Original Paper

A Study of Some Morphological Problems of Chadian Learners of English

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Abstract

The study of new Englishes has been the focus of many researchers who evaluate the spoken and written quality of non-native English in different parts of the globe. This study investigates morphological errors made by Chadian learners of English in their written and oral production. 250 essays by Première and Terminale learners of Lycée Pascal Yoadimnadji and 300 ones by students of the University of Doba were scrutinised. This was completed with oral presentations and free conversations on topics of general interest by 30 secondary school learners and 50 university students. The paper particularly looked at their production of plural forms, third person singular markers, omission/addition, and the production of the -ed morpheme of the simple past tense and past participle. The results show that irrespective of their levels of education, Chadian learners of English generally omit or mispronounce the inflection morphemes in their various forms. The findings also reveal that some of the errors found are general features of non-native English, while others are specific to Chadian setting where English varieties from Cameroon (CamFE), Nigeria (NigE & Pidgin English), and from Sudan lead to a real mixture in classrooms.

Keywords

New Englishes, Interference, inflexion, morpheme, Francophone English

1. Introduction

English timidly entered Chad with the arrival of missionaries in the early 1900s (Anderson, 2008), but has remained stagnant. The country faces language barriers due to a lack of enough English speakers who can help in its multinational, economic and cultural cooperation with English speaking countries. In order to bridge this communication gap, in 1990s, Chad has adopted the teaching/learning of English

throughout the country. The discovery of oil and the multilateral cooperation with English-owned corporations motivated francophone Chadians to learn English (Safotso & Ndoubangar, 2018) as an important developmental tool (Anderson, 2008). English has thus become a language of economic and socio-cultural development of the country, especially in the oil and educational sectors. It has become a challenging language to French, which is regarded as a language of colonisation and imperialism according to Anderson (2008). English is thus a compulsory subject in Chad right from *Sixième*, the first class of the secondary school. The country's response to the development of English includes the creation of public and private English language teaching institutions. The English taught in public and private institutions is generally Standard British English or American English. However, there is a problem concerning the efficient use of the standard varieties as many factors cause important deviations. To date very little research has been carried out on English in Chad (Anderson, 2008; Safotso, 2018; Safotso & Ndoubangar, 2018, 2020). Most information can rather be found in students' dissertations (Alladoum, 2014; Ndoubangar, 2018; Titibeye, 2020; Ngaidandi, 2021; Tao, 2021), etc.

1.1 English-language Teaching in Chad

English language does not play a leading role in formal education in Chad since French and Arabic are the two official languages of the country, but it is now taught at all levels of education, and the enthusiasm of many learners to acquire it is real. At tertiary level, there are already two full departments of English in Chadian universities, namely at the Universities of N'Djamena and Doba. Many linguistic centres in the capital city also offer English for Specific Purposes courses to learners who prepare to work with oil companies or to travel to English-speaking countries. In diplomacy, English is the language of transactions between Chad and countries like the USA, Nigeria, Canada, India, etc.

The overall objective of the teaching of English in Chadian schools as stated in the updated programme for secondary schools (*Programmes Réactualisés de l'Enseignement Secondaire Général*, 2008) and as underlined by the departments of English of the universities of Doba and Ndjamena, targets the following: (1) enriching learners' ability to express themselves and to be externalised to multiple areas and occasions of exchange; (2) acquiring and mastering the four basic linguistic competencies which are the ability to listen, write, read and fluently speak English; (3) understanding and being understood in simple communication situations with English-speaking people, and (4) being opened and exposed to British and American cultures and civilisations.

The syllabi designed for various levels from the entry into secondary school to *Terminale* (Upper Sixth) contain lessons such as English sounds, verbs, tenses, adjectives, adverbs, nouns and words' formation. In each class teachers are prescribed specific syllabuses containing all the lessons to be taught, which they must follow systematically. They have no freedom to go out of those syllabuses, which are organised on a weekly and monthly basis throughout the year. In the programme, emphasis is generally on the mastery of word formation and accurate pronunciation.

1.2 Challenges to English Language Teaching in Chad

The lack of trained/qualified teachers for all public and private schools contributes to poor performance of learners. Some teachers come from countries like Nigeria, Cameroon and Sudan with their various varieties, deviations and accents. Those are some of the factors that lead to the poor quality of English produced by Chadian learners. Moreover, the lack of locally produced literature and teaching materials aggravates the situation. The learners practise English only at school. Back home, they speak French/Arabic and their local languages. This work thus aims to investigate some morphological features in their written and oral productions.

2. Review of literature

According to Weinreich (1953), any speaker of two languages will tend to identify sounds, words, structures and meanings of one of the languages with corresponding elements in the other language. That is to say, speakers of two or more languages are engaged in a process of making "interlingual identifications". For a foreign language learner, the usual direction of the influence will be from the mother tongue to the foreign language at phonological level. This will produce typical foreign pronunciation.

An investigation of students' grammatical and lexical errors (Al-Ta'ani, 2019) in eight United Arab Emirates universities showed that some errors were due to interference from the first language and that the majority of them were interlanguage errors, simplification, and overgeneralization. Aliyu (2017) looked at the use of grammatical morphemes –ed and –s in the spoken English of secondary school students of Bauchi State in Nigeria. The subjects were made up of 52 female students who did some reading tasks and structured presentations completed with interviews. The findings showed that the participants either did not pronounce the morphemes at all or pronounced them wrongly. They were not aware that morphemes are phonologically conditioned and can be the cause of their wrong realisation.

Rezai (2013) explored the morphological spoken errors of Iranian EFL learners. The results showed mis-selection as the most frequent type of errors and the difference between gender in terms of errors frequency. These errors were attributed to interference with L1, interlanguage, simplification and overgeneralization. Gayo & Widodo (2018) pointed out that most EFL students' morphological and syntactical errors such as omission, addition and misuse are caused by interlingual and intralingual factors.

A study of some features of Cameroon Francophone English (Safotso, 2012) showed that French grammatical rules heavily impacted the subjects' productions. The data from various sources helped to focus the investigation among others on the plural forms, 3rd person singular markers, simple past tense and past participle morpheme. The results revealed that the subjects mostly used the French reading/pronunciation rules in the production of most items concerned. For example, they generally silenced the –s plural marker. Mesthrie & Bhatt (2012) reviewed a number of World Englishes by describing and categorising them historically and geographically. Some of the theories and approaches

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reviewed here will be useful in the analysis of the data below.

3. Methodology

The data for this study were gathered from Chadian secondary school (Lycée Lycée Pascal Yoadimnadji) and university students' (University of Doba) written and oral productions. The focus was on how they produce the third person singular /plural markers -s, -oes, -es, -ies and the simple past tense /participle morpheme –ed. 300 essays produced by university students and 250 ones by *Première* (Lower Sixth) and *Terminale* (Upper Sixth) learners were collected and scrutinised, making a total of 550 scripts. The topics treated in the various essays were of general interest such as football, travelling, family life, etc. This exercise was completed with some oral presentations in class and free conversations by the subjects. 30 secondary school participants and 50 university ones took part in that activity. In secondary school, three colleagues supplied the scripts, facilitated access into their classrooms and prepared their learners for the exercises. Oral presentations at this level mainly consisted in very short reports by students on some events observed in town and answers to teachers' questions during the lessons. At the end of each session, volunteer learners were paired up to engage in a conversation on a topic of their choice. Five sessions of two hours each were necessary to collect enough data. At university level, Tompté gathered all the data during his teachings and marking of scripts. Conversations among peers were recorded on a mobile telephone for a better later exploitation (transcription). The analysis was done taking into account the level of education of the subjects to see if this variable has an impact on their productions.

4. Results

The analysis is organised into the various categories of errors made in the productions, i.e., omission, addition and some features of misuse.

4.1 Omission of the Plural and Possessive –s Morpheme

Both groups of participants omit the -s plural marker in nouns and possessive cases in their production as presented in the table below.

Table 1. Omission of the Plural Marker and Possessive -s Morpheme

Sentence samples	Standard English Version
The white **car** given to people are expensive.	The white *cars* given to people are expensive.
Under republican **institution**, women **voter** were fewer than nowadays.	Under republican *institutions*, women *voters* were fewer than nowadays.
They said that **mango** are very rich **fruit**.	They said that *mangoes* are very rich *fruits*.
The statute **book** are full of foolish **law**.	The statute *books* are full of foolish *laws*.
All the **people** money has been stolen.	All the *people's* money has been stolen.

My mother **earring** are gold-made	My *mother's earrings* are gold made.
This is a waste of **villager resource.**	This is a waste of *villagers' resources.*
All the **school-leaver** and **dropout** lack **job.**	All the *school-leavers* and *dropouts* lack *jobs.*

The above omissions are due to the influence of French reading rule, which does not pronounce the final plural -s. For example, in the plural of French word like *des/les torches* [tɔRʃ] -s is silent because the -s inflection is not pronounced in that language (Safotso, 2012). The cause of these errors could also be poor or incomplete learning/teaching approach. In Chad, very few teachers of English have gone to a teacher training school. As to possessives, the learners may have used their intuition as they function in a different way in French.

4.2 Omission of -s Morpheme of Third Person Singular Present Tense

In their oral and written productions, both secondary school and university students omit the -s morpheme inflexion of the third person singular in the simple present tense as illustrated below.

Table 2. Omission of the "s" Morpheme of Third Person Singular

Sentence Samples	Standard English Version
He **try** to win the game every day.	He *tries* to win the game every day.
Gas **pollute** the air and the water.	Gas *pollutes* air the water.
She **study** English every year.	She *studies* English every year.
A good student **go** to school every day.	A good student *goes* to school every day.

These deviations are certainly due to the fact that in French the verb is inflected differently from English in the simple present tense. So, the subjects may have used their intuition to produce what is obtained here. Safotso (2012, 2473) and Mesthrie and Bhatt (2012, 46) pointed out that this type of deviation is a regular feature in many non-native Englishes, and thus should not be considered as error. That is what Kachru (1983) considers a deviation from Standard English seen as a regular feature of new Englishes. Therefore, when a deviant feature becomes consistent in any variety of English it should be codified as one of its regular characteristics.

4.3 Omission of the -ed Morpheme of Regular Verbs

The simple past tense of regular verbs has three different pronunciations /-t, -d, -∩d/ that cause problems to Chadian learners of English in their oral production at secondary and university levels. Table 3 below shows some of these features.

Table 3. Production of -ed Morpheme

Sample words	RP form	Subjects' realization
*Book**ed***	bʊkt	bʊk
*Miss**ed***	mɪst	mis
*Bak**ed***	beɪkt	bake
*Cross**ed***	krɒst	kros
*Serv**ed***	sɜːvd	sɛrv
*Play**ed***	pleɪd	plai
*Battl**ed***	bætld	batl
*Appear**ed***	əpɪəd	apiə
*Obtain**ed***	əbteɪnd	obten
*Hat**ed***	heɪtɪd	
	stɑːtɪd	hɛt
*Start**ed***	wɒntɪd	stɑrt
*Want**ed***	ləʊdɪd	want
*Load**ed***	krʊkɪd	lode
*Crook**ed***	wɒntɪd	kruk
*Want**ed***		wɒnt

In oral production, the simple past tense -ed morpheme was systematically silenced by both secondary school and university participants. The subjects pronounced all the verbs as in their infinitive form. This particular problem may be caused their interlanguage. In Cameroon Francophone English (CamFE), Safotso (2018, p. 4) reported some of these features, e.g. "*disturbed, damaged, arrived, trampled* [dist b, damed↗, araf, tram] for [ɔ∩st ːbd, ○∵∓∩○↗○, ╠↵↦∩╙○,↦∴∓≺ℓ○]," which seem consistent in Chadian learners' speech.

4.4 Addition of -s Morpheme to Plural Forms of Uncountable Nouns

In the written productions, the participants add an -s morpheme to uncountable nouns to form their plural forms. Examples of these are provided in the table below.

Table 4. Addition of the -s Morpheme to Plural Forms of Uncountable Nouns

Sentence Samples	Standard English Version
Our students received all this **moneys**.	Our students received all this *money*.
The road accidents caused a lot of **damages** to the passengers.	The road accident caused a lot of *damage* to the passengers.
This vehicle carries a lot of **luggages**.	This vehicle carries a lot of *luggage*.
The policeman obtained a lot of **informations**	The policeman obtained a lot of *information* from

from the agent.	the agent.
Chadians breed millions of **cattles**.	Chadians breed millions of *cattle*.
My mother bought ten **dozens** of eggs.	My mother bought ten *dozen* of eggs.
There are a lot of **furnitures** in that house.	There are a lot of *pieces of furniture* in that house.
I thank the Pastor for all his **advices**.	I thank the Pastor for all his *pieces of advice*.

These errors may be due to the fact that some of the nouns concerned are common to French and English. They are countable in French, but are not in English. In English, *luggage, information, cattle* etc. are invariable, but in French, they take an *-s* in their plural form. As Mesthrie and Bhatt (2012) argue, generally, in non-native Englishes, the cause of some errors comes from the fact that L2 speakers use a form that reveals their uncertainty about the rules of the target language. It may also be a version developed by some more competent L2 speakers of their varieties. That is where the term new Englishes applies where each part of the globe develops a variety that corresponds to the linguistic repertoire of its area. The subjects also add an -s to the plural form of irregular nouns. This is shown in the following table.

Table 5. Addition of the -s Morpheme to Irregular Nouns

Sentence samples	Standard English version
How many **childrens** do you have?	How many *children* do you have?
There were several **mens** in the office.	There were several *men* in the office.
All the **Womens** were exempted from being checked.	All the *women* were exempted from being checked.
The ten **oxens** from that herd are old.	The ten *oxen* from that herd are old.

The problem here like in the preceding section is induced by French in which all the nouns concerned are regular, and thus take the plural marker -s, e.g. un enfant/des enfan**ts** (a child/children); un home/des hom**es** (a man/men); une femme/des femm**es** (a woman/women). This may also be due to the fact that in French grammar there are a host of rules concerning the plural forms of nouns. For example, all the nouns that end in -x, -s, and -z do not vary in French (une croi**x**/deux croi**x**, un ne**z**/deux ne**z**, un fil**s**/deux fil**s**). On the contrary, those whose singular end in -al have their plural in -aux, e.g. un anim**al**/deux anim**aux** (an animal/two animals), those whose singular end in -ail have their plural form in –aux, e.g. un trav**ail**/deux trav**aux** (a work/ two works), etc. So, being not sure of the category in which falls an English noun the subjects prefer just to add an -s to it to form its plural form.

4.5 Misuse of the Past Form of Irregular Verbs

In the written and spoken productions of secondary school participants, the past tense forms of English irregular verbs are misused. Although university students do not misuse them systematically, that problem is also found in some of their productions as illustrated by Table 6 below.

Table 6. Production of Past Tense Forms of Irregular Verbs

Sentence Samples	Standard English Version
The Carpenter **cutted** the piece of wood.	The Carpenter _cut_ the piece of wood.
David **drinked** the whole bottle by himself.	David _drank_ the whole bottle by himself.
The dog **eated** that meat.	The dog _ate_ that meat.
Tom **falled** on the ground and begged for mercy.	Tom _fell_ on the ground and begged for mercy.
The man was **borned** a sinner.	The man was _born_ a sinner.
I **puted** my telephone on charge	I _put_ my telephone on charge.

The wrong use of the past tense / past participle -ed morpheme may be caused by overgeneralization which is a very common problem in EFL learners' productions. These learners have guessed that forming any past tense of English verbs is obtained by adding -ed to the infinitive of the verb.

4.6 Some Productions in General Free Speech

In free speech, the subjects of the two groups deviate almost in the same way as they do in their written production, e.g. Fatwat is **richest than** his friend for Fatwat is _richer than_ his friend; she **know** to cook millet for _she knows_ to cook millet; my friend **have** a lot of money for my _friend has_ a lot of money; the **passenger** were in the car for the _passengers_ were in the car; they went to school since two **hours** for they went to school for _two hours,_ etc.. This somewhat confirms the regularity of some features observed in their written production. The following section summarises the various trends observed in the productions.

4.7 General Trends in Deviations

Although Chadian secondary school and university students have almost the same morphological problems, this classification is necessary to check if the level of education somehow matters. As the data were being processed, there were two separate files to count the number of correct and incorrect productions per group of participants. This was done only on the essays as it was not possible to systematically count them in oral exercises.

Table 7. Distribution of Secondary School Learners Participants' Problems

Number of essays N =250	Frequency	Percentage
Correct realisations	15	06%
Omission	88	35.2%
Addition	68	27.72%
Misuse	88	35.2%

The table shows that very few (6%) participants correctly produced the features under research in their essays. Many of the problems are omission and misuse which respectively represent each 35.2% of the

productions. Although they make less addition errors, their percentage is also quite significant (27.72%). This is quite striking as one may wonder about how intelligible those productions are. Given that they are grammatical errors, to their teachers, whose emphasis is on communication, they pose little problem as some of them make the same errors. The difficulty may mostly be with their oral production (to the Inner Circle speakers). Table 9 below distributes the university student participants' errors.

Table 8. Distribution of University Students Participants' Problems

Number of essays N=300	Frequency	Percentage
Correct realisations	116	38.67%
Omission	65	21.67%
Addition	46	15.33%
Misuse	73	24.33%

In their essays, university student participants have a higher number of correct realisations than their peers of secondary school (38.67% of the participants), which implies that the level of education somewhat influences Chadian learners' production in the area of morphology. So, as they progress, they become conscious of some errors. Misuse and omission errors represent respectively 24.33% and 21.67% against 34.51 % for secondary school subjects. Both groups of learners make less addition errors (26.27 % and 15.33%).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Chadian learners of English, irrespective of their level of education have enormous difficulties in producing the inflexional morphemes. They generally omit /silence the plural, third person singular and the possessive marker -s. The past tense -ed morpheme causes serious phonological problems to them as they generally silence it in their oral productions. Addition and omission are also two major problems in their productions. But as they progress to tertiary education, they slightly ameliorate their use of inflectional morphemes. As the findings show, most features analysed can be seen as general features of francophone English in particular and World Englishes in general as pointed out by Safotso (2012) and Mesthrie and Bhatt (2012). What is striking is the fact that in a French-Arabic-speaking context the results are not so far from those reported elsewhere.

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