LINGUISTIC INTERFERENCE: A CASE OF HAUSA LANGUAGE SPEAKERS IN LEARNING FRENCH GRAMMAR GENDERS

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Abstract

French and Hausa languages are both highly gender sensitive and this is so because gender plays a significant role in offering more explanations on the agreement between nouns and their modifiers. The main focus of this paper is to examine the impact of Hausa gender with a reference to inanimate nouns and its implication on mastery of French nouns most especially French inanimate nouns among Hausa learners of French language in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Linguistic interference, gender, noun, errors, mastering and impart.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The word gender originated from Latin "genus" which means "kind" or "such". According to Murlly (2012), gender indicates whether a person or animal is male or female and to Abubakar (2015) grammatical gender is a specific form of noun class system in which the division of noun classes forms an agreement system with another aspect of the language such as adjective, article etc.

Gender in language could be classified into the following:

i. Masculine gender: A noun that refers to a male person or animal, boy, husband, goat.

ii. Female gender: A noun that refers to a female person or animal such as sister, wife, mother, ant, niece.

iii. Common gender: A noun that refers to both male or female person and animal such as parent, friend, etc.

iv. Neuter gender: A noun that refers to neither male nor female such as book, table, country, town, etc.

1.1 FRENCH LANGUAGE

French language belongs to Indo European family that was first used for official document in AD 842. According to Ade-Ojo (2002), it owes its origin to France which formerly adopted it as her official language in 1539 through the special linguistic degree referred to as ordinance de Villiers cotterets passed by Francois 1er. Apart from France, French language is an official language in 129 countries which all belong to "la francophonie i.e. the world community of French speaking countries and according to France ministry of foreign and European affairs cited by Sumahoro (2015), more than 250 million people speak French language all over the world.

1.2 HAUSA LANGUAGE

According to Yakasai (2013), Hausa language is a Chadic language of Afro-Asiatic family. Although Hausa language was not reduced into writing until the early nineteenth century, the language was quite fortunate in several aspects.

Firstly, according to Amfani (2013) the British colonial administration highly promoted and supported the codification of Hausa language.

Secondly, Hausa language scholars in Europe and in America including well known scholars like William Leban, Paul Norman, Lauries Tuller and Jungrathmayr Hermann did a lot to promote Hausa language.

Thirdly, foreign institutions like University of London, University of Sorbonne in Paris, Indiana and Stanford University in United State of America did a lot in promoting Hausa language and fourthly, from Amfani (2013) point of observation:

> *"After the Nigeria independence in (1960) the European tradition of supporting Hausa language continues with a renewed vigour teaching and research into all aspects of Hausa language, literature and culture flourished in Universities in Europe and America".*

1.3 HAUSA AND FRENCH LANGUAGE CONTACT IN NIGERIA

The contact between French and Hausa languages in Nigeria goes back to 15th century. According to Araromi (1996). Foster in an article 'le français au Nigéria (French in Nigeria) related how the French about 15th century had engaged in a serious warfare against the Portuguese and the Dutch and this led to the presence of French people in the then northern and southern protectorates

of Nigeria. However, French language became a prominent language in Nigeria after the Yaoundé conference of prominent African linguists on foreign language. According to Araromi (1996) at the said conference of experts on modern languages in 1960, it was highly recommended that while French speaking countries adopted English language as their second foreign language, English speaking countries should equally adopt French language as their second foreign language. This policy led to the official teaching and learning of French language in Nigerian schools most especially secondary schools and this led to the contact of Hausa and French language.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The model on which this study is anchored is behaviorist theory, the contrastive analysis hypothesis that believe that in any second language acquisition, there is interference of first language habit. According to behaviorist theory on second language acquisition,

- If the first language and target language (second language) are similar, the learner will be successful in learning.
- If there are differences between L_1 and L_2, the learner will have difficulty and will make mistakes.

In behaviorist theory, linguistic transfer could be in form of a positive transfer (where learners use the similarities between L_1 and L_2, negative transfer (when a grammatical structure or sound is different in the first language and the large language, the first language may interfere and cause difficulty in producing the new form. According to Howltz (2008) cited by Traoré (2015) takes place, fossilization (when the L_2 structures differed from L_1 structure, reinforcement is needed and according to behaviorist theory on second language acquisition in Ajani (2015) some errors in second language acquisition become permanent and resistant to change if not corrected, hence error correction based on practice and memorization is highly needed because the more learners repeat the forms of L_2, the better they will learn.

In this research, we examine the problems faced by Hausa learners of French grammatical gender in Nigeria.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

One of the major problems among numerous problems facing teaching and learning of French language as a foreign language in Nigeria is the problem of linguistic interference. This paper aims at finding out to what extent the gender of Hausa language affects the mastering of French nouns by Hausa learners of French language in Nigeria. And for a proper discussion, the paper takes a brief look into Hausa and French languages, the theoretical background of the paper, presentation and analysis of the data collected and finally ends up with pertinent recommendations and conclusion.

2.1 METHODOLOGY

This research concerns the examination of the productions (oral and written) of Hausa learners of French language as regard to their mastery of French grammatical gender. We have limited the choice of our informants to Hausa learners of French language who came to Nigerian French Language Village for their linguistic immersion programme. This choice is based on the assumption that Nigeria French language village being a French language immersion center accommodates a large number of Hausa learners of French language.

2.2 PRESENTATION OF DATA

In this section, we highlighted some of the data collected for the study. These data were collected from oral and written production of the informants:

- **Expression 1:** J'ai une sac blanche.
  Intended expression: J'ai un sac blanc.
  English: I have a bag.
  Hausa: *Ina da jaka*.
- **Expression II:** Ma sac est avec mon ami.
  Intended expression: Mon sac est avec mon ami
  English: My bag is with my friend.
  Hausa: *Jaka ta tana wurin abokina*.
- **Expression III:** Cette sac est la mienne
  Intended expression: Ce sac est le mien.
  English: This bag is mine
  Hausa: *Wannan Jakar tawa ce.*

- **Expression IV:** La couteau est dans la cuisine.

  Intended expression: Le couteau est dans la cuisine.

  English: The knife is in the kitchen

  Hausa: *Wukar tana (Kicin) dakin girki.*
- **Expression V:** Il se sert de la couteau pour couper la viande

  Intended expression: Il se sert du couteau pour cuper la viande.

  English: He is making use of the knife to cut the meat.

  Hausa: *Yana amfani da wukar wajen yanka nama.*
- **Expression VI:** J'ai besoin d'un couteau.

  Intended expression: J'ai besoin d'un couteau.

  English: I need a knife.

  Hausa: *Ina son wuka*
- **Expression VII:** Nous allons demain en Ghana.

  Intended expression: Nous allons demain au Ghana.

  English: We are going to Ghana tomorrow.

  Hausa: *Za mu taf, kasar Ghana gobe.*
- **Expression VIII:** Ils vont tous en Canada.

  Intended expression: Ils vont tous au Canada.

  English: They are all going to Canada

  Hausa: *Za su tafi Canada gobe.*
- **Expression IX:** Elle est de la Niger.

  Intended expression: Elle est du Niger.

  English: She is from Niger.

  Hausa: *Daga kasar Niger ta ke.*
- **Expression X:** Mon père est de la Nigeria

  Intended expression: Mon père est du Nigeria

  English: My father is from Nigeria.

  Hausa: *Babana daga kasar Nijeriya yak e.*
- **Expression XI:** La matelas est avec moi.

  Intended expression: Le matelas est avec moi.

  English: The mattress is with me.

Hausa: *Katifar tana wuri na.*

2.3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Above are some of selected productions in French of Hausa learners of French language and critically looking at the above French production, one could notice grammatical errors that cuts across the production of our respondents and those errors lead to lack of agreements between the noun and other related words such as adjective, article and preposition to mention a few.

Language is a very important tool to human development. It is one of the most important ways of expressing our want, our love or hatred. Language is used for planning, for deciding ad even for remembering.

In any second language acquisition, there is always the presence of linguistics interference, which according to Weinreich (1953) cited by Kwoffie (1995):

> *…the re-arrangement of pattern 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 and syntax and some areas of the vocabulary.*

And from Haugen (1956) cited by Ajani (2011):

> *"In practice, linguistics interference takes many forms described in the literature as foreign accents, language mixture, unidiomatic expression, loan words, semantic borrowing and the like".*

In actual fact, what normally lead to linguistics interference could be deducted from Lightbrown and Spida (1999) in Abubakar (2015):

> *"When learners are given the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities, they are compelled to negotiate for meaning, that is to express and clarify their intention, ;thought, opinion etc in a way which permit them to come out with understanding expression".*

Taking a critical look at the productions of our respondents who are all Hausa learners of French language, one could notice a lot of grammatical errors ranging from the gender of the countries mentioned such as Gabon, Niger, Nigeria that are all male countries in French, the use of article, "la" for "le", the use of possessive article 'ma' for 'mon', the use of possessive pronoun 'mienne' for 'mien' etc. because of influence of Hausa grammatical structure on their French language acquisition in the area of French grammar.

According to Abubakar (2015), Hausa language is highly gender sensitive and all singular Hausa nouns are either masculine or feminine and from Makeudi (2008) and Newman (2000), Kirke Green and Kraft (1994) in Abubakar (2015), names of objects like knife (wuka), chair (kujera), mattress (kutifa), bag (Jaka), door (kofa) are feminine and according to Kirke-Greene (1973) in Abubakar (2015) names of towns/cities, countries and rivers are regarded as feminine regardless of their vowel endings hence countries like Nigeria, China, Indonesia, America are feminine going by Kirke-Green (1973) submission on Hausa gender.

Hence, from the above, one could see where lies the problem of Hausa learners of French language when it comes to identification of masculine French nouns.

2.4 RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUION

In learning a second language like the case of French language among Hausa learners, there is no way errors could be avoided totally on the part of the learners. The issue of errors in second language study has been a topic of debate which quite surprising has defied specific resolution for many years from S.P. Corder (1967), Andrew Cohen (1975), Hendrikson (1978), Robert Dike (1993), Olusegun Soetan (2013) and Ajani (2015) among many scholars. The topic of error correction in the second language most especially foreign language like French continue to call for more attention.

This paper therefore offers the following way out. To start with, unlike in other languages, French nouns have a certain features very peculiar to French language and which impose on each learner or user of French language a pertinent need to pay a very special regard to every French noun. It must be noted, that French language has no neuter gender, it gender could only be masculine or feminine. The gender or French noun is not necessarily determined by:

a) The meaning of the word.
b) The gender of the word.
c) The ending of the word.

Furthermore, the following should be noted:

i) All countries and rivers which do not end in a silent ‘e’ exceptions of ‘*le zimbabwe*’ (Zimbabwe), *le mexique* (Mexico), *le Mozambique* (Mozambie), *le Niger* (River Niger), *le Benue* (River Benue) are masculine.

ii) Words for metal and chemicals like *le cuivre* (leather), *le fer* (iron), *le sel* (salt), *l’argent* (money are masculine).

iii) Words for languages, *le Yoruba* (Yoruba language), *le Hausa* (Hausa language), *l'igbo* (Igbo language) etc are masculine.

iv) Words for days, months, seasons and point of compass *le lundi* – Monday, *l'avri* – (April), *le nord* (north) are masculine.

v) Names used for trees like *cocotier orangier* (orange tree) are masculine.

vi) Names used for fruit and vegetable, which do not end in 'e' like *le citron, le haricot* (bean) are masculine. However, vegetable like *le legume, le concombre* are masculine.

Finally, we should always put it to the French learners that whenever a new French word is to be learnt, it should be learnt with their gender and good indeed, in any French dictionary, letter 'm' or 'f' is always put in front of a French word to mark their gender.

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