

Pluralization of English Loan Words in Written Communication of Selected Students of English for Academic Purposes in Makurdi

Adaje, Ambrose Ochigbo

Federal University of Agriculture,

Makurdi,

Nigeria.

and

Esther Olayinka Bamigbola

Adekunle Ajasin University,

Akungba-Akoko,

Nigeria

Abstract

*The study examines the pluralization of English loan words in the written works of undergraduate students of English for Academic Purposes(EAP) of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The Structural Grammar model's description of plural patterns of English loan words provides basis for assessing pluralization of English loan words in the students' works. The model is also employed to design the research instrument, tagged Pluralization of English Loan Words, which was administered to randomly selected eighty-four students during the 2020/21 academic session in the university. The results of data analysis, using frequency count and percentage score, demonstrate that some EAP students are unable to pluralize common English loan words. Specifically, the students cannot pluralize *alumnus, corpus, prospectus, census, terminus, nucleus, alumna, alga, dilemma, nebula, vertebrae, corrigendum, premium, referendum, ultimum, annex, apex, Latex (Latin); ellipsis, axis, metropolis, pelvis, criterion, phenomenon, automata, ganglions (Greek); chasis, adieux (French); tempo, soprano, virtuoso (Hebrew) and cherub, seraph (Italian)* The findings implicate the necessity of including and teaching plural formation of English loan words in EAP course to give students grammatical basis for effective use of English.*

Keywords: *English loan words, plural formation, EAP students' deficiencies*

Background to the Study

Number system is an indispensable feature of human linguistic communication. The English language has a number system that facilitates the specification of one entity, called *singular*, and more than one, referred to as *plural*. Number system is an item in elementary grammar in a second language learning context. For example, in Nigerian school system, learners are taught the English number system at the foundational grammar class; so advanced students should expectedly exhibit some basic mastery of plural forms of English loan words. Most grammatical studies of the written English of learners in both secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria have identified wrong formation of plural nouns among the common grammatical difficulties of the students. (Bodunde & Sotiloye, 2013; Amuseghan & Tunde- Awe, 2016; Afolabi & Otemuyiwa, 2018; Adekemi, 2021). However, these researches are not on pluralization of English loan words. The present study investigates the pluralization of loan words in the English usage of some EAP students of a Nigerian university. All Nigerian first-year undergraduate students undertake a course in English for academic purposes (EAP), called *Communication in English*. The objectives of this study are to find out if the students use correct plural forms of English loan words and to ascertain the plurals of loan words which the students find problematic.

Sources of English Loan Words

The literature review here accounts for the linguistic sources of English loan words. Borrowing has been the most prolific source of additions to English vocabulary, in addition to other sources such as derivation, compounding, functional shift, back formation, clipping, proper names, imitation, blending and original coinage (Francis, 1975). English vocabulary contains some loan words from classical languages such as Latin, Greek, French, Italy, Hebrew, other European languages, the languages of the Middle and Far East, including the languages of the New World. For instance, there is a large number of borrowed Latin words borrowed in English. Some of these loan words are in the areas of law (*alibi, deficit*), science (*nebula, nucleus, cirrus*), politics (*propaganda, ultimatum*), mechanical engineering (*pendulum, fulcrum*) and medicine (*serum, lumbago, insomnia*).

English has also borrowed words from French; some of the loan words are in the areas of military (*colonel, corps*), people (*bourgeois, chauffeur*), buildings and furniture (*salon, hangar*), literature, art, music (*burlesque, tableau, renaissance*), dress, fashion and materials (*grosgrain, blouse*) food and cooking (*soup, restaurant, chef*). From French also English has borrowed some working words of business men (*contract*), merchants (*import, debt*) lawyers (*felony, criminal, judge*), doctors (*ointment, medicine, surgeon*) architects (*lodge, chapel, buttress, porta, vault*) and from Scandinavian languages, English has borrowed *troll, rune, floe, saga* and *ski*.

English has also borrowed various words from other European languages such as Italy, Spanish, Dutch, German, Russian, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Finnish and Portuguese. Some of the loan words from these languages are *stanza, buffoon, sonnet, balcony, opera, vista, sopra no, maestro, arpeygio, spaghetti, pizza, umbrella, vendetta, inferno, ditto, studio, etc*(Italian); *Negro, bravado, siesta, stampede, albino,* (Spanish); *snatch, tackle, buoy, deck, splice, shop, skipper, sketch, banker, bustle, boss, trek, smear, case, loafer* (Dutch); *quartz, nickel, shalegneiss, lager, waltz, kindergarten, seminars, semester,* (German); *tsar, ruble, vodka* (Russian); *robot* (Czech); *polka* (Polish); *goulash* (Hungarian); *sauna* (Finnish) and *veranda, tank* (Portuguese).

Languages of the Middle and Far East have loaned English some words: some Arabic loan words are *admiral, alkali, alchemy, lemon, algebra, alcohol, albatross*; Indian words include *much, juggernaut, shampoo, thug, polo, tiger, paradise*; some Chinese words are *silk, tea*; Japanese words include *kimono, tycoon*; from Polynesian came *taboo*.

Words from the languages of the New World such as Caribbean, Mexico, Central South America have been borrowed into English: *canoe, hurricane, hammock, potato, tobacco, tomato, pampas,* and so on..

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical leaning of this study is structural grammar model because of its focus on the forms, features and functions of linguistic items in communication (Culler,1988; Lester, 1990). The study adopts the structural grammar's conceptualization of plural formation patterns of Latin, Greek, French, Italian and Hebrew loan words in English, as described by structural grammarians such as Greenbaum, 1996; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Quirk, Leech, Greenbaum & Svartvik, 2007; and Huddleston & Pullum,2002. The model's description is also employed to

design the research instrument and also used to discriminate deviant plural forms of English loan words in the students' works. According to Huddleston & Pullum (2002), many English loan words have been totally anglicized and become regular plurals. However others retain foreign plurals as the only possibility or as variants of regular plurals. The short review that follows examines patterns of plurals of common Latin, Greek, French, Hebrew and Italian loan words in English.

Pluralization of Selected English Loan Words

Latin words exhibit two patterns of plural formation in English, vizly, Latin plural, which involves changing the ending of the base, and regular plural that adds the plural suffix to the base. Bases that end in *-a*, take Latin plural in *alga~algae*, *alumna~alumnae* and *larva~larvae*. Some take regular plural. Examples include *algebras*, *areas*, *arenas*, *dilemmas*, *encyclopedias*, *guerrillas*, *phobias*, *quatas*, *replicas*, *rumbas*, etc. Others take either Latin or regular plural: *amoeba* or *amoebas*, *antennae* or *antennas*, *fibulae* or *fibulas*, *formulae* or *formulas*, *lacunae* or *lacunas*, *nebulae* or *nebulas*, *personae* or *personas*, *retinae* or *retinas*, *tubiae* or *tibias*, *vertebrae* or *vertebras*, and many more. Latin words with bases that terminate in *-us* replace *-us* with *-i* as in *alumnus~alumni*, *bacillu~bucili*, *homunculus~homunculi*, *locus~loci*, *rectus~recti*, *stimulus~stimuli*, etc; some Latin words with this ending (*us*) that take, *-es* are *apparatuses*, *census*, *excursuses*, *focuses*, *hialuse*, *impertuses*, *prospectuses*, *statuses*, *viruses*, etc, while others take either *-i* or *-es* as in *abacuses* or *abaci*, *lactuses* or *cacti*, *focuses* or *foci*, *funguses* or *fungi*, *hippopotamuses*, or *hippopotami*, *narcissuses* or *narcissi*, *nucleuses*, or *nuclei*, *radiuses* or *radii*, *styluses* or *styli*, *syllabuses* or *syllabic*, *terminuses* or *termini*, *thesauruses* or *thesauri*, *uteruses* or *uteri* etc.

Latin nouns with bases ending in *-um*, replace the ending with *-a* as it is in *addenia*, *bacteria*, *corrigenda*, *data*, *desiderata*, *errata*, *labia*, *ova*, *pineta*, *quantum*, etc; regular plural (with the *-s* suffix) is common with *albums*, *asylums*, *chrysanthemums*, *conundrums*, *forurus*, *gerangiuns*, *armniuns*, *mausoleum*, *museums*, *pendulums*, *premiums*, etc. But either Latin or regular plural is associated with *acquariums* or *acquaria*, *candelabrum* or *candelabra*; other Latinate words in this class are *curriculum*, *honorarium*, *maximum*, *memorandum*, *millennium*,

moratorium, plectrum, podium, referendum, spectrum, stadium, stratum, symposium, ultimum and others.

Finally, Latin words with bases which end in either *-ex* or *-ix*, replace the ending with *--ices* or *-es* in *appendix, apex, cervix, codex, cortex, helix, ibex, index, latex, matrix, lortix, vortex*, etc while Latin words like *annex, crucifix, reflex, spinifex* etc. allow only regular plural because they do not belong to the same etymological class as the earlier ones but *-x* is replaced by *-ges* in *larynx, pharynx and coccyx*. Regular plural is also found in them.

Greek loan words into English display two types of plural: first the words ending in *-is* replace the ending *-is* with *-es* as in *analysis~analyse, antithesis~antithes*. Others in this class are *arsis, axis, crisis, diagnosis, ellipsis, emphasis, genesis, hypothesis, metamorphosis, neurosis, oasis, paraplysis, psychosis, synopsis, synthesis, testis, thesis* and *thrombosis*; but *-es* is added after *-is* in *Iris (Iris), metropolis (metropolises), pelvises (pelvises)* and *penis (penises)*.

Also, Greek words with bases ending in *-o*, replace it with *-a* as in *criteria, phenomena, prolegomena* but 's' only is allowed with *electron (electrons), neutron, position, prion, proton, skeleton, horizon, pentagon, polyon, etc*. Greek words like *automaton* and *gonglin* take *-a* or *-s*.

French loan words ending in *-s* have base plurals as in *chases, chamois, corps, faux pas, patois* but French words that end in *-eau* or *-ieu* such as *plateau, adieu, bureau, chateau, milieu* and *tableau* have French plural in *-x* as well as a regular plural in *-s*.

Hebrew loan words like *cherub, seraph, goys*, etc allow Hebrew plural (*cherubium, seraphim*, and *goyim* or *kibbutzim*) and regular plurals (*cherubs, seraphs, goys* and *kibbutzes*). Italian words such as *paparazzi, graffiti, connettoini, capellini, macroni, ravioli, spaghetti, tagliatelli* and *tortellini* were borrowed into English as plurals. Both regular and foreign plurals ending in *-i* are acceptable in *concerto, contralto, libretto, soprano, tempo, virtuoso*, etc.

The foregoing survey review of plural patterns of foreign words in modern English usage is foregrounded to provide insightful grammatical basis for discriminating wrong plural forms of selected common Latin, Greek, French, Hebrew and Italian nouns in the students' written English.

Methodology

This expo-facto study was conducted among first-year students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The study population is all students who enrolled for a course in English for Academic Purposes(EAP) in 2020/21 academic session. The students were divided into six EAP lecture groups to facilitate effective teaching and learning of the course. The sample size was made of 85 students who were randomly selected from the EAP lecture group which was taught by the lead Plresearcher. The research instrument tagged *Pluralization of English Loan Words*, was drawn from structural grammar description of English loan words and administered by the lead researcher as a continuous assessment test to the study's subjects. The data were analyzed with frequency ccount and percentage statistical tools. A percentage score that is less than 50% is an evidence of inadequate knowledge of Englishloan words while a score that ranges from 50-100 % is an indication of adequate knowledge. All instances of wrong plural form of English loan words are discriminated with an asterisks (*).

Results and Interpretations of Data Analysis

Table 1: Students' Plural Formation of Latin Nouns in English

S/N	Plural Noun Formation Tasks	Word Endings	Pluralization Process	Students' Competence	
				X	%
1.	The animals were conditioned to respond to auditory (stimulus) ...	-us	regular/irregular	56	66
		-us	regular/irregular	33	39
2.	The two Mathematics professors are (alumnus) ...of Harvard University	-us	regular/irregular	18	21
		-us	regular/irregular	16	19
3.	Ancient and modern (corpus) ... are available in National Library of Nigeria.	-us	regular/irregular	10	11
4.	Two (prospectus)...are on the table: one from a college and the other from a bank	-us	regular/irregular	23	27
		-us	regular/irregular	32	38
5.	My country has had many				

(census)	-a	regular/irregular	16	19
6. Railway and bus (terminus)... are close to our house	-a	regular/irregular	38	45
7. He drew two (nucleus)...; one of an atom in physics and other of a cell in Biology	-a	regular/irregular	41	48
8. The female astronauts are (alumna)... of Cambridge university	-a	regular/irregular	24	28
9. (alga)..... grow in or near water	-a	regular/irregular	30	35
10. The country faces two diplomatic (dilemma)	-um	regular/irregular	18	8
11. The town has cultural and sports (arena)...	-um	regular/irregular	51	60
12. The astrologist has seen three (nebula)..... in a night sky	-um	regular/irregular	33	39
13. (vertebra)..... are small bones that are connected together to form the spine	-um	regular/irregular	28	33
14. Some (corrigendum)..... are appended to the document	-um	regular/irregular	32	38
15. Nigeria has many (museum).....	-ex	regular/irregular	45	53
16. The Professor pays some monthly (premium).....	-ex	regular/irregular	38	45
17. The United Nations has conducted several (referendum)..... since its formation	-ex	regular/irregular	36	42
18. The workers' union issued three (ultimatum)..... before the commencement of the strike	-ex	regular/irregular	32	38
19. The doctor tested her (reflex)				
20. The mansion has three				

-
- (annex).....
21. The roof has two
 (apex).....
22. The cartoon contains
 (latex).....
-

The table exhibits the students' performance in pluralization of twenty-two common Latinate names used in modern English. Using the decision criterion percentage score of 50%, the students find it difficult to generate the plural forms of eighteen Latin words. The words are *aluminum*, *corpus*, *prospectus*, *census*, *terminus*, *nucleus*, *alumna*, *alga*, *dilemma*, *nebula*, *vertebrae*, *corrigendum*, *premium*, *referendum*, *ultimatum*, *annex*, *apex*, and *Latex*.

Table 2: Students' Plural Formation of Greek Nouns in English

S/N	Plural Noun Formation Tasks	Word Endings	Pluralization Process	Students' Competence	
				X	%
1.	(Ellipsis)... show omissions in write ups	-is	regular/irregular	25	29
2.	A graph has vertical and horizontal (axis)...	-is	regular/irregular	24	28
3.	That politician owns a house in each of the (metropolis)..... in the country	-is	regular/irregular	25	29
4.	The diagram displays young and adult (pelvis).....	-is	regular/irregular	19	22
5.	What (criterion) are..... used for assessing a student's ability?	-on	regular/irregular	30	35
6.	Some epidemics are not natural (phenomenon).....	-on	regular/irregular	22	26
7.	Physics studies (proton).....	-on	regular/irregular	60	71
8.	The Biology Laboratory houses animal and human (skeleton).....	-on	regular/irregular	54	60
9.	Palace servants work as (automaton).....	-on	regular/irregular	38	45
10.	(Ganglion)....are curable medical				

conditions	-on	regular/irregular	41	48
------------	-----	-------------------	----	----

Applying the decision-criterion percentage score of 50% to table 2, the students are deficient in plural formation of eight Greek words, which are *ellipsis*, *axis*, *metropolis*, *pelvis*, *criterion*, *phenomenon*, *automaton* and *ganglions*.

Table 3: Students' Plural Formation of French Nouns in English

S/N	Plural Noun Formation Tasks	Word Endings	Pluralization Process	Students' Competence	
				X	%
1.	The trader has many car (chasis)in his warehouse.	French	regular/irregular	37	44
2.	Several peace (corps)..... exist in nations	French	regular/irregular	44	51
3.	Jos is a cold city with numerous (plateau)	French	regular/irregular	42	50
4.	The old man has bidden several (adieu) to dead uncles and aunties	French	regular/irregular	38	45

Table 3 shows incompetence in the plural formation of two French words in English: *chasis* and *adieu*.

Table 4: Students' Plural Formation of Italian Nouns in English

S/N	Plural Noun Formation Tasks	Word Endings	Pluralization Process	Students' Competence	
				X	%
1.	The music is a difficult piece with numerous (tempo).....	Italian	regular/irregular	5	56
2.	The choir has only two (soprano).....	Italian	regular/irregular	34	40
3.	The university music department has employed three piano (virtuoso).....	Italian	regular/irregular	36	42

Table 4 shows that the students have insufficient knowledge of the plural forms of some Italian words. Of the three Italian words (*tempo*, *soprano* and *virtuoso*), the students can not pluralize two (*soprano* and *virtuoso*).

Table 5: Students' Plural Formation of Hebrew Nouns in English

S/N	Plural Noun Formation Tasks	Word Endings	Pluralization Process	Students' Competence	
				X	%
1.	(Cherub) are a type of angel	Hebrew	regular/irregular	23	27
2.	(Seraph)are angels of the highest rank	Hebrew	regular/irregular	26	30

In the table, using the decision-criterion score of 50%, the students show inadequate knowledge of the plural forms of these Hebrew words: *cherub* and *seraph*.

Discussion of Findings

The chief finding of the study is that some EAP students at university level demonstrate inadequate knowledge of the plural formation of some common Latin, Greek, French, Hebrew and Italian words in English. The study assesses the students on plural formation of forty-one English loan words but the students are unable to produce the plurals of thirty-three words.

In particular, the students are incapable of pluralizing these common Latin nouns *alumnus*, *corpus*, *prospectus*, *census*, *terminus*, *nucleus*, *alumna*, *alga*, *dilemma*, *nebula*, *vertebrae*, *corrigendum*, *premium*, *referendum*, *ultimatum*, *annex*, *apex*, and *Latex*. The plural forms are *stumuli*, *alumni*, *corpuses* or *corpora*, *prospectuses*, *censuses*, *terminuses* or *temini*, *nucleus*, or *nuclei*, *alumae*, *algae*, *dilemmas*, *arenas*, *nebulas* or *nebuli*, *vertebra* or *vertebrae*, *corrigenda*,

museums, premiums, referendums or referenda, ultimatum or ultimata, reflexes, annexes, apices or apexes and lattices or laxes, respectively. Some of the students' wrong pluralizations include **stimulus*, **stimulies*; **aluminumies*, **aluminumuses*; **corpors*, **corpura*; **prospecti*, **prospectives*; **census*; **population*; **termines*, **termina*; **nucleuses*, **nucleous*; **aluminumus*, **aluminumas*; **algas*, **algie*; **dilemmies*, **dilemmas*; **arenals*, **arenae*; **nebulas*, **nebuae*; **vertebras*; **corrigendumies*, **corrigendums*; **museum's*; **premium's*; **referendences*; **ultimates*; **reflexes*, **reflexes*; **annexs*, **annexies*; **apexies*, **apexs*; and **latexs*, **latex*.

The students have difficulty with the plural formation of Greek words in English. The students are unable pluralize these Greek words, *ellipsis*, *axis*, *metropolis*, *pelvis*, *criterion*, *phenomenon*, *automaton* and *ganglions*; the plural forms are *ellipses*, *axes*, *metropolises*, *pelvises*, *criteria*, *phenomena*, *automata* and *ganglions*. Some of the wrong plural forms of the Greek words include **ellipsises*, **axes*, **metropolish*, **criterionie*, **phenomenans*, **protonok*, **skeletal*, **automatium* and **gaugli*.

Again, the students demonstrate deficiency in plural formation of some common French words in English. The French words are *chasis*, *corps*, *plateau*, *adieu*; the plural forms are *chasis*, *corps*, *plateaux* or *plateaus* and *adieux* or *adieux*. The students are unable to provide the plurals of *chasis* and *adieu*.

In addition, the students are unable to pluralize these Hebrew words : *tempo*, *soprano* and *virtuoso*; the plural forms are which are *temi*, *sopranos* and *virtuoso* or *virtuosi*. Some wrong plural forms from the students' responses include **temps*, **tempos*; **sopranos*, **soprano*; **virtuoses* and **virtuous*.

Finally the students have inadequate knowledge of plural forms of common Italian words in English as they can not pluralize *cherub* and *seraph*; the plurals are *cherubs* and *seraphs*.

The findings of the study prove that some first-year university students are deficient in plural formation of common English loan words as their written plural forms are evident deviations from the standard English forms. This linguistic deficiency in a basic English grammar item (as pluralization of English loan words) is possibly caused by improper learning which is likely a product of inadequate teaching of the English number system. The findings is corroborated by earlier research findings (Angboso,2010; Adaje & Oreoluwa, 2020) which have associated error

of wrong plural formation, though the works are not on English loan words, with most written English of some students of English for Academic Purposes in Nigerian universities.

Conclusion, Implications And Recommendations

The study has established that some EAP students at university level are deficient in plural formation of some common Latin, Greek, French, Hebrew and Italian words in modern English usage. This elementary grammatical deficiency is probably engendered by improper learning of the English number system. The major implication is that, except the students assiduously make personal efforts to learn the plurals of English loan words, they are likely going to live with the errors in their English as the research was conducted at the end of the students' course in English for Academic Purposes, the last formal institutional classroom exposure to English language teaching and learning in Nigeria universities for non-English course students.. The EAP course should give more attention to basic grammatical items which have been established by researchers to be difficult to the students. The students should be subjected to frequent drill exercises in basic grammatical items which are foundational to effective communication in English. Students should be made to read novels which would expose them to Standard English usage; again, the students could be tasked to construct sentences with plural forms of all loan words in modern English.

References

- Adaje, A.O & Oreoluwa, B.O. (2020).Grammatical Deficiencies in Expository Essays of Engineering Students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi.The Journal of Communicative English, 25, 145-156
- Anagboso, U.L. (2010). An Error Analysis of the Written English of the First Year Studnts of The University of Nigeria, Nsukka. An MA thesis, Department of English, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Amuseghan, S.A & Tunde- Awe, B.M (2016). Error analysis of the written English of compositions of undergraduates: A case study of Nigeria. *Journal of teaching and teacher education*. 4. NO.2

- Adekemi, B.T. (2021) Appraisal of common errors in spoken and written English of 400 level students s of Gombe State University. *Journal of humanities and social sciences*. VOL.22, No.4.
- Afolabi, K and Otemuyiwa, A. A (2018). Common errors in oral and written communication of Nigeria undergraduates: A case study of Joseph Ayo Babalola University undergraduates *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*. Vol. 6 (5).
<http://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJEL.index.htm>.
- Bodunde, H. A and Sotiloye, B. S (2013). A Critique of undergraduate students' writing in an ESL Setting: Samples from the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria. *World Journal of English Language*. www.sciedu.ca/wjel.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006). *Cambridge grammar of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culler, J, (1988). "Saussure's theory of language". In *language and Literacy from educational perspective. Volume 1: language studies*. Ed. Neil Mercer. England: Open university educational enterprises limited.
- Francis, W.Nelson (1975). *The English Language: An introduction*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational Ltd.
- Greenbaum, S. (1996). *The Oxford English grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huddleston, R & Pullum, G.K (2002) *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech and Svartvik, J. (2007). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. Edinburgh Pearson Education Limited
- Lestr, Mark. (1990). *Grammar in the classroom*. New York: Macmillian.