Linguistic Interference of Nigerian Languages on Yoruba Learners of French in Selected Tertiary Institutions in South-Western Nigeria

Oladeji Olayiwola Nureni1, Ogundiran Kemi Fisayo2, Awonusi Abiodun Makinde3., Ganiyat Omotola ADENIRAN, PhD4

1Department of French,
Oladeji.olayiwola1326@fcesoyo.edu.ng
08067327822
2Kemifisayo2017@gmail.om
08134651452
Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo
3Department of French,
08174869220
4Department of French
ganiyatomotola@gmail.com
08103285755
Federal College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta,

Abstract: Yoruba indigenous learners of French experience linguistic interference while learning the language. Language transfer, which is also referred to as linguistic interference, happens when a first-language structure and habit of a learner contrasts in the process of acquiring and using a second language. Learners of French as a second language in Nigeria have specific difficulties because of structural, phonological, and semantic differences between Yoruba and French. The study adopted descriptive survey methods. The population comprised Yoruba indigenous learners of French and their lecturers in selected tertiary institutions in Southwestern Nigeria. The sample consists of 60 students and 10 lecturers who were randomly selected. Three instruments were used to collect data for the study. These are Oral Production Test (r = 0.78); Written Production Test (r = 0.81) and Structured Interview Guide (r = 0.71).All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance and Regression Analysis was used to analyse the data. The results showed that the most significant type of interference is phonological, in which learners would replace nasal vowels with the sounds that sound more like in English and apply tonal patterns to the intonation in French. The morphological interference can also be traced through the mistakes of gender and number agreement, whereas the syntactic interference can be found in the negation and adjective positioning. Semantic and pragmatic interference is created when Yoruba idioms and proverbs are translated into French directly which leads to communication breakdown. To enhance the French education in the Yoruba speaking areas and help in the process of multilingual education in Africa, it was recommended that learners should be motivated and assisted instead of being viewed as inadequate. The necessity of improved pedagogical approaches, which should be in line with the local linguistic life conditions in Africa, the dynamism, and resourcefulness with which learners have to address themselves when they are negotiating between languages are to be provided.

Keywords: Linguistic interference, Yoruba, French, Indigenous language, Nigerian learners

Introduction

Nigeria is a rich mosaic of languages in which more than 500indigenous languages can be heard throughout the country. Studying a new language under these circumstances is not only about memorizing a vocabulary or learning grammar rules, it is a journey that is very rich and multidimensional, including our thoughts, our socializing, and all the cultural peculiarities, which form our identity. When someone starts to study a new language, they usually take the impact of the native language with them It implies that their cognition, language and even expression using their first language may have an influence on the manner in which they acquire and use the new language. It is an interesting phenomenon as the ancient and the new are combined, and it leads to a new learning experience. Nigeria is a diverse country with more than 500 indigenous languages and learning a new language is a special challenge. English is our official language, but French is taught in schools in order to facilitate our integration into the rest of the world. Yoruba is one of the native languages, and it is very common in the southwestern part particularly. Yoruba speakers enter into a complicated linguistic environment when learning the French language. They do not only alternate between Yoruba and French, they also cope with English as the teaching language. This causes an interactive dynamic between three languages Yoruba, English and French that may result in what is referred to as linguistic interference. As an example, the Yoruba and French are very different. Yoruba is a tonal language and therefore one can alter the meaning of words by the tone used. It does not depend on grammatical gender, whereas

French has its rules of masculine and feminine. This may cause the confusion of the article to be used such as the conflation of ''le'' and ''la''.

Moreover, Yoruba lacks nasal vowels, so Yoruba speakers may have problems with some French sounds, which results in the production of an accent. And where negation is concerned, Yoruba has a simple approach as compared to French, which is a more elaborate technique of expressing a negative. An example is the learner saying "Je pas veux" as opposed to the right one, Je ne veux pas. In sum, such distinctions may make the process of learning French particularly difficult when Yoruba speakers struggle to comprehend a new language and translate their thoughts and ideas into the new vocabulary correctly. Learning a language is not about the rules of grammar and words only; it is also entwined in our culture and social process. The Yoruba language is very colourful in communication and is full of idioms, proverbs and indirectness. In the attempt to articulate these rich contents in French by the Yoruba speakers, this may make them misunderstood because sometimes the nuances do not translate.

In addition to this, the perception of French in most of the Yoruba-speaking regions is another complication. French is viewed in a rather remote and elitist manner, associated with diplomacy rather than with life itself. This perception may discourage the zeal of learning, and it may become more difficult to learners to practice and get involved in the language. The teachers, not necessarily both Yoruba and French speaking, are in a tricky position trying to overcome these issues. The problem of the linguistic interference between the Yoruba who study French is not only the problem of personal errors but the problem of greater interest regarding the way languages are taught and promoted in Nigeria. Most students fail to communicate conveniently even after years of attending French classes. This begs significant questions regarding the approaches to the teaching and whether they really make the learners satisfied with the multilingual setting.

The necessity of more culturally appropriate methods of teaching languages in Africa has been noted by such scholars as Bamgbose, Adegbija, and Awonusi though there have been no precise studies regarding the interaction of Yoruba and French. The proposed research will fill this gap by exploring the interference on different levels such as on sounds, word forms, sentence structure, and meaning. It further explores both the social and instructional issues that determine learning. Through these patterns of interferences and a comprehension of the causes, the study would contribute to finding feasible solutions to minimise such misunderstandings and improve the practice of French teaching in the Yoruba speaking regions. The study will ultimately illuminate the way in which local languages such as Yoruba interact with global languages and this can be seen to be of great value in the context of language education as well as policy making that takes into consideration and includes the African multilingual realities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Linguistic Interference

Language transfer or linguistic interference is a phenomenon in which elements of the first language (L1) of a person affect how he or she learns or uses a second language (L2). This is more so in a multilingual society such as Nigeria. This was first applied by linguist Weinreich who observed that interference is an inherent aspect of being a bilingual or multilingual person.Selinker cited by Popoola (2022 :29) extended this concept to his inter-language theory as he considered it to be a transitional phase during language acquisition as students are in the process of attempting to bridge the gap between their L1 and the new language. Interference in this perspective does not only mean making errors; it is an indication of improvement since students go through their language experiences. Such researchers as Echu (2019:51) and Bamgbose(2018)have indicated that the interfering aspect extends beyond grammar it is interwoven with the culture and with social contexts within which languages are being learnt.

Theories of Linguistic Interference.

Theories that attempt to describe the mechanism of interference and the reasons why occur:Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH): This theory was proposed by Lado(1992: 29) butressed by Adepoju (2019:38) and it provides that similarities between the first language and the new language of a learner might aid the learning process and differences might cause an interference. Even though it has its opponents, CAH aids us in the recognition of structural relationship between Yoruba and French.Error Analysis (EA): This method was created by Corder and it examines the real errors that the learners commit in order to understand their learning processes. In the case of Yoruba speakers learning French, EA can detect particular patterns, such as pronunciation mistakes (replacing French nasal vowels with oral ones), EA can identify grammatical errors (such as the loss of gender markers).

Inter-language Theory: This theory is based on a combination of CAH and EA in which the language of the learner is developed as a unique system due to the first language, second language and general rules of the language. This theory is applicable in the multilingual setting of Africa since learners can also refer to other languages including the English language.

Yoruba and their impact on the French education take their own peculiarities and shape their learning. Yoruba speakers possess certain peculiarities of language that may cause interference in case of learning FrenchPhonology: Yoruba is a tonal language in which pitch determines meaning. Intonation in French is used primarily to express feelings or to inquire as opposed to altering word senses. Consequently, Yoruba students may bring the tone habits into the French language, which will cause problems with pronunciation. Moreover, the fact that Yoruba lacks nasal vowel implies substitutions with oral vowel and this wrongly dents

understanding, as an example, having difficulties distinguishing between beau and bon.Morphology: Yoruba is an inflection-based language, which means that it has word order in place of inflections (i.e. the addition of some endings to indicate tense or gender). French, on the contrary, depends on the inflections immensely. This fact makes matters difficult to the Yoruba learners who may declare le table rather than la table because of lack of knowledge on gender agreement.

Syntax: The structure of both languages in terms of modifiers and negative is different although both largely adhere to Subject-Verb-Object arrangement. As an example, Yoruba does not produce verbs with special particles in its negation, but in French, there is a two-part structure. This usually causes mistakes like saying Je pas veux, which means Je ne veux pas. Semantics and Pragmatics: Yoruba is also full of expressions with more cultural undertones. When these are taken directly to the French language, it may cause confusion. Indicatively, the Yoruba "o niinu re dun" (meaning, he has sweetness in his stomach, that is, he is happy) may not convey the same meaning in a direct translation of this phrase to il a la douceur dans le ventre.

The Interference in African Contexts Research.

It has also been established that language interference is a major challenge among learners throughout Africa. Echu (2019) discovered that Cameroon speakers of Bantu languages also had similar problems, especially in tonal patterns and syntax. According to Ndimele,(2023:52) the native languages mostly determine the mistakes made by the learners of English and French in Nigeria.A research study conducted by Akinjobi(2024) found out that the most mistakes Yoruba pupils whose first language is French committed were phonological and many of them could not overcome the situation even at higher levels. Sociolinguistic variables also contribute to it; learners regularly alternate between Yoruba, English, and French during speech, and it can support the tendency towards relying on familiar patterns. Others such as Oyetade (2024) can claim that the sense of foreignness and elitism that French often evokes can further prevent motivation and interest in learning.

2.5 Pedagogical Implications of Literature.

The issues of linguistic interference create significant questions to French teaching. According to Akinjobi, most of these problems are as a result of lack of awareness concerning the differences between languages in learning French. According to Adegbija, teachers ought to incorporate these differences in the lessons. In the meantime, Bamgbose also insists on the necessity of the inclusion of knowledge of the local languages into the teaching of the foreign language. Fakoya also supports the idea of educating cultural settings in order to avoid misconceptions that arise due to cultural differences.

In summary, the literature review reveals that the notion of parental involvement and engagement has evolved over recent decades, gradually becoming a significant concept within today's educational and social spheres.|human|n general, the literature analysis shows that the idea of parental involvement and engagement has developed during the past decades as it is turning into an important concept in the contemporary educational and social context.

The study of linguistic interference demonstrates that the problem is rather extensive and intricate among Yoruba students studying the French language. Although this intrusion has been studied by a large number of scholars in Africa in general, few studies exist where the particular way Yoruba interacts with French is investigated. Majority of research is inclined to narrow down to sound related issues and forget the cultural and pragmatic aspects. Moreover, a large number of studies fail to take into account such sociolinguistic factors as the attitude of learners, their exposure to French, and how they position it among the other languages in terms of its status. The proposed new study will be used to fill this gap, offering a full perspective on the interference on different levels that considers both the structural, cultural, and educational factors.

Methodology

This paper adopted descriptive survey research design. The researcher collected data from both the French students and their lecturers using self-structured questionnaires. The population and sample from the target population were Yoruba speaking learners of the French language who were students of selected tertiary institutions located in southwestern Nigeria where French is offered either as a major or elective subject. The selection of participants was done using purposive sampling method, to meet the inclusion criteria; mother tongue Yoruba, no less than two years of formal instruction in the French language, and a desire to take part in both verbal and written language practice.A total of 60 students and 10 lecturers of the French language in four institutions of Osun State University, Ikire Campus, Osun State 15 students, Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State 15 students and Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State 15 students and Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo State 15 students were included in the sample. Also 10 French language lecturers, who had not less than five years experience in teaching, were chosen in these institutions. Data collection took place using three major tools that is,Oral Production Tests (OPT): These were reading aloud and conversation tasks that were meant to determine phonological and prosodic interference.Written Production Tests (WPT): Learners wrote short texts in French and their texts were analyzed in terms of morphological, syntactic and lexical errors.Structured Interview

Guides (SIG): Both the lecturers and a sample group of learners engaged in semi-structured interviews to provide their understanding of interference, its causes and their pedagogical implication.

All instruments were subject to expert review and pilot testing before deployment in order to give them validity and reliability. The inter-rater reliability was determined by cross checking by bilingual raters who had knowledge of both Yoruba and French. The data collection was conducted in three stages: oral tests administration was conducted with administration of written tests and eventually, interviews.

Results

Composite contribution of phonological, syntactic, and mophological errors

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Frequency	Sig.
1	Regression	870420.424	4	217605.106	1103.067	.000[b]
	Residual	1766971.641	8957	197.273		
	Total	2637392.065	8961			

R = 0.57   Adjusted R^2 = 0.33

The table above reveals the R-value (0.57) with the adjusted R^2 (0.33) which shows that there is a 33.0% of the variance in linguistic interference jointly accounted for by phonological, syntactic, and mophological errors. The F-value (1103.067) which is significant at 0.05 indicates that there is a significant composite contribution of phonological, syntactic, and mophological errors on linguistic interference among Yoruba indigenous learners of French in Southwest public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Relative contribution of phonological, syntactic, and mophological errors

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	50.960	1.259		40.477	.000
phonological	.561	.034	.156	16.698	.000
Syntacticerror	-.599	.015	-.460	-39.886	.000
Mophologicalerror	-.126	.038	-.037	-3.314	.001

Table above shows the beta values, 0.156 forphonological errors, 0.460 for syntactic errors, and 0.037 for mophological error. It follows that phonological error predicts linguistic interference most, followed by syntactic error, and mophological error the least predictor. All of them have significant prediction of linguistic interference. The three errors are potent factors predicting linguistic interference among indigenous Yoruba learners of French language.

The results indicate that there are four primary areas in which Yoruba learners of French experience interference, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. These trends are not arbitrary; they are representative of the structural and cultural disparities between Yoruba and French and also, sociolinguistic aspects of the students such as the attitudes and their exposure to the language.

Discussion:

Phonological Interference

The most common errors were phonological errors which constituted 65 percent mistakes. Students often mixed up French nasal vowels with their oral counterparts and therefore did not understand words such as beau and bon. Moreover, the tonal character of Yoruba influenced their usage of intonation in French whereby many times the patterns of pitch became awkward. Final consonant clusters were also a problem to many learners, as they even reduced the words such as parlent to parle. Even the students of higher

levels of development faced these phonological issues which did confirm the previous observations regarding the hardness of changing the pronunciation habits.

Morphological Interference

The percentage of morphological errors was 15. The comparative analysis of Yoruba is significantly different as it relies on word order and particles rather than inflections contrary to the French where there are numerous inflectional endings. Such confusion frequently led to such mistakes as saying le table rather than la table or not using these marks of tenses as it should be, which shows the problems that learners encounter in their attempts to master grammatical categories that are not found in Yoruba.

Syntactic Interference

Efforts to create syntax errors contributed 20% of errors. Although both languages have the rules of subject-verb-object structure, they are different in the adjectives placement and the negation structure. Students tended to put adjectives in wrong order by saying une rouge voiture rather than unevoiture rouge and were not able to use the French negation system properly so they ended up saying je pas veux rather than je ne veux pas. Such errors point at the structural variations that bring about confusion.

Semantic and Pragmatic interference.

When direct translations of the Yoruba idioms and proverbs were used in the French language, semantic and pragmatic problems were noticed. An example is when the English version of the phrase "o n i inu r x d u n" (he is happy) was translated into the French version "il a la douceur d u n ventre," which translates to meaningless phrases in the French language. Students also transferred Yoruba politeness strategies to the French conversation and this could result in misunderstandings at times. Although these transfers enriched the communication, they were in many cases contradicting the ordinary rules of the French language.

Sociolinguistic Factors

The sociolinguistic aspects increased interference. It was found during interviews that a lot of learners considered French elitist and detached, which impeded their motivation and exposure to the language. The educators noted that students tended to use English as a mediating language, which resulted in additional interferences. The switching of languages between Yoruba, English, and French were common in the classrooms and this made mixed language classrooms where the boundaries of the languages were not clear. These results are in tandem with previous arguments regarding the influence of the attitudes of learners and the social conditions that they learn in.

Distribution of Interference Types

Table 1. Contrastive Features of Yoruba and French

Linguistic Level	Yoruba Features	French Features	Interference Tendencies
Phonology	Tonal; no nasal vowels	Intonational; nasal vowels	Tone transfer; nasal vowel substitution
Morphology	Analytic; no inflection	Synthetic; gender/number inflections	Errors in agreement (*le table*)
Syntax	SVO; simple negation	SVO; discontinuous negation	Omission/misplacement (*Je pas veux*)
Semantics	Idioms/proverbs	Literal semantic encoding	Direct translation errors

Table 2. Contrastive Features of Yoruba and French

Feature	Yoruba	French
Word Order	Subject-Verb-Object (SVO)	Subject-Verb-Object (SVO)
Articles	No definite/indefinite articles	Uses définit / indéfinité articles (le, la, un, une)
Gender	No grammatical gender	Masculine and feminine nouns
Verb Conjugation	Minimal inflection	Rich inflection based on tense and subject

Tones	Tonal language (3 tones)	Non-tonal language
Negation	Simple negation (e.g., kò)	Complex negation (ne...pas)
Plural Formation	Lexical or contextual	Morphological (e.g., -s, -x endings)

Figure 2. Sources of Interference in Yoruba Learners of French

Yoruba (50%): This is the highest interference source. Students tend to carry over structures, words, and pronouncing with the Yoruba to the French language and this may lead to grammatical and pronunciation mistakes.English (30%): English is popular in Nigeria and, therefore, it also disrupts French education. Students can use English cognates or syntax that will result in false friends and structural differences.Sociocultural (20%): The sociocultural factors such as cultural norms, mode of communication and social setting have an impact on the way the Yoruba learners study French. Indicatively, politeness schemes or idiomatic phrases might not conform to French customs and this brings about pragmatic interference.Table 2. Frequency of Interference Errors

Error Type	Frequency (%)	Example
Phonological	65%	Bon / bon
Syntactic	20%	Je pas veux
Morphological	15%	Les enfants

Understanding the Frequency of Interference Errors in Yoruba Learners of French

The pie chart titled "Frequency of Interference Errors in Yoruba Learners of French" shows how common different types of language errors are among Yoruba speakers learning French. Here's a breakdown of what the chart reveals:

Phonological Errors (65%)

This is the largest category and reveals how often Yoruba learners apply sounds from their native language or English when speaking French.

Example: Pronouncing "bon" as "bo" shows a tendency to drop the nasal sound, a feature not present in Yoruba.

Implication: To help students improve, teachers should focus on training them in pronunciation and listening exercises to correct these habits.

Syntactic Errors (20%)

These are the mistakes that are made when students write the wrong structures of sentences, normally as a result of direct translation of Yoruba or English.

Example: the use of "Je pas veux" as a substitute of Je ne veux pas is a result of English confusion.

Implication of this is that syntactic problems require more attention to French grammar, in particular, the use of negation and word order.

Morphological Errors (15%)

This is the usage of wrong forms of words such as articles, plurals, or verb forms. Example: By saying les enfant, but not les enfants, one is demonstrating ignorance about the forms of the plural. Implication: Morphology exercises and contrastive analysis can enhance the knowledge of the learners about grammar rules in French. These are some of the common types of errors, being aware of these enables teachers to customize their instructions. It enables them to focus on the phonological and syntactic correctness and learners have better insight into the common errors to be able to correct them on their own.

Summary of Findings

The results show that Yoruba students have the greatest difficulty in phonological interference as compared to syntactic and morphological mistakes in learning French. Despite the fact that the incidence of semantic and pragmatic interference is not common,

it still can have severe implications on communication. Furthermore, the acquisition process is further complicated by sociolinguistic determinants such as attitude of the learners, exposure as well as code-switching. These findings suggest that there is the need of pedagogical interventions which would deal with structural as well as cultural dimensions of language interference.

Discussion

This research indicates that Yoruba students learning French are prone to different forms of linguistic interference. The following is a discussion of these challenges:

Phonological Interference

The most common ones were phonological problems, which resonated with the results of previous scholars such as Akinjobi (2024:28) and Ogunmodimu (2022:37). The high rate of confusion between nasal and oral sounds indicates the sound system of the Yoruba speakers and its impact on the pronunciation of the French language. Students also have the tendency to use tonal patterns of the Yoruba language with the French speech that may result in inappropriate intonation. This is in line with Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which argues that variations between languages (first and second languages) of a learner can become a challenge.

Morphological Interference

Although not as common, morphological errors are used to emphasize how challenging it can be to learn grammar rules in the French language among the Yoruba speakers. The fact that word order is more important in Yoruba as compared to inflections makes it difficult to learners to use the right form of gender and numbers in the French language. This problem refers to shortcomings in the conventional methods of teaching that disregards the importance of language comparison.

Syntactic Interference

Syntactic errors represent the variation in sentence structuring between Yoruba and French. To illustrate this, Yoruba is a simple language that negatives are formed in an impractical way which collides with the elaborate nature of the French style of forming negations resulting to errors. These mistakes indicate that learners find it difficult to learn the syntactic rules of French.

The Semantic and Pragmatic Interference.

Misunderstandings in meanings and cultural peculiarities arise when students translate Yoruba idioms to the French language and in most cases, misinterpretations do arise. This is an indication of the tightness of language and culture. As observed, it is difficult to transfer these idiomatic expressions and this brings out the awkwardness in communication and this brings out the struggles of the learners to retain their cultural identity despite learning a new language.

Sociolinguistic Factors

The researchers discovered that the sociolinguistic variables have a significant influence on language learning. Most learners perceive French as a snobbish language and this reduces their level of motivation and encourages more dependence of the English language in the learning process. This is consistent with previous studies that put emphasis on the influence of attitude towards a language on its success in learning.

Greater Significance and Theoretical Implications.

The findings provide useful knowledge on the linguistic interference. This is because teaching methods must consider the structural differences and cultural background of language acquisition. Going on, it is important to reconsider interference as a normal fact of becoming a skilled speaker of a new language instead of being a mere failure in the areas of basic linguistics skills and competence..

Pedagogical Implications

Considering the endemic issue of interference among the Yoruba students of French, the following are some of the practices that can be used to enhance the teaching process : Contrastive analysis are very essential because teachers must include it in their lessons as a way of making the learners recognize and learn the differences between the Yoruba and French. There can be clear and specific exercises that can be used to alleviate the problems, particularly in pronunciation and grammar. Teacher competencies needed because when the teachers are proficient in both languages, there is a better chance that they can intervene better in terms of interference. To manage these challenges, the training programs must aim at developing this bilingual competency to enable the teachers to effectively cope with the challenges. Pragmatic awareness is needed for the learners because they have to know more than what they need to say in French but how to say it in a cultural context. Cultural norms may be taught explicitly to prevent misunderstandings that come about due to literal translations. Curriculum reform is necessary in as much as French language programme do not need a one-size-fits-all curriculum anymore and the linguistic background of students should be taken into consideration. Resources that capture the variety of language in Nigeria have the potential of greatly contributing to learning. Policy

changes should beencouraged using and appearance of French in the Nigerian society. Providing more exposure to the French language outside of the classroom can encourage students and decrease the habitual patterns of errors.

Conclusion

This is a multifaceted and a dynamic process of learning a language in a multilingual country such as Nigeria because there are several languages that interact with each other. This paper has taken a keen interest in the linguistic interference between Yoruba and French with a viewt of pointing out that such errors do not merely refer to mistakes but to the deeper thinking of the cognitive processes and the cultures that interact with each other. Throughout the process of interference that is seen as a developmental stage, learners may be motivated and assisted instead of being viewed as inadequate. This paper shows the necessity of improved pedagogical approaches, which should be in line with the local linguistic life conditions in Africa, the dynamism, and resourcefulness with which learners have to address themselves when they are negotiating between languages. Finally, linguistic interference is a guardian to the flexibility of human language and identity and it is also how the language would live, evolve and influencing one another in the multicultural Nigeria.

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