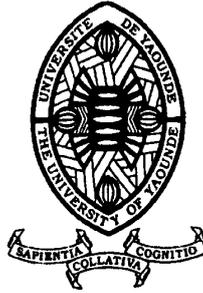


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UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I
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DEPARTMENT OF DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND THE MASTERY OF SOME BASIC ENGLISH GRAMMAR RULES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Award of a Postgraduate Teacher's Diploma(DIPES II) in Bilingual Studies

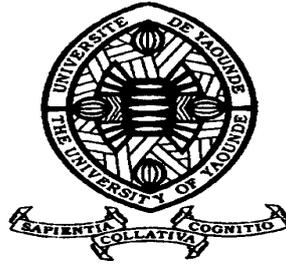
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the correlation between level of education and the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules in English and hypothetically claims that there is no significant relationship between educational attainment and the mastery of these grammar rules in English. In order to investigate the plausibility of this claim, a production test was administered to 160 Level One and Level Three students of the Department of Geography and the Department of English of the University of Yaounde 1 for the assessment of their knowledge of grammatical concord, proximity concord, and notional concord. The overall findings reveal that the ability of students ,with a higher level of education, in the use of these subject-verb grammatical rules is not significantly different from that of students with a lower level of education. In other words, there is no predictable relationship that can be established between educational attainment and the mastery of subject-verb agreement rules. Furthermore, the status of being either an ESL or an EFL learner showed a weak correlation with the mastery of these agreement rules. Theses findings, therefore, have many sociolinguistic and pedagogic implications.

RÉSUMÉ

La présente étude porte sur la corrélation entre le niveau d'éducation et la maîtrise de certaines règles d'accord du verbe avec son sujet en anglais. Ce travail est fondé sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle il n'existe pas une forte corrélation entre le niveau d'éducation et la maîtrise de certaines règles d'accord du verbe avec son sujet. Pour vérifier la plausibilité de cette hypothèse, un questionnaire a été administré à 160 étudiants du niveau 1 et niveau 3 du département de géographie et du département d'anglais respectivement de l'Université de Yaounde 1 afin d'évaluer leur compétence sur la maîtrise de certaines règles d'accord du verbe avec son sujet en anglais. Les résultats de cette étude de manière générale révèlent que la compétence des étudiants ayant un niveau supérieur d'éducation sur la maîtrise de certaines règles d'accord du verbe avec son sujet en anglais n'est pas différente de celle des étudiants ayant un niveau inférieur d'éducation. Autrement dit, le niveau d'éducation n'a pas un impact significatif sur la maîtrise de ces règles d'accord. Ainsi, nous ne saurons prédire de manière générale aucun rapport corrélationnel entre ces deux variables étudiées. De plus, le fait d'être un apprenant de l'anglais soit comme langue seconde soit comme langue étrangère a une faible corrélation avec la maîtrise des règles d'accord du verbe avec son sujet. Ces résultats présentent donc des implications multidimensionnelles aussi bien qu'en sociolinguistique qu'en pédagogie.

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I would like to equally thank my respondents of Level 1 and Level 3 of both the Department of Geography and the Department of English for their collaboration during my field work. My heart-felt and deep gratitude goes to my family, particularly my father, Alh. Issa Moctard, my mother, Roukayatou, my sisters, Aicha, Amina, and Zainab, and my brother, Abdoul-Aziz Salahoudine, for all their unconditional love, financial, moral and spiritual support in the realisation of this study.

DEDICATION

To my two precious Pearls, my Mom and Dad,
for their relentless and unconditional support
And to my very best friend, Charlaine

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this work, entitled “The Correlation between Level of Education and the Mastery of some Basic English Grammar Rules”, was carried out by Mohamadou Moubarak, under my academic supervision.

Supervisor

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AmE:	American English
CA:	Contrastive Analysis
CamE:	Cameroon English
EA:	Error Analysis
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
ELT:	English Language Teaching
EngD:	Department of English
ESL:	English as a Second Language
GeogD:	Department of Geography
L1:	Level one
L3:	Level three
PMC:	Principle of Multiple Causes
PQM:	Principle of Quantitative Modeling
SBE:	Standard British English

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The past four decades or so have witnessed increasingly rapid advances in the field of correlational sociolinguistics after the pioneer work of William Labov, carried out in 1966. This seminal study paved the way for the exploration of language change and variation in different parts of the world. As Labov (2006:381) himself points out in the revised edition of his (1966) book,

Judging from the literature and general opinion, SSENYC [*The Social Stratification of English in New York*] had considerable impact on the field of sociolinguistics. It initiated a field of quantitative, linguistically-oriented sociolinguistics, or as it is commonly referred to today, the study of linguistic change and variation.

Labov's investigation and subsequent similar studies carried out in Western societies (e.g. Fasold, 1972; Macaulay & Trevelyan, 1973, Trudgill, 1974; Wolfram, 1974; Christian, Wolfram & Dube, 1984) brought to prominence how the choice of certain standard linguistic features indicates the speaker's social class, gender, age, and level of education. In their respective investigations, the afore-mentioned scholars and many other linguists established a correlation between extra-linguistic variables (occupation, ethnicity, age, social class, education, etc.) and linguistic variables (selected sound features, principally) in the industrialised Western world. Central to almost their entire investigations is the consideration of phonological features in relation to independent variables. This focus could be accounted for by the fact that sound features appear to be a fertile ground which obviously spells out how speakers of a given speech community articulate use , language in 'their own way', which ultimately indicates their societal status in their community. To date, different studies in general and those conducted in Cameroon in particular have focused mostly on sound features as they vary according to occupational, ethnic, geographic, and educational factors (e.g. Ngefac, 2003, 2006, 2011; Yong 2010, Sahmo, 2014, and Kouam, 2015). But most of these studies have concentrated mainly on the correlation between phonological variables

and sociolinguistic factors, and very few have investigated the correlation between sociolinguistic variables and linguistic variables from other linguistic levels (grammar, lexis, etc.). This justifies Guy's (2007:5) observation that

[t]here exists an almost prescriptive attitude that phonology is the only domain in which linguists should speak of variation, arising from an uneasy suspicion that any alternations found at other levels of linguistic structure might involve intentional differences in meaning.

There is, therefore, the need to explore different variables (other than phonological features), so as to have a more comprehensive view of how sociolinguistic factors and linguistic variables interact in different communities. In this light, this study set out to examine the correlation between level of education and some grammatical variables in the Cameroonian setting. However, following Labov's (2006:380) remark that "linguistic behavior of individuals cannot be understood without knowledge of the communities that they belong to," it is necessary to briefly present the linguistic situation of Cameroon.

The linguistic situation of Cameroon is what Mbassi-Manga (1964), cited in Tanyi (2014), has described as "a marriage of three cultures: French, English and African cultures". Cameroon is a platform whereon multiple African and Western languages and cultures intermingle simultaneously. This is to say that besides approximately 286 indigenous languages (Epoge, 2012) that co-exist in Cameroon, two European languages, English and French, further render the situation more complex. As history shows, Cameroon inherited English and French from her colonial masters, Great Britain and France, respectively. After independence, English and French were both adopted as the two official languages of Cameroon. As a result, these two languages were introduced in the Cameroonian educational system with English being considered as a second language in the Anglophone educational sub-system, and as a foreign language in the Francophone educational sub-system in a bid to promote bilingualism in the country. Although the Cameroonian Constitution stipulates that English and French should be maintained as the two official languages, there is no official document that spells out the variety of English that needs to be promoted in Cameroon. The Constitutions of 1996, 1961 1972, 1984, and 2008, as quoted by Elock (2012:3), simply stipulate that "[t]he official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and

French. Both languages having the same status, the State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country....” Though the preference seems to be for British English, it is unambiguously clear today that Standard British English (henceforth SBE) is a far-fetched phenomenon in Cameroon (see Mbangwana 1987, Kouega 1991, Simo Bobda 1994, Ngefac 2008, etc.) and pedagogic efforts are not yielding the expected results. This failure to promote SBE in Cameroon can be partly justified by the co-existence of many cultures and indigenous languages that make it difficult for SBE to hold sway in Cameroon. In other words, the learning of English as a second language or a foreign language in Cameroon has been significantly influenced by the complex sociolinguistic and linguistic landscape of the country. In addition, many varieties of English are heard in Cameroon and this makes it difficult for SBE to gain ground (Ubanako, 2011). In spite of the existence of many varieties of English in Cameroon and the conspicuous dominance of indigenized Cameroon English (henceforth CamE), SBE norms continue to be the target in the Cameroonian classroom.

Many reasons motivated this investigation. First, the investigator has a keen interest in correlation-related studies, especially those conducted in non-Western contexts. This is because certain correlation patterns, claimed to have a universal scope, have been reported in such contexts, and there is the need to investigate the situation in postcolonial contexts, as an attempt to confirm or refute such previously reported correlation patterns. Second, the correlation between grammatical variables and sociolinguistic factors has received little scholarly attention. In the Cameroonian context, it was difficult to identify any research work that has investigated how grammatical variables correlate with sociolinguistic categories.

This work has a clearly mapped-out sociolinguistic and linguistic scope. Sociolinguistically, the focus is on level of education, and the other sociolinguistic variables like gender, age, and ethnicity are not the concerns of the investigation. With regard to level of education, the focus is on First and Third Year students of the University of Yaoundé I, studying at the Department of English (EngD) and at the Department of Geography (GeogD). Linguistically, the focus is on grammatical concord, proximity concord, and notional concord. Our main concerns in this analysis touch on issues of subject-verb

agreement relevant to this work and set aside all other exceptions and complexities of agreement in English that transcend the scope of our investigation.

The study has a number of objectives. First, it aims to find out the correlation between level of education and the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules in English. Second, it intends to find out whether this sociolinguistic variable shares a predictable relationship with speakers' mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules. Third, the study seeks to find out the sociolinguistic and pedagogic implications of the pattern of correlation that will emerge from the study.

Based on the observation of the way English is used in Cameroon, it was hypothesised that there is no significant relationship between level of education and the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules in English by First and Third year students from both the EngD and the GeogD of the University of Yaounde 1.

The investigation is thus based on the following research questions:

1. What is the correlation between level of education and the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules in English by First Year and Third Year students of both the EngD and the GeogD of the University of Yaounde I? In other words, is there any predictable relationship between level of education and the mastery of some grammatical rules involving concord?
2. What explains the correlation pattern that emerges from this study? Does it confirm or refute the pattern reported in previous studies?
3. What are the possible sociolinguistic and pedagogic implications of this pattern of correlation?

Current literature shows that most previous sociolinguistic studies conducted in the Western world in general and in Cameroon in particular have been concerned with the correlation between sociolinguistic variables and phonological variables. Unlike most previous studies, this work rather investigates the possible relationship between level of education and some grammatical variables among ESL (students from EngD) and EFL (students from GeogD) undergraduates of the University of Yaounde 1 in Cameroon. Considering that Cameroon has contextual realities that are different from those of Western

countries where most previous investigations have been carried out, the findings of this investigation are likely to have multi-dimensional implications. First, it is a further attempt to investigate the impact of pedagogic efforts on English Language learners' performance. It should be noted that most previous efforts have been limited to phonology and the correlation between level of education and grammatical variables has hardly been investigated. Second, the work offers an opportunity for a previously reported correlation pattern to be further investigated in an indigenized English context. It is worth noting that previous studies, especially those conducted in the Western world, maintain that there is a predictable relationship between level of education and linguistic variables, but it is hypothesised in this work that this sociolinguistic variable does not exert any significant impact on speakers' ability to observe certain grammatical norms involving subject-verb agreement. Third, Cameroon English has witnessed very little scholarly attention in the domain of grammar. Apart from Kouega (1998), Simo Bobda (2006), Sala (2005), and Anchimbe (2006), most studies carried out on this New English are in the domain of phonology (see, for instance, Masanga 1983, Mbangwana 1987, Kouega 1991, Simo Bobda 1994, and Ngefac 2008). Fourth, the findings of such a study are likely to have serious sociolinguistic and pedagogic impacts.

The work is conveniently divided into three chapters, besides the General Introduction and the General Conclusion. The General Introduction presents the background of this study, its aim, scope, and significance. Chapter One focuses on the theoretical frameworks, literature review, and contribution of the work. With regard to the theoretical frameworks, the sociolinguistic theory (also known as the theory of correlation), the World Englishes paradigm, and the error analysis framework are discussed. As concerns literature review, the chapter makes an appraisal of previous sociolinguistic studies and those carried out on Cameroon English. In this chapter, the contribution of the work is highlighted and the difference between this research work and previous ones is shown. Chapter Two is concerned with the research design, the data collection procedure, and the methods of data analysis adopted for this study. Chapter Three presents and discusses the findings of the investigation. The General Conclusion summarises the findings, and concludes with a discussion of the sociolinguistic and pedagogical implications of the findings, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL PREMISES AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1.0 Introduction

Correlational sociolinguistics distinguishes itself from other sub-branches of linguistics by its prowess to elicit social phenomena through linguistic variables across different communities around the world. In this chapter, theoretical premises and relevant studies related to sociolinguistic factors and linguistic variables are explored and reviewed in a bid to rationalise the current study. The theoretical premises considered for this survey include the sociolinguistic theory (also known as the theory of correlation), the World Englishes paradigm, the error analysis framework, and the quantitative paradigm. The review of literature focuses on the major types of subject-verb agreement existent in English and on pertinent correlational studies between sociolinguistic factors and linguistic variables across different speech communities around the world and in Cameroon. The differences between these works and the current study will reveal the modest contribution that this investigation intends to bring to existing knowledge.

1.1 Theoretical Premises

The theoretical issues discussed under this section comprise the sociolinguistic theory, the quantitative paradigm, the error analysis framework, and the World Englishes paradigm. These paradigms constitute the underpinning theories that support this study.

1.1.1 The Sociolinguistic Theory

The sociolinguistic theory explores how language and society interact. It examines how society influences language and how language manifests itself in the social platform. In other words, this theory endeavours to elicit how sociolinguistic factors such as age, gender, level of education, etc., relate to linguistic variables. This correlational paradigm juxtaposes the social variables to linguistic variables so as to reveal the social meaning that can be construed from the linguistically-related variables. In this respect, the use of prestigious standard features, for instance, is associated with the higher social hierarchy. The prediction is that, the utterance of some acrolectal linguistic features proportionates the change of one's social status from lower to higher class. In the Western societies, based on Labov's (1966) seminal work, many empirical studies have established a correlation between social factors and linguistic variables (see, for instance, Fasold, 1972; Macaulay & Trevelyan, 1973; Trudgill, 1974; Wolfram, 1974, etc.). However, in the context of New Englishes like Cameroon, Ngefac (2006) demonstrates that applying Labov's (1966) theory would not yield similar results because of the existence of socio-economic, cultural and linguistic realities of the environments that differ from those of the Western World. In contrast to Labov's (1966) social differentiation of linguistic variables based on occupational status, Ngefac (2006) proposed what he called "a model of social structure for Cameroon" that relies on the educational attainment of its citizens, as the notion of social class is alien to the Cameroonian setting and occupational status hardly reflects one's level of education. Ngefac (2006) concludes that correlational sociolinguistic investigations in Cameroon cannot yield significant results unless "the investigation is based on a model of social structure that realistically reflects the Cameroonian context." Thus, the sociolinguistic theory adopted for this study considers the ecological realities of Cameroon. The choice of this theory can be further justified by our principal goal that attempts to elicit the correlation between the mastery of certain grammatical features and the level of education of First Year and Third Year students of the University of Yaounde I, Cameroon.

1.1.1.1 Language and Level of Education

The quality of one's speech somehow reflects one's level of education (Labov 1966). In this regard, the level of one's education generally situates one's speech type on the speech

continuum, be it the basilect, mesolect or acrolect. Ngefac (2010:4) surveyed the phonological features of CamE in relation to level of education and demonstrated that the basilectal tribal phonological features, the mainstream mesolectal features, and the acrolectal hypercorrect features, respectively, follow concomitantly the low, middle and high level of educational attainments in Cameroon. It has been established in the literature that those with higher level of education tend to speak and appropriate the approximate acrolectal forms of their major language of communication (Scherre & Naro, 2013:187). This statement should be treated, however, with caution, as one's level of education does not always guarantee a consistent use of standard acrolectal forms of speech (Ngefac, 2006). On this, Jibril (1992), cited in Kouam (2015:7), argues that it is the regular exposure to the language through speech training that determines one's performance in English, not necessarily one's level of education. The present survey intends to find out whether Jibril's contention holds in the light of Cameroonian ESL and EFL learners in respect to their different levels of education at the University of Yaounde 1.

1.1.1.2 ESL/EFL Learners and English Linguistic Competence

Generally, ESL learners are believed to be more communicatively competent than their EFL counterparts because of their constant exposure to English in both formal and informal settings. Their communicative competence, as outlined by Canale and Swain (1980), comprises four areas of knowledge and skill: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. However, our main focus here is on the linguistic competence. Linguistic competence refers to the grammatical knowledge of a language code, that is, the features and rules of that language, including vocabulary, word-formation, sentence-formation, pronunciation and spelling. This means that ESL learners' linguistic competence develops and increases as their level of education increases.

Given that EFL learners are less exposed to English, it is believed that their linguistic competence should obviously be lower than that of ESL learners. We want to find out via this study how valid this hypothetical statement can be in respect to ESL/EFL learners' level of education at the university and their English language linguistic competence.

1.1.2 Quantitative Paradigm

Quantitative paradigm in variationist sociolinguistics has to do with counting and making statistical statements in terms of correlation between sociolinguistic factors and linguistic variables in a given social environment. The statistical statements obtained express the strength of association between the linguistic and non-linguistic variables. Using a representative sample drawn from the target population, linguists make empirically verifiable generalisations on linguistic and extra-linguistic variables in a given community (e.g. Macaulay & Trevelyan, 1973; Stuart-Smith, 1999, etc.). Furthermore, based on what Labov (2006:5) has called “the dogma of sociolinguistics”, these generalisations are not based on the individual productions of certain linguistic forms in respect to social factors but rather on the recurrent underlying utterances characteristic of the community members in general. That is, as Bayley (2003:17) explains:

Speakers’ choices between variable linguistic forms are systematically constrained by multiple linguistic and social factors that reflect underlying grammatical systems and that both reflect and partially constitute the social organisation of the communities to which users of the language belong.

Several principles are used in quantitative analysis to establish statistical relationship between linguistic and social variables. The most relevant to this study are the “principle of quantitative modeling” and the “principle of multiple causes” (Young & Bayley 1996:253), as shall be examined below.

1.1.2.1 Principle of Quantitative Modeling

The Principle of Quantitative Modeling (PQM) is an aspect of quantitative analysis. According to Bayley (2003:2), with the PQM, linguists

can examine closely the forms that a linguistic variable takes, and note what features of the context co-occur with these forms. By context is meant the surrounding linguistic environment and the social phenomena that co-occur with a given variable form.

This principle allows linguists to predict the likelihood of co-occurrence of linguistic variability and determine the contextual factor. Here the utterance of given linguistic forms is

associated with one single social factor. In other words, it is possible with the PQM to envisage the production of certain linguistic features in association to a socially contextual phenomenon that characterises a given population or a sub-group of population. Using this principle, linguists can juxtapose arithmetically certain linguistic variables with a contextual social factor, be it ethnicity, gender, or level of education, which conditions the regular utterance or production of these linguistic variable. Thus, the PQM reveals the statistical relationship between sociolinguistic factors and the linguistic variables.

The relevance of PQM in this study can be justified by the fact that we want to find out the statistical strength of correlation between Cameroonian First Year and Third Year students and their mastery of certain norms of subject-verb agreement rules in English. We intend to establish that correlation using the PQM model.

1.1.2.2 The Principle of Multiple Causes

The Principle of Multiple Causes (PMC) is a principle that considers many social factors to explain certain results in quantitative analysis. The PMC model stipulates that “it is unlikely that any single contextual factor can explain the variability observed in natural language data” (Bayley 2003:3). That is, one contextual conditioning factor cannot explain or justify the production of certain linguistic variables associated with speakers of a given community; rather, multiple social phenomena co-occur in the production of particular variable linguistic forms. In this connection, many contextual or social factors implicate the production of certain variable forms associated with a particular section of a given population. The PMC principle is thus an extension of PQM model, for it entails the consideration of more than one single social factor in explicating certain variable linguistic forms produced by a particular sub-section of a community.

Our interest in this survey is not to find out the causes of patterns of correlation between social factors and linguistic variables. Rather, more specifically, we intend to both inquire whether level of education of the selected university students correlates with their mastery of some English grammar rules and see whether the status of being an ESL or EFL learner can be statistically related to the mastery of subject-verb agreement rules in English.

Two sociolinguistic factors will therefore be associated with the production of certain grammatical variables in this investigation.

1.1.3 Error Analysis Framework

An error is a systematic deviation from a norm or set of norms of a given target language (TL) made by TL learners (Corder,1981; Dulay & Kreshen, 1982). For Gass and Selinker (1994),cited in Medzogo (2012), errors are “red flags” that index evidently the learner’s knowledge of the L2. That is, errors reveal both the linguistic aspects of L2 that the learners have well understood and those that they do not know or have not acquired well.

In the past five decades, studies of second language acquisition have focused on learners’ errors since they allow for prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring a second language. In this connection, a teacher’s attention is drawn to the difficulties frequently encountered by their students so as to devote special care and emphasis to them. Error analysis (henceforth EA) is “a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the target language and that target language itself” (Khansir, 2012:1029). Thus, EA is a systematic investigation of errors made by second language learners. Contrary to the claims made by contrastive analysis (henceforth CA) theorists that learner’s errors are caused by their mother tongue, and the differences between the mother tongue and the TL, EA demonstrated that CA studies had ignored many other determining factors that may equally affect the learner’s performance. Thus, linguists attempted to categorise different types of errors on the basis of the various processes that could presumably account for them. For instance, Richards (1971:6-14) classified errors observed in the acquisition of ESL in terms of:

- a) Overgeneralization, covering instances where the learners create a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures of the target language;
- b) Ignorance of rule restriction, occurring as a result of failure to observe the restrictions or existing structures;
- c) Incomplete application of rules, arising when the learners fail to fully develop a certain structure required to produce acceptable sentences;

d) False concepts hypothesized, deriving from faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language.

However, this classification seems to be more of the processes that trigger errors than the different types of errors *per se* made by L2 learners. A more convincing classification is proposed by Corder (1981:31), who categorises them as:

- (1) *errors of omission* where some element is omitted which should be present;
- (2) *errors of addition* where some element is present which should not be there;
- (3) *errors of selection* where the wrong item has been chosen in place of the right one;
- (4) *errors of ordering* where the elements presented are correct but wrongly sequenced.

Corder (*ibid.*) further argues that this superficial classification of errors is just a starting point in the systematic analysis of errors, and suggests that one should indicate at what linguistic level errors have been made by L2 learners: be it the graphological, phonological, lexico-semantic or syntactic level. Fundamentally, errors are described by the application of second language theories (CA, EA, etc...) to the data of erroneous utterances produced by an L2 learner or a group of learners in order to determine the root causes or the linguistic processes consequential of these errors. After identification and description of errors, a comparative analysis is subsequently carried out between the correct utterance of a native speaker and the erroneous utterances of the TL learners so as to propose remedial drillings or teaching to these errors. Corder (1981:54) again believes that:

Remedial teaching is adjudged necessary when we discover a mismatch between a learner's (or group of learners') 'knowledge of the language' and the linguistic demands of some situation in which he finds himself. This situation may be a *situation of language learning*, as we may find it within a school system, or it may be a *situation of language use*, where the learner will have to use what he knows for real communicative purposes. *The degree of mismatch* determines whether and how much remedial teaching is necessary and is normally measured by language tests.

On this, Erdođan (2005:270) concludes:

Correction of errors is as important as identification and description of them. In fact, the last two are preliminary for error treatment. [...] Findings of error analysis function as facilitator in language teaching in many ways only if the teacher is aware of them and able to make use of them in the teaching process appropriately.

The EA approach essentially uses the standard forms expected from a native speaker to assess the L2 learners' errors in an attempt to make them acquire a 'native-like' manipulation of the language. One may then wonder how the EA approach can be reconciled with the World Englishes framework in a peculiar postcolonial context like that of Cameroon.

1.1.4 The World Englishes Framework and the EA Approach

Over the last three decades, the field of English linguistics witnessed a number of remarkable major evolutions. Among its leading developments is the emergence of the World Englishes paradigm, which, now, is firmly established world-wide as a school of thought. Prior to that was the dominance of CA and EA approaches that seek to explain and remedy the difficulties encountered by L2 learners in the acquisition of ESL/EFL. However, the emergence of varieties of English around the globe seems to challenge the acceptance of the native variety as norms of reference to English language studies today, especially in postcolonial settings (Schneider, 2007).

Kachru (1985), the propounder of the World Englishes framework, sees the spread of English across the world in three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle covers countries such as Britain, Canada, and USA, where English is used as a native language (ENL). In the Outer Circle countries which are British former colonies, English is used as a second language (ESL), playing the role of official or co-official language alongside many local languages. These countries include Singapore, Kenya, India, etc. As regards the Expanding Circle, in countries such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, Gabon, English is positioned as a foreign language (EFL) that is studied as a

subject in schools. However, English in the Outer Circle stands at the heart of continual discussion, as it is undergoing the process of nativization in postcolonial settings in an attempt to respond to the socio-economic demands and to reflect the linguistic ecology of its users. Schneider (2007:2) observes that:

English has managed to stay, not only in formal and official functions; it has indigenised and grown local roots. It has begun to thrive and to produce innovative, regionally distinctive forms and uses of its own, in contact with indigenous languages and cultures and in the mouths of both native populations and the descendants of former immigrants, making ever deeper inroads into local communities. Its pull and attractiveness are immense.

Today, the indigenous forms or new varieties of English that stem from local use have fostered debates on forms of English that deviate from the native SBE within the framework of EA approach. The issue of ‘errors’ seems nowadays to be controversial among those who define deviations of English and the English language purists. What stands as an error for the purists is not necessarily an error for the advocates of varieties of English. Wolf and Polzenhagen (2009:11) meticulously articulate this controversy as follows:

From an Inner Circle perspective and for English language purists, all forms that deviate from the standard of the native varieties (or even from British English, English English, the Received Pronunciation) may count as errors. Yet from a World Englishes perspective, the problem of errors is far more complex, as it is tied to the question of (endonormative and exonormative) standards and codification.

This debate is still on-going and seems to not end in the near future. Nevertheless, some proponents of varieties of English are also, surprisingly, the advocates of SBE with a strong commitment to root out common errors made by L2 learners (e.g. Simo Bobda, 2006), as has been rightly underscored by Wolf and Polzenhagen (*ibid.*): “it is often proponents of the WE [World Englishes] paradigm that are involved in projects designed to identify “errors” in L2-varieties with the aim to help learners to overcome them and hence to become more “native-like””. Within the same perspective, though our investigation is conducted within the context of World Englishes, the EA approach is adopted in this survey in the light of SBE grammatical rules of subject-verb agreement in a bid to determine the extent to

which level of education correlates with the errors made by ESL/EFL learners at the undergraduate level. The EA approach could not be avoided in this work because the grammatical norms promoted in the Cameroonian classroom are those of SBE. The work thus seeks to measure the extent to which students master what we assume is taught to them. At the same time, the World Englishes framework could not be ignored because of the place that the indigenised varieties of English occupy today in postcolonial contexts (see, for instance, Kachru, 1985 and Ngefac, 2008).

1.2 Review of Related Literature

This section reviews and discusses issues related to English subject-verb agreement system. Firstly, it succinctly gives an overview of the present-day English subject-verb agreement system throughout its evolution; this is followed by the definition of variables considered for this study. Secondly, it ponders over the notions of grammatical concord, notional concord, and proximity concord. Thirdly, it presents a detailed review of empirical studies on correlation between sociolinguistic factors and linguistic variables (phonological and grammatical) in the Western world and in Cameroon, and wraps up by clearly stating the contribution of this research work.

1.2.1 Overview of the Current Subject-Verb Agreement System in English

The current English subject-verb agreement system is the development of various morphological distinctions of the Old and Modern English. In the early English, the subject-verb agreement inflections for the present tense required distinctions both for person and number. In this connection, for singular subjects the first, second, and third person forms were differentiated while the plural subjects were simply contrasted with the singular ones, but differentiated as to person (Robertson & Cassidy, 1954). The third person singular agreement is different from other personal pronouns, as it still maintains the inflectional suffix “-s.” All other forms are identical to the basic word stem of the verb. The evolution and development of English subject-verb agreement system is summarised and tabulated by Robertson and Cassidy (1954:141) as follows

Table 1: Development of Subject-Verb Concord Inflections in English

	<u>Old English</u>		<u>Middle English</u>		<u>Modern English</u>	
	Sg.	Plur.	Sg.	Plur.	Sg.	Plur.
1st person	-e	-a	-e	-e (n)	-	-
2nd person	-est	-a	-est	-e (n)	-	-
3rd person	-e	-a	-eth	-e (n)	-s	-

Source: Robertson and Cassidy (1954:141)

Table 1 shows us the current simplified inflectional morphology of the Modern English verb system where we have one single inflectional marker only in the third person singular out of the six personal pronouns while inflections are marked in the six personal pronouns in both Old English and Middle English. Commenting on this table, Christian et al. (1984:191-2) observe that “the system of concord marking on verbs in English has undergone considerable fluctuation in its evolution from the more complex set of inflections to the simpler set of standard forms in current usage.” Therefore, it is convenient for us to define certain key terms.

The umbrella terms “agreement” and “concord” in linguistics embody a multitude of concepts which describe the different semantic and morpho-syntactic relations between a verb and one or more arguments. Steele (1978), cited in Corbet (2003:109), for instance, observes that the “term agreement commonly refers to some systematic covariance between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another”. Concord, on its part, is viewed by Quirk et al. (1972:312) as “the relationship between two grammatical elements such that if one of them contains a particular feature (e.g. plurality) then the other also has to have that feature”. From these two definitions, it can be construed that the meanings of the terms “agreement” and “concord” are semantically equivalent. This may give room to use the two concepts interchangeably. However, Corbet (2003: 112), in his reviews of the many definitions assigned to these two terms by many linguists, suggests that:

Since there is no distinction being drawn consistently between the two terms, and since too the terms are used in opposing ways, and in ways based even on

rather different criteria, I suggest we should use ‘agreement’ as the cover term. Any subdivision within it, whether or not ‘concord’ is used as the term, requires a careful definition, since there is no generally accepted term here.

Consequently, in our next discussion the word “agreement” will be used as a cover term that accounts for systematic morphosyntactic features that a verb bears in terms of person, number, and gender of one or more arguments. Further, the terms “grammatical concord,” “notional concord,” and “proximity concord” are used as co-hyponyms of the superordinate term “agreement” to indicate specific types of subject-verb agreement. Quirk et al. (1972: 313) used the terms “grammatical concord”, “notional concord”, and “proximity concord” to classify the major different types of verb concords attested in the English language. These concepts shall be further developed in subsequent paragraphs.

1.2.2.1 Grammatical Concord

Grammatical concord is a rule that requires a singular subject to agree with a singular verb and a plural subject to concord with a plural verb (Quirk et al., 1972:313). If this rule is to be observed correctly in practical situations, its observance requires knowing, among other things, (1) how to mark number on verbs and nouns, (2) how to identify the number of subject(s), and (3) how to identify the subject(s) of a verb (Bock & Miller, 1991:49). Knowledge of these linguistic procedures empowers learners with an off-hand manipulation of subject-verb agreement in English.

As concerns marking number on verbs, the English system is relatively simple and straightforward. With the exception of the verb to “be” that displays person and number concord in the first and third person in the present and past tenses, verbs generally mark the singular and the plural forms differently only in the third person as in “The pet sleeps” versus “The pets sleep.”

Plurality is marked in count nouns by using the inflectional plural markers (/s/, /z/, or /əz/) as in “cats,” “boys” and “crises.” Mass nouns, in contrast, have their own system of rules that governs their plurality marking (see Quirk & Greenbaum, 1987). With regard to how to

identify the number of subject(s) and how to identify the subject(s) of a verb, the subsequent sub-sections will expatiate on them.

1.2.2.2 Notional Concord: the Semantics of Subject-Verb Agreement in English

Quirk et al. (1972:313) define notional concord as “agreement of verb with subject according to the idea of number rather than the actual presence of the grammatical marker for that idea”. Here, the verb concurs with the numerical meaning expressed by the argument rather than the formal structure of the word. Sala and Ubanako (2010:239) view notional concord as a “type of semantic agreement between the verb and its noun in subject position, whose form is singular but whose meaning involves plurality”. Thus, the concept of notional plurality is somehow linked to grammatical plurality based not on the actual presence of plural markers but on the idea or number expressed by an entity (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: 176). In this connection, there are some categories of nouns in English for which notional and grammatical plurality operate differently. One of such categories is composed of nouns that Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:82) have dubbed “summation plurals”. These are nouns that are notionally singular but grammatically plural and take plural marking on the verb (e.g. trousers, glasses, scissors, tweezers, etc.). Some nouns called “unmarked plurals” are notionally plural and take plural marking on the verb, though the nouns themselves are uninflected for plurality (e.g. people, cattle, police, vermin, etc.). Collective nouns are notionally plural and take singular marking on the verb, though they are likewise uninflected (e.g. team, committee, police, audience, etc.). However, these collective nouns have some peculiarities of usage. They may sometimes take either a singular or plural verb depending on whether the collective is viewed as a unit or as multiple individuals. In SBE particularly, these nouns generally take plural-agreeing verbs (as in “The committee have lifted the sanction”), a rule which may not probably be observed in AmE.

Furthermore, the issue of appositional and non-appositional coordination falls under the scope of notional concord. Non-apposition coordination refers to a situation where two different entities conjoined by the conjunction “and” concomitantly act as the subject of a plural verb. These two entities are implied reduction of two clauses (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:177) as in:

Betty and Anna are running (=Betty is running and Anna is running).

The teacher and the students dance (=the teacher dances and the students dance).

However, the quasi-coordinators such as “as well as,” “rather than,” “along with,” and “as much as” behave like prepositions rather than conjunctions when they occur in the subject position (Quirk et al., 1972:316). In this regard, when a singular subject is followed by these quasi-coordinators plus a singular verb, the verb remains singular as in:

The teacher, as well as/rather than his students, sings.

The chief, along with his notables, is sitting at the palace.

As regards appositional coordination, the coordinated entities refer to the same single entity, and agree with a singular verb, accordingly. For example:

Waterfufu and eru is a traditional dish of Cameroon. (Fufu and eru refers to a single meal.)

Bread and butter is his daily meal at breakfast (Bread and butter refers to one entity.)

1.2.2.3 Proximity Concord

Proximity concord “denotes agreement of the verb with whatever noun or pronoun that closely precedes it, sometimes in preference to agreement with the headword of the subject” (Quirk et al., 1972:313). Proximity concord is, in other words, an agreement between the verb and the proximal argument that occurs closer to that verb in a hierarchical structure of arguments in a subject position. Sala and Ubanako (2010:244) further explain that the “concept of proximity involves what can be called number attraction and denotes formal agreement between the verb and the nominal (i.e. noun or pronoun) that most closely precedes it.” Though accurate, the afore-mentioned description needs further clarifications on rules that underlie proximity concord in English. According to Bock and Miller (1991:50), the verb does not concord with the local noun or argument that immediately precedes it

but with the number of the highest noun phrase that immediately precedes it in the same clause (compare *The bridges to the island were damaged by the hurricane* with the generally unacceptable *The bridges to the island was damaged by the hurricane*).

Thus, the head noun in a noun phrase controls the formal structure of the verb in terms of concord, not necessarily any local noun of the noun phrase proximate to the verb. Confusion arises in most cases when the head noun is plural and the local one is singular. In this regard, Bock and Miller (1991:63) observe that:

The increase in agreement errors following a mismatching local noun is in line with the pattern noted for the same kinds of errors in spontaneous speech: People seem to be prone to say such things as *The bridge to the islands were crowded*. But this rarely occurred when the head was plural and the local noun was singular: The speakers seldom made the mistake found in *The bridges to the island was crowded*.

Furthermore, following the principle of proximity, the last subject element of a coordinate subject (where the coordinator is “or”, “either...or”, or “neither...nor”) determines the person of the verb (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:180). That is, the agreeing-verb concords with the subject element closest to it as in:

Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else knows the answer.

Either my wife or I am going.

1.2.3 Social Categories and Linguistic Variables in the Western World

Labov’s (1966) ground-breaking investigation and subsequent similar studies (Trudgill, 1974; Macaulay & Trevelyan, 1973 and Stuart-Smith, 1999, for instance) conducted in the Western world (precisely in the US and UK) have associated certain phonological features with specific demographic categories of the population. For instance, in New York City previous investigations have shown that the speech of its residents is characterised by either the presence or the absence of the post-vocalic /r/. Words such as “car” are pronounced randomly either as /kɑ:/ or as /kɑ:r/. This inconsistent pronunciation was termed “free variation” without any rational explanation. However, Labov’s series of investigations in New York City and other similar ones (Trudgill, 1974; Macaulay & Trevelyan, 1973 and Stuart-Smith, 1999, for instance) have explicated that when such free variation in the speech of individuals is observed against the background of the community as a whole, this variation is not free, but is rather conditioned by social factors such as social class, age, ethnicity,

gender, and educational level in predictable ways (Romaine, 2001: 8309). The presence or the absence of the post-vocalic /r/ in the speech of New Yorkers can be statistically predicted in certain situations and associated with their social class, sex, gender, etc. Labov's (1966) survey was based on the assumption that some social factors to some extent control individuals' linguistic behaviour, that is, certain phonological features reflect existing social factors. Surprisingly, while mainstream AmE accent featuring the post-vocalic /r/ is associated with certain prestigious occupational status, in British urban cities such as Reading, accents that are "r-less" have more prestige than those that preserve it, like the Scottish English (Romaine (*ibid.*)). The prestige of certain phonological features varies from one geographical location to another. Labov (2010:170) further reported that the traditional pattern of the New York speech, as described by previous investigations, was consistently r-less:

The prestige pronunciation which was superimposed upon this pattern was heavily influenced by Eastern New England and British speech, and was also r-less. In recent decades, a new prestige pattern has been superimposed upon the speech of the city, based upon an r-pronouncing dialect characteristic of other Northern regions outside of Eastern New England. This has replaced the earlier prestige pattern almost completely in the speech of our informants.

This indicates that the pronunciation of the postvocalic /r/ "shows a geographically as well as socially significant distribution" (Romaine, 2001:8310).

Furthermore, Trudgill (1974) conducted similar studies in Norwich and concluded that the choice of certain prestigious phonological features of the suffix "-ing" (as in "dancing," "working," etc.) is associated with social status differentiation in the Norwich community. The variable "-ing" refers to alternation between an alveolar /n/ and a velar nasal /ŋ/ in words with "-ing" endings. The lower a person's social status, Trudgill (1974) predicted, the more likely he or she is likely to use a higher percentage of alveolar rather than velar nasal endings. Moreover, following the correlational variationist surveys carried out on the varieties of urban AmE in respect to gender differentiation, Trudgill (1972:180) generalises that

women, allowing for other variables such as age, education, and social class, consistently produce linguistic forms which more closely approach those of

the standard language or have higher prestige than those produced by men or alternatively, that,they produce forms of this type more frequently.

This implies that linguistic variables are sensitive to social factors and bear in them some social significance.

Major empirical studies on grammatical features in relation to social factors carried out in the Western World include those conducted in Detroit (Wolfram,1974) and in Norwich (Trudgill,1974).These studies focused on the use of nonstandard third person singular present tense verb forms without an “-s,” e.g., *he eat*. Wolfram’s (1974) and Trudgill’s (1974) studies have both discovered that only the working class speakers use these forms with a great frequency. However, this use is more frequent in Norwich than in Detroit. Romaine (2001: 8311) notes that “[t]he gap between the middle and working class norms is also greater in Norwich than in Detroit, reflecting the greater social mobility of the American social system.” Further, Romaine (*ibid.*) adds that “[t]here are also other varieties of British English, e.g., in parts of the north, south-west and south Wales, where the present tense paradigm is regularised in the opposite direction and all persons of the verb takes -s, i.e., *I goes, you goes, he goes, etc..*” Thus,variation of present tense changes as one moves from one geographical location to another.

1.2.4 Extra-Linguistic Correlates of Subject-Verb Agreement in English

The subject-verb agreement formed the central focus of a study by Stapa and Izahar (2010),wherein the authors discovered that the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules is not sensitive to educational attainment of some Malaysian postgraduate ESL students. The study is based on the sample population of 20 post-graduate teacher trainees majoring in English Language Studies in a Malaysian college. It examined errors in 5 types of subject-verb agreements: subject verb agreement of person, subject verb agreement of number, agreement with coordinated subject, agreement with indefinite expression of amount and also notional agreement and proximity agreement. Stapa and Izahar (2010) report that these post-graduates tend to avoid rules of subject-verb agreement with coordinated subject, indefinite expressions of amount, notional concord, and proximity concord in their writings.

Macaulay's (1991 and 1995) investigations on the use of adverbs in the Scottish town of Ayr based on data collected through interviews revealed that the middle-class speakers use derived adverbs more frequently than the lower-class speakers in Ayr town (cited in Macaulay, 2002). This difference was also observed in other adverbs and evaluative adjectives. Macaulay (1995:56) points out that "the use of adverbs and adjectives by the middle-class speakers reflects a self-confident and authoritarian attitude" while "the lower-class seem to show a greater tolerance for the weakness of others in their community and a reluctance to make categorically negative judgments about them." This study is based on materials collected in Glasgow for study of language variation and change in Glasgow, Scotland (Stuart-Smith, 1999). Macaulay's (2002) comparison of the results of his previous survey with the 2002 one has confirmed that the general pattern of frequency of adverb use recurs again "with the middle-class speakers using derived adverbs in-ly more than twice as frequently as the working-class speakers, so the social class differences in the use of derivative-adverbs found in the Ayr study cannot be simply an artefact of the interview situation" (Macaulay, 2002:135). Though one may ask why did he not use fresh data from fieldwork instead of old data of 1995 and 1999 studies to confront results in 2002, Macaulay's comparison of the two surveys reveals that there exists a strong correlation between the social polarisation and the use of some adverbs in the Ayr and Glasgow local speech communities.

In a recent study which sets out to determine the strength of correlation between level of education and number concord in Brazilian Portuguese in a trend study of Rio de Janeiro speech from 1980 and 2000, Scherre and Naro (2013) found that education is indexical to the use of standard concord in Brazilian Portuguese in 2000 than in 1980. The education variable has a significant influence on the concord variable in the speech community. However, after an in-depth examination of the education variable, Scherre and Naro (2013:187) argue that education is creating a wider linguistic polarization as "speakers with higher levels of education now appropriate a greater proportion of the linguistic standard than those with less education." In other words, those who, for one reason or another, drop school equally abandon standard Brazilian Portuguese, using the stigmatised forms of the language that reflects their level of education. Nevertheless, Scherre and Naro (2013:186) acknowledge that "contact with media is another source of experience with standard forms,

especially relevant for less privileged people who have little effective contact in real life with speakers with high rates of usage of standard forms”. They conclude that education is, however, far more effective in appropriating standard Brazilian Portuguese than the media. Thus, those with little education face a daily “linguistic apartheid” as chances for them to come across standard features out of the educational milieu are minimal. Years of schooling reasonably foster one’s mastery and manipulation of grammatical rules of a given language.

1.2.5 Level of Education and Linguistic Variables in Cameroon

Recent surveys such as those conducted by Ngefac (2006 and 2008) have demonstrated that Labov’s (1966) theory based on correlation between Western model of social class continuum and phonological features is hardly applicable in postcolonial contexts like that of Cameroon. Ngefac’s (1997) study confirmed this by applying this Labovian theory of social structure based on occupational status to investigate the correlation between social class indicators of some Anglophone students which he categorised as high status speakers (HSs) and low status speakers (LSs) and some phonological features in the Cameroonian setting. He discovered an insignificant relationship between the Received Pronunciations (RP) of selected phonological features and HSs and LSs speakers. His survey has therefore invalidated the workability of Labov’s (1966) theory in the New Englishes contexts. If insightful results are to be obtained like those of the western settings, Ngefac (2006) suggests, sociolinguistic surveys in such contexts should consider their ecological, cultural and socio-economic realities. Using what he has designed and called the “model of social structure for Cameroon”, Ngefac (2008) examines the correlation between social structure based on educational attainment and mainstream CamE phonological variants in Cameroon. He investigated the ability of 100 high school students, 100 undergraduate students, and 100 postgraduate students to articulate certain segmental and supra-segmental features of RP, and concluded that there is no significant correlation between level of education of these learners and their ability to articulate RP features.

What we know about correlational sociolinguistic investigations conducted in Cameroon is largely based upon empirical studies that examine how sociolinguistic variables correlate with almost exclusively phonological features (e.g. Ngefac, 1997, 2006, 2008; Ngaajie, 2010; Yong,2010; Sahmo, 2014; Kouam, 2015). For instance, Yong (2010) investigated the correlational pattern between level of education and some phonological features of Kom (a Grassfields language) speakers of English. Her 90 informants are made up of 30 FSLC holders, 30 Ordinary and Advanced Level holders, and 30 University students. Her findings show that, although there is some correlation between level of education and the standard articulation of some RP phonological features by native Kom speakers of English as they climb up the academic ladder, certain English sound features such as /p/ and /r/ that are inexistent in Kom are replaced with /b/ and /l/ respectively by Kom natives, regardless their level of education. A similar study was carried by Ngaajie (2010) on the correlational strength between level of education of Akɔɔse learners of English and some English phonological features. Her informants comprise 60 Akɔɔse speakers of Form Two, Form Five, and Upper Six. Ngaajie's (2010) discovered that, though educational attainment seems to influence the articulation of English fricatives /ð/ and /θ/, and affricates /dʒ/ and /tʃ/, there exists no significant correlation between level of education and the RP pronunciation of selected English sounds by Akɔɔse learners of English. These studies show that some peculiar and deviant phonological productions of English sounds are ethnic-specific, with educational attainment playing an insignificant role for their standard articulation. However, Sahmo (2014) has convincingly contested this argument in her investigation on the replacement of English sounds /əv/ with /u/, and /eɪ/ with /i/ that are previously claimed to be aspects of Lamso's English pronunciation. She conducted her research on five different Grassfields ethnic groups, namely Wimum, Oku, Kom, Babungo, and Nso. In her findings, Sahmo demonstrated that, contrary to the previous claim by some researchers that these deviant vowel pronunciations are specific to Lamso speakers, the replacement of English sounds /əv/ with /u/, and /eɪ/ with /i/ in some environments is "also very frequent in the speech of speakers of English from Wimum, Oku, Kom, and Babungo." Further, Sahmo (2014:48) argues that in several instances the stigmatised so-called Nso-specific phonological features are rather far more frequent in the English speech of Oku, Wimum, and Kom natives than in the speech of Nso users of the

language. Acknowledging the fact that educational attainment conditions the avoidance or the use of stigmatised features and somewhat helps neutralise the effects of mother tongues as expertised by Ngefac (2008), Sahmo (2014) concludes with Ngefac (2008) that it is misleading to make baseless generalisations that certain phonological features are specific to speakers from certain ethnic group without considering the level of education of these speakers.

Previous empirical studies conducted in Cameroon that we have explored thus far all draw their conclusions on correlational patterns between sociolinguistic variables and exclusively phonological features. These existing accounts seem to ignore the linguistic variables other than phonological features such as lexis, grammar, etc. Nevertheless, Romaine (2001:8311) has pointed out that “[a]lthough grammatical variables have been less frequently studied than phonological ones, they have tended to show sharp stratification.” One may then ask why scholars paid little attention to correlation between sociolinguistic factors and other linguistic aspects. There appears to be a consensus view among some linguists that phonological features are the only fertile grounds of variation across languages. This claim is supported by Labov’s (2006:46) statement that

the most useful items [...] are those that are high in frequency, have a certain immunity from conscious suppression, are integral units of larger structures, and may be easily quantified on a linear scale. By all these criteria, phonological variables appear to be the most useful.

This view, however plausible, should not close the door to the investigation of other linguistic variables in relation to sociolinguistic variables across languages in general. Particularly, if today in the Cameroonian context of New Englishes, there seem to be no comprehensive and firm conclusions on correlation between some contextually relevant extra-linguistic variables and grammatical variables, it is because of insufficiency of research on these correlates and strong inclination by linguists to phonological variables to the detriment of grammatical variables. Yet, lack of directly relevant studies on grammatical variables sensitive to social factors speaks volume about the absence of linguists’ interests towards grammatical variables in our context.

1.2.6 Gap and Contribution

This work is different from previous works in many ways. First, most previous works that have focused on the correlation between sociolinguistic variables and linguistic variable have been carried out in the Western world and few of such works have been carried out in Cameroon. A work of this nature, carried out in Cameroon, is an opportunity to confirm or refute some sociolinguistic patterns reported in the Western world. Second, most previous studies, conducted either in the Western world or in Cameroon, have focused only on phonological variables and the domain of grammar has hardly been investigated. This work investigates the impact of educational attainment on speakers' mastery of subject-verb agreement rules and does not include phonology in its scope as is the case in previous studies. Third, unlike some previous studies, especially those conducted in the Western world, this work hypothesises and claims that in Cameroon there is no significant correlation between level of education and language. If this hypothesis is confirmed, it will imply that this study has revisited some previously reported findings. Fourth, this study is a significant step towards the codification of the grammar of a new English, namely, Cameroon English, whose existence is no longer debatable issue. It should be noted that most previous studies on this New English have concentrated on the phonological dimension of the language, but the syntactic domain has received very little scholarly attention, as shown in the review of literature. This work is, therefore, a major contribution to sociolinguistics in general and (Cameroon) English grammar in particular.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.0 Introduction

This chapter describes, discusses, and justifies the research design adopted for this research in relation to our research goal, research questions, and theoretical frameworks. Details on key points related to data gathering, and the method of data analysis of this survey are hereafter provided in subsequent sections.

2.1 Research Design

The research design considered for this study includes a survey. A survey is an empirical research which requires that a researcher goes out and looks for the necessary information from his target population in the field (Denscombe, 2007:8). Given that a micro-sociolinguistic survey cannot obtain data from everyone who is in the category of the population, social researchers exploit some techniques such as the technique of probability sampling. This technique consists in “getting evidence from a portion of the whole in the expectation and hope that what is found in that portion applies equally to the rest of the ‘population’” (Denscombe, 2007:13). The probability sampling technique is based on the idea that the people or events that are chosen as the sample are selected because “the researcher has some notion of the probability that these will be a representative cross-section of people or events in the whole population being studied (Denscombe, *Ibid.*)”. A researcher can thus obtain a representative view of the phenomenon being investigated from the whole target population and draw comprehensive and firm conclusions. In the present study, our survey investigates the mastery of some English subject-verb agreement rules by some undergraduate students from the University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon. The sample population consisted of First Year and Third Year students selected randomly from the GeogD and the EngD, respectively. The general conclusions of this survey were drawn from the findings on this sample population.

A correlational research establishes the strength of connections or associations between two variables through quantitative and qualitative studies. Drawing from the results of a survey, a correlational research can outline predictions on similar variables for general conclusions in social sciences. The quantitative approach herein examines the frequency of use of standard rules of subject-verb agreement in English and the qualitative one indicates “the respondent’s performance in relation to their level of education” (Tanyi,2014:24).

In conformity to our research goal and research questions, and our underlying theoretical frameworks, this research design thus appears to be appropriate to this investigation.

2.2 Data Gathering

This section dwells on the area within which the study was conducted and presents the target population as well as the research tool designed for this study.

2.2.1 Area of Study

This survey was conducted in Yaounde, the capital city of Cameroon. Precisely, it was carried out at the University of Yaounde 1 with focus on language students from the EngD and on science students from the GeogD. By selecting these two major cross-sections of students at Yaoundé 1, it is believed that this study took into consideration the relatively different categories of students majoring in letters and social sciences in that institution. Moreover, the study was essentially on ESL and EFL learners at Level 1 (L1) and Level 3 (L3) of the two respective departments.

2.2.2 Target Population

The participants to this study consisted of 160 university students of L1 and L3 from the departments of Geography and English of the University of Yaounde 1, with 80 students from each department. These students have either an Anglophone or a Francophone educational background. They are therefore categorised as ESL and EFL learners respectively. The following table recaps the 160 respondents who participated in this research project.

Table 2: Distribution of ESL and EFL learners per department

Category of learners	ESL learners		EFL learners		Total
Department	English		Geography		160
Level of education	L1	L3	L1	L3	
Number of respondents	40	40	40	40	
Total	80		80		

2.2.2.1 ESL Learners

As previously mentioned above, the ESL learners selected for this study are 80 students from the EngD of the University of Yaounde 1. These students have an English-subsystem educational background and have been exposed to English language, as a second language, since primary school and continue to study it with the wish of majoring in English language studies upon graduation. It has been widely hypothesised in the literature that ESL students have generally a relatively good mastery of the English language. The participants in this portion are categorised into L1 and L3 students. L1 students, 40 in total, are those coming freshly from high schools. They have just started reading English Language at the university. L3 students, also 40 in total, were those who were about to complete their final study at the graduate level. They have been studying English for three years at the university. These L1 and L3 students were chosen for this study because we intended to study the gradual trend of their mastery of the English language as they climb up the academic ladder in higher education. This choice was equally justified by the fact that higher education in Cameroon starts from L1 and ends at L3 for the first university degree. The scope of the study is therefore limited at the graduate level. Table 3 below summarises the number of respondents per level of education.

Table 3: Distribution of ESL learners from the EngD

ESL learners' level of education		Total
L1	L3	
40	40	80

2.2.2.2 EFL Learners

The EFL learners selected for this study are students from the GeogD with a Francophone educational background. These students studied in primary and secondary schools using the French language as the medium of instruction. At the university level, they opted for studies in a social science discipline, Geography. Thus, they can be called as science students, as opposed to language students of the EngD. Considered as EFL learners, these science students have studied and continue to study the English Language as a mere school subject. Therefore, they are expected to have a relative communicative fluency in English as they move on with their higher education. This study intends to find out how this expectation correlates with their educational attainment in a foreign language learning situation. Table 4 below gives details of the respondents from GeogD.

Table 4: Distribution of EFL learners from the GeogD

EFL learners' level of education		Total
L1	L3	
40	40	80

2.2.3 Research Tool: Questionnaire

The copies of the questionnaire distributed to the 160 respondents were the same for both ESL and EFL learners of L1 and L3. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section provides the bio-data of the respondents. It indicates their level of education, their educational background and the department of their studies. Their identification is based on a strict code of anonymity and confidentiality. The second section consists of 20 questionnaire items partitioned as follows: three (03) questions on grammatical concord, five (05) questions on proximity concord, and twelve (12) questions on notional concord. The respondents were asked to fill in the blanks with the correct answers from those proposed in the parentheses. Four copies of this questionnaire, filled in by L1 and L3 students from each department, are provided in the appendix.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected in April of the 2014/2015 academic year on the campus of the University of Yaounde 1, though at different dates and amphitheatres. This is due to the fact that L1 and L3 students from the two departments considered have different timetables. Following their respective timetables, the copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the students of each level to fill in. It was ensured that the respondents answered the questions individually, and this took them duration of about 30 minutes. Before handing over the questionnaires to L1 and L3 students of GeogD, we ascertained that they have a Francophone educational background, as this department, unlike the EngD, has students with either a Baccalauréat or a GCE Advanced Level. After the copies of the questionnaire were filled in, they were returned to us.

2.4 Method of Data Analysis

The analysis of the questionnaire was based on the respondents' answers on each questionnaire item. Copies of the questionnaire filled in by the respondents were marked in terms of correct and wrong answers. Every correct answer or wrong answer provided was codified as 1 and 0, respectively, in a bid to obtain the frequency of each token per level of education. After the codification, we then proceeded to the analysis of the data using the *IBM*

SPSS Statistics 20 software (SPSS stands for Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The output of occurrences of each token provided by the software was examined and classified according to the departments of the respondents and their level of education in tables that present the frequencies of correct and wrong answers along with their respective percentages. The following formula is used to calculate the percentage of each questionnaire item:

$$\mathbf{X\% = \frac{N}{T} \times 100}$$

N= number of answers (correct or wrong)

X%= percentage count

T= total number of sample population per level or per department

CHAPTER THREE

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the presentation, analysis and discussion of the different results of the study, as generated by the *IBM SPSS Statistics 20software*. The first three sections of this chapter deal with the correlation between: firstly, level of education and the mastery of some grammatical concord rules; secondly, level of education and the mastery of some proximity concord rules, and finally, level of education and the mastery of some notional concord rules. The last section dwells on the correlation between the status of being an EFL / ESL learner and the mastery of some English subject-verb agreement rules.

3.1 Level of Education and the Mastery of some Grammatical Concord Rules

In this sub-section, we assess, in relation to their level of education, the performance of our respondents from the GeogD and the EngD on the questionnaire items related to some English grammatical concord rules. Three questionnaire items were proposed for this concord for the informants to choose correct answers from those proposed in the parentheses. These questionnaires items are: Q.4 “There our teammates (comes, come), Q.9 “The teacher, as well as his students,in the class (sing, sings), and Q.10 “The emperor, with one of his body guards,assassinated (was, were). The grammatical concord rule assessed I Q.4 is on the use of the dummy subject “there” and the other rule concerns a subject separated from the verb by the connectors “as well as” in Q.9 and “with...” in Q.10.

3.1.1 Department of Geography

Of the study population in this department, 80 respondents filled in and returned copies of the questionnaire. This means that we re-collected 40 copies of the questionnaire from L1 students and 40 copies of the questionnaire from L3 students, respectively. Further, it implies

that 40 students per level ticked the Q.4, Q.9, and Q.10 set on grammatical concord rules in English. The performance of the respondents is evaluated in terms of the number of tokens of correct answers and wrong answers per level. Table 5 summarises the output of the results.

Table 5: Performance of Students from the GeogD on some English Grammatical Concord Rules

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS		DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY				TOTAL
		L1		L3		
		NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	
Q.4	wrong	11	27.5%	12	30.0%	23
	correct	29	72.5%	28	70.0%	57
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.9	wrong	25	62.5%	22	55.0%	47
	correct	15	37.5%	18	45.0%	33
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.10	wrong	26	65.0%	30	75.0%	56
	correct	14	35.0%	10	25.0%	24
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80

Table 6 presents the results obtained from the preliminary analysis of Q.4, Q.9, and Q.10 in the GeogD. It can be seen from the above table that each level performed statistically differently on the questions related to grammatical rules. Details on the performance of each level are provided below.

Table 6: Performance of L1 Students from the GeogD on some Grammatical Concord Rules

ANSWERS	Q.4	Q.9	Q.10	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
wrong	11	25	26	21	52.5
correct	29	15	14	19	47.5
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	100.0

From the output shown above, L1 students recorded a mean score of 19 (47.5%) tokens of correct answers on the three questionnaire items. In Q.4, 29 students scored correct answers, in Q.9, 15 students, and in Q.10, 14 students. This means that L1 students from the GeogD still have some problems on the grammatical concord rules. With a mean score of 19, we conclude that there is no correlation between L1 students from the GeogD and the mastery of some English grammatical concord rules. There is therefore no predictable relationship that could be established.

Table 7: Performance of L3 Students from the GeogD on some Grammatical Concord Rules

ANSWERS	Q.4	Q.9	Q.10	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
wrong	12	22	30	21	52.5
correct	28	18	10	19	47.5
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	100.0

Both L3 students and L1 set a similar mean score of 19 (47.5%) tokens of correct answers and 21 (52.5%) tokens of incorrect ones. The mean score of wrong answers is bigger than that of correct ones. This indicates that there is no progress in the mastery of the grammatical concord rules as one moves from L1 to L3. Thus, we conclude that there is no correlation between the level of education of L1 and L3 students of the GeogD and the mastery of the dummy subject rule and the rule on subject separated from the verb by other words.

3.1.2 Department of English

In this department, 40 copies of the questionnaire were passed to the students per level, were filled in and were returned *in toto*, making a one hundred per cent (100 %) participation of the informants. Consequently, this participation rate equally applies to the grammatical concord-related items: Q.4, Q.9, and Q.10. These questionnaire items are the same as the ones passed to the Geography students. Table 8 below presents and summarises the performance of L1 and L3 students from the EngD.

Table 8: Performance of Students from the EngD on some English Grammatical Concord Rules

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS		DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH				TOTAL
		L1		L3		
		NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	
Q.4	wrong	29	72.5%	19	47.5%	48
	correct	11	27.5%	21	52.5%	32
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.9	wrong	22	55.0%	25	62.5%	47
	correct	18	45.0%	15	37.5%	33
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.10	wrong	27	67.5%	20	50.0%	47
	correct	13	32.5%	20	50.0%	33
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80

The output provided in this table shows a statistical difference in terms of performance by L1 and L3 students on questionnaire items Q.4, Q. 9, and Q.10. Let us examine in detail the performance of each level below.

Table 9: Performance of EngD L1 Students on some Grammatical Concord Rules

ANSWERS	Q.4	Q.9	Q.10	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
wrong	29	22	27	26	65.0
correct	11	18	13	14	35.0
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	100.0

Table 9 above shows that L1 students recorded a mean score of 14 (35.0%) on correct answers. In Q.4,11 students ticked correct answers, in Q.9,18 students,and in Q.10,13 students. These descriptive statistics suggest that these students also have some problems concerning the English grammatical concord rules considered in this study. Table 9 shows that twenty-six students (26) ticked the wrong answers in all the three questionnaire items. This means that these L1 students do not have a good mastery of the rules.

Table 10: Performance of L3 Students from the EngD on some Grammatical Concord Rules

ANSWERS	Q.4	Q.9	Q.10	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
wrong	19	25	20	21	52.5
correct	21	15	20	19	47.5
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	100.0

There is a relative progress of performance by L3 students, though insignificant, compared to those of L1 on grammatical concord rules. L3 students had a mean score of 19 (47.5%) tokens of correct answers while L1 students in Table 9 scored 14 (35%) tokens of correct answers. We moved from (35%) in L1 to (47.5%) in L3, making a slight progress of (12.5%). However, looking at the individual questionnaire item, we notice that 21 students of L3 scored in Q.4, 15 students in Q.9, and 20 students in Q.10. This is a clear indication that, out of the 40 respondents of L3 consulted on the three questionnaire items, more than half of the informants proposed the wrong answers. Therefore, we are made to believe that these L3 students from EngD still have problems with the dummy subject rule and the rule on subjects separated from the verb by connectors. Thus, it is safe to conclude that the level of education of L1 and L3 students from the EngD does not correlate with their mastery of some English grammatical concord rules. Therefore, we cannot provide any predictable pattern of these two variables.

3.2 Level of Education and the Mastery of some English Proximity Concord Rules

The assessment of performance by the informants from the GeogD and the EngD in relation to their respective levels is based on the analysis of the questionnaire items Q.11, Q.16, Q.17, Q.18, and Q.19. These questionnaire items are: Q.11 “Many a job seeker.....already enquired about the job vacancy (have, has)”, Q.16 “Neither he nor Iill (are, is, am)”, Q.17 “Each of the staff membersthe petition (have signed, has signed)”, Q.18 “Either my students or Iable to do the task (am, is, are)”, and Q.19 “Neither you, nor I, nor anyone elsethe answer (know, knows)”. These items are built upon the English

proximity concord rules, namely the use of correlative pairs such as “neither...nor,” the use of “many a...” and the use of “each of the...” before a verb. The mastery of these rules is analysed and evaluated in terms of the number of correct and incorrect answers scored by each informant below.

3.2.1 Department of Geography

A total number of 80 students from the GeogD responded to the five questionnaire items. In both L1 and L3, 40 students were respectively consulted on their mastery of these rules. Table 11 below provides a broad statistical data of their performance with regard to the five questionnaire items.

Table 11: Performance of Students from the GeogD on some Proximity Concord Rules

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS		DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY				TOTAL
		L1		L3		
		NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	
Q.11	wrong	24	60.0%	29	72.5%	53
	correct	16	40.0%	11	27.5%	27
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.16	wrong	21	52.5%	24	60.0%	45
	correct	19	47.5%	16	40.0%	35
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.17	wrong	21	52.5%	24	60.0%	45
	correct	19	47.5%	16	40.0%	35
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.18	wrong	26	65.0%	19	57.5%	45
	correct	14	35.0%	21	42.5%	35
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.19	wrong	20	50.0%	23	55.0%	43
	correct	20	50.0%	17	45.0%	37
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80

From the above table, we notice that the performance of L1 and L3 students per questionnaire item is quite different. For a thorough analysis of performance by L1 and L3, let us cross-examine the next tables (Table 12 and Table 13).

Table 12: Performance of L1 Students from the GeogD on some Proximity Concord Rules

ANSWERS	Q.11	Q.16	Q.17	Q.18	Q.19	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
wrong	24	21	21	26	20	22	55.0
correct	16	19	19	14	20	18	45.0
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	40	40	100.0

Table 12 above shows that L1 students set a mean score of 18 (45.0%) tokens of correct answers on the five proximity concord-based questionnaire items. The statistics of the above table reveal that in L1, 16 students proposed correct answers in Q.11, 19 students in Q.16 and Q.17, 14 students in Q.18, and 20 students in Q.19. However, 22 (55%) students ticked the wrong answers with a frequency which is slightly greater than that of correct answers. This indicates that L1 students do not have a good mastery of the proximity concord rules.

Table 13: Performance of L3 Students from the GeogD on some Proximity Concord Rules

ANSWERS	Q.11	Q.16	Q.17	Q.18	Q.19	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
wrong	29	24	24	19	23	24	60.0
correct	11	16	16	21	17	16	40.0
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	40	40	100.00

The data presented in Table 13 shows that the performance output of L3 students on the knowledge of English proximity concord rules is slightly lower than that of L1 students, as assessed in Table 12 above. In fact, while L3 students had a mean record of 16 (40%) tokens of correct answers on the five questionnaire items, those of L1 had a mean score of 18 (45%)

tokens of correct answers with a margin of 2. This indicates that these informants do not have a good mastery of proximity concord rules. Equally, this means that there is no neat progress in the mastery of concord rules as one moves from L1 to L3 in the GeogD. It can thus be construed that the level of education of L1 and L3 of the GeogD does not correlate with their mastery of the English proximity concord rules. Therefore, it is difficult to predict a pattern between the two variables.

3.2.2 Department of English

Eighty (80) students from the EngD in both L1 and L3 were consulted to check out their mastery of some English proximity rules via a set of questionnaire items (Q.11, Q.16, Q.17, Q.18, and Q.19). These questionnaire items are the same as those passed to the Geography students. The full participation of 40 students per level has generated the statistics in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Performance of Students from the EngD on some Proximity Concord Rules

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS		DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH				TOTAL
		L1		L3		
		FREQ.	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	
Q. 11	wrong	25	62.5%	20	50.0%	45
	correct	15	37.5%	20	50.0%	35
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q. 16	wrong	37	92.5%	27	67.5%	54
	correct	3	7.5%	13	32.5%	16
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q. 17	wrong	24	60.0%	22	55.0%	46
	correct	16	40.0%	18	45.0%	34
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q. 18	wrong	25	62.5%	28	70.0%	53
	correct	15	37.5%	12	30.0%	27
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q. 19	wrong	11	27.5%	14	35.0%	25
	correct	29	72.5%	26	65.0%	55
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80

The statistical output in the above table reports the performance of our respondents from L1 and L3 on each questionnaire item. It is indicated in this table that the performance of L1 respondents differs statistically from that of L3 respondents. An in-depth analysis of the statistics of each level is considered in turn below.

Table 15: Performance of L1 Students from the EngD on some Proximity Concord Rules

ANSWERS	Q.11	Q.16	Q.17	Q.18	Q.19	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
wrong	25	37	24	25	11	25	62.5
correct	15	3	16	15	29	15	37.5
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	40	40	100.0

In table 15 above, L1 students had a mean score of 15 (37.5%) tokens of correct answers on the five questionnaire items. Fifteen (15) L1 students proposed correct answers for Q.11, 3 students for Q.16, 16 students for Q.17, 15 students for Q.18, and 29 students for Q.19. The statistics indicate that out of the 40 students from L1, only 15 (37.5%) students scored correct answers while 25 (62.5%) students proposed wrong answers. This implies that L1 students from the GeogD have but a poor mastery of the English proximity concord rules.

Table 16: Performance of L3 Students from the EngD on some Proximity Concord Rules

ANSWERS	Q.11	Q.16	Q.17	Q.18	Q.19	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
wrong	20	27	22	28	14	22	55
correct	20	13	18	12	26	18	45
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	40	40	100

An inspection of Table 16 indicates that L3 students recorded a mean score of 18 (45%) tokens of correct answers on the five questionnaire items. In Q.11, 20 students scored points on correct answers, 13 students in Q.16, 18 students in Q.17, 12 students in Q.18, and 26 students in Q.19. However, twenty two (22) students ticked wrong answers with a frequency

of (55%) that is higher than that of correct ones. While those of L1 had a mean score of 15 (37.5%) tokens of correct answers, those of L3 set a mean score of 18 (45%) with a marginal progress that is not significant enough for us to claim a correlation between the two variables. The fact that one moves from one academic ladder (L1) to another one (L3) has little impact on the mastery of some English proximity rules. It can therefore be concluded that there is no correlation between level of education and the mastery of the assessed proximity concord rules. Therefore, no predictable pattern can be established between the two variables.

3.3 Level of Education and the Mastery of some English Notional Concord Rules

The assessment of the mastery of some English notional concord rules by our target respondents in this section is based on 12 questionnaire items. These questionnaire items are: Q.1 “Three quarters of an hourtoo short for that work (seem, seems)”, Q.2 “One and a half spoonsleft (is, are)”, Q.3 “Five kilogrammes of meatenough (is, are)”, Q.5 “Three pens multiplied by two.....six pens (equals, equal) ,Q.6 “Ten years in high schooltoo much(is, are)”, Q.7 “Fifty percent of his timedevoted to research (is, are)”, Q.8 “Her whereaboutsa mystery to everyone (remains, remain)”, Q.12 “A good many.....ready to help in this project (is, are)”, Q.13 “More than one criminal.....executed yesterday(was, were), Q.14“.....either of the sisters coming? (is, are)”, Q.15 “Neither of the students.....correct answers (give, gives)” and Q.20 “the hammer and sickleflying from the flagpole (was,were)”. The notional concord rules considered in these questionnaire items include the use of figures as subjects, nouns ending with “-s”(whereabouts”) used as subjects, and the use of oppositional coordination in the expression “the hammer and sickle” as a subject. One hundred and sixty (160) students participated in this specific survey with 80 respondents per department and 40 students per level.

3.3.1 Department of Geography

As previously mentioned, 40 students of L1 and 40 students of L3 from the GeogD filled in and returned the copies of the questionnaire containing 12 questionnaire items set on the English notional concord rules. Table 17 below captures the statistical performance of both L1 and L3 students.

Table 17: Performance of Students from the GeogD on some Notional Concord Rules

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS		DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY				TOTAL
		L1		L3		
		NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	
Q.1	wrong	22	55.0%	21	52.5%	43
	correct	18	45.0%	19	47.5%	37
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.2	wrong	26	65.0%	22	55.0%	48
	correct	14	35.0%	18	45.0%	32
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.3	wrong	25	62.5%	28	70.0%	53
	correct	15	37.5%	12	30.0%	27
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.5	wrong	20	50.0%	30	75.0%	50
	correct	20	50.0%	10	25.0%	30
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.6	wrong	25	62.5%	25	62.5%	50
	correct	15	37.5%	15	37.5%	30
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.7	wrong	22	55.0%	11	27.5%	33
	correct	18	45.0%	29	72.5%	47
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.8	wrong	37	92.5%	19	47.5%	56
	correct	3	7.5%	21	52.5%	24
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.12	wrong	28	70.0%	28	70.0%	56
	correct	12	30.0%	12	30.0%	24
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.13	wrong	21	52.5%	24	60.0%	45
	correct	19	47.5%	16	40.0%	35
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.14	wrong	13	32.5%	21	52.5%	34
	correct	27	67.5%	19	47.5%	46
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.15	wrong	17	42.5%	26	65.0%	43
	correct	23	57.5%	14	35.0%	37
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.20	wrong	32	80.0%	31	77.5%	63
	correct	8	20.0%	9	22.5%	17
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80

The data from the above table presents in a broad way the statistical performance of both L1 and L3 students on the twelve questionnaire items built upon the English notional concord rules. A detailed analysis of the performance of the respondents per level is done below.

Table 18: Performance of L1 Students from the GeogD on some Notional Concord Rules

answers	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.5	Q.6	Q.7	Q.8	Q.12	Q.13	Q.14	Q.15	Q.20	MEAN	%
wrong	22	26	25	20	25	22	37	28	21	13	17	32	26	65
correct	18	14	15	20	15	18	3	12	19	27	23	8	14	35
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	100

A glance at Table 17 above shows that L1 respondents set a mean score of 14 (35%) tokens of correct answers and 26 (65%) tokens of incorrect ones. Of the 12 questionnaire items, 18 students of L1 ticked correct answers in Q.1, 14 students in Q.2, 15 students in Q.3, 20 students in Q.5, 15 students in Q.6, 18 students in Q.8, 12 students in Q.12, 19 students in Q.13, 27 students in Q.14, 23 students in Q.15, and 8 students in Q.20. The statistics report that, out of the 12 questionnaire items just 14 (35%) students of L1 were able to score points on correct answers and 26 (65%) students ticked wrong answers. With the frequency of wrong answers being higher than that of correct ones, it is clear that L1 students have not yet appropriated the rules of notional concord in English.

Table 19: Performance of L3 Students from the GeogD on some Notional Concord Rules

answers	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.5	Q.6	Q.7	Q.8	Q.12	Q.13	Q.14	Q.15	Q.20	MEAN	%
wrong	21	22	28	30	25	11	19	28	24	21	26	31	25	62.5
correct	19	18	12	10	15	19	21	12	16	19	14	9	15	37.5
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	100.0

L3 students in Table 18 above had a mean score of 15 (37.5%) tokens of correct answers. Examining the items separately, we note that in L3, 19 students scored points in Q.1, 18 students in Q.2, 12 students in Q.3, 10 students in Q.5, 19 students in Q.7, 21 students in Q.8, 12 students in Q.12, 16 students in Q.13, 19 students in Q.14, 14 students in Q.15, and 9 students

in Q.20. Twenty five (25) students out of 40 have ticked incorrect answers. This shows that L3 students have a poor knowledge of some rules of the English notional concord. These students do not have a good mastery of the rules of notional concord in English. With a mean score of 14 (35%) by L1 students and 15 (37.5%) by L3 students, the results simply indicate that there is no significant relationship between the level of education of L1 and L3 students and the mastery of notional concord rules that can be established.

3.3.2 Department of English

A total number of 80 students filled in and returned the copies of the questionnaire containing the twelve questionnaire items set on the English notional concord rules, as was the case with informants of the GeogD. The performance of both L1 and L3 students is presented below.

Table 20: Performance of the Students from the EngD on some Notional Concord Rules

QUESTIONNAI RE ITEMS		DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH				TOTAL
		L1		L3		
		NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	
Q.1	wrong	8	20.0%	9	22.5%	17
	correct	32	80.0%	31	77.5%	63
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.2	wrong	12	30.0%	10	25.0%	22
	correct	28	70.0%	30	75.0%	58
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.3	wrong	4	10.0%	7	17.5%	11
	correct	36	90.0%	33	82.5%	69
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.5	wrong	29	72.5%	27	67.5%	56
	correct	11	27.5%	13	32.5%	24
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.6	wrong	8	20.0%	7	17.5%	15
	correct	32	80.0%	33	82.5%	65
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.7	wrong	4	10.0%	3	7.5%	7
	correct	36	90.0%	37	92.5%	63
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80

Q.8	wrong	14	35.0%	11	27.5%	25
	correct	26	65.0%	29	72.5%	55
TOTAL		40	100.05	40	100.0%	80
Q.12	wrong	10	25.0%	16	40.0%	26
	correct	30	75.0%	24	60.0%	54
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.13	wrong	25	62.5%	19	47.5%	44
	correct	15	37.5%	21	52.5%	26
TOTAL		40	100.05	40	100.0%	80
Q.14	wrong	16	40.0%	6	15.0%	22
	correct	24	60.0%	34	85.0%	58
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.15	wrong	24	60.0%	21	52.5%	45
	correct	16	40.0%	19	47.5%	35
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80
Q.20	wrong	34	85.0%	25	62.5%	59
	correct	6	15.0%	15	37.5%	21
TOTAL		40	100.0%	40	100.0%	80

The statistical performance of our respondents on each questionnaire item differs in L1 and L3 in Table 19 shown above. To capture in details the nature of performance per level, let us examine in details Table 20 and Table 21 below.

Table 21: Performance of L1 Students from the EngD on some Notional Concord Rules

answes	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.5	Q.6	Q.7	Q.8	Q.12	Q.1 3	Q.1 4	Q.1 5	Q.2 0	MEAN	%
wrong	8	12	4	29	8	4	14	10	25	16	24	34	16	40
correct	32	28	36	11	32	36	26	30	15	24	16	6	24	60
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	100

From Table 20 below, it can be seen that L1 students recorded a mean score of 24 (60%) tokens of correct answers. However, of the 12 questionnaire items, L1 students scored 30 points in Q.12, 32 points in Q.1 and Q.6, 36 points in Q.3 and Q.7. We have in total 5

questionnaire items out of the 12 where L1 students recorded a score of 30 points or above on the correct answers and 6 questionnaire items which were ticked incorrectly. It is indicative that the students have a relative mastery of the rule on subject-verb agreement that contain figures.

Table 22: Performance of L3 Students from the EngD on some Notional Concord Rules

answers	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.5	Q.6	Q.7	Q.8	Q.12	Q.13	Q.14	Q.15	Q.20	MEAN	%
wrong	9	10	7	27	7	3	11	16	19	6	21	25	14	35
correct	31	30	33	13	33	37	29	24	21	34	19	15	26	65
TOTAL	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	100

From the data in Table 21, L3 students set a mean score of 26 (65%) tokens of correct answers and 14(35%) tokens of wrong answers. Out of the 12 questionnaire items set on the notional concord rules, L3 students have scored points in six (06) items. The respondents scored 31 points and 30 points in Q.1 and Q.2, respectively, and 33 points in both Q.3 and Q.6. There is a progress in the appropriation of the notional concord rules compared to Table 19, where L1 respondents came up with a mean score of 24 (60%) tokens while in L3 the respondents had 26 (65%) tokens. It can therefore be construed that L3 students have appropriated to some extent some rules of the English notional concord. However, these statistics are not significant enough for us to assert that there exists a strong correlation between level of education of L1 and L3 students and the mastery of some English notional concord rules.

3.4 Relationship between EFL/ ESL learners' Levels of Education and their Mastery of some English Subject-Verb Agreement Rules

This section discusses the statistical performance of the ESL and EFL students in relation to their level of education. In this regard, the performance of both L1 and L3 students from the GeogD is compared to that of L1 and L3 students from the EngD. The comparison focuses on their performance, as analysed in sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 above, on questionnaire items set on grammatical concord, proximity concord, and notional concord, respectively. The

following analysis starts with the case of the grammatical concord and the other two types of concord are taken up subsequently.

3.4.1 Relationship between EFL/ ESL learners' Levels of Education and their Mastery of some Grammatical Concord Rules

Of the three questionnaire items set on the rules of the English grammatical concord, L1 and L3 students from the GeogD set an equal mean score of 19 (47.5%) tokens of correct answers in Table 22 below, a score which is not a strong figure for us to claim a correlational pattern. Thus, there is no progress in the mastery of the grammatical concord rules as one moves from L1 to L3 in the GeogD. Consequently, no correlation can be established at this level.

The total score of these L1 and L3 students on correct answers is 38 (47.5%). This means that 38 students out of 80 were able to propose the correct answers on the three questionnaire items and 42 (52.5%) students ticked wrong answers.

Table 23: EFL Learners' Approximation of some Grammatical Concord Rules

ANSWERS	GeogD				TOTAL	%
	L1	%	L3	%		
wrong	21	52.5	21	52.5	42	52.5
correct	19	47.5	19	47.5	38	47.5
TOTAL	40	100	40	100	80	100

Concerning the respondents from the EngD in Table 23 below, the statistics show that L1 students ticked 14 (35%) tokens of correct answers while those of L3 had 19 (47.5%) tokens, hitting a total score of 33 (41.25%). Comparing the overall score of the GeogD students (38) to that of the EngD students (33), we realise that the GeogD students performed slightly better than the EngD students. The students of GeogD outscored those of the EngD by a margin of 5. These findings show that the students from the GeogD have a slightly better mastery of grammatical concord rules than those of the EngD. This indicates that the status of being an ESL learner has no significant impact on the mastery of the rule on dummy subject and other grammatical concord-related rules among the students from the EngD.

Table 24: ESL Learners' Approximation of some Grammatical Concord Rules

ANSWERS	EngD				TOTAL	%
	L1	%	L3	%		
wrong	26	65	21	52.5	47	58.75
correct	14	35	19	47.5	33	41.25
TOTAL	40	100	40	100	80	100

Furthermore, L1 students of the GeogD scored 19 (47.5%) tokens of correct answers while those of the EngD had 14 (35%) tokens. L1 respondents of the GeogD had a better performance than L1 students of the EngD by a margin of 5. Examining the performance of L3 students, the respondents from the GeogD and those from the EngD both recorded 19 (47.5%) tokens of correct answers and 21 (52.5%) of incorrect answers, respectively. This implies that L3 students of the EngD (ESL learners) and L3 students of the GeogD (EFL learners) both have the same level of appropriation of some rules of grammatical concord (see Figure 1 below for a graphical representation). The status of being either an ESL or an EFL learner has therefore no influence on the mastery of some English grammatical concord rules.

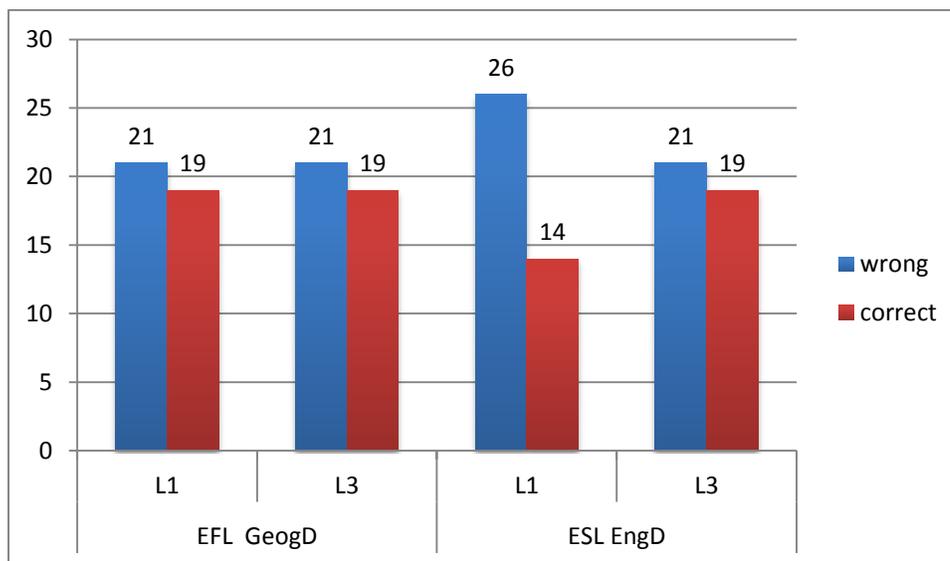


Figure 1: Performance of the EFL and ESL Learners on Grammatical Concord Rules

Assessing the performance of student from the two departments,we notice that there is a weak correlation between the status of being an ESL/ EFL learner and the mastery of some grammatical concord rules. The data yielded in Tables 22 and 23 provide convincing evidence that the fact of being eitheran EFL or an ESL learner at the same educational level does not correlate with one’s mastery of some rules of grammatical concord. We cannot therefore establish a predictable pattern between the two variables.

3.4.2 Relationship between Level of Education of EFL / ESL Learners and their Mastery of some Proximity Concord Rules

Table 24 below suggests that L1 respondents from the GeogD had a mean score of 18 (45%) tokens of correct answers and 22 (55%) of incorrect ones while those of L3 had a mean score of 16 (40%) and 24 (60%) of wrong ones. Here, it can be noticed that there is no correlation on the mastery of proximity rules as one moves from L1 to L3 in the GeogD. The respondents from the GeogD make a total score of 34 (42.5%) tokens of correct answers and 46 (57.5%) of incorrect answers. This means that 46 (57.5%) students out of the 80 from the GeogD proposed the incorrect answers on the English proximity concord rules set in the questionnaire. Therefore, we cannot establish a correlation between level of education and the mastery of English proximity rules.

Table 25: EFL Learners’ Approximation of the Mastery of some Rules of Proximity Concord

ANSWERS	GeogD				TOTAL	%
	L1	%	L3	%		
wrong	22	55	24	60	46	57.5
correct	18	45	16	40	34	42.5
TOTAL	40	100	40	100	80	100

In the EngD, L1 students recorded a mean score of 15 (37.5%) tokens of correct answers and L3 students had 18 (44%).There is a margin of 3 between the two levels, a margin which is

not significant enough to say that there is a neat progress of mastery of the proximity concord rules as one climbs up the academic ladder.

In total, the students of the EngD had a mean score of 33 (41.25%) tokens of correct answers and 47 (58.75%) of incorrect answers on the set English proximity concord rules. The overall score of the respondents from the GeogD (34) is almost similar to that of the EngD, (33). Thus, the status of being either an ESL or EFL learner has an insignificant impact on the mastery of proximity concord rules.

Table 26: ESL Learners’ Approximation of the Mastery of some Rules of Proximity Concord

EngD				TOTAL	%
L1	%	L3	%		
25	62.5	22	55	47	58.75
15	37.5	18	45	33	41.25
40	100	40	100	80	100

L1 respondents of the GeogD recorded a score of 18 (45%) tokens of correct answers while those of the EngD had a score of 15 (37.5). L1 students of the GeogD had a margin of 3 tokens of correct answers over L1 students from the EngD. However, L3 students of the EngD outscored L3 students of the GeogD by a margin of 2, as the former had 18 (45%) tokens of correct answers while the latter recorded a mean score of 16 (40%). There seems to be no significant statistical difference between the performance of our two distinct respondents from the GeogD and the EngD, as illustrated by Figure 2 below. L3 students from the GeogD and L3 students from the EngD thus appear to have the same level of understanding of some rules of the English proximity concord. The status of being either an ESL or an EFL does not correlate with the mastery of the English proximity concord rules.

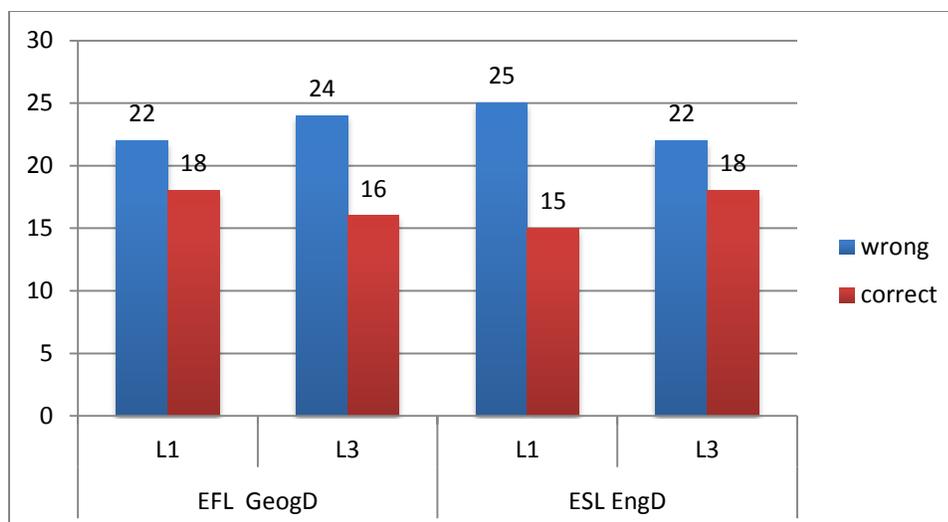


Figure 2: Performance of the EFL and ESL Learners on some Proximity Concord Rules

On the basis of the statistics evidenced in the above table, it is fair to say that the fact of being an EFL (students from the GeogD) or an ESL (students from the EngD) learner in consonance with their level of education has no significant influence on their mastery of some rules of proximity concord in English. The status of being an ESL or an EFL learner does not correlate with the mastery of the English proximity concord rules.

3.4.3 Relationship between Level of Education of EFL / ESL Learners and their Mastery of some Notional Concord Rules

In Table 25 below, the statistical data generated suggests that L1 students from the GeogD recorded a mean score of 14 (35%) tokens of correct answers and 26 (65%) of incorrect ones while their counterparts of L3 had a mean score 15 (37.5%) tokens of correct answers and 25 (62.5%) of incorrect ones on the questionnaire items set on the notional concord rules. The total score of wrong answers of the students from EngD is higher than that of the correct answers, 29 (36.25%). This means that these students do not master the English proximity concord rules.

Table 27: EFL Learners' Approximation on the Mastery of some Rules of Notional Concord

ANSWERS	EFL GeogD				TOTAL	%
	L1	%	L3	%		
wrong	26	65	25	62.5	51	63.75
correct	14	35	15	37.5	29	36.25
TOTAL	40	100	40	100	80	100

In the EngD, L1 respondents had a mean score of 24 (60%) tokens of correct answers and 16 (40%) of incorrect ones while L3 students set a mean score of 26 (65%) of correct answers and 14 (35%) of incorrect ones. The total score of correct answers of the EngD is 50 (62.5%) and that of the incorrect ones is 30 (37.5%). L3 students have a better mastery of notional concord rules than L1 students from the EngD. There is a relative progress of the mastery of these rules as one moves from L1 to L3.

Table 28: ESL Learners' Approximation on the Mastery of some Rules of Notional Concord

ANSWERS	ESL EngD				TOTAL	%
	L1	%	L3	%		
wrong	16	40	14	35	30	37.5
correct	24	60	26	65	50	62.5
TOTAL	40	100	40	100	80	100

The total score (50) of the EngD students is higher than that of the GeogD students (30). The ESL learners of L1 appear to have a better understanding of the rules of notional concord than their EFL counterparts of the same level. Figure 3 below provides a visual

representation of their performance. It can therefore be concluded that, in respect to the statistical evidence available in Table 27 above, one's status as an ESL learner or as an EFL learner does not have any significant influence on his/her mastery of some English notional concord rules.

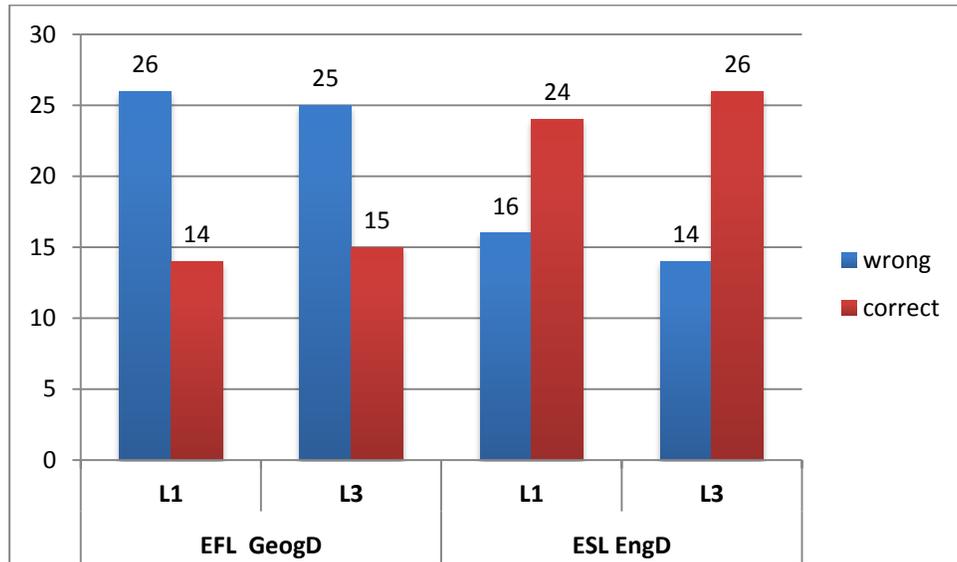


Figure 3: Performance of the EFL and ESL Learners on some Notional Concord Rules

GENERAL CONCLUSION

4.0 Introduction

This conclusion summarises the findings, discusses the sociolinguistic and pedagogical implications of the findings, and wraps up with recommendations for further research.

4.1 Summary and Discussion of Findings

The aim of this research work was to investigate the correlation between level of education and the mastery of some basic English subject-verb agreement rules. Based on the observation of the way English is used in Cameroon ,it was hypothesised that there is no significant relationship between level of education and the mastery of some English subject-verb agreement rules by L1 and L3 students from both the EngD and the GeogD of the University of Yaounde 1. To verify the plausibility of this hypothesis, a questionnaire was used as the main source of data collection for this investigation.

The first research question aimed to find out the correlation between level of education and the mastery of some subject- verb agreement rules in English by First Year and Third Year students of both the EngD and the GeogD of the University of Yaounde I. What we have studied is the strength of the correlation between level of education and use of standard subject-verb agreement forms, not its cause. The analysis of the questionnaires revealed that there is no significant correlation between level of education and the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules. In fact, with regard to the grammatical concord rules, for instance, Table 21 in the previous chapter indicates that both L1 and L3 students of the GeogD had a similar mean score of 19 (47.5%) tokens of correct answers .The performance is the same in either level. Consequently, the correlation between the two variables is weak. Furthermore, in table 22, L1students of the EngD scored 14 (35%) tokens of correct answers while those of L3 had 19 (47.5%) tokens. We observe here a relative progress, though insignificant enough for us to claim a strong a correlational pattern between the two

variables. Thus, no predictable pattern can be drawn at this juncture. Concerning the proximity concord rules, Table 23 in the preceding chapter shows that L1 students of the GeogD set a mean score of 18 (45%) tokens of correct answers while those of L3 had just 16 (40%). L3 students rather regressed in their performance, making it impossible to claim any correlational pattern in this regard. Moreover, in Table 24, L1 students of the EngD scored 15 (37.5%) tokens of correct answers while those of L3 had 18 (45%) tokens. Though a relative progress can be noted here, it is not significant enough to establish a correlation between the two variables. Considering the notional concord rules, in Tables 25 and 26 still in the previous chapter, we notice a marginal progress between the performance of L1 and L3 students in both the GeogD and the EngD. While L1 students of the GeogD had a mean score of 14 (35%), their L3 counterparts scored in average 15 (37.5%) tokens of correct answers. In the EngD, L1 students scored 24 (60%) tokens of correct answers while those of L3 had 26 (65%) tokens, with a marginal progress that is not significant enough to establish a correlation pattern. We therefore can conclude that there is no significant correlation between level of education and the mastery of notional concord rules.

Furthermore, in an attempt to find out the correlation between status of being an ESL or EFL learner and the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules in English by First Year and Third Year students of both the EngD and the GeogD of the University of Yaounde I, the study reveals that this status has little impact on the mastery of some English subject-verb agreement rules. Figures 1, 2, and 3 in Chapter Three provide a visual representation of the performance output of the EFL learners (L1 and L3 students of the GeogD) and ESL learners (L1 and L3 students of the EngD). These figures indicate that the status of being either an EFL or an ESL learner has but an insignificant impact on the mastery of grammatical concord, proximity concord and notional concord rules. This implies that there is no correlation between one's status as an EFL learner or ESL learner and the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules. Here, we can construe that both the ESL and EFL learners are more exposed to indogenous languages and Pidgin English than to the standard norms of English. This exposure may justify the little impact of status of being an ESL or EFL speaker on the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules.

The second research question sought to know the correlation pattern that emerges from this study. Given that the results of this study corroborate with our hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between level of education and the mastery of some English subject-verb agreement rules by L1 and L3 students from both the EngD and the GeogD of the University of Yaounde 1, we conclude that there is no predictable pattern that emerges from this study. Therefore, this investigation contradicts the universality of the predictable patterns that were reported in the Western World. This contradiction occurs because the socio-economic realities of the Western societies and those of the New English context (Cameroon) are dissimilar in many respects. The socio-economic factors in Cameroon have little impact on educational attainments. Yet, our cotextual realities are characterised by the dominant use of indigenous languages and the Pidgin English.

4.2. Sociolinguistic and Pedagogic Implications

The findings of this study have a number of relevant sociolinguistic and pedagogic implications. Sociolinguistically, this correlational research is a further attempt to investigate the relationship between a sociolinguistic variable and grammatical variables. The study has proven that grammatical variables other than phonological ones are equally fertile grounds where correlational sociolinguistic surveys can be conducted in relation to sociolinguistic factor in a New English context like Cameroon. It is hoped that this study will trigger more scholarly interests in postcolonial settings for a large-scale correlational study of sociolinguistic variables and lexical or grammatical variables. It should be recalled that most previous surveys conducted both in the West (e.g. Fasold, 1972; Macaulay & Trevelyan, 1973, Trudgill, 1974) and in New English contexts (e.g. Ngefac, 1997, 2006, 2008; Ngaajie, 2010; Yong, 2010; Sahmo, 2014; Kouam, 2015) focused almost exclusively on correlation between phonological features and extra-linguistic variables.

Moreover, this survey has shown that it is difficult to obtain a predictable correlational pattern in postcolonial settings like Cameroon as those reported in the Western World. The research could not establish any predictable patterns simply because educational attainment has little impact on the mastery of grammatical variables. For educational attainment to significantly correlate with the grammatical features, we need more educational

efforts on the parts of both learners and the English Language teachers, efforts which will impact the use of the language features following the standard forms.

Pedagogically, this study has equally some relevant implications. First, the fact that there exists no significant correlation between level of education and the mastery of some subject-verb agreement rules among the students of the GeogD and the EngD of University of Yaounde 1 implies that the tendency may be prevailing in other departments of the same institution as well as in other departments of different Cameroonian universities.

Second, the findings of this study imply that many Cameroonian university students still have serious problems with some basic English grammar rules that they are supposed to have mastered in respect to their levels of education. This shows that our informants are not making substantial efforts to observe the English standard grammatical rules. The results raise here the alarm to the educational stakeholders involved in the ELT domain in higher education. One question needs to be posed here: can the weak performance of our EFL and ESL learners be attributed to the aspects of English that was taught to them or it is just an act of negligence deriving from incomplete application of concord rules on the part of these learners themselves? There is an urgent need for both educational stakeholders and ELT teachers to rethink of their syllabuses and approaches in teaching “how to speak and write English correctly” and focus more on the basics of the English language that are being neglected rather than on abstract aspects of the language that can hardly increase communicative competence among both EFL and ESL learners.

Third, if the status of being an ESL or EFL learner has an insignificant impact on the mastery of some English subject-verb agreement rules, this implies that regular exposure to the English language of our learners in their daily life coupled with their level of education are insufficient for them to upgrade their performance in English, given the multilingual nature of Cameroon’s linguistic platform is dominated by local languages and Pidgin English. Effective training on English basic grammatical aspects can help improve on their communicative performance. Furthermore, the contextual realities and the New Englishes’ strong arguments on varieties of English have made some English users in postcolonial settings lazy. Despite sound postulations made on CamE, the use of CamE does not mean users of this variety of English are allowed to haphazardly distort SBE grammatical

rules. Therefore, there is a need on their parts to make extra efforts to master the basic rules of the English language.

Fourth, this research reveals the output performance of the undergraduates that may justify their poor writing skill characterised by poor mastery of basic subject-verb agreement rules and other grammatical errors. The results reveal that our informants make efforts to use standard English only in formal situations. This implies that these informants are rather more exposed to local languages and Pidgin English, a situation which undermines their mastery of SBE grammatical rules. Preparation for their academic and extra-curricular productions begins at undergraduate levels and passes through the mastery of some basic rules, among the most important ones, the subject-verb rules. Therefore, drillings and effective training on subject-verb agreement rules can yield positive results among these undergraduates and improve on their writing skills in English.

4.3 Suggestions for Further Research

This research work has attempted to investigate the correlation between level of education and mastery of some basic English subject-verb agreement rules and has concluded that there exists no strong correlation between the two variables. One may then seek to find out the major causes that could justify this poor performance of Cameroonian university students on the use of standard subject-verb agreement rules, despite their levels of education. Another interesting topic could be on correlation between level of education and other aspects of grammar, such as phrasal verbs, prepositions, etc.

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APPENDIX

A PRODUCTION TEST SAMPLE

This questionnaire aims at collecting data for research. Kindly fill in each blank by ticking (✓) to provide relevant information and by choosing the appropriate answer from those proposed in the parentheses. Your answers to any questions will be treated as confidential and the information collected will be used strictly for academic purposes.

I. Identification: please answer the following questions by ticking (✓) the appropriate answer.

1. Are you a Francophone or an Anglophone?

a. Francophone b. Anglophone

2. Are you a student of the Department of Geography or the Department of English?

a. Department of Geography b. Department of English

3. Are you in level 1 or level 3?

a. Level 1 b. Level 3

II. Questions: kindly fill in each blank by choosing one appropriate answer from those proposed in parentheses.

1. Three quarters of an hour.....too short for that work. (seem, seems)

2. One and a half spoons.....left. (is, are)

3. Five kilogrammes of meat.....enough. (is, are)

4. There.....our teammates. (come, comes)

5. Three pens multiplied by two.....six pens. (equals, equal)

6. Ten years in high school..... too much. (is ,are,)

7. Fifty per cent of his timedevoted to research. (is , are)
8. Her whereabouts.....a mystery to everyone. (remains, remains)
9. The teacher, as well as his students, in the class. (sings, sing)
10. The emperor, with one of his body guards, assassinated. (was, were)
11. Many a job seekeralready enquired about the job vacancy. (have, has)
12. A good many.....ready to help in this project. (is, are)
13. More than one criminal.....executed yesterday. (was, were)
14.either of the sisters coming? (Is, Are)
15. Neither of the students.....correct answers. (give, gives)
16. Neither he nor I..... ill. (are, is, am)
17. Each of the staff members.....the petition. (have signed, has signed)
18. Either my students or I.....able to do the task. (am, is, are)
19. Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else..... the answer. (knows, know)
20. The hammer and sickleflying from the flagpole. (was, were)