LINGUISTIC TRANSFER OF L1 AND L2 IN THE ACQUISITION OF L3: THE CASE OF FRENCH LEARNERS IN SOUTH WEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Generally, interference occurs at the phonetic, phonological, syntactic, or lexical levels through contact with foreign languages, especially among learners of French as a foreign language (FLE). Previous works on language interference have examined the concept of transfer and error in the acquisition of L2 and L3 in French without paying attention to learners of French who have Yoruba as their L1, English as their L2, and French as their L3 in South-West Nigeria. Therefore, this paper attempts to examine the linguistic transfer of L1 and L2 in the acquisition of French as L3 among learners of French in South-West Nigeria to demonstrate the influence of Yoruba and English on their learning of French. For this study, through the pronunciation of word lists according to the Labovian approach, data were collected from forty-four (44) students from four universities, namely, the University of Ibadan, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Osun State University and the University of Lagos. The participants were selected because they have Yoruba as their mother tongue, English as their L2, and French as their L3. The results revealed transfers and errors such as anglicism, substitution, insertion, voicing and devoicing, omission, denasalization, and nasalization.

Introduction

In order to be part of a linguistic community, it is important to speak the local language. During this process, the individual unconsciously acquires one or two languages that can be called his or her mother tongue(s), which allow him or her to express his ideas, feelings, fears, anxieties, etc., each language being a means of communication. Following the acquisition of the mother tongue comes the learning of other so-called foreign languages. However, the value and influence of the mother tongue on a foreign language should never be underestimated. Learning a foreign language gives rise to the manifestation of various types of errors that are often due to inter-language communication. Consequently, in order to communicate, the learner uses language knowledge already stored in his or her memory. It is around this concept of inter-language that this paper focuses, and it is from this angle that the errors and transfers extracted and analyzed will be examined. In this paper, we will attempt to treat the errors that occur between two foreign languages: English and French according to the characteristics of our audience, the second year learners of French at the University of Ibadan, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Osun State University, and the University of Lagos with French as a Foreign Language (FLE). Questionnaire is the instrument used for this study.

The concept of error

In language teaching, several types of errors occur for one reason or another, and in order to correct them, they should be identified and classified. This study attempts to identify and analyze inter-lingual errors, intra-lingual errors, and developmental errors. The first step in error analysis (EA) involves identifying elements of the learner's language sample that deviate from language transfer (LT) in some way. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between errors. According to James (1998:77), an error occurs "only when there was no intention to make it". Errors are systematic and consistent deviations that characterize the learning produced by the learner's language system at a given stage of learning. Errors are usually produced by learners who have not yet fully mastered an institutionalized linguistic system; they are due to imperfect competence in the target language.

Fauziati (2009: 139), is of the opinion that errors are deviations due to performance factors such as memory limitation, fatigue, and emotional stress. They are usually irregular and can be easily corrected by the learners themselves when their attention is drawn to them. Ellis (1987), on the other hand, sees the issue of error from a different angle, recognizing in principle two types of errors: competence errors and performance errors. He also considers competence errors to be appropriate for the term "error", whereas performance errors are associated with the term "fault". Finally, he divides proficiency error into two sub-categories, which he calls: inter-lingual error and intra-lingual error, and he states that ‘‘both concern errors at the phonological levels’’.

Inter-lingual error

Interference, language transfer, and cross-linguistic interference are also known as cross-lingual errors. Corder (1981) states that this type of error occurs when the learner's habitual behaviour (patterns, systems, or rules) interferes with or prevents him to some extent from acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language. Lado (1964) submits that interference (negative transfer) is the negative influence of the mother tongue (L1) on the performance of the target language (L2) whereas Chelli (2013) defined cross-lingual errors as the result of language transfer, which is caused by the learner's mother tongue.

According to Allen and Corder (1974), inter-lingual errors are caused by transfer errors. Touchie (1986) suggests that cross-linguistic errors are mainly caused by the native language.

Al-Khresheh (2010), argues that inter-lingual errors are committed by literal translation. Transfer error could be caused by mother-tongue interference. A student who is not familiar with the rules of the target language will use the same rules that he has learned in his native language. Moreover, errors could occur as learners attempt to discover the structure of the target language rather than transferring patterns from their mother tongue. In addition, errors could also occur as a student translates his mother tongue phrase or idiom into the target language word by word.

Intra-lingual error

The interference of the student's language is not the only reason for making errors. Students can make errors in the target language because they do not know the target language very well and have difficulties using it. Richard (1974: 6) states that: Intra-linguistic interference refers to items produced by the learner that do not reflect the structure of the mother tongue but are generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language. Brown (1980: 162) notes that it has been found that the early stages of language learning are characterized by a predominance of inter-lingual transfer, but once the learner begins to acquire elements of the new system, more and more generalization of the target language transfers will occur.

Methodology

Forty-four (44) French as a Foreign Language (FLE) participants were selected from the empirical sample of four universities in South West Nigeria, namely: University of Ibadan (10 participants) in Oyo State at the Department of European Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye (11 participants) in Ogun State at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of Osun (12 participants) at the Department of French, Ikire in Osun State and University of Lagos (11 participants) at the Department of Foreign Languages and Diplomatic Studies, located at Akoka in Lagos State. The learners were chosen because they have Yoruba as their L1, English as their L2, and French as their L3. Also, the learners of French are in their final year. We chose the finalists because it is believed that they have acquired the four skills in FLE at this level. These universities represent the geographical region in southwestern Nigeria where Yoruba people are located. Data were collected through the reading/pronunciation of word lists on a tape recorder. The word list contained 96 words. Each participant read the words for 45 minutes. The data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods, respectively.

Tracking Transfers

This step focuses on the precision of the domain and scope of each transfer. The domain of a transfer refers to the boundaries of the context in which the transfer occurs, namely its carrier word or phrase. The extent of the transfer on the other hand refers to the size of the unit to be reconstructed to repair the transfer. Using this criterion, we identified five hundred and fifty-six (556) pronunciation errors and transfers in the analyzed data set.

Transfer/Error Analysis/Description

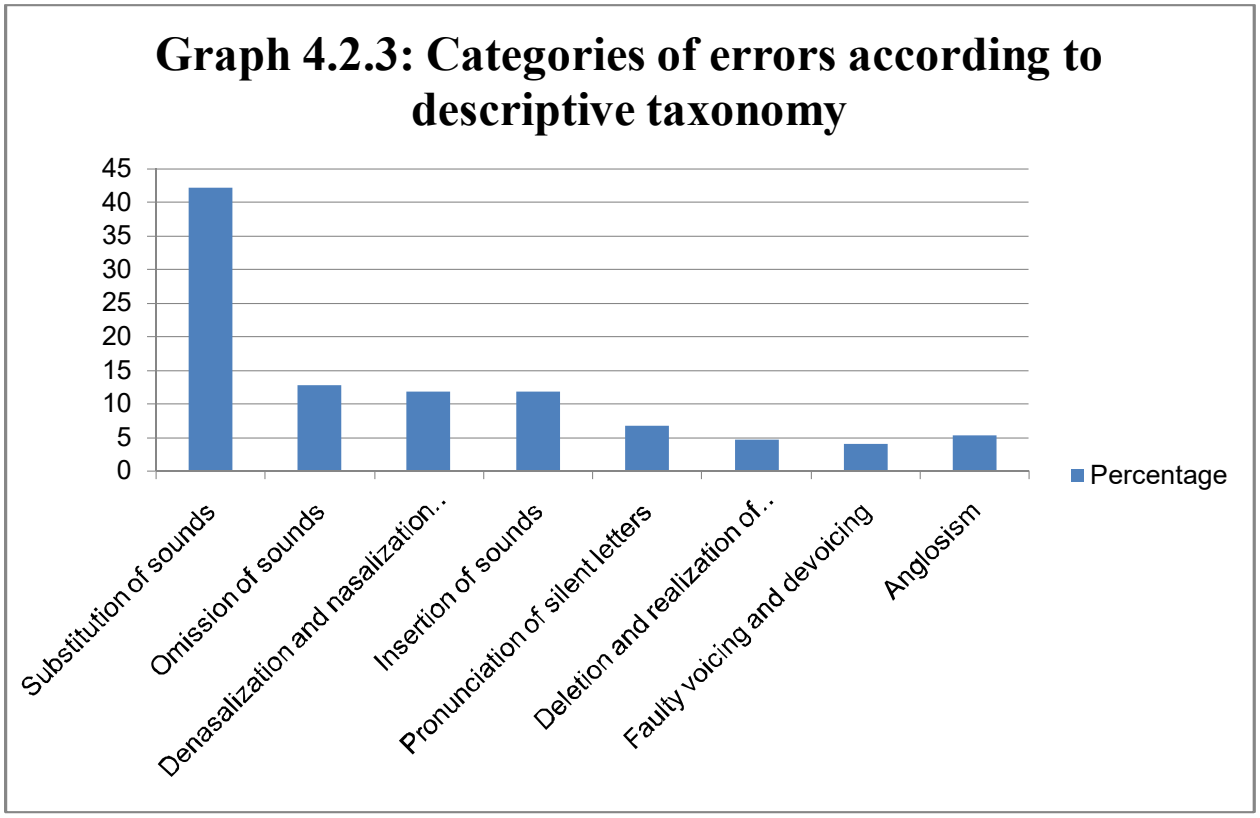
According to Corder (1974), this step is a comparative process between the original utterances and the pronunciation provided in standard dictionaries. In order to describe the errors, found in the learners' recordings we formed a set of descriptive categories to code the errors that had been spotted and then indicated the frequency of errors in each category using a linguistic taxonomy involving different aspects of the French phonetic system. The table below shows the frequencies and percentages of errors according to the results of the analysis of the learners' recordings.

Categories of errors/transfers according to the descriptive taxonomy

Description of error	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Substitution of sounds	235	42.3
Denasalization and nasalization errors	66	11.9
Anglicism	30	5.4
Omission of sounds	72	12.9
Insertion of sounds	66	11.9
Pronunciation of silent letters	38	6.8
Deletion and realization of faulty linkage	26	4.7
Faulty voicing and devoicing	23	4.1
Total	**556**	**100**

According to the table above, the phonetic description of the errors/transfers observed resulted in eight general categories of errors. The first, constituting almost half of the errors/transfers (42.3%), included the substitution of vowel and consonant sounds. In second

place with (12.9%) comes the error of omission of vowel and consonant sounds. Then there is the category of insertion of sounds and those of nasalization and denasalization accounting for (11.9%) of the errors observed and then we noticed the voicing and devoicing of sounds which constituted 4.1% of errors. Errors related to the pronunciation of silent letters /p, s, t, d/ amounted to 6.8% and the error of linking (link erasure and wrong linking) to 4.7%. These were followed by Anglicism, which is the pronunciation of French sounds or words as English words, and sound shifting at 5.4% of the total errors found. These error categories were summarized graphically as follows:



In the graph above, the sound substitution error observed appeared strongly in the learners' oral productions. Three types of errors appeared on average, namely those related to the omission of sounds, the insertion of sounds and also the error of denasalization and nasalization.

Secondly, there is another group of errors such as the pronunciation of silent letters, voicing and devoicing errors, and linkage erasures which appeared less than the errors mentioned above.

It is clear that errors related to sound shifts and the pronunciation of foreign sounds and other words were rarely obvious. In the following section, we will try to explain the possible sources of these errors.

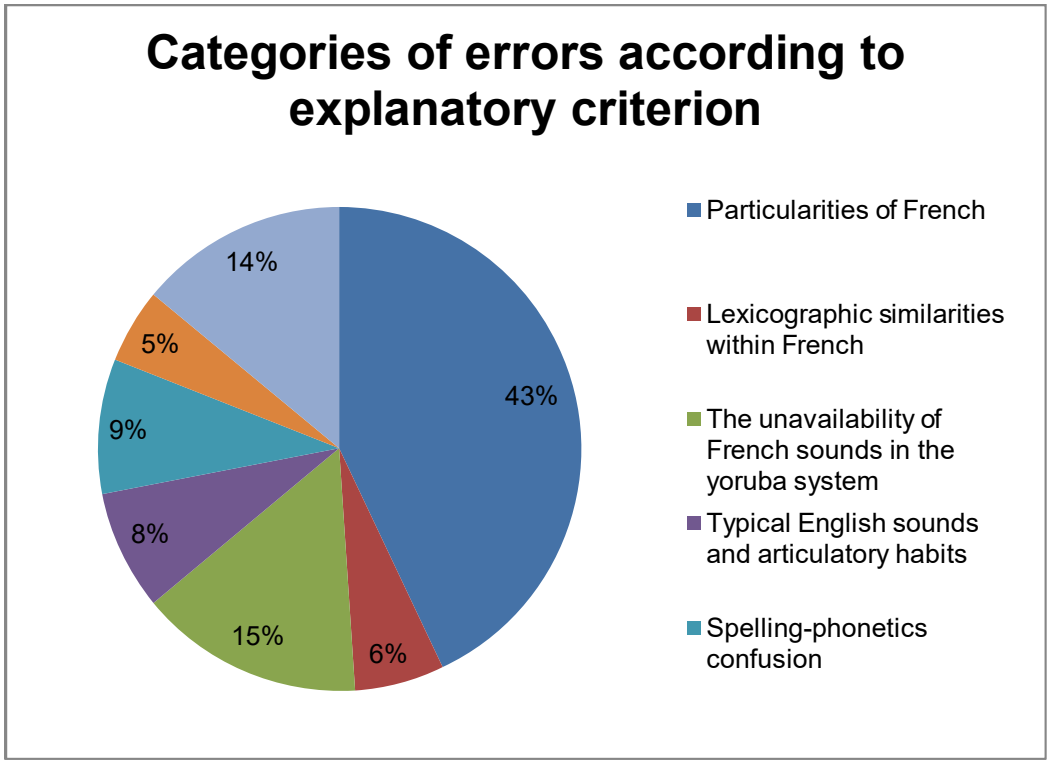
Explanation of errors

This step involves determining the possible sources of errors made and methods of correction. In other words, it is the step that largely guides the choice of error correction methods. To explain the 556 errors found in the learners' recordings, we adopted the comparative taxonomy which categorizes errors on the basis of their possible sources such as intra-lingual errors and inter-lingual errors. As in the previous step, we have constituted a set of explanatory categories according to the different factors that may be the causes.

Speaking of intra-lingual error, we have the following factors: the particularities of the French language and the lexicographic similarities between French and other languages. With regard to inter-lingual errors, there are the following factors: unavailability of French sounds in the Yoruba system, typical sounds and articulatory habits of other languages spoken by the learners, spelling-phonetics confusion, overlapping causal factors, and inexplicable articulatory habits.

Categories of errors by explanatory criterion

Description of errors	**Frequency**	**Perrcentage (%)**
Particularities of French	240	43.2
Lexicographic similarities within French	32	5.8
The unavailability of French sounds in the Yoruba system	83	14.9
Typical English sounds and articulatory habits (Anglicism)	46	8.3
Spelling-phonetics confusion	50	8.9
Overlapping causal factors	27	4.9
Inexplicable articulatory habits	78	14.0
Total	**556**	**100**



Particularities of French

Generally speaking, there are two categories of intra-lingual errors. The first, constituting 43.2% of the errors is attributable to the particularities of the French language. By 'particularities' we mean distinctive notions of the French language such as nasalization, assimilation, linking and sequence, oral vowel sounds that are absent in the L1 of the students, for example [ə] caduc, [œ], [ø], [y], [ɥ], silent letters and the realization of [R] as well as phonic variations according to the different orthographic contexts of letters. We believe that this factor explains the following errors;

Errors/Transfers attributable to the particularities of the French language

Orthography	Observed error/transfer
déc**é**dée, télévi**s**ion, se**s**, se**s** **l**ivres, garçons, Fai**s**ais, en**s**emble, ro**s**e,	**[s] - [z]**
le**s** oiseaux, cau**s**e,	**[z] - [s]**
Fâche	**[f] - [v]**
Dupon**t**, tro**p**, cou**p,** repo**s,** repa**s,** s'assie**d,** fai**t,**	Pronunciation of silent letters
mesu**r**e, peu**r,** sueu**r,** sœu**r,** seu**l,** veu**f**	Omission of final [R], [f] et [l]
seu**l**, erreu**r**, veu**f**, peu**r**, sueu**r,** lecteu**r**, jeune	[œ] - [o], [ø], [ɔ], [i], [u]
fa**i**sais, m**e,** r**e**garde, s**e** trouve, f**e**nêtre, d**e**venu	[ə] - [e] [i], [ɛ], [a]
mesu**r**e,	[y] - [u], [o], [a]
qu'**un,** mat**in,** **en**semble, jard**in,** Cont**ent,** **un,** **en**vironnement, ma**in,**	Denasalization of nasal vowels

R**u**itiers	[ɥ] - [u]
Quan**d** il, nou**s** **y** avons	Erasure of linkage

Lexicographical similarities within French

Still related to intra-lingual errors, a second category emerged consisting of only thirty-two (or 5.8%) related to confusion between French words with the same or almost the same spelling and almost the same pronunciation, i.e. differing by only one sound.

Errors/Transfers attributable to lexicographic similarities within French

Orthography	Observed error
Regard**ait**	[ɛ] - [e]
Jou**ais**	[ɛ] - [e]
Déran**gent**, don**ne,** Belg**e,** chaq**ue**	Insertion of oral vowels
Regard**ent**	Insertion of nasal vowels

Spelling-phonetics confusion

Errors related to the spelling of words constituted the fifth category of errors, accounting for 8.9%. This refers to errors arising from confusion between letters and sounds. The list of words, taken from learners' expressions, provides specific examples.

Substitution of French sounds by Yoruba sounds

The next category, constituting 14.9% of the errors observed and forming part of the inter-lingual errors, included cases of substitution of French sounds that do not exist in the Yoruba phonological system. We found that learners tend to substitute French sounds that do not exist in Yoruba with sounds that are articulated almost the same way in their native language. We have cited specific examples in the table below;

Errors/Transfers attributable to spelling-speech confusion

Orthography	Errors/Transfers
B***e***lge, dér***a***ngent, donn***e***, t***ê***te	Insertion de [e]
Regard***an***t	Omission of [ã]
Environnem***e***nt	[ã] - [ɛ̃]

jou***ai***s, l***ai***t, r***ai***son	[ɛ] - [e]
Chaq***ue***	Insertion of [o]

Substitution of French sounds by Yoruba sounds

The next category constituting 14.9% of the errors observed and forming part of the inter-lingual errors included cases of substitution of French sounds which do not exist in the Yoruba phonological system. We found that learners tend to substitute French sounds that do not exist in Yoruba with sounds that are articulated almost the same way in their native language. We have cited specific examples in the table below;

Errors/Transfers attributable to the unavailability of French sounds in the Yoruba system

Orthography	Error/Transfer
s**eu**l, err**eu**r, v**eu**f, p**eu**r, sueu**r,** l**e**ct**eu**r, j**eu**ne	[œ] - [o], [ɔ], [i], [u]
f**ai**sais, m**e, re**garde, s**e** trouve, f**e**nêtre, d**e**v**e**nu	[ə] - [e] [i], [ɛ], [a]
Mes**u**re	[y] - [u], [o], [a]
R**u**itiers	[ɥ] - [u]
Thé	[e] – [i]

Typical English Sounds and Articulatory Habits

According to the analysis, it was found that sounds and articulatory habits of other languages spoken by the learners (especially English) clogged their pronunciation of French. This type of cross-lingual error was evident in 8.3% of the total errors found. These errors were found to be denasalization of French words and substitution of sounds. The table below shows typical examples of these errors.

Errors/Transfers attributable to English

Orthography	French transcription	Errors/Transfers
J***ea***n	[ʒɔ̃]	[ʒin]
Thé	[te]	[Θe]
Insulte	[[Rsylt]]	[insult]
Mes***ur***e	[məzyR]	[məʃɔ]
Th***é***	[te]	[ti]
No**n**	[nɔ̃]	[non]
Tél***é***vision	[tel**e**visjɔ̃]	[tel**i**vizjɔ̃]

R***ai***son	[Rɛzɔ̃]	[rizin]
Environnem***en***t	[ãvironmã]	[environment]
R***e***garde	[RəgaRd]	[rigard]
Thé	[e] - [Θ]	Thé

Overlapping

The penultimate category comprises twenty-seven errors (4.9%) known as cross-cutting errors. This term refers to the overlapping factors assumed to be the possible causes. This fact required multidimensional explanations [157] for each of the errors in question as detailed in the table below:

Errors/Transfers due to overlapping factors

Orthography	Error/Transfer
f**ai**sais, m**e, re**garde, s**e** trouve, f**e**nêtre, d**e**v**e**nu	[ə] - [e] [i], [ɛ], [a]
Mes**u**re	[y] - [u], [o], [a]

Inexplicable articulatory habits

Finally, we treated 78 seventy-eight errors (i.e. 14.0%) which are practically difficult to link to any cause, except for individual and sometimes inexplicable characteristics of the learners concerned. This category includes particular errors, especially substitutions, distortions and sound shifts. Here are some specific examples from the learners' recordings in tabular form.

Inexplicable or cross-cutting errors/transfers

Orthography	**Error/Transfer**
Thé	[e] - [Θ]
Dérang***en***t	[deRegadɔ̃]
Mar**x**iste	[maRist]
Notre environnement, Lui offre	Linking error
Mou**ch**oir, Cau**se**, S'ass**ied**	Omission and substitution of sounds
Bo**it**, **la**, il **est**, thé	Substitution of sounds

As noted by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2009), it is often impossible to locate the precise linguistic source of an error. Therefore, we were only able to identify the linguistic source of 72.2% of the errors observed in the learners, namely intra-lingual errors, which amount to 49%, and inter-lingual errors, which amount to 23.2%. The source of 27.8% of the errors is still

unknown, of which 13.8% fell into more than one category, while the source of the remaining 14% of errors remains completely unknown.

CONCLUSION

Through the characteristics of the linguistic sign, each language is unique from the other. The rules of writing and speaking differ from one language to another, and this poses problems for learners. Previous knowledge of a language (either the mother tongue or English) plays a very important role in learning French in Nigeria. In this research work, it can be said that this exercise helped us identify pronunciation problems faced by learners who have Yoruba as their L1, English as their L2, and French as their L3. This helped us study the implication of L1 (Yoruba) and L2 (English) transfer in the acquisition of L3 (French).

Also, from this study, we find that there is still a transfer of some Yoruba sounds into French, especially the semi-vowels [y, ɥ], the voiced fricatives [v, z], and the caduc [ə] which do not exist in the Yoruba phonemic system. This showed us that in the case of Yoruba-speaking learners, this is not only attributable to the influence of their mother tongue but also to the structure of French and English, which are among the causes of these transfers.

Then, following the presentation and analyses of pronunciation errors among Yoruba-speaking learners, we found that there are differences such as the peculiarity of French rules, the confusion of spelling and pronunciation, the existence of English (Anglicism), and the unavailability of French sounds in the Yoruba and English phonetic systems.

Therefore, to avoid the problem of transfer, the FLE learner must master and respect the rules of French phonetics. Teachers must be well trained. In order to improve learners' linguistic competence and combat the problems of phonetic interference, teachers need to abandon the traditional approach in which the teacher transmits knowledge through lectures and readings only. We suggest that they start with the use of modern methods and integrate socio-educational activities. Thus, we recommend active approach with the use of audio-visuals, cassettes, and tape recorders in phonetics classes and that they introduce the method of phonological oppositions, which consists of classifying and grouping phonemes according to their intrinsic characteristics in binary type.

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