THE UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I

UNIVERSITE DE YAOUNDE I

HIGHER TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

N
E S

ECOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE

DEPARTEMENT D'ANGLAIS

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN EFL LEARNERS' SENSITIVITY TO NOUN INFLECTION AND TWO SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIABLES

A Dissertation Submitted to the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Yaounde in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Award of a Postgraduate Teacher's Diploma (DIPES II) in English Language

By
LINDA ESOH TIMAH
BA English Modern Letters
University of Yaounde 1

Supervised by

Napoleon Epoge
Senior lecturer
ENS Yaounde

Yaounde, June 2016

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Clementine Eboutou, and my son, Matteo Eboutou.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those who helped me to realize this work. My profound gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr Napoleon Epoge. Despite his busy schedule, he always gave me the necessary support. His comments, corrections and encouragement have helped immensely in giving this work its present shape.

My gratitude spans out to all the lecturers of the Department of English in the Higher Teacher Training College Yaounde. They served as veritable models and indefatigable torch bearers throughout my stay in the institution.

I equally whole-heartedly extend my gratitude to Divine Ndesan Ade who gave me material and academic support. His meticulous proof-reading and editing of this work cannot go unnoticed.

ABSTRACT

This work examines the correlation between EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection and two sociolinguistic variables. This is done within two theoretical paradigms: Correlation (Labov, 1966) and Error Analysis (Corder, 1974). A total of 120 respondents comprised the sample population. Out of this number, forty (40) respondents came from each of the institutions ear-marked for study; GBHS Mballa II, GBHS Etoug-Ebe and the University of Yaounde I. In addition, an even number of male respondents and female respondents was randomly selected from each institution: 20 males and 20 females in each case. It is worthy of note that in each of the secondary schools earmarked, twenty (20) respondents came from *Troisieme* and twenty (20) came from *Premiere.* With regard to *LMF II*, forty (40) respondents were randomly selected after the administration of the test. A production test constituting 10 multiple choice task items and 10 gap-filling task items and an essay writing exercise was administered to elicit data from the respondents with regard to noun inflection. Findings revealed that there is no meaningful correlation between EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection and level of education. This was clearly proven by the mean scores of the three classes; *Troisieme* scored 8.5, *Premiere* scored 10.5 while *LMF II* scored 7.5. Secondly, it is revealed that male EFL learners are generally more sensitive to noun inflections than female EFL learners since 57% of male respondents were able to set the parameters of noun inflection as stipulated by the English language as opposed to just 48% of female respondents. The arbitrary inflection of nouns by these learners of English is a call for concern with regard to the teaching and learning of the English language.

RESUME

Ce travail examine la corrélation entre la sensibilité des apprenants EFL à l'inflexion nominale et deux variables sociolinguistiques: le sexe et le niveau d'éducation. Cela se fait dans deux paradigmes théoriques: *Correlation* (Labov, 1966) et *Error Analysis* (Corder, 1974). Un total de 120 répondants comprenait la population de l'échantillon. Sur ce nombre, quarante (40) répondants provenaient de chacune des institutions ciblé pour l'étude; Lycee de Mballa II, GBHS Etoug-Ebe et l'Université de Yaoundé I. En outre, un nombre pair de garçons et de filles ont été choisis au hasard dans chaque établissement: 20 garçons et 20 filles dans chaque cas. Il est intéressant de noter que dans chacune des écoles secondaires ciblé, vingt (20) répondants provenaient de Troisieme et vingt (20) sont venus de Premiere. En ce qui concerne LMF II, quarante (40) répondants ont été choisis au hasard après l'administration du test. Un test de production constituant 10 plusieurs tâches de choix multiples, 10 tâches à combler l'écart et un exercice d'écriture de l'essai a été administré pour vérifier si ces informateurs étaient conscients des formes correctes des inflexions nominales dans certains cas, ainsi que la non-existence des inflexions dans d'autres cas. Un certain nombre de constatations ont été faites. Tout d'abord, il a été révélé qu'il n'y a pas de corrélation significative entre la sensibilité des apprenants EFL à l'inflexion nominale et le niveau de l'éducation. Ceci a été clairement démontré par les notes moyens des trois classes; Troisieme a eu 8.5, Premiere a eu 10,5 tandis que LMF II a eu 7,5. Deuxièmement, il a été révélé que les apprenants de sexe masculin EFL sont généralement plus sensibles à l'inflexion nominale que les apprenants EFL du sexe feminin demontré par le 57% de réussite du côté masculin et seulement 48% du côté feminin. En outre, il a également été prouvé que les apprenants EFL sont confrontés à d'énormes défis en infléchissant les noms anglais de manière appropriée. Cela a conduit à la conclusion que l'objectif du système éducatif n'est pas entièrement remplie, car il n'y a aucune garantie que les apprenants deviennent plus compétents avec une augmentation du niveau de l'éducation.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

%: Percentage

X: Class

m: Mean

***f*:** Frequency

G: Gender

EA: Error Analysis

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ENS: Ecole Normale Superieure

FSLC: First School Leaving Certificate

GBHS: Government Bilingual High School

GenAM: General American English

GFT: Gap Filling Task

L1: First language

L2: Second language

LMF II: Level two, Department of French in the University of Yaounde I

MCCT: Multiple Choice Comprehension Task

SBE: Standard British English

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Nouns that end in –o, -ch, -sh, -s and –x…….13

Table 2: Clips and nouns of foreign origin…….....13

Table 3: Nouns that end in –ay, -ey, -oy and –uy……..13

Table 4: Nouns that end in a consonant preceding –y…….....14

Table 5: Nouns ending in ‘f’ and ‘fe’ that take ‘-ves’…….....14

Table 6: Nouns which take either ‘-s’ or ‘-ves’……..15

Table 7: Nouns ending in ‘f’ and ‘fe’ that take ‘s’……15

Table 8: Distribution of the population of the study……..21

Table 9: Distribution of the population of the study in relation to level of education….22

Table 10: Respondents’ general performance in relation to level of education……26

Table 11: Respondents’ performance in MCCT in relation to level of education……28

Table 12: Respondents’ performance in GFT in relation to level of education……29

Table 13: Respondents’ general performance in relation to gender…….....30

Table 14: Respondents’ performance in relation to gender in MCCT……31

Table 15: Respondents’ performance in relation to gender in GFT……33

Table 16: Test scores in *Troisieme*……34

Table 17: Test scores of *Troisieme* in relation to gender…….35

Table 18: Test scores and average score of respondents in *Premiere*……36

Table 19: Test scores and average score of *Premiere* in relation to gender……...37

Table 20: Test scores and average score of *LMF II*……....39

Table 21: Test scores and average score of *LMF II* in relation to gender……..40

Table 22: Respondents’ performance in each question in relation to level of education..42

Table 23: Performance in each question in relation to gender…….45

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Formula for mean score…….24

Figure 2: Formula for mean score of female respondents in each class…….24

Figure 3: Formula of mean score of male respondents in each class……..24

Figure 4: Formula for overall mean of each gender…….24

Figure 5: Respondents' general performance in relation to level of education……..27

Figure 6: Respondents' performance in MCCT in relation to level of education……..28

Figure 7: Respondents' performance in GFT in relation to level of education……..30

Figure 8: *Troisieme* performance……34

Figure 9: Performance of *Troisieme* in relation to gender……36

Figure 10: Performance of *Premiere*…….37

Figure 11: Performance of *Premiere* respondents in relation to gender……..38

Figure 12: Performance of *LMF II*…….39

Figure 13: LMF II respondents' performance in relation to gender…….41

Figure 14: Respondents' performance in relation to level of education…….42

Figure 15: Correlation between gender and sensitivity to noun inflection…….,,45

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this research work, entitled “The Correlation between EFL Learners’ Sensitivity to Noun Inflection and Two Sociolinguistic Variables” was carried out by Linda Esoh Timah, a student at the Department of English, Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Yaounde.

_____

Supervisor

Dr Napoleon Epoge

Department of English

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii
ABSTRACT iii
RESUME iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS v
LIST OF TABLES vi
LIST OF FIGURES vii
CERTIFICATION viii
CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION 1
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE 4
2.0 Introduction 4
2.1 Theoretical Framework 4
2.1.1 Language and Gender 5
2.1.2 Language and Level of Education 8
2.2 Error Analysis 8
2.2.1 Relevance of Error Analysis in language teaching 9
2.2.2 Types of Errors 11
2.3 Literature Review 12
2.3.1 The notion of noun inflection 12
1.3.2 Related Empirical Studies 16
1.4 The Contribution of This Work 20
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY 21
3.0 Introduction 21
3.1 Population of Study 21
3.2 Instrument of data collection 22
3.3 Procedure of data collection 23
3.4 Method of data analysis 23
3.5 Difficulties Encountered 24
3.6 Conclusion 25
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONOF FINDINGS 26
4.0 Introduction 26

4.1 General Performance of the respondents in relation to the level of education **26**
4.1.1 Respondents' Performance in Multiple Choice task in relation to level of education ... **27**
4.1.2 Respondents' performance in Gap Filling task in relation to the level of education..... **29**
4.2 Respondents' General Performance in relation to gender **30**
4.2.1 Respondents' performance in relation to gender in the multiple choice task **31**
4.2.2 Respondents' performance in relation to gender in the gap filling task **32**
4.3 Test scores of the respondents **33**
4.3.1 Scores of respondents from troisième..... **34**
4.3.1.1 Scores of respondents in Troisieme in relation to gender..... **35**
4.3.2 Scores of respondents in Premiere..... **36**
4.3.2.1 Scores of respondents from premiere in relation to gender **37**
4.3.3 Test scores of the respondents from LMF II class in noun inflection **39**
4.3.3.1 Test scores of LMF II respondents in relation to gender..... **40**
4.4 Correlation between the respondents' performance and level of education. **41**
4.5 Correlation between noun inflection and gender..... **44**
4.6 Feature Specifications..... **47**
4.6.1 Inflection of non-inflectional nouns to mark plurality..... **47**
4.6.2 Interference of French parameter settings **48**
4.6.3 Overgeneralization of inflectional rules **49**
4.6.4 Substitution of apostrophe "s" ('s) for inflectional "s" in the genitive case..... **49**
4.6.5 Omission of the genitive case marker..... **50**
4.7 Conclusion **50**
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, PEDAGOGICAL RELEVANCE AND CONCLUSION **52**
5.0 Introduction..... **52**
5.1 Summary of Findings..... **52**
4.2 Pedagogical Implications..... **54**
5.2 Recommendations..... **54**
4.3 Suggestions for Further Research..... **55**
5.4 Conclusion **55**
REFERENCES..... **56**

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A language is construed generally as a vehicle for the expression or exchange of thought, concepts, knowledge, and information as well as fixing and transmission of experience and knowledge (Bussman, 1998). Thus, language is the brain behind communication among human beings in different societies (Jackson, 1990:1). This implies that ideas, messages, norms, are shared among people in divergent societies through conventional symbols and sounds (i.e., verbal communication). But communication can be non-verbal, for instance, shaking of hands, gestures, nodding, winking (Jackson, 1990).

An aspect of this broad means of communication is lexis and semantics (lexico-semantics). The term "lexis" is "the vocabulary of a language" (Crystal, 2008:279); while, semantics is construed as "a major branch of linguistics devoted to the study of meaning in language (Crystal, 2008:428). Hence, the selection of words in relation to their functional ends in terms of meaning informs the field of lexico-semantics. This implies that each time a language user sets out to speak or write, he/she is faced with choices to select from among infinite sets of lexical items. Though this may seem easy for native speakers of a language, non-native speakers always face some challenges in making appropriate choices and form of the lexical item they want to use. One feature of English which many English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) learners find difficult is the inflection of nouns in order to express plurality. This is because the notion of noun inflection is considered problematic for a number of reasons. At the most basic level, some nouns never have an 's' added to them (e.g., correspondence, luggage, equipment, advice) making them difficult to be distinguished as a singular or plural single semantic unit. Unless a learner knows that expressions such as "a lot of", "pieces of", which carry the plural marker, precede the noun, he will likely try to encode the meanings by adding an "s" to the nouns. In the same vein, some nouns may have an "s" added to them but are not the plural of the same noun without an "s" (e.g., memoir/memoirs, wood/woods, proof/proofs, transport/transports). These nouns have to be acquired, stored and retrieved from memory as a holistic unit. Another problem is that the inflection of nouns that end in "f" or "fe" vary in the way they are inflected to express plurality. Some change the final "f" or "fe" to "ves" (e.g., knife = knives, loaf =loaves), while others take just an "s" (e.g., chief = chiefs, roof =roofs). The

challenges this linguistic feature poses to non-native learners is even made complex in a multilingual setting like Cameroon.

Cameroon is a multilingual country comprising 247 indigenous languages, two official languages and Cameroon Pidgin English (Breton and Fohtung, 1991). Although Ethnologue (2002) puts the number of indigenous languages for Cameroon at 279, these figures are challenged by scholars such as Wolf (2001) for not seeing an accurate reflection of the current language situation. More so, some dialects of the same language are sometimes considered as different languages Echu (2003). Though this multiplicity of languages in the Cameroonian sociolinguistic set up, only two languages (French and English) have official status. These imported languages, as a result of their colonial history, have bred two sub-systems of education in Cameroon: English Sub-system of education and French Sub-system of education, with regard to the language of instructions that is opted for the sub-system. Hence, those who follow the English Sub-system learn English as a second language, that is, English as second language learners (ESL), and those who following the French Sub-system of education learn English as a foreign language, that is, English as foreign language learners (EFL). Thus, the focus of the present research is on EFL learners of English in Cameroon and their sensitivity to noun inflection.

This work has a well-defined scope. In terms of the linguistic scope, the work targets the notion of noun inflection. As concerns the sociolinguistic scope, the study focuses on two socio-linguistic variables: gender and level of education. In terms of the geographic scope, the study is set in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon, where EFL learners were targeted in GBHS Mballa II, Government Bilingual high School Etoug-ebe and the University of Yaounde I. The target population is made up of *Troisieme*, *Premiere*, and LMF2 students.

The present study is significant in a number of ways. First, it shows the extent to which EFL learners in Cameroon master the notion of noun inflection. This will go a long way to add to previous findings such as Njenga (1994), Parrot (2000), Etame (2005) and Berinyuy (2010) that ascertain that EFL learners face difficulties in using SBE nouns. Second, it is an appropriate pedagogic tool in the teaching of the English language to EFL learners as it seeks to reveal and describe their errors. This conforms to the view of Corder (1974) that learners' errors constitute an integral part of the learning process. In a similar development, the work also provides a rationale for planning and constructing English Language lessons and activities that are centred on transferring competence and building learners' autonomy.

The study is based on the thesis statement that EFL learners inflect nouns in such a way that does not reflect the English input-based feature specifications. With regard to this, the study relies on the following research questions:

1. What are the feature specifications that characterise EFL learners' noun inflection?
2. What is the relation between these feature specifications and the level of education?
3. What is the relation between these feature specifications and gender?
4. What are some noticeable challenges EFL learners face in inflecting nouns?

The work is divided into four chapters. Chapter One, entitled "General Introduction" gives the background, aim, scope, significance of the study, as well as the thesis statement, research questions and structure of the work. Chapter Two, dwells on the theoretical framework and review of related literature. Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study. It describes the sample population, instrument of data collection, procedure of data collection and method of data analysis. Chapter Four presents the results, analyses, interprets and discusses the results. And Chapter five presents the summary of finding, pedagogical relevance, makes recommendations and concludes the work.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical paradigm adopted for the study and reviews relevant literature.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical paradigm adopted for this study is the correlational framework of Labov (1966). Labov theorized that the stratification of society is necessarily reflected in language. That is, the way people use language in society spells out their social status. Therefore, this theory is based on Labov's observation that as one moves up the social ladder, the rate of occurrence of prestige forms of speech also increases. The theory has been tested and confirmed in many native communities.

The striking thing in the theory is that language is necessarily a reflection of social class. The question that arises here is to wonder how universal is the notion of social class, upon which the theory is constructed. This is evidenced by the fact that Labov tends to assume the existence of social structure whose credibility or plausibility is limited to the western industrialized communities. This argument portrays that every society has a specific social reality and the construction of any model of social structure should be based on the realities of that society. In Africa, for instance, the notion of social class is foreign. Hence, the measuring rod to be used in stratifying a society in Africa, in the use of language, is not based on social class distinction but on the level of education. In view of the above-stated, the Labovian Theory is adopted for this study, not in respect to social class but to the level of education and gender. Therefore, it can be broadly construed that the theory is based on the observation that as one moves up the academic ladder, the rate of occurrence of prestige forms of speech also increases. The striking thing here is that language is necessarily a reflection of level of education. In addition, gender based linguistic investigations have underscored a unanimous view that male and female speakers are linguistically different in the use of language. In view of the fore-going discussion, it is evident that the correlation framework is a sociolinguistic perspective from which the relationship between language and society is studied (Kouam, 2015). It looks at the variation of language use in society and helps in investigating its relationship to social variables such as level of education, sex, social class, age, occupation and, ethnic group (Kouam, 2015). Many studies have demonstrated

that there is a predictable correlation between these social factors and linguistic variables (Labov, 1966; Ngefac, 2008). Consequently, the correlation framework is relevant to this study because the study seeks to investigate the relationship between EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection and its relationship with two linguistic variables: level of education and sex.

2.1.1 Language and Gender

According to Coates (1988), the research on language and gender is divided into studies that focus on dominance and those which concentrate on difference in language features of men and women. The person who first pioneered in this field was Lakoff (1973) whose work confirmed that women's speech had some features that were different from men's speech. Women have the tendency to use forms which help them express uncertainty related to what they are talking about. In Lakoff's view, some language aspects consisting of lexical distinctions, tag questions, and strength of directive speech acts, strong versus weak expletives, question intonation with statement syntax are more associated with women than with men. Women using these features are considered to be not only weak but also inferior and powerless. Lakoff (1975), cited in Wardhaugh, 2010) suggested that the discussion of "Women's language" is related to "men's language". Male speech is the unmarked standard form and it sets the benchmark whereas female speech was considered to be a marked form. Therefore, female's language is thought to be less powerful.

The other commonly known approach is the "Dominance Approach", which theorizes that male speech is dominant over the subordinate female speech. Since men are likely to use what power they have to dominate women, so language is one of the powerful tools which allows men to express their status of supremacy. In other words, men are considered to play a great role in establishing the social norms, which causes inequality in the behaviour and treatment between men and women.

By contrast, not focusing on the perception of power and dominance of male language, the "Difference Approach" has explained that male and female speakers born in different culture learn how to communicate and set the rules of socializing in different ways, which have to accompany them during their lifetime. Hence, Maltz and Borker (1982) has shown the different language features of men and women and has suggested that these norms are achieved in same-sex groups. It is healthy to point out here that research focused on different areas of differentiation between the conversational style of men and that of

women holds that the conversational style of men is competitive whereas that of women seems to be cooperative. Moreover, Wardhaugh (2010) claims that women have a tendency to use more compliments and polite forms than men. Also, he states that "women prefer to avoid 'masculine', 'authoritative' and 'powerful' ways of speaking" (Wardhaugh2010:343). In the same line of thought, Tennen (1990) figures out that men feel more comfortable than women when they are talking in public and women feel more comfortable than men when they are in private settings.

Although the Dominance Approach and the Difference Approach are accepted widely, researchers such as Cameron (2007) argued that although the Difference Approach makes an effort to focus on contextual differences rather than power in order to eliminate the notion of the fact that male speech is superior to female speech, a relative two-way dominance also exists in these differences. Each gender has a fixed and unique style in communication (Talbot, 1998 as cited in Shiel, 2001).

Another approach used in the study of gender language is the Social Constructionist Approach. It is said that culture is the combination of value of material and spirit created by humans during a long period of history. Thus, language is one part of culture and it is also maintained by culture. In other words, speech features are associated with social constructs. In order to make this principle understood, it is necessary to consider the concept of Communities of Practice introduced by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998:490 in Wardhaugh, 2010: 348-349):

> A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, value, power relations – in short, practice in the course of their joint activity around that endeavour. A community of practice is different as a social constructs from the traditional notion of community, primary because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.

With regard to this concept, groups of people sharing the tasks or duties build up communities. When these communities are set up and developed, language features and norms are also formed and maintained. Thus, the concept of Communities of Practice is more suitable with social constructionist approach compared to other concepts. Cameron (1992) confirms that it stimulates a different focus, a new focus on the difference gender makes not on gender differences. From the above-stated, the Community of Practice

benefits those who are attempting to find out the relationship between language, community and gender. Besides, conversational styles and speech patterns are also explored by Modern Approach. It holds that in conversation, women are more likely to use more standard, polite forms and compliments than men, so they try to build up the solidarity with their interlocutors (Wardhaugh, 2010:343). He goes further to state that men use questions as a strategy to request information, while women use them to maintain the conversation or build up the conversational participation.

The reasons why women's linguistic behaviour is different from men's are discussed in detail by Holmes (1992). The first explanation pertains to social status. More standard speech forms are used by women as they are more status conscious than men (Holmes 1992:171). High social status is linked to standard speech forms, thus using more standard linguistic features is a means which helps women acquire such status in society. The second explanation concerning this issue is "woman's role as guardian of society's values" (Holmes 1992:172), which means that society expects better and more standard behaviour from women. That explains why a young boy with misbehaviour is easily tolerated than a girl. In addition, little girls are allowed less freedom than little boys. In each community, women are considered to have a role of modeling correct behaviour so that they have the better influence on their children in terms of daily communication. Therefore, women are expected to use more standard forms than men. The third explanation is that women should not get exposure to vernaculars in order to not only save their "face" but also save their husbands' "face". Hence, gender based linguistic investigations have underscored a unanimous view that male and female speakers are linguistically different in the use of language. Fasold (1990) ascertains this point by pointing out that female speakers tend to use forms that are generally considered "correct" than male speakers do.

Sex difference is a fundamental fact of human life and it is, therefore, not surprising to find it reflected in language. There are a few languages which have certain phonological and morphological forms that are only appropriate for use by women and others that only men can use. In some cases, this kind of difference depends not only on the sex of the speaker but of both the speaker and the addressee (Fasold, 1990). It is in this light that sociolinguistic surveys have come up with a phenomenon that Fasold (1990) has termed the "gender pattern". According to Fasold (ibid), the gender pattern involves the differential use of certain status-marking linguistic forms. Lakoff (1975) pointed out that, for the most part, women are

not expected to use strong feelings and emotions with impunity that they are denied to the extent that women are prevented from expressing themselves with feelings and their individuality along such line is never publicly revealed. From the above revelations, therefore, there is a meaningful correlation between language and gender.

2.1.2 Language and Level of Education

Earlier debates concerned with language and education in some metropolitan countries centred on the relationship between communicative competence and the educational achievement of children. Hence, many studies have established that the higher the speakers' level of education, the higher the possibility that his/her speech will be closer to the standard norm.

The correlation between language and level of education has been of principal interest to some researchers. A speaker's level of education is a social dimension which incontestably affects his or her speech (Kouam, 2015). Many studies have attested that the higher one's level of education is, the higher the possibility for his/her speech to approximate the standard norm (Kouam, ibid). However, level of education should not always appear as a guarantee for speech quality. This view is shared by Jibril (1992), who argues that it is not a speaker's level of education which determines his/her linguistic ability, but rather the amount of speech training which influences performance in English pronunciation. In many studies, it has been demonstrated that while speakers with a low level of education are very likely to produce basilectal features, the ones with a higher level are more familiar with mainstream features and tend to produce numerous hypercorrect forms because they want to be careful with pronunciation (Jibril, 1992).

The correlation framework is relevant to this study because this study seeks to investigate the relationship between language use and selected social variables: gender and level of education. Another theoretical framework that is taken into consideration in the analysis of the data of this study is Error Analysis.

2.2 Error Analysis

The field of Error Analysis in Second Language Acquisition was established in the 1970s by Corder (1967) and colleagues. A key finding of Error Analysis has been that many learner errors were produced by learners misunderstanding the rules of the new language. Hence, it is a type of linguistic study that focuses on the errors learners make. Errors used to be "flaws"

that needed to be eradicated. However, Corder (1967) presented a completely different point of view. He contended that those errors are "important in and of themselves". In his opinion, systematically analyzing errors made by language learners makes it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching. Consequently, error analysis emphasizes "the significance of errors in learners' interlanguages system" (Brown 1994:204). The term interlanguages introduced by Selinker (1972), refers to the systematic knowledge of a second language which is independent on both the learner's first language and the target language. Nemser (1974:55) referred to it as the Approximate System, and Corder (1967) as the Idiosyncratic Dialect or Transitional Competence.

According to Corder (1967), Error Analysis has two objects: one is theoretical and the other is applied. The theoretical object is to understand what and how a learner learns when he studies an L2. The applied object is to enable the learner to learn more efficiently by using the knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes. At the same time, the investigation of errors can serve two purposes, diagnostic (to in-point the problem) and prognostic (to make plans to solve a problem). Corder (1967) said that it is diagnostic because it can tell us the learner's grasp of a language at any given point during the learning process. It is also prognostic because it can tell the teacher to modify learning materials to meet the learners' problems.

It is healthy to point out here that Error Analysis research has limitations of providing only a partial picture of learner language because it does not take into account avoidance strategy in Second Language Acquisition, since Error Analysis only investigates what learners do. Learners who avoided the sentence structures which they found difficult due to the differences between their first language and target language may be viewed to have no difficulty. This was pointed out by Brown (1994) and Ellis (1996).

2.2.1 Relevance of Error Analysis in language teaching

The relevance of Error Analysis in language teaching needs not to be emphasized. Learning a foreign language is a step-by-step process, during which errors or mistakes are to be expected during this process of learning. Corder (1967) states that errors are visible proof that learning is taking place. He has emphasized that errors, if studied systematically, can provide significant insights into how a language is actually learned by a foreigner. He also agrees that studying students' errors of usage has immediate practical application for language teachers. In his view, errors provide feedback; they tell the teachers something about the effectiveness

of his teaching. According to Ancker (2000), making mistakes or errors is a natural process of learning and must be considered as part of cognition. Richards (1971) argues that many of the learners' errors happen due to the strategies that they use in language acquisition, especially their L2. The problem includes the reciprocal interference of the target language items; that is, negative effect of their prior knowledge of their L1 on their absorption of L2. In this situation, Error Analysis would allow teachers to figure out on what areas to be focused and what kind of attention is needed in an L2 classroom.

Weireesh (1991) also considers learners' errors to be of particular importance because the making of errors is a device the learners' use in order to learn. According to him, Error Analysis is a valuable aid to identify and explain difficulties faced by learners. He goes on to say that Error Analysis serves as a reliable feedback to design a remedial teaching method. Consequently, Sercombe (2000) explains that Error Analysis serves three purposes. Firstly, to find out the level of language proficiency the learner has reached. Secondly, to obtain information about common difficulties in language learning, and thirdly, to find out how people learn a language. In the same vein, Candling (2001) considers Error Analysis as "the monitoring and analysis of learner's language". He refers to an error as a deviation. Candling (2001:69) adds that the L2 learner's errors are potentially important for the understanding of the processes of Second Language Acquisition.

In view of the fore-going discussion, Mitchell and Myles (2004) claims that errors if studied could reveal a developing system of the students L2 and this system is dynamic and open to changes and resetting of parameters. This view is supported by Stark (2001:19) when he opines that teachers need to view students' errors positively and should not regard them as the learners' failure to grasp the rules and structures but view the errors as process of learning. He subscribes to the view that errors are normal and inevitable features of learning. He added that errors are essential condition of learning. Thus, Vahdatinejad (2008) maintains that error analyses can be used to determine what a learner still needs to be taught. It provides the necessary information about what is lacking in his or her competence.

In view of the foregoing discussion, Error Analysis involves collecting samples of learners' language, identifying the errors in the samples, classifying them according to their nature and causes and evaluating their seriousness (Corder, 1967). From the definition of Error Analysis, we understand that one of its main goals is to check learners' language for

errors. Previous research has proven that most often, errors in the learner's productions are cases of language transfer from the L1 to the L2 (Selinker, 1972). However, Corder (1967) revealed that not all errors made by second language learners can be justified by the interference of their first language into the language they are learning. He views second language learners' errors as a natural, inevitable, integral and important part of the language learning process. Since Error Analysis involves identifying learners' errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their seriousness, it is important to spell out the different types of errors.

2.2.2 Types of Errors

There are basically two main types of errors: intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors. Intra-lingual errors refer to errors that occur within the L2, while inter-lingual errors refer to errors that occur as a result of negative transfer from L1 to L2. Ogrady et al (1981:310) observe that intra-lingual errors are developmental since they occur within the L2 system. Hence, intra-lingual errors have been described as a reflection of learners' competence at a specific level of acquisition (Richards 1974:175). In effect, these errors are found within the structure of the target language through pedagogical and methodological lapses in the process of knowledge transmission. Consequently, Ogrady (ibid) considers performance errors as a sub-class of intra-lingual errors. Performance errors are not the effects of incompetence in the target language, but the effect of lapses in the spontaneous flow of speech production as a result of excitement, stress, fear, fatigue, etc. Such an error is temporary and not usually the case in every instance of speech production.

Ogrady (ibid) further observed that errors could either be omissive, additive, or substitutive. Omissive errors refer to those errors that involve the exclusion of grammatical elements which may make a word or sentence ungrammatical. For their part, additive errors refer to those errors which involve the insertion of ungrammatical segments in the case of a word, or ungrammatical word for a sentence that may render an entire construction ungrammatical. Substitutive errors refer to the replacement of grammatical structures for ungrammatical ones.

In addition to those discussed above, the following two errors could equally be noted: interference and developmental errors. Interference errors are those produced as a result of the use of elements of one language while writing or speaking another. Developmental errors

occur when learners attempt to build up hypothesis about the target language on the basis of limited experiences (see Ogrady et al, 1981).

The relevant of error analysis to this study is centred on identifying learners' errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their seriousness with regard to the processing of noun inflection in the English of EFL learners of English in some selected schools in Yaounde.

2.3 Literature Review

Research requires that the review of literature should be done in order to situate the topic under study within the available global knowledge. It also aims at showing how different or similar the work is to what other researchers have said. In view of the aforementioned, the review of literature in this study is divided into the following phases: the notion of noun inflection (2.3.1) and related empirical studies (2.3.2).

2.3.1 The notion of noun inflection

Yule (1985:88) considers nouns as "words used to refer to people, objects, creatures, places, phenomena, and abstract ideas as if they were things''. Crystal (2004), for his part, thinks that instead of spending much time to give the definition of a noun which will unfortunately exclude many nouns, focus should rather be on what nouns can do. According to Crystal (ibid), nouns convey specificity of reference which enables people to focus on the subject matter of a text. In other words, a noun possesses a semantic property which has an important contribution to the meaning of a sentence or text. In English, as in many Western and African languages, nouns possess some structural, grammatical, syntactic and even semantic features that distinguish them from other word classes. Grammatically, nouns can be inflected to denote number, gender and case (Swan and Walter, 2001).

Noun inflection could be described as a process whereby a minimal linguistic unit of grammatical function such as –s (plural marker) or -'s (genitive case) is added to a noun to express a grammatical function. Common inflectional morphemes include: *-s, -es, -en* which mark plurality. According to Swan and Walter (2001), noun inflection to mark plurality includes the addition of the suffix "s" to words such as *house, boy, boat, cat* and *river* to render the plural forms *houses, boys, boats, cats* and *rivers*, respectively. Nouns that end in –o, -ch, -sh, -s and -x are inflected for plurality by the addition of the suffix "es" as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Nouns that end in –o, -ch, -sh, -s and -x.

Noun	**Plural**
1. Tomato	- tomatoes
2. church	- churches
3. wish	- wishes
4. bus	- buses
5. fox	- foxes

However, clips and nouns of foreign origin that end in –o take the suffix "s" in the plural form.

Table 2. Clips and nouns of foreign origin

Noun	**Plural**
1. amphi	- amphis
2. photo	- photos
3. advert	- adverts
4. piano	- pianos
5. studio	- studios

Nouns that end in –ay, -ey, -oy, and –uy also take an "s" in forming their plurals, as illustrated below.

Table 3. Nouns that end in –ay, -ey, -oy, and –uy

Noun	**Plural**
1. day	Days
2. monkey	Monkeys
3. toy	Toys
4. guy	guys

For their part, those that end in a consonant preceding *y* (*–by*, *-dy*, *-ry*, *-gy*, *ty*, etc) generally take "*ies*" to form their plurals, as seen in the table below.

Table 4. Nouns that end in a consonant preceding 'y'

Noun	**Plural**
1. baby	- babies
2. lady	- ladies
3. lorry	- lorries
4. strategy	- strategies
5. city	- cities

Furthermore, Swan and Walter (ibid) highlights a group of twelve nouns ending in 'fe' and 'f' that take '-ves' in forming their plurals. These nouns are presented in the table below.

Table 5. Nouns ending in ‘f’ and ‘fe’ that take ‘-ves’

Noun	**Plural**
1. wife	- wives
2. life	- lives
3. knife	- knives
4. wolf	- wolves
5. self	- selves
6. calf	- calves
7. shelf	- shelves
8. leaf	- leaves
9. thief	- thieves
10. sheaf	- sheaves
11. half	- halves
12. loaf	- loaves

They also stress that there are certain nouns which take either ‘-s’ or ‘-ves’ in the plural. This means that either of the plurals of the following nouns is correct.

Table 6. Nouns that take either ‘-s’ o ‘-ves’

Noun	**Plural 1**	**Plural 2**
1. scarf	- scarfs	- scarves
2. wharf	- wharfs	- wharves
3. hoof	- hoofs	- hooves

In addition, other words ending in ‘f’ and ‘fe’ add ‘s’ in the plural in the ordinary way as seen below.

Table 7. Nouns ending in ‘f’ and ‘fe’ that take ‘-s’

Noun	**Plural**
1. cliff	- cliffs
2. fife	- fifes
3. handkerchief	- handkerchiefs
4. chief	- chiefs

Besides the above-stated, Swan and Walter (ibid) also note that some nouns are not inflected to express pluralty: *deer,* sheep, *species, equipment, infrastructure, luggage, correspondence, advice, aircraft* etc.

The notion of noun inflection, as described above, is certainly daunting to master and it is but normal that it poses considerable problems to EFL learners. Parrot (2000), for instance, postulates that in relation to nouns, learners sometimes face difficulties with the popularization of nouns: using plural nouns as though they were singular; choosing the wrong plural nouns as though they were uncountable.

1.3.2 Related Empirical Studies

There is a sizeable body of empirical study on the correlation between some sociolinguistic variables and performance of learners of English as a second or foreign language (Ngefac 1997, 2008; Chialoh 2010; Ngaajie 2010, Kouam 2015) as well as the challenges that EFL learners of English in Cameroon face (Tadjom 1993; Etame 2005; Beboy 2007, Berinyuy 2010, Sokeng 2014).

With regard to correlations studies between language performance and some sociolinguistic variables, Ngefac (1997) investigates the influence of level of education over speech production. He assigned Form One and Upper Sixth students to the pronunciation of such linguistic items such as *colonel*, *mayor* and *country*. These students were supposed to

articulate the words according to the norms of Standard British English. Findings that emanate from this study reveal a remarkable correlation between level of education and the degree of approximation of Standard British English features by the students. For instance, only 6.66% of Form One students rendered the word *colonel* in Standard British English, as compared to 26.66% in Upper Sixth. In the same vein, Ngefac (2008) investigate the correlation between speech forms and speakers' level of education. His findings revealed a correlation between two major types of deviations from mainstream Cameroon English (CamE) and level of education. The first type includes tribally determined forms from speakers with low educational attainment, while the second type involves stigmatized form that show an unsuccessful attempt to approximate mother tongue English features by speakers with high educational attainment. Moreover, the author remarks that the general tendency of backward stress led highly educated informant stress the lexical items on the initial syllables, yielding such hypercorrect forms as ˈ*hotel* and ˈ*commercialize*. In addition, Chialoh (2010) examines the correlation between phonological features and level of education in English. In the investigation, 90 Kom speakers of English were taken as sample population. The informants comprise 30 FSLC holders, 30 Ordinary Level and Advanced Level holders and 30 university students. Her findings reveal that there is some correlation between the level of education and some phonological features as far as Kom speakers of English are concerned. In other words, their phonological competence increases as they advance academically. In the same light, Ngaajie (2010), probes into the correlation between some phonological features and level of education of native-speakers of *Akose* learners of English in Cameroon. As concerns the phonological features, the rendition of sounds like /f/ and /v/, and the fricatives /s/ and /z/ were tested. A total of 60 respondents: 20 from the elementary group, 20 from the intermediate group and 20 from the advanced group took part in the test. Findings reveal that, though education seems to affect the attainment of selected sound segments, there is no significant correlation between level of education and patterns of use of English fricatives and affricates as far as *Akose* learners are concerned.

In addition to the above-stated, Kouam (2015) went further to investigate the correlation between level of education and professional status and Standard British English stress pattern of words from Romance languages. As regards level of education, Form Five, Level One and Level Four studentd were targeted. After analyzing the scores registered by the various factions of informants, Kouam (ibid) reveals that there is no significant

correlation between the sociolinguistic factors: level of education and professional status, and degree of approximation of Standard British English stress patterns of words.

With regard to EFL learners of English in Cameroon performance in the use of different grammatical points, many studies have been carried out in this perspective. For instance, comparing the English language performance of EFL learners in *Lycée de Mballa II* (Government High School Mballa II) to those in *Lycée Bilingue d'Application Yaounde*, (Government Bilingual Practicising High School Yaounde) Njenga (1994), reveals that students, in some cases, ignore the use of the ***-s*** morpheme to indicate plurality in nouns and also overgeneralize the use of the ***-s*** morpheme to indicate plurality with irregular nouns. Besides, these students also falsely use the ***–s*** morpheme to mark plurality in adjectives. In the same vein, Etame (2005) examines the way First Year francophone science student teachers of ENS Yaounde use English grammar, in general, and parts of speech in particular. His findings reveal that the students overgeneralize the use of the ***-s*** to indicate plural form of nouns and omit the ***–s*** morpheme in plural forms.

In addition to the foregoing discussion, Beboy (2007) focuses on the problem of translation from French to English and vice versa. His findings reveal that the lack of performance in translation, non-mastery of semantic and syntactic structures in both languages and the influence of national language constitute the causes and origins of deviations and errors. In the same light, Fornkwa (2012) examining aspects of francophone Cameroon English inflectional morphology, reveals that learners in some situations tend to overgeneralize the use of the s-morpheme to mark plurality with nouns. This involved mainly the addition of "s" to nouns that are generally not pluralized in English except in particular contexts (e.g., *we bought* ***foods*** *and drinks).* However, Sokeng (2014) who focues on checking the grammatical errors of Bilingual One Fancophone learners of English in the University of Yaounde 1, observes that only few students master the rules applied in the formation of the plural case in English. One of the recurrent errors the students make, as outlined by Sokeng (ibid), is the omission of the "s" morpheme as in "The DJ played many ***song*** that I like during the ceremony" as well as the substitution of the "es" morpheme for "s" morpheme in the expression of plurality in nouns that end in –sh as in "My sister asked me to remove all the ***dishs*** on the table". Drawing from Kouatie (2008), Sokeng (ibid) attributes the students' poor performance on the fact that students do not attend English classes and are not, for the majority of them, interested in learning English in secondary school. She proceeds to

argue that they have a negative attitude towards learning the language and this negative attitude affects their performance.

In addition to the above discussion, Berinyuy (2010), working in the domain of SLA, investigates the problems ESL learners in Cameroon encounter in the acquisition of nouns. Paying attention to characteristic features common to some students of Form One, Form Three and Form Five, he traced the developmental trend of the acquisition and use of nouns by secondary school students in Cameroon. Berinyuy (ibid) came up with a number of interesting findings. First, some of the features common to students' use of nouns are influenced by the teachers. Second, ESL learners in Cameroon are not familiar with such features as singular-only nouns and plural-only nouns, irregular nouns, etc. They also get confused when a noun has a similar adjective or verb form. Third, that the ESL leaners in Cameroon mix-up Standard British English (SBE) and General American (GenAM) English nouns in their usage. Despite this, Tadjom (1993) sees the first language as an impediment to second language acquisition. He observes that similarities between French and English often lead French-speaking users of English to overgeneralization. This results in the use of false cognates which break down communication. Furthermore, Njocha (1993) studies deceptive cognates in both English and French. His findings show that users are misled by apparent similarities between both languages. This phenomenon is evident in both French-speaking and English-speaking Cameroonians. The above findings tie with Selinker (1972) who argues that most of the errors in the learner's productions are cases of language transfer from L1 to L2. The researcher concludes that false cognates constitute a hindrance to real bilingualism in Cameroon.

On the other side of the spectrum, Mbuakoto (2009:22) identifies some errors that are typical to ESL context in Cameroon. Some of these errors include complexities in the target language such as differentiating confusables such as "counsel" and "council" which are often used interchangeably by learners. He argues that the inequitable allocation of teachers to different schools accounts greatly for the production of multiple errors in usage. This inequitable allocation of teachers leads to a situation whereby teachers of content subjects such as history and geography are asked to teach English due to the absence of English teachers. Mbuakoto (ibid) also identifies material-induced errors. In the latter, she quotes Norrish (1983) who argues that some teaching materials use the present progressive aspect to describe a simple present aspect and to describe a simple present tense. In effect, he comes to

the conclusion that inadequate teaching materials could be a fundamental source of learners' inability to attain a significant level of English language in our secondary schools.

1.4 The Contribution of This Work

This chapter has revealed clearly that many studies have been carried out on nouns, and many other aspects of grammar and vocabulary points. Some of them have been carried out on the correlation between language and some sociolinguistic variables such as level of education and profession. This is the point of convergence between the previous studies and the present. However, the present study diverges from the previous ones in various ways. First, the current investigation is focused on the correlation between EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection and two sociolinguistic variables in a metropolitan town, Yaounde. Previous works have simply brought into limelight the challenges non-native learners of English in Cameroon face in the production of Standard British English with regard to noun inflection. They have not sought to find out if the learners' levels of education and sex have any bearing on their sensitivity to this notion, a task this work embarks on. Second, this work is expected to provide fresher information concerning the difficulty non-native learners of English, especially EFL learners face in inflecting nouns. It, therefore, becomes interesting to find out if what obtains in previous studies holds in this context.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the population of study (3.1), instrument of data collection (3.2), procedure of data collection (3.3), and method of data analysis (3.4).

3.1 Population of Study

The population of study includes learners of English in the French Sub-system of Education in the metropolitan town Yaounde, the headquarters of the Centre Region of the Republic of Cameroon. Informants were drawn from three different academic institutions: GBHS Mballa II, GBHS Etoug-Ebe and the University of Yaounde I. The target population comprises *Troisième* and *Premiere* students of the secondary schools, and Level Two students of the Department of French (LMF) of the University of Yaounde I. These students have been exposed to and taught the English language since Primary school and, therefore, expected to have had a considerable knowledge of the language. The distribution of the sample population, which consisted of 120 respondents from the three different institutions ear-marked, is presented in table below.

Table 8: Distribution of the Population of Study

Institution	**Population of study**		**Total**
	Male respondents	**Female respondents**	
GBHS Mballa II	20	20	40
GBHS Etoug-Ebe	20	20	40
University of Yaounde I	20	20	40
TOTAL	**60**	**60**	**120**

As the table above shows, a total of 120 respondents comprised the sample population. Out of this number, forty (40) respondents came from each from of the institutions ear-marked for study; *Lycee de Mballa II*, GBHS Etoug-Ebe and the University of

Yaounde I. In addition, an even number of male and female was randomly selected from each institution: 20 female and 20 male in each case, in order to ease correlational analysis. It is healthy to also spell out the population of study in relation to the level of education. The table below presents the distribution of the population of study in relation to the level of education.

Table 9: Distribution of the Population of Study in Relation to Level of Education

Institution	**Level of Education**			**Total**
	Troisiéme	*Premiére*	*LMF II*	
GBHS Mballa II	20	20	00	40
GBHS Etoug-ebe	20	20	00	40
University of Yaounde I	00	00	40	40
TOTAL	**40**	**40**	**40**	**120**

As can be seen in the table above, 40 informants came from each of the targeted institutions. This makes a total of 120 respondents. It is worthy of note that in each of the secondary schools : *Lycée de Mballa II* and GBHS Etoug-Ebe, twenty (20) respondents came from *Troisieme* and twenty (20) came from *Premiere* classes. With regard to *LMF II*, forty (40) respondents were randomly selected after the administration of the test.

3.2 Instrument of data collection

The instrument used that was used in the collection of data was a production test. The test consisted of three tasks: the Multiple Choice Comprehension Task (MCCT), Gap Filling Task (GFT), and essay writing.

The multiple choice comprehension task comprised ten (10) multiple choice questions, whereby the respondents were asked to choose an appropriate form of the noun provided in the brackets, in each case, to complete the gap so that the sentence expresses a complete sense. A sample token of questions in this category is:

"The old man gave his___ to his son (property, properties, propertis)".

The gap filling task comprised ten (10) gap-filling questions whereby the respondents were asked to fill in the gap with the appropriate form of the noun provided in the brackets in each case. A sample token of questions in this category is "My___wife is beautiful. (son)".

Essay writing component was aimed at collecting data from free writing. Respondents were asked to write an essay of not more than 150 words on the topic "A day I will never forget". Hence, the production test was designed to elicit data with regard to EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection.

3.3 Procedure of data collection

The collection of data for this study followed a strict procedure. Primarily, a *Troisième* and a *Première* class were randomly selected in each of the schools. To do this, the names of the various *Troisièmes* in each of the schools were written on pieces of papers, folded and grouped. The same was done for the *Première* classes in the selected schools and the various French-speaking departments in the Faculty of Arts in the University of Yaounde I. Next, the researcher picked a paper indiscriminately from each group.

Subsequently, the researcher sought the permission of the school authorities and English Language teachers who teach the classes selected to gain access into their classes. The production test was administered by the researcher in collaboration with the English language teachers teaching the classes concerned. This was done to obtain authentic data for the study. As concerns the duration of the exercise, each class was given fifty (50) minutes to answer the questions in the production test. Subsequently, the scripts were examined to find out if the students answered questions in all the tasks. Scripts wherein the respondents did not answer questions in all the tasks were discarded.

3.4 Method of data analysis

The scripts of the production test that was administered to the respondents were collected and marked. Responses which reflected Standard British English parameter settings scored a point and those that did not received no point. After this step, instances which did not meet Standard British English specifications were identified and categorized in relation to the morphological processes that have taken place with regard to noun inflection. Thereafter, the scripts were classed in order of level of education, on the one hand, and gender, on the other. Afterwards, the required number in each category was selected through random sampling. This was done in order to render the data free of bias.

The data collected was quantified, presented on tables, a histogram and a pie chart and analysed. Feature specifications were identified and discussed. The average or mean score for each class (X) was obtained as follows:

$$\frac{Sum\ total\ of\ scores\ in\ class\ X}{Total\ number\ of\ respondents\ in\ class\ X}$$

Fig 1: Formula for mean score

The results of each class were then analyzed in relation to gender. In each class, the mean score for each gender was sought using the formulae below.

$$\frac{Sum\ total\ of\ scores\ of\ female\ respondents\ in\ class\ X}{Total\ number\ of\ female\ respondents\ in\ class\ X}$$

Fig 2: Formula for the mean score (m) of female respondents in each class

$$\frac{Sum\ total\ of\ scores\ of\ male\ respondents\ in\ class\ X}{Total\ number\ of\ male\ respondents\ in\ class\ X}$$

Fig 3: Formula for mean score (m) of male respondents in each class

In addition, the overall mean of each gender (G) was calculated thus:

$$\frac{Sum\ total\ of\ scores\ of\ G\ in\ all\ the\ schools}{Total\ number\ of\ G\ respondents\ in\ all\ schools}$$

Fig 4: Formula for overall mean of each gender (G)

Finally, the results were analyzed in terms of level of education by comparing the mean score of the various classes. Performances were also analyzed in relation to the gender of the respondents.

3.5 Difficulties Encountered

A number of difficulties were faced in the process of collecting data for this study. The researcher faced considerable problems having access into some of the institutions due to the impending security concerns in the country. In effect, the researcher was subject to security

checks and she had to clearly state the aim of her visit. In addition, access into the selected classrooms was not evident as the researcher had to obtain permission from the administration and even from the teachers whose periods had to be used in the collection of data.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described the methodology adopted for this study. It focuses on the description of the population of study, the instrument of data collection, procedure of data collection and method of data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONOF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected. There were 120 respondents, each of whom answered twenty (20) questions: 10 multiple choice and 10 gap filling tokens. Hence, these respondents produced 2400 instances. The performance of the students is summarized in tables. The tables record the number of instances in which the respondents respected the input parameter settings as well as the number of instances whereby they violated the input parameter settings respondents and their percentage score. The general performance was examined first and the performance in each of the tasks was examined subsequently.

4.1 General Performance of the respondents in relation to the level of education

The general performance of the respondents in noun inflections is recorded in the table below. The table records the number of instances in which respondents provided the input-oriented parameter settings as well as the percentage scored, on the one hand, and on the other, the number of instances in which they violated the input-oriented parameter settings as well as the percentage scored.

Table 10: Respondents' general performance in relation to the level of education

Class	**Respondents' performance**				**Total**
	Setting Input Parameters		**Other Parameter settings**		
	No. of instances	**%**	**No of instances**	**%**	
Troisième	380	47%	420	53%	800
Première	600	75%	200	25%	800
LMF2	280	35%	520	65%	800
TOTAL	1260		1140		**2400**

From the table above, it is clearly seen that the students produce a total of 1260 setting input parameters and a total of 1140 other parameter settings. More specifically, 47% of *troisième* students' responses was made up of setting input parameters and 53% of their responses was made up of deviant parameter settings. On the other hand, 75% of the premiere students' responses comprised input parameters and 25% comprised deviant or other parameter settings. As concerns the *LMF II* informants, 35% of their responses was made up of setting

input parameters while 65% was made up of other parameter settings. The respondents' general performance in relation to level of education is further summarized in the bar chart below.

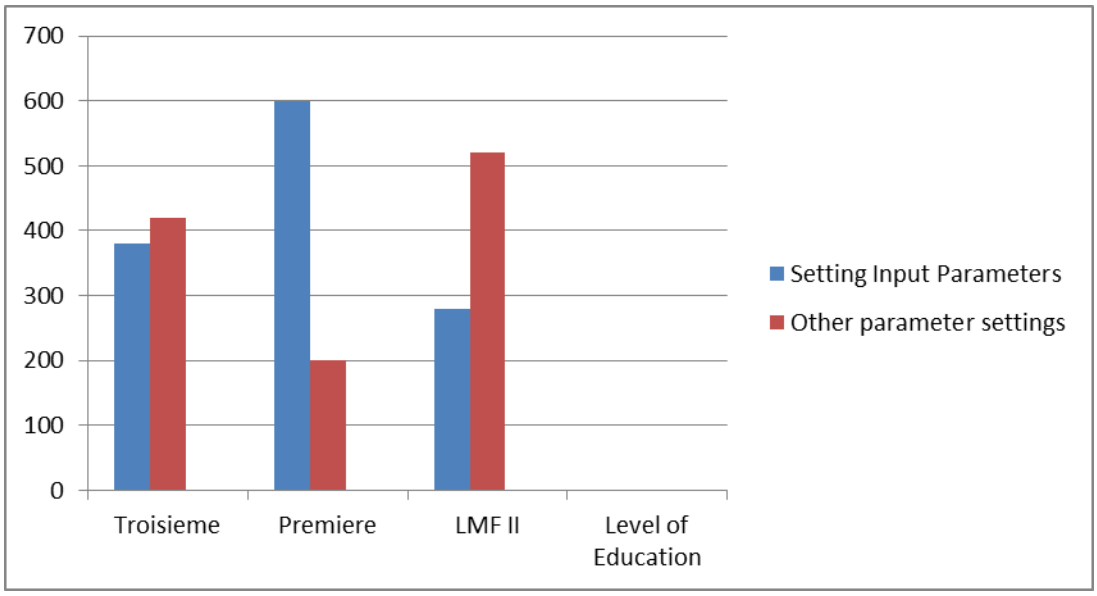

Fig. 5: Respondents' general performance in relation to level of education

As illustrated in the figure above, *Troisieme* respondents record 380 setting input parameters and 420 other parameter settings. For their part, *Premiere* respondents record 600 setting input parameters and 200 other parameter settings. In addition, *LMF II* respondents register 280 setting input parameters and 520 other parameter settings.

4.1.1 Respondents' Performance in Multiple Choice task in relation to level of education

The general performance of the respondents in the Multiple Choice Task is summarized in the table below. The table records the number of instances in which respondents provided the input-oriented parameter settings as well as the percentage scored, on the one hand, and on the other, the number of instances in which they violated the input-oriented parameter settings as well as the percentage scored.

Table 11: Respondents' Performance in Multiple Choice Comprehension Task in relation to level of education

Class	**Respondents' Multiple choice task**				**Total**
	Setting Input Parameters		**Other Parameter settings**		
	No. of instances	**%**	**No of instances**	**%**	
Troisième	214	53%	186	47%	400

Première	224	56%	176	44%	400
LMF2	144	36%	256	63%	400
TOTAL	582		618		1200

From the table above, it is underscored that the informants of all the three levels produced a total of 582 setting input parameters, and 618 other parameter settings. In this regard, *Troisième* students' responses comprised a total of 214 setting input parameters (53%) and 186 other parameter settings (47%). In a similar light, premiere students' responses constitute 224 setting input parameters (56%) and 176 other parameter settings (44%). Again, LMF II students' production comprised 144 setting input parameters (36%) and 256 other setting parameters (63%). The bar chart below further illustrates the respondents' performance in the MCCT in relation to level of education.

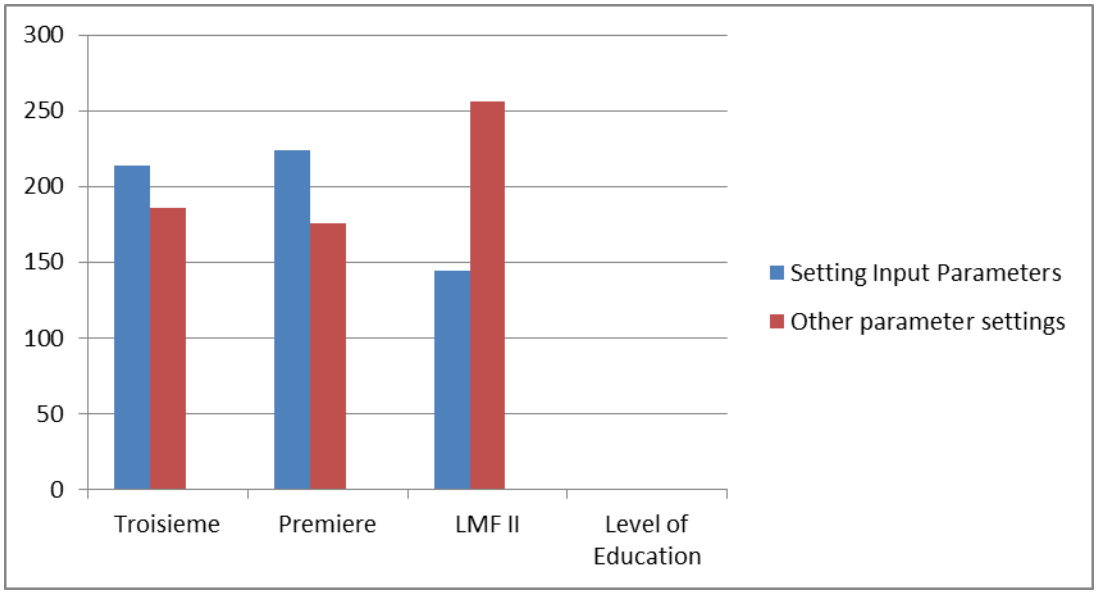

Fig. 6: Respondents' performance in MCCT in relation to level of education

The above figure illustrates that *Troisieme* respondents register 214 setting input parameters and 186 other parameter settings in the MCCT; *Premiere* respondents register 224 setting input parameters and 176 other parameter settings in the MCCT; and *LMF II* respondents register 144 setting input parameters and 256 other parameter settings in the MCCT.

4.1.2 Respondents' performance in Gap Filling task in relation to the level of education

The overall performance of the respondents in the gap-filling task is recapitulated in the table below. The table shows the frequency and percentage of setting input parameters and other parameter settings with regard to each class.

Table 12: Respondents' performance in Gap Filling Task in relation to the level of education

Class	**Respondents' performance in gap filling task**				**Total**
	Setting Input Parameters		**Other Parameter settings**		
	No. of instances	**%**	**No of instances**	**%**	
Troisième	172	43%	228	57%	400
Première	174	44%	226	56%	400
LMF2	70	18%	330	82%	400
TOTAL	416		784		1200

From the table above, it is observed that the students produce a total of 416 setting input parameters and a total of 784 other or deviant parameter settings. More specifically, the *troisième* informants' productions comprised 172 setting input parameters (43%) and 228 cases of other input parameters (57%). On the other hand, the production of the *première* informants comprises 174 setting input parameters (44%) and a total of 226 other parameter settings (56%). In another light, the *LMF II* students' speech contains 70 setting input parameters (18%) and 330 instances of other parameter settings (82%). Summarily, the table presents the frequency and percentage of setting input parameters and other input parameters of the respondents in relation to level of education. The bar chart below further summarizes the respondents' performance in Gap Filling Task in relation to the level of education.

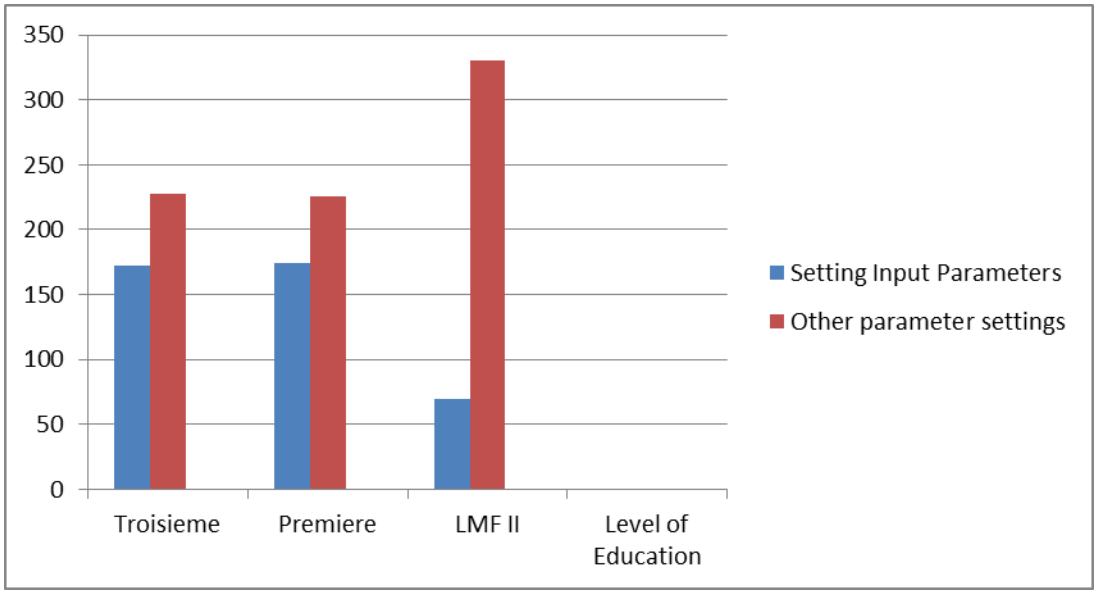

Fig. 7: Respondents' performance in the GFT in relation to level of education

The above figure illustrates that *Troisieme* respondents register 172 setting input parameters and 228 other parameter settings in the GFT; *Premiere* respondents register 174 setting input parameters and 226 other parameter settings in the GFT; and *LMF II* respondents register 70 setting input parameters and 330 other parameter settings in the GFT.

4.2 Respondents' General Performance in relation to gender

It was also worthwhile to check the respondents' general performance in relation to gender. The table below presents the frequency and percentage of setting input parameters and other setting parameters in relation to gender in each of the levels.

Table 13: Respondents' General Performance in relation to gender

Class	**Respondents' performance**								**Total**
	Setting Input Parameters				**Other Parameter settings**				
	Male		**Female**		**Male**		**Female**		
	No. of instances	%	No of instances	%	No of instances	%	No of instances	**%**	
Troisième	220	55%	176	44%	180	45%	224	56%	800
Première	207	51.7 %	208	52%	193	48.3 %	192	48%	800

LMF2	148	37%	150	37.5 %	252	63%	250	62.5 %	800
TOTAL	575	47.9 %	534	44.5 %	625	52%	666	55.5 %	2400

As illustrated in the table above, the male respondents produced a total of 575 setting input parameters while female respondents produced a total of 625. Out of the afore-mentioned figures, the responses of the male respondents in *Troisième* comprises 220 (55%) setting input parameters and 180 (45%) other setting parameters; those of male respondents in *Premiere* comprises 207 (51.7%) setting input parameters and 193 (48.3%) other parameter settings; and those of male respondents in *LMF II* comprises 148 (37%) setting input parameters and 252 (63%) other parameter settings. On the other hand, the responses of female respondents in *Troisième* is made up of 176 (44%) setting input parameters and 224 (56%) other parameter settings; those of female respondents in premiere comprises 208 (52%) setting input parameters and 192 (48%) other parameter settings; and those of female respondents in *LMF II* is composed of 150 (37.5%) setting input parameters and 250 (62.5%) other parameter settings. Summarily, the table presents the frequency and percentage of setting input parameters and other input parameters of the respondents in relation to gender.

4.2.1 Respondents' performance in relation to gender in the multiple choice task

It is also of vital interest to take a close look at the performance in relation to gender in each of the sections of the production test. The table below captures the respondents' performance in relation to gender in the multiple choice task.

Table 14: Respondents' performance in relation to gender in the multiple choice task

Class	**Respondents' performance**								**Total**
	Setting Input Parameters				**Other Parameter Settings**				
	Male		**Female**		**Male**		**Female**		
	No. of instances	%	No of instances	%	No of instances	%	No of instances	**%**	
Troisième	107	53.5 %	90	45%	93	46.5 %	110	55%	400

Première	102	51%	101	50.5 %	98	49%	99	49.5 %	400
LMF2	86	43%	88	44%	114	57%	112	56%	400
TOTAL	295		279		305		321		1200

We see clearly from the above table that in the multiple choice task, the male respondents register a total of 295 setting input parameters as opposed to 279 registered by the female respondents. In terms of other setting parameters, the male register a total of 305 while their female counterparts register a total of 321. Out of the afore-mentioned figures, the responses of the male respondents in *troisième* comprises 107 (53.5%) setting input parameters and 93 (46.5%) other parameter settings; the production of male respondents in premiere is composed of 102 (51%) setting input parameters and 98 (49%) other parameter settings; and the production of male respondents in *LMF II* comprises 86 (43%) setting input parameters and 114 (57%) other parameter settings. On the opposite side of the coin, the responses of the female respondents in *troisième* comprises 90 (45%) setting input parameters and 110 (55%) other input parameters; the responses of female respondents in premiere is made up of 101 (50.5%) setting input parameters and 99 (49.5%) other input parameters; and the responses of female respondents in *LMF II* is made up of 88 (44%) setting input parameters and 112 (56%) other parameter settings. Succinctly, the above table outlines the frequency and percentage of setting input parameters and other parameter settings in the multiple choice task in relation to gender.

4.2.2 Respondents' performance in relation to gender in the gap filling task

It is also healthy to take a closer look at the respondents' performance in relation to gender in the gap filling task. The table below captures the respondents' performance in relation to gender in the gap filling test.

Table 15: Respondents' performance in relation to gender in the gap filling task

Class	**Respondents' performance**								**Total**
	Setting Input Parameters				**Other Parameter settings**				
	Male		**Female**		**Male**		**Female**		
	No. of	%	No of	%	No of	%	No of	**%**	

	instances		instances		instances		instances		
Troisième	98	49%	79	39.5 %	102	51%	121	60.5 %	400
Première	107	53.5 %	108	54%	93	46.5 %	92	46%	400
LMF2	72	36%	71	35.5 %	128	64%	129	63.5 %	400
TOTAL	277		258		323		342		1200

As outlined in the above table, the male respondents register a total of 277 setting input parameters in the gap filling test while their female counterparts register a total of 323. With regard to other input parameters, the male respondents register a total of 258 while the female respondents have 342. Out of the afore-mentioned statistics, the responses of male respondents in *troisième* contains 98 (49%) setting input parameters and 102 (51%) other parameter settings; the production of the male students in premiere comprises 107 (53.5%) setting input parameters and 93 (46.5%) other parameter settings; and the production of male respondents in *LMF II* comprises 72 (36%) setting input parameters and 128 (64%) other parameter settings. In a similar development, the production of female respondents in *troisième* is made up of 79 (39.5%) setting input parameters and 121 (60.5%) other parameter settings; that of *première* is made up of 108 (54%) setting input parameters and 92 (46%) other parameter settings; and that of *LMF II* is made up of 71 (35.5%) setting input parameters and 129 (63.5%) other parameter settings. In general, the table above presents the respondents' performance in relation to gender in the gap filling task.

4.3 Test scores of the respondents

To guarantee a more in-depth analysis of the respondents' performance, it is healthy to examine the scores and average scores of relation to gender and level of education.

4.3.1 Scores of respondents from troisième

Table 16. Test scores and average score in *troisième.*

Score	Frequency
5	3
7	4
8	6
9	8
10	3
11	3
12	6
13	3
14	2
15	1
16	1
Mean score (*m*) in *troisième* = **8.5**	

From the table above, it is clearly seen that the test scores in *troisième* range from 5 to 16. A total of 19 (47.5%) students scored a pass mark while 21 (52.5%) scored below average. The average score of the class stands at 8.5, below average. This result is indicative of the difficulties students in general, and EFL learners, in particular face in inflecting nouns. The general class performance is illustrated in the pie chart below.

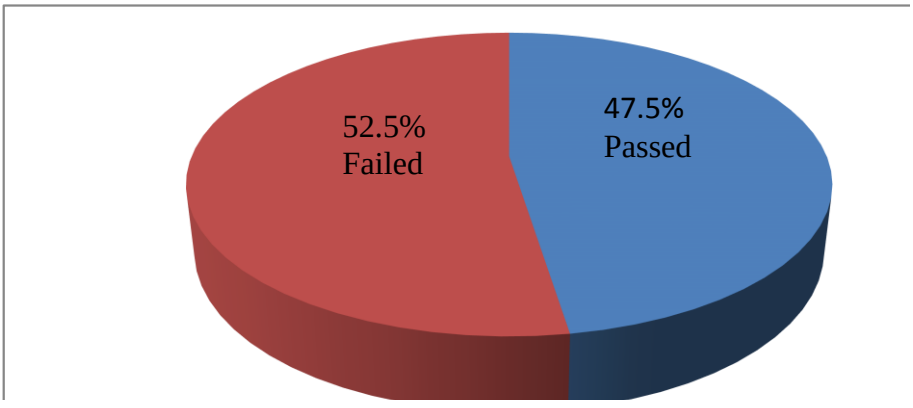

Fig 8. *Troisième* performance

4.3.1.1 Scores of respondents in Troisieme in relation to gender

The table below captures the test scores of Troisieme students in relation to gender.

Table 17. Test scores and average score of *Troisieme* students in relation to gender

Respondents from *troisième* performance in relation to gender			
Male		**Female**	
Score	**Frequency**	**Score**	**Frequency**
8	4	5	3
9	4	7	4
10	1	8	2
11	2	9	4
12	4	10	2
13	1	11	1
14	2	12	2
15	1	13	2
16	1		
Mean score of male respondents in *Troisieme* = **11**		Mean score of female respondents in *Troisieme*= **8.8**	

From the table above, we see clearly that the scores of the male respondents in *troisième* range from 8 to 16. A total of 12 male scored a pass mark, while 8 failed. The average score of the males in the class stands at 11. On the other hand, the scores of the female respondents in *Troisieme* range from 5 to13. In the class, 7 female scored a pass mark. The average score of the female is 8.8. The figure below summarizes the performance of *Troisieme* respondents in relation to gender.

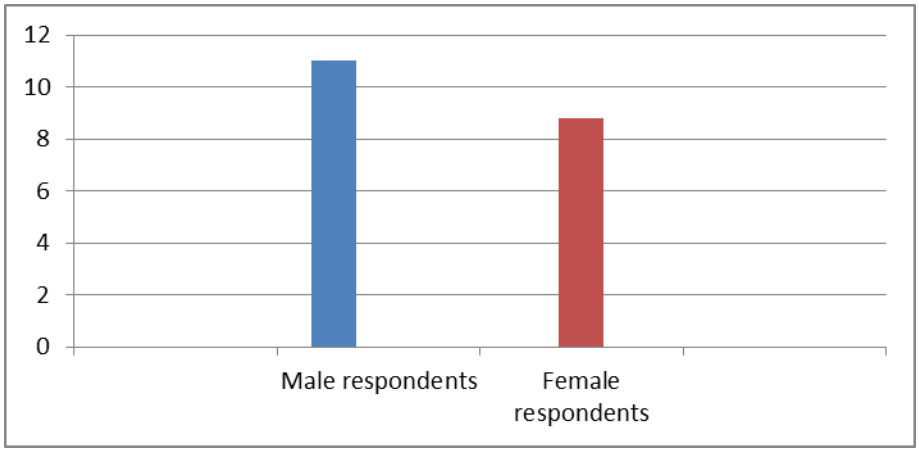

Fig. 9: Performance of *Troisieme* respondents in relation to gender.

From the above figure, it is clearly seen that the mean score of the male respondents in Troisieme stands at 11/20 while that of the female respondents in the same class stands at 8.8./20.

4.3.2 Scores of respondents in Premiere

It is also worthwhile examining the test scores and average score of respondents in Premiere, as presented in the table below.

Table 18. Test scores and average score of respondents in *Premiere*

Scores	**Frequency**
6	2
7	2
8	4
9	2
10	12
11	4
12	9
13	3
14	2
Mean score in *première*= 10.3	

As outlined in the table above, the scores of premiere students range from 6 to 14. A total of 30 students (75%) passed the test while 10 (25%) failed. In addition, the mean of the class stands at 10.3. These results indicate that a majority of *première* students do not face much of a difficulty in using in inflecting nouns. The performance of premiere is summarized in the pie chart below.

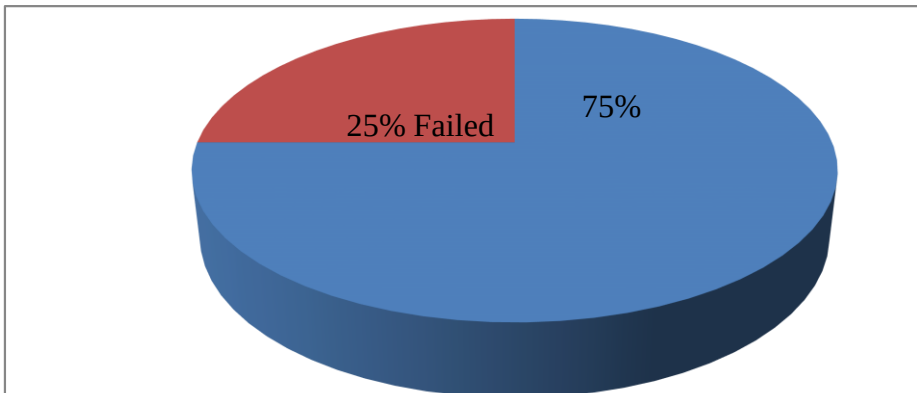

Fig.10: Performance of *première*.

4.3.2.1 Scores of respondents from premiere in relation to gender

The table below presents the test scores and average score of respondents in premiere in relation to gender.

Table 19: Respondents from *Premiere* performance in relation to gender

Respondents from *Premiere* performance in relation to gender			
Male		**Female**	
Score	**Frequency**	**Score**	**Frequency**
8	4	6	2
9	2	7	2
10	6	10	6
11	2	11	2
12	3	12	6
13	3	14	2

Mean score of male respondents in *Premiere* = **10.4**	Mean score of female respondents in *Premiere* = **10.4**

From the table above, it is visible that the test scores of the male respondents in *Premiere* range from 8 to 13. Fourteen (14) male scored a pass mark while 6 scored a mark below average. Again, the mean of the male respondents from *Premiere* was 10.4. This mean score is slightly higher than the general class mean. As underscored clearly in the above table, the test scores of the female in *Première* range from 6 to 14. Furthermore, 16 out of 20 female in this class scored a pass grade while only 4 failed. The bar chart below summarizes the performance of *Premiere* respondents in relation to gender.

From the table, it can be deduced that the female respondents performed better than the male respondents. While the score of the female respondents ranges from 06 to 14, that of the male respondents ranges from 08 to 13. Besides, 16 female respondents scored a pass mark and 14 male respondents scored a passed mark. In the same vein, two female respondents scored a 16 whereas the highest mark scored by the male respondents is 13. Hence, female respondents performed better than the male respondents though they have the same mean score 10.4.

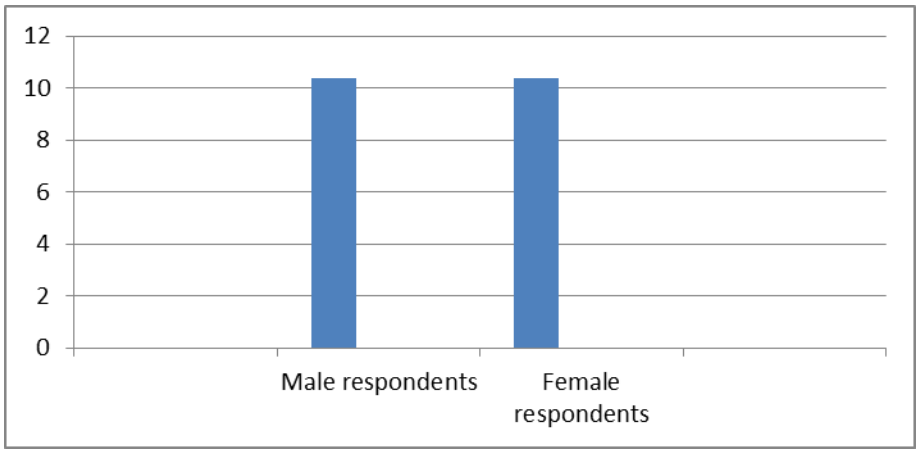

Fig. 11: Performance of *Premiere* respondents in relation to gender.

The figure above clearly shows that both male and female respondents in Premiere register a mean score of 10.4/20. The next class taken into consideration in this study is the *LMF II*.

4.3.3 Test scores of the respondents from LMF II class in noun inflection

The range and frequency of the respondents' scores have been recorded in the table below. The table also has recorded the average (mean) score of the respondents from this class.

Table 20: Performance of the respondents from *LMF II* in noun inflection

Scores	**Frequency**
2	2
4	8
6	6
8	6
9	4
10	12
11	2
Mean score of LMF II= **7.5**	

The table above indicates that the test score of *LMF II* respondents range from 2 to 11. Equally, a total of 14 students scored a pass mark, while 26 students scored a mark below average. The average score of the class stands at 7.5 which is below average. The general class performance of *LMF II* is presented in the pie chart below.

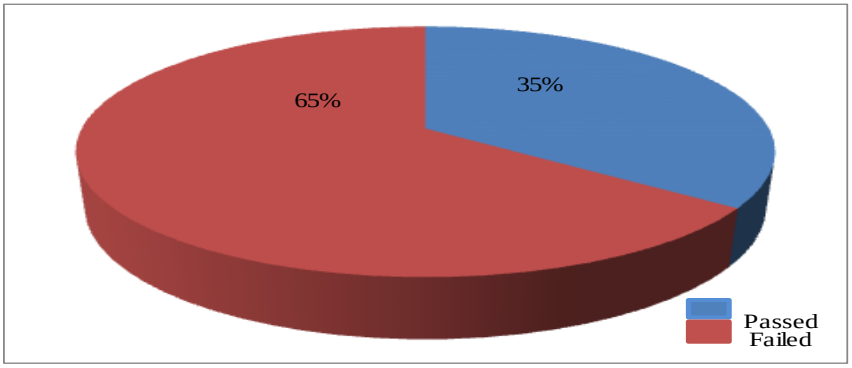

Fig.12**:** Performance *LMF II*

4.3.3.1 Test scores of LMF II respondents in relation to gender

The performance of the male and the female respondents in the *LMF II* were also examined in a bid to compare them. The table below has recorded the respondents' performance.

Table 21. Respondents from *LMF II* performance in relation to gender

Respondents from *LMFII* performance in relation to gender			
Male		**Female**	
Score	**Frequency**	**Score**	**Frequency**
2	2	4	4
4	4	6	6
8	6	9	4
10	8	10	4
Mean score of male respondents in *LMF II* = **07.4**		11	2
		Mean score of female respondents in *LMF II* = **07.5**	

From the table above, it is noticed that the test scores of the male range from 2 to 8. It is also seen that the average score of the male is 7.4. This average score is below average. It is also worthy to note that just 8 out of 20 male scored a pass mark. With regard to the female respondents, their score ranges from 4 to 11 and just 6 out of 20 female scored a passed mark. Also, the average score for the female respondents stood at 7.5. Hence, it can be deduced that the male and female respondents face the same challenges in noun inflection. The figure below summarizes the respondents' performance in *LMF II* with regard to gender.

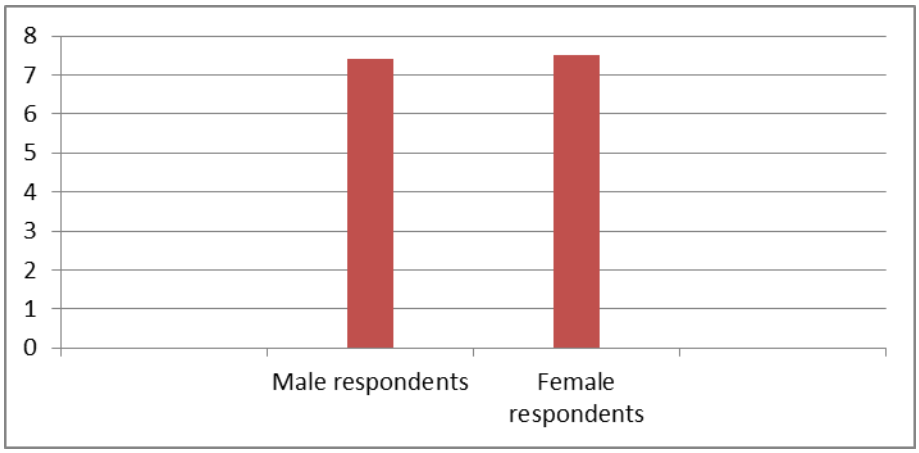

Fig. 13: *LMF II* respondents' performance in relation to gender.

From the above bar chart, it is clearly underscored that the male respondents in *LMF II* have a mean score of 7.4/20 while the female respondents have a mean score of 7.5/20. It is therefore proven that the *LMF II* male and female respondents face the same challenges in noun inflection

4.4 Correlation between the respondents' performance and level of education.

The correlation between the students' ability to inflect nouns and their level of education was checked by comparing the various class averages. While *Troisième* scored 8.5/20, *Première* scored 10.5/20 and *LMF II* scored 7.5/20. In effect, it can be deduced here that, of all the three classes, *Premiere* respondents performance in noun inflection was the best. Surprisingly, *LMF II* respondents scored the worst average. This reveals that level of education has not got an impact in these learners' of English performance. However, a diligent analysis of the data, that takes into consideration the number of hours of exposure to the target language as well as the weight given to the study of the language in each of the classes, may justify the poor performance of *LMF* respondents. Despite this argument, the performance, in terms of the level of education is succinctly captured in the bar chart below.

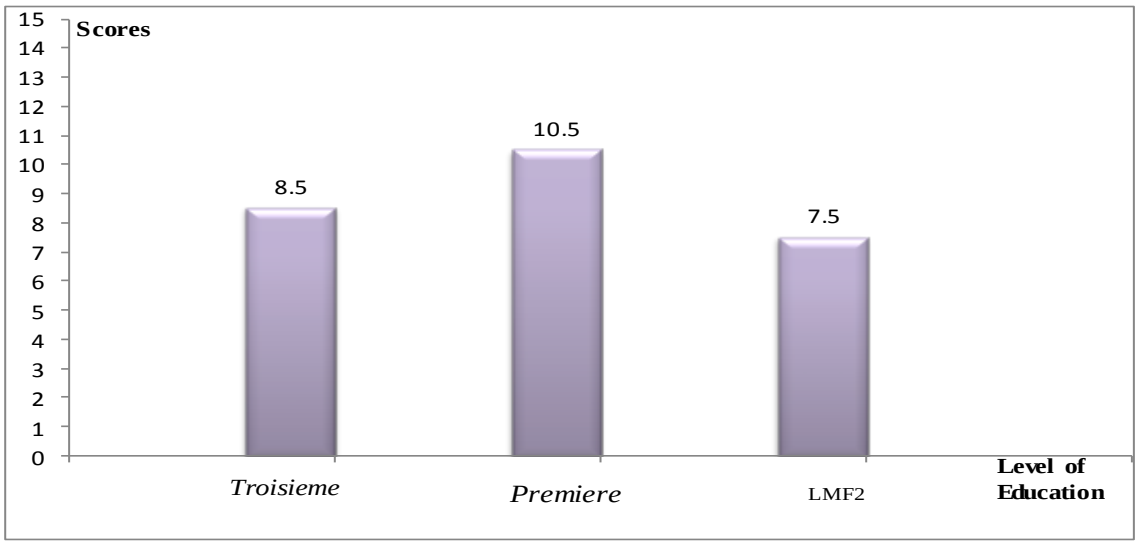

Fig.14: Respondents performance in relation to the level of education

In addition, the performance of the various classes in the inflection of each of the noun items that was investigated provide further proof to the relation between level of education and inflection of nouns. The table below presents the respondents' success rate in setting the input-oriented feature specifications.

Table 22: Respondents performance in each question in relation to level of education

Noun item	**Frequency**						**% of success in each item**	**% of failure in each item**
	Troisième		***Première***		***LMF II***			
	P	**F**	**P**	**F**	**P**	**F**		
property	24	16	20	20	18	22	52%	48%
cities	18	22	34	6	20	20	60%	40%
leaves	6	34	12	28	8	32	22%	78%
sheep	32	8	34	6	16	24	68%	32%
grandmother's	22	18	24	16	18	22	53%	47%

luggage	16	24	12	28	4	36	27%	73%
police	24	16	28	12	18	22	58%	42%
harassment	34	6	34	6	22	18	75%	25%
inconvenience	24	16	16	24	16	24	47%	53%
damage	14	26	10	30	4	26	23%	77%
son’s	6	34	18	22	8	32	27%	73%
proof	28	12	16	24	6	24	42%	58%
jewelry	4	36	14	26	2	38	17%	83%
hair	32	8	26	14	8	32	55%	45%
information	14	26	14	26	8	32	30%	70%
equipment	6	34	14	26	4	36	20%	80%
cattle	14	26	12	28	4	36	25%	75%
furniture	26	14	18	22	10	30	45%	55%
species	32	8	20	20	10	30	52%	48%
people	10	30	22	18	10	30	35%	65%

As seen in the table above, there is a drop in performance, as one climbs the education ladder, with regard to setting the input-oriented feature specifications as regards the following nouns: *property, luggage, harassment, inconvenience, damage, proof, hair, information, damage, proof, hair, information, cattle, furniture* and *species*. In addition, the nouns which pose the most serious challenge to learners include: *leaves*, *luggage*, *damage* and *jewelry*. This reinforces the view that an increase in education level does not guarantee competence in noun inflection. Therefore, there is no meaningful correlation between noun inflection and level of education among EFL learners. This finding ties with and reinforces the views of previous works like Jibril (1992), Ngefac (2008) and Kouam (2015) who attest that a speaker's level of education has little or no influence on respondents' ability to approximate the Standard British English form of the English language.

4.5 Correlation between noun inflection and gender

At this level of the analysis the mean scores of each gender was the criterion that is taken into consideration.

In *Troisième*, there is a marked difference between the performances of both sexes. The mean score of the male respondents is 11 while that of the female is 8.8. This indicates that the male learners have a better mastery of noun inflections than their female counterparts. In *Premiere*, however, both sexes have an equal proficiency level in inflecting nouns, given that they scored an average of 10.4 each. In *LMF II*, there also appears to be a balance between the male and the female, with the female scoring an average of 7.5 and the male scoring 7.4. From the individual class analysis, we clearly see that while gender seems to play a role on noun inflection in *Troisième,* it is not the case in the other two levels.

However, the examination of the general performance of all the male and female respondents provides a better judgment in correlating noun inflection and gender. While 57% of the male respondents scored a pass mark, only 48% of the female respondents registered a pass mark. This reveals that male respondents succeed in setting the input-oriented feature specifications in noun inflection better than female respondents do. Such findings comply with previous statements made by Fasold (1990) and Lakoff (1975) who underscore that there are specific differences in the way men and women use language. The pie charts below summarize the performance of each gender.

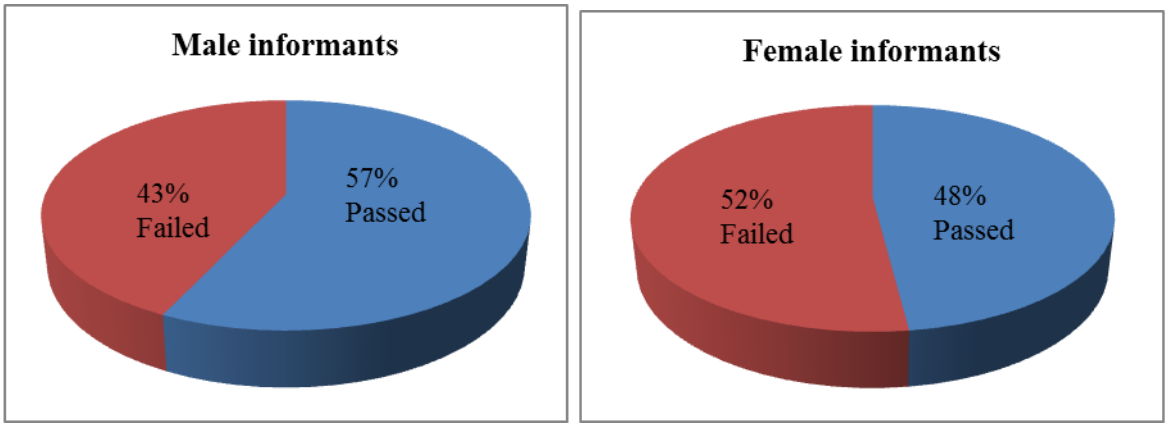

Fig.15: The correlation between gender and sensitivity to noun inflection

As demonstrated in the above pie charts, the 57% of the male respondents pass the test while 43% of them fail. As concerns the female respondents, 48% of them fail while 52% of them pass. These statistics reinforce the view that there are specific differences in the way men and women use language.

It was equally important to take a closer look at the performance of both sexes in each of the questions. The table below presents each gender's frequency and percentage of setting the input-oriented feature specification in noun inflection.

Table 23: Performance in each question in relation to gender.

Noun item	**Gender performance**			
	Male		**Female**	
	Frequency	**%**	**frequency**	**%**
Property	36	60%	26	43%
Cities	38	63%	18	30%
Leaves	16	27%	6	10%
Sheep	42	70%	40	67%
grandmother's	32	53%	32	53%

Luggage	14	23%	16	27%
Police	38	63%	32	53%
Harassment	44	73%	46	77%
Inconvenience	24	40%	32	53%
Damage	12	20%	16	27%
son’s	16	27%	16	27%
Proof	28	47%	22	37%
Jewelry	10	17%	10	17%
Hair	36	60%	30	60%
Information	12	20%	20	33%
Equipment	8	13%	12	20%
Cattle	18	30%	12	20%
Furniture	28	47%	24	40%
Species	28	47%	32	53%
People	26	43%	11	18%

In the table above, it can be readily noticed that the male respondents dominate in 10 of the tokens out of the 20 noun items tested. For example, the male respondents score 60% success in the non-inflection of "property" as opposed to 43% scored by the female; the male register 63% success in the inflection of "city" as opposed to just 30% registered by their female counterparts; the male respondents; the male respondents register a 63% success in the non-inflection of "police" as opposed to 53% registered by the female respondents; the male score 27% success in inflecting "leaf" while the female score just 10%; the male score 70% in the non-inflection of "sheep" while the female score 67%; the male register 47% success in the non-inflection of "proof" while the female score 37%; the male score 18% success in the non-inflection of "cattle" while the female score 12%; the male score 47% success in the non-inflection of furniture while the female score 40%; and the male score 43% success in the non-inflection of "people" while the female score 18% . For their part, the female respondents dominate in just 6 of them; that is, the female score 27% success in the non-inflection of "luggage" while the male score 23%; the female score 77% success in the non-inflection of "harassment" while the female score 73%; the female score 53% success in the non-inflection of "inconvenience" while the male score 40%; the female register 27% success in the non-inflection of "damage" while the male register 23%; the female register 33% success in the non-inflection of "information" while the male register 20%; the female score 20% success in the non-inflection of "equipment" while the male score 13%; and the female score 53% success in the non-inflection of "species" as opposed to 47% scored by the male respondents. Moreover, the lowest percentage is registered by the female respondents, that is, 10% in the inflection of "leaf". These revelations further fortify the fact that male respondents have a better mastery of noun inflections than their female counterparts.

4.6 Feature Specifications

A diligent examination of the data provided has enabled the identification of some feature specifications that do not tie with the Standard British English specifications. These features include: inflection of nouns that are not inflected to mark plurality, interference of French parameter settings, and overgeneralization of inflectional rules.

4.6.1 Inflection of non-inflectional nouns to mark plurality

With regard to the Standard British English parameter settings, there are some nouns that are not inflected to mark plurality. However, in the data provided by the respondents, they tend to inflect these nouns to mark plurality. Some of the tokens identified in the data include:

*The old man gave his **properties** to his son.

*Paul has a flock of **sheeps**.

*The tourists lost their **luggages** at the airport.

*The **polices** are looking for the two criminals.

*I paid my rents to avoid **harassments** from the landlord.

*The flood caused a lot of **damages**.

*The paper gave us a lot of documented **proofs** for his involvement in the embezzlement.

*Jane has so much **hairs** on her head.

As the highlighted and underlined tokens reveal, respondents have inflected nouns such as: property, sheep, luggage, police, harassment, damage, proof, and hair, to mark plurality. The plurality of these nouns is not expressed by the inflection of the noun, but rather by using the expression such as "a lot of". Another feature specification is interference of French parameter settings.

4.6.2 Interference of French parameter settings

There are some English nouns that look like French cognates and which are inflected in the French language to mark plurality but are not inflected in the English language when they are used in the plural form. In the data provided, respondents tend to inflect these nouns in the English language. Some tokens identified in their data include:

*Sorry for the **inconveniences** I have cost you.

*The journalist gave a lot of valuable **informations** yesterday.

*The technician had seven different **equipments** in his workshop.

*My aunt has a beautiful set of **furnitures**.

Though the nouns highlighted and underlined above are not inflected in the English language to mark plurality, it is noted that a significant proportion of the respondents' production could be attributed to the process of language transfer. As defined by Selinker (1972), language transfer is the phenomenon whereby a learner uses his or her own L1 as a resource. In more general terms, it could be seen as a situation wherein a learner transfers the rules of one language into another. As seen in the data, some of the respondents apparently used their knowledge of the French language words such as *inconvéniences*, *informations* and *équipements* to obtain the erroneous English forms **inconvenience**__s__, **information**__s__ and

equipment__**s**__. In addition, the students' essays also displayed aspects of language transfer such as the use of the French word *journal* to mean *news*. We clearly see, therefore, that EFL learners are tempted to use the French language parameters in the target language. As a result, a significant chunk of their deviations could be attributed to overgeneralization and language transfer.

4.6.3 Overgeneralization of inflectional rules

Overgeneralization is a situation whereby a learner uses an L2 rule in instances in which a native speaker would not. This phenomenon could occur at different levels such as the phonetic, grammatical and lexical levels. It is noticeable form the table above that the informants generalize the SBE rules which says that nouns are inflected with **"–s"**, **"-es"** and **"–ies"** to mark plurality. As a result, most of them obtained erroneous forms such as *propert**ies**, leaf**s**, sheep**s**, luggage**s**, jewelr**ies**, cattle**s*** and *people**s***. In addition, 62% of them are not aware that *species* remains same both in its singular and plural form. As concerns the students' essays, cases of overgeneralization were equally prominent. For instance, the indiscriminate addition of the "**-s**" morpheme even in words like *people**s***. Some sample structures include:

*There are many **leafs** on the tree.

*Nina sells various types of **jewelries**.

*I ate alot of **rices.**

*Our parents gave us **juices**.

*My brother has **cottons** dresses.

It is worthy of note that this finding conforms to that of Sokeng (2014) which reports that overgeneralization is responsible for most of the errors EFL learners' face in inflecting English nouns.

4.6.4 Substitution of apostrophe "s" ('s) for inflectional "s" in the genitive case

In English language, the genitive case is marked by inflecting the noun with an apostrophe "s" or "s" apostrophe. However, respondents tend to substitute this parameter setting by inflecting the noun only with an inflection "s" that marks plurality. Hence they come up with structures such as:

* My **sons** wife is beautiful.

* Our **familys** house.

* His **childrens** birthday party.

* The **boys** shoes.

* A **days** job.

As seen in the examples above, the respondents substitute apostrophe "s" for inflectional "s"; thereby, rendering "sons", "familys", "childrens", "boys" and "days" which are all incorrect.

4.6.5 Omission of the genitive case marker

In the essay component of the production, there was recurrent omission of the apostrophe "s" ('s) to mark the genitive case of a noun. Some of these tokens identified include:

*My **uncle** son.

***John** sister.

*My **landlord** dog.

*My **mother** wedding.

*His **father** car.

As seen in the examples above, the respondents tend to omit the genitive case marker as in "uncle", "John", "landlord", "mother" and "father" which are all incorrect in context.

In addition to the above, the poor performance of the respondents could be attributed equally to their attitude towards the language and the limited number of hours for which they are taught the language. As reported by Sokeng (2014) most Francophone learners of English develop a rather negative attitude towards the English language. This in turn, leads to low proficiency level. Furthermore, the small amount of time dedicated to the teaching of English could also account for the students' poor mastery of the language. At the university level, for instance, the *LMF II* students are taught English for just two hours a week during one semester. This could be the reason for their limited knowledge of the language.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analysed the data collected. Statistical results have been captures in tables, bar charts and pie charts. Feature specifications that were feasible in the data were identified and discussed. Following the analysis of the data collected from *Troisième, Première* and *LMF II*, it was revealed that there is no meaningful correlation between noun inflection and level of education. With regard to the correlation between noun inflection and gender, it was found out that male respondents have a significantly better mastery of noun inflection than their female counterpart due to their better mastery of the notion of noun inflection. This ties with previous findings such as that of Fasold (1990)

which ascertains that females use language in a way that is significantly different to the way their male counterparts use it.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, PEDAGOGICAL RELEVANCE AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings obtained from the investigation of the correlation between EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection and two sociolinguistic variables: level of education and gender. It equally highlights the pedagogic and sociolinguistic relevance of the study, suggests areas for further research and concludes the work.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study was carried out within two main guiding theoretical premises: Correlation (Labov, 1966) and Error Analysis (Corder, 1974). On the one hand, the Error Analysis framework served in checking deviant forms in the respondents' productions. On the other hand, the Correlation framework functioned as the basis for investigating if gender and level of education have any significant bearing on EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection.

Findings have revealed that EFL learners come up with deviate features which do not adhere to the English parameter settings in the inflection of nouns. Some of these deviant features include: (i) inflection of non-inflectional nouns to mark plurality as in "*The old man gave his **properties** to his son"; "*The tourists lost their **luggages** at the airport"; "I paid my rents to avoid **harassments** from the landlord"; and "*The flood caused a lot of **damages"**. (ii) Transference of French parameter settings to English language as in the inflection of non-inflectional nouns with French cognates in structures such as "*Sorry for the **inconveniences** I have cost you"; "*The journalist gave a lot of valuable **informations** yesterday"; "*The technician had seven different **equipments** in his workshop"; and "*My aunt has a beautiful set of **furnitures**"; to mark plurality. The respondentss apparently must have used their knowledge of the French language words such as *inconvéniences, informations* and *équipements* to obtain the erroneous English forms **inconvenience**__s__, **information**__s__ and **equipment**__s__. (iii) Overgeneralization of inflectional rules which stipulates that nouns are inflected with **"–s"**, **"-es"** and **"–ies"** to mark plurality. As a result, most of them overgeneralized the rules to obtain erroneous forms such as *propert**ies**, leaf**s**, sheep**s**, luggage**s**, jewelr**ies**, cattle**s*** and *people**s***. (iv) Substitution of apostrophe "s" ('s) for inflectional "s" in the genitive case as in *My son**s** wife is beautiful (v) Omission of the

genitive case marker, the apostrophe "s" ('s) to mark the genitive case of a noun as in "*My **uncle** son"; "***John** sister"; and "*My **landlord** dog".

With regard to correlation, findings reveal that an increase in the level of education by EFL learners does not guarantee competence in noun inflection. This is evidenced by the fact that there is no meaningful correlation between noun inflection and level of education among these EFL learners. This finding ties with and reinforces the views of previous works like Jibril (1992), Ngefac (2008) and Kouam (2015) who attest that a speaker's level of education has little or no influence on respondents' ability to approximate the Standard British English form of the English language.

On the other side of the spectrum, the examination of the general performance of all the male and female respondents provides a better judgment in correlating noun inflection and gender. While 57% of male respondents scored a passed mark, only 48% of the female respondents registered a passed mark. This reveals that male respondents succeed in setting the input-oriented feature specifications in noun inflection better than female do. Such findings comply with previous statements made by Fasold (1990) and Lakoff (1975) who underscore that there are specific differences in the way male and female use language.

Besides the above stated findings, the poor performance of the respondents in *LMF II* could be attributed to their attitude towards the language and the limited number of hours for which they are taught the language. The *LMF II* students are taught English for just two hours a week during one semester. This could be the reason for their limited knowledge of the language. It healthy to mention here that at the level of free writing, respondents demonstrated a recurrent feature of the substitution of one inflectional more for another in marking the plurality of nouns or the genitive case as in "**brotheres",* "*ceremonys,* and *familys.* They equally substituted the inflectional morpheme *ies* for *ie* in words such as *technologie, familie.* In the same vein, a good number of respondents add inflections to nouns like *people, cotton, juice, rice* that do not require inflectional markers to mark plurality, thereby, obtaining deviant forms like *peoples, cottons, juices* and *rices,* respectively. In terms of marking genitive case, structures such as, "*My <u>brother</u> family"; "My <u>uncle</u> son";and "*My <u>landlord</u> dog"; were identified. This revelation conforms to the views of previous works such as Etame (2005), Berinyuy (2010) and Sokeng (2014) which have all reported that ESL learners find the notion of noun inflection very challenging.

4.2 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have a number of important pedagogical implications. First, the insignificant correlation between noun inflection and level of education indicates that the educational system is not achieving its objectives. This is because, in principle, learners are supposed to become more proficient in the target language as they climb the education ladder. In other words, for the system to prove its effectiveness there should be a significant correlation between sensitivity to a language point such as noun inflection and level of education. Findings reveal that it is not the case in French sub-system of education in Cameroon. Hence, a call for concerned. Second, the poor performance of the EFL learners in inflecting nouns also implies that the assimilation of the notion of noun inflection is not as effective as it should be. Therefore, educationists and pedagogues need to go back to the drawing board to review the EFL teaching strategy.

With regard to the field of sociolinguistics, the finding that male EFL learners are more sensitive to noun inflection than female EFL learners reinforces the views of studies like Lakoff (1975) and Fasold (1990) who argue that there is actually a difference when it comes to the way learners of different sexes use language. In effect, the findings of this study empower the above-mentioned view. Secondly, the insignificant correlation between sensitivity to noun inflection and level of education strengthens the view that a speaker's level of education has little or no influence on his or her ability to approximate standard forms (Jibril 1992; Ngefac 2008; and Kouam 2015).

5.2 Recommendations

Certain recommendations can be made on how to overcome challenges learners face. First, pedagogic authorities should consider inserting more structures in school syllabi that can help pupils better understand the complex nature of the notion. Second, the number of hours allocated to the teaching of English in Francophone educational institutions could be increased so as to grant learners a greater chance of internalizing the grammar, especially in the university where English is taught to Francophone learners during just one semester a year. By and large, much has to be done to render the learning of English less challenging to ESL learners in Cameroon.

4.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Much is still left to be investigated in relation to this work. First, other linguistic variables could equally be investigated with regards to EFL learners. Second, this study is limited just to Yaounde; therefore, it can be carried out in a different town in Cameroon to check if the same results will be yielded. Third, the present study can be carried out targeting ESL learners.

5.4 Conclusion

This study has investigated the correlation between EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection and two sociolinguistic variables: level of education and gender. The study was anchored by two frameworks: Correlation (Labov, 1966) and Error Analysis (Corder, 1974). Following the analysis of the data which comprises students' responses to a written test, two principal revelations are made to meet the objectives of the study. It is revealed that there is no meaningful correlation between EFL learners' sensitivity to noun inflection and level of education. However, it is revealed that male EFL learners are more sensitive than female EFL learners with regards to noun inflection.

REFERENCES

Ancker, W. (2000). Errors and Corrective Feedback Updated Theory and Classroom Practice. *English Teaching Forum*, 8(4), 20-25.

Beboy, N. (2007).The Problem of Translation from French to English and vice versa in the University of Bangue: a Case Study of the First Year Students' Performances at the Department of Modern Linguistics. PhD Thesis, University of Yaounde I.

Berinyuy, J. (2010). A Descriptive Study on the Acquisition of Nouns by ESL Learners: the Case of Secondary Schools in Cameroon. MA Dissertation, University of Yaounde I.

Breton, R. & Fohtung, B. (1991). *Atlas Administratif des Langues Nationales du Cameroun*. Yaounde/Paris: Cerdotola.

Brown, H. (1994). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.

Bussman, H. (1998). *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*. London: Routledge

Cameron, D. (1992). *Researching Language: Issues of Power and Method*. London/New York: Routledge.

Cameron, D. (2007). *The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages?*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Candling, R. (2001). *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. New York: Longman Inc.

Chialoh, E. (2010). The Correlation Between Some Phonological Features of Kom English and Level of Education. DIPES II Dissertation, ENS Yaounde, University of Yaounde I.

Coates, J. (1988). *Women in their Speech Communities*. Harlow: Longman.

Corder, P. (1967). *The Significance of Learners' Errors. Investigating English Discourse.* London: Routledge.

Corder, P. (1974). *Error Analysis: Perspectives on second language acquisition*. London: Longman.

Crystal, D. (2004). *The Language Revolution*. Malden: Polity Press.

Crystal, D. (2008). On Trying to be Crystal: A Response to Philipson. In *Applied Linguistics*, 21(3), 415-422.

Echu, G. (2003). Multilingualism as a Resource: The Lexical Appropriation of Cameroon Indeginous Languages by English and French. In *Zeitschrift Fur Kulturwissen Chaften*, (13), 207-216.

Etame, E. (2005). Some Grammatical Problems in the Essays of Francophone Students of the Science Classes in ENS Yaounde. DIPES II Dissertation, ENS Yaounde, University of Yaounde I.

Ethno (2008). http/www.ethnologue.com. Website consulted on February 14th 2016.

Fasold, R. (1990). *Sociolinguistics of Language*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Inc.

Fornkwa, M. (2012). Aspects of Francophone Cameroon English Inflection Morphology: the Case of the S-inflection. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 1(1), 49-67.

Holmes, J. (1992). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London: Longman.

Jackson, K. (1990). *Language and History in Early Britain*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Jibril, M. (1992). Phonological Variation in Nigerian English. PhD Thesis, Lancaster University.

Kouam, C. (2015). The Correlation between some Sociolinguistic Variables and Standard British English Stress Pattern of Words from Romance languages. DIPES II

Dissertation, ENS Yaounde, University of Yaounde I.

Kouatie, T. (2008). The Use of English by Second Year Engineering Students of *Ecole Nationale Superieure Polytechnique* (ENSP) Yaounde. An Appraisal of Problems Encountered. MA Dissertation, University of Yaounde I

Labov, W. (1966). *The Social stratification of English in New York City*. Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Lakoff, R. (1973). *The Logic of Politeness: or Minding Your P's and Q's*. New York: Blackwell.

Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper and Row.

Maltz, D. & Borker, R. (1982). A Cultural Approach to Male and Female Miscommunication. In Coates, J. (ed).

Mbuakoto, R. (2009). English Word Formation Processes: Implications on Second Language Teaching and Learning. Case Study: GSS Bokova and Summerset College Molyko. DIPES II Dissertation, ENS Yaounde, University of Yaounde I.

Mitchell, R. & Myles, F. (2004). Second Language Learning Theories. Oxford: OUP.

Nemser, W. (1974). *Approximative Systems of Foreign Language Learners in J.C*. Cambridge: CUP.

Ngaajie, S. (2010). The Correlation Between Some Phonological Features and Level of Education: the Case of Akɔɔse Learners of English. DIPES II Dissertation, ENS Yaounde, University of Yaounde I.

Ngefac, A. (1997). The Influence of Some Sociolinguistic Variables on English Pronunciation: A Case Study of Form One and Upper Sixth Students in Anglophone Schools in Yaounde. Unpublished Maitrise Dissertation, University of Yaounde I.

Ngefac, A. (2008). *Social Differentiation in Cameroon English: Evidence from Sociolinguistic Fieldwork*. New York: Peter Lang.

Njenga, N. (1994). A Comparative Study of English Language Performance between *Lycee de Mballa II* and *Lycee d'Application de Yaounde*: An Error Analysis Approach. MA Dissertation, University of Yaounde I.

Njocha, A. (1993). Deceptive Cognates: A Major Impediment to Effective Bilingualism in Cameroon. Unpublished Dissertation, ENS Yaounde, University of Yaounde I.

Norrish, J. (1983). *Language Learners and Their Errors*. Indiana: Macmillan.

O'Grady, W. Dobrovolsky, A. & Aronoff, T. (1981). *Contemporary Linguistics*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Parrot, M. (2000). *Grammar for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. (1971). A Non-contrastive Approach to Error Analysis. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 25(3), 204-219.

Richards, J. ed. (1974). *Error Analysis: Perspectives on Second language Acquisition*. London: Longman.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics London*, 10, 209-241.

Sercombe, P. (2000). Learner Language and the Consideration of Idiosyncrasies by Students of English as a Second or Foreign Language in the Context of Brunei Darulsalam. In A. M. Noor et al (eds) *Strategising Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century*. Proceedings of the International Conference on Teaching and Learning. Faculty of Education: University of Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.

Shiel, R. (2011). Investigating the Relationship between Simultaneous Speech and Gender: A Comparison of the Same Sex Group of University Students: 2011 Retrieved.

Sokeng, S. (2014). Grammatical Errors of Bilingual 1 Francophone Learners of English in

the University of Yaounde I. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(9), 1778-1785.

Stark, L. (2001). *Analysing the Interlanguage of ASL Natives*. Newark: University of Delaware.

Swan, M. & Walter, C. (2001). *The Good Grammar*. London: Oxford University Press.

Tadjom, J. (1993). The Source of Language as an Obstructor in Second Language Learning: the Case Study of Francophone Learners of English. MA Dissertation, University of Yaounde I.

Tannen, D. (1990). *You Just Don't Understand*. New York: William Morrow.

Vahdatinejad, S. (2008). Students' Error Analysis and Attitude towards Teacher Feedback Using a Selective Software: A Case Study. MA Thesis, University of Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.

Wardhaugh, R. (2010). An Introduction to Sociolinguistics. *Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics*, 207-218.

Weireesh, S. (1991). How to Analyse Inter language. *Journal of Psychology and Education*, (19) 13-22.

Wolf, H. (2001). *English in Cameroon*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Yule, G. (1985). *The Study of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

APPENDIX

CLASS_____ GENDER_____

A. Fill in each of the blanks with an appropriate form of the noun chosen from the list in the brackets.

1. The old man gave his_____to his son.[A) property B) properties C) propertis]
2. Europe has many beautiful_____. [A) cities B) city C) citys]
3. There are many _____on the plant. [A) leaves B) leaf C) leafs]
4. Paul has a flock of_____. [A) sheeps B) sheep C) sheepes]
5. The two girls disappeared from their_____house. [A) grandmother's B) grandmothers C) grandmother]
6. The tourists lost their_____at the airport. [A) luggages B) luggage C) luggagies]
7. The_____are looking for the two criminals. [A) polices B) polices C) police]
8. I paid my rents to avoid_____from my landlord. [A) harassment B) harassments C) harasmenties]
9. Sorry for the_____I have cost you. [A) inconveniences B) inconvenience C) inconveniencies]
10. The flood caused a lot of_____[A)damage B) damages C) damagies]

B. Complete each of the following sentences with the appropriate form of the noun in the brackets.

1. My_____wife is beautiful. [A) sons B) son's C) sons']
2. The paper gave us a lot of documented_____for his involvement in the embezzlement. [A) proof B) proofs C) proves]
3. Nina sells various types of_____.[A) jewelries B) jewelrys C) jewelry]
4. Jane has so much_____on her head. [A) hairs B) hair C) haires]
5. The journalist gave a lot of valuable_____yesterday. [A) informations B) informationes C) information]
6. The technician had seven different___in his bag. [A) equipment B) equipments C) equipmentes]
7. My father rears so many_____. [A) cattles B) cattless C) cattle]
8. My aunt has a beautiful set of____in her house. [A) furnitures B) furniture C) furnituress]
9. Tilapia is a_____of fish. [A) specie B) species B) species]
10. Many_____attended the party. [A) peoples B) people C) peoples]

C. Write an essay of not more than 150 words on the topic **"A day I will never forget"**.