener finding it difficult to understand what the speaker is saying.

In every human society, there is always a need to communicate, hence the development of one

language or the other. Lehman (1976:4) defines language as "a system for the communication of

meaning through sounds". From this definition, we can deduce that when we talk about

language, we talk about meaning, that is, sound that is made to convey meaning; because it is not every sound that is produced that is meaningful. Osisanwo (2003:1) has this to say about language:

> Language is human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication.

From Osisanwo's (2003:1) definition, it becomes clear that language consists of both the oral and the written form and it is used systematically and conventionally by members of a group or speech community, as the case may be, for the purpose of communication; sending and receiving message, information, and ideas, etc.

On the other hand, Obanya (1982:1) says "language is a system for the expression of thoughts, feelings and social togetherness through the use of spoken sounds or conventional symbols. By his definition we are made to understand that language is a powerful tool to express our thought, feelings, emotions and social oneness through the use of words and spoken sounds or conventional symbols. Language is the conventional name or general name for different codes used by different groups of people to express their mind, thought, feelings and so on. Most times when language users use language, they use it without giving cognizance to the rule of the language; some other times, they use language to suit what they want to say or what they have in mind to say. This has therefore called for the study of how language is used to see if language users follow the rules of sentence construction, find out if there are errors in how they use language, the cause and effect of errors in language use.

In language use, using words expressively requires a deeper level of word knowledge and the ability to use words in speaking and writing discourse demonstrates our true knowledge of word usage. Therefore, in order to use words accurately and expressively, we must have a good understanding of what we want to say, how to say it (the posture, body language, tone unit and pitch) and when to say it. It is usually easy to understand a speaker when the discourse is an oral discourse, but more skill and understanding are required when the speaker chooses the written medium to express him or herself. In the spoken discourse, pauses, in other words, tone unit boundaries are mainly used while punctuation marks are used in written discourse; and this has led to the belief that punctuation marks symbolize the prosodic unit in written discourse(Stenstrom, 1994).

In most of our spoken discourse, we say what we want to say using our voice, facial expression, and body language. We may raise the pitch of our voice to indicate that we are asking a question or showing our excitement in form of exclamation, or we may lower the pitch of our voice to indicate that it is a statement. Also we apply pause to break words when we are listing, pause to separate one clause from another; and raise our voice too, and at the end raise or lower the voice to show that we have come to the end of the statement/sentence. When we engage in the written discourse, since the written form is the representation of the spoken form, all these prosodic effects must reflect in the written work. This will enhance the readability of the text and prevent ambiguity. This, therefore, leads to the use of punctuation in written discourse in order to achieve the readability of a text.

Therefore, one of the most important things to take note of in a written discourse is the punctuation used by the writer because it has a way of defining what writers are saying. It has also been noted that punctuations help a lot to divide the various ranks in a discourse into their

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