A CLOSE NOTIFICATION OF THE USE OF BOUND MORPHEMES IN THE ENGLISH SPEECH OF LEVEL 2 STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF N'DJAMENA (CHAD)

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Abstract

This study examines the use of bound morphemes in the English speech of Level 2 students of the Department of English, University of N'Djamena (Chad). It seeks to identify the most common morphological patterns, errors, and challenges encountered by learners in applying bound morphemes during oral communication. Using a qualitative descriptive method based on recorded student speech and classroom interactions, the study reveals that students demonstrate partial mastery of inflectional morphemes such as plural –s, possessive –'s, and past tense –ed, while derivational morphemes remain largely misunderstood or inconsistently applied. The paper concludes that insufficient exposure to authentic English input, interference from French and local languages, and limited morphological awareness contribute to these errors. Pedagogical recommendations include explicit teaching of English morphology, emphasis on pronunciation of bound morphemes, and the integration of morphological awareness into oral communication courses.

Keywords : *Bound morphemes, Inflectional morphemes, Level 2 students, University of N'Djamena, Departement of English.*

Une Observation profonde de l'utilisation des morphèmes dans le discours Anglais produit par des étudiants de deuxième année du Département d'Anglais, Université de N'Djamena (Tchad)

Résumé

Cette étude analyse l'utilisation des morphèmes dans le discours Anglais des étudiants de deuxième année du Département d'Anglais de l'Université de N'Djamena (Tchad). Elle identifie les modèles morphologiques fréquentes, les erreurs et les difficultés rencontrées lors de la communication orale produite par ces etudiants. À partir d'une méthode descriptive qualitative basée sur des enregistrements et des interactions en classe, les résultats montrent que les étudiants maîtrisent partiellement les morphèmes flexionnels (pluriel –*s*, possessif –'*s*, passé –*ed*), tandis que les morphèmes dérivationnels sont souvent mal utilisés ou incompris. Les erreurs s'expliquent par le manque d'exposition à l'Anglais authentique, l'interférence du français et des langues locales, et une conscience morphologique limitée. Les perspectives pédagogiques incluent l'enseignement explicite de la morphologie Anglaise, la prononciation correcte

des morphèmes, et l'intégration de la conscience morphologique dans les cours de communication orale.

Mots-clés : *Morphèmes liés, Morphèmes flexionnels, Étudiants de deuxième année, Université de N'Djamena, Département d'Anglais*

Introduction

Morphology, as a branch of linguistics, studies the internal structure of words and the way in which morphemes the smallest units of meaning combine to form words. Within this framework, bound morphemes play a vital role, as they cannot stand alone but must attach to other morphemes to convey grammatical or lexical meaning. For example, the –s in *cats*, the –ed in *played*, and the prefix un– in *unhappy* are all bound morphemes. In English language learning, especially in second language contexts such as Chad, the correct use of bound morphemes is crucial for grammatical accuracy and fluent communication. However, many learners of English at university level still face difficulties in using them appropriately in speech, often omitting or mispronouncing them. This paper therefore provides a close notification that is, a detailed observation and analysis of how bound morphemes are used by Level 2 English students at the University of N'Djamena. It aims :

To highlight patterns, identify errors, and propose pedagogical interventions to enhance morphological competence among learners.

To identify the types of bound morphemes used by Level 2 English students at the University of N'Djamena in their spoken English.

To analyze the accuracy and frequency with which students apply inflectional and derivational bound morphemes in spontaneous speech.

To examine common errors or patterns of misuse of bound morphemes among the students.

To determine the linguistic factors (phonological, syntactic, or semantic) that influence students' correct or incorrect use of bound morphemes.

To evaluate the impact of mother-tongue interference on students' ability to use English bound morphemes correctly.

To assess the extent to which classroom instruction on morphology contributes to students' spoken mastery of bound morphemes.

To propose pedagogical strategies that could improve the proper use of bound morphemes in the students' spoken English.

It is to mention that in this introductory section, various works provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study by exploring previous research on morpheme acquisition, bound morphemes in second language learning, and morphological errors among EFL learners. This section examines key concepts, theories, and findings that inform the analysis of English speech among Level 2 students at the University of N'Djamena. Morphology is the branch of linguistics that studies the structure of words and the rules for word

formation (Katamba, 2005; Yule, 2020). Morphemes, the smallest meaningful units of language, are classified into Free morphemes which stand alone as words (e.g. *book, run, happy*) and Bound morphemes which must attach to other morphemes to convey meaning (e.g. *–s, –ed, un–, –ness*). Bound morphemes are further divided into: Inflectional morphemes which indicate grammatical functions without changing word class (e.g. plural *–s*, past tense *–ed*) and Derivational morphemes which form new words or change word class (e.g, prefix *un–* in *unhappy*, suffix *–ment* in *movement*). Bound morphemes are crucial in second language acquisition, as correct use is associated with grammatical accuracy, fluency, and lexical development (Brown, 1973; Ellis, 2003). Several theoretical frameworks have guided research on morpheme acquisition. Brown (1973) and Dulay & Burt (1974) found that English morphemes are acquired in a predictable order by learners. For example: Early acquired: progressive *–ing*, plural *–s* and Later acquired: past tense *–ed*, third-person singular *–s*. This developmental sequence reflects both phonological salience and functional frequency in language use. Selinker (1972) proposed that second language learners create an intermediate linguistic system influenced by their first language (L1) and the target language (L2). This theory explains common errors such as: Omission of bound morphemes due to L1 phonological patterns and Transfer of L1 syntactic structures into L2 speech. Krashen (1982) suggested that learners acquire grammatical morphemes in a natural, predictable order, largely independent of explicit instruction. Omissions of past tense *–ed* or possessive *–'s* are consistent with this hypothesis, as some morphemes are inherently more difficult to acquire than others. Abubakar (2018) examined Nigerian EFL learners and found frequent omission of plural *–s* and past tense *–ed* in oral speech, attributed to L1 interference and low exposure. Mba (2020) reported that Cameroonian students overgeneralized morphemes (e.g. *comed, childs*) in spontaneous speech, reflecting developmental errors. Nation (2001) emphasized that derivational morphemes expand learners' vocabulary. However, EFL learners often underuse these morphemes, relying instead on base forms. Katamba (2005) noted that derivational errors frequently occur when learners attempt to create unfamiliar words without sufficient morphological awareness. Studies in African EFL classrooms show that written grammar exercises improve recognition of morphemes but do not guarantee accurate oral use (Ellis, 2003). Phonological difficulties and teaching methods that emphasize reading and writing over speaking contribute significantly to oral morpheme errors.

1. Definition of Morphemes

A *morpheme* is the smallest grammatical unit in a language that carries meaning. There are two main types:

1. Free morphemes: Can stand alone (e.g. *book*, *run*, *happy*).

2. Bound morphemes: Cannot stand alone and must attach to other morphemes (e.g. –*s*, –*ed*, *un*–).

Bound morphemes are generally divided into two categories:

Inflectional morphemes – express grammatical relationships without changing word class or core meaning. Examples include:

–*s* / –*es* (plural),

–*ed* (past tense),

–*ing* (progressive),

–*'s* (possessive).

Derivational morphemes – create new words or change word class and meaning. Examples:

Prefixes (*un*–, *dis*–, *re*–).

Suffixes (–*ness*, –*ment*, –*able*, –*tion*).

The accurate use of bound morphemes reflects a learner's grasp of grammatical structure and morphological awareness. According to Brown (1973) and Larsen-Freeman (2015), mastery of morphemes follows a developmental order and is influenced by exposure, input frequency, and the learner's first language (L1). The University of N'Djamena is a bilingual institution in a multilingual country where French and Arabic dominate public life. English, as a foreign language, is learned mainly in academic settings. Level 2 students in the Department of English are typically in their second year of study, having received prior instruction in English grammar, phonetics, and oral expression. However, despite two years of instruction, many students show inconsistency in their spoken English, particularly in the realization of grammatical morphemes. For example, a student may say:

He go to school yesterday (omitting –ed)

Two student come (omitting –s)

My brother book (omitting possessive –'s)

Such errors motivate a deeper investigation into the use of bound morphemes in their speech.

2. Methods of Data Collection

In any research study, the method of data collection determines the quality, reliability, and validity of the findings. For linguistic studies particularly those examining students' use of English data must reflect authentic language use. This section describes the various methods used to collect data on how Level 2 students of the Department of English at the University of N'Djamena use bound morphemes in their spoken English. The research focused mainly on oral linguistic data, supported by written samples and observations. The types of data collected included the Recorded speech (from interviews, oral presentations, and classroom interactions). The Written exercises (short paragraphs or essays by the same students). And the Observation notes (researcher's field notes during speech collection sessions). Short questionnaires

with open and closed questions were distributed and Data helped contextualize speech errors (e.g, influence of mother tongue or instruction).

3. Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial stage in linguistic research as it transforms raw data into meaningful findings. In this study, data collected from audio recordings, classroom observations, interviews, and written tasks were analyzed to determine how Level 2 English students use bound morphemes in their speech. The analysis focused on identifying the frequency, accuracy, and types of morphological errors in the use of both inflectional and derivational bound morphemes.

Data Preparation

Before analysis, all recorded data were carefully transcribed verbatim. Each utterance was written exactly as produced by the speaker, preserving pronunciation features and omissions.

For example: Actual utterance: *"He go school yesterday."* Transcription note: omission of –ed morpheme in *go → went*. Transcriptions were then coded manually using a simple notation system:

✔ for correct use of bound morpheme

❌ for omission or misuse

~ for uncertain or unclear pronunciation

Example of coding:

Student	Sentence	Morpheme	Correct/Incorrect	Comment
S1	He goes to school.	–s	✔	Correct 3rd person singular
S2	He go to school yesterday.	–ed	❌	Omitted past tense marker
S3	My brother car.	–'s	❌	Omitted possessive morpheme

Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by morphological and error analysis frameworks in second language acquisition (Ellis, 1994; Brown, 1973; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Bound morphemes were categorized and analyzed according to:

Inflectional Morphemes

These indicate grammatical relationships such as:

Plural –s / –es (e.g. *books, churches*)

Possessive –'s (e.g. *John's book*)

Past tense –ed (e.g. *played, worked*)

Progressive –ing (e.g. *studying, playing*)

Third person singular –s (e.g. *he walks*)

Derivational Morphemes

These change word meaning or class:

Prefixes: *un–, dis–, re–, in–*
Suffixes: *–ness, –ment, –tion, –able, –er*
Each student's speech was analyzed to check how often and how accurately these morphemes were used.

4. Results

This section presents the major findings obtained from the analysis of the speech and written data collected from Level 2 students of the Department of English at the University of N'Djamena. The findings are organized according to the types of bound morphemes (inflectional and derivational), the accuracy of use, and the common patterns of errors observed in the students' speech. The analysis provides both quantitative results (frequency and percentage of correct and incorrect morpheme use) and qualitative observations (error types, examples, and explanations). Many students omit the plural marker –s in speech, even when they understand the concept of plurality. Example: *"Two student came yesterday"* instead of *"Two students came yesterday."* Some plural forms were overgeneralized, e.g. *"childs"*, *"mans"*. Overall, the results reveal that the majority of Level 2 students demonstrate partial mastery of English bound morphemes. While most students can recognize and occasionally use some inflectional morphemes correctly, their oral production often shows frequent omissions and misformations. Derivational morphemes appear even less frequently, suggesting limited vocabulary expansion through word formation.

5.   Discussion

The discussion interprets the findings presented in the previous section in light of relevant linguistic theories, previous studies, and the sociolinguistic context of English learning in Chad. The aim is to explain *why* the students made the observed errors in using bound morphemes and what these patterns reveal about their level of morphological competence and second language acquisition processes. The findings indicate that most Level 2 students possess partial control of English bound morphemes, particularly those of the inflectional type (such as *–s*, *–ed*, and *–ing*). However, their speech shows frequent omissions and misformations, which point to developmental and transfer-related errors rather than total lack of knowledge. These results align with theories of Interlanguage (Selinker, 1972), which propose that second language learners develop a transitional linguistic system influenced by both their mother tongue and the target language. In this case, the interlanguage of the students reflects features of French and local Chadian languages, where morphological marking is different or less salient. The consistent omission of inflectional endings (e.g. *–s*, *–ed*) can be traced to negative transfer from the students' first languages: Many local languages in Chad, as well as French, do not emphasize final consonant clusters, making English endings difficult to pronounce and perceive. As a result, students tend to drop these morphemes in oral communication. Example: *"He play"* → omission of *–s* due to avoidance of the final consonant sound. The

preference for structures like *"the car of my brother"* instead of *"my brother's car"* mirrors the French possessive structure (*la voiture de mon frère*). This direct translation pattern shows how French grammar interferes with English morphology. Hence, L1 interference remains a dominant factor in shaping learners' morphemic errors. Several students displayed overgeneralization, such as *"comed"*, *"goed"*, or *"childs"*. This is a natural stage in language development, consistent with Krashen's (1982) *Natural Order Hypothesis*, which suggests that learners acquire grammatical morphemes in predictable sequences. According to this hypothesis, inflectional morphemes like plural –s and past –ed are typically acquired later because they carry little communicative meaning compared to content words. Thus, the frequent omission or overgeneralization of these morphemes in students' speech suggests that they are still progressing through early stages of morphological acquisition. The phonological structure of English endings plays a significant role in error production. Bound morphemes such as –ed or –s often attach to base forms that create consonant clusters (e.g, *walked*, *talks*). Since most Chadian languages, including Arabic and Sara, avoid cluster endings, learners find these difficult to articulate. Consequently, they either omit them or replace them with simplified forms. This supports Brown's (1973) argument that phonological complexity affects the order of morpheme acquisition. Therefore, pronunciation challenges directly contribute to morphological inaccuracies in speech. The study also shows that students rarely use derivational morphemes (e.g, *–ness*, *–ment*, *–tion*, *un–*, *dis–*). This reveals a lack of morphological awareness — the ability to recognize and manipulate word parts to form new words. This finding is supported by Nation (2001), who emphasized that morphological awareness contributes to vocabulary expansion and reading comprehension. Since derivational morphology is not often emphasized in classroom instruction, students depend on rote vocabulary learning rather than word-formation skills. This results in limited lexical diversity and underuse of derived words in speech. Instructional factors appear to contribute significantly to the problem. English grammar at the University of N'Djamena is often taught theoretically, with strong emphasis on written exercises and rule memorization, while oral practice is limited. Consequently, students can apply grammatical rules in writing but fail to do so spontaneously in speech. This aligns with research by Ellis (2003), who argued that explicit knowledge (grammar rules) does not automatically lead to implicit knowledge (natural use). Hence, students' failure to use morphemes correctly in oral contexts shows a gap between what they know and how they use it. English in Chad functions primarily as a foreign language (EFL), not as a second language used in daily communication. Students are exposed to English mainly in the classroom, with limited real-life practice. This limited exposure hinders the internalization of morphological rules and reduces opportunities for feedback-based correction. The findings thus echo those of African EFL contexts where

low exposure and interference from French affect grammatical development (e.g, Abubakar, 2018; Mba, 2020).

Perspectives for improving the situation

To improve students' use of bound morphemes in English speech the following key points are expected among others :

Explicit Teaching of Morphology which Introduces lessons that focus specifically on morphemes and their meanings.

Pronunciation Training: Include phonological practice of word endings.

Integrate Morphology into Oral Activities: Role plays, debates, and storytelling using target morphemes.

Use of Morphological Awareness Tasks: Activities that require word formation and sentence transformation.

Continuous Assessment: Oral tests should evaluate correct morphological use, not just fluency.

Integrate oral morphology practice where teachers should include spoken grammar drills that focus on morpheme pronunciation and usage.

Raise morphological awareness through explicit teaching of prefixes, suffixes, and word-formation patterns.

Encourage communicative contexts where students can practice using morphemes naturally in speech.

Contrastive analysis between English, French, and local languages should be introduced to help learners notice structural differences.

Audio and pronunciation training should emphasize the articulation of word-final morphemes.

Conclusion

The study confirms that Level 2 English students at the University of N'Djamena show significant challenges in using bound morphemes correctly in speech. While they demonstrate awareness of English structure, the transfer from knowledge to spoken accuracy remains weak. Strengthening morphological and phonological awareness, supported by communicative and context-based teaching strategies, is essential for improving learners' grammatical competence and oral proficiency. This study examines the use of bound morphemes in the English speech of Level 2 students of the Department of English at the University of N'Djamena. The research aimed to determine how effectively these learners use inflectional and derivational morphemes in spoken English and to identify the main difficulties they encounter. The findings revealed that while students possess a basic awareness of English morphological rules, their oral production is marked by frequent omissions, misformations, and overgeneralizations. Inflectional morphemes such as plural –s, past –ed, and third-person singular –s posed major challenges, while progressive –ing was the most accurately used. Derivational morphemes, on the other hand, were rarely used, showing limited morphological creativity and

vocabulary expansion. The study also establishes that these difficulties arise mainly from three interrelated sources:

1. Linguistic interference from French and local languages, which differ significantly from English in morphological marking and word-final pronunciation.
2. Phonological and developmental factors, making some morphemes harder to perceive and articulate.
3. Instructional limitations, as teaching tends to emphasize written grammar rather than spoken practice and morphological awareness.

In light of these findings, it is evident that students are still in the process of developing their interlanguage system, where features of both the first language and the target language coexist. Their performance demonstrates transitional competence, rather than complete deficiency. The study therefore underscores the need for integrated teaching approaches that balance grammar instruction with oral application, phonological training, and morphological awareness activities. Teachers should encourage learners to notice, pronounce, and practice morphemes in communicative contexts, not only in writing. The mastery of bound morphemes is essential for achieving grammatical accuracy and fluency in English. For Chadian learners, improving this aspect of language use requires continuous exposure, practical oral exercises, and teaching strategies that connect form, meaning, and use. Strengthening morphological competence will not only enhance students' spoken English but also contribute to their overall linguistic proficiency and academic performance.

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