Accentuation among Yoruba Learners of French Language in the Higher Institution.

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Abstract

This study examines accentuation of Yoruba learners of French language in the higher institution with particular reference to Ekiti State University Ado - Ekiti. It examined Yoruba Language students' attitudes in the study of French language. It investigates the forms, functions and uses of tone (accents) in the phonology and lexicon of French and Yoruba languages. The study demonstrates that tone operates at a wide range of levels of linguistic analysis in French and Yoruba languages. Some French accents have similarities with Yoruba accents and these need clarifications. The study encourages Yoruba learners of French language to use association, learning transfer or knowledge comparison acquired from accentuation in Yoruba or French language in mastering and pronouncing French words. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The sample consisted of randomly selected 20 French language lecturers in Ekiti State University and 100 students of Yoruba learners of French language. Questionnaire was designed on accentuation among Yoruba learners of French language on the teaching and learning of French language. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts and percentage. From the findings, French teachers have not been using instructional materials to teach accents or tones with the students. Conclusively, there should be provision of corresponding instructional materials that will improve the method of teaching and learning experience of the students in order to enhance its development for the progressive output, as accentuation in French and Yoruba involve development and acquisition of skills. It is recommended that the teachers of French must use good teaching methods in teaching the Students.

Keywords: French language, Yoruba language, Accentuation, Association, Learning transfer, Knowledge comparison.

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I. Introduction

French Language has gained a lot of recognition and has consequently become a foreign language to non-native users and standard languages. Odia and Omofonmwan (2007) affirm that this language has reason which makes it to be very important. One of which is that, it creates easy access to our neighbouring countries. It is accepted as a means of communication in the international community. The inclusion of French language in the university curriculum especially as a teaching subject in the Faculty of Education seems not to be a surprise, as it is considered a major European language with a long tradition of being a foreign language. However, Nigeria is surrounded by countries that were colonized by France. French is a foreign languages and the second official language of Nigeria. It is optionally taught especially at the secondary school level.

Yoruba Language is spoken in West Africa. According to Akinlabi and Mark (2000), it is a language spoken principally in Benin and Nigeria with other communities in other parts of Africa, America, and Europe. The number of speakers of Yoruba is approximately 30 million. Many Yoruba words are used in the Afro-Brazilian religion. It is also used in many other Afro-American regions in the Americas and the Caribbean. Yoruba is a tonal language spoken in Nigeria and her neighbouring countries of the republic of Benin and Togo. In Nigeria, Yoruba language speakers reside in the southwest region in the following states; Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ekiti, Ondo, part of Kwara and Kogi states (Adewale 2007). Yoruba is recognized as an indigenous language, it enjoys official recognition as a compulsory subject both in the primary and secondary school level. It is ranked among the most studied African languages in the University level and overseas especially United States of America. (Ilori 2010). French and Yoruba languages are taught as academic disciplines at various levels of our tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Yoruba and French are two regular language based subject in the Nigeria system of education. French and Yoruba are some of the languages that serve as language of trade. It is used along the south western borders of Nigeria by Nigerians and Beninnois traders in transacting business. French and Yoruba are teaching subjects which attract learners from various linguistic backgrounds in Nigeria school system.

French and Yoruba Accents

Accents are graphical signs put on vowels to indicate a particular tone and other languages (Kolawole 2000). Accents play very vital roles as a tonal language. In French, when accents are not put on letters that need them in a word, the meaning of such word may change. Accents are distinguishing orthographic marks placed on certain vowels in French to indicate specific pronunciation for those vowels in order to distinguish them from other similar vowels

There are essentially 5 types of accents in French:

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l' accent aigu (/)
l' accent grave (\)
l' accent circonflex (^)
le cédille (') (ç)
le tréma ( '' )
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A wrongly put accent may mar the good idea expressed in a write up. Students normally use their local dialect decently while pronouncing or writing sentences in French. French accents are five in number and they have a purpose. They are accented characters as follows: -

The first two accents (l' accent aigu and l' accent grave) resemble that of Yoruba while other accents with their related symbols are used in French.

l' accent aigu - the acute (/)

This accent (/) resembles the Yoruba high tone. It is placed on letter 'e' either at the beginning or end of a word in other to make it sounded. This appears above the letter e, é. Without the acute accent, the letter 'e' is normally pronounced 'e' or '¶', with the acute accent, it is pronounced [e]

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French
                                 English
        fatigué
                                  tired
      donné
                                          gave
ému
                                  moved
      équipement
                                  equipment
côté
                                  side
été
                                  summer
révélé
                                  revealed
étent
                                  being
bonté
                                  goodness
chanté
                                  sang
```

So letter é is /e/ in French

ii). L' accent grave – grave accent (\setminus)

This is like Yoruba low tone accent which is placed on letter 'e' so as to be pronounced /e/. This accent (\) indicates an open "e" and it is placed over the letter 'e' when the next syllable is mute or occurs before a silent 'e' or 'ent'

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French
                                  English
le père
                             father
la mère
                                           mother
ils donnèrent
                                   they gave
très
                                   very
près
                                           near
après
                                           after
frère
                                           brother
                                           very
```

This accent (\) is also placed on letter 'o' and 'u' likewise à [to or at] and aú [where]. It differentiates their orthographical from letter o and u while pronouncing these. It is always used on 'a' and 'u' to show differences in meaning. Example: -

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i). a - has (verb avoir) à - to (preposition)
ii). ou - or où - where
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iii). ses - his/her (Plural) dès - from iv). la - the [article] là - there
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While pronouncing alphabets or words in french, the accent does not affect the prononciation of the letters, \dot{e} will be /e/, \dot{a} will be /a/ and \dot{u} will be /u/ respectively in french. These are the explanations on remaining french accents:

le tréma (˙ ˙) - the trema or dieresis

Tréma ('') this is another accent in French, it is placed on a vowel to separate its pronunciation from that of the immediate preceding vowel. The trema (••) marks a vowel as being in a separate syllable from any neighbouring vowel. For example, the letter combination 'ai' is normally pronounced 'e'. However, with trema over the 'i' it becomes [ai], 'a' and 'i' is pronounced separately; not as in j' ai - [I have].

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French
                           English
maïs
                           maize
haïr [ai:R]
                           to hate
noël [ñæ]
                           Christmas
  contiguë /k≯igy/
                                    intrigue /etring/
  moïse /m>:s/
                           mose
égoïste
                           selfish
coïncidence
                           coincidence
                                                  Ondot (2000)
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la cedille (') the cedilla

The accent is called cedilla (') it is placed under letter c that is 'c'. This indicates that it is pronounced /s/ and not /k/. This is used to make the letter 'c' soft (like an 's') before the following letters "a, o, u". Example: -

French English
le garçon lad
le français French
ça this/that
(là /ici) - pour désigner there/ here
reçu received

Note: 'c' is naturally soft before 'i, e' . e.g:- ici, ce.

v). l'accent circumflexe [^]

The circumflex $(\hat{e}, \hat{a}, \hat{u}, \hat{i}, \hat{o})$ This accent $(^{\wedge})$ is called circumflex. It looks like a falling tone placed on a vowel, atimes to indicate lengthy. Example: -

This accent is used to show the length of the vowel owing to the dropping of 's' which existed in the original Latin version of the word, but over the centuries as the language evolved and changed. It was eventually dropped. e.g. fenêtre – window [Latin - fenestre].

to show some other contraction e.g sûr - sure [Latin: securus].

to distinguish two words spelt alike e.g cru (believed) and crû (grown).

Examples of words written with circumflex are:

```
French
                                              English
                  être
                                                        to be
                  âne
                                              donkey
                  île
                                                        island
                  peut-être
                                              perhaps
                  arrêter
                                              to stop
                  âme
                                              soul
âge
                              age
                  hôtel
                                                        hotel
                  hôpital
                                              hospital
                  hôte /o:/
                                              guest
                  pâte /pa:/
                                                        dough, pasta
                  île /i:l/
                                               island
                                                                     Ondot (2000)
Likewise letter e will indicate that it sounds /e / in: -
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Likewise letter e will indicate that it sounds /e / in:
Bête /bet/ - stupid, animal or beast

Créte /kret/ - comb of a birth, crest

We have another letter in this group ai, ei, eu, oi and ou

Example: -

maître /metr/ - master, teacher, leader

goût /gutr/ - taste croûte /krut/ - crust croîs /krwa/ - believe

Similarly, this accent; circumflex also distinguishes letter u in spelling other similar spelt words e.g crû – overflow, increased floated (in poetic) and cru /kru/ believed, vineyard.

Mûr - ripe, mature Mur /mur/ - wall

Yorùbá Intonation (accent) Marks

Yorùbá is a tonal language with three tones. The tone is the pillar of the Yorùbá language, high, mid and low. The high tone is indicated by an acute accent (/) example are (\acute{a} , \acute{e} ,

Three intonation marks are commonly: -

The acute accent mark (/)
The grave accent mark (\)

The middle tone accent mark (-)

The easy way to learn how to pronounce words with these accent marks is to compare them with three of the tones played on the organ or piano these are (do - re - mi). The combination of the "do-re-mi" concept and colour coding will facilitate learning for expert alike.

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In Yorùbá
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Ó wè - she bathed
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Ó wè é - she bathed

awó - bird

àwò - glasses

Àwo - plate

Apá - hand

Àpá – mark

Àpà - destroyer

Accents is used to show the difference and give meaning between words while writing the words

Agbó n - An insect

Àgbò n - jaw (A part of the body)

Àgbo n - A fruit from palm tree

Others

Oko - Husband bé – Jump

Okó- Hoebè- Take apologyokò- Motorbe- Cut

ò kò - Sword

A là - We are rich

Àlà - Boundary

Àlá - Dream

Ìgbà - Time

Ìgbá - Garden egg

Igba - 200 (number)

igbà - Object used to climb palm tree

O wó - Hands

Owo - Broom

Ò wó /ìwó - Unblican cord

Ò wò - Name of a town

Ò tá - Enemy

Q ta - Pellet / Bullet

Ò tà - A town in Ogun State Olatubosun (1996)

The tone in French and Yorùbá language appears to be another aspect that constitutes threat to the students learning the language in the higher institution especially Ekiti State University, Ado – Ekiti. The two languages are tonal languages, tones are part of the structure of words, words that are not tone marked always constitute ambiguity. Babatunde (2011) stresses that the use of combined method of teaching can easily aid students to learn French language. In the same vein, Olaseinde (2016) affirms that the use of videotape together with demonstration method holds students' attention in the teaching and learning of French language. The French teacher should use these instructional materials (Videotape, Radio together with demonstration method) while teaching accents and during lessons.

Adegbite (2010) notes that students are poor readers because they read only to pass examinations, observation reveals that French or Yoruba students find it difficult to put accent on any French or Yoruba words. They could not even read fluently. This made them not to have ability to cope with the literacy demand of the present day. The main objective of reading is to promote the student's language competence and their ability to comprehend the content of what they have read. The National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004) stresses the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and social cohesion; and presenting cultures.

Olaseinde (2018) opines that students taught by more qualified teachers in terms of academic credentials perform significantly better that students of less qualified teachers. The ability of teachers to carryout perfect learning outcome depends largely on the qualification the teacher has on the job.

David (2006) advices that government should employ French graduates to teach the subject. This researcher is of the opinion that poor teaching could result in low achievement of students; no matter how well the policy is formulated, the successful implementation of the French programme depends on the teacher who would put the policy into practice.

Statement of the Problem:

It was observed that Yoruba learners of French language find accentuation difficult in the teaching and learning of French language. It seems most of the students that are offering Yoruba don't make use of Yoruba tone in their class work. Likewise find the use of French accents difficult while doing French assignment. Students seem to find accentuation of words and sentences difficult and by this, they are afraid of studying French language.

Purpose of the Study

The study is expected to train the Yoruba learners of French language to make use of the similarities in Yoruba and French accents to learn French language. It is to assist these learners to make use of transfer of learning, association and comparison in learning French language. This will assist these students in mastering the accents and tones in French language.

Research Questions

Can mastering of similar tones or accents in Yoruba aid the learning of French language by students?

Do the French teachers use any corresponding instructional materials while teaching?

Does the institution have enough and qualified French teacher in the school?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

There is no significant difference in the mastering of similar tones in Yoruba and French language

There is no significant difference in the use of any corresponding instructional materials while teaching between male and female French teachers

There is no significant difference in the qualification of French lecturers and the availability of qualified French teachers in the school

II. Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The sample for the study consisted of selected 20 French language lecturers in Ekiti State University and 100 students of Yoruba learners of French language. The questionnaire was designed on the accentuation among Yoruba learners of French language on the teaching and learning of French language. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts and percentage.

III. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: Can mastering of similar tones or accent in Yoruba aid the learning of French language? **Table 1: Students accepted mastering of similar tones or accents aid the learning of French language.**

S/N	Items	Agree	Agree		, ,
		Yes	%	No	%
1	Similar Yoruba accents or tones aid the learning of French language				
		80	80	20	20
2	Yoruba tones are very easy in learning related accents in French language	80	80	20	20
3	both French and Yoruba related tones are easy to understand	40	40	60	60

The table showed that 80(80%) students agree that similar Yoruba accents or tones aids the learning of French language while 20(20%) students disagree. 80(80%) agree that Yoruba related tones are very easy in learning French related accents in French language while 60(60%) disagree. 40(40%) agree that both French and Yoruba related tones are easy to understand while 60(60%) disagree

Research Question 2: Do the French teacher use any corresponding instructional materials while teaching

Table 2: French teachers use corresponding instructional materials while teaching

Items	Agrees	Agrees		Disagree	
	Yes	%	No	%	
French teachers used picture reading while teaching accents and tones					
	05	05	95	95	
French teachers always demonstrate on the accented words while teaching	10	10	90	90	
The teachers gives explanation on the accented words while teaching	20	20	80	80	

The table showed that 05(05%) French teachers used picture reading while teaching accents or tones while 95(95%)do not. 10(10%) French teachers always demonstrate while teaching accents and tones, while 90(90%) do not. 20(20%) French teachers give explanation on the accented words while teaching while 80(80%) do not.

Research Question 3: Dose the school have enough and qualified French teachers

Table 3: The school have enough and qualified French teachers.

S/N	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		Yes	%	No	%
1	The institution has more than five French teacher	10	10	90	90
2	The institution has French graduate teachers	20	20	80	80
3	The institution has 2 nd degree holders	90	90	10	10

The table showed that 10 (10%) students agreed that the school has more than one French lecturers in the institution while 90(90%) disagree with the statement.

20(20%) agree that the school has French graduate while 80(80%) disagree. 90 (90%) said that the school has second degree holders that are teaching French language while 10(10%) disagree.

IV. Discussion

From the study, the following findings were made; teachers have not been using instructional materials like picture reading to teach accents or tones with the students. Teachers have not been using similar Yoruba accents or tones to aid the learning of French language. French teachers have not been demonstrating enough while teaching so that students could understand the lecture. The Government has not been employing French teachers. Teachers qualification ought to be put into consideration when employing teachers.

V. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that accentuation in French language involves development and acquisition of skills. Also, provision of corresponding instructional materials will improve the method of teaching and learning experience of the students and enhance its development for a progressive output. The use of French language communication skills during the teaching and learning of French language will bring better performance of the students.

Recommendations

From this study it is recommended that certain things must be put in place; teachers' qualification must be considered. The teachers of French must use good teaching methods in teaching the students. Instructional materials must be available in the classroom for the teaching of French language. Students should be encouraged to use learning transfer, association and comparison in acquiring knowledge.

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