

The Acquisition of Adverbs by Learners of English as a Second Language in Cameroon

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Abstract

Despite the embedded linguistic capabilities that human beings possess¹, language acquisition still remains a daunting and staggering experience especially to the second language learner who is already comfortable with the first language. While other categories come pretty earlier in the acquisition schedule, adverbs are observed to be quite challenging for learners to acquire and use. It is within this backdrop that this paper investigates the challenges faced by second language learners of English in Cameroon with the aim of identifying the challenges in the acquisition process as learners move from one proficiency level to the other. Grounded on the theory of interlanguage and its ramifications, the paper adopts a mixed method design to collect data from 120 primary school pupils in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. Both quantitative and qualitative designs are used for data analysis. The findings show that learners exhibited limited knowledge of adverb categories and consequently the adverbs had a very low frequency of occurrence in learners' productions. Typologically speaking, the highest frequency rate of occurrence was observed with items that give pictorial representations in the learners' mind as was the case with adverbs that portray independent than subsidiary meaning. That is why comparatively speaking, adverbs of place and time had a higher frequency rate in learners' productions unlike other typologies. The specificity of structural gap filling tasks at this level was noticeable and memorisation was used to a greater extent as a learning strategy by a good number of learners.

Keywords: Language Acquisition, Language Learning, Adverbs, Interlanguage, SLA

¹ This line of thought is championed by Chomsky.

1. Introduction and Background

One of the aims of linguistic theory has been to explain the dynamism in human language (Chomsky 2002) as well as the intricacies involved in the process by which a child, hitherto empty², successfully develops the linguistic ability to communicate in spite of the inherent complicated system. In order to facilitate the comprehension of the varied ways in which languages are acquired, linguists have identified a macrocosm of varied contexts in which a language is acquired. Such contexts include the first language acquisition context, the second as well as the foreign language acquisition contexts. The peculiarities in terms of general characteristics within these contexts isolate the different learners within the spheres of specific learning strategies and processes involved.

If first language acquisition (FLA) is such a mystery, then second language acquisition (SLA) is more thought-provoking. While drawing a dichotomy between the first language (L1) learner and the second language (L2) learner, Littlewood (1984:17) re-emphasises this difficulty when she states that whereas the L1 learner is a novice as regards language habits, the L2 learner possesses a set of habits from his/her native language. While some of these earlier habits facilitate the new learning task, others are an enormous impediment³ to the acquisition of L2 as research for the past three decades has proven. Second language acquisition is therefore more of a resolution of constraints that are analogous to L1 principles in order to match them with second language parameters (see Ellis 1997, Krashen 1982). Even though this may not be the essence of L2 acquisition as Dulay et al (1982:3) postulate given that “learning a second language can be exciting and productive”, they still underscore that due to the inherent difficulties, it is a “painful” endeavour which could even be fruitless since such efforts may end up in “a stumbling repertoire of sentences soon to be forgotten”.

Adverbs constitute the least exploited category due especially to the fact that they are accompaniments to other categories (Brown 1987). It is believed that they only add meaning to already existing verbs and to other adverbs and adjectives. In effect, children definitely see no reason acquiring adverbs given that they do not find the communicative significance as found embedded in the other categories. That is why naturally, adjectives are relegated to the terminal position even in grammatical descriptions and in the acquisition chain. Such consideration spurred the curiosity to investigate what methods learners in ESL contexts like Cameroon use to acquire adverbs, what challenges they face and what developmental trends could be observed in the acquisition process.

Within this perspective, attention in this study is dedicated specifically to errors related to the learner’s manipulation of the lexical item in different communicative situations. The errors involved in the learner’s use of adverbs are identified in terms of the internal properties of adverbs, (errors related to the type of inflectional properties they exhibit) as well as their

² Whether the child comes to the process of first language acquisition tabula rasa or not is an issue of crucial debate amongst linguists of the behaviourist and mentalist schools of linguistics. However, ‘empty’ as used here refers more to the overt communicative perspective than to the linguistic theory discussions.

³ See Odlin (1989) and other studies on interference.

distributional characteristics. It is from these errors that the characteristic trends of the learners' acquisition of adverbs is determined. Errors that stem from the semantic connotations learners attribute to adverbs fall within the scope of investigation in this study. Given that language in the first place is what it means, the communicative power of language is of utmost importance in language learning. If a learner uses a particular item, it is not sufficient to identify what has been used. It is even more important to further determine the meaning the learner intends to convey. Having this caveat in mind, this study far from only identifying the adverbs used by learners of English as L2 in Cameroon, goes further to examine the semantic connotations these learners attribute to the items they acquire.

After an identification of the learners' errors, the study further traces the development of learners' interlanguage at different levels of education. As such, a comparative analysis of the different stages of acquisition will determine whether the learners' behavioural patterns with regard to the acquisition of adverbs have witnessed any progress or regress at the different levels. Still within this perspective, an assessment of learners' preference of typological categories is done.

2. English Language Learning in Cameroon

Reviewing the situation of English language learning in Cameroon provides an essential background for understanding the discussions in this paper. If second language teaching is enigmatic as earlier mentioned, the situation is rooted on the background of English in Cameroon and the learning situation which is replete with challenges (Mbibeh 2013, Nkwetisama 2017, Mbibeh 2021). There is an established inextricable relationship between teaching and learning and above all the significant role of instruction in second language learning is inevitable. Unlike teaching that is for the most part formal, learning is a double-edged venture. Learning can take place in both formal and informal environments. A discussion of second language learning in Cameroon here is simply introductory and general. Hence, major highlights here are based on the contexts (formal and informal) in which L2 English is acquired in Cameroon, its stakes and challenges.

Informal learning of any knowledge refers to learning that takes place out of the confines of a formal environment which could include a classroom or a workshop. In short, informal learning takes place without an instructor and the learner is left all alone to decide on what to learn or not from the knowledge available in his/her environment. First language acquisition mostly takes place on informal basis. When an infant starts speaking a first language it is often startling on account of the fact that there has scarcely been any overt teaching (De Villiers and De Villiers 1978).

The learning of English in Cameroon is mostly more in formal than informal contexts. However, historically speaking, during the slave trade period no formal schools had been set up; hence for the most part, the learning of English was done informally. That is why the kind of English spoken at the time had a mixture of items in local languages along the coast of Cameroon. Modern linguistic analysis however situates this language within pidgins and

creoles rather than English per say. This English acquired informally and spoken at the time was quite significant as it had great impacts on the socio-economic and political development of the indigenes and the territory.

After the slave trade period, missionary schools and later on colonial schools especially during the British mandate were quite few. That is why it was possible to see natives who did not pursue even elementary education. In which case, such natives did not acquire English in any formal context but simply picked one or two words from family members or friends who went to school. A multiplicity of schools after independence up to the present date has greatly influenced the acquisition and spread of English in Cameroon in general and in the English-speaking regions in particular in formal institutions. It is difficult now to talk of informal acquisition given that an average Cameroonian has at least attained primary education which for the past decade has been decreed free and compulsory for all Cameroonians. Even if English could later on be acquired in informal situations after primary school, it is evident that the basis is set up in a formal milieu. It is no news again today that English second language learning is the prerogative of the formal context as averagely all Cameroonians that speak English today, must have attained at least the primary level of education where English language is taught.

3. Theoretical Premise

There is a plethora of theories on second language acquisition which assume two extreme polarised considerations;

- 1) That language acquisition is a result of externally determined factors; stimulus or input that learners imitate and reproduce during communication.
- 2) That language acquisition is innately determined; it is a creative process in which input only triggers the built-in device to process and produce language hitherto unheard.

While these theories like any others, have had their hey days and limitations, this research used the Theory of Interlanguage propounded by Larry Selinker in 1972 and subsequently developed and broadened. Unlike other theories that concentrated mostly on language acquisition as a whole from where SLA could then be extrapolated, Selinker's theory of interlanguage is essentially on SLA. This theory is significant in this study not only because it focuses on SLA but equally because it traces second language development from initial stages to final near native stages as well as its inherent characteristics. Equally, that the theory draws from the two extremist behaviourist and mentalist positions render it even more solid and quite relevant for this study.

Drawing from linguistics and psychology, Selinker (1972) propounded the theory of

interlanguage to discuss SLA. This theory is basically used “to refer to the intermediate states (or interim grammars) of learners’ language as they move towards the target language” It is a creative process “driven by inner forces in interaction with environmental factors and influenced by both L1 and by input from the target language” (Saville-Troike2006:41). Interlanguage is the most frequently used of SLA terminologies (Littlewood 1984:33). In the discussion of interlanguage, White (2003) gives credit to the fathers of this term including; Adjemian (1976), Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972). These linguists as she presents, pointed out that the L2 learner language is systematic and the errors produced by learners do not consist of random mistakes but, rather, suggest rule governed behaviour. This theory will constitute a key background and yardstick in the analysis of data collected for this study.

4. Methodology

Just as in any study, one of the first steps in a language development study is the selection of a basic research design (Dulay et al 1982:245). This study uses the survey research design which entails direct contact with the sample population using appropriate tools of data collection with special focus on the cross-sectional subdivision of the design. In this light, the study used proficiency tests designed to evaluate the acquisition of adverbs by L2 learners in Cameroon. From these tests and observation, it was possible to evaluate the characteristics of learners’ acquisition of adverb categories in terms of the difficulties learners faced and developmental patterns at the various stages of acquisition.

Following Hosker (2002) and Amin (2004)’s postulate, the population of this study comprised English second language learners in the Northwest and South West Regions (English-speaking regions) of Cameroon. These learners were drawn from the primary level of education. They included learners from Classes Three and learners from primary Six in the primary representing the preliminary and final stages respectively. The aim of this population was to enable us trace learners’ progress in the acquisition of English as they moved from one proficiency level to another. In this light, a general sample of 120 learners was selected from the two regions using stratified random sampling techniques and distributed as follows.

In which case, 60 learners were selected per region and distributed as thirty for Class Three and thirty for Class Six thereby making a total of sixty learners. These learners were selected from schools in the major towns of the regions including Limbe and Buea for the South West and Kumbo and Bamenda for the Northwest region. The information above is better illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Distribution of General Sample Population

Region	Class 3	Class 6	Total
North west	30	30	60
South west	30	30	60

Total	60	60	120
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It should be noted that in each region, the informants were not drawn from one area. In the South West Region for example, subjects came from two major areas. In which case, if the total population of learners in Class 3 is 30 then 15 were drawn from Buea and 15 others from Limbe. This distribution was similar for other levels and is simply presented in the table below.

Table 2. Distribution of Sample Population in the SW Region

Town	Class 3	Class 6	Total
Limbe	15	15	30
Buea	15	15	30
Total	30	30	60

Statistics in table 3.2 above indicate that for each level, 15 learners were selected from the Buea area and the same number was drawn from Limbe making a total population of 30 learners per proficiency level. A sum of subjects per town indicates that 30 learners were generally drawn from Buea and 30 informants equally selected from Limbe. This gives a total number of 60 subjects for the South West Region. The aim of this distribution was to make the sample as representative as possible of learners in the South West Region.

For the Northwest Region the subjects were extracted from two major areas. These areas included Kumbo and Bamenda. The number of subjects per area was similar to that in the South West Region. For each proficiency level, 30 learners were generally selected with half of the number representing a particular area. Class 3 for instance, 15 learners come from Kumbo and 15 others from Bamenda. The following table gives a glaring picture of this distribution.

Table 3. Distribution of Sample Population in the NW Region

Town	Class 3	Class 6	Total
Bamenda	15	15	30
Kumbo	15	15	30
Total	30	30	60

The preceding table reveals that the Bamenda area in the North West Region (further NW)

comprised 15 subjects for Class Three and the same number for the Kumbo area giving a total of 30 learners per class. This distribution was applicable to other classes with 15 learners per class. The NW Region made up a total population of 60 learners distributed into 30 learners per class as seen in the table above.

4.1 Research Instruments

The nature of this work as well as the population of study; made up of learners within the ages of about five to 12 years, rendered the process of data collection complicated. This was due to the fact that the researcher had to be present and collect first-hand information that could not easily be collected by anyone else. That is why the study used different instruments including an observation checklist and a proficiency test. The proficiency tests were graded according to the levels of the learners with beginners and final level learners. The proficiency test comprised three main exercises.

Exercise 1 focused on adverb identification within a context and demanded that learners underline adverbs found in a text.

Exercise 2 was based on the general command of adverbs. Here, learners were provided with the context but allowed the freedom to insert an adverb of their choice within the context. The various sentences provided were tailored to test the use of certain prototypical adverb sub-categories including adverbs of manner, frequency, time, place and intensity.

Exercise 3 while testing the acquisition of adverbs required learners to create contexts themselves in which given adverbs can be used. As such, a number of adverbs were provided and learners were asked to construct a sentence using these adverbs. The adverbs were of different types (manner, time, frequency).

Exercise 4 was a production task where learners were expected to describe the longest journey they had ever undertaken. It was envisaged that learners would use various forms of adjectives and adverbs in this task. The essay, as well as other similar tasks were geared towards evaluating learners' free use of adverbs in free writing unlike the other structural exercises.

4.2 Method of Data Analysis

In analysing this data, focus was shifted from the various methods used to the general data collected. As such, the data was not analysed in terms of observed, recorded or written data but was analysed as a whole, in terms of different lexical trends noted and the different proficiency levels.

At the macro level, data for this study was analysed in two main stages. That is, data from the preliminary section and data from the final level of education. For example, the analysis begins with learners in Class Three before moving to those in Class Six which is the final class for the primary section. The *raison d'être* for this segmentation is to trace the evolution of learner language from preliminary states to final levels. For each level, the acquisition adverbs is analysed within these lines: items used, frequency of use, difficulties faced and error patterns noticed. It is thus possible to isolate the characteristic trends of learners'

acquisition of adverbs at each level of education. After this, the next stage of the analysis involves a comparison of the different proficiency levels with the aim of evaluating the development of learners' interlanguage as they progress from one class to the next class.

5. Analysis and Findings

As mentioned above, analysis begins with data collected from preliminary stages of acquisition before moving to the final stage. The analysis is done simultaneously. To ease the presentation and analysis, the discussion is segmented into two major parts including first, the preliminary stage of primary education and then the final stage. A concomitant discussion of the two parts permits the reader to evaluate learners' abilities at the different stages. For the preliminary stage, the data collected from learners in Class Three is used while the learners in Class Six provide data for the final stage. Given that the proficiency test administered to learners contains both a gap filling or structural exercise and a production task, the analysis will generally follow this division beginning with data from the gap filling task before moving to data from the production task.

5.1 Data from Structural Exercises

The peculiarity of structural exercises lies in the fact that they involve gap filling tasks where learners are provided with specific contexts to fill targeted items. This is unlike the production task where learners are free to use any of the items they have acquired. The analysis thereof enables us to make specific statements on varied grammatical categories of the lexical items under study.

Here, two major gap filling exercises were used including an exercise on adverb identification and one on the general command of adverbs (the use of various typological categories) within particular structural contexts.

a) Exercise on adverb identification

The aim of this exercise was to test learners' ability to identify adverbs within other lexical items. As such, two sentences were provided in which a number of these adverbs were embedded. The analysis reveals that at the preliminary stage of primary education, learners do not generally understand what an adverb is all about. The statistics in the table below and subsequent analysis will help to buttress this point.

Table 4. Results on Adverb Identification Class 3

Item	No of learners	Item	No of learners
Yesterday	30	All	31
Slowly	31	Night	51
Still	28	And	37

Early	40	/	From	38
Enough	43	/	To	23
Last	10	/	School	22
Here	48	/	Rope	18
Completely	51	/		

It is quite complicated to read meaning into the statistics presented in table 4 above. That a good majority of learners identified some ⁴relatively prototypical adverbs in the exercise could be an indication that they know what an adverb is. Such adverbs with the corresponding number of learners who recognised the items as adverbs as the table indicates include; *completely* (51), *here* (48), *early* (40) and *enough* with (40)/60 learners that took part in the exercise. Another possible translation of these statistics could be that learners considered items that do not fall within the prototypical noun, verb and adjective categories to belong to the class of adverbs.

However, this interpretation is short-lived given that as many as 50/60 learners considered the noun *night* as belonging to the category of adverbs. Worse still, such prominent nouns as *school* and *rope* were underlined by 22 and 18/60 learners respectively. Other negative identifications and the respective number of learners that erroneously underlined the items as adverbs include the adjectives *all* (35) and *last* (10), the conjunction *and* (37), the prepositions *from* (38) and *to* (23)/60. It should be recalled that the classification in these examples depends on the context in which these items were used in the exercise. This is because in isolation it is almost impossible to determine the category to which a majority of the items cited above do belong.

The situation observed at the initial level of primary education was relatively the same at the final level given that learners in Class six were also as confused as their counterparts in Class three. Even though in Class six such prototypical categories like the nouns *school* and *rope* were left out, many learners still considered the adjectives *all* and *last*, the prepositions *from* and *to* and the conjunction *and* as adverbs. One positive note is that as many as 52 and 55 /60 learners respectively identified *slowly* and *completely* as adverbs. Such positive identification can easily be translated as recognition of the morphology of the relatively prototypical adverbs which end in the derivational suffix *ly*. Mindful of the inherent exceptions, it can be observed here that learners are gradually attributing some definitions to adverbs which of course work to a considerable degree. That is;

1 That adverbs constitute the other categories that do not fall within the prototypical noun, verb and adjectives.

2 That a majority of adverbs end in the suffix -ly-.

As a conclusion, it is evident from the statistics and analyses above that learners in the

⁴ Considering the heterogeneity of adverbs, it is quite difficult to talk of prototypical adverbs. Confer Payne (1997), Parrot (2000) and Huddleston and Pallum (2005)

primary section of education are not very conversant with the category of adverbs. This explains the negative identifications noted. However, identifying an item as belonging to a category is just a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is more interesting to evaluate how these learners used adverbs in free exercises. This will constitute the *raison d'être* for other tasks yet to be analysed in the study.

b) Exercise on the general command of adverbs

This exercise provided learners with the possibility of using relatively prototypical adverbs in specific contexts. Here, learners were free to use any adverb of their choice. However, the contexts provided imposed particular categories of adverbs for learners to use including commonly recognisable categories such as adverbs of manner, place, time frequency and intensity. The analysis of results is therefore done in a systematic manner; moving from one sentence to the other, given that the sentences are peculiar in terms of the type of adverb being evaluated. As in previous analyses, results from both initial and final stages are discussed simultaneously.

In the first sentence, learners were expected to fill the gap with an adverb of manner. Results from this first item show that as many as 38 learners in Class 3 used the adjectival counterpart of the adverb they were supposed to use with the following rendering;

Item 1 The thief went into the house * *slow*, * *quit*, * *fast*, so; no one could hear him.

It is curious that none of the learners used the derivational suffix *ly* to derive adverbs from the adjectives used above. The conclusion drawn from here is that these learners are yet to acquire this form or that they are not yet exposed to it. This may even explain why 20 of the 60 learners allowed the space empty. The fact that 33 of the 60 learners in Class 6 unlike their counterparts in Class 3 successfully derived adverbs from the adjectives above is evidence of progress. Equally, there were a few (6) cases of omission but the error worth mentioning remains the placement of adjectives in cases where adverbs were supposed to be used.

The second item required an adverb of frequency such as *often*, *always*, *scarcely etc.* In Class 3, learners did not see the importance of this adverb in the target item and that is why an overwhelming majority of the learners allowed the space empty. Out of the 60 learners in Class 3, 47 of them did not fill anything in the following item;

Item 2 Mary _____ *cries when the teacher beats her.*

This situation in Class 3 was equally noticed with adverbs of time and degree. In which case, 37 and 34 omissions were respectively noted in items 3 and 4 below;

Item 3 Will you go to school _____

Item 4 He is a _____ *good boy*

Despite the fact that these results are indicative of the fact that learners may not have been exposed to this category, it is equally worth mentioning that learners attach little significance to the meaning of these adverbs within the contexts where such adverbs are expected to be inserted. From a semantic perspective, the adverbs in the contexts above only go a long way

to either precise or intensify the action depicted by the verb. Consequently, the absence of these adverbs does not entail any significant grammatical and semantic anomaly. That is why a majority of the learners feel the sentences are self-expressive and need nothing more.

At the final level however, the omissions were not as many as the ones in Class 3 especially for items 3 and 4. At least as many as 41 and 32 learners successfully inserted adverbs of time and intensity in items 3 and 4 respectively. This is of course indicative of the fact that learners at the final level of education have started attaching some significance to the categorisation of actions. In which case, precision is of course becoming important in the expression of meaning.

The last item in the exercise necessitated the insertion of an adverb of place. A majority of learners in Class Three inserted the preposition ⁵*in* instead of its adverbial counterpart *inside* in the item below.

Item 5. The dog is _____ the cage. Don't be afraid.

What is interesting to note here is that learners pay more attention to the semantics of the whole sentential string rather than to the particular category to be inserted in the gap. It is true that the insertion of the preposition above does not engender neither a grammatical nor a semantic glitch. In fact, the sole error is that learners did not follow the instruction (to insert an adverb in the blank space). If language is meant to be expressive, then learners may not be held to task here for not inserting an adverb. However, the information that could be deduced from this case is that learners at this stage are unable to give a specific definition to the category of adverbs or that they do not know what it is all about. In the following class, the situation was quite similar. Apart from the 17 learners that used the adverb *inside*, the rest of the 60 either used the prepositions *in* or ⁶*around*. This can only go a long way to confirm the observation noted in the preliminary class.

5.2 Data from the Production Task

Unlike the structural tasks analysed previously with constrained specific contexts, the production task gave learners an opportunity to use target lexical items in a more liberal manner. The aim of the production (or commonly called essay) tasks was first of all to evaluate learners' acquisition of the various typological categories of Adverbs. Equally, since the essay involves sentences within which the target items are used, the syntactic positioning of these items and the consequent semantic connotations they portray are not left out. It is equally within the analysis of these tasks that the frequency of categories used as well as the learners' error patterns can be evaluated.

As mentioned earlier, adverbs come at the tail end in the acquisition schedule meaning that the other categories including nouns, verbs and adjectives are acquired before adverbs. The

⁵ Though *in* could equally be an adverb in a context like *I stopped by but you were not in*

⁶ The item *around* could equally either be an adverb in *Pass the plate around* or adjective as in *Everyone from my father's generation is still around (alive)* but a preposition in the context above.

heterogeneous nature of this category renders its sub-classification and consequent analysis difficult given that even the prototypical categories still exhibit considerable irregularities. Data analysed in this sub-section is sorted in terms of the predominant sub-category that learners use and the most prototypical categories that they are expected to use.

a) Types of adverbs used in the production task

Comparatively speaking, adverbs had the least frequency rate of occurrence in learners' written and even oral productions. However, looking at the different types of adverbs used, it was realised that adverbs of place and time constituted the most widely used within the category followed by adverbs of frequency. Detailed statistics related to the use of various types of adverbs are presented in the table below beginning with learners in Class Three before moving to those in Class Six.

Table 5. Frequency of Adverb Type Used By Class Three Learners

Adverb Type	Average frequency	No of Scripts/60	Percentage
Manner	0	0	00
Frequency	1	10	16.6
Place and time	2	55	91.6
Degree	1	35	58

The table above indicates that adverbs had a very low frequency rate on learners' scripts. The highest category of adverbs recorded on Class Three learners' scripts constituted those that refer to time and place with an average frequency of 2 on 55 scripts recording 91.6% of the 60 learners. Adverbs of degree and frequency constitute the next category both scoring a minimal average frequency of 1. However, there is a difference in the number of learners who used these adverbs given that only 10 learners used adverbs of frequency while up to 35 learners at the preliminary stage of primary school did use adverbs of degree. Adverbs of manner were completely absent from learners' discourse.

The low frequency of adverbs on learners' scripts can be explained by the basic definition of adverbs as a category that simply modifies verbs, nouns, adjectives and even other adverbs. Of course, learners at this level are still identifying and paying more attention to the general characteristics of items and are not yet at the level in which specifications could be drawn and modifications on items made. It is definitely enough for a learner to know that the class is noisy and not that it is *quite* noisy. This even explains why learners at this level use more of adverbs of time and place since these adverbs do not have the tendency to modify but to express independent concepts or specific issues. Unlike adverbs of manner for example, that may specify how an action is done (for example he walked *slowly*), adverbs of time and place express finalities. In the sentence *He is coming tomorrow*, the adverb *tomorrow* expresses

finality and does not simply modify. The absence of adverbs of degree as well as other categories of adverbs is thus justified by the level of learners.

This situation at the preliminary stage is similar to what was observed at the final stage as the table below indicates.

Table 6. Frequency of Adverb Type Used by Class Six Learners

Adverb Type	Average frequency	No of Scripts/60	Percentage
Manner	0	0	00
Frequency	1	47	78.3
Place and time	2	60	100
Degree	1	37	61.7

Even though the percentage of learners that used various categories of adverbs increased in the final level of primary education, it is worth noting that the average frequency of adverb types used remained the same. Contrary to expectations, Class Six learners still failed to use adverbs of manner with a 00% occurrence. This only confirms the situation observed at the preliminary stage with the simple explanation being that learners are more interested in single items for specific meanings and are not yet prepared to categorise or to extend its embedded meaning. It should equally be recalled that a majority of learners used similar adverbs especially the intensifiers *very* and *so* in many occasions to describe their school in sentences such as; *Our school is very big* etc.

In summary, it is important to indicate that adverbs from conception are prototypically considered subsidiary given that they mostly accompany other categories. Learners may not be overtly held to task here for not using the category. However, for the beauty of language and above all, if we must lead learners to be more specific than simply general especially as they move up the academic ladder, there is need for specialised reinforcement within the context of the classroom in line with behaviourist paradigms so as to enable learners make use of unknown items.

6. Conclusion

From a general perspective, this paper set out to analyse the situation of second language acquisition at the primary level of education in Cameroon with particular attention paid to the acquisition of adverbs by learners of English as a Second Language. The learners' acquisition of this lexical item was evaluated using both structural gap filling tasks, and production or essay tasks. The general observation resulting from the analysis of data is that learners used adverb categories with relatively very low frequencies of occurrence. Typologically speaking,

it was observed that the highest frequency rate of occurrence was observed with items that give pictorial representations in the learners' mind as was the case with adverbs that portray independent than subsidiary meaning. That is why comparatively speaking, adverbs of place and time had a higher frequency rate in learners' written and even oral productions unlike was the case with other adverb categories. Looking at the two proficiency levels from where data was collected (Class Three and Six), the global observation is that most of the characteristics noted at the preliminary stage of education still found expression at the final stage. The difference however, was found in the frequency rate as well as the number of learners, which for the most part was higher in the final level than at the preliminary stage. The specificity of structural gap filling tasks at this level was noticed in that it is with these tasks that memorisation was greatly used as a learning strategy by a good number of learners. This is observable from the fact that a majority of the respondents could conveniently and correctly use some categories in structural gap filling tasks but ironically were unable to use these very items in the production or essay tasks as was the case with a good number of inflections. It is therefore recommended that educators use reinforcement drills during teaching to ensure that learners are inspired to use adverbs in their productions given the necessity not only to sound good but equally given that the semantic subtleties that adverbs add to expressions cannot be neglected.

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