

# ASSESSING THE SO CALLED MARKED INFLECTIONAL FEATURES OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH: A SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORY ACCOUNT

EVALUACIÓN DE LAS LLAMADAS CARACTERÍSTICAS INFLEXIONALES MARCADAS DEL INGLÉS NIGERIANO: UN CASO RELACIONADO CON LA TEORÍA DE ADQUISICIÓN DE UNA SEGUNDA LENGUA

EVALUATION DES TRAITS FLEXIONNELS SAILLANTS DE L'ANGLAIS NIGÉRIEN: UN CAS POUR LA THÉORIE D'ACQUISITION D'UNE LANGUE SECONDE

**Boluwaji Oshodi**

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Kota  
Samarahan Sarawak Malaysia &  
Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba  
Akoko Nigeria Department of  
Linguistics and Languages Adekunle  
Ajasin University  
P. M. B. 001 Akungba Akoko Nigeria  
E-mail: bolu\_oshodi@yahoo.com

## ABSTRACT

There are conflicting claims among scholars on whether the structural outputs of the types of English spoken in countries where English is used as a second language gives such speech forms the status of varieties of English. This study examined those morphological features considered to be marked features of the variety spoken in Nigeria according to Kirkpatrick (2011) and the variety spoken in Malaysia by considering the claims of the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (MSIH) a Second Language Acquisition theory which accounts for the cause of the variable use of such inflections among L2 learners. Results from oral and written composition tasks administered on selected undergraduate students of Nigerian and Malaysian universities revealed that what is regarded as morphological features are actually a deviation from the L2 target forms. According to the MSIH the variability in the use of such inflections is due to problems of lexical retrieval a psycholinguistic problem which manifests among L2 learners of English generally which results in wrong surface representations.

**Keywords:** varieties of English, second language, inflections, interlanguage

## RESUMEN

Existen posturas contrarias entre los estudiosos con respecto a si las características estructurales de los tipos de inglés que se hablan en países donde éste se utiliza como segunda lengua les da el estatus de variante. Esta investigación analiza dichas características morfológicas consideradas como marcadas en el inglés que se habla en Nigeria tal y como lo establece Kirpatrick (2011) y la variante de inglés que se habla en Malaysia considerando los presupuestos de la Hipótesis de Inflexión Superficial Ausente (MSIH, por sus siglas en inglés), una teoría de adquisición de segunda lengua que da cuenta de la causa del uso variable de dichas inflexiones entre los aprendices de L2. Resultados de tareas de producción oral y escrita asignadas a estudiantes de pregrado de universidades en Nigeria y Malasia muestran que las que se consideran características morfológicas son de hecho desviaciones de las formas de la L2. De acuerdo a la MSIH, la variabilidad de tales inflexiones se debe a los problemas de recuperación léxica, un problema

psicolingüístico que se manifiesta entre los aprendices de inglés como L2, dando generalmente como resultado representaciones superficiales erróneas.

**Palabras clave:** variantes del inglés, segunda lengua, inflexiones, interlenguaje.

### RÉSUMÉ

Il existe des perspectives contraires quant au statut à donner aux variétés de l'anglais qui se manifestent par des *output* structurels manifestés dans des types d'anglais parlés dans des pays où l'anglais est utilisé comme langue seconde. Cette étude analyse les traits morphologiques considérés selon Kirkpatrick (2011) comme traits saillants de la variété de l'anglais parlé au Nigeria. Elle s'intéresse aussi à la variété de l'anglais parlée en Malaisie en s'appuyant sur les hypothèses des inflexions absentes en surface (MSIH), une théorie d'acquisition de langue seconde qui prend en compte la cause des variations d'usage de ces inflexions chez les apprenants d'une langue seconde. Les résultats de tâches orales et écrites appliquées à des étudiants nigériens et malaisiens en licence ont montré que les traits morphologiques sont en fait un écart par rapport aux formes de la langue seconde. Selon la théorie MSIH, les variations quant à l'emploi de ces inflexions sont dues aux difficultés pour récupérer le lexique, difficulté psycholinguistique qui se présente généralement chez des apprenants de l'anglais langue seconde et dont la cause est les représentations de surface inexactes.

**Mots-clés:** variétés de l'anglais, langue seconde, inflexions, interlangue.

## Introduction

A lot of writers have written about the existence of varieties of English which have been given different names like world Englishes, New Englishes, Modern Englishes, etc. Some have even made reference to the fact that a variety known as Nigerian English (NE) actually exists, such linguists include Alo & Mesthrie (2008), Adebija (1989), Adetugbo (1979), Bamiro (1991), Kachru (1987, 1992a), Kujore (1985), Salami (1968), and Gut & Fuchs (2013). According to Ogu (1992), Walsh (1967) was among the first to draw attention to the existence of a variety of English Language known as “Nigerian English” (NE henceforth). Ogu (1992) quoted Walsh as saying that: “The varieties of English spoken by educated Nigerians, no matter what their language, have enough features in common to mark off a general type, which may be called Nigerian English” (p. 88).

Kirkpatrick (2011) observed that NE has some marked features, which distinguish it from other Englishes. Some of these so called marked features involved the “omission” and “misuse” of those inflections found in the area of ‘inflectional morphology’ which are used for tense marking, such as *—s* on third person singular verb, *—ed* which expresses past, *—ing* which shows continuous and *—en* which is used for past participle. These inflectional morphemes are sometimes omitted and misused by Nigerian L2 English in obligatory contexts (i.e. contexts in which adult native speakers of English would use them).

According to the Encyclopedia of Malaysian Languages and Literature (2004), Malaysia English can be categorized into three types; *Collector*, *Mesolithic* and *Basile* while Roslie & Ting Su Hie (1994) also grouped it into three; ME Type I, ME Type II and Colloquial Malaysian English (CME). The above observation by Roslie & Ting Su Hie also affirms that in Malaysia just like in Nigeria a variety of English peculiar to Malaysian L2 English also exists. This simply implies that the above scholars see the kinds of English spoken in these contexts (Nigeria and

Malaysia) which are regarded as deviant forms of Received Pronunciation (RP) in this present study as having certain features, which qualify them as varieties of English. It is this issue that this study seeks to address with particular focus on certain inflections that are said to constitute a feature in the claimed Nigerian variety.

## The Markedness Concept in L2 Acquisition

Markedness has been employed in various senses in SLA literature. According to McCarthy (2007), “unmarked” forms in L2 are thought to be those that are more basic or general, use less structure, are acquired first, and are typologically more frequent, whereas “marked” forms are more complex, use more structure, are acquired late, and are typologically more rare (Battistella, 1990, p. 3). There is considerable difficulty in defining this term. McCarthy (2007) observed that markedness can be defined in terms of meaning and distribution. Thus the focus will be on the meanings of morphology, rather than on morpho-phonology. Markedness theory deals with oppositions in language. From early studies in structural linguistics (e.g. Jakobson 1984), oppositions in language are very often not best characterized as mere opposites. Instead, one term within an opposed pair is more general than the other. The more general term is unmarked, whereas the more complex term is marked. Thus, unmarked forms have a dual function: they can mean the opposite of a marked term, but they can also mean the absence of signalization of the marked term. An example from tense that comes from Battistella (1990, pp. 3-4) is given below.

- 1 (a) I wear sneakers.
- (b) I arrive home Sunday
- (c) So then I say to him, “Shut up!”

Examples (1a-c) show that past and present tenses do not behave as mere opposites. Instead, past tense unambiguously signals past time, whereas the present tense is not necessarily specified for time. In (a) example, present tense demonstrates a

range of temporal meanings: it is used to indicate a habitual reading that is independent of time. Examples (b) and (c) show how to signal the future, and to signal the past respectively.

If the above definition and explanation of markedness is applied to the context in which it was used by Kirkpatrick (2011) in defence of such features as peculiar to NE, it implies that the verbal inflections (*—s*, *—ed*, *—ing* and *—en*) are more complex, use more structure, are acquired late, and are typologically more rare than other morphological features in the interlanguage grammar of Nigerian L2 English. It would also imply that such features are restricted only to Nigerian L2 English and should not be found among any other L2 speakers of English from other L2 settings i.e. countries.

### Tense Marking and Agreement in English Yorùbá and Malay

The identified inflections (*—s*, *—ed*, *—ing* and *—en*) are all distinct morphemes attached to root verbs to indicate various tenses in English. According to Yusuf (1998), tense is a feature marked in all languages of the world. However, the pattern and the features involved vary from one language to the other. For a clear picture of the issue under discussion, we shall briefly examine the pattern of tense marking and agreement relations in the three languages in focus in this study i.e. English, Yorùbá and Malay.

In English, tense is marked with inflections on verbs, consider the following examples:

1. John **work-s** in the garden (simple present tense)
2. John is **work-ing** in the garden (present continuous tense)
3. John **work-ed** in the garden (past tense)

Examples (1-3) contain verbs with regular inflection. Example (2) also reflects subject-verb agreement, consider the following examples:

4. John and Mary **eat** everyday (simple present tense)

5. John **has eat-en** rice (past participle)
6. John and Mary **have eat-en** rice (past participle)

In (4), the verb *eat* is uninflected because the subject Noun Phrase (NP)<sup>1</sup> is plural (John and Mary). In (5) the auxiliary *has* (singular) was used alongside the inflected verb *eaten* because the subject (John) is singular while in (6), the auxiliary verb *have* (plural) was used because of the plural subject (John and Mary). However, in both Yorùbá<sup>2</sup> and Malay<sup>3</sup> verbs are never inflected for tense marking and there is no agreement relation between subjects and verbs, consider the following examples in table 1:

**Table-1** Pattern of tense marking in Yorùbá and Malay

Yorùbá	Malay
1. (a) Òjọ́ lẹ́ sí oko Òjọ́ go to farm 'Òjọ́ went to the farm'	(b) Nora pergi ke kebun Nora go to farm 'Nora went to the farm'
2. (a) Òjọ́ ní lẹ́ sí oko Òjọ́ CONT go to farm 'Òjọ́ is going to the farm'	(b) Nora pergi ke kebun Nora go to farm 'Nora is going to the farm'
3. (a) Òjọ́ á lẹ́ sí oko Òjọ́ FUT go to farm 'Òjọ́ will go to the farm'	(b) Nora akan pergi ke kebun Nora will go to farm 'Nora will go the farm'
4. (a) Òjọ́ ati Tífí lẹ́ si oko Òjọ́ and Tífí go to farm 'Òjọ́ and Tífí went to the farm'	(b) Nora dan Amza pergi ke kebun Nora and Amza go to farm 'Nora and Amza went to the farm'

*Note.* CONT = continuous tense marker. FUT = future tense marker

- 1 The Noun Phrase (NP) is always the subject (performer) or object (receiver) of the action described in the sentence it could be a noun or pronoun.
- 2 Yorùbá is one of the three national languages in Nigeria; it is the native language of the Nigerian subjects
- 3 Malay is the national as well as official language in Malaysia; it is the native language of the Malaysian subjects

In examples (1a-4b), the verbs *lọ* 'go' (Yorùbá) and *pergi* 'go' (Malay) remain the same without being inflected in all contexts of tense marking, simple present in (1a and b), present continuous tense in (2a and b) and future tense in (3 a and b) while in (4 a and b), there is no agreement relationship between subject Noun Phrases (NPs) and the verbs as the verbs *lọ* and *pergi* 'go' remain the same even when the subject NPs (*Ójó and Títí*) in the Yorùbá sentences and (*Nora and Hamza*) in the Malay sentences were plural. These examples show that the concept of tense marking through inflections and agreement relations which are attested in English are lacking in both Yorùbá and Malay as shown in examples (1-6). The above examples also revealed the significant and clear differences in tense and agreement concepts as they operate in English, Yorùbá and Malay.

### A Second Language Acquisition Theory Account

It should be noted that the above morphemes identified by Kirkpatrick (2011) as marked features of Nigerian English have been identified in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) circle as having variable use in the interlanguage grammars of second language (L2) learners of English (Lardiere 1998a, & 1998b) and Hazenadar (2007) with subjects who have Chinese and Turkish as L1. According to Prevost and White (2000) and McCarthy (2007), similar inflectional morphemes which mark tenses in inflectional languages like French and Spanish have also been identified in the interlanguage grammars of L2 learners of these languages; the phenomenon is known in SLA literature as *morphological variability*. It involves the misuse, overuse as well as omission of such morphemes by L2 learners in their attempt to acquire the L2 morphological inflections. According to Selinker (1972), this type of grammar produced by L2 learners which is in between the L1 and the target L2 a cognitive creation of L2 learners en-route the L2 target form is known as interlanguage grammar.

Various hypotheses have been proposed to account for the phenomenon of morphological variability particularly the likely cause of what has come to be regarded as a "phenomenon" (McCarthy 2007: 4) among L2 learners which cuts across every level of L2 learners including advanced and near native ones as observed by Prevost and White (2000). One of the hypotheses that have received a lot of attention in terms of evaluation of this particular concept is the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (MSIH). This hypothesis shall be evaluated in the next section.

### The Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis

The MSIH was developed by Haznedar and Schwartz (1997) and has been propagated by SLA scholars Like Prevost and White (2000), Lardiere (1998a and b), Ionin and Wexler (2002) and Geckin and Hazenadar (2008). The MSIH claims that second language learners' (adults) interlanguage grammars are not impaired<sup>4</sup>. It claims that abstract properties may be present in the interlanguage grammar without being systematically realized morphologically. More specifically, L2 learners may have problems accessing morphology or mapping morphology and syntax. This view also holds that infinitival forms are used as default finite forms, which imply that verbs that look nonfinite on the surface may occur in finite positions. In simple terms, the MSIH claims that adult L2 learners have access to Universal Grammar<sup>5</sup> (UG)

4 The MSIH was actually proposed as a contradictory response to the FFFH (Failed Functional Feature Hypothesis) of (Beck 1998). The FFFH claims that L2 learners exhibit inflectional variability due to syntactic impairment i.e. their inability to acquire those inflections features which were not instantiated in their L1

5 According to Chomsky (1986) Universal Grammar (UG) is defined as a complex abstract system of grammatical knowledge bridged by an innate mental faculty that is part of the human unique biological endowment that is designed purposely for the task of language acquisition known as LAD (Language Acquisition Device). This language faculty is what is referred to as Universal Grammar. UG is assumed to be fully active among L1

and are not limited to only those features and parameters instantiated in their L1. It is assumed that L2 learners have unconscious knowledge of the functional projections and feature values underlying Tense, Agreement, Number, and Determiner. However, they exhibit variability with respect to inflectional morphology either through omission or making inappropriate substitution of one kind of inflection for another. The underlying syntactic representations are correct, however, the resulting surface functional morphology is not target-like due to surface mapping problems (Slabakova 2009: 280). In other words failure to produce consistent inflection is attributed to difficulties in accessing the relevant lexical items by which inflection is realized particularly in oral production due to communicative pressure.

The implication of the above observation by the MSIH is that what is being regarded as a feature of Nigerian English actually emanated due to L2 acquisition factors. This means that such factors are not peculiar to Nigerian learners and users of English as L2 alone but to all learners and users of English as L2 generally. This study attempts to verify and substantiate the claim of the MSIH by examining production and comprehension data obtained from two separate groups of L2 learners of English with each group comprising of Nigerian and Malaysian<sup>6</sup> undergraduate university students who all acquired and use English as L2.

## Methodology

This section presents and discusses the procedures involved in the research design. It introduces and expatiates on the research question, the

---

acquiring children while its role among adults acquiring L2 is controversial

6 The Malaysian data were specifically added in order to draw a comparison with the Nigerian data which would enable us to make categorical statement about the true status of the inflectional elements in general terms as regards whether their pattern of occurrence in the Nigerian speech variety truly constitutes a feature peculiar to Nigerian L2 English

background of the subjects, as well as the method of data collection and analysis.

## General Objective

The general objective of this study is to examine the occurrence of the verbal inflectional morphemes (*-s*, *-ing*, *-ed* and *-en*) in the speech patterns of adult L2 English from Nigeria and Malaysia to see if such features are truly peculiar to the Nigerian group in order to verify whether or not they are features of Nigerian English or they are universal features of L2 learners of English.

## Research Question

The main research question which this study seeks to answer is: do the missing overt inflections on verbs in the interlanguage grammars of Nigerian L2 English constitute marked feature which is peculiar to Nigerian English alone?

To answer this question, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Those acclaimed marked inflectional features should occur only in the interlanguage grammars of Nigerian L2 English.

This hypothesis would be tested with two sets of data collected from Nigerian and Malaysian university undergraduate students who have English as their L2.

## Sampling

The data for this study were collected from twenty subjects, ten (10) Nigerian University undergraduate students in Nigeria and ten (10) Malaysian undergraduate students in Malaysia. The Nigerian subjects have Yorùbá as their native language (L1). All the Malaysian subjects have Malay as their L1. Two types of data were collected and examined: oral and written. For the oral data, the participants were each given different topics and were given two weeks to collect facts on them after which they made oral presentations on the given topic in the classroom. The participants

were all adult L2 learners above twenty years who already had a full and perfect knowledge of their L1s. They had studied English for over ten years in formal contexts when these data were collected.

**Table-2** Profile of Subjects

Subject Groups	M	F	Age Range	L1	L2
Nigerian Subjects	6	4	21-24 (mean=22)	Yorùbá	English
Malaysian Subjects	7	3	19-23 (mean=21)	Malay	English

*Note.* *n* = 20 *M* = male. *F* = female. *L1* = first language. *L2* = second language.

**Instrument**

The production test consisted of various topics which include: My faculty, My Department, My Course of study, My University, among others. Each subject was given twenty minutes to make the presentation in class in the presence of their colleagues. The comprehension data were collected through a short written composition on the topic “A day I will never forget”; it was conducted in the class and lasted for a period of 45 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

For data analysis, focus was on the suppliance of the inflectional morphemes i.e. *-s*, *-ed*, *-ing*, and *-en* in obligatory contexts. The inflections were scored as correct when they were used correctly in obligatory contexts and scored incorrect whenever they were omitted or incorrectly supplied in obligatory contexts.

**Results**

The main results which interest us have to do with the pattern and the systematicity of suppliance of the inflections particularly as they occur in the interlanguage grammars of the two groups of Nigerian and Malaysian subjects and not really their frequency of occurrence. However, the results based on the frequency of occurrence of the target inflections were calculated and presented in percentages for each group with focus on the percentage of *inaccurate suppliance* in obligatory contexts. This is done to establish the actual knowledge of these inflections as exhibited in the interlanguage grammars of all subjects. The results are presented below in tables 3 and 4.

**Table-3** Inaccurate suppliance of verbal inflections in percentage (oral production test)

Verbal Inflections	Nigerian Subjects			Malaysian Subjects		
	Correct	Incorrect	%	Correct	Incorrect	%
-3psg -s	482	298	(38.2)	149	157	(51.3)
-ed (regular)	420	85	(16.8)	275	101	(26.9)
-ed (irregular)	381	140	(26.9)	113	146	(56.4)
-ing	464	75	(13.9)	239	88	(26.9)
-en	265	73	(21.6)	70	72	(50.7)
Total	2012	671		846	564	
%			(25%)			(40%)

*Note.* *3psg* = third person singular, *ed* = past tense marker, *ing* = continuous tense marker, *en* = past participle, % = percentage, *correct* = number of correct suppliance of inflections, *incorrect* = number of incorrect suppliance of inflections

**Table-4** Inaccurate suppliance of verbal inflections in percentage (written composition test)

Verbal Inflections	Nigerian Subjects			Malaysian Subjects		
	Correct	Incorrect	%	Correct	Incorrect	%
-3psg —s	363	154	(29.7)	165	121	(42.3)
-ed (regular)	321	35	(9.8)	168	89	(34.6)
-ed (irregular)	301	105	(25.9)	119	122	(50.6)
-ing	345	33	(8.7)	199	91	(31.3)
-en	158	41	(20.6)	49	64	(56.6)
Total	1488	368		700	487	
%			(24%)			(69%)

*Note.* 3psg = third person singular. *ed* = past tense marker. *ing* = continuous tense marker. *en* = past participle. % = percentage. *correct* = number of correct suppliance of inflections. *incorrect* = number of incorrect suppliance of inflections

Table 5 shows the examples of the pattern of occurrence of the inflections (i.e. their wrong suppliance in obligatory contexts) from all the 20 subjects involved in this study with examples taken from both the oral and written production tasks.

**Table 5** Examples of the pattern of occurrence of the inflections in the oral and written production tasks

Oral Production Data (Nigerian Subjects)		
1.(a) They have not *eat... (eaten)	(b) I have bought my books	(Subject 2)
2.(a) God *have deposited... (has)	(b) I have bought my books	(subject 4)
3.(a) The two people who *knows... (know)	(b) My HOD speaks very well	(subject 6)
4.(a) Those people that *was able... (were)	(b) They were at the meeting	(subject 8)
5.(a) Òjò *drink beer every time (drinks)	(b) My friend likes me a lot	(subject 10)
Written Composition Data (Nigerian Subjects)		
6. After I have *pass... my examination (passed)		(subject 1)
7. The security man *shout at me (shouted)		(subject 3)
8. I don't know why he *love my school (loves)		(subject 5)
9. After he has *take the drug (taken)		(subject 7)
10. I *discover that my friend *lie to me (discovered, lied)		(subject 9)
Oral Production Data (Malaysian Subjects)		
11.(a) Do you like *eat rice (eating)	(b) I like eating rice	(subject 1)
12. (a) My friend not *take her dinner yet (taken)	(b) I have taken my dinner (subj3)	(subject 3)
13. (a) Me and my friend *likes rice (like)	(b) I like rice	(subject 5)



14. (a) Have you *see my friend ( <i>seen</i> )	(b) I have <i>seen</i> my friend	(subject 7)
15. (a) When I *get here last year ( <i>got</i> )	(b) I <i>got</i> home late that day	(subject 9)
<b>Written Composition Data (Malaysian Subjects)</b>		
16. The man *call me back ( <i>called</i> )		(Subject 2)
17. I *ask for direction to the office ( <i>asked</i> )		(Subject 4)
18. I *ask why he *talk to me like that ( <i>asked, talked</i> )		(subject 6)
19. He has *tell me already ( <i>told</i> )		(subject 8)
20. The man *show me the road to my faculty ( <i>showed</i> )		(subject 10)

Note: The words with the asterisc indicate a misuse i.e. inaccurate suppliance of the inflection in this context i.e. in an obligatory context.

### Findings

It was observed from the frequency of suppliance of the inflections that the rate of correct suppliance exceeded the rate of incomplete suppliance (at least in most cases), for example in table 3 (oral production) the overall rate of inaccurate suppliance for the Nigerian subjects was 25% and 40% for the Malaysian subjects while in table 4 (written composition) the overall rate of inaccurate suppliance was 24.7% for the Nigerian subjects and 69.5% for the Malaysian subjects. In spite of the inaccurate level of suppliance which was still high particularly among the Malaysian subjects, the level of accuracy in obligatory contexts clearly showed that both the Nigerian and Malaysian subjects have the knowledge of the English inflections in their language faculty and their target was to supply the inflections in all obligatory contexts and the inaccurate suppliance was due to some factors one of which was evaluated in this study as proposed by the MSIH.

However, based on the major aim of this study which is to verify whether the inflections investigated are actually features of Nigerian English or such features exist in the interlanguage grammars of other L2 English, for instance Malaysian L2 English, the focus would be to establish whether there are similarities or differences in the pattern of occurrence i.e. suppliance of these so called marked features (inflections) in the interlanguage

grammars of the two groups of subjects as shown in both oral production and written data.

The various examples revealed that the Nigerian subjects committed errors of omission and inaccurate suppliance of these inflections in obligatory contexts. However, in the same discourse as shown in the (b) examples in the examples cited under the oral composition data, the same subjects constructed sentences in which the inflectional morphemes were correctly supplied in obligatory contexts. One important observation noticed in the examples of both the Nigerian and Malaysian subjects in both oral production and written composition was that similar errors committed by the Nigerian subjects were also committed by the Malaysian subjects in the same contexts; again like their Nigerian counterparts as shown in the (b) examples under oral production, they still constructed sentences in the same discourse where the inflections were accurately supplied. Most importantly, it was discovered from the examples given that all the twenty subjects committed error of morphological variability at a point in the course of supplying the inflections in either oral or written form.

### Discussion

The main objective of this study is to verify whether the missing inflections on the verbs actually constitute a feature which is peculiar to a particular group of

learners of English as L2 i.e. Nigerian learners of English as claimed by the likes of Kirkpatrick. From the data, the assertion that they are marked features of Nigerian English appears faulty and cannot be substantiated. For example, if the inconsistent suppliance of the inflections actually constitutes a feature peculiar to Nigerian L2 English speakers alone as claimed by Kirkpatrick (2011), similar inconsistent use would not have been found in the interlanguage grammar of Malaysian L2 English as well. However, the same forms of omission and inaccurate suppliance of the inflections exhibited by the Nigerian subjects were also exhibited by the Malaysian subjects in virtually the same contexts of occurrence. As observed by the MSIH, the variable use of inflections among L2 learners of English is not peculiar to verbs alone but also occurs on nouns Lardiere (1998a) and White (2003) as L2 learners usually inflect them variably (sometimes they do sometimes they don't) for plural marking.

24

The above facts have made it clear that what Kirkpatrick (2011) referred to as marked features of Nigerian English (in the area of inflectional morphology) with respect to the inconsistent suppliance of the overt inflections in obligatory contexts are actually deviations from the target L2 forms as established by the MSIH to be purely due to L2 acquisition issues. The MSIH makes it clear that, those inflections were omitted but not deliberately, and the fact that they were supplied correctly in other similar contexts (see the tables and various examples cited above) clearly supports the claim of the MSIH as regards the reason for this inconsistency.

The non-suppliance came as a result of pressure of retrieving the inflections from their language faculty which led to their inability to map those inflections to the surface level bearing in mind that both Yorùbá and Malay which are the L1s of the participants do not inflect verbs for tense (see examples 8-11) and since they already have the full knowledge of their L1s, configuring and retrieving new features from their language faculty usually present some difficulties for them. Also, the MSIH rightly claim that while present

morphemes would occur in past contexts, past morphemes are not expected to occur in present contexts, this was shown in the omission of the use of the third person singular –s on verbs as well as the use of present tense verbs in past contexts but not the other way round; past tense verbs were not used in present contexts.

The conceptual issue from the standpoint of SLA which is being propagated through the MSIH is that, the Nigerian L2 English have problems with the inflections because their L1 does not inflect verbs for tense marking. Since learners have the tendency to learn differently they also have the tendency to exhibit different interlanguage grammars. Selinker (1972) refers to interlanguage as “the intermediate states or intermediate grammars of a learner’s language as it moves towards the target language. It is a product of a creative process driven by inner forces and interaction, influenced by L1 and input from the target language”. The interlanguage has some peculiar characteristics which include frequent changes, it is governed by some innate rules as well as the L1; it also reduces complex grammaticality in form. Above all, it is used for a smaller range of communicative needs. The fact that the interlanguage grammar exhibits frequent changes as well as reduces complex grammaticality confirmed the claim of the MSIH and also explains why both the Nigerian and Malaysian L2 English omitted and misused the inflections in certain obligatory contexts.

Slabakova (2009) observed that the variable use of inflections which was erroneously tagged marked features of Nigerian English by the likes of Kirkpatrick is actually a deviation from the target L2 form. Slabakova believes it is an issue which has to do with how L2 learners process such features in their language faculty and try to configure them correctly to the surface representation something which usually presents problems because their L1 is always active in the process.

### Conclusion

In this study, an attempt was made to investigate the claim that the inconsistent use of certain

morphological inflections constitutes a feature which marks them as a variety of English peculiar to Nigerian L2 English. However, the comparison of results from data collected from adults L2 English in Nigeria and Malaysia two L2 English contexts clearly revealed that the claim of Kirkpatrick (2011) cannot be substantiated as it was confirmed that such variable use of inflection is not peculiar to Nigerian L2 English alone. It is a form of interlanguage grammar peculiar to all second language learners of English whose L1 lacks inflections and definitely not a feature of “Nigerian English”.

The issue of the existence of Nigerian English has been a contentious issue among scholars, while writers like Adegbija (1989), Bamiro (1991), Alo & Mesthrie (2008) and Gut & Fuchs (2013) believe it does exist there are those who vehemently oppose its existence, scholars like Theo Vincent (1974), sees it as “bad English.” Likewise, Salami (1968) contends that what has been identified as Nigerian English is in reality “errors of usage.” Thus, the position taken by writers such as Salami (1968) and Theo Vincent (1974) that what is considered as features of Nigerian English (at least in the area of inflectional morphology) is indeed an error of usage. This is evident with facts from the variable use of morphological inflections which cuts across different L2 learners and users of English as revealed in this study by the data from adult Malaysian L2 English. However, there is the need to examine other grammatical areas in order to make a categorical statement on this issue.

## References

- Adegbija, E. (1989). Lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English, *World Englishes*. Vol. 8, No.2, pp. 165-177.
- Adetugbo, A. (1979). Appropriateness in Nigerian English & Nigerian English and communicative competence. In E. Ubahakwe (Ed.), *Varieties and functions of English in Nigeria*, pp. 137-165 & 167-183 respectively. Ibadan: African Universities Press.
- Alo, M., & Mesthrie, R. (2008). Nigerian English: morphology and syntax. In R. Mesthrie, (Ed.), *Varieties of English, Africa, South and Southeast Asia*, (pp. 323-339). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bamiro, E. (1991). Nigerian Englishes in Nigerian English literature, *World Englishes*. Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 7-17.
- Bamiro, E. (1991). The social and functional power of Nigerian English, *World Englishes*. Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 275-286.
- Battistella, E. L. (1990). *Markedness: The evaluative superstructure of language*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1986). Knowledge of language: its origin, nature and use. New York, Praeger.
- Geckin, V., & Hazenadar, B. (2008). The morphology/syntax interface in child L2 acquisition: evidence from verbal morphology. *Current trends in child second language acquisition: A generative perspective*. In B. Haznedar & E. Gavrusseva (Eds.), 237-270. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gut, U., & Fuchs, R. (2013). Progressive aspect in Nigerian English. *Journal of English Linguistics* 41(3), 243-276.
- Hazenadar, B. (2007). The acquisition of tense-aspect in child language English. *Second Language Research* 23, (4) 383-417.
- Haznedar, B., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Are there optional infinitives in child L2 acquisition? *In Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> annual Boston University conference on language development*. In E. Hughs, & A. Greenhill (Eds.), 257-268. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.
- Ionin, T., & Wexler, K. (2002). Why is ‘is’ easier than ‘-s’? Acquisition of tense/agreement morphology by child second language learners of English. *Second Language Research*, 18, 95-136.
- Jakobson, R. (1984). Shifters, verbal categories and the Russian verb. *Selected writings, Vol. 2: Word and Language*, 130-147. The Hague: Mouton.
- Kachru, B. (1987). The alchemy of English: The speed, functions and models of non-native Englishes, *World Englishes*. Vol. 8, No. 2, pp.239-241. Reviewed. by J. Fishman.
- Kachru, B. (1992a). World Englishes. In *Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2011). World Englishes. In J. Simpson (Ed.), *Handbook of Applied Linguistics*. London: Routledge: 373-387.
- Kujore, O. (1985). *English usage: Some notable Nigerian variations*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers Ltd.
- Lardiere, D. (1998a). Case and tense in fossilized steady state grammar. *Second Language Research*, 14, 1-26.

- Lardiere, D. (1998b). Dissociating syntax from morphology in a divergent L2 end-state grammar. *Second Language Research*, 14, 359-375.
- McCarthy, C. L. (2007). Morphological variability in second language Spanish. PhD Dissertation. Department of Linguistics McGill University Montreal Canada.
- Ogu, J. (1992). *A Historical survey of English and the Nigerian situation*. Lagos: Krafts Books Ltd.
- Omar, A. (Ed.). (2004). *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Languages & literature*. (9 Vol.). Michigan: Archipelago Press.
- Prevost, P., & White, L. (2000). Missing surface inflection or impairment in second language acquisition? Evidence from tense and agreement. *Second Language Research*, 16, 103-133.
- Roslie, T., & Ting, Su Hie, (1994). Malaysian English: Exploring the possibility of standardization. *Pertanika Journal of social science and humanities*, Vol, 2, (1). 69-76.
- Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 10, 209-231.
- Salami, A. (1968). Defining a standard Nigerian English. *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association* (2)1, 99-106.
- Slabakova, R. (2009). What is easy and what is hard to acquire in a second language. In *Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> generative approaches to second language acquisition conference*. In M. Bowles, T. Ionin, S. Montrul, & A. Tremblay, (Eds.), 280-294. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Walsh, N. (1967). Distinguishing types and varieties of English in Nigeria. *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association* (2)2, 47-55.
- White, L. (2003). *Second language acquisition and universal grammar*. Cambridge University Press.

**How to reference this article:** Oshodi, B. (2014). Assessing the so Called Marked Inflectional Features of Nigerian English: A Second Language Acquisition Theory Account. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 19(1), 15-26.