

- 7 Walt Wolfram, The Study of Social Dialects in American English (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 90.
- 8 Ibid. p. 91.
- 9 Ibid. p. 153.
- 10 Ibid. p. 151.
- 11 Ibid. p. 158.
- 12 Ibid. p. 162
- 13 Robert Lado, Language Testing: The Construction and Use of Foreign Language Tests (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962), p. 149.

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the first sentences to answer the past context questions. The informant who lived in the United States longer answered with proper verb forms more frequently. However, since this is the only thing which support the hypothesis among all the data we have studied, we cannot say anything definite with it.

As a conclusion, it is evident that this study does not support the hypothesis. But we have been able to deduce two interesting things from this study. One is that when your native tongue is not an inflected language, no matter how many years you may stay in an English-speaking country, you will not improve your English so far as verb and noun inflection is concerned without studying and practicing it carefully by yourself. The other is that if you start living in an English-speaking country when you are an adolescent, it is possible that you will acquire nonstandard English inflection.

It may be too soon to deduce them only from this study, as Robert Lado has mentioned, "We should keep in mind that not all the speakers of a language will have exactly the same amount of difficulty with each problem. Personal differences rule out such a possibility."¹³ But in order to help students learn English, further study should be done on how English inflection is learned and used by foreign students whose native language does not have inflection, for as Robert Lado has written, the students' mistakes are quite stable and predictable for each language background.¹⁴

Notes

1 Inflected Language is the language whose words or parts of words are arranged in formally similar sets consisting of a root, or base, and various affixes which carries certain grammatical restrictions with it; for example, with the plural inflection -s, a change from singular to plural in the noun 'tree/trees' requires a concomitant change in the verb form from singular to plural: "the tree is green" "the trees are green." (The New Columbia Encyclopedia, p. 1338.)

2 Japanese language does not have any inflection for nouns and pronouns. Verbs in Japanese are inflected but they exhibit such a high degree of agglutination that Japanese language is not called inflective language.

3 Inflection of verbs is called conjugation and noun inflection is called declension.

4 Robert Lado, Language Testing: The Construction and Use of Foreign Language Tests (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962), p. 146.

5 Jane W. Torrey, "Second-Language Learning" In The Learning of Language, Ed. Carroll E. Reed. (New York: Meredith Corporation), P. 224.

6 Mario Pei, How to Learn Languages and What Languages to Learn (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 90.

probably the English language that Informant E's peers spoke was not standard English, as W. Walfram has said that the 10 to 17-year-old people use more stigmatized forms than adults and that during the adolescent years, the use of socially stigmatized forms may be expected to be at maximum.⁸ In this way Informant E seems to have learned American English nonstandard dialect, grammar features of which include absence of third-person singular '-s' and regularization of irregular verbs. W. Wolfram has written about suffix '-s' as follows:

In every American English nonstandard dialect the standard -s (or -es) suffix marking nonpast tense when the subject of the sentence is third-person singular is variably absent. It is usually also the case that sentences in the nonpast tense with subjects other than third-person singular do sometimes have the suffix.⁹

And concerning regularization of irregular verbs he has said as follows:

Another phenomenon involving irregular verbs is a tendency to regularize some of them. Verbs that are irregular in Standard English are given regular -ed past forms occasionally by some nonstandard speakers.¹⁰

During the 15-minute interview, Informant E spoke sentences like "If China don't take over Taiwan, I may go back," four times, sentences like "Anything you wants to do," twice, and sentences like "She goed back," twice, though other informants (B, C, and D) made the first kind of mistakes not more than once, and never made the second or third kind of mistakes. Therefore, it may be possible to say that Informant E has acquired American English nonstandard dialect since she started living in the United States in her adolescent days when children's speech is said to be much influenced by their peers.

Now that we, beyond expectation, have been able to think and study speech of a foreign student who came to the United States in her early teens, we can add another thing which is unique on her, that is to say, she spoke sentences without necessary verbs and sentences with needless be-verbs most frequently. Probably this is also due to her learning English from her peers in her adolescent years, as W. Wolfram has said that in some nonstandard English dialect, contracted forms of auxiliary 'has', 'have', 'had', 'will', 'would', 'am', 'are', and 'is' can be deleted,¹¹ and 'ain't' is used where Standard English has 'haven't' or 'hasn't' and where Standard English would have 'didn't'.¹²

Among all the outcomes of this study, there is only one thing that follows the hypothesis, that is, how frequently the informant answered with proper verb forms in

that staying in the English-speaking country does not produce any effect in speaking with correct verb inflection. That can also be said about plural inflection of nouns. Although one informant (Informant B) used the indefinite article 'a' and the plural suffix '-s' fairly correctly (the frequency of wrong usage was 36%), all the rest of the informants omitted the necessary plural suffix '-s' and the indefinite article 'a' or added needless '-s' and 'a' quite often, the frequency of them being very high and very close to each other (between 60% and 67%). Therefore, it is found that no matter how many years the foreign student may stay in an English-speaking country, he does not improve the correct usage of verb and noun inflection.

The second point that does not support the hypothesis is Informant E's mistakes which are quite different from the others'. Although Informant E has lived and studied in the United States for the longest period of all the five informants, the frequencies of her making mistakes about the suffix '-s' of the third-person singular and regularization of irregular verbs were greatest of all. There seems to be an important reason for that, that is, Informant E's background which is very different from the other informants': not only that she is more than five years younger than the others, but also that she began to live in the United States when she was fourteen years old, which is almost ten years earlier than the other informants. And two factors in this unique background of hers seem to have made Informant E's speech different from the other informants'.

First, although all the rest of the informants came to the United States after finishing their college study in their country, where they learned a lot of English grammar including verb and noun inflection as one of the most important things in foreign language learning, Informant E is assumed to have learned English grammar in the United States not in the way of learning foreign language grammar but in the way of learning native language grammar in the same class with native American students who have already learned when to use suffix '-s' and other basic grammar in their elementary school days or who may have learned those basic things from their mothers before going to school. Therefore, she might have missed the chance to learn fundamental English grammar, especially verb inflection as an exact rule.

Secondly, since she came to the United States while young, she could easily get adapted to the new language, but probably the language she learned was the one which American young people use. Young people usually speak like their friends do, as W. Wolfram has written, "During the pre-adolescent and adolescent years, a child learns a local dialect that is primarily that of his immediate peers. The emphasis on peer influence on speech cannot be underestimated. There is clear-cut evidence that adolescents desire to talk like their peers and there is considerable peer pressure to do so."⁷ And

TABLE 12
VERB AND NOUN INFLECTION MISTAKES

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Absence of verb & use of needless 'be'	9 %	4 %	4 %	5 %	13 %
Absence of third-person singular '-s' & use of needless '-s' suffix	6 %	1 %	1 %	0 %	8 %
Use of non-past form & improper past form in past contexts	75 %	61 %	84 %	60 %	67 %
Use of non-past form in initial sentence to answer past-context questions	100 %	80 %	80 %	55 %	50 %
Absence of indefinite article 'a' and plural '-s' & use of needless 'a' and '-s'	65 %	36 %	67 %	60 %	65 %

Discussion

Does the result of this study support the hypothesis that if the foreign student, especially the student whose native language does not have inflection, stays in the English-speaking country longer and longer, his English will be the more correct in the usage of inflection? As a whole, we have to say "No."

There are two main points that do not follow the hypothesis: one is every informant's high frequency of the use of the non-past forms in past contexts and plural inflection mistakes of nouns, and the other is the high frequency of Informant E's mistakes concerning third-person singular '-s' and regularization of irregular verbs. Do these two things mean anything? If so, what do they mean?

As for the first point, when we see the high percentages of the use of non-past or improper past forms in past contexts, and when we notice that all the informants, from the one who has stayed in the United States only for three months to the one who has lived for four years, show close percentages (between 60% and 85%), we can say

Informant B: If something impress you very much, and in that day you have special kind of situation like special surroundings, you will never forget

Informant C: Everything seems so strange to me, and I had hard time to understand people

Informant D: My first semester I was living in a dormitory because my husband didn't come that time. So I have experience in a dorm.

Informant E: Art department in this university is very good one.

Through Tables 10 and 11, we understand every informant made noun inflection mistakes with considerable frequency but we can not find any systematic relationship between the period of staying in the United States and the frequency of mistakes.

No informant but Informant E omitted the possessive suffix '-s'. (Informant E omitted the possessive '-s' only once.) And pronouns were all inflected correctly by every informant, although once in a while some informants used a wrong pronoun and corrected it by herself, as are shown below:

Informant B: So I went to the chairman's office and, ah, I told him my situation. And I finished all my registration in her, his office

Informant E: They come over visit us twice a year. And my Dad stay only two weeks. My mother, he stay, she stay longer.

Table 12 indicates the frequency of mistakes we have studied now with more rough and brief classification. Through this table we can sum up some notable points we have studied so far. First, all the informants made verb-inflection mistakes in past contexts with considerable frequency, the percentage being 60 or more. Secondly, all informants but one made noun mistakes concerning singular-plural inflection very often, the frequency being between 60% and 70%. Thirdly, Informant E, who has lived in the United States longest of all, most frequently made mistakes **concerning** third-person singular suffix '-s' and absence of necessary verbs and insertion of unnecessary verbs. Finally, as for the initial sentences to answer the past context questions, the longer the informant lived in the United States, the more correctly she answered in terms of verb inflection.

TABLE 11
NOUN INFLECTION MISTAKES
IN SINGULAR CONTEXTS

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of nouns which should have indefinite article 'a'	5	6	5	5	6
Absence of indefinite article 'a'	2	3	5	2	2
Use of plural suffix '-s' in singular contexts	2	0	0	0	2
Total number of mistakes	4	3	5	2	4
Frequency of mistakes	80%	50%	100%	40%	67%

Informant D: I have to use English very often. It's not foreign company, but we have lot of customer. We have to deal with foreign company. We have, ah, American customer and many other European customer. So sometimes we have to use.

(This should have been said as follows:

I had to use English very often. It was not a foreign company, but we had lots of customers. We had to deal with foreign companies. We had, ah, American customers, and many other European customers. So sometimes we had to use English.)

Informant E: In Taiwan we not even talk to boy. Class separate. We never talk to boy, even talk to boy.

(This should have been said as follows:

In Taiwan we do not even talk to boys. Classes are separate. We never talk to boys, even talk to boys.)

As Table 11 shows, every informant used singular countable nouns without the indefinite article 'a' twice or more often, and the nouns which are hard to tell countable or uncountable tended to be used without 'a'. Examples are as below:

Informant A: (They) sleep very late and they get up very late. So that's big problem.

Table 9 shows the number of past-context questions and the number of the initial sentences with non-past forms to answer the past-context questions. We see a very interesting thing in this table, that is, Informant A shows the highest frequency (100%), the frequency of Informants B and C is a little lower (80%), and Informant D's frequency is even lower (55%), Informant E's frequency being the lowest (50%). Now we have finally come to the figures which show any relationship between the period of staying in the United States and the frequency of making mistakes. Informant A who has stayed in the United States shortest of all used non-past forms all the time he answered the past context questions, while Informant E who has lived in the United States longest of all used non-past forms with half of the Informant A's frequency. The other three informants show the frequency between 100% and 50%, and the figure is smaller if the period of staying in the United States is longer.

TABLE 10 NOUN INFLECTION MISTAKES IN PLURAL CONTEXTS					
Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of nouns in plural contexts	18	22	10	15	25
Absence of plural suffix 's'	10	6	5	10	16
Use of indefinite article 'a' in plural contexts	1	1	0	0	0
Total number of mistakes	11	7	5	10	16
Frequency of mistakes	61%	32%	50%	67%	64%

Tables 10 and 11 show the number and frequency of grammatical mistakes related to noun plural inflection. Through Table 10, we find that plural suffix 's' was omitted very often by every informant, the frequency being more than 50% except Informant B. The situation the informants omitted plural 's' was similar to when they forgot to inflect the verbs in past contexts, that is, once they got involved in what they were talking about they made more mistakes consecutively, as the examples shown below:

Interviewer : How is your study here? Is it hard to follow the classes?

Informant: A: Oh, that's depend on the course.

(use of needless be-verb)

Inteviewer : Do they have strong feeling against smoking in Taiwan?

Informant A: In our country, all cigarette is belong to our government.

(use of needless be-verb)

Intervewer : This is your third year in the United States. So you have no problem now (in understanding English)?

Informant D: I cannot say no problem....If I'm not concentrate, maybe I lost more.

(use of needless be-verb)

Every informant used present form verbs in past contexts very often, and as we have seen in the example of Informant D before, every informant spoke more and more sentences with present form verbs when she got involved in her memory that she was talking about. That probably is a natural thing because even native English speakers use present forms when they become excited and talk as if the things were really happening now. Therefore, it may be more meaningful to see whether each informant used past form verbs in the initial sentences to answer the past-context questions than only to count all the non-past forms she used during the interview.

TABLE 9
VERB INFLECTION MISTAKES
IN THE INITIAL SENTENCES TO ANSWER
PAST-CONTEXT QUESTIONS

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of past-context questions	5	5	5	11	6
Number of first sentences answerd with non-past form verbs	5	4	4	6	3
Frequency of mistakes	100%	80%	80%	55%	50%

TABLE 8
ABSENCE OF VERBS AND
USE OF NEEDLESS VERBS

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of verbs needed	86	77	77	66	77
Absence of verbs	2	3	2	1	9
Use of needless be-verbs	6	0	1	2	1
Total of absent verbs and needless be-verbs	8	3	3	3	10
Frequency of absent verbs and needless be-verbs	9%	4%	4%	5%	13%

Interviewer : How about American food? Do you cook Chinese food?

Informant E: Sometimes I do. But it's hard. Material, it's hard to get and cook, too. Hamburgers, sandwiches easier.

(absence of be-verb)

Interviewer : How do you like this university?

Informant E: Well... my feeling's sort like, ah, strange, doing nothing. And, ah, when I choosed courses, I don't which one to choose.

(absence of verb 'know')

Interviewer : Why is it hard to have a party in Taiwan?

Informant E: ...If you want have a party, I have to permission from the government, police station, you know. Most of party there dance.

(absence of verb 'have' and be-verb)

Interviewer : What do they talk at the party?

Informant A: Actually I don't a lot of attention on the topic.

(absence of verb 'pay')

We have studied the frequency of using wrongly inflected verbs in the case of be-verbs and other verbs separately both in present contexts and in past contexts. However, we have not seen anything systematic through Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5. Now in Table 6, we see the frequency of total mistakes of be-verbs and other verbs in present contexts and in Table 7, that of past contexts.

TABLE 7 VERB INFLECTION MISTAKES IN PAST CONTEXTS (Both Be-verbs and Non-be-verbs)						
Informant	A	B	C	D	E	
Number of verbs in past contexts	24	51	50	47	21	
Number of mistaken verbs	18	31	42	28	14	
Frequency of mistakes	75%	61%	84%	60%	67%	

Table 6 indicates that in present contexts Informant E has the highest frequency (17%) of using wrongly inflected verbs, followed by Informants A and D (10%). On the other hand, in past contexts, as Table 7 shows, Informant C, who made the least inflection mistakes in present contexts, spoke sentences with wrong verb forms most often. However, neither of these two tables show any relationship between the length of staying in the United States and the frequency of using correct verb inflection.

So far, all of the verb-inflection mistakes have been picked out, counted, and classified, but we have not studied the omission of verbs or the use of needless verbs yet. Although these mistakes do not belong to inflection mistakes, it will mean a lot to study the relationship between the frequency of omitting verbs or inserting needless be-verbs and the period of staying in the United States, since many foreign students whose native tongue does not belong to Indo-European languages have a hard time to master the usage of be-verbs and different usages between be-verbs and other verbs. As is shown in Table 8, we find that the frequency of omitting verbs and using needless be-verbs is very close to that of verb inflection mistakes in present contexts indicated in Table 6. Informant E omitted verbs most often, and Informant A used needless be-verbs most frequently, totally Informant E making most mistakes. Some of the mistakes they made are as follows:

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of be-verbs in past contexts	3	16	16	15	1
Non-past form	2	10	13	10	0
Frequency of mistakes	67%	62%	81%	67%	0%

as below :

Interviewer : Would you tell me about the first day you came to I. U. P.?

Informant C: I can hardly say, you know, how is the feeling, since it's my first time to foreign country. And I find everything is not clear for me. ... and I don't understand what they say, because all my English is learned from the book.

(It should have been said as follows:

I can hardly say, you know, how was the feeling, since it was my first time to a foreign country. And I found everything was not clear for me... and I didn't understand what they said, because all my English was learned from the book.)

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of verbs in present contexts	61	26	27	20	58
Non-present form and improper present form	6	1	1	2	10
Frequency of mistakes	10%	4%	4%	10%	17%

Interviewer : Do you mean you had a hard time in the first semester?

Informant C: Yeah, because my classes really fast... I don't understand their English.

If they speak slang, I don't understand any... I don't know at all.
(use of present negation)

Interviewer : Did you have a lot of troubles when you first came here?

Informant E: Well, I'm not get used to...

(use of present be-verb negative)

We have seen many interesting things through Table 3, but no relationship between the number of mistakes and the period of staying in the United States can be found.

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of be-verbs in present contexts	19	12	4	3	20
Non-present form	0	0	0	0	0
Use of 'is' with plural subject	0	0	0	0	1
Total number of mistakes	0	0	0	0	1
Frequency of mistakes	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%

Tables 4 and 5 indicate the number and the frequency of be-verb inflection mistakes. Since the times each informant used be-verbs in present contexts or in past contexts are very different among the five informants, the frequency of using mistaken be-verb inflection may not be very reliable data, that is, in present contexts Informants C and D needed to say sentences with be-verbs only three or four times during the interview, while the other informants more than ten times. As for the past tense, Informants A and E needed to speak sentences with be-verbs only a few times, while the other informants around fifteen times. Even so, we see two notable things through Table 4 and 5, that is to say, no one but Informant E mis-inflected present-form be-verbs, and the use of non-past forms of be-verbs in past contexts shows, except for Informant E, as high frequency as that of non-be-verbs in past contexts. Examples of the latter are

about their unforgettable memory, mistakes on verb inflection increased very much. For example, Informant D, whose frequency of using non-past form in past contexts was the lowest, gradually started making mistakes as she became excited.

Interviewer : Did you come to I.U.P. (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) with your husband?

Informant D: No, I came myself. And I took the Trailway in, ah, New York City. And then, ah, that was a snowing day. It's really heavy snow. So it took me one day to arrive in Indiana. So it's already in the evening time. And my friend came to pick me up. And at that time, nobody has the car. So we walk from the bus station to the dormitory, Leininger. And the bus station is not, was not in the same place now. It's near the post office. So it's really not so far from Leininger. But it's still really hard to, ah, walk in, in the winter, especially I have so many luggages to carry. So I really feel a little bit frustrated and upset.

As for regularization of irregular past verbs, only Informant E regularized two irregular past verbs, as is shown below:

Interviewer : When did she come here last? This year?

Informant E: Yeah, that's right. This years. But she goed back February 29th...

Interviewer : How do you like I.U.P. ?

Informant E: Well, sort like strange. I'm new. My feeling's sort like, ah, strange, doing nothing. And, ah, when I choosed courses, I don't...

It is very interesting that Informant E who has lived in the United States longest of the five made such fundamental mistakes on verb inflection. No other informant made any mistakes like that.

Double past forms were used by informant A and D like below:

Interviewer : Did you know there were several Chinese students here?

Informant A: I know. I didn't met them because the course is not beginning...

Interviewer : Since you came to the United States with your husband, you have never lived with American students, have you?

Informant D: The first semester I was living in a dormitory because my husband didn't came that time.....

Both Informants A and D used double past only once, but neither of them pronounced past negation correctly even once during the fifteen-minute interview. They used double past forms or present forms instead. And other two informants (C and E) never pronounced past negation correctly, either, only Informant B using correct past negation once.

TABLE 3
 VERB INFLECTION MISTAKES
 IN PAST CONTEXTS
 (Be Verbs Are Not Included)

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of verbs in past contexts	21	35	34	31	19
Non-past form	15	21	29	17	12
Regularization of irregular past form	0	0	0	0	2
Double past	1	0	0	1	0
Total number of mistakes	16	21	29	18	14
Frequency of mistakes	76%	60%	85%	55%	74%

Table 3 shows the number of the verbs except 'be' which were used in past contexts by each informant during the interview and the number of verb inflection mistakes. Through this table, we can say that non-past forms were very often used in past contexts by each informant, Informant C showing the highest frequency. Examples of non-past forms in past contexts are as follows:

Interviewer : Didn't you have a hard time to quit smoking?

Informant A: Of course. I smoke from thirteen. Just the curiosity. Maybe I smoke for more than ten year. After I go to the airport, I decide I'll quit.

Interviewer : When you were working in a company, didn't you use English?

Informant B: I work in a trading company. So we use English. My job is to handle the correspondence. All our foreign customers, ah, talk to us in English.

Interviewer : Did you have a hard time in the first semester?

Informant C: Yeah, because my classes really fast. I have two accounting courses. One computer, and another one was about, you know, report writing. I don't understand their English. If they speak slang, I don't understand any. And I don't understand why my classmate are laughing in the class...I just feel, ah, depressed.

When the informants talked about their past experience and got involved in speaking

(use of 'have' with third-person singular)

"... they likes to do anything you wants to."

(use of '-s' suffix with 'they' and 'you')

And moreover, Informant E used non-present form in present contexts more often than the others.

Interviewer : When did you begin to drink alcohol?

Informant E: I didn't drink alcohol. I never try that.

(It should have been "I don't drink...")

Interviewer : Do your brothers like America?

Informant E: I think so... Sometimes I find out my brother attitudes sort like American. Like, ah, free for sex... You couldn't control them. If you say something, they mad....

(It should have been "You can't control them....")

As these examples show, Informant E's mistakes were rather basic ones. It seems that she knew that 'did' and 'could' were the past forms of 'do' and 'can', but she must have used those wrong forms unconsciously probably because she was so excited about the story she was telling. On the other hand, Informant D, who made no '-s' suffix mistakes but who used non-present forms twice in present contexts misinflecting the same verb twice, the conjugation of which is very often wrongly pronounced by foreigners, must have been unconscious what she used was a wrong form.

Interviewer: This is your third year in the United States. So you have no problem now (in understanding English)?

Informant D: I cannot say no problem. I think I would say ninety percent I can catch up. Maybe only ten percent I lost. Or if I'm not concentrate, maybe I lost more.

Informant D must have misunderstood the inflection of the verb 'lose', as many other foreign students learn the wrong conjugation 'lost, lost, lost'.

What is noticeable in Table 2 is that Informant E made mistakes most frequently though she has been living in the United States longest of the five. Informants B, C, and D made very few mistakes. However, nothing can be said from Table 2 about relationship between how many years the informant has lived in the United States and how many mistakes she made.

contexts by each informant during the interview and the number of verb inflection mistakes. Meaningless expression, such as “you know,” “you see?” and “You know what I mean?” are not included in the number. When the informant corrected herself after saying a wrong verb form, the mistaken verb is not counted. And when the informant stuttered or repeated the same verb consecutively, they are counted as one. This way of counting holds in all the other tables in this study.

TABLE 2
VERB INFLECTION MISTAKES
IN PRESENT CONTEXTS
(Be Verbs Are Not Included)

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Number of verbs in present contexts	42	14	23	17	38
Non-present form	1	0	0	2	3
No '-s' suffix with third-person singular	2	1	1	0	4
Use of '-s' suffix with other than third-person singular	3	0	0	0	2
Total number of mistakes	6	1	1	2	9
Frequency of mistakes	14%	7%	4%	13%	24%

Informant A made five mistakes concerning '-s' suffix. Some examples of his mistakes are as below:

“The government have a lot of money from....”

(use of 'have' with third-person singular)

“I thinks it does the problem.”

(use of '-s' suffix with 'I')

Informant E made six mistakes concerning '-s' suffix, as below:

“My Dad want to get them....”

“Everything have to arrange....”

Interview

Each informant was interviewed with the first few standardized questions which were designed to let her remember the first impression of the United States. Talking about what the informant felt about her university when she first came, the informant and the interviewer could share the similar impression of the United States, since both are foreign students. And that helped a lot to alleviate some of the awkwardness in the interview situation. After the conversation about the first impression of her university, topics were selected by the interviewer to keep on informal conversation situation.

The interview was given in a familiar environment, such as in the lounge of the library, or in the kitchen of the informant's dormitory, which would diminish some of the uncomfortableness of talking in front of the tape recorder.

Each interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes.

Result

The background of each informant is shown in Table 1. Each of the informants has been staying in the United States for a different period from each other. However, their age now and their age when they first came to the U. S. is not so different from each other except for Informant E who has been in the U.S. since she was 14 years old.

Informant	A	B	C	D	E
Time in the U. S.	3 months	7 months	1 year & 4 months	2 years & 3 months	4 years
Sex	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female
Marital Status	Single	Single	Single	Married to a Chinese	Single
Age	26	24	26	29	19
Age when came to the U. S.	26	23	24	26	14
Major	Business	Business	Business	Business	Art

Table 2 shows the number of verbs except be-verbs which were used in present

it with correct grammar.

Many people say that the best way for foreigners to master English is to live with native English-speaking people in an English-speaking country for some years. As Mario Pei has written, "Residence abroad can be the very best means of acquiring a language at the adult stage."⁶ Some people, however, say that some years' living in an English-speaking country makes one learn whatever one can learn most easily in order to live in the strange country. In other words, living in an English-speaking country improves one's English ability in terms of communication skill, but it does not necessarily mean that one can speak correct English after a certain period of residence in an English-speaking country.

This study focuses on the question whether staying in the United States for some years helps for the foreign students, whose native language is not an inflected language, to master correct English in terms of inflection.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the longer the student, whose native language is not an inflected language, lives and studies in an English-speaking country, the more correctly he will be able to speak English in terms of inflection.

Selection of the Informants

For this study, five Chinese students who are living and studying in a university in western Pennsylvania have been chosen as informants according to how long they have been staying in the United States: the length of the period each informant has spent in the United States ranges from three months to four years. Four of them are majoring in Business and the other is an Art major. None of them are majoring in English. One is nineteen years old, and the rest of them are between twenty-four and twenty-nine years old. All but one are female.

The reason why the Chinese students have been chosen as informants instead of Japanese students is that the Chinese language is similar to English in fundamental word orders, such as "Subject-Verb-Object," and "Subject-Negation-Verb-Object," but that the Chinese language has neither conjugation of verbs nor declension of nouns, unlike Japanese language whose word order is totally different from that of English and which has a kind of conjugation only for verbs. Therefore, it is expected that Chinese students will not make so many mistakes on word orders but that the frequency and the types of mistakes they make on inflection will show the typical mistakes of the students whose native language does not have inflection.

**Study of Inflection in English
Spoken by Foreign Students
in the United States**

Reiko Okada

アメリカ留学中の外人学生の
英語会話における
動詞・名詞の語尾変化習得について

岡 田 礼 子

Statement of the Problem

It is said that there are between 3,000 and 4,000 languages in the world, among which English has been becoming an international communication medium. English is categorized as an inflected language,¹ which many other Indo-European languages belong to. But there are many other languages on earth which do not have word inflections, such as Chinese and Japanese languages.² For the people whose native language is not inflected, it is very hard to master the inflections in English. For example, in Japan the teachers of English make their students recite conjugations of verb and declensions of nouns and pronouns very often,³ such as "go, went, gone; sing, sang, sung," and "I, my, me; he, his, him." However, the student can hardly master them in conversation even if he understands the inflection of all verbs and nouns, for he is not accustomed to using inflection in his native language. As Robert Lado has said, the student is apt to transfer the set of habits of the grammatical structure of his native language to the foreign language. Thus "when the structural pattern is not paralleled in the native language, the student will have trouble learning it because of interference from the native language habit patterns."⁴

As Jane W. Torrey has mentioned, "the language being learned is much the same regardless of whether, for a given learner, it is his first or his second language and regardless of his method of learning. The goals of all language learning include the ability to produce original sentences that conform to the rules of the language."⁵ In other words, so long as the student learns a new language, he should try to master