PATTERNS IN THE ACQUISITION OF IRREGULAR VERBS BY ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

Purpose: This study sought answers on the patterns of acquisition of irregular verbs by second and foreign language learners of English in Cameroon. The premise is that in the process of acquiring irregular verbs, second and foreign language learners of English tend to use one form in place of the other, transfer rules, omit, substitute, overgeneralize and add rules. This study therefore embarked on a developmental and comparative paradigm to analyze morphological features in English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) and English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL) learners' acquisition of irregular verbs in Cameroon. The scope was limited to a selection of some verbs of group 1, 2 and 3 irregular verbs, such as shut, split, hit, flee, bring, free, shine, tear, speak among others.

Methodology: The survey research design was used and through simple random sampling, 900 students from six schools in Cameroon, of the Anglophone sub-system, and from the francophone sub-system, of secondary education were selected. Data was collected from completion tasks, multiple-choice questions and gap filling exercises, where the participants had to write out the present continuous, past tense and past perfect forms of irregular verbs; complete sentences by filling the blanks with the appropriate irregular verb form from given choices, and provide the appropriate form of a given irregular verb to complete a sentence. Data was analysed by identifying and mapping traceable frequency patterns of use and performing a comparative analysis of ESL and EFL users.

Findings: The findings revealed that ESL and EFL learners of English possess some developmental features and they evolve as they move up the interlanguage continuum towards the target language forms. ESL learners produced more frequencies in form in the completion and gap filling tasks as opposed to the multiple choice task. Meanwhile, EFL learners produced more frequencies in gap filling tasks than ESL learners, and over generalized the "-ed" morpheme as a past tense marker to irregular verbs. Addition and substitution of forms were produced more with EFL learners. However, no matter the proficiency level, both ESL and EFL learners faced similar difficulties in the use of morphological forms in the process of acquiring irregular verbs.

Unique contribution to theory, policy and practice: This paper informs on best practices for successful learning, specifically in the acquisition of irregular verbs by ESL and EFL learners of Cameroon. The interlanguage theory provides an explanation of the complexity of language learning within Cameroon's against its multiplicity of indigenous languages, thus recommending a rethink for novel approaches in the teaching of the English language in schools.

Key words: *English as a Foreign Language and English as a Second Language, irregular verb acquisition, morphological forms of irregular verbs.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Cameroon presents a complex linguistic mix, from its official bilingualism language policy to the multiplicity of local languages, which all affect the way the English language is learned and used. Most often referred to as ''Africa in miniature'' Mbangwana (1987:411) the complexity and multiplicity of indigenous languages Cameroonians speak is indicated variously by different linguists such as Ketcha (2019), and Atechi (2010) who all agree to earlier estimates from Dieu et al (1983) and Mbangwana (1987) which identified the number to be between 123 to 236 standardized, and unintelligible indigenous languages.

As per its historical background, French speaking Cameroonians study English as a foreign language while their English-speaking counterparts study it as a second language. English language is therefore learnt with the interference of these other languages as each individual has an affinity and contact with one or more of these indigenous languages, coupled with the prominence of pidgin, as the lingua franca.

1.1 Problem Statement

Irregular verbs are complex in nature, hence, learners exposed to different learning context spiced by socio-cultural realities such as local languages, will no doubt yield verbs and tenses discrepancies. There are therefore bound to be some unique morphological traits from interferences as these learners of English use English for communication, or for performing academic tasks in English. Finding out what these difficulties are, and their recurrent frequencies, is important. Again, finding out why some learners are more successful than others in irregular verb acquisition, can provide enriching solutions in ESL and EFL pedagogy.

1.2 Specific objectives

This paper aims at investigating and analysing the frequency of use of morphological features by ESL and EFL learners in their acquisition of irregular verbs, likewise, in analysing contrastively and comparatively the morphological features they produce. It is expected that at the end a developmental trend in the acquisition of irregular verbs by these learners will be established.

2.0 THEORETICAL PREMISE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The theory of Interlanguage

This paper is buttressed within the theoretical premise of interlanguage, a situation or a process which Selinker thinks is the main cause of the errors produced by learners of English as a second or foreign language. Selinker (1972) defines interlanguage as Second Language (L2) learner's construction of a linguistic system that draws, in part, on the learner's First Language (L1) but also different from it and from the target language. A learner's interlanguage is therefore a unique linguistic system. Generally speaking, the term ''interlanguage'' means two things: (1) the learner's system at a single point in time and (2) the range of interlocking systems that characterizes the development of learners over time. It evolves over time as learners employ various internal strategies to make sense of the input and to control their own output. These strategies were central to Selinker's thinking about interlanguage. Selinker (1972) argues that the interlanguage, which he saw to be a separate linguistic system resulting from the learner's attempted production of the target language norm, was the product of five central cognitive

processes, which are: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication, and overgeneralization of the target language linguistic material.

The concept of interlanguage also involves certain premises about second language acquisition. These include the learner constructs, which are a system of abstract linguistic rules that underlie comprehension and production of the second language, also known as the mental language. It also involves the learner's grammar, which is permeable as it is open to influence from outside, through input, or inside, through omission, overgeneralization and transfer errors. To these are added the transitional factor, as the learners change their grammar from one time to another by adding rules, deleting rules and restructuring the whole system; the learners' construction of variable rules; the learners' use of various learning strategies to develop their interlanguages. The different kinds of errors learners produce reflect their different learning strategies and the learners' fossilization of grammar. To this last point, Selinker suggested that only about five per cent of learners go on to develop the same mental grammar as native speakers. The majority stop some way short. The prevalence of backsliding, that is, the production of errors representing an early stage of development, is typical of fossilized learners. Fossilization does not occur in L1 acquisition and thus is unique to L2 grammars.

From the above notion of interlanguage by Selinker, it is clear that L2 learners of English must make errors in the course of learning the target language and these errors come as a result of interlanguage. Interlanguage theory is adopted for this study because it discusses the general trends and stages that all second-language learners undergo towards learning a second language, in the absence of native-speaking peers of the second language.

2.2 Reviewing the Verb and the irregular verb

Huddleston (1988) says, at the general level the word, 'verb' is applied to a grammatically distinct word class in a language   which contains amongst its most central members the morphologically simplest words denoting 'actions', 'processes' or 'events'. Members of the class carry inflections of 'tense', 'aspect' and 'mood' if the language has these as inflectional categories.

To the above, MC Dougal, (1989), adds that every verb has different forms. Speakers and writers construct these forms by using the four Principal parts of the verb: The present infinitive (or Present), the present participle, the past, and the past participle. Similarly, McArthur (1992) sees a verb as a class of words that serve to indicate the occurrence or performance of an action or the existence of a state or condition. This paper however favours Crystal (1997) who proposes a formal definition of a verb as: An element which can display morphological contrasts of tense, aspect, voice, mood, person and number. Functionally, it is the element which, singly or in combination with other verbs (that is, the verb phrase) is used as the minimal predicate of a sentence occurring with a subject. Table 1 below clarifies this with a presentation of the principal parts of the verb alongside some examples of irregular verbs.

Table1: Principal Parts Of The Verb With Examples Of Irregular Verbs.

Principal Parts Of A Verb	English Verbs Have Four Principal Forms:
1 The Simple Form	The Simple Form Is The Form That Is Found In A Dictionary. It Is The Base Form With No Endings On It (No Final –S,-Ed,-Or-Ing). Ex. See, Make, Sing
2. The Simple Past	The Simple Past Form Ends In –Ed For Regular Verbs. Most Verbs Are Regular, But Many Common Verbs Have Irregular Past Forms Ex. Saw, Made, Sang.
3. The Past Participle	The Past Participle Also Ends In –Ed For Regular Verbs. Some Verbs Are Irregular. It Is Used In Perfect Tenses And The Passive. Ex. Seen, Made, Sung
4.The Present Participle	The Present Participle Ends In –Ing (For Both Regular And Irregular Verbs). It Is Used In Progressive Tenses. (E.G, The Present Progressive And The Past Progressive) Ex. Seeing, Making, Singing

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

As seen above, irregular Verbs are verbs in which the past tense is not formed by adding the usual "ed" ending for the past simple and past participle forms. MC Dougal (1989) divides irregular verbs in to five groups, presented below, which are of particular interest in this paper.

Table 2: Irregular verb classification

Group One: The present, past and past participles of the first group of irregular verbs have the same form

Present	Present Participle	Past	Past Participle
Burst	Bursting	Burst	**Burst**
Cost	**Costing**	**Cost**	**Cost**

Group Two: The Past and Past Participle of every verb in this group are spelled alike

Present	Present Participle	Past	Past Participle
Bring	Bringing	Brought	Brought
Catch	Catching	Caught	Caught

Group Three: In this group, add –n or -en to make the past participle

Present	Present Participle	Past	Past Participle
Break	Breaking	Broke	Broken
Choose	Choosing	Chose	Chosen

Group Four: In this group of irregular verbs, the vowel "i" in the present changes to "a" in the past and "u" in the past participle.

Present	Present Participle	Past	Past Participle
Begin	Beginning	Began	Begun
Drink	Drinking	Drank	Drunk

Group Five: These verbs are grouped together because the past participle is formed from the present rather than the past form.

Present	Present Participle	Past	Past Participle
Blow	Blowing	Blew	Blown
Draw	Drawing	Drew	Drawn

Source: culled from MC Dougal (1989)

2.3 Tense, Aspect, Voice and Mood

With regard to tense, Comrie (1985:12) says it is "*a grammatical category indicated on the verb, either by the verb's morphology or by grammatical words adjacent to the verb such as the auxiliaries (be, do have)".* Crystal (2000) continues that tense is a category used in the grammatical description of verbs (along with aspect and mood), referring primarily to the way the grammar marks the time at which the action denoted by the verb took place. With regard to aspect, according to Quirk et al (1972:90), it "*refers to the manner in which the verb action is regarded or experienced*". Aspectual analysis may lead us to make a distinction between the perfective and imperfective. With regard to voice, Crystal (2000) defines it as a category used in grammatical description of sentences or clause structures, primarily with reference to verbs, to express the way sentences may alter the relationship between the subject and object of a verb, without changing the meaning of the sentence. Finally, concern the term mood, Crystal (ibid) refers to it as a term used in the theoretical and descriptive study of sentence/clause types and especially of the verbs, they contain. Mood ('modality' or 'mode') refers to a set of syntactic and semantic contrast signalled by alternative paradigms of the verb. English verbs have three moods: the indicative, the imperative, and the subjunctive. The indicative mood states a fact or asks a question, while the imperative mood is used to give a command or make a request. The subjunctive mood however is used to express a wish or a condition that is contrary to fact. It is also used to express a command or request after the word "that".

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Research Design

Using the survey research design, this research was carried out on a sample of Forms One, Three, Five, Sixième, Quatrième and Seconde students from selected secondary schools in Cameroon. The results obtained from this study are generalized to cover the entire population.

3.2 Population

The population is made up of nine hundred (900) students from the six selected schools in Cameroon. The informants were chosen amongst learner of ESL and EFL. The subjects are both

males and females considering the fact that the schools are co-educational institutions. Some live in an environment where the main language of social interaction is French and others English. Their ages ranged from ten to seventeen (10-17) years for students and twenty-one to fifty (21-50) for teachers. These students speak English, French and different mother tongues from Cameroon. The schools are representative of the Government, Lay Private and Mission Institutions in the country. We also have students studying in the Anglophone subsystem using French as a foreign language and their French counterparts using English as a foreign language. In school, the Francophone learners speak English with their teachers and French with friends. Their English-speaking counterparts, interact in English and Pidgin, mostly.

Table 3: Statistical Presentation of the Target Population

REGION	SCHOOLS	CLASS
SOUTH WEST	- GHS Limbe, Government	F 1,3 & 5
	- PSS Besongabang, Mission	F 1,3 & 5
	- Vocast Muyuka Lay private	F 1,3 & 5
LITTORAL	Lycée Makepe, Government	6eme, 4eme & 2nd
	College Ste Jeanne D'arc / Ste Monique Nkongsamba, Mission	6eme, 4eme & 2nd
	Fondation Pippart Souza, Lay private	6eme, 4eme & 2nd

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

The table above shows the two regions of Cameroon where the data was collected, the schools and the classes. The South West region is the Anglophone zone, with more users of English as a day-to-day language for communication, while the littoral is the francophone zone, with more French speakers.

3.3 The Sampling Technique and tools

The Sampling Technique used for this study is the Simple Random Sampling Technique. Samples of scripts were randomly selected and analysed, so that the results could be generalized to cover the entire population. Fifty (50) scripts from each of the classes, representing each region were randomly selected and analysed, giving a total nine hundred (900). Primary data for this study was obtained from the completion task, multiple-choice questions, and gap filling tasks, assigned to the target population. In order to get students committed, the tasks were written under examination condition and considered to be a test. The various tasks are presented below. The completion task had nine tokens, representative of three groups of irregular verbs. The multiple choice task had nine tokens, and the gap filling 9 tokens. These tasks were aimed at evaluating students' acquisition and use of morphological forms of verb inflection in the present tense, present continuous, simple past, present perfect, past perfect, passive, modal auxiliary and interrogative sentences.

A) The completion task

Complete the Table with the Correct Form of the Verbs

	Verbs	Present Continuous Tense	Past Tense	Past Perfect Tense
Example	**Go**	**Going**	**Went**	**Had gone**
1	Shut			
2	Split			
3	Hit			
4	Flee			
5	Shine			
6	Bring			
7	Freeze			
8	Tear			
9	Speak			

For numbers one, two and three which are verbs of the first group, the following morphological verb forms were expected to be provided by learners; present continuous tense t + - ing "shutting", past tense + - "shut" and past perfect tense + - "had shut". With regards to verbs of the second group, the following morphological verb forms were expected to be provided by learners: present continuous tense + - ing "fleeing" past tense, - e + - d "fled" and past perfect – e + - d "had fled". In addition to verbs of the third group, the expected verb form in the present continuous tense is + - ing "tearing", past tense + - ore, "tore" and past perfect tense + - orn "had torn".

B) The multiple choice task

For the Multiple Choice Task, the sample below was provided

Choose the Correct Form of the Verb and Fill in the Space Provided.

1- Maria _____ me English every day.
   a) teach   b) teached   c) teaches   d) teaching
2- The children are _____ the tables.
   a) hiting   b) hitting   c) hited   d) hitted
3- I _____ a house for my mother next month.
   a) will build   b) shall build   c) will built   d) shall built
4- Susan said she would _____ a car before travelling to the village.
   a) bought   b) buy   c) buying   d) buyed
5- They _____ the tree yesterday.
   a) cutted   b) cut   c) cutting   d) cuts
6- The thief _____ the goat.
   a) had stole   b) had steal   c) had stealing   d) had stolen
7- The lazy girl said that she would _____before doing her homework.
   a) swung   b) swinged   c) swinging   d) swing
8- She _____ leg last week.
   a) hurted   b) hurt   c) hurts   d) hurting
9- The woman _____ the beautiful dress.
   a) had chose   b) had choose   c) had choosing   d) had chosen

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Question one was aimed at analysing the use of the + - es morphological form in the third person singular, in the simple present tense, with verbs of the second group, (teaches). Question two was aimed at analysing the use of the morphological form t+ - ing in the present continuous tense, with verbs of the first group, (hitting). Question three was aimed at analysing the use of shall, in the first person singular and plural and the base form of the verb + - in the future (shall build). Question four and seven were aimed at analysing the use of the base form of the verb + -, in modal auxiliary verbs, with verbs of the second group (buy). Question five and eight were aimed at analysing the morphological form + -, with verbs of the first group, in the past tense (cut). Question six and nine were aimed at analysing the use of the morphological form + - en, with verbs of the third group, in the past perfect tense (had stolen).

C The gap filling task

For the gap filling exercise, it was aimed at evaluating learners' use of morphological forms in the simple past, present perfect, past perfect, passive, present tense, modal auxiliary verb and interrogative sentences, as shown in the sample below.

Fill in the Gap with the Appropriate Form of the Verb.

1- Last week, Joseph_____ never to steal again. (swear)
2- The bucket has _____ into the well. (fall)
3- Mary _____ insects every day (catch)
4- The bell is _____ by the class prefect. (ring)
5- I am _____ the clock now. (set)
6- The ship had _____ in the sea. (sink)
7- John will _____ his new shirt tomorrow. (wear)
8- The students said they would_____ before going home. (fight)
9- Much beer is _____ by Cameroonians (drink).

Question one was aimed at analysing the use of the morphological form + - ore in the past tense, with verbs of the third group (swore). Question three was aimed at analysing the use of the –es morphological form in the 3rd person singular, in the present simple tense, with verbs of the second group (catches). Question five was aimed at analysing the use of the morphological form t –ing in the present continuous tense, with verbs of the first group (setting). Meanwhile, question eight was aimed at analysing the use of the base form in modal auxiliary verbs, with verbs of the second group (would fight). Finally, question seven was aimed at analysing the use of the base form of the verb + - in the future with verbs of the third group (will wear).

3.4 Method of Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

Data analysis consisted in reading through all the scripts identifying and presenting morphological features traceable in learner's use of irregular verbs through tables. The frequencies of each of these features per task were equally presented in relation to denominational school and proficiency level. The next phase involved a comparison in the use of morphological forms of ESL and EFL Learners as per their proficiency levels and tasks.

4.0 RESULTS

The tables present a sample of the results of the verbs (one verb only) in each verb grouping for each task of morphological forms by ESL and EFL learners as per their proficiency levels. The third table presents a comparative outcome in the use of both the ESL and EFL learners.

4.1 Results for the completion task

This task was aimed at analysing morphological features in learners' acquisition of irregular verbs in the present continuous, simple past and past participle for irregular verbs in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd groups. The following data was obtained, presented below in tables.

4.1.1 Morphological Forms of Verbs of the First Group

This is the group of verbs whose present, past and past participle have the same forms. The verbs presented were split, hit and shut. In the course of analysing the data, we found out that, the results were the same; as such the table present the findings only for 'shut'.

Table 4: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the present continuous, past and past perfect tenses with verbs of the first group (ESL Learners)

Morphological Form	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			Past Perfect Tense		
	+ -ing	t + -ing	+ - en	+ - ed	t + -ed	+-	+ -ed	t + -ed	+-
Verb	shuting	shutting	shuten	shuted	shutted	shut	had shuted	had shutted	had shut
Form 1 (%)	63.3	26	10.7	56.7	26	17.3	57.3	26.7	16
Form 3 (%)	54.7	38.6	6.7	40.7	30 7	28.7	33.3	33.3	36.7
Form 5 (%)	52.6	44	3.3	32	28.7	36	32.7	24.7	42.7

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 5: Frequency in the use of Morphological forms in the Present continuous, past and past perfect tenses with verbs of the first group (EFL learners)

Morphological Form	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			Past Perfect Tense		
	+ -ing	t + -ing	+ - en	+ - ed	t + -ed	+-	+ -ed	t + -ed	+-
Verb	shuting	shutting	shuten	shuted	shutted	shut	had shuted	had shutted	had shut
6eme (%)	79.3	9.3	11.3	69.3	16	14.7	65.3	20.7	14
4eme (%)	64.7	26.7	8.7	51.3	24	20	44.7	30.7	24.7
2nd (%)	53.3	35.3	10.7	30.7	26	43.3	24.7	26.7	48.7

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 6 : Frequency in the use of Morphological forms in the present continuous, past and past perfect tenses with verbs of the first group (ESL and EFL learners**)**

	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			Past Perfect Tense		
Morphol ogical Form	+ -ing	t + -ing	+ - en	+ - ed	t + -ed	+-	+ -ed	t + -ed	**+-**
Verb	shuting	shutting	shuten	shuted	shutted	shut	had shuted	had shutted	had shut
ESL (%)	56.8	36.2	6.8	43.1	28.4	28.4	41.1	28.2	31.7
EFL (%)	65.7	23.7	10.2	50.4	22	26	44.8	26	29.1

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

The pattern here clearly shows that ESL learners produced more frequencies with verbs of the first group with the form "+-ing" as in "shuting", as against "t+-ing" as in "shutting", in the present continuous tense. On the other hand, learners over generalized the "-ed" morpheme in the past and past perfect tenses. Similarly, EFL learners produced more frequencies in the present continuous tense with the form "+-ing" as in "shuting" as opposed to the form "t+-ing" as in ''shutting''. In the past and past perfect forms, learners over generalized the "ed'' morpheme as in "shuted" also. It should however be noted that verbs of the first group do not change their forms in the past and past participle forms.

4.1.2 Morphological Forms of Verbs of the second Group

Table 7: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Continuous, Past and Past Perfect Tenses with verbs of the second group (ESL Learners)

	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			Past Perfect Tense		
Morphol ogical Form	+ -ing	-e + -ing	+ - ings	-e + - t	+ -d	-e + -d	-e + -t	+ -d	-e + -d
Verb	Fleeing	fleing	fleeings	Flet	Fleed	fled	had flet	had fleed	had fled
From 1 (%)	72	21.3	6.7	18	59.3	22.7	38.7	44.7	16.7
Form 3 (%)	82	14	4	40.7	42	17.3	36.7	34.7	28.7
Form 5 (%)	92.7	5.3	2	24	30.7	45.3	24.7	29.3	46

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 8: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Continuous, Past and Past Perfect Tenses with verbs of the second group (EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			**Past Perfect Tense**		
	+ -ing	-e + -ing	+ - ings	-e + - t	+ -d	-e + -d	-e + -t	+ -d	-e + -d
Verb	Fleeing	fleing	fleeings	Flet	Fleed	fled	had flet	had fleed	had fled
6eme (%)	82	8	10	4	86	10	5.3	84	10.7
4eme (%)	86.7	6.7	6.7	13.3	64.7	18.47	20	56.7	23.3
2nd (%)	91.3	5.3	3.3	14.7	58.6	26.7	10.7	58.7	30.7

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 9: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Continuous, Past and Past Perfect Tenses with verbs of the second group (ESL and EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			Past Perfect Tense		
	+ -ing	-e + -ing	+ - ings	-e + - t	+ -d	-e + -d	-e + -t	+ -d	-e + -d
Verb	Fleeing	fleing	fleeings	Flet	Fleed	fled	had flet	had fleed	had fled
ESL (%)	82.2	13.5	4.2	27.5	44	28.4	33.3	36.2	30.4
EFL(%)	86.6	6.6	6.6	10.6	69.7	18.4	12	66.4	21.5

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

The comparative table above (table 9) indicates that with verbs of the second group, ESL learners produced more frequencies with the form "-t" as in "flet" in the past and past perfect tenses as opposed to "-e", "fled". They also over generalized the "-ed" morpheme as a past tense marker to irregular verbs. Meanwhile, EFL learners used the "-ed" morpheme as in "fleed" as opposed to "fled'' in the past and past perfect form.

4.1.3 Morphological Forms of Verbs of the third Group

Table 10: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Continuous, Past and Past Perfect Tenses with verbs of the third group (ESL Learners)

	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			Past Perfect Tense		
Morphological Form	+ -ing	+ -s	+ - en	+ - ed	+ -s	+ -o-	+ -ed	+ -ore	+ -orn
Verb	tearing	Tears	tearen	teared	tears	tore	had teared	had tore	had torn
Form 1 (%)	92.7	3.3	4	53.3	13.3	33.3	46.7	41.3	12
Form 3 (%)	95.3	2.7	3.3	38	9.3	44.7	22.7	45.3	28.7
Form 5 (%)	99.3	0.7	0	20	5.3	68	22.7	36	41.3

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 11: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Continuous, Past and Past Perfect Tenses with verbs of the third group (EFL Learners)

	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			Past Perfect Tense		
Morphological Form	+ -ing	+ -s	+ - en	+ - ed	+ -s	+ -o-	+ -ed	+ -ore	+ -orn
Verb	tearing	tears	tearen	teared	tears	tore	had teared	had tore	had torn
6eme (%)	82.7	7.3	10	64.7	20.7	14.7	76	17.3	6.7
4eme (%)	82.7	6	11.3	62.7	17.3	20.7	48	30	22
2nd (%)	88.7	4	7.3	52.7	14	33.3	30	38.7	31.3

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

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Table 12: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Continuous, Past and Past Perfect Tenses with verbs of the third group (ESL and EFL Learners)

	Present Continuous Tense			Past Tense			Past Perfect Tense		
Morphological Form	+ -ing	+ -s	+ - en	+ - ed	+ -s	+ -o-	+ -ed	+ -ore	+ -orn
Verb	tearing	tears	tearen	teared	tears	tore	had teared	had tore	had torn
ESL(%)	95.7	2.2	2	37.1	9.3	48.6	30.6	40.8	27.3
EFL(%)	84.6	4.1	9.5	60	17.3	22.8	51.3	28.6	20

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Here it can be observed that ESL learners mixed up the form "ore'' in the past and "-orn" in the past perfect tense as in "tore'' and "torn'', "swore'' and "sworn" with verbs of the third group. EFL learners however produced lesser frequencies with the forms "ore'' and "-orn".

4.2 Multiple Choice Tasks

The tables below present the data obtained first individually (EFL and ESL) productions, after which a third table presents a comparative analysis of the productions of these two categories.

4.2.1 Morphological Forms of Verbs of the first Group

Table 13: Frequency of Morphological Forms in the Present, Present Continuous and Present Perfect Tenses. (ESL Learners)

	Present Tense				Present Continuous Tense				Present Perfect Tense			
Morphological Form	+ -	+ -ed	+ -es	+ - ing	+ - ing	t + - ing	t + -ed	+ - ed	+ -	+ -a -	+ - en	+ - ing
Verb	teach	teached	teaches	teaching	hiting	hitting	hitted	hited	have see	have saw	have seen	have seeing
Form 1 (%)	8.7	4.7	44.7	42	52	26	11.3	10.7	11.3	42	31.3	15.3
Form 3 (%)	7.3	9.3	62.7	20.7	38.6	39.3	12.7	9.3	12	37.3	44.7	5.4
Form 5 (%)	6.7	6	64	8.7	44.7	44	6.7	4.7	10	22.7	63.3	4

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 14: Frequency of Morphological Forms in the Present, Present Continuous and Present Perfect Tenses (EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Present Tense				Present Continuous Tense				Present Perfect Tense			
	+ -	+ -ed	+ -es	+ - ing	+ - ing	t + - ing	t + -ed	+ - ed	+ -	+ -a -	+ - en	+ - ing
Verb	teach	teached	teaches	teaching	hiting	hitting	hitted	hited	have see	have saw	have seen	have seeing
6eme (%)	18.7	29.3	17.3	36.7	64	20.7	8.7	23.7	38.7	8.7	20.7	31.3
4eme (%)	14.7	30.7	32	26.7	52.7	24.7	7.3	15.3	33.3	15.3	32.7	18.7
2nd (%)	10.7	25.7	42	23.3	50	28.7	13.3	20	50	17.3	54	11.3

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020

Table 15: Frequency of Morphological Forms in the Present, Present Continuous and Present Perfect Tenses (ESL and EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Present Tense				Present Continuous Tense				Present Perfect Tense			
	+ -	+ -ed	+ -es	+ - ing	+ - ing	t + - ing	t + -ed	+ - ed	+ -	+ -a -	+ - en	+ - ing
Verb	teach	teached	teaches	teaching	hiting	hitting	hitted	hited	have see	have saw	have seen	have seeing
ESL (%)	8.4	6.6	62	23.7	45.1	36.4	10.2	8.2	11.3	34	46.4	8.2
EFL (%)	14.6	128.5	30.4	27.5	55.5	24.6	9.7	19.5	29.5	13.7	36	20.4

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

EFL learners produced more frequencies with the +-ed as many went for the form 'teached", a clear indication of overgeneralizing. This was observed to be very limited with ESL learners.

4.2.2 Morphological Forms of Verbs of the past, past perfect and interrogative sentences

Table 16: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Past, Past Perfect and Interrogative Sentences (ESL Learners)

Morphological Form	Past Tense				Past Perfect Tense				Interrogative Sentence			
	t+ -ed	+ -	t + -ing	+ -s	+ -o-	+ -	+ - ing	+ - n	+ - a -	+ - ing	+ -	+ - en
Verb	cutted	Cut	cutting	cuts	had stole	had steal	had stealing	had stolen	ate	eating	eat	eten
Form 1 (%)	54.7	18.7	13.3	13.3	46.7	13.3	14.7	25.3	61.3	6	24.7	8
Form 2 (%)	42	30.7	10	17.3	40.7	14	8.6	36.7	41.3	15.3	36.7	6.7
Form 5 (%)	39.3	42.7	4.7	13.3	40	11.3	5.3	43.3	34	3.3	52.7	4

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 17: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Past, Past Perfect and Interrogative Sentences (EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Past Tense				Past Perfect Tense				Interrogative Sentence			
	t+ -ed	+ -	t + -ing	+ -s	+ -o-	+ -	+ - ing	+ - n	+ - a -	+ - ing	+ -	+ - en
Verb	cutted	cut	cutting	cuts	had stole	had steal	had stealing	had stolen	ate	eating	eat	eaten
6eme (%)	56	9.3	16.7	11.3	9.3	48.7	32.7	9.3	12	24	54	10
4eme (%)	54.3	24	12	10.7	12	34.7	33.3	20	7.3	14.7	61.3	17.3
2nd (%)	47.3	24	18	10.7	14.7	38	22.7	18.7	10	13.3	60.7	16

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 18: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Past, Past Perfect and Interrogative Sentences (ESL and EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Past Tense				Past Perfect Tense				Interrogative Sentence			
	t+ -ed	+ -	t + -ing	+ -s	+ -o-	+ -	+ - ing	+ - n	+ - a -	+ - ing	+ -	+ - en
Verb	cutted	Cut	cutting	cuts	had stole	had steal	had stealing	had stolen	ate	eating	eat	eaten
ESL (%)	45.3	30.6	9.3	14.6	42.4	12.8	9.5	33.1	45.5	8.2	4	5.7
EFL (%)	52.5	19.1	15.5	10.8	12	40.4	29.5	16	9.7	17.1	58.6	14.4

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

4.2.3 Morphological Forms of passive, modal auxiliary and the future

Table 19: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in Passive Voice, Modal Auxiliary Verbs and the Future Tense (ESL Learners)

Morphological Form	Passive Voice				Modal Auxiliary Verbs				Future Tense			
	+ -ing	+ -a -	+ - s	+ - u -	+ - o -	+ -	+ - ing	+ - ed	will + -	shall + -	will + -t	shall + -t
Verb	is singing	is sang	is sings	is sung	bought	buy	buying	buyed	will build	shall build	will built	shall built
Form 1 (%)	16.7	66	5.3	13.3	56.7	26	8	12	60	22	12.7	5.3
Form 3 (%)	15.3	48.7	4.7	31.3	42.7	45.3	2.6	9.3	55.3	30.7	8	8
From 5 (%)	7.3	46	6	40.6	35.3	53.3	2.6	6	55.3	34.7	6	3.3

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 20: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in Passive Voice, Modal Auxiliary Verbs and the Future Tense (EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Passive Voice				Modal Auxiliary Verbs				Future Tense			
	+ -ing	+ -a -	+ - s	+ - u -	+ - o -	+ -	+ - ing	+ - ed	will + -	shall + -	will + -t	shall + -t
Verb	is singing	is sang	is sings	is sung	bought	buy	buying	buyed	will build	shall build	will built	shall built
6eme (%)	53.3	24.7	11.3	8.7	9.3	11.3	30	46	68.7	15.3	11.3	4.7
4eme (%)	46.7	16.7	26.7	12	18	19.3	22.7	40	60.3	20	10	8.7
2nd (%)	25.3	39.3	17.3	18	44	34.7	10	11.3	52.7	28.7	12.7	6

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 21: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in Passive Voice, Modal Auxiliary Verbs and the Future Tense (ESL and EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Passive Voice				Modal Auxiliary Verbs				Future Tense			
	+ -ing	+ -a -	+ - s	+ - u -	+ - o -	+ -	+ - ing	+ - ed	will + -	shall + -	will + -t	shall + -t
Verb	is singing	is sang	is sings	is sung	bought	buy	buying	buyed	will build	shall build	will built	shall built
ESL (%)	13.1	53.5	5.3	28.4	43.3	44	4.4	9.1	56.8	29.1	8.8	5.5
EFL (%)	41.7	26.8	18.4	12.8	23.7	21.7	20.8	32.4	55.1	21.3	11.3	6.4

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

With respect to the multiple choice task, the findings reveal that learners produced more frequencies with verbs of the first group in the present continuous, past and past perfect tenses. There is the omission of the "-s" morpheme to indicate the third person singular in the present tense with verbs of the second group, likewise, the over generalization of the "-ed" morpheme as a past tense marker to irregular verbs. The learners used the past forms in place of the past participle forms.

4.3 Gap Filling Task

The tables below present the data obtained first individually for EFL and ESL productions, after which a third table presents a comparative analysis of them. Comments follow at the end.

4.3.1 Morphological Forms of the present simple, present perfect and present continuous

Table 22: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Simple, Present Perfect and Present continuous Tense (ESL Learners)

Morphological Form	Present Simple Tense				Present Continuous Tense				Present Perfect Tense			
	+ -ed	+ - es	+ - ing	+ -	+ -	+ -ing	+-t ing	+- ed	+ -a-	+ -e -	+ - en	+-ed
Verb	------	catches	catching	catch	set	seting	setting	------	has fall	has fell	has fallen	has felled
Form 1 (%)	----	26	52.7	21.3		56	30	----	26	54	16.7	------
Form 3 (%)	----	34.7	32.3	11.3	8	51.3	41.3	-----	15.3	45.3	39.3	-------
Form 5 (%)	-----	22.7	66	11.3	7.3	51.3	41.3	-----	8.7	40	51.3	-------

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 23: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Simple, Present Perfect and Present Perfect Tense (EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Present Simple Tense				Present Continuous Tense				Present Perfect Tense			
	+ -ed	+ - es	+ - ing	+ -	+ -	+ -ing	t +-ing	+- ed	+ -a-	+ -e -	+ - en	+-ed
Verb	catched	catches	catching	catch	set	seting	setting	seted	has fall	has fell	has fallen	has felled
6eme (%)	16	19.3	52	12.7	46.7	30.7	11.3	11.3	48	16	8.7	19.3
4eme (%)	22	30.7	28.7	18.7	24.7	42	20.7	12.7	29.3	30	15.3	14.7
2nd (%)	21.3	34	30.7	14	12	50	31.3	6.7	8.7	32.7	48.7	10.7

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 24: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Present Simple, Present, Perfect and Present Perfect Tense (ESL and EFL Learners)

Morphological Form	Present Simple Tense				Present Continuous Tense				Present Perfect Tense			
	+ -ed	+ - es	+ - ing	+ -	+ -	+ -ing	t +-ing	+- ed	+ -a-	+ -e -	+ - en	+-ed
Verb	catched	catches	catching	catch	set	seting	setting	seted	has fall	has fell	has fallen	has felled
ESL (%)	30.7	50.7	18.6		9.7	52.8	37.5	****	16.8	46.4	36.8	****
EFL (%)	19.7	28	37.1	15.2	27.7	40.8	21.1	10.4	30.6	26.2	24.2	19

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

4.3.2 Morphological Forms of the past tense, past perfect and interrogative

Table 25: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Past Tense, Past Perfect Tense and Interrogative Sentences (ESL Learners)

Morphological Form	Past Tense				Past Perfect			Interrogative sentences		
	+ -	+ - ore	+ - orn	+- ed	+ -ed	+ -a -	+ - u -	+ - i -	+ -a -	+ - n
Verb	swear	swore	sworn	------	had sinked	had sank	had sunk	give	gave	given
From 1 (%)	26.7	54	19.3	------	56	30	13.3	36.7	44	19.3
Form 3 (%)	24.7	62.7	12.7	-----	40	29.3	30.7	28.7	43.7	24.7
Form 5 (%)	14.7	79.3	6	------	17.3	40	42.7	16	38	46

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 26: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Past Tense, Past Perfect Tense and Interrogative Sentences (EFL Learners).

Morphological Form	Past Tense				Past Perfect Tense			Interrogative Sentences		
	+ -	+ - ore	+ - orn	+- ed	+ -ed	+ -a -	+ - u -	+ - i -	+ -a -	+ - n
Verb	swear	swore	sworn	sweared	had sinked	had sank	had sunk	give	gave	given
6[eme] (%)	28	18.7	6	47.3	68	22	10	72	18.7	9.3
4[eme] (%)	24	28	10	38	54	28.7	17.3	27.3	46.7	21.3
2nd (%)	18	36.7	14.7	30	30.7	42	27.3	22.7	54	23.3

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 27: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Past Tense, Past Perfect Tense and Interrogative Sentences

	Past Tense				Past perfect Tense				Interrogative		
Morphological Form	+ -	+ - ore	+ - orn	+- ed	+ -ed	+ -a -	+ - u -		+ - i -	+ -a -	+ - n
Verb	swear	swore	sworn	**sweared**	had sinked	had sank	had sunk		give	gave	given
ESL (%)	22	65.3	12.7		37.7	33.5	28.8		28.3	41.7	30
EFL (%)	23.3	27.7	10.4	38.6	50.8	30.8	18.4		40.6	39.7	19.7

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

4.3.3 Morphological Forms of the passive, modal auxiliaries and future tense

Table 28: Frequency in the use of Morphological Forms in the Passive, Modal Auxiliary and Future Tense (ESL Learners)

	Passive				Modal Auxiliary				Future Tense		
Morphological Form	+ - i -	+ -a -	+ - u -	+- ed	+ -	+ - o -	+ - ing	+- ed	+ -	+ - ed	+ - o-
Verb	is drink	is drank	is drunk	----	would fight	would fought	-----	would fighted	wear	weared	wore
Form 1 (%)	22.7	65.3	12	----	21.3	66.7	---	8.7	72	20.7	7.3
Form 3 (%)	14.7	42	8.7	----	46	42	---	8.7	68.7	18.7	12.7
From 5 (%)	12	52.6	35.3	----	70.7	24	-----	5.3	78.7	7.3	14

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

Table 29: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Passive, Modal Auxiliary and Future Tense (EFL Learners)

	Passive				Modal Auxiliary				Future Tense		
Morphological Form	+ - i -	+ -a -	+ - u -	+- ed	+ -	+ - o -	+ - ing	+- ed	+ -	+ - ed	+ - o-
Verb	is drink	is drank	is drunk	is drinked	would fight	would fought	would fighting	would fighted	wear	weared	wore
6eme (%)	44.7	15.3	13.3	26.7	44.7	12.7	6	36.7	473	43.3	9.3
4eme (%)	22.7	34.7	16	26.7	53.3	22.7	8	16	56	27.3	16.7
2nd (%)	28.7	26.7	22.6	18.7	54.7	26.7	5.3	30.3	57.3	26	16.7

Table 30: Frequency in the Use of Morphological Forms in the Passive, Modal Auxiliary and Future Tense (ESL and EFL Learners)

	Passive				Modal Auxiliary Verbs				Future Tense		
Morphological Form	+ - i -	+ -a -	+ - u -	+- ed	+ -	+ - o -	+ - ing	+- ed	+ -	+ - ed	+ - o-
Verb	is drink	is drank	is drunk	is drinked	would fight	would fought	would fighting	would fighted	wear	weared	wore
ESL (%)	16.4	57.6	26		46	44.2	9.8		73.1	15.5	11.4
EFL (%)	32	26.7	17.3	24	50.8	20.6	6.6	22	53.5	32.3	14.2

Source: Researcher's compilation (2020)

With respect to the gap filling task, findings reveal that EFL learners produced more frequencies with the form "+-ing'' as in "cuting", "splitting" as opposed to "cutting" and 'splitting'' in the present continuous form with verbs of the first group. In continuation, with verbs of the second group in the present tense, learners omitted the "-s" morpheme as in "catches" to indicate the third person singular. Learners over generalized the "-ed" morpheme as a past tense marker to irregular verbs. In addition, they misused the four inflectional suffixes to indicate tense. They mixed up morphological forms and used the past forms in place of the past participle forms, substituted the "-ed" morpheme for the "-en" in the past participle as in "fallen" and "broken". There was the addition of the "-s" morpheme after the gerund "-ing" in the present continuous form as in "feelings''.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The findings of this work in answering the research questions revealed that ESL learners produced more frequencies in form in the completion and gap filling tasks as opposed to the multiple choice task. This is due to the fact that; these learners are producing what they already have acquired in the linguistic repertoires. EFL learners produced more frequencies in gap filling tasks than ESL learners, owing to the fact that ESL learners are more exposed to the target language than their EFL counterparts. They also over generalized the "-ed" morpheme as a past tense marker of irregular verbs than ESL learners. Addition and substitution of forms was produced more with EFL learners.

Conclusions

Conclusively, we found out that the more learners advanced up the academic ladder; there was a decrease in the frequency rate at which features occurred in the production of morphological forms of irregular verbs. However, no matter the proficiency level, both ESL and EFL learners faced similar difficulties in the use of morphological forms in the process of acquiring irregular verbs. With regard to the theory of interlanguage, the results reveal that ESL and EFL learners of English possess some developmental features and they evolve as they move up the interlanguage continuum towards the target language forms.

Recommendations

One of the key recommendations is with regard to the pedagogical relevance of the findings which this paper recommends the findings be applied in course design and the writing of text books for EFL and ESL with more on irregular verbs as the focus. It will also be interesting if further research is carried out in regions where limited interaction of EFL and ESL students exist like in the Adamawa and Northern regions.

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