
Phonological Interference of Igbo Sounds Among Adult Igbo Learners of the French Language

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Abstract

Igbo adult learners of the French language in Nigerian schools, most especially in higher institutions (Universities and Colleges of Education) find it difficult to speak the French language fluently without the features of Igbo phonology. This is due to the negative effect of linguistic interference. This study investigates the features of Igbo sounds interference in the speech of Igbo learners of French at the Nigerian French Language Village, Ajara, Badagry during their French Language Immersion Programme. Thirty Igbo learners of French form the population of the study. Data for this study, which were mostly recorded using tape recorder were obtained from Igbo learners of French as they speak, during a close observation of their utterances. The recorded data were carefully listened to in order to sieve the French sounds that were badly uttered due to negative interference of Igbo sounds. It was discovered that hardly could any of them utter French words without Igbo sounds interfering. The study therefore recommends that Igbo learners of the French language get intensively and practically involved in oral drill of French sounds using the Contrastive Analysis (CA) to ensure appropriate articulation of those sounds.

Key words: language, mother-tongue, foreign language, sounds, linguistic interference.

Introduction

Since the French language became a subject of study in the Nigerian schools, many observations, appraisals and recommendations have been made and still being offered on how to improve its teaching and learning in Nigerian schools (Kizito 1995, 1997; Kwofie 1995; Aduke 1995; Alo 1995; Igbenegu 1998; Jimoh 1997; Ajani & Soqid 2017; Adeleke 2019) just to mention but a few.

The introduction of the French language as a teaching and learning subject in Nigeria dates back to 1859. According to Adelekan (1983), the French language was among the earliest subjects introduced into the first secondary school (CMS Grammar School, Lagos) in 1859. Also, in April 1878, when the Wesleyan High School and Training Institution was opened, the French language was one of the modern languages taught in that school. Since the inception of the French language, its teaching and learning have been facing series of problems, one of such problems is the issue of mother-tongue interference. Igbo learners of French, like other Nigerian learners, are faced with this problem most especially in the area of phonology as a result of the influence of Igbo sounds on French sounds.

This paper is set to point out areas of difficulties in pronunciation of French sounds encountered by Igbo university undergraduates learning French during their language Immersion Programme at Nigerian French language village, and suggest some didactic approaches

Review of Literature

Linguistic interference according to Crystal (2001:199) is “a term used in sociolinguistics and foreign language to refer to error a speaker introduces into one language as a result of contact with another language.” The theory on which this study is anchored is the

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M. Van Overbeke's (1976) theory of linguistics interference known as *Mecanisme de L'interference linguistique* (Mecanism of linguistics interference). According to this theory, interference may be conscious or unconscious. Consciously, the learner may guess because he/she has learnt or has forgotten the correct usage. Unconsciously, the learner may not consider that the features of the languages may differ, or may know the correct rules but be insufficiently skilled to put on the example of his first language.

Linguistic interference also known as LI interference, cross linguistics interference or transfer is the effects of language learner's first language on their production of the language they are learning. The effect can be on any aspect of language: Phonology, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and so on. It is most often discussed as a source of errors (negative transfer); where the relevant features of both languages are the same, it results in correct language production, that is, positive transfer. The greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative the effects of linguistic interference are likely to be. Furthermore, linguistic interference according to Weinreich (1966:1) is:

... the re-arrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of elements into the more highly structured domains of language such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of the morphology, syntax and some of the vocabulary.

While Debyser (1970:31) sees it as a typical language error committed by a foreign language learner due to the impact of the structure of the mother tongue already acquired by the learner. From Kwofie (1995:2) point of view, linguistics interference is a deviation

from the normal structure of a foreign language due to the influence of the structure of either L1 (mother tongue) or L2 which is a second language already mastered by the foreign language learner.

Interference can affect any aspects of language it can be negative or positive depending on the features of both languages. The greater the difference between the two languages, the more negative the effects of interference are expected to be.

The focus of this paper is linguistic interference that manifests due to differences between sounds (vowel and consonant sounds) of Igbo as a mother tongue and that of French as a Foreign Language and the consequence of these differences as manifested in wrong production of some French words by Igbo learners of French language in Nigeria.

Comparison of the Phonological Systems of Igbo and French

The Igbo Language

The Igbo language is spoken by the Igbo people in the South East Nigeria. The language cuts across five (5) eastern states, namely: Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi and Enugu States. The Igbo people are also partially found in Delta and River States. Eze (2014:166) notes that the Igbos are found in every nook and cranny of Nigeria. According to Emenanjo (1978:11), Igbo is a tone language (that is, one which makes use of the pitch of the voice to make a difference to the meaning of the words). Eze (2014) points out that the Igbo language study started formally in Igbo land with the coming of the missionaries in 1857.

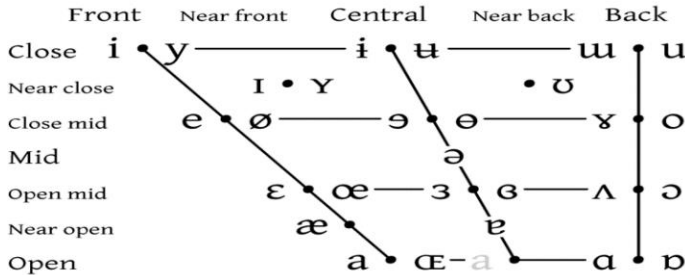
According to Emenanjo (1978:41), Igbo sounds are grouped into two: the vowels and the consonants. The Igbo vowels are eight in number. They are /i, ɪ, e, a, ɔ, o, ʊ, u/ and they are found in Igbo words as presented in 1.

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1. i /i/ ísí 'ahead'
- ì /i/ ùdírí 'type/kind'
- e /e/ íré 'tongue'
- a /a/ aka 'hand'
- o /ɔ/ oso 'race'
- o /o/ ero 'mushroom'
- ɔ /ʊ/ ɔka 'discussion'
- u /u/ ukwu 'waist'

The chart below from Emenanjo (1978:4) points to the realization of Igbo vowel sounds.

VOWELS



Vowels at right & left of bullets are rounded & unrounded.

Fig. 1 Igbo Vowel Chart adapted from Emenanjo (1978:5)

Igbo has twenty-eight consonant sounds. They are: /p b m t d n g k kw gw kp gb f v s z ʃ ʒ ɖ ɗ l r ɲ ɳ w j ɣ h/. They are found in the following words:

2. p /p/ pùá 'go out'
- b /b/ bàtá 'enter'

t /t/	ntú	‘nail’
d /d/	ndù	‘life’
ch /tʃ/	nchá	‘soap’
j /dʒ/	ájā	‘sand’
l /l/	àlà	‘land’
g /g/	égō	‘money’
kw /kw/	àkwá	‘egg’
gw /gw/	ágwó	‘snake’
kp /kp/	àkpà	‘bag’
gb /gb/	agba	‘jaw’
f /f/	áfó	‘belly’
v /v/	ávù	‘armpit’
y /j/	m̀yò	‘sieve’
z /z/	ázù	‘fish’
sh /ʃ/	ìshá	‘crayfish’
gh /ɣ/	ághá	‘war’
h /h/	àhù	‘body’
m /m/	mé	‘do’
n /n/	ánù	‘meat’
ny /ɲ/	ányá	‘eye’
ñ /ɲ/	ánñù	‘bee’
nw /ŋw/	ánwū	‘sunshine’
r /r/	ìrí	‘ten’
w /w/	éwú	‘goat’
y /j/	óyò	‘rattle’
k /k/	áká	‘hand’

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Table 1 points to the articulation of Igbo consonant sounds as presented by Emenanjo (1978:8).

Table 1. Igbo Consonant Chart

	Bilabial	Labio dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labiali zed Velar	Glottal
Stops/ Plosives	p b		t d		k g	kw gw	
Implosives	kp gb						
Fricatives		f v	s z	ʃ	ɣ		h
Affricate				tʃ dʒ			
Nasals	m		n	ɲ	ŋ	ŋw	
Roll			r				
Lateral			l				
Approx. Semi- Vowels)				j		w	

The French Language

According to Adeleke (2019:27), French sounds are made up of seventeen consonant sounds, sixteen vowels and three semi vowel/ semi consonant sounds. Omozuwa and Moye (2011:7) present the French vowels and consonants as follow:

Table 2 French Consonants

Symbole Phonétique	Représentation graphique	Comme dans
[p]	p	père, pantalon, peuple
[b]	b	bèbè, beau, belle
[t]	t, th	tu, thè, tante
[d]	d	dans, dormir, dinde
[k]	k, q, c	kiosque, queue, comme
[g]	g	garçon, gare, langue
[f]	f, ph	frère, feu, fou, photo
[v]	v	vent, ville, voyelle
[s]	s, c, ss, c	septembre, ce, leçon, son, sommet, classe
[z]	z, s	zèle, zinc, vision
[ʃ]	ch, sch	chanson, chat, chemise, schéma
[ʒ]	j, g	je, gentil, juin
[l]	l	lit, limonade, langue
[j]	ile, consonne+i	filles, école, cahier, pied, yeux, viande
[w]	oui, oi, etc	oui, toi, boit
[r]	r	radio, règne, regard
[ʁ]	ui	huit, lui, nuit
[m]	m	martin, mère, maison
[n]	n	normandie, normal, non
[ɲ]	gn	champagne, ligne, igname

(Source: Omozuwa & Moye, 2018)

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[I]	i, ui	Riz, dix, qui
[y]	U	Tu, du, sur, rue
[e]	E, ai(e), er	Bèbè, serai, peje, manger
[ø]	Eu	Peu, queue, feu, bleu
[œ]	Oeu, eur	Sœur, peur, l'heure
[ɛ]	Ain, in, ein, un	Pain, singe, sein, un (en français standard)
[u]	Ou	Cou, loup, nous
[o]	Eau, au	Faut, eau, pau
[ɔ]	Or	Corp, port, dormir
[ɔ̃]	On	Bon, pont, son
[œ̃]	Un, um	Un, parform
[ə]	e, ue	Je, de,

(Source: Omozuwa & Moye, 2018)

Mebiame (2013:199) presents the realization of French vowel and nasal vowel sounds as represented in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 French Vowels

Localisation	Antérieure		Postérieure
Degré d'aperture	Non-arrondi	Arrondi	Non-arrondi
			Arrondi
1 ^{er} degré	/i/	/y/	/u/
2 ^{eme} degré	/e/	/ø/	/o/
3 ^{eme} degré	/ɛ/	/œ/	/ɔ/
4 ^{eme} degré	/a/		/ɑ/

Table 4 French Voyelles nasals

Localisation	Antérieure		Postérieure
Labialité	Non-arrondi		Non-arrondi
	Arrondi		Arrondi
	/ɛ̃/	/œ̃/	/ɔ̃/
			/ɑ̃/

Table 5 Système phonologique des consonnes du français standard

Lieu d'articulation Mode d'articulation	Labial Sourd sonore		Alvéolaire Sourd sonore		Palatal Sourd sonore		Vélaire Sourd sonore	
Oral Occlusif	p	b	t	d			k	g
nasal		m		n		ɲ		(ŋ)
Fricatif	f	v	s	z	ʃ	ʒ		
Latéral Liquide				l				
vibrant				R				

Methodology

The Nigeria French language village (*Le Village français du Nigeria* in French) for many years has been known as a Centre for Linguistic Immersion Programme for learners of French language in Nigeria schools most especially Universities and Colleges of Education.

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The data were obtained from the Igbo learners of French in the Nigeria French language Village during their French language Immersion Programme. The collection was done through a close observation of utterances of the speakers. Their utterances were recorded and analyzed to establish areas of interference of Igbo sounds on French sounds. Table (6) shows the words, interferences and their correct versions.

Table 6 Stated Expression, Oral Expression from students and Expected Oral Expressions from Students

S/N	Stated expressions	Oral expression realized from Students	Expected correct oral expression from students
1	voici ma main	[vwasimamə]	[vwasimamě]
2	je mange du pain	[ʒəmaʒdupən]	[ʒəmaʒdypě]
3	tu arrives quand?	[TuaRivka]	[TyaRivkã]
4	voici ma voiture:	[VwasimavwatuR]	[VwasimavwatyR]
5	j' arrive dans deux ans	[JaRivdadəza]	[JaRivdadəzã]

6	on arrive le soir	[onaRiveləSwaR]	[ʔnaRiveləSwaR]
7	le vélo est ici.	[iəuəloetisi]	[iəuəloetisi]
8	elle est parti.	[ələpaRti]	[ɛləpaRti]
9	servez moi peu du sucre	[səRvəmwapədusuk RE]	[səRvəmwapədusykR]
10	bonjour tour le monde.	[boJuRtuləmød]	[bʔjuRtuLmʔd]
11	les Femmes sont ici	[ləFamsotisi]	[ləFamsʔtisi]
12	les gens sont L partis	[ləʒāsopaRti]	[ləʒāsʔpaRti]
13	où sont les huit stylo	[ʏsələwitstilo]	[ʏsʔləʏitstilo]
14	voici les huit amis	[vwasiləwitami]	[vwasileʏitami]
15	nous cherchons notre ami	[nʏsəRsonnotRami]	[nʏʃɛRʔnʔtRami]
16	voici mon chapeu	[vwasimosapo]	[vwasimʔʃapo]
17	le bidon est vide	[ləbidəvid]	[ləbidʔvid]
18	le bonbon est avec qui ?	[ləbʔbʔətavəki]	[ləbʔbʔətavəki]
19	cette femme est ma mère	[sətʃaməmaməR]	[setʃaməmaməR]
20	elle est avec nous	[əltavəknu]	[ɛltavəknu]

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21	nous allons chez vous	[nusalɔsəvu]	[nusalɔʃevu]
22	j'ai peu avec moi	[JəPəavəumwa]	[JəPəavəkmwa]
23	j'ai deux stylos avec lui	[Jədəstyloavəklwi]	[Jədəstyloavəklwi]
24	il fait le zig zag	[ilfələsigsig]	[ilfələzigzig]
25	où est notre classe	[ʊənotRklas]	[ʊənɔtRklas]
26	voici mon pantalon	[vwasimɔpatalɔ]	[vwasimɔpatalɔ]
27	cet élève est mon ami	[sətələvəmɔami]	[setələvəmɔami]
28	la classe est fermée	[laklasətəRminə]	[laklasətəRmine]
29	bonjour la classe	[boʝuRlaklas]	[bɔʝuRlaklas]
30	nous sommes maintenant dans la classe	[nusɔmmətənadalaklas]	[nusɔmmətənadəlaklas]

Discussion of Findings

Looking critically at the sounds of the two languages (Igbo and French), the following facts could be established:

- i. While French is made of thirty-six sounds (sixteen vowels, seventeen consonants and three semi vowel/same consonant sounds), Igbo is made up of eight vowels and twenty-eight consonants, making a total of thirty-six sounds.

- ii. While the French language has three semi vowel/consonant sounds, Igbo has no semi vowel/semi consonant sounds.
- iii. The French language has four nasal vowel sounds [ɛ̃, â, œ̃, ɔ̃], but the Igbo language does not have similar sounds.
- iv. Furthermore, the French language possesses the vowel sounds (œ, ə, y, ε), which do not exist in Igbo as vowels and in most cases they are replaced by another Igbo vowel sounds by the Igbo learners of the French language. One hears main /mɛ̃/ pronounced /me/, tu /ty/ pronounced /tu/, and peu /pø/ realized as /po/ by Igbo learners of the French language, just to mention a few.
- v. Finally, the absence of the Igbo consonant sounds /kp/, /gb/, /ʃ/, /ɣ/, /ɲ/, /ŋw/ in French leads many Igbo learners of the French language to get confused when they are producing some French words. For example, words like *papa* /papa/, *chaussure* /ʃosyR/ are realized as /kpakpa/ and /ʃhosuR/ respectively.

Findings

From the data collected from the samples, one could see that Igbo learners of the French language have problem with the realization of some French sounds. Majority of them have problem with French vowels nasal sounds, such as [ɛ̃], [â] and [ɔ̃]. Also, majority of them have difficulties with the following French oral vowel sounds, such as /ɛ/, /y/, /ə/, /ø/. For the consonant sounds, majority have difficulties with the following French consonant sounds /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ and semi consonant/semi vowel sound /ɥ/.

Our findings show that in their oral production in French, all the above identified French sounds are replaced by other close Igbo sounds and this leads to a situation where the sound /y/, which is a front closed oral vowel is replaced by /u/, a back closed oral vowel;

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such that *tu* /ty/ ‘you’ is pronounced as /tu/. The French nasal vowel sound /ɛ̃/ is replaced by French closed mid vowel /ə/ so that *main* /mɛ̃/ is realised as /mə/. Similarly, nasal vowel sounds /ɔ̃/ is replaced by /ɔ/ in French word *bonjour* /bɔ̃juR/, and it is realised as /bɔjur/.

At the level of the consonant sounds, the problematic areas are the French consonant fricative palatal non noised sound /ʃ/ which is replaced by non-voiced sound /ti/; oral occlusive labial sound /p/ is replaced by Igbo sound /kp/, and the vibrant alveolaire sound /R/ is replaced by a lateral alveolaire sound /l/, especially among Igbo learners of French language from Anambra state. As a result, words like *papa* /papa/ is realised as /kpakpa/, *chercher* /ʃɛRʃe/ realised as /tʃɛtʃe/, *zig zag* /zigzag/ is realised as /sigsag/, and *votre radio* /vɔtRRadio/ is realised as (votRladio).

Conclusion

The study explores the effects of phonological interference of Igbo sounds among Igbo University undergraduate French learners who were in the Nigeria French language Village, Ajara, Badagry for their French language Immersion Programme.

Our findings revealed that hardly could anyone of the learners utter French words without Igbo sounds interfering. It is concluded that some didactic approaches needed to be taken to address the issue.

Recommendations

On the basis of our findings, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. The use of contrastive analysis (CA) which is an approach in linguistic field to identify area of similarity and

dissimilarity between the existing language, most especially the mother tongue and foreign language. In contrastive analysis of two languages, the point of structural differences is identified and then studied as area of potential difficulty and this may, at times, lead to what Crystal (2001:199) called negative transfer in foreign language. And based on Crystal (2001), these difficult areas are the real source of errors in French classes.

In making use of contrastive analysis in French classes in Igbo speaking area, one needs to bring out Igbo sounds and French sounds and find out area of difficulties. This approach will lead us to identify some of their linguistic problems.

2. Practical involvement of students in oral drill in French sounds. By making use of this approach, learners are exposed to various French sounds, most especially the problematic ones and engage in mouth exercise of calling out the sounds as produced orally by their teachers. This could be done in two ways: individual exercise and group exercise.
3. Provision of a functional language laboratory. In many schools, especially in the Colleges of Education and the Universities, French language laboratory do not exist. And where they exist, in most cases, they are non-functional due to lack of adequate supply of electricity or lack of maintenance culture. Without a functional language laboratory, effective teaching and learning of language sounds is highly difficult.

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