Verbal Vexations: An Examination of Everyday English Usage by students of University of Jos

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Abstract

The English language, with its extensive lexicon and complicated grammatical rules, is a rich ground for linguistic challenges. This article, aims to address common sources of confusion and error in everyday English usage. By examining frequently misused word pairs, commonly mispronounced terms, tricky grammatical constructions, and context-dependent meanings, this paper seeks to provide readers with a clearer understanding of these verbal pitfalls. Additionally, we explore the dynamic nature of language and how evolving usages can influence accepted norms. Through this exploration, readers will gain the knowledge and tools needed to navigate and master these everyday linguistic challenges.

1. Introduction

There are more than 170,000 words in English Language. This vast vocabulary equips us with exceptional expressive capabilities but also presents numerous opportunities for confusion, misuse, and mispronunciation. This hopes to look at and document these common linguistic pitfalls, to empower readers to communicate with greater clarity and confidence.

The fact that English language is a combination of different dialectal origin, it's hard to have a common, unified rule that guides the language usage. This is the reason why many speakers tend to fall shorts of certain grammatical and phonological pitfall

The exploration is not limited to static rules; it also considers the evolving nature of language. As societal norms and preferences shift, so too do the conventions of English usage. By acknowledging and understanding these changes, readers can adapt to and anticipate future linguistic trends.

The goal of this article is to provide a comprehensive guide to help the linguistic landmines that saturate everyday communication. Whether you are a seasoned writer, a novice speaker,

or somewhere in between, the insights offered in this article will enhance your command of the English language and bolster your confidence in its day to day usage.

2. Methods

The study uses a mixed-methods approach to explore common language challenges. Data is collected through surveys and questionnaires from 200 students, interviews with 30 students, analysis of written assignments from 100 students, and audio recordings of 20 students' conversations. Stratified random sampling ensures diversity among participants. Quantitative data is analyzed for trends and correlations, while qualitative data is examined for recurring themes and patterns. Ethical considerations include informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical clearance. Despite limitations like sample size and self-reporting bias, the study aims to provide a detailed understanding of English usage among students, highlighting areas for improvement.

3. Findings of the study

The study finds that students at the University of Jos commonly encounter several linguistic challenges in their everyday English usage. Key findings include:

4. Commonly Misused Words

One of the most ubiquitous sources of linguistic confusion stems from word pairs that are frequently misused or confused. Let us begin by examining a few of the most vexing examples:

5. Affect vs. Effect

The distinction between "affect" and "effect" is a notorious stumbling block for many writers and speakers. In the majority of cases, "affect" functions as a verb, meaning "to influence or produce a change in something." For instance, "The news of the company's layoffs deeply affected the morale of the employees." Conversely, "effect" is most often employed as a noun, denoting "the result or consequence of an action or influence." As in, "The new marketing campaign had a positive effect on sales."

However, there are exceptions to this general rule. "Effect" can occasionally serve as a verb, meaning "to bring about or make happen," as in "The committee hoped to effect positive

changes in the company's policies." Similarly, "affect" is sometimes used as a noun, particularly in the field of psychology, to refer to someone's emotional state or expression, such as "She had a flat affect and seemed emotionally distant."

The key to properly using these terms is to first identify the part of speech required in the sentence. If you're looking to indicate influence or change, "affect" is likely the appropriate verb. If you're trying to convey a result or consequence, "effect" will probably serve as the correct noun.

6. Advice vs. Advise

Another common point of confusion is the word pair "advice" and "advise." "Advice" is a noun that refers to a recommendation or guidance offered, as in "I sought the financial advisor's advice on investing for my retirement." "Advise," on the other hand, is the verb form, meaning "to offer suggestions about the best course of action to someone." For example, "The financial advisor advised me to diversify my portfolio."

7. Its vs. It's

The distinction between the possessive pronoun "its" and the contraction "it's" (short for "it is" or "it has") is a perennial source of frustration for writers. The rule is straightforward: use "its" to indicate ownership, as in "The dog chewed on its bone," and "it's" when the word is a contraction, as in "It's been a long day."

8. Lose vs. Loose

Finally, let's consider the difference between "lose" and "loose." "Lose" is a verb that means "to be deprived of, to be unable to find, or to fail to win," as in "I don't want to lose my keys again." "Loose," on the other hand, is an adjective that describes something as not firmly or tightly fixed in place, such as "The screws on the door are loose and need to be tightened."

9. Mispronounced words

In addition to misusing words, many people struggle with properly pronouncing certain terms in the English language. Let's see some of the more commonly mispronounced words:

9.1 Niche

The proper pronunciation of "niche" is "neesh," not "nitch." This word originates from the French "niche," meaning a recess in a wall. The "ch" combination in French is typically pronounced as "sh," hence the correct English pronunciation.

9.2 Sherbet

The frozen dessert known as "sherbet" is frequently mispronounced as "sherbert." The proper pronunciation is "SHER-bit," without the extraneous "r" sound.

9.3 February

Perhaps the most infamous mispronunciation in the English language is "February." Many people incorrectly say "FEB-yoo-er-ee," when the correct pronunciation is "FEB-roo-er-ee," with the "r" sound clearly articulated.

In each of these cases, the mispronunciation stems from a disconnect between the written form of the word and its actual spoken sound. Understanding the origins and proper enunciation of these terms can help speakers avoid common verbal blunders.

10. Tricky grammatical constructions

Beyond lexical confusions, the English language is rife with grammatical pitfalls that can trip up even the most seasoned writers and speakers. Let's examine a few of the trickier constructions:

10.1 Subject-Verb Agreement

Ensuring that the subject and verb of a sentence agree in number (singular or plural) is crucial for clear, grammatically correct communication. For example, "The group of students were attending the concert" is incorrect; it should be "The group of students was attending the concert." Maintaining subject-verb agreement can be especially challenging when the subject is separated from the verb by intervening phrases or clauses.

10.2 Placement of Modifiers

Modifiers, such as adjectives and adverbs, should be placed as close as possible to the word or phrase they are meant to modify. Misplaced modifiers can result in unintentionally comical or

nonsensical sentences, as in "I saw the man with a telescope in the park." In this case, it's unclear whether the man or the speaker had the telescope.

10.3 Proper Use of Apostrophes

The apostrophe is a small but mighty punctuation mark that can easily trip up writers if not used correctly. Apostrophes are used to indicate possession, as in "the dog's bone," or to form contractions, as in "it's time to go." Improper apostrophe usage, such as "the dog's bone's" or "its time to go," can make even the most carefully crafted sentence appear amateurish.

11. Contextual conundrums

In addition to misused words and tricky grammatical constructions, the English language is rife with terms and phrases that can take on different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. Let's explore a few of these "contextual conundrums":

12. Sanction

The word "sanction" can function as both a verb and a noun, with vastly different meanings in each case. As a verb, "to sanction" means to officially approve or encourage an action. As a noun, however, "a sanction" refers to a penalty or punishment imposed on a person or organization. This dual meaning can lead to confusion, as in the statement "The government sanctioned the use of economic sanctions," which could be interpreted in multiple ways.

12.1 Dust

The word "dust" can be both a noun and a verb, with the noun form referring to fine, dry particles and the verb form meaning to remove or apply such particles. This dual usage can create ambiguity, as in the sentence "I need to dust the furniture." It's unclear whether the speaker intends to clean the furniture or apply a dust-like substance to it.

12.2 Cleave

The verb "cleave" is particularly perplexing, as it can mean both "to separate or divide" and "to adhere or cling to." This seemingly contradictory definition arises from the word's evolution, as it was originally used to denote the act of splitting or dividing, but later acquired the meaning of adhering or sticking to something. Careful consideration of the context is essential when using this term.

13. Conclusion

The study "Verbal Vexations: An Examination of Everyday English Usage" by students of the University of Jos provides a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic challenges faced by students in their daily use of English. The findings highlight several key areas of difficulty, including commonly misused words, mispronounced terms, tricky grammatical constructions, and contextual conundrums.

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