

Syntactic Distortions and Cohesive devices in the Language of Scam Mails

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Abstract

This paper is a contribution to the description and characterization of the language of scam emails. It focuses on syntactic distortions and grammatical cohesion in the mails to reveal the inherent deceit hidden in the language used by scammers. In all, two scam mails were presented and analysed from the perspective of pronominal reference. Twenty-four other excerpts were extracted from other emails and analysed; twelve from the point of view of syntactic distortions; and thirteen from other aspects of syntactic cohesion. At the level of syntactic distortion, the language of these emails contradicts the educational and social status claimed by the creators of the mails while the use of reference focuses much more on the writers to reveal their selfishness in the presumed business. Essentially, it was discovered that people fall victim to these emails partly due to greediness. This is so because there is inherent deceit in the language of the mails.

1.1 Introduction

Apart from the wanton looting of the national treasury by the political class in Nigeria, one of the major corrupt practices which have given Nigeria and Nigerians a negative image nationally and internationally is “Advanced Fee Fraud,” otherwise known as “419”. According to Okagbare (2003, p. xiv), 419ers have given the whole country the contemptible image of thieves, drug pushers, rogues, liars, swindlers and scammers. The name “419” is derived from section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code, Cap 77, Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This section of the criminal code states that:

Any person who by any pretence and with intent to defraud, obtain from any other person anything capable of being stolen, or induce any other person to deliver to any person anything capable of being stolen, is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment of three years....

The Nigerian 419scam dates back to the late 1970s and early 1980s (Koerner, 2002; Kemsley, 2003). According to Kemsley (2003), 419 scheme starts with a mail claiming that millions of U.S. dollars are trapped in a bank account in countries like Nigeria or South Africa and a foreign bank account is needed to free the money. It is often stated that the person receiving the mail was chosen for his “trustworthiness”. The writers emphasise that the matter is urgent and requires absolute secrecy. At some stage, the victim will be required to pay some money upfront while in some cases the victim may be requested to travel to Nigeria with

travelling documents forged for him. This illegal entry will later be used as leverage to force the victim to release money (Maledo, 2011, p. 115). Schaffer (2012, p.157) puts their method of operation thus:

Patterns in content include similar narratives involving vast sums of money to be transferred from the scammer's home country with outside help and common persuasive strategies frequently involving apologies, flattery, attempts to intrigue recipients, and appeals to greed, altruism, trust, and religious feelings, while patterns in writing features include use of attention-inducing buzz words like "urgent" and "secret" in subject headings as well as in the letters themselves, and obvious nonnative English grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary errors

That 419ers have defrauded thousands of people of their hard-earned money is no longer news. Many fall victim either due to their high sense of greed or lack of awareness. Lack of awareness may be a result of ignorance of the existence of scam emails or difficulty in identifying the mails through their linguistics features. So, while creating some measure of awareness, the main purpose of this study is to examine the use of syntactic distortions and cohesion in the language of 419 scam mails to reveal the inherent deceit in the language of the mails.

1.2 Language and Scam

Language fulfils three major meta-functions: ideational, interpersonal and textual functions to enable people to express different types of meanings. The ideational function helps in the expression of our experiences of the world. The interpersonal function enables us to express our social relationships, interact with others and get things done while the textual function allows us to organise what we say or write into a coherent and cohesive piece of text (Morley, 2000, p. 7). The interpersonal function which helps in maintaining social relations (Maledo & Uzezi, 2011; Emama, 2020) is relevant to this study.

Language is a mode of communication which is peculiar to humans. It is a means through which all human beings express their thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions among others. In fact, through language, we express our beings. Scot et al (1968, p. 3) see it as a part of human behaviour. A scam on the other hand is a fraudulent deal. This can be extended to mean dishonest behaviour in business deals. Scam can be defined as "the deliberate intent to deceive with promises of goods, services, or other financial benefits that do not exist or that were never

intended to be provided” (Titus et al., 1995, p. 54). According to Hanoch and Wood (2021, p. 260):

Scams have several features that distinguish them from most, if not all, other crimes. The perpetrators can be—and often are—located far away from their potential victims. Also, potential victims must play an active role in the process: They provide personal information, send money, keep the activity secret, and fail to report it to the authorities. In fact, without the victims’ involvement, most scams would simply fail.

The major tool in the hands of 419ers is language. According to Maledo (2011, p. 118), “effective use of language is a necessity in convincing their victims. Language is used to establish the initial contact and to sustain further contacts before any financial commitment”. Thus, Okagbare (2003, p. xi) states that one of the gabs of 419ers is mastery of the language in which they communicate with their victims. To him, 419ers are versed in the culture, the idioms and proverbs of the language they use. Since language “reveals both the individual personality of the creator and the general language habits of the society in which he lives” (Epstein, 1978, p. 21), we aim to show how syntactic distortions and cohesion reveal the dishonest intention of the scammers.

2.0 Analytical Approach

Of the numerous scam emails downloaded from the internet for this study, two are presented in full and twenty-five other excerpts are extracted from several other mails for this study. The two full mails were analysed from the perspectives of pronominal references; twelve extracts were analysed from the point of view of syntactic distortion and thirteen others from the perspectives of other cohesive features of conjunction, ellipsis, and apposition. An explanation of each of these terms is given at each level of analysis.

2.1 Syntactic Distortions

One prominent feature of scam emails is the predominance of syntactic distortions. There is hardly any sample of a scam letter without grammatical distortion. From the point of view of syntactic distortions, we examined the extracts for obvious changes in their grammatical features. A distinction is necessary here between *distortion* and *error* from the point of view of grammar. By *distortion*, we mean the intentional changes/re-arrangements of the grammatical features of an utterance; while by *error* we refer to mistakes which are systematic and unintentional. Observing the academic and social status claims of the authors of the emails, one can unarguably

conclude that there is an obvious contrast between their claims and their levels of linguistic competence. Let us illustrate with examples in the italicized portions of the following extracts:

- i) *In a brief introduction as Allah, has allowed me to ask for your help because by my power I cannot do anything in my life and that of my mother, than the will of Allah.*
- ii) *Although Personally, I kept this information secret within myself and partner to enable the whole plans and idea to be profitable and successful during the time of execution.*
- iii) *I know that this letter will come to you as a surprise as we don't know ourselves before.*
- iv) *We need your assistance as the funds are secured in an escrow account.*
- v) *We have a payment of... with Central Bank of Nigeria.*
- vi) *... Genuine U.S Dollar Bills brought into Nigeria by powerful Arab National who were out to give financial support to a Moslem former Presidential aspirant.*
- vii) *I therefore decide to contact you because I believe you must have been my late husbands friend.*
- viii) *Please be informed that my colleagues and myself will be depending on your kind advise and directives as we wish to privately invest our share of the funds into any viable business...*
- (vix) *...and in the event that you accept to work with me, you shall entitled to 40% of this funds.*
- (x) *My major reason for writing this letter to you is that my husband left a lot of properties and huge amount of cash money before his sudden death.*
- (xi) *All documents and proves to enable you get this fund have been carefully worked out and we are assuring you a 100% risk free involvement.*
- (xii) *By virtue of our position in CRP, we have over-time be able to uncover several over-invoiced/overestimated contracts.*

Example (i) has a prepositional group as an introductory adjunct; this is followed by two dependent clauses introduced by *as* and *because* and it ends with a period at the end of the second dependent clause. It does not contain a main clause; therefore, it cannot be regarded as a full sentence. But in the mail, it is used as a single sentence paragraph. Sample (ii) would have passed as a full sentence but it starts with a subordinate conjunction *Although*. Like the first, it is a dependent clause with the independent clause not supplied. It also contains other syntactic distortions. The preposition *within* is not appropriate in the context and the noun *partner* should

be preceded by the determiner *my*. *Within* is used if the action concerns an individual while *between* is used for two persons. Thus, the prepositional phrase should read *between myself and my partner*. Also, *plans and ideas* are not of equal grammatical category and so should not be conjoined. [*P*] *plans* is plural while *idea* is singular. The phrase should read *the whole plans and ideas*. Furthermore, *during the time of execution* is equally wrong in the context. *Time*, as used here, refers to a particular moment or hour. A better expression should be *during the period of execution* where a *period* would refer to the “length of time the business will last”. In (iii), the reflexive pronoun, *ourselves*, is wrongly used as the complement of the verb *know*. The writer and the recipient are not together and are not affected by the same action. The pronoun *each other* is the appropriate complement since it has the semantic implication of the writer and the recipient being strangers at the moment. In (iv), there is no concord between the subject and the verb. What we should have is *the funds are secured*. And in (v), "Dr Charles Piedo" the writer of the letter, omits the determiner *the* before the name of the bank; while Engr. Kebbi Zanna, the writer of the letter (vi), omits the indefinite article *a* before *National* and the first letter of the pre-modifying nominal element *Arab* is written in lower case. Also, there is no concord between the subject of the rank-shifted relative clause, *who* and the verb *were*. [*W*] *ho* refers to the singular nominal entity *powerful Arab National*. Therefore, it should take a singular verb *was*. The relative pronoun should always be in number agreement with the preceding noun (pronoun antecedent concord). So the verb should be singular. Thus, we should have *a powerful Arab National who was out to give financial support*. Also, the order of the modifiers in the last underlined phrase in (vi) is wrong. It violates the DOEN structure of the modifier system in which the epithet should come before the nominal element (see Adejare and Adejare, 2006). Thus, *former* should come before *Moslem* to read *a former Moslem presidential aspirant*.

In (vii) *decide to* cannot be taken as a typographical error coming from the wife of a former head of state who has all it takes to engage competent and educated secretaries and/or confidants. However, it should read *decided to*. Furthermore, omitting the possessive marker in *husbands* makes it plural. The apostrophe sign should be placed before *s* to show possession. Such distortions contradict the status claim of the wife of a former head of state. In (viii), *myself* a reflexive form of *I*, should not be used in the subject position (except for emphasis). Reflexive pronouns function either as a complement or qualifiers in prepositional groups and nominal groups (Adejare and Adejare, 2006: 122). Thus, the expression should read *my colleagues and I will be....* The writer of (vii) also fails to distinguish between *advise*, (verb) and *advice* (noun).

Thus, he writes *kind advise* instead of *kind advice*. The preposition *into* is wrongly used in this excerpt too. *We invest in*, not *invest into*. Such prepositional error may be common in ESL contexts but not in someone who claims to be an engineer. In (vix) the auxiliary verb *be* is omitted between the modal auxiliary *shall* and the lexical verb *entitled*. In (x), the use of *cash money* is verbose or unnecessary reiteration as the semantic implication of *cash* is included in *money*. This repetition is intentional and it is meant to lure the victim and appeal to his sense of greed and underscore the fact that the money is not in the form of a cheque. In the long run, such expression exposes the writer as a con man to a discerning mind. The use of *all documents and proves* in (xi) is also a distortion. The writer has failed to make a word class distinction between *proves* (a verb) and *proofs* (a noun). The expression should read *all documents and proofs*. Two instances of distortions are noticeable in (xii): the use of *over-time* and the auxiliary verb *be*. [*O*] *ver-time* is used as a hyphenated compound word, similar in meaning to the word “overtime,” meaning “extra time spent outside an official working hour”. The appropriate form should be "over time", meaning "several times" or "repeatedly". The writer also fails to use the appropriate form of the verb BE. Thus, they use the present tense form *be*, instead of the past tense form *been*. The expression should read *we have over time been able to....*

Considering the frequency of grammatical infelicities that are inherent in scam letters, the above is just a brief representation of what one encounter always in the mails. These grammatical distortions are in utter contradiction to the academic and social status claim made by the scammers. This underscores the fact that scammers are impostors, and it betrays their concealed intentions. Such distortions form a very prominent feature of 419 scam emails.

2.2 Syntactic Cohesion

Cohesion is the quality a text displays to form a unified whole."Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one PRESSUPOSES the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it (Halliday and Hassan, 1976, p. 4). Cohesion falls within the textual functions among the three meta-functions of language. Two letters and twelve other excerpts are analysed by applying Halliday and Hassan’s (1976) analytical method to see how scammers create unified text. Among the cohesive feature to be analysed are reference, conjunction, ellipsis and apposition.

2.2.1 Reference

Reference is a type of cohesive device whose interpretation depends on the presence of other linguistic items. There are two types of reference: exophoric and endophoric. Exophoric reference refers to items within a text's context of situation. Endophoric references are references to items within the text. It is further subdivided into two: cataphoric and anaphoric references. A cataphoric reference refers to items which have not been mentioned in the text while an anaphoric reference refers to items already mentioned. Reference, therefore, is a structural mechanism for signaling the connection between a full lexical expression and its pro-form/substitute (Morley, 1985, p. 76).

In Scam emails, personal references predominate. These are references derived through the use of categories of personal pronouns such as *I, you, me, your, we, my, he, his, our* etc. It is these pronouns and other links between sentences that bind sentences together and make them into a unified coherent discourse. We shall illustrate this with examples from two scam emails below.

In Letter 1, (see the graphic pronominal reference network on the next page) the personal existential reference *I* appears three times in paragraph one, referring anaphorically to *DR ANAYO OBI* identified at the address as the writer of the letter. In paragraph two it appears cataphorically once and anaphorically once to *DR ANAYO OBI* who is introduced again in the first line of the paragraph. And in paragraph four it refers back to *DR ANAYO OBI* once. *You* appears twelve times in this text: twice in paragraphs one and two, thrice in paragraph three, and five times in paragraph four. And in all, it refers anaphorically to the *PRESIDENT/CEO* whose attention is sought and who is also identified as a *Friend* via the salutation. *Your* is used eight times in the anaphoric sense to the *PRESIDENT/CEO* too (once in paragraph one, four times in paragraph three, and thrice in paragraph four). *We* is used twice in paragraph one in a cataphoric sense to *myself and some of my trusted colleagues* identified in paragraph three; and in an anaphoric manner, it appears once in paragraphs three and four, referring also to *myself and my trusted colleagues*.

FROM: DR. ANAYO OBI BANK MANAGER
 (UNION BANK OF NIGERIA PLC) MARINA LAGOS
 ATTENTION: PRESIDENT/CEO
 Dear Friend,

REQUEST FOR YOUR UNRESERVED ASSISTANCE

Firstly, I must solicit your confidence in this transaction, this by virtue of its nature as being utterly confidential and top secret. Though I know that a transaction of this magnitude will make any one apprehensive and worried, but I am assuring you all will be well at the end of the day. We have decided to contact you due to the urgency of this transaction, as we have been reliably informed of its swiftness and confidentiality.

Let me start by first introducing myself properly to you. I am DR. ANAYO OBI, a Manager at the Union Bank Nigeria PLC, Lagos. I came to know of you in my private search for a reliable and reputable person to handle a very confidential transaction, which involves the transfer of a huge sum of money to a foreign account requiring maximum confidence. A foreigner, Late Engineer William Adams, an oil Merchant/contractor with the federal Government of Nigeria, until his death three years ago in a ghastly air crash, banked with us here at the Union Bank PLC, Lagos, and had a closing balance of USD\$22.2M (Twenty-Two million, Two Hundred Thousand United States Dollars) which the bank now unquestionably expects to be claimed by any of his available foreign next of kin or alternatively donated to a discredited trust fund for arms and ammunition at a military war collage here in Nigeria.

Fervent valuable efforts are being made by the Union Bank to get in touch with any of late Engr. William Adams's next of kin (he had no known wife and children) that the management under the influence of our chairman, board of directors, Retired Major General Kalu Uke Kalu, that an arrangement for the fund to be declared "UNCLAIMABLE" and then be subsequently donated to the trust fund for Arms and ammunition, which will further enhance the course of war in Africa and the world in general. In order to avert this negative development, myself and some of my trusted colleagues in the bank now seek for your permission to have you stand as late Engr. WILLIAMS ADAMS next of kin so that the fund, USD\$22.2M, would be subsequently transferred and paid into your bank account as the beneficiary next of kin. All documents and proves to enable you get this fund have been carefully worked out and we are assuring you a 100% risk free involvement. Your share would be 30% of the total amount. 10% has been set aside for expenses, while the rest would be for myself and my colleagues for purposes in your country.

If this proposal is OK by you and you do not wish to take advantage of the trust we hope to bestow on you and your company, then kindly get to me immediately via my e-mail address furnishing me with your most confidential telephone, fax and e-mail, so that I can forward to you the relevant details of this transaction. Thank you in advance for your anticipated co-operation.

Regards.
 DR. ANAYO OBI
 (MANAGER UNION BANK OF NIGERIA PLC).

A graphic pronominal reference network of letter 1

For letter 2, (see the reference network on the next page) our focus is on *You* and its possessive form *Your* and *I* and its objective form *me*. *I* appears two times in paragraphs, one, two and nine, and once in paragraphs four and eight. In all, it refers anaphorically to *ENGR. KEBBI ZANNA* the identified writer of the letter at the address. Also, *me* refers anaphorically to *ENGR. KEBBI ZANNA* once in paragraphs one, four, and eight, and two times in paragraph five. *You* refers, anaphorically, twice in paragraphs five and seven, and once in paragraphs six and eight to *Sir*, the identified recipient of the mail through the salutation. *Your* functions thrice in paragraph one, once in paragraphs four and seven, and twice in paragraph nine in an anaphoric sense to *Sir*. Other pronouns used in this text include *we* (twice), *our* (once), *me* (twice), *yourself* (twice), *our* (once), and *us* (once).

ENGR. KEBBI ZANNA
LAGOS, NIGERIA
Telfax: 234-1-88553.5890814

Dear Sir,

BUSINESS PROPOSAL STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Your contacts came to me through a friend who does business between your country and Lagos. But I was careful not to reveal to him why I needed a competent foreign link in the person of you respected sell.

In short, I am a trained Chemist specializing in currency chemistry and top official in the Nigerian security printing and mining limited, in Lagos. During the last political dispensation in Nigeria (1992 to 1993), I was hired and involved in the chemical re-conversion of otherwise genuine us dollar bills brought into Nigeria under hidden circumstances by powerful arab national who were out to give Financial Support to a moslem former presidential aspirant. And of course, this was with the tacit connivance of the then military government.

Now in the heat that followed the political crises and the subsequent cancellation of the elections, the former moslem presidential aspirant was damped in jail and has since remained in detention, with the result that some package containing a little less than (Forty-Million United States Dollars) \$40, Million U.S. Dollars awaiting re-conversion, were abandoned in my care and custody.

As a result of the discreet nature of the reconversion exercise, which in fact is known only to me, I now have in my exclusive control about (Forty-Million United States Dollars) \$40 million U.S. Dollars bills in cash, presently in the form of bonded re-tractable negative 267.03 mint stage, deliberately defaced to elude election and facilitate their importation into Nigeria. The bills now require only chemical reconversion to grade A1 135 neon proof mint stage and subsequent movement outside of Nigeria for choice investments preferably in your country.

After successfully reconverting the Dollar bills by chemical process, and in the event that you accept to work with me, you shall entitled to 40% of this funds and another 5% shall be set aside for expenses, while the remainder of 55% shall be fore me and (2) subordinates.

What in essence, the whole exercise entail, is that you shall be required to make a brief visit to Nigeria to see things for yourself and be convinced beyond doubts, that the reconverted bills would really meet any scientific or commercial tests in terms of its genuineness, either in Nigeria, Europe or in the U.S.A

Your visit will also avail us the opportunity of knowing each other and collectively plan Workable strategies for smooth conclusion of this exercise. A letter of invitation to Enable you obtain a visa to Nigeria will be faxed to you in due course.

Finally, it is important to keep the facts of this exercise to yourself, the way I have done all these months. You must agree with me that we cannot blow up a chance of a lifetime because we cannot be discreet over a matter that would definitely work to our mutual satisfaction.

I await your urgent response, while I remain with best regards for your kind attention.

Sincerely yours,

ENGR. KEBBI ZANNA

A graphic pronominal reference network of L er 8

What is obvious in the above analysis is the relative distribution of the pronouns in all the paragraphs of both letters. Though the antecedent noun(s) may not be positioned so close to the pronouns, the nature of the letters makes their positions so strategic (at the address and salutation) that there is no ambiguity. And as one can deduce from the above, the co-texts may provide the element to which the pronouns conceivably refer. More importantly, the secret nature of the deal which is always obviously stated as the thesis statement of scam emails is well foregrounded through the use of pronominal references. As we can see from the analysis, all the references are endophoric, there is no exophoric reference. The references are made to the writers and the recipients of the letters. And the most common pronouns used are *You* (twelve times in letter 1 and six times in letter 2), *Your* (eight times in letter 1 and seven times in letter 2), *I* (five times in letter 1 and eight times in letter 2). Though *we* is used four times in letter 1, the emphasis on the antecedent conjoined noun phrase *myself and my trusted colleagues* in paragraph three is on *myself*. The above underscores the fact that it is a *You and I* type of business, no third party, thus secret. This should make the emails suspicious. Again, such usage of pronominal references in the texts is a means to instill confidence in the target victim in carrying out the secret business. Thus, apart from achieving cohesion and readability, pronominal references are thematically significant as they are used as a strategy to convince potential victims. And to a discerning reader, it may help to reveal the real intention of the sender.

2.2.2 Conjunction

Arema (1997, p. 241) refers to conjunction as “the connection of sentences into units of meaning in discourse by using conjunctions (e.g.: *and, but*) or conjuncts (e.g.: *however, yet*) to make explicit the meaning relationship between the sentences”. A conjunction is simply taken to be any element that can join structures together. Some conjunctive elements in our texts which show how conjunction is used to realise syntactic cohesion are italicized and analysed in the excerpts below:

- i) ... this is by virtue of its nature as being utterly confidential *and* top secret.
- ii) Though I know *that* a transaction of this magnitude will make anyone apprehensive *and* worried, *but* I am assuring you that all will be well at the end of the day.

- iii) A foreigner, late Engineer William Adams, an oil merchant/contractor with the Federal government of Nigeria *until* his death three years ago in a ghastly air crash, banked with us...
- iv) All documents *and* proves to enable you get this fund have been carefully worked out *and* we are assuring you a 100% risk free involvement.

In the above, the additive conjunction, *and*, conjoins two noun phrases and two adjective phrases in (i) and (ii) respectively. The two instances of *that* in (ii) bind the dependent clauses they introduce to the independent ones before them, while the adversative conjunction *but* introduces hope as against being apprehensive and worried in the preceding clause. [*U*]*ntil*, the temporal conjunction in (iii), shows the relationship of the two clauses preceding and following it in terms of time. The act of banking terminated when Engineer William Adams died. In (iv) the two usages of *and* perform additive function. The first links two noun phrases while the last links two clauses.

In letter 2 the two examples below further illustrate conjunction.

- v) *But* I was careful not to reveal to him *why* I needed a competent foreign link in the person of your respected self.
- vi) *As a result* of the discreet nature of the reconversion exercise, *which* in fact is only known to me, I now have in my exclusive control...

In (v), *but* shows a transition between the sentence it introduces and the preceding one, while the adverbial conjunct *why*(erroneously used in place of *while*) links the two clauses in the sentences. In (vi), the causal conjunct *as a result* links the content of the first clause to that of the second clause. The causal effect of the discreet nature of the business is the possession of the Forty Million United States dollars.

2.2.3 Ellipsis

Ellipsis refers to the omission of an item which can be readily supplied from the context. Usually, it is used to avoid unnecessary repetition of an item (Aremo, 1997, p. 250). It is not a very common cohesive technique used by scammers. However, let us consider the following excerpts:

- i) A. foreigner, late Engineer William Adams ... until his death three years ago in a ghastly air crash, banked with us here at Union Bank Plc Lagos and has a closing balance of USD 22.2M...
- ii) ... the former Moslem presidential aspirant was clamped in jail and has since remained in jail. (L. 8)
- iii) By virtue of our position in CRP, we have over-time been able to uncover several over-invoiced/overestimated contract. And through careful manipulation of these documents, secured for ourselves the sum of US\$14.3

Sentence (i) is a compound sentence linked by the linker *and*. The subject of the first clause is *Late Engineer William Adams*. It is modified and qualified heavily. The second clause which starts with *had* after the conjunction, has no subject, or the subject is said to be elided. From the context, the subject of the first clause is "understood" to be the subject of the second clause. This interpretation can also go for extract (ii). The elided element here is between the conjunction *and* and the verb *has*. Excerpt (iii) appears to be more complex. Here, two sentences are involved. The subject of the first sentence is *we*, placed after the introductory adjunct, and the auxiliary verb is *have*. In the second sentence, both the auxiliary verb and the subject are not supplied. From contextual information, it is understood that *we* and *have* are elided from the subject and auxiliary positions of the second sentence. This is made clear by the fact that the two sentences have a similar structure. This is a demonstration of inter-sentence cohesion.

2.2.4 Apposition

The co-occurrence of grammatical units that reflects intensive relationship or co-referentiality among similar grammatical units is called apposition (Asinyambola, 2012, p. 243). It falls within the logical component of the ideational functions of language which handles the logical relation between the various types and sizes of elements of content (Morley, 1985, p. 50). Apposition resembles coordination in linking units having grammatical affinity. However, for units to be appositive, they must be identical in reference or else, the reference of one must be included in the other (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973, p. 276). Therefore, elements of a language which have equal grammatical status or which are co-referential are said to be in apposition. Scammers make use of apposition in their texts as a cohesive device and as a credibility strategy to instil confidence in the prospective victims. Some selected examples are analysed below.

- i) *A foreigner, late Engr William Adams an oil merchant contractor with the Federal government of Nigeria, until his death three years ago in a ghastly air crash...*
- ii) *... that the management, under the influence of our chairman board of directors, Retired Major General Kalu Uke Kalu that an arrangement for the funds to be declared “UNCLIAMABLE”...*
- iii) *I am Mohammed Deen Kamara, the son of Captain Usman Kamara the former national secretary adviser to the former head of state Major Paul Jonny Korornah of the Republic of Sierra Leone.*
- iv) *I am DR CHARLES PIEDO, the director in charge of auditing and accounting section of international bank of Africa Lome-Togo West Africa.*

In excerpt (i) *A foreigner* is identified in the following phrase as *Late Engr. William Adams* who is also identified as an *oil Merchant contractor with the Federal government of Nigeria*. Therefore they are in appositive relation. And the relationship underlying the structure is that of co-reference, an intensive relation. In (ii) the *Chairman, board of directors*, is one and the same person as *Retired Major General Uke Kalu*. The feature of (iii) is that of recursive apposition, *Mohammed Deen Kamara* is identified as *the son of Captain Usman Kamara*. *Captain Usman Kamara* is further identified as *the former national secretary adviser to the former Head of State*. And *the former Head of state* is further identified as *Major Paul Jonny Kororna*. The noun phrases in apposition form a cohesive co-referential relationship among the various units of the noun phrase. It should be noted that each unit of the apposition is a noun phrase and they are equal in grammatical category. Excerpt (iv) is a simple appositive relationship as *director in charge of auditing section of international bank of west Africa* is co-referential to *DR CHARLES PIEDO*.

What is clear from the above is that scammers achieve a cohesive unified text through appositives. Apposition, more importantly, is used by scammers to provide adequate and detailed circumstantial/semantic information about the noun head being described. It is a credibility strategy used to make seemingly authentic and verifiable claims aimed at convincing the prospective victims.

Based on the above analysis of the cohesive features in the excerpts from our texts, we can state that scam emails are syntactically cohesive. A sample of scam mail is not made up of a

jumble of sentences but ones that are closely related and linked into a unified discourse. Thus, the textual function of language is achieved. More importantly, the innate capacity for telling lies that scammers possess is unveiled. Scammers are careful to knit the various strands of the text together to avoid any suspicious loophole. Such seemingly verifiable claims which scammers tend to achieve through cohesion easily lure victims to participate in the deal.

3.0 Conclusion

This study has been able to delineate syntactic distortion and cohesion as aspects of stylistic and linguistic peculiarities of Nigerian 419 scam emails. The study has shown that there is something fraudulent about the emails and the writers of the emails from the point of view of syntactic distortion and cohesion. In particular, the level of syntactic distortions inherent in the mails contradicts the educational and social status claims made by the writers. Even if the writers are not mother-tongue speakers of English, the level of distortions should be able to trigger off suspicion from the recipients. The cohesive features of the emails show that scammers are masters of the language they use. Cohesive features also help to realize the textual functions of language. However, references and apposition place undue emphasis on the writers of such letters. This goes a long way to underscore the selfishness of the writers of the letters. Thus, it is also a means of detecting the mails as fraudulent if the recipients were discerning readers and not greedy in themselves. Again, this study has been able to illustrate both the interpersonal and textual functions of language in the business of scam emails.

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