

# Aspects of Francophone Cameroon English

## Derivational Morphology: The Case of Noun-formation

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### Abstract

This study focuses on a morphological analysis of noun-forming affixes that Francophone learners of English in Cameroon use in their written English. This entails identifying and analysing the use of these affixes when added to verbs, adjectives and other nouns, while taking into consideration the frequency of their use, the various difficulties involved in their use, and the strategies employed by learners to overcome these difficulties. The study is carried out on some four schools in Yaounde: the Government Bilingual Primary School Mballa II, Lycée d'Anguissa, College Adventist and The University of Yaounde I. Data for this analysis is collected from some forty scripts equitably selected from these schools using random sampling. The data are analysed based on the Principles and Parameters theory in Second Language Acquisition. The major findings reveal some general trends in the use of these affixes by Francophone learners of English. There is evidence of French interference in the morphological parameter settings of these learners' written English due to the negative transfer and use of French morphological settings in situations that require different parameter settings in English. Furthermore, learners of all levels simply omit the use of the affixes where they are not familiar with. Besides, they tend to over-generalize the use of the affixes to exceptional situations. In rare contexts, learners, especially those of Terminale and Level III, succeed in setting and using some morphological parameter settings that are peculiar to English.

**Keywords:** Derivational morphology, Interference, Transfer, Modification, Parameter setting

## 1. Background

After the independence and reunification of the British and the French Cameroons in 1961, English and French were adopted as the two official languages in the country. These languages have been used in all the major areas of society such as religion, education, the media, business and politics. In the area of education, French is used as the main medium of instruction in the Francophone educational sub-system, with English as a subject; while English is used as the main medium of instruction in the Anglophone sub-system, with French as a subject, in the basic and secondary educational levels.

The bulk of research that has been done on the English of learners who go through the Francophone educational sub-system has proven that most of them find it difficult to express themselves properly both in written and spoken English. It is on this basis that we have decided to carry out a morphological analysis of the written lexicon of these learners. Francophone learners of English in Cameroon range from the primary, through the secondary to the university levels.

This analysis falls within the domain of morphological analysis. According to Bauer (1983: 13), “morphology is a sub-branch of linguistics that deals with the internal structure of word-forms.” The present study is therefore focused on the internal structure of the written vocabulary items of Francophone learners. This entails examining these learners’ use of morphemes. A morpheme according to Radford et al (1999: 162) is “the smallest component of a word which contributes to its meaning.” This includes what is known as an affix, which according to McArthur (ed.) (1992:18) is “an element added to a word, base or roots to produce an inflected or derived form.”

The present morphological analysis is thus limited to Francophone learners’ use of affixes. Affixes are of two types: inflectional and derivational affixes. According to Lyons (1981), as cited in Bauer (1983:22), “inflection produces for the stem (or stems) of a given lexeme all the word-forms of the lexeme which occur in syntactically determined environments.” So, when added to words, inflectional affixes give other forms of the words. English generally has only nine inflectional affixes (Jackson and Ze Amvela 2000).

Derivation on the other hand is “the process of adding bound morphs to create new words of the same or different word classes” (Malmkjaer (ed.) 2004:358). Derivational affixes include noun-forming, verb-forming, adjective-forming and adverb-forming prefixes and suffixes. This analysis of Francophone learners’ use of affixes is done on the background of the numerous derivational affixes presented by Bauer (1983). The study is however limited only to the use of noun-forming derivational affixes. Nouns can be derived by adding affixes to either verbs, adjectives or other nouns. Some examples are presented below:

| <b>Verb</b>      | <b>+</b> | <b>affix</b> | <b>noun</b> |
|------------------|----------|--------------|-------------|
| Leak             |          | -age         | leakage     |
| <b>Adjective</b> | <b>+</b> | <b>affix</b> | <b>noun</b> |
| Good             |          | -ness        | goodness    |

**Noun + affix            noun**

Nutrition            mal-            malnutrition

Our analysis is therefore based on the use of these noun-forming derivational affixes by Francophone learners of English in their English essays.

## **2. Theoretical Premise and Literature Review**

This study is based on the Principles and Parameters theory. Chomsky propounded this theory on the basis of his theory of Universal Grammar (UG); what all languages have in common. The Principles and Parameters model brings out the similarities and differences that exist between languages and shows that the acquisition of all languages follows a particular pattern. Regarding similarities, the theory “offers the postulate that there are universal principles of grammar that are, without exception, invariant across languages. The content and operation of these principles of grammar ensure the similarity of all natural languages” (Weibelhuth, 1992:8). Relating to differences, the theory postulates that “the principles of UG are supported by a set of parameters (options) provided by UG along a certain dimension from which individual grammars may select, possibly subject to relative conditions of accessibility and markedness” (ibid: 8).

### *2.1 Principles*

As stated above, there are universal principles of grammar that are, without exception, invariant across all languages. This can be justified by the fact that despite the many variations in the forms and structures of the various human languages, they are all used in various societies for the same ends. This universality in function must therefore have some linguistic evidence in all languages, hence the existence of the universal principles of grammar. It is a universal principle of grammar that words in all languages are classified according to grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. Furthermore, in all languages, these words play different functions in sentences. They can be subject, verb, object, complement or adverbial.

These are just few examples of the universal principles of language. The existence of these universal principles is accounted for, from the Chomskyian perspective, by the innate knowledge that the human species is genetically endowed with. Ellis (1985:191) quotes Cook (1985) who explains this by stating that “language properties inherent in the human mind make up ‘Universal Grammar’ which consists not of particular rules of a particular language, but a set of general principles that apply to all languages.” These inherent language properties are already present in all children’s mind when they come to the task of acquiring any language, in what Chomsky refers to as the ‘language faculty’, otherwise known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). This is “a component of the human mind physically represented in the brain and is part of the biological endowment of the species” (Chomsky, 2002:1).

Chomsky’s explanation for the innateness of UG is that without a set of innate principles, it would not be possible for a child to learn the grammar of his mother tongue. This is because

the data available from the input are insufficient to enable the child to discover certain rules. (Ellis, 1985:192)

Felix (1984) concedes with this explanation and advances three reasons to justify it:

- 1) Some structures are so rare and marginal; therefore the child will hardly get any such data from the environment that will enhance acquisition.
- 2) There is hardly or never any negative feedback (negative evidence) from the environment. So it will be difficult for learners to correct their errors.
- 3) The rules of the grammar of human languages are so abstract and complicated for a learner to acquire without any natural predisposition.

These justifications enlighten the fact that a child cannot succeed in learning a target language by depending uniquely on the input from the environment. This is referred to in language acquisition as the ‘poverty of the stimulus.’ The child therefore makes use of UG which is innate and input from the society which serves as triggering data in order to learn any target language.

## *2.2 Parameters*

Despite the fact that there are general principles that are invariant across all languages, there are certain properties of language that are language-specific. This is what explains the variation between different languages. There therefore exist certain parameters under which languages vary.

According to Haegeman (1991:14), the mastery of these language-specific properties requires very little learning, just as is the case with the universal principles. This is because “for those principles that are parametrized, the available options are given by UG. Attaining linguistic knowledge consists in fixing the parameters.”

Ellis (1985:193) explains this concept by stipulating that UG “constrains the form which the grammars of individual languages can take” not by “providing the child with ready-made rules” but by providing “parameters which must then be fixed according to the particular input data that the child obtains.” For acquisition to take place, the child therefore needs input from the environment in order to set the parameters of the target language, while depending on the innate principles of grammar that s/he is naturally endowed with.

The universal principles of grammar that we saw in the previous section all provide parameters under which languages vary. We saw that in all languages, words are classified into categories and that they play different roles in sentences. However, the way these elements are ordered in sentences differs across languages. The word-order parameter therefore accounts for cross linguistic variation as concerns the ordering of words in sentences. This can be observed in the French and English sentences below:

She is eating it.

S     V     O

Elle la mange.

S   O   V

We can see that although the sentences above have the same elements, they are ordered differently in the two languages. In English, a pronoun functioning as object comes after the verb, while in French; it comes before the verb in sentences.

Besides, although in many languages, words can be derived from others by the addition of affixes, the affixes that are used in the various derivational processes differ across languages. There are therefore language-specific parameters to reset in the course of derivational process in various languages.

According to Ellis (1985) not all rules of a language can be discovered with the aid of UG. “Those rules that the child discovers with the aid of UG form the ‘core’ grammar of his language” (ibid: 193). Those rules that are not constrained by UG are the peripheral ones, such as those derived from the history of the language, those that have been borrowed from other languages and those that have arisen accidentally. “Thus, the child’s knowledge of his mother tongue is made up of rules determined by UG (the core) and those that have to be learnt without the help of UG (the periphery).” This relates to Chomsky’s (2002) theory of ‘markedness.’ “Core rules are unmarked; that is, they accord with the general tendencies of language, while periphery rules are marked; that is, they are exceptional” and pertain to a particular language (ibid). Therefore, during the acquisition process, learners face more difficulties with marked rules than with unmarked rules.

### *2.3 Principles and Parameters, and Second Language Acquisition (SLA)*

Chomsky propounded the Principles and Parameters theory to account for L1 acquisition. It has however been proven that the theory also accounts for SLA.

Saville-Troike (2006) identifies the relevance of the Principles and Parameters theory in SLA in a three state process. During what she terms the initial state in SLA, “learners already have knowledge of L1 at the point where SLA begins; they already have made all the parametric choices that are appropriate for that L1, guided by UG. Some L1 knowledge is clearly transferred to L2, depending on the relationship of L1 and L2 and other factors” (ibid: 50). When we talk of transfer here, two possibilities present themselves: there can be positive transfer from L1 to L2 when the L1 and L2 parameter settings for the same principle are the same, as well as there can be negative transfer or interference, when the L1 and L2 parameter settings are different. This interference therefore constitutes one of the major preoccupations of this study because it poses as a difficulty to accurate L2 acquisition. Thus, in our analysis of the morphological difficulties of Francophone learners of English, we are looking for difficulties that come up due to negative transfer or interference.

The second state in which the theory relates to SLA is in the nature and development of interlanguage. Considering interlanguage from a Principles and Parameters perspective as the “immediate states of L2 development (IL1, IL2, IL3, etc),” Saville-Troike (2006:51) states that “the process of interlanguage development is in large, one of resetting parameters on the basis of input in the new language.” The acquisition of an L2 therefore demands that learners reset the parameters of their L1 to suit the principles of the L2, depending on the input they receive from the environment. This change or resetting of parameters imposes itself in situations where the L2 input learners receive does not match with the L1 settings they have.

Three related hypotheses that account for the effect of universals in interlanguage development have been advanced:

- 1) Like other natural languages, interlanguage is subject to the constraint imposed by linguistic universals.
- 2) Implicational universals can be used to predict the order in which properties of the L2 appear in interlanguage.
- 3) L2 learners learn unmarked (or less marked) properties before marked (or more marked) properties of the target language. (Ellis, 1985).

In our analysis of the development of the interlanguage of Francophone learners of English in Cameroon, we are therefore investigating into the difficulties that these learners face in learning marked properties related to the morphology of English; in other words, the difficulties that these learners face in resetting the marked properties of the morphology of English, which are not accounted for by the parametric choices that they had earlier made.

The third state is the final state, during which learners attain an acceptable level of competence in the target language. This is the state in which learners’ interlanguage reaches an approximate level of the L2. According to Saville-Troike (2006: 52), “L2 learners’ attainment of the final state varies greatly among learners” and can be accounted for by the following possibilities:

- 1) All learners may not have the same degree of access to UG.
- 2) Different relationships between various L1s and L2s may result in differential transfer or interference.
- 3) Some learners receive more qualitatively different L2 inputs from others.
- 4) Some learners may be more perceptive than others of mismatches between L2 input and existing L1 parameter settings.
- 5) Different degrees of specification for lexical features may be achieved by different learners.

Taking into consideration these possibilities, we are examining the difficulties that the Francophone learners of English of our study encounter in their process to attain the final state in the acquisition of the target language.

We can therefore summarily situate this study within the scope of the Principles and Parameters framework by stating that we are basing our analysis on Chomsky's theory of Principles and Parameters to examine how negative transfer or interference, parameter resetting of marked properties and the different possibilities that learners are exposed to, pose difficulties to the acquisition of accurate properties of English morphology by Francophone learners of English in Cameroon.

#### *2.4 Previous Literature*

While presenting the various categories of words, Parrot (2000) advances some possible difficulties they may pose to learners. We are more interested here in the difficulties related to derivational morphology. To that respect, Parrot (ibid) postulates that in relation to nouns, learners sometimes face difficulties with their endings, especially when these nouns are derived from other words (for example \**jealousness*).

Previous research on Francophone Cameroonian learners' use of English has concentrated mostly on the difficulties these learners face with the inflectional morphology of English words (Ntankeu 1989, Njenga 1994, Neba 2002, Kameni 2004, Etame 2005, etc.) So, by focusing on derivational morphology, we are venturing into a domain that has hitherto attracted very little or no attention from researchers in Cameroon. Focus here is therefore on the difficulties these learners face with the derivational morphology of English nouns and the various strategies they employ to overcome them.

Ellis (1997:34) identifies the various strategies employed by learners to develop their interlanguage. These strategies that include omission, overgeneralization and transfer are reflected in the different kind of errors produced by the learners in the course of learning.

Littlewood (1984) gives a detailed description of how second language learners use these strategies in SLA. According to him, "learners' errors need not be seen as signs of failure. On the contrary, they are the clearest evidence for the learners' developing systems and can offer us insights into how they process the data of the language" (ibid: 22).

According to Littlewood, overgeneralization errors occur because learners have either over-generalized a rule to cover an exceptional item within a given category, or because learners have over-generalized a rule to cover an item that is not within the category covered by the rule. In both cases, learners must therefore need to learn an exception to the general rule or construct a new category and rule respectively.

In other cases, second language learners turn to transfer their previous knowledge of language (including the first language) to the new tasks. In situations where the languages have similar parameter settings, the hypotheses will be confirmed. But when the parameter settings are different in the two languages, transfer will lead to errors in the second language due to the interference of L1 rules in the L2.

Another learning strategy used by L2 learners is omission. This occurs due to some elaborative simplification of items. According to Littlewood (1984:28), "the omission of inflections and other morphemes seems to be due more to limitations in capacity than to the

construction of rules.” This is a kind of redundancy reduction because learners turn to eliminate smaller items and concentrate on the items that convey the intended meaning. This simplifies production “but may, of course, make comprehension difficult or even impossible” (ibid). For example in: *Daddy want chair*, the verb inflection and the article have been omitted.

Saville-Troike (ibid: 174-176) also presents what exactly the L2 learner comes to know and how the learner acquires L2 knowledge. According to him, what exactly the learner comes to know includes, a system of knowledge about a second language, patterns of recurrent elements that comprise components of L2-specific knowledge: vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax, and discourse, how to encode particular concepts in the L2, pragmatic competence, means of using the L2 in communicative activities and communicative competence.

The learner acquires this L2 knowledge by using his innate language acquisition capacity, applying his prior knowledge of his L1 as well as prior social experience, interaction, restructuring of the L2 knowledge system, mapping of relationships of associations and by automatization.

In the present study, focus is on examining the various strategies used by learners in the acquisition and learning of the morphological properties of English, and how their productions reflect the rules which they have internalized; that is, their underlying competence in the second language.

### 3. Data

Data for this study is derived from 40 English essay scripts collected from Francophone learners of English at various levels of education: primary, first cycle of secondary, second cycle of secondary and the university. Hence, 10 scripts are randomly collected from learners in *Cours Moyen II* at Government Bilingual Primary School Mballa II, 10 from those in *Troisième* at Lycée d’Aguissa, 10 from those in *Terminale* at Collège Adventiste Yaounde and 10 from those in Level III at the University of Yaounde I.<sup>1</sup> We first of all read through the scripts, while identifying all the instances of the use of noun-forming affixes. We then proceeded by entering them into databases. Another reading of the scripts was done with focus on identifying all the problematic instances of the use of these affixes. They were in turn entered into databases. Another reading of the scripts was done with focus on identifying the various strategies used by learners to overcome their morphological difficulties. The data collected on this was also entered into data bases.

We therefore have three main data bases; one for the correct use of affixes, one for problems involving the use of these affixes, and another for avoidance strategies involving the use of affixes. It is the data in these data bases that we proceed to analyse.

Data analysis is done at various stages. In the first stage we study the information on the databases and come up with frequency tables showing the occurrence of the correct use of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Cours Moyen II*, *Troisième* and *Terminale* are respectively final year classes of the primary, first cycle secondary and second cycle secondary levels of the Francophone system of education in Cameroon.

affixes. We then proceed by focusing on the difficulties faced by the learners in the derivation of nouns and the various strategies employed by learners to overcome these difficulties. We assess the productivity in the use of these strategies and also come-up with tables showing the frequency of their use. These tables show how the frequencies vary according to the various levels involved in the study.

#### 4. Results

As earlier mentioned, for the purpose of this project, this analysis will be limited only to derivational morphological processes that result in the formation of nouns. The analysis will be based on the frequency of use of noun-forming affixes, the difficulties involved in their use and the various strategies employed by learners to overcome these difficulties.

An examination of learners' scripts showed that the frequency of the use of affixes in noun-forming processes varied depending on the processes and the level of the learners. The table below presents a general view of the use of noun-forming affixes by learners at the various levels of education involved in this study.

Table 1. The use of noun-forming morphemes by learners

| Type of affix               | Frequency at each level |           |           |           |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                             | CM2                     | Troisième | Terminale | Level III |
| Forming noun from noun      | 0                       | 0         | 6         | 8         |
| Forming noun from verb      | 5                       | 32        | 51        | 85        |
| Forming noun from adjective | 0                       | 11        | 22        | 26        |
| Total                       | 5                       | 43        | 79        | 119       |

The table above shows a rise in the frequency of the use of noun-forming affixes as we move from the primary, through the secondary to the university levels. The use of affixes to form nouns from verbs had the highest frequency at all levels, followed by the formation of nouns from adjectives, then by the formation of nouns from other nouns. For a more detailed analysis, we will examine the use of these morphemes from one level to the other before making a comparison of all the levels.

##### 4.1 The Use of Noun-forming Affixes at CM2

At this level, it was generally observed that learners did not make use of noun-forming affixes. With regards to the three noun-forming morphological processes, no learner used an affix to derive a noun from a noun as well as a noun from an adjective. Only three nouns (*composition*, *education* and *teacher*) showing a derivation from a verb were used by four learners. The total frequency of the use of the *-tion* and *-er* noun-forming affixes with these nouns was only 5. We however have the conviction that the learners who used the nouns above were ignorant of the derivational processes within the nouns. This is because these are nouns that learners are exposed to in very early stages of learning. Right from the basic levels, learners already know who a *teacher* is; in Class Six there is an English language exercise called *Composition*; and the word *Education* is used very often in the school context. So,

primary school learners tend to acquire these words as entities and not as derivatives of other words by the addition of affixes.

Apart from the nouns discussed above, the other nouns used by learners at this level showed no derivational morphological processes. They were just simple nouns that could not be split into their constituent derivational morphemes, simply because they did not have such morphemes. The table below shows the frequency of the use of nouns on learners' scripts.

Table 2. Frequency of nouns at CM2

| Script number | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | Total |
|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| Frequency     | 16 | 15 | 14 | 20 | 10 | 20 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 141   |

The table above shows that in all the 10 scripts selected, learners used nouns, with the frequency ranging between 10 and 20. Out of the total 141 nouns used, only the three discussed above (*teacher, education and composition*) showed derivational processes.

We can therefore conclude here that at the CM2 level, learners are still generally ignorant of English noun-forming derivational morphological processes. They have not yet set their acquisition parameters to include the principles of noun-forming through morphological processes.

#### 4.2 The Use of Noun-forming Affixes at Troisième

The statistics on Table 1 show that at this level, no learner made use of affixes resulting in the derivation of nouns from other nouns. However, affixes resulting in the derivation of nouns from verbs and from adjectives were used with varying frequencies. The table below presents the frequency of the use of these affixes in all the 10 scripts selected at this level.

Table 3. Frequency of noun-forming morphemes at Troisième

| Type of affix                 | Frequency per script |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    | Total |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-------|
|                               | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 10    |
| Forming nouns from verbs      | 1                    | 6 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 5  | 32    |
| Forming nouns from adjectives | 0                    | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0  | 11    |
| Total                         | 1                    | 7 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 5  | 43    |

The table above shows that the frequency of the use of affixes to derive nouns from verbs was higher than that of the use of affixes to derive nouns from adjectives. Affixes used to derive nouns from verbs were identified in all the 10 scripts with frequencies ranging between 1 and 6 and yielding a total frequency of 32; while those used to derive nouns from adjectives were identified in 6 of the 10 scripts with frequencies ranging between 1 and 3 and yielding a total frequency of 11.

A close examination of the affixes used revealed some strategies employed by learners in deriving nouns from verbs and adjectives. An analysis of such strategies follows suit.

#### 4.2.1 Successful Noun-Forming Strategies at Troisième

An examination of learners' scripts revealed two strategies employed by learners in order to successfully derive nouns from verbs and adjectives. These are positive transfer and transfer and modification. The frequency of the use of these strategies is presented on the table below.

Table 4. Strategies of correct noun derivations Troisième

| Strategy                  | Frequency per script |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    | Total |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-------|
|                           | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |       |
| Positive transfer         | 1                    | 6 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 5  | 27    |
| Transfer and modification | 0                    | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0  | 11    |
| Total                     | 1                    | 7 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 5  | 38    |

The statistics on the table above show that learners benefited more from positive transfer than from transfer and modification.

##### a. Positive transfer

Positive transfer involves situations in which learners used affixes that are used the same in French and English. So, learners easily transferred them from French to English and used them correctly without any modifications. This mainly involved the suffixes *-tion* and *-ment* which are used to derive nouns from verbs both in French and English, as in the words *education*, and *government*. These constituted a large part of the affixes used by learners to derive nouns from verbs. Out of the 32 cases involving the correct use of affixes to derive nouns from verbs, 27 of them involved the transfer and use of the suffixes *-tion* and *-ment*. The other 5 cases involved the use of the suffix *-er* to derive nouns from verbs, as in *teacher*.

##### b. Transfer and modification

This involved the correct use of the suffix *-ity* to derive nouns from adjectives. This is the equivalent of the French suffix *-ité* that is used for the same purpose. So, Francophone learners succeeded here to transfer and adapt it to its English equivalent *-ity* and used it correctly to derive nouns from adjectives. This is the only affix used by learners at this level to derive nouns from adjectives. The other affixes that can play the same role were completely absent from the scripts. This shows that at the Troisième level, learners have not quite mastered the use of affixes to derive nouns from adjectives.

Other noun-forming strategies used by learners at this level resulted in the derivation of deviant noun-forms. These are analysed below.

#### 4.2.2 Deviant Noun-Forming Strategies at Troisième

In some situations in which learners could not benefit from positive transfer or transfer and modification, they employed other strategies which unfortunately resulted in deviant derivations. This involved mainly the negative transfer of French noun-forming affixes from French into English in situations in which this is not possible. This was identified in 6 of the 10 scripts yielding a total frequency of 9. Examples of such deviant noun derivatives include:

*\*christianisme for Christianity*

*\*changement for change*

*\*confiance for confidence*

This shows that apart from situations in which learners can benefit from positive transfer or modification, learners at the Troisième level generally face difficulties in deriving English nouns from other words as this requires the setting and application of new parameters that suit the principles of English noun derivation.

#### 4.3 The Use of Noun-forming Affixes at Terminale

The statistics on Table 1 show that learners at this level made use of all the types of noun-forming affixes, with varying frequencies. The table below presents the frequency of these affixes in each of the 10 scripts selected at this level.

Table 5. Frequency of noun-forming affixes at Terminale

| Type of affix         | Frequency per script |   |    |   |    |   |   |   |    |    | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---|----|---|----|---|---|---|----|----|-------|
|                       | 1                    | 2 | 3  | 4 | 5  | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9  | 10 |       |
| Nouns from nouns      | 0                    | 0 | 0  | 0 | 3  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1  | 2  | 6     |
| Nouns from verbs      | 8                    | 7 | 4  | 1 | 7  | 2 | 2 | 4 | 7  | 9  | 51    |
| Nouns from adjectives | 0                    | 0 | 3  | 1 | 0  | 1 | 0 | 1 | 7  | 9  | 22    |
| Total                 | 7                    | 1 | 10 | 2 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 15 | 20 | 79    |

The table above shows that the highest occurring morpheme was that used to derive nouns from verbs. This was used in all the 10 scripts with frequencies ranging between 1 and 9 and yielding a total frequency of 51. This was followed by that used to derive nouns from adjectives, identified in 6 of the 10 scripts with frequencies ranging between 1 and 9 and yielding a total frequency of 22. That used to derive nouns from other nouns was identified in 3 of the 10 scripts with a total frequency of 6.

A close examination of the situations revealed some strategies used by learners in order to successfully use these noun-forming morphemes. These strategies are examined below.

##### 4.3.1 Successful Noun-forming Strategies

Three strategies resulting in the correct derivation of nouns from other words were identified at this level. These include; positive transfer, transfer and modification, and the use of new parameters. The frequency of the use of these strategies in the 10 scripts is presented on the table below.

Table 6. Frequency of correct strategies

| Strategy                  | Frequency per script |    |   |   |    |   |   |   |    |    | Total |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----|---|---|----|---|---|---|----|----|-------|
|                           | 1                    | 2  | 3 | 4 | 5  | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9  | 10 |       |
| Positive transfer         | 8                    | 7  | 2 | 2 | 7  | 2 | 2 | 2 | 8  | 10 | 50    |
| Transfer and modification | 0                    | 3  | 0 | 0 | 0  | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5  | 6  | 16    |
| Use of new parameters     | 0                    | 0  | 0 | 0 | 3  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2  | 1  | 6     |
| Total                     | 8                    | 10 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 15 | 17 | 72    |

The table above shows that the strategy with the highest frequency was positive transfer, followed by transfer and modification and then by the use of new parameters.

#### a. Positive transfer

This mainly involved the use of *-tion* and *-ment* to derive nouns from verbs and that of *-ence* to derive nouns from adjectives. These affixes also exist in French and the words with which they were used have the same forms and meaning in French, for example; *situation*, *solution*, *government*, *development*, *presence* and *independence*. So, learners at this level did not need to carry out any parameter resetting in order to use these suffixes in their written English. They simply benefited from the positive transfer of French parameter settings in to their written English.

#### b. Transfer and modification

This mainly involved the use of *-ity* and *-ism* to derive nouns from adjectives. With the use of these suffixes, learners needed to adapt their French parameter settings to suit the principles of English, especially concerning spelling. They therefore succeeded in adapting the French suffixes *-ité* and *-isme* to their English equivalents *-ity* and *-ism* and successfully used them in words such as *difficulty* and *imperialism*.

#### c. The use of new parameters

This mainly involved the use of affixes that neither exist nor have similar forms in French. This was observed in the use of the prefix *un-* to derive nouns from nouns, as in *unemployment*; and the use of the suffix *-ness* to derive nouns from adjectives as in *kindness*. Here, learners needed to set completely new parameters and apply them in these derivations, since neither these affixes nor similar forms do exist in French. This is a difficult task and obviously accounts for the very low frequency of the use of these affixes. Other noun-forming affixes that require a complete setting and application of new parameters were not used by learners at this level.

We can therefore observe here that at the Terminale level, all the learners are able to use French parameter settings in the derivation of English nouns that have the same forms and meanings as in French, hence, they benefit from positive transfer. About half of them succeed in transferring and modifying the French parameter settings to suit the principles of English in the derivation of English nouns that have similar morphological forms in French. Very few of them are able to successfully use noun-forming affixes that do not exist in French and therefore require the setting of new parameters for their use. This accounts for the low

productivity in the use of such affixes and for the occurrence of some deviant noun-forms identified in some learners' scripts.

#### 4.3.2 Deviant Noun-Forming Strategies at Terminale

Due to the difficulties involved in setting parameters for the use of noun-forming morphemes, some learners used some strategies that resulted in the realisation of some deviant noun-forms. These strategies include negative transfer and the use of a wrong affix. The table below shows the occurrence of these deviations.

Table 6. Frequency of deviant strategies at Terminale

| Strategy  | Negative transfer | Use of wrong affix |
|-----------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Frequency | 3                 | 2                  |

The table above shows that the frequency of these deviant strategies was not very high at the Terminale level.

Negative transfer involved situations in which learners transferred French affixes and used them in their written English in situations in which this is not possible, as in:

*jealousie* for *jealousy*

*proposition* for *proposal*

The use of wrong affixes was in situations in which learners used an affix that is never used with the word concerned as in:

*Justness* for *justice*

The use of these deviant strategies is accounted for by the fact that learners faced difficulties in setting their parameters to include these noun-forming affixes that are not used in the same or a similar way as in French.

#### 4.4 The Use of Noun-forming Morphemes at Level III

Table 1 shows that learners at this level made use of all types of noun-forming affixes. The table below presents the frequency of the use these affixes in each of the 10 scripts selected at this level

Table 7. Frequency of noun-forming affixes at Level III

| Type of affix                 | Frequency per script |    |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    | Total |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----|----|----|---|----|---|---|----|----|-------|
|                               | 1                    | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5 | 6  | 7 | 8 | 9  | 10 |       |
| Forming nouns from nouns      | 4                    | 0  | 1  | 0  | 0 | 2  | 0 | 1 | 0  | 0  | 8     |
| Forming nouns from verbs      | 9                    | 10 | 10 | 9  | 4 | 8  | 5 | 1 | 15 | 8  | 85    |
| Forming nouns from adjectives | 5                    | 5  | 6  | 2  | 3 | 2  | 2 | 0 | 0  | 1  | 26    |
| Total                         | 18                   | 15 | 17 | 11 | 7 | 12 | 7 | 2 | 15 | 9  | 119   |

The table above shows that the morpheme with the highest frequency in all the scripts was that used to derive nouns from verbs. This morpheme was used in all the 10 scripts, with its

frequency ranging between 1 and 15, and with a total frequency of 85. This was followed by that used in deriving nouns from adjectives, identified in 8 of the 10 scripts, with its frequency ranging between 1 and 6, and yielding a total frequency of 26; and lastly that used to derive nouns from other nouns, identified in only 4 of the 10 scripts, frequency ranging between 1 and 4, and yielding a total frequency of 8. Various strategies employed by learners account for the use of these noun-forming affixes.

#### 4.4.1 Successful Noun-Forming Strategies at Level III

A close examination of learners' scripts revealed some strategies that they employed in order to correctly derive nouns from other words through affixation. These strategies include; positive transfer, transfer and modification and the use of new parameters. The frequency of the use of these strategies is presented on the table below.

Table 8. Frequency of noun-forming strategies

| Strategy                  | Frequency per script |    |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    | Total |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----|----|----|---|----|---|---|----|----|-------|
|                           | 1                    | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5 | 6  | 7 | 8 | 9  | 10 |       |
| Positive transfer         | 9                    | 14 | 10 | 10 | 6 | 6  | 4 | 1 | 15 | 9  | 84    |
| Transfer and modification | 4                    | 1  | 5  | 1  | 1 | 3  | 3 | 0 | 0  | 0  | 18    |
| Use of new parameters     | 5                    | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1 | 3  | 0 | 1 | 0  | 0  | 11    |
| Total                     | 18                   | 14 | 16 | 11 | 8 | 12 | 7 | 2 | 15 | 9  | 112   |

The table above shows that the strategy with the highest frequency was positive transfer, followed by transfer and modification and then by the use of new parameters.

##### a. Positive transfer

This involved the use of the suffixes *-tion*, *-ment* and *-ence*. These suffixes also exist in French and also used to form nouns from words that have the same forms and meaning as in English; for example *corruption*, *situation*, *tolerance*, *difference*, *employment* and *development*. So, learners easily transferred the parameter settings for the use of these suffixes from French to English. This accounts for the high frequency of the use of this strategy.

##### b. Transfer and modification

This involved the use of the affixes *-ity*, and *-ism*. These affixes have similar equivalents in French; *-ité* and *-isme* that are used for the same purposes with similar words as in English. So, learners had to adapt them for use in English by resetting the parameters determining their use to suit the principles of English at the level of spelling. This resulted in the successful derivation of words such as *colonialism*, *liberty*, *difficulty*.

##### c. The use of new parameters

This involved the use of affixes that required the application of new parameter settings. Such affixes neither exist nor have similar equivalents in French. Those identified in learners' scripts at this level were *-ship*, *-er*, *-ist* and *-or* with the frequency of 3, 3, 3 and 2 respectively.

This shows a very low productivity in their use. This is because these affixes do not exist in French so learners face difficulties in setting the parameters determining their correct use in English.

We therefore comment here that, apart from the noun-forming affixes that also exist in French, and those that have similar equivalents in French, the frequency of the other affixes is very low on learners' scripts due to the fact that they need to set parameters for their use according to the principles of English. This poses a problem, especially as learners are generally ignorant of these affixes. This sometimes results in the use of some deviant noun-forms.

#### 4.4.2 Deviant Noun-Forming Strategies at Level III

An examination of the learners' scripts revealed that in certain situations, learners resorted to the use of some deviant strategies in deriving nouns from other words. The ones identified include negative transfer, simplification by omission and using a wrong affix. The table below presents the frequency of their use.

Table 8. Frequency of deviant strategies at Level III

| Deviation | Negative transfer | Omission | Using a wrong affix |
|-----------|-------------------|----------|---------------------|
| Frequency | 3                 | 4        | 2                   |

Negative transfer involved the false transfer and use of French noun-forming affixes with English words as in the following examples:

*\*signification for significance*

*\*approchement for approach*

Due to their ignorance of the correct affix to use, learners in some cases completely omitted to use any noun-forming affix and used just the base form as in the following examples:

*This \*explain helps the government...*

*If this \*resolve is taken...*

In other cases learners used an affix that is not normally used with the words concerned, as in the following examples:

*Friendness for friendship*

The use of all the above deviant noun-forms stems from the fact that learners face difficulties in setting parameters for the correct use of noun-forming affixes in situations in which these affixes neither exist nor have similar French equivalents. This is because they do not make use of their previous knowledge in order to solve L2 acquisition problems.

#### *4.5 A Comparison of the Use of Noun-forming Affixes at Various Levels*

The analyses done in the previous sections show that as we move from the primary, through the secondary to the university levels, learners' mastery of the use of noun-forming affixes improves. At the primary level, the total frequency of these affixes was only 5. We are even convinced that the learners who used the affixes were ignorant of the morphological processes involved in their use. So, learners at the primary level are generally ignorant of noun-forming morphological processes.

At the Troisième level, learners start manifesting some awareness of the use of noun-forming affixes, as we had a total frequency of 43 for their use. Most of them are transferred from French in situations where the affixes can be used in English in the same way as in French. Learners also start showing that they can modify French affixes and use them in English in situations where the affixes have similar forms and functions.

At the Terminale level, learners' mastery of the use of these affixes improves as we had a rise in to the total frequency to 79. More learners exploit situations where positive transfer is possible with high frequencies. Besides, the frequency of the use of affixes that require some parameter resetting also rises. At this level, learners also start using some noun-forming affixes that require complete new parameter settings in English.

At Level III, learners' mastery of the use of these affixes is highest, with a total frequency of 119. All the learners prove a good mastery of the situations that require the transfer of parameter settings from French to English. The frequency goes up to 10 in some scripts at this level, yielding a total frequency of 84. Besides, the use of affixes that require a modification of their French equivalents also rises to 18. There is also an improvement in the use of affixes that do not exist in French and that need complete parameter settings, though the productivity of their use remains very low, as their total frequency stands at 11 only.

### **5. Discussion**

The findings are discussed in relation to the various issues highlighted from the findings, previous literature, the Principles and Parameters theory and learners' background.

It was revealed in the findings that in situations in which the parameters setting for the use of some noun-forming affixes are the same in English and French, learners easily transfer the use of these affixes which they already master from French to English nouns. The ease with which this is done accounts for the high frequency of the cases of positive transfer at all the levels involved. Noun-forming suffixes such as *-tion*, *-ment* and *-ence* therefore had very high frequencies in learners' script, given that they are used with words that have the same forms and meanings in both French and English. Ellis (1997) and Littlewood (1984) identify positive transfer as one of the strategies employed by second language learners to ease the development of their interlanguage.

As indicated in the results, at Terminale and Level III, all the learners successfully employ this strategy. This implies that by the time they complete from the first cycle in the university, Francophone learners of English have successfully passed through what Saville-Troike (2006)

terms the initial state in SLA; which requires the transfer of some knowledge from a previous language to the target language. Learners therefore make use of their prior experience with the morphology of language in order to develop the morphology of their interlanguage.

The findings also revealed that in situations in which the parameter settings for the use of some affixes are quite similar in French and English some learners successfully adapted previously acquired French affixes for use in English. This is not a very difficult task as it involves only a slight modification in spelling. Learners could easily modify the French suffixes *-ité* and *-isme* to the English *-ity* and *-ism* and use them correctly in deriving nouns from adjectives. This is why we have a high frequency of the use of this strategy at all levels.

Here, learners therefore blend their prior experience in morphology and the new input they receive on the target language in order to realize morphological structures that are adequate in the target language. This is therefore another successful learning strategy employed by learners to develop their interlanguage.

The findings equally revealed that there were situations in which learners need to apply new principles depending on the new parameters they have set. Here, learners' previous knowledge does not help them. The affixes they use neither exist nor have similar equivalents in French nor are used in similar contexts in French. So they are required to set and apply parameters for their use in the target language depending on the input they get from their environment. This is quite a difficult task for L2 learners and accounts for the fact that affixes of such nature such as *-ness* and *-ship* had very low frequencies on learners' scripts.

Learners who succeed to use these English affixes that do not emanate from their previous experience with language therefore score a remarkable success in SLA. This is because the chances of fossilization are reduced due to this success in the second state.

Unfortunately very few learners stand out successful at this state. This means that by the time they complete from the first cycle in the university, very few Francophone learners are able to successfully reset their parameters to suit the principles of English morphology in situations in which they can not be helped by their prior experience with language.

It was equally revealed in the findings that due to the difficulty in resetting parameters in situations in which morphological parameter settings are not the same in both languages some learners transferred French morphological parameter settings into their written English. In situations where learners resorted to this strategy, the outcome was deviant noun-forms such as *\*jealousie*, *\*approchement*, and *\*signification*. This is due to the interference of French morphological features with English due to negative transfer.

According to Saville-Troike (2006) interference is a common feature in second language learners' interlanguage because the learners do not always perceive the point of difference between their L1 and the language they are learning; especially in situations where there is some similarity.

Interference should therefore be considered as a learning strategy employed by learners in order to develop their interlanguage. Learners of this level in SLA already know that there is

a possibility of parameter transfer from French to English, but they are not yet able to determine some situations in which this transfer is not possible. They are therefore in what Saville-Troike (2006) considers as the second state in SLA which basically involves the resetting of parameters on the basis of the input in the new language. Although erroneous, morphological problems resulting from the interference of French are therefore normally expected to be part and parcel of the English of Francophone learners.

## 6. Conclusion

The major focus in this work has been to examine the use of noun-forming affixes by Francophone learners of English in Cameroon. After analyzing their use in some essay scripts, it was discovered that these learners use the affixes correctly in some situations but face difficulties in others. In situations in which learners can transfer previously acquired French affixes and use them in English, they do so without any difficulties. When they need to modify French affixes before using them in English, learners of the junior levels face some difficulties while those of the senior levels do not face any major difficulty. The main problem is with the use of noun-forming affixes that neither exist nor have similar equivalents in French. Only very few learners at Terminale and Level III succeed to use these. The difficulty in the setting of parameters for the use of these affixes results in the use of deviant noun-forming affixes by the learners. Basing on these trends, it is speculated that research on the use of verb-forming, adjective-forming and adverb-forming affixes by these learners may reveal similar results.

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