

LEXICAL ERRORS OF NIGERIAN LEARNERS OF FRENCH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In Nigeria, since the introduction of French language in Nigerian schools, French Teaching and Learning have been facing many difficulties and series of didactic efforts have been made to see the end of those difficulties. However, some of those identified difficulties persisted and one of those difficulties is the issue of Lexical Errors on the part of Nigerian learners of French language. The objective of this study is to look at the problem of lexical errors of Nigerian learners of French language and recommend some didactic approaches. For the methodology adopted for this study, a sample of Forty six Nigerian French learners (twelve males and thirty-four females) that were in Nigeria French language village, Badagry for their linguistics Immersion programme were selected for the study. Based on their written production, lexical errors were noted. Having identified the problem, some didactic approaches were offered to the problem namely: Regular exercise with French words so as to perfect their mastery of French language, Allocation of more time for the teaching and learning of French language and the idea of giving them the opportunity to have a short stay after their linguistic immersion programme at the Nigeria French language village, Badagry should be encouraged.

Keywords: Language, lexic, foreign language, error, learner, didactic approach.

Résumé

Depuis l'introduction de l'enseignement/apprentissage de la langue française dans l'enceinte des établissements scolaires au Nigeria, l'enseignement/apprentissage du français est confronté avec tas des difficultés et prévenir et déjouer ces difficultés a fait l'objet de nombreuses communications et le problème d'erreur lexicale demeure l'un de ces difficultés. L'objectif que nous pour suivons dans cet article, c'est de mettre en exergue ce problème et proposer quelques approches correctives/didactiques que vont aider nos apprenants. Dans le cadre de cette étude, nous avons enquêté auprès de quarante-six apprenants nigériens (douze hommes et trente-quatre femmes) qui sont arrivés au Village Français du Nigeria, Badagry pour leur bain Linguistique. Et selon leur production écrite, l'erreur lexicale a été identifiée pour les approches correctives didactiques au service de non seulement des enseignants mais aussi des apprenants, nous avons proposé la sensibilisation de nos apprenants aux exercices régulières en utilisant des mots français pour s'exprimer correctement en Français. Et d'accorder assez de temps à l'enseignement et à l'apprentissage de la langue française dans nos établissements scolaires. En plus des démarches didactiques déjà soulevées, nous avons

ajoute la sensibilisation de nos apprenants au bref séjour dans les pays Francophone après leur programme de bain linguistique au village Français de Badagry.

Mots-clés: Langue, langue étrangère, apprenant, erreur linguistique, lexical, approche didactiques.

Introduction

French language is the native language of France, part of Canada (Quebec) and part of Belgium. According to Ade-Ojo (1), French language owns its origin to France which formally adopted it as her official language in the year 1539 through the special decree known as Ordonnance de villers-cotterêts passed by François 1er. As at this moment French has become a world language.

Apart from the fact that French is the official language of all countries surrounding Nigeria namely; Benin, Cameroun, Niger and Tchad, French is the official language of 8 out of 15 members countries of ECOWAS and 24 out of 53 African countries. And at the world level, based on Ade-Ojo (Op.cit: 3), French language is the 5th International World Language after English, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese in term of the number of its speaker found all over the continents. At the national level, based on Adelekan (6), the presence of French language in Nigeria goes back to 1859. It was among the earliest subjects introduced into Nigeria Schools Curriculum. Furthermore, according to Araromi (226), in 1961, after Yaounde conference of expert of Modern Languages of Africa where it was recommended that a Second European Language should be introduced into our schools, French language became official language to be taught in Nigerian Schools.

Since its introduction in our schools, the language has been facing series of challenges at the level of its teaching and learning. Alq (7) observes that for the teaching and learning of French language to move forward in Nigeria, all the identified challenges and problems must be looked into and solution given so as to move forward the teaching and learning of French language. Taking into consideration Alq's (2-4) observation, one of these problems is the French lexical errors on the part of Nigerian learners of French language.

Objective

The objective of this study is to take look at the Problem of Lexical errors of Nigerian learners of French language and put forward some didactic approaches to both teachers teaching French language and Nigerian learners of French language all in an effort to move forward the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria.

Definition of Terms

Certain terms as used in this study need clarification by definition.

Language

While Cook (1) sees language as what we use for planning our lives and remembering our past. Dom-Anyanwu (79) defines language as a means or a process of understanding the experience, ideas and emotion. And Ilona (71) opines that language is not only a means of communication by man but also an instrument of learning and transmission of culture from one generation to another.

Foreign Language

Foreign Language according to Yule (8-9) is a language that is not generally spoken in the surrounding community. He cites example of Japanese students in an English class

in Japan learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Furthermore, based on Akindele and Adegbite (4), a Foreign Language could be second, third, fourth or fifth language of a multilingual person. Ajiboye (2) sees a Foreign Language as a language that is geographically exogenous to the mother tongue identifiable in the geographically community used as a reference point.

Learner

Learner according to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (886) is a person who is finding out about a subject or how to do something.

Linguistic Error

Crystal (25) sees linguistic error as a deviation from the target languages, furthermore Crystal (139) sees a linguistic error as a mistake in spontaneous speaking or writing attribute to a malfunctioning of neuromuscular commands from the brain. According to Corder (96), in a language, a linguistic error is of two types namely systematic errors which are errors related to second language acquisition and non-systematic errors which are errors that occur in one's native language which according to Corder (Op.cit) are mistakes and not significant to the process of language learning. On error correction, Lyster and Ranta (97-99) opines

- When should learner's errors be corrected?
- What errors should be corrected?
- How should error be corrected?
- Who should do the correction?

Furthermore, on usefulness of errors in language class, Olowofeyeku (33) opines that errors could be useful in three ways;

- a) They provide the teacher useful information about how much the learners have learnt.
- b) They provide the researcher with evidence of how language was learnt and
- c) They serve as devices by which the learner discourse the roles of the target language.

Lexis

Lexis according to Crystal (221) is a term used in linguistics to refer to the vocabulary of a language and used adjectively in variety of technical phrases. Crystal (Op.cit) opines further that "a unit of vocabulary is generally refers to as lexical item".

Theoretical framework

The Model of which this Study is anchored on is Communicative approach to language teaching and learning that states that language is competence and based on this, the ultimate aim of communicative language teaching (CLT) is communicative competence in which learners learn the target language by using it frequently to communicate anywhere they find themselves. Skinner's (1967) Behaviour theory states clearly that Language Practice should be based on Repetition and Memorization so that Learners can cultivate habit formation because according to him, the more learners are exposed to the form of L2, the better they learn.

Methodology

This research examines the use of French words among Nigerian Learners of French Language. Our major means of collecting data therefore is through the engagement of some Nigerian Learners of French Language who were in French Village for their Language Immersion Programme. From their write up, lexical errors

were noted and this formed the background of our study. We have limited the choice of our informants to Nigerian Learners of French language who were in the French Village for their Immersion Programme based on the assumption that Nigeria French Language Village is a language Centre that accommodate learners of French language across the country for their language immersion programme. A total number of forty six informants were involved, twelve males and thirty four females.

Presentation of Data

In this section, we highlighted some of the data collected for the study. These data were collected from their write up inform of a short essay in French Language. The intended expressions are first stated after which we provided the expressions realized and followed by the correct expressions.

Expression 1:

Intended expression: Femi is about to finish his assignment.

Expression realised: Femi est prêt à finir son devoir.

Correct expression: Femi est près de finir son devoir.

Expression 2:

Intended expression: I finished my primary education in a public school.

Expression realised: J'ai fini mes études primaires dans une école public.

Correct expression: J'ai fini mes études primaires dans une école publique.

Expression 3:

Intended expression: Where is the post office in this town.

Expression realised: Où est le poste dans cette ville.

Correct expression: Où se trouve la poste dans cette ville?

Expression 4:

Intended expression: Where is our class?

Expression realised: Ou est notre classe?

Correct expression: Où est notre classe.

Expression 5:

Intended expression: Our friend has a serious issue to resolve with us.

Expression realised: Notre ami à un sérieux diffèrent à résoudre avec nous.

Correct expression: Notre ami a un sérieux différend à résoudre avec nous.

Expression 6:

Intended expression: My father is an emigrant in Holland

Expression realised: Mon père est un immigré au pays bas

Correct expression: Mon père est un émigré au pays bas

Expression 7:

Intended expression: Everyone goes to class with biro and pencil

Expression realised: Chaque va en classe avec un stylo et un crayon.

Correct expression: Chacun va en classe avec un stylo et un crayon.

Expression 8:

Intended expression: I bought a biro and an exercise book yesterday

Expression realised: Hier, j'ai payé un stylo et un cahier

Correct expression: Hier, j'ai acheté un stylo et un cahier

Expression 9:

Intended expression: I borrow Obina my book

Expression realised: J'ai emprunté Obina mon livre

Correct expression: J'ai prêté obina mon livre

Expression 10:

Intended expression: I am writing a project

Expression realised: Je rédige une mémoire

Correct expression: je rédige un mémoire

Expression 11:

Intended expression: I bought a bag

Expression realised: J'ai payé un sac

Correct expression: J'ai acheté un sac

Expression 12:

Intended expression: Who is the giver of the biro?

Expression realised: Qui est le donataire de ce stylo?

Correct expression: Qui est le donateur de ce stylo?

Expression 13:

Intended expression: The bus is out of service.

Expression realised: Le bus est or de service

Correct expression: Le bus est hors de service.

Expression 14:

Intended expression: I am the one taking Chubuzor to his parents

Expression realised: C'est moi qui amène Chibuzor chez ces parents

Correct expression: C'est moi qui emmène Chibuzor à ses parents

Expression 15:

Intended expression: I will always participate in the development of my school

Expression realised: Je vais toujours participer dans le développement de mon école

Correct expression: Je vais toujours participer au développement de mon école

Expression 16:

Intended expression: Everybody is in the class

Expression realised: Tout le monde sont dans la classe

Correct expression: Tout le monde est dans la classe.

Expression 17:

Intended expression: I am listening to the teacher

Expression realised: J'entends le professeur

Correct expression: J'écoute le professeur

Analysis and Discussion

From the analysis of the data, the type of inappropriate use of French words has to do with French lexical problème among Nigerian learners of French language.

Let us start with expression number one. The French expression près de and prêt a need clarification. When pronouncing the two words près and prêt they have similar pronunciation /Prɛ/ performing different function grammatically, while the French word près is an adverb, invariable word and always followed by the word 'de', the French word prêt is an adjective and always followed by preposition à. Also as an adjective, it must be in line with the noun or pronoun it qualify: Example Il est prêt à partir - (He is ready to go) and Elle est prête à partir (she is ready to go). Furthermore while the French phrase: près à expresses a desire or readiness to do something, expression près de indicate a proximity of the level of doing something.

In expression number two, while the French word public is a noun which refers to crowd of people, the word publique is an adjective that qualifies a noun. When the noun that it is qualifies a masculine noun, it takes the shape of “public” for example; un bus public --- (A public bus) and when the noun it qualifies is a feminine noun, it takes the shape of publique, for example Une voiture publique - (A public car).

In expression number three, there is a difference between French words: le post and la poste though the two French words are nouns. While le poste means function/office, la poste means a Post office where letters/documents are posted to the receiver.

Furthermore, in expression number four, we have two different words ou and où and the two of them are pronounced as /u/, while ou means or in English, où means where in English. Example où est notre professeur - (Where is our teacher). Tu veux le stylo rouge ou le stylo noir - (Do you want a red biro or a black biro).

In expression number 5, we have two different French words and though they are different, the two different words sound alike /difeRã/ but different in meaning, while different means different, differend means dispute. Also in expression number 6, there is a difference between French word émigré and French word immigré. Though the two words are common nouns, while ‘un émigré’ refers to a person that move out of his/her country to leave in another country, un immigré is a person that is hosted in a another country.

In expression number seven, we have two different French words: Chaque and Chacun, while Chaque is an indefinite adjective, ‘Chacun’ is indefinite pronoun, hence the correct word to be used is chacun.

In expression number eight, we have two confusing words, payer and acheter. Though the two of them are verbs, however, they are two different words with a different meaning, while payer means to pay, acheter means to buy. Hence, the correct French word for expression number eight is acheté (bought) and not payé (paid).

Similarly, in expression number nine, there are two different confusing words: emprunté and prêté. In French language, the word ‘preter’ means to borrow someone what does not belong to him or her while the word emprunter is to borrow something from somebody else. (i.e. to receive something from someone). Example ‘J’ai emprunté trois sylos chez mon ami’ which means I borrowed three biros from my friend.

Furthermore, in expression number ten, there is a difference between ‘le memoire’ and ‘la memoire’. The two are nouns, however while le memoire is a concrete object and its means Academic Project or Thesis, la memoire is an abstract noun which means a memory. Hence, for expression number ten, le memoire is the correct French word.

In expression number eleven, there are two different words with a different meaning, the two words payé and acheté are all French first group verb. While payer means to pay, acheté means to buy. Hence j’ai acheté un sac means (I bought a bag) is the correct word.

In expression number twelve, we have two different French words: Donateur and Donataire. The two words are noun, however, while the French word donateur is the giver, the one that offer the gift, donataire is the receiver of the gift being offered, hence for the exercise number fourteen, the appropriate word there is Donateur and not Donataire.

In expression number thirteen, we have two confusion words or and hors while French word or is a conjunction word, French word hors means out, hence French word hors is the appropriate word for expression number fourteen.

In expression number fourteen, we have two words, *amener* is to bring something or somebody to oneself and *emmener* take something or someone to somewhere. The two are French first group verbs. Hence, the appropriate word is *emmener*.

In expression number fifteen, we have two words namely *participer à* and *participer dans*, the two words are verbs and the two have different meaning. In French language the word *participer* is always followed by preposition *à* and not *dans*, hence the correct expression is the *verbe participer à* not *participer dans*.

In expression number sixteen, we have the case of *tout le monde est dans la classe* and *tout le monde sont dans la classe*, the correct expression is *tout le monde est dans la classe* and not *tout le monde sont dans la classe* because *donc tout le monde est* is a group noun in French referring to everybody in English, hence it must be followed by French verb *est* which means *is* in English language.

In expression number seventeen, we have two confusing words namely *entend* et *ecoute*. The two words are *verbes* and they convey different meaning while *entend* is just to perceive a sound/noise, *ecouter* on the other hand means listening to something. Example *j'écoute mon professeur* (i am listening to my teacher.) *J'écoute un disque* (i am listening to a music.) And for the *verbe entend*; *J'entend un bruit*'' dans la sale --- I am hearing a noise emanating from the room.

Implication of the Study

From Bloor and Bloor (226) point of observation, what occupied minds of educators and critics for many years is the question of how to speak or write more effectively. Bloor and Bloor (Op.cit) opine further that most educators and critics have something to say on the subject and this is exactly what this study is trying to do in the area of French lexical problem among the Nigerian learners of French language. And based on the finding of this study which indicate clearly that most Nigeria learners of French have lexical problem in French class, we therefore put forward some didactic recommendations.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on Corder (72) that language errors made by learners not only indicates the development of the underlying linguistics competence, it also indicate the learners attempt to organize linguistic input. And in line with Skinner (84) view that learners error is evidence of positive effort by the learner to learn the new language and this show that every effort should be done to support the learners in solving their linguistic problems. Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestion are hereby put forward.

Practical involvement of students in writing drill involving French words. By making use of this approach, Nigerian French learners are exposed to various French words most especially those French words that looked alike in appearance/pronunciation but have different meaning such as *où* /u/ (where) and *ou* /u/ (or), *près* /PRɛ/ (near) and *prêt* /PRɛ/ (prepared, ready) and *debout* /debu/ standing up and *debours* /debuR/ (outlay). In exposing them to those words we should ensure that they are not only exposed to the meaning of those words but also involving them in forming simple French sentences with those words either individual or inform of a good exercise.

Time Allocation: According to Cook (48) learning a second language literacy mean seeing the word in a different ways and this also applies to Nigerian learners of French language. The implication of this is that foreign word that is learnt repeatedly gives room for effective mastering by the learner and for this to be possible, it means more time should be made available for the learning of French language in our schools most especially in the area of acquisition of French words and their uses.

Exposure of Nigerian French learners to French countries, Presently, we have the Nigeria French Language Village created by the Nigeria Federal government to take care of French language immersion programme of Nigeria French learners and the centre has been doing its best in the area of French Immersion Programme organized yearly for the Nigeria Higher Institutions (Universities and Colleges of Education). In addition, the Centre provides solid French programme for Nigerian adults who want to learn French language. However, in addition to the various French programmes organized by the Nigerian French Language Centre, based on the experience, this study further suggest that Nigerian French language learners should always be given the opportunity to have a short stay in French countries most especially the nearby French countries like Benin in the West, Cameroun in the East and Niger and Tchad in the North. This will go a long way in exposing them to the practical aspect of the use of French language. However the presence of this Center in Nigeria and despite its effort in the area of French teaching and learning, there is a strong need to expose Nigeria French learners to the practical aspect of the use of French language and this could be achieved in Francophone environment.

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