



**FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VERB
MORPHOLOGICAL USES OF NATIVE HAUSA
LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN SA'ADATU RIMI**

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Abstract

This paper examines the verb morphological uses in the English usage of Native Hausa learners of English (NHLE) in Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education, Kumbotso. The subjects who participated in the study are 250 N.C.E. III English Double Major students from School of Languages. Sentence completion and essay writing tests were collected to identify the uses in the respondents' written English. The problem which this study is set to look into is that many second language learners (SLL) find it difficult to form a series of verbs when they appear as regular or irregular. Simple percentages are used to analyse the marks awarded. It also presents the data on verb morphological uses. The result reveals that the students' competence in the morphology of the verb is very low and the uses show: inconsistencies in verb morphological processes and

overgeneralization and the misapplication of rules, as well as the interference of the subjects' mother tongue on English. Thus, the study concludes that many Native Hausa learners of English in SRCOE Kumbotso find it difficult to form a series of verbs when they appear as regular and irregular verbs.

Introduction

This paper provides a theoretical explanation of facts about verb morphological uses and describes how some second language learners of English use the inflection of verbs. Moreover, the paper uses the Interlanguage Theory (IL) and simple percentages (%) to provide explanations of how English as a Second Language (ESL) students form verbs (regular and irregular) in English. Despite the fact that there exist various studies that have accounted for the justification of verb morphological use, most second language learners of English do not know how regular and irregular verbs are formed.

Verb morphological (inflectional) uses are commonly observed in the written English of many ESL learners (for example, Friedman and Grodzinsky 1997, Wible and Itsu 2002, Akande 2001, Tackstrom 2009, among others). The importance of SL learner's competence in morphological appropriateness is very crucial. Yule (1996) contents that "grammatical competence helps greatly in facilitating communicative competence". In view of this, ESL learners that lack both morphological and grammatical competences tend to communicate poorly in both written and spoken form of English.

Hausa Native learners use English verbs to express themselves when writing assignments, examinations or any formal writing. In these various forms of expression, we notice frequent flaws from the misuse of regular and irregular verbs and other verb inflections. Therefore, the problem of this paper arises from the fact that many SL learners find it difficult to form regular and irregular verbs in their morphological processes. In fact, verb morphological uses occur as a result of the poor background knowledge (BGK) of ESL learners. They find it difficult to separate exceptions from general rules in morphological processes. Consequently, the verb morphological uses that Native Hausa learners display in their writing do not only mark their linguistic incompetence but also affect their capacities as future teachers of English. In order to examine the stated problem, it is pertinent to discuss the concept of morphology, morphological errors and, Morphology of Lexical verbs, as well as present the methodology, results and discussion on the topic under investigation.

The Concept of Morphology

According to Prasad (2009:48), “Morphology studies the smallest grammatical units of language and their formation into words; including inflection, derivation and composition.” Tomori (1997) defines morphology as one of the traditional branches of grammar. The other branch is known as syntax. This implies that, Morphology is the study of the internal structure of words. For example, the word “rearranged” when

analyzed has three components “re: first unit of meaning (meaning again) ‘arrange” second unit of meaning (i.e. base) and ‘ed’ – the third grammatical function (indicated past tense). For Todd (1987), morphology refers to “the meaningful combinations of sound to form words. It is the study of the smallest significant units of grammar known as morphemes”. This implies that we can realize different morphemes in a word. For example, cats” has two morphemes. The first morpheme ‘cat’ and the ‘s’ attached to it is a plural marker. Matthews (1991), describes morphology as a term in the branch of linguistics concerned with the forms of words in different uses and constructions. Tomori (1997) views morphology as the study of the structure of the word. It can be regarded as the study of the rules governing the formation of the words in a language. Thus, Matthews (1991) and Tomori (1997) share the same view that morphology as a term can be regarded as a branch of linguistics concerned with the study of the forms of words in different uses. Most linguists agree that morphology is the study of the meaningful parts of words.

Morphological Uses

Linguists and psychologists have noted that errors occur when a learner describes the developing state of grammar in a second language (L2) in English. The error of learners is a universal linguistic phenomenon, which affects ESL (i.e. Hausa learners) of L2, who tend to carry over into the second language he/she is learning. This error implies that, despite the exposure to English, Native Hausa learners find some grammatical

morphemes difficult to ascertain regardless of their length of exposure to English.

The Morphology of Lexical Verbs

Patrick (2009:23) explains that “verbs is known as a doing work”. He further explained that, although many verbs do express action, many simply indicate a condition or state. That is to say, the verb is usually the word in a sentence that is most concerned with the action and is usually essential to the structure of a sentence. Verbs have a number of functions. In this regard, they indicate tense, voice, mood, number and person. They are classified as regular and irregular. Patrick (2009:124) further observes that “most verbs are regular verbs, occasionally known as weak verbs: they are described as regular because they obey certain rules, especially regarding the formation of tenses”. Regular verbs end with -s to the base or the infinitive form of the verb, example: He walks, It plays, She looks, while the rest of the present tense is formed by using just the base or infinitive form, as in: I walk, You play, They love.

The present participle of regular verbs is formed by adding the ending -ing to the base form as in: walking, playing, cooking, standing, etc. In a situation below where the: 1-base form ends with a vowel -‘e’, the ‘e’ is usually omitted before the -ing is added. E.g. loving, hating, hoping, making. (2) The past tense is formed by adding-‘ed’ to the base, or ‘d’ if the base form already ends in -‘ed’. This applies to all persons, for example: I cooked, He walked, You killed, She loved, They hated, etc.

For Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), majority of English verbs are regular verbs. They form the third person singular of the present tense by adding –‘s’ to the base or infinitive form of the verb. For instance, calls, likes, tries: The –ing form or the present participle is formed by adding the –ing to the base form of the verb (for example, Sleeping, working, dancing, pushing, etc.) They further categorize the –s rule’ to three, predictable in its realization (/iz/, /z/ and /s/).

1. Pronounced /iz/after bases ending in voiced or voiceless and spelled –‘es’ unless the base already ends in – ‘e’, as in:

pass – passes budge – budges Pass – passes

budge – budges catch – catches make – makes.

2. Pronounced /z/ and spelled –s after bases ending in other voiced sounds, e.g.

call - calls, rob - robs

3. It is also pronounced /s/ and spelled –‘s’ after bases ending in other voiceless sounds, e.g.

cut - cuts and lock – locks.

The past (v-ed1 and the –ed participle (v-ed2) of regular verbs are spelled as –ed, unless the base ends in ‘-e’and have three spoken realizations:

- i. It is pronounced as /id/ after bases ending in /d/ and /t/ example: pad – padded, pat - patted

- ii. It is pronounced as /d/ after bases ending in voiced sounds, example, budge–budgeted.
- iii. It is pronounced as /t/ after bases ending in voice less sounds. Example, pass – passed, pack - packed

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvick (1972), posit that irregular lexical verbs differ from the regular verbs because they break the rule of the regular verb. That is to say, irregular verbs have a varying number of distinct forms. These could be seen in the following:

- a. Irregular verbs either do not have a /d/ or /t/ inflection when compared with the regular verb. Example: (drink – drank –drunk) and for voiced inflection, e.g. burn-burnt /t/ beside the regular burned /d/).
- b. Irregular verbs in most instances have variation in their base vowel. Example: find – found – found, write – wrote – wrote
- c. Irregular verbs have the same pattern with regular verbs for –‘s’ and –ing forms. The only difference is in the formation of past and the –ed participle irregular verbs violate the regular verbs rule.

Inflections in Verbs

Morphologically, the verbs of English are highly productive when we look at the verb inflections. English verbs have five inflections. Example, ‘cook’, ‘cooks’, ‘cooking’, ‘cooked’ and ‘cooked’. The five inflections

may be referred to as: (1) the infinitive, (2) the –‘s’ form, (3) the – ing form, (4) the –ed₁ form and (5) the –ed₂ form, which have three allomorphs /t/, (d) and (id) which are phonologically conditioned.

(i) The sound /t/ is used after voiceless consonants, as in:

cook cooked kick kicked

(ii) The sound /d/ is used after a voiced consonant as in:

rob robbed /robd/ beg begged/begd/

(iii) The sound /id/ occurs after /t/ or /d/, as seen in:

(i) Conclude concluded

(ii) rent rented

We have those that have irregular endings as in ‘go’ – ‘went’. These irregular endings are usually referred to as morphological superlatives. While others like strong verbs are changed into a process of sound called the Replacive. For example:

(i) take /teik/ took /tuk/ /ei/ changes to /u/

(ii) see /s/ saw /si :/ /i:/ changes to /i:/

(iii) come /kam/ came /KEM/ /Λ/ changes to /ei/

(iv) sing /sig/ sang /sag/ /i/ changes /ae/

In English, some verbs are not inflected and these are known as zero allomorphs. Example: put :put, : cut cut and broadcast: broadcast

Source: Quirk and Greenbaum (1973).

Studies on Morphological Uses

Akande (2001) studied on the competence of some senior secondary school students in English morphology and considered eight morphological processes, namely suffixation, prefixation, compounding, conversion, acronym, blending, clipping and reduplication with a view to find out which of these processes are mostly employed by Nigerian learners of English. The elicitation procedure used are written essays. The result reveals that there is a discrepancy in the subjects' acquisition and mastery of word-formation processes. This is because while some of the processes, namely acronym, blending, clipping, etc. are not regularly used, suffixation is regularly used. The study concludes that suffixation, which is the most regularly used, poses the greatest difficulty to the subjects.

In a related study, Akande (2003) investigated the acquisition of the eight inflectional morphemes in English. The data used for the study were drawn from sixty Yoruba-speaking learners of English who were selected from four secondary schools in Oke-Igbo, Ondo State. He used two types of elicitation techniques of written English composition and a grammar exercise. The results in the analysis of the compositions indicate

that the subjects have a poor mastery of the use of the English past participle, possessive inflection, past tense inflection and plural inflection. However, in the grammar exercise, the subjects performed relatively well (Akande 2003).

Babalola and Akande (2002) conducted another study in which they investigated some linguistic problems of some Yoruba learners of English. They grouped the problems into the phonological, the orthographic, the morphological and the syntactic. They argue that morphological – related problems are quite relevant. They further claim that “English is not free of inconsistency in the area of morphology. There are ambiguities which usually compound learners’ problems” (Babalola and Akande 2002: 250). The result of their study further reveals that a morpheme may be phonologically conditioned and as a result it may have different allomorphs. For example: ‘*in*-which means ‘not’ is realized orthographically as ‘*in*’ as in *the case of the word* indecent, and insignificant respectively. It is realized as *im* as in ‘impossible’ and as *un* in ‘unfair’ and as *ir-* as in ‘irrelevant’ and as *il* in ‘illegal’.

Following the studies above, this paper projects that there are many verb morphological uses made by the second language learners (i.e. Hausa learners) in their written expression in some tertiary institutions. Therefore, this paper examines the verb morphological uses among Hausa learners in Sa’adatu Rimi College of Education, particularly the use of regular and irregular verbs.

Method of Analysis

A class test comprising twenty-five (25) items on sentence completion exercise and essay writing of at least 300-350 words was administered to the respondents. In order to carry out a proper analysis of the data, a marking scheme was provided. In the analysis, the raw scores were converted into the appropriate percentage forms. The analysis identified the correct uses and uses the respondents made using the verb morphological process in its different formation (inflection). The formula used for the analysis was the number of scores over the total number of the respondents multiplied by one hundred:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Scores}}{\text{The total number of respondents}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

Evidence of results on Verb Morphological Uses

The results reflect the following verbs morphological error categories:

- a. Category I (Items 1-10) Regular verb
- b. Category II (Items 11-25) Irregular verb

Results on Verb Morphological Uses

It is assumed that some of the N.C.E. III English Double Major students in the School of Languages, SRCOE Kano use sentences that violate the morphology of

lexical verb rules especially the use of the regular verb. Table 1 below indicates the correct and incorrect responses by the subjects.

Table: 1

Question	All question in category 1(1-10)	
Responses	Respondents	Percentages
Correct	125	82.24%
Incorrect	26	17.10%
None	0	0.66%
Total	152	100%

The question in this category (items 1-10) of regular verb inflection includes: the '-s' form, '-ing' form and the '-ed' form given to test the respondents' ability in the morphology of the regular verb. The analysis reflects their mastery level of category 1 regular verb inflection.

Thus, the analysis shows a high percentage of correct response of 82.24% .This implies that many of the students have mastered this category of regular verb inflection. However, there are still some who constitute 17.10% that have no knowledge, as indicated in the analysis. This could be attributed to lack of knowledge of the verb morphology.

The presence of many uses of this category of regular verb inflection in their essays proves that they have not actually mastered the rule. In this regard, the high percentage of the correct responses in the analysis could be as a result of either guess or familiarity because

competence has not been proved in the essays they wrote. As a result of this, they were not able to use the rules correctly. Some sentences from their essays show that there are verb morphological uses of regular verb inflection.

1. She stay at one place and

v. plu

instead of the “-ed” suffix

2. She starting crying

‘-ing’ inflection

instead of the ‘ed’ suffix

3. We are waiting for one person to completed the work

‘ed’ inflection instead of base form

4. One driver stop and

1st person sing

v.plu

5. The doctor advising us

The ‘ing’ – inflection

instead of the ‘ed’ suffi

The finding is that there exists evidence of the wrong inflection of the regular verb in the sentence completion test in section B, which are equivalent to 0.26%, 0.83%

of the total data, respectively, which are very insignificant.

In this regard, the presence of many uses of this category, regular and irregular verb inflection, respondents proves that they are actually still trying to master the rule. This confirms Akande's (2001) finding that second language learners do encounter serious problems when faced with irregular verbs, especially in the area of morphemes that are regarded as "neutral". For example, the ed1 and ed2 of the word "cut" is the same "cut". There is no inflection to the base form of the word. Such type of verbs has a zero-morpheme marker in their formation.

Furthermore, wrong inflections related to concord (-s form), progressive (ing) and the past tense could be noticed in the following examples: - Concord error (the -s form): It give us more energy. (Plural verb instead of singular, i.e. - s form "gives"). She like pounded yam. (Plural verb instead of singular "likes"). Some people does not take it serious (subject plural and the verb singular instead of plural verb "do"). The progressive (ing): The doctor advising us (-ing suffix instead of 'ed' suffix). I started attended the lecture (the ed suffix instead of -ing). Past tense (ed): I meet with armed robbers (the base form instead of 'ed' met). I sees it and said congratulation (the -s form instead of ed1 saw). I beggined to pay my registration fees (beginned instead of "began"). She "payed" the money ('payed' instead of "paid").

They breaked my leg. (breaked instead of broke). From the examples above, it is concluded that some of the respondents used the wrong inflection in the formation of both regular and irregular verbs. That is why Akande's (2003) research on the eight inflectional morphemes in English concluded that the Yoruba Native learners used as the subjects of the study have a poor mastery of the use of English past participle (ed), progressive inflection, past tense and plural inflection in essay writing.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there exists poor knowledge in the morphology of verbs, especially in the formation of regular and irregular verbs among NHLE learners in SRCOE. This can be attributed mostly to poor exposure to the target language. In this regard, L₂ learners of English need to develop interest and pay more attention in learning English. Bot (2006) explains that learning is a distinct way of developing competence in a second language. The problem of verb morphological uses committed by learners can be attributed to the way they overgeneralise and apply certain rules. This problem can be considered at the socio-linguistic level. Language is a product of human culture and any comprehensive study of it must take into account the total context in which it is learned and used. That is to say, the morphology of the verb in English is different from other Nigerian languages. As such, this could be responsible for verb morphological uses the learners make. Rivers (1968) argues that the major difficulties for the language learner are to be found at

these points where the foreign language differs radically from the native language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the morphology of verbs is not well understood by many Native Hausa Learners of English. Therefore, the study, among others, reveals that the causes of these wrong uses are numerous and range from inconsistency in using English, poor background knowledge of the target language, use of poor teaching methods, lack of trained teachers, overgeneralization, the misapplication of the rules and L1 interference are the major problems that leads to the wrong uses of verb morphology.

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