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**A Study on the Use of Contractions in Speech and Writing by
Selected Students of the University of Jos**

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Abstract

The study examined the impact (of the wrong use) contraction on speech and writing of Remedial Sciences students of the University of Jos. The study specifically sought to find out their knowledge of the contracted forms of verbs, how and in what contexts students use the contracted forms in writing and speech and whether the contractions have any impact on their writing and speaking skills. For the purpose of data collection, questionnaires were administered to 300 Remedial Sciences students selected from a class of 700 students.

Frequency count and simple percentages were used to analyze the data. The results showed that the students are cognizant of the contracted forms of verb, the contexts in which they are used and they were able to identify them correctly in different contexts. The result also revealed that the students know the rules of contractions in verb, but they are not mindful of the contexts of usage. The findings indicate the need to design instructional activities that will enable students to apply the knowledge of the use of contracted verb forms in all their activities. Interactive activities such as debate, quizzes and other group competitive activities were suggested to be organized for students on a regular basis.

Key Words: verb, contractions, speech, writing, frequency count, interactive activities

Introduction

The essence of every human language is to facilitate communication. English is not an exception. Every human language has rules and the wrong application or completely ignoring such rules governing the convention of a language adversely affects the communicative and other purposes of the language. According to Akindele and Adebite (2005) human language is unique in the sense that it has its own structure, its own system of organizing its component units into meaningful patterns.

In English, there are rules governing the organization of the different elements of speech or discourse including but not limited to the rules of tense, phrase, clause, sentence, concord, contractions and so on. It is however a worrisome idea that the wrong use of the verb and particularly its contracted forms is prevalent among speakers of English and this often impedes proper communication. This misnomer also affects student's performances in internal and external examinations especially at the secondary level of education where students write West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Examinations Council (NECO) and JAMB examinations (WAEC, 2010).

Considering the importance of English language in Nigeria, it will be an educational disservice to ignore these abnormalities. It is for this reason that the researchers intend to identify, describe and analyze the contracted forms of the English verb in both affirmative and negative sentences. The research made use of data collected from final year students of English Department, University of Jos to ascertain how often and in what contexts they use the contracted forms. It also seeks to ascertain how proficient the students are in the use of contracted forms of verb.

The English verb is a large class of words, hence it will be impossible to discuss it exhaustively in a paper of this kind. However, a few definitions will suffice. The verb may be defined as a part of the sentence that expresses what a subject does in a sentence as well as what happens to the object where there is one (Ebibi, Nnaji & Ebibi, 2014). A verb also expresses what the subject feels, experiences or thinks. At times, it expresses a state of being. According to Murthy (2007) a verb is a word used to express action or condition (a state of being) or existence. It is a word that expresses action or a state of being and is necessary to make a statement (Ukwuegbu, Okoro, Idris, Okebukola, Owokade, & Okebukola, 2004; Eka,

2004). The authors opined that the action can be physical (e.g. write, sing, shout) or mental (e.g. think, hope, expect); the most frequently used state of being verb according to them is 'Be' with its different forms. According to them, verbs are generally classified into lexical (main) and auxiliary or helping verbs. Lexical verbs are further grouped into regular and irregular, transitive and intransitive, linking and none linking, stative and dynamic, simply/complex verbs.

The study is designed to give an in depth analysis of the contracted forms of the verb with a view to further educating the readers on the conventions and their uses. For this reason and for purpose of this paper, the focus will be on auxiliary verbs because they are at the heart of contraction in English verbs. Quirk and Greenbaum (1989) state that auxiliary verbs are grouped into two major classes namely:

The primary auxiliary: *Be, Do, have* and their forms.

The modal auxiliary verbs are: *can, could, will, would, shall, should, ought to, dare may, might, must, used to and need.*

The primary auxiliary verbs are:

Be: (present forms): am, is, are, being-ing, been (past forms): was, were

Do: (present forms): do, does (past form): did

Have: (present forms): has, have (past form): had

One of the distinctions between the primary auxiliary verbs and the modal auxiliary is, while the former can be used as main and auxiliary verbs, the latter can only function in a sentence as auxiliaries. In other words, the primary auxiliary verbs can function as the main verb elements in a sentence and can also function as an auxiliary in another (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1989).

For example:

James is a student. 'Is' here is a main verb.

James is reading English. 'Is' here, is an auxiliary while reading is the main verb.

The Apostrophe (')

According to Mitcalf and Astle (1995) the apostrophe is used to indicate possession and it is also used to take the place of, for the sake of abbreviation of, omitted letters'.

For the purpose of this paper, the use of the apostrophe for omitted letters is more relevant. Confusion between the possessive *its* and the contracted *it's*. (It is) is one of the commonest mistakes in spelling. *'It's is* one of the contractions which is in the same group as *can't, won't, shouldn't, 'it is', I'd, we'll, they're.*

Quirk and Greenbaum (1989) explain that the apostrophe is used in writing genitive singular and plural (this marking the difference between dogs, dogs' and dog's ;) and the informal contractions, especially of the negative particles and of auxiliaries with pronoun subjects.

*Example: John did n't
He'll I've*

The apostrophe mark (') is a very important element in English sentence because it is a very strong and indeed the only mark used for contractions in English whether in affirmative or negative statements. It will therefore be unwise to neglect it (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1989).

Contractions in Affirmative and Negative Expressions

Contractions in English verbs are too wide that it will be relatively difficult to explain each one as it occurs in different contexts. The researchers have however tried to exemplify the use of the contracted forms of the auxiliary verbs *be, have, do* and their forms including the modal auxiliaries using simple short sentences. Some of the non-contracted and contracted forms have been summarized in the tables below. This is meant to serve as appetizers to those who may find it time consuming to read them as illustrated in the sentence after each table.

Long and short forms (*contracted forms of: to be, am, are and is.*)

<i>Affirmative</i>		<i>Negative</i>	
Long form	Short form	Long form	Contracted form
I am	I'm	I am not.	I'm not.

He, she, it

He is	He's	He is not	He <i>isn't</i> order he's not
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We, you, they:

We are	We're	We were not.	We <i>aren't</i> order <i>we're not.</i>
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To, be (was, were)

<i>Affirmative</i>		<i>Negative</i>	
<i>I, he, she, it:</i>			
Long form	Short form	Long form	Contracted form
<i>I/he/she/it</i> was	-	<i>I/he/she/it</i> was not	<i>I/he/she/it</i> wasn't

We, you, they:

<i>We/you/they</i> were.	-	<i>We/you/they</i> were not.	<i>We/you/they</i> weren't.
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Have got

Affirmative

Negative

Long form	Contracted term	Long form	Contracted form
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I, we, you, they:

I/we/you/they have got.	I/we/you/they 've got.	I/we/you/they have not got.	I/we/you/they 've not got or we <i>haven't</i> got.
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He, she, it:

He/she/it has got	He/she/it 's got	He/she/it has not got.	He/she/it 's not got or he <i>hasn't</i> got.
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Had

Affirmative

Negative

Long form	Contracted form	Long form	Contracted form
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Every time regardless of the subject (I, he, she, it, we, you, they)

I had	I'd	I had not.	I <i>hadn't</i> .
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Do

Affirmative

Negative

Long form	Contracted form	Long form	Contracted form
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I/we/you/they

I/we/you/they do.		I/we/you/they do not.	I/we/you/they <i>don't</i>
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He/she/it

He/she/it does.		He/she/it does not.	He/she/it <i>doesn't</i> .
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Did

Affirmative

Negative

Long form	Contracted form	Long form	Contracted form
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Every time regardless of the subject (I, he, she, it, we, you, they)

I/he/she/it/we/you/they did.	--	I/he/she/it/we/you/they did not.	I/he/she/it/we/you/they <i>didn't</i> .
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Modals auxiliaries: can, could, must, might, will, would, shall, should, ought to, etc.

Affirmative		Negative	
Long form	Contracted form	Long form	Contracted form
<i>Can</i>	–	<i>Cannot</i>	<i>Can't</i>
<i>Could</i>	–	<i>Could not</i>	<i>Couldn't</i>
<i>Must</i>	–	<i>Must not</i>	<i>Mustn't</i>
<i>Might</i>	–	<i>Might not</i>	–
<i>Need</i>	–	<i>Need not</i>	<i>Needn't</i>
<i>Will</i>	<i>'ll</i>	<i>Will not</i>	<i>Won't</i>
<i>Would</i>	<i>'d</i>	<i>Would not</i>	<i>Wouldn't</i>
<i>Shall</i>	<i>'ll</i>	<i>Shall not</i>	<i>Shan't</i>
<i>Should</i>	<i>'d</i>	<i>Should</i>	<i>Shouldn't</i>
<i>Ought to</i>	–	<i>Ought not to</i>	<i>Oughtn't to</i>

The verb *be* – auxiliary and main verb.

The verb *be* can be an auxiliary verb or a main verb in English.

Be as a main verb in the simple present (am, are, is)

Affirmative: *I'm from Jos.*

Negative: *I'm not from Jos.*

He/she/it

Affirmative: *He/she/it's from Jos.*

Negative: *He/she/it isn't from Jos.*

We/you/they

Affirmative: *We/you/they are from Jos.*

Negative: *We/you/they aren't from Jos.*

Be as a main verb in the simple past (was, were)

Affirmative

Negative (I, We)

I was here.

I wasn't here.

We were here.

We weren't here.

Be as an auxiliary verb in the present progressive (am, are, is).

Affirmative

I'm reading a book.

We are reading a book.

Negative (personal pronouns: I and We)

I'm not reading a book we.

We aren't reading a book.

Research Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was descriptive survey. The study administered questionnaires to a selected number of the students to ascertain their ability to identify the use of contracted forms of verb, establish the frequency of the use of contractions in their spoken and written communications. The data obtained from the questionnaire helped to determine the students' ability to identify verb contractions when used in different contexts and the frequency with which they use contractions in their speech and writing. The data were further used to determine whether or not contracted forms were used skilfully by the students.

Data Presentation and Results

The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentage.

The results of the data analyses are presented as follows:

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
1	0		280	20	93.3	6.6	300

Question 1: Sought to know whether students of Remedial Science Department are aware of the existence of contracted verb forms in English language usage.

The table indicates that 93.3% of the respondents agreed that they are aware of the existence of contracted verb forms in English Language usage leaving only 6.6% of the population as ignorant of the concept.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
2	0		290	10	96.6	3.3	300

Question 2: sought to know if the students are aware of contracted verb forms and if they make use of them at any point.

The table indicates that 96.6% of the population agreed that they make use contracted forms of the verbs for various points while 3.3% said they do not use them.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
3	0		270	30	90	10	300

Question 3: This question sought to know whether the students know when and where to use contracted verb forms and if they observe the rules of usage.

The table indicates that 90% of students accepted that they know the time and context in which contractions are used both in spoken and written English while 10% do not know when and where contracted verb forms are used in English.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
4	0		250	50	83.3	16.6	300

Question 4: Sought to know whether the students observe rules of usage of contractions in English verb. The table shows that 83.3% of the respondents agreed that students observe rules while 16.6% do not observe the rules.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
5	0		280	20	93.3	6.6	300

Question 5: Sought to know if the students use contraction when writing text message or email to their friends.

The table reveals that 93.3% of the students use contraction when writing text messages and emails while 6.6% do not use contractions in similar writings.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents

6	0		260	40	86.6	13.3	300
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Question 6: Sought to know if the students use contractions mistakenly during official writings like assignment, tests, or examinations.

The table below shows that 86.6% use contractions in official writing, such as school assignments, test and examinations while 13.3% of the population say they do not use them.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
7	80	26.6	200	20	73.2		30

Question 7: Sought to know whether the students use contractions when speaking to their superiors or to only their friends.

The table indicates that 73.2% of the respondents use contracted verb form to both their superiors and friends, while 26.6% of the respondents are not sure whether they use contracted verb forms.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
8	50	16.6	100	150	33.3	50	300

Question 8: Sought to know if the use of contracted verb forms has negatively affected the fluency of their spoken English.

The table indicates that 16.6% of the respondents are say it has not affected their fluency in the language while 83.3% of the respondents say it has affected their fluency of spoken English.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
9	0		290	10	96.6	3.3	300

Question 9: Sought to know if the students plan to be more careful and observant in their spoken and written English with regards to the use of contracted verb forms. The table indicates that 96.6% of the respondents plan to be more observant in their spoken and written English while 3.3% of the respondents say they will not be careful or observant when using contracted forms of the verbs.

Question	Total Number Not Sure	% of Not Sure	Total Number of Yes	Total Number of No	% of Yes	% of No	Total Number of Respondents
10	300	10	270	0	90%		300

Question 10: Sought to know how the students plan to be observant and careful in the use of contracted verb forms.

The table shows that 27 students or 90% of the students say they will be observant by using them more appropriately while 10% say they are not sure on what to do.

Questions	No. of students with wrong answers 'could not'	% of Could Not	No. of students with correct answers 'could'	% Could	Total Number of Respondents
11	20	6.6	280	93.3	300
12	10	3.3	290	96.6	300
13	20	6.6	280	93.3	300
14	10	3.3	290	96.6	300
15	10	3.3	290	96.6	300
16	10	3.3	290	26.6	300
17	0		300	100	300
18	10	3.3	290	96.6	300
19	30	10	270	90	300
20	0		300	100	300

Questions 11 – 20 sought to know whether the respondents recognized when contracted verb forms are used or recognized the use of contracted verb forms.

The results reveal that at least 93.3% of the respondents to these questions were able to identify the use of contracted verb forms in the given sentences. This indicates that the students can identify the use of contracted verb forms in English.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that students of the Department of Remedial Sciences, University of Jos are generally aware of the existence of contracted verb forms in English language and they use contractions at different points in their interaction and in writing. Majority of the students deliberately use contracted verb forms in official and serious academic writings such as assignments, tests and even examinations. In other words, a very high percentage of the students admit to using contractions in formal or official writings as revealed in their responses

The study further showed that the students know when and in what contexts contractions are used in both written and spoken English. This is completely negation of their knowledge because whereas the students claimed knowledge of the contexts in which contractions are used, they still use contractions to write in official contexts. It is also a contradiction that students admit that they use them to speak to their superiors even when the situation demands the use formal language. Another discovery from the study was that the use of contracted verb forms affects the students' fluency spoken English.

Finally and interestingly, the study revealed that the students recognize and could identify contractions used in different and complicated contexts. This is evident in the very high percentage of the students that were able to identify sentences with contraction from among those without contraction. It is ironical to discover that many of them still use contractions in formal and official contexts in spite of good knowledge of the contracted verb forms exhibited in their responses to these questions

Conclusion

In conclusion, a good number of students of the Remedial Sciences Department showed a good knowledge of the contracted verb forms, demonstrated appropriateness of usage of the same in their spoken and written English section of the questionnaire. The students also applied the rules of usage of the concept in responding to the questionnaire as revealed by the statistics of their responses however many of them still use contracted verb forms in official contexts which is a negation of the rules the use of contracted forms of English verb.

This paper suggested that language lecturers and teachers alike should place emphasis on the need for the students to apply the rules of the language taught and acquired to their daily events. This will prevent situations where some students still use many abbreviations and contracted verb forms in academic papers and in other formal situations. In the same vein, teachers should penalize students who intentionally or inadvertently use contracted verb

forms out of contexts in whatever aspect of English even if it is not the concept that is being taught and they should reward those who observe/apply the rules correctly. Furthermore, Students should be exposed to a good number of interactive activities or events such as inter and intra-departmental and university seminars, debates and quizzes to reinforce what is taught and learnt in class.

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