

The Role of Contrastive Analysis/Error Analysis in Solving Learners Errors Problems in French as a Foreign Language Class in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *In French as a Foreign Language class in Nigeria where the Nigerian learners of the language study the language against the background of their mother tongue/ English Language which they have attained to some level a reasonable degree of competence, the making of errors is inevitable since the learners concerned are faced with a lot of linguistic problems such as; interference of their Native tongue/English on French language and other linguistic problems emanating from French language. The study is set to take a look into the role of Contrastive Analysis/ Error Analysis in solving French learners' error problems.*

KEYWORD: language, foreign language, French as a foreign language, language error, learner, interference.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of a Foreign Language Teaching in Nigeria schools like schools in other English speaking countries in Africa and beyond cannot be over emphasized.

In Nigeria, the introduction of French Language according to Adelekan, (1983) dates back to 1859 when it was among the earliest subjects introduced in the First Secondary School located in Lagos. It was later introduced in schools like Wesleyan High School in 1876 and King's College in 1909 all located in Lagos.

Furthermore, based on Araromi (1996), French language became a Foreign Language to be taught in Nigeria schools after the 1961 Yaounde's conference on Foreign Languages where it was recommended that a Second Foreign Language should be introduced into Schools after assurance that Students have acquired sufficient knowledge of the Official language of their country which is English here in Nigeria.

Since the introduction of French language in Nigeria based on Alo, (1995), French Teaching and Learning have been faced with series of problems such as Phonetic Problem, Grammatical Problem, Deceptive Cognance Problem, etc. And for French Teaching and Learning to move forward, all those problems must be looked into.

Objective

The objective of this study is to take a look into the role of Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA) in solving Nigerian French learner's error problem in their attempt to make use of French Language to communicate (Oral/Written).

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two theories namely:

Interference theory that predict that if a learner is called upon to produce some L2 forms which he has not learnt, he will tend to produce an erroneous forms having its origin in his L1. And the Ignorance Hypothesis of Newmake and Reibel (1968) which states that who does not yet know how to say something in L2 uses whatever means he has at his disposal to say whatever he has in mind to say.

Definition of Terms

Certain terms used in this study need clarification by definition.

Language

Language according to Sapir (1921:8) is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. While Hall (1968:158) defines language as the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols. Furthermore, on definition of language, Mekeliuwa (2021:1), sees language as a system of human communication through the use of spoken or written symbols or words. While Oyelaran (1990:22) opines that language in addition to be the most important vehicle of people culture, it is also the most distinctive of all traits which separate human being from any other being conceivable.

On classification of language, based on Capo (1990), Elugbe (1990) and Akoha (2010), language are classified into various categories namely; Native language, National language, Official language, Foreign Language, etc.

French language and French as a Foreign Language

While Yule (2010), opines that Foreign Language is a language that is not generally spoken in the surrounding environment, Ajiboye (2002), sees it as a language that is geographically exogenous

to the mother tongue identifiable in the geographically community used as a reference point. Based on Ajiboye (2002) and Yule (2010), French as a Foreign Language is a French taught and learnt where French language is not used as a mother tongue/official language such as countries like France, Belgium and part of Canada in the region of Quebec.

Language Error

According to Corder (1967), language errors made by learner indicate the development of the underlying linguistic competence and also reflect the learners attempt to organize linguistic input. This view was shared by Selinker (1970), who also opines that learners' language errors point to a positive effort on the part of the learner to learn a language the learner is been exposed to.

Learner

A learner, based on Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2017:886), is a person who is finding out about a subject or how to do something.

Interference

Interference according to Crystal (2001:199), is a term used in socio linguistics and Foreign Language learning to refer to the error a speaker brings into one language due to his or her contact with another language. Furthermore, based on Crystal (Op cit), it is also refers to as negative transfer and it is most common source of error in the process of learning a Foreign Language where the native tongue interferes. It should be noted that interference could occurs in other contact situation especially in a multilingual environment.

Contrastive Analysis

According to Oller (1971), contrastive analysis is a device for predicting points of difficulty and some of the errors that learners will make. And based on Carles (1983:143), Contrastive Analysis can predict four things namely; **(a)** Pre-identity. This concerns what aspect will likely cause problem. **(b)** It can predict difficulty. **(c)** It can predict errors on the part of the learners. **(d)** It can predict the tenacity of certain errors, that is, their strong resistance to extinction through time and teaching.

Going down the memory lane, Contrastive Analysis which according to Olubunmi and Olowofoyekemi (2021: 4) has the following objectives among others:

1. Providing insights to similarities and differences between languages.
2. Explaining and predicting problems in L2 learning.
3. Developing course materials for language teaching came into domain of teaching and learning of language in 1950 just after the coming out of Fries book named teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language in 1945 and the focus of Contrastive Analysis

was further expanded with the publication of Lado's book titled "Linguistics across Culture" published in the year 1957 where he opines that individual tends to transfer the forms and meaning of their native language and culture to the meaning and culture of the foreign language. And in line with Chomsky (1996:87), since Contractive Analysis can enable us to predict learners' difficulties as regard to the Foreign Language the learner is learning, this will go a long way in helping us to solve learners difficulties. Furthermore, it will help us to find out the root of the learners errors most especially interference from the Native Language and what are the steps to take in solving those problems.

Error and Error Analysis

According to Crystal (2001:139), Error is a term used in psycholinguistic to refer to mistake in spontaneous speaking or writing attribute to a malfunctioning of the neuro-muscular commands from the brain and this could lead to the addition, deletion or substitution of sounds and morphemes.

Furthermore, based on Crystal (Op.cit), Errors are assumed to reflect in a systematic way the level of competence achieved by a learner and they are contrasted with mistakes which are performance limitations that a learner would be able to correct. Also, according to Soetan (2013:297), in learning a second language, there is no way errors could be avoided totally on the part of the learner and in fact, native speaker of a language sometime make mistake in their speech. According to Crystal (2001:139), Error Analysis is a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics. And based on Carter (1967:167), in Ajani (2015:74), Error Analysis is based on three assumptions namely:

1. Errors are inevitable and we cannot learn a language without making error.
2. Errors are significant in different ways.
3. Not all errors are attributable to the learner's Native Language.

Sources of Errors in French as a Foreign Language in Nigeria Schools

Since the introduction of French language teaching into the Nigeria educational system that dates back to 1859 when it was among the earliest subjects introduced in the first secondary school founded in Lagos in 1859 (Adelekan 1983), and when it was officially introduced into Nigeria schools in 1962 after the Yaounde Cameroon conference organized by experts of Modern Language of Africa where it was recommended that a second European language should be introduced into Nigeria schools after a deep assurance that Nigerian students had acquired sufficient knowledge of the country official language (Araromi 1996:226), French teaching and

learning have been facing series of problems. And beside series of those problems cited by Alq (1995:2), one other major problem facing by learners of French language in Nigeria is the problem of linguistic errors on the part of the learners and among series of the factors causing it are;

1. Interference from the already acquired Native Language/another Foreign Language which according to Weinreich (1966:1),

“Implies the re-arrangement of patterns that results from the introduction of elements into the more highly structured domains of language such as the bulk of the phonetic system, a large part of the morphology and syntax and some areas of the vocabulary”

And based on Haugen (1956:12), cited by Ajani (2015:172)

In practice, interference takes many forms described in the literature as “foreign accent”, “language mixture”, “unidiomatic expressions”, “loan word”, “semantic borrowing”, etc.

Furthermore, according to Kwofie (1995:1), due to its negative impact on the learners of French language as a foreign language, linguistic interference has been a major topics of discussion among French scholars. And here in Nigeria, it is a major source of language error among Nigerian learners of French language.

2. Lack of indebt knowledge of French grammatical/phonetic-phonological rules. This is another source of language error in French class in Nigeria. In French classes in Nigeria, many learners find French grammatical rules very difficult and when it come to the application of those rules, they find the rules highly difficult and this go a long way in affecting their writing/oral expression skills. Similarly, their inability to grap French phonetic/ phonology, this go a long way in affecting their mode of pronouncing correctly French sounds/French words.
3. Problem of deceptive cognate (faux-amis) in French classes.
This has to do with words that look alike but different in meaning in two languages. According to Ajiboye (2014:174), faux amis is understood in French grammar “to mean, broadly speaking, words that look alike for one reason or another but which are not really so” and furthermore based on Ajiboye (op cit) it may be phonetic i.e. words sound alike but different in meaning like ont and on, allais and allait, it may also be orthographical i.e words spelt nearly alike but different in meaning e.g. dessin and dessein, mère and mer. In addition, it may be syntactic, that is words sounding alike, written or nearly written alike but may have different domains of grammatical usage and good example are Fermi and fermé; quel and quelle. In French classe in Nigeria, deceptive cognate (faux-amis) is a big problem that needs solution.

4. Finally, we have problem emanating from French teachers teaching French language and this has to do with inpatient on the part of teacher in correcting learner's errors.

Based on Alo (1995:2), all the above mentioned problems and other problems not mentioned here have to be solved for teaching and learning of French language to move ahead in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In line with Corder (1967), that language errors made by the learners not only point to the linguistic competence of the learner but also shows learner attempt to organize linguistic inputs, the study hereby put forward the under listed ways contrastive analysis/Error analysis could help French teacher in solving learner's error problem in French class in Nigeria.

Prediction

In the area of interference which according to Crystal (2001:199), is a term used in sociolinguistics and foreign language learning to refer to the errors a speaker introduce into one language as a result of contact with another language, by making use of contrastive analysis/error analysis, a French teacher will be in a best position to know in advance the negative effect of the structure of either Native Language or English language will have on the structure of French language when French language is been put into use by student learning French under him and this will put him in a best position to get adequate corrections to mistakes that may likely occurred on the part of his students due to a negative transfer emanating from either the negative language of the learners or the English language.

Diagnosing of errors: In any Foreign Language class, the purpose of making use of contrastive analysis/error analysis is to find out if errors committed by the learners is a result of interference of L1 on L2 and if no L1 structure could be found in the learners production, then we look for another source of the error. In diagnosing of our learners errors in French class, similar thing could be done and this will go a long way in finding adequate solutions to the errors always committed by our learners in our class be a grammatical error or phonological error and in solving the problems we could either make use of grammatical contrastive analysis/error analysis where comparable system of the two languages concerned are carried out. For example:

He is a student
Il est un etudiant
She is a student
Elle est une etudiante

From the above, we study the functional patterning of classes of language units, not individual word and morphemes as physical entities.

At the level of phonological contrastive analysis or error analysis we are interested in the way in which sounds are functioning in a particular language and while it is French in own case and what part they play in manifesting meaningful distinction of languages. As a French teacher and as a phonetician, based on O'Corner (1973:16), we are concern with three types of physical reality when study the sounds of language and these three types of physical realistic are;

1. The way in which the air is set in motion in the movement of the speech organ (Articulatory phonetics).
2. The way in which the air vibrate between the mouth of the speaker and the ear of the listener (Acoustic phonetics).
3. Interested in the hearing process (Auditory phonetics). Hence, as a French teacher teaching French sounds and making use of contractive analysis/error analysis, in solving our learners errors problems in the area of the production of French sounds, we should have the following things done:
 1. Draw up a phonetic inventory of L1 and L2.
 2. Equate phonetics interlingually.
 3. List out the phonetic restriction (allophones) for L1 and L2.
 4. List the distribution restriction of the phonetics and allophones of each language (L1 and L2).

All the above will go a long way in helping us solving our learners errors in French class.

CONCLUSION

This study discovered that one major problem confronting the learning of French among Nigerian learners is the problem of error both grammatical and phonology on the part of the learners. Haven discovered the sources, such as interference most especially from L1 Native Language, Lack of indebt knowledge of French grammar/phonological rules problem of deceptive cognate, etc, the paper went ahead in offering various roles Contrastive Analysis/Error Analysis could play in solving learner's error problem in French class in Nigeria.

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