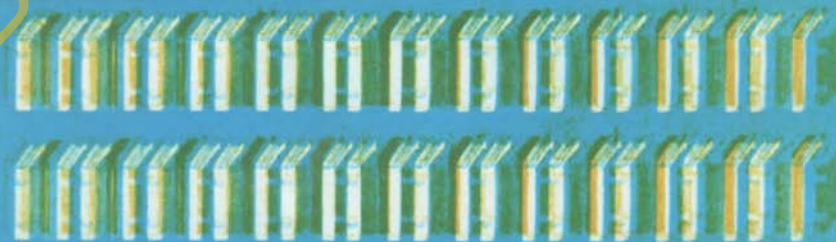
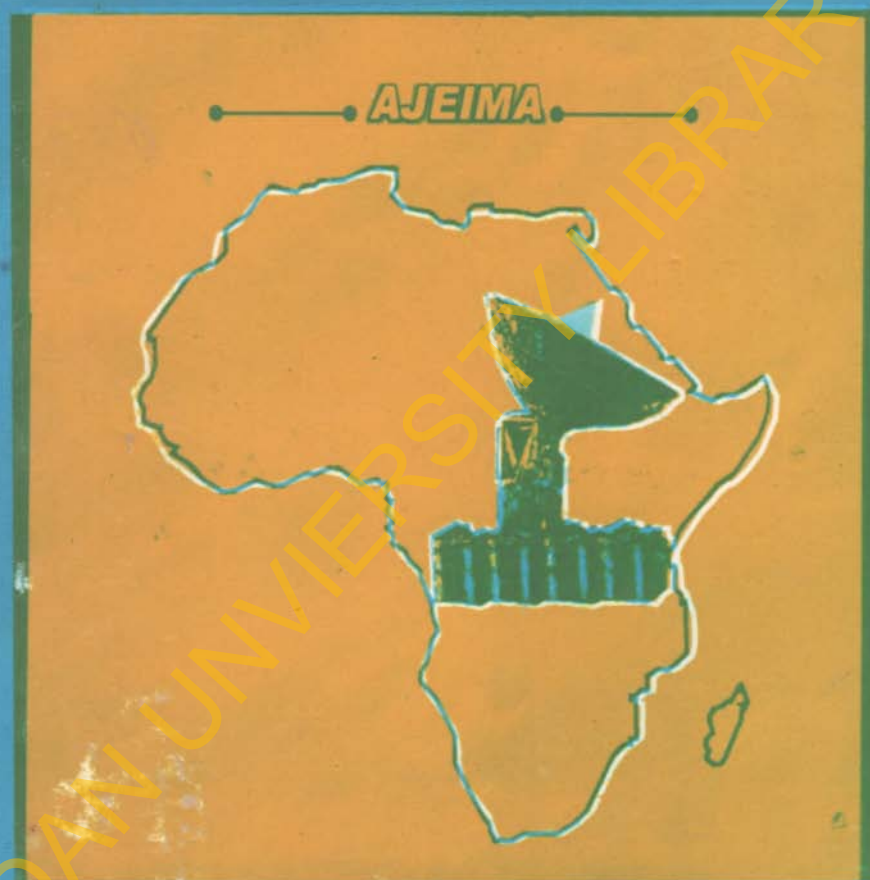


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## Phonological Errors of Selected Ijebu Undergraduate French Learners in Two Southwestern Universities in Nigeria.

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### Abstract

**T***his essay examined the typology of errors and what factors are responsible for the errors in the spoken French of Ijebu undergraduate French learners in two Southwestern Universities, Nigeria. It also reports the findings of a pilot study carried out on this study. The major elicitation instrument is the Labovian sociolinguistic interview which is supplemented by reading materials (Labov 1966). The theoretical framework that was used in the analysis of data was interference theory. In the end, the study concluded that the teaching of phonetics and phonology of French language should be emphasized especially in the Anglophone setting for better mastery of speech production of French sounds and words.*

## Introduction

Interference is a psycho-linguistic concept which is a reality in language learning. Errors in second language learning are partly attributable to interference. Theorists of interference believe that acquisition of the first language usually affects performance in subsequent language acquired. Interference as a linguistic problem is common in communities where second languages (usually the lingua franca) must be learnt. In other words, interference is a term which refers to a situation whereby two different languages overlap. In this situation, the linguistic system of one of the languages is transferred into the other in the process of producing the latter which is the second or target languages. In interference, one of the two or more languages in use in a speech community is dominant. The features of the dominant language are transferred to the subordinate or target languages at the phonological, lexical, grammatical and discourse levels. One major cause of interference is interlingual identification. That is a situation whereby the bilingual equates two separate elements of the two languages in contact. Interference cases therefore occur when learning and performance in French is impeded by the transfer of speaker's knowledge of his mother tongue or other acquired languages before contact with French.

Within the field of psycholinguistics, speech errors fall under the category of language production. Types of speech errors include exchange, perseveration, anticipation, shift, substitution, blends, addition and deletion errors. The study of speech errors contributes to the establishment/refinement of models of

speech production (Carroll David 1986, Schachter et al. 1991). From the above types of speech errors, we have been able to discover, through the data collected, substitution, addition, deletion errors and this article adds what is called replacement errors as a contribution to the existing knowledge on the field of error analyses.

## Second Language Acquisition and Error Analysis

The field of error analysis in Second Language Acquisition was established in the 1970s by S. P. Corder and colleagues. A widely-available survey can be found in Brown (2000). Error analysis was an alternative to contrastive analysis, an approach influenced by behaviorism through which applied linguists sought to use the formal distinctions between the learners' first and second languages to predict errors. Error analysis showed that contrastive analysis was unable to predict a great majority of errors, although its more valuable aspects have been incorporated into the study of language transfer (Corder 1981). A key finding of error analysis has been that many learner errors are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language. Error analysts distinguish between errors, which are systematic, and mistakes, which are not. They often seek to develop a typology of errors. Error can be classified according to basic type: omissive, additive, substitutive or related to word order (B. Lekova, 2010). They can be classified by how apparent they are: overt errors such as "Je suis manger" are obvious even out of context, whereas covert errors are evident only in context. Closely related to this is the classification according to domain, the

breadth of context which the analyst must examine, and extent, the breadth of the utterance which must be changed in order to fix the error. Errors may also be classified according to the level of language: phonological errors which are our focus in this article, vocabulary or lexical errors, syntactic errors, and so on. They may be assessed according to the degree to which they interfere with communication: global errors make an utterance difficult to understand, while local errors do not. In the above example, "Je suis faim" would be a local error, since the meaning is apparent.

From the beginning, error analysis was beset with methodological problems. In particular, the above typologies are problematic: from linguistic data alone, it is often impossible to reliably determine what kind of error a learner is making. Also, error analysis can deal effectively only with learner production (speaking and writing) and not with learner reception (listening and reading). Furthermore, it cannot control for learner use of communicative strategies such as avoidance, in which learners simply do not use a form with which they are uncomfortable. For these reasons, although error analysis is still used to investigate specific questions in SLA, the quest for an overarching theory of learner errors has largely been abandoned. In the mid-1970s, Corder and others moved on to a more wide-ranging approach to learner language, known as interlanguage. Error analysis is closely related to the study of error treatment in language teaching. Today, the study of errors is particularly relevant for focus on form teaching methodology.

Language interference is one of the current problems in foreign language teaching. Its consideration on an international scale is an actual response to the applied results of the structural methods also known as audio-visual, audio-oral and structural-global. With the above methods the learning of a foreign language becomes a process realized through imitation and mechanical reaction to the language stimuli. Structural methods exclude theoretical explanation, deliberate approaches in foreign language education and above all any comparison with the native language. Thus, the educational materials developed in accordance with these methods suppose that the teaching of a foreign language should be done in one and the same way with students from different nationalities regardless of any difficulties deriving from the native language or other factors. Only when it becomes evident that the results from the application of such methods are not the expected ones since the way of explanation and language acquisition is a long and cumbersome process (learners have to apprehend for themselves the educational content according to their language and cultural knowledge), can a step be undertaken towards a discussion of the language interference and its influence on foreign language teaching.

### **Methodology**

Most sociolinguistic works involves the collection of data by fieldworkers from informants. One of the problems that researchers normally encounter in the collection of sociolinguistic data is the observer's paradox. That is, the tendency of the informants to distort their linguistic behaviour toward the norm of

correctness as a result of the presence of researcher. Labov (1972) argued that the major goal of the researcher is to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation. An empirical, a descriptive and explicative research has been carried out: by empirical, we mean this study is based on or characterized by observation and experiment through gathering or collection of new data; by descriptive we mean systematic description and establishing the collection of data; and by explicative we mean the contrastive analysis of the causes of the interferential phenomena in the research (Igboanusi 2006).

In second language acquisition, error analysis studies the types and causes of language errors. Errors are classified according to modality (i.e., level of proficiency in speaking, writing, reading, listening), linguistic levels (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, style and form) (omission, insertion, substitution), type (systematic errors/errors in competence vs. occasional errors/errors in performance), cause (interference, interlanguage) and norm vs. system (Routledge 1991).

In this article, we have employed the means above that is, data collection through tape-recording with reading materials (word list) of 71 words with 24 French phonetic sounds to gain valuable insight into the subject: through rapid anonymous surveys (short surveys investigating one linguistic feature from many people in a short space of time) (Labov 1972) and subsequently through tape-recorded data collection and analysis in a relevant community.

Having their consent being obtained, the subjects for this study are 19 undergraduate learners of French who are natives of Ijebu in Ogun State all in 400 levels from Olabisi Onabanjo University (Ago-Iwoye) and Tai Solarin University of Education (Ijebu-Ode). We interviewed 13 subjects from Olabisi Onabanjo University and 6 from Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun State. We have decided to choose our informants from 400 levels because it is believed that they would have attained a considerable level of proficiency in French and this has also affected the number of informants from each of the selected Universities. We have chosen our informants from these two because through our research, we have discovered that students who are natives of Ijebu prefer to attend their state Universities.

## Contrastive and Error Analyses

Contrastive and error analyses are the main approaches for studying and overcoming interference. There is no unanimous agreement as to the subject of contrastive study. In some theoretical conceptions, the subject of description are contrastive phenomena; in others, the set of distinctions between the grammars of the two languages. More scientifically sound is the statement that similarities, as well as differences between languages, should be considered because only the reciprocal complement of the two provides an opportunity for complete language characterization. The juxtaposition of language systems occurs on the levels of system, norm and usage. There could be absence of some sounds in one language which is present in the other language as we shall see in the analyses of errors of the data collected in this study. In this study, we have tested 24 French phonetic sounds and out of the twenty-four sounds tested, 12 sounds do not exist in Yoruba phonetic sounds. The sounds which do not exist in Yoruba phonetic sounds are: /ə/, /ʃ/, /ŋ/, /ʒ/, /j/, /œ/, /ɛ/, /ʒ/, /ø/, /ɛ/, /z/ and /v/, while sounds such as /p/, /b/, /t/, /e/, /ɛ/, /f/, /ɛ̃/, /a/, /o/, /ʃ/, /l/ and /u/ exist in both languages. In addition, the production of some sounds of some borrowed words from English into French was tested, and the sounds are: /ŋ/ and /j/.

**Table 1. Analyses of Errors of Data Collected from the field.**

| Linguistic Variable | Errors from Data Collected  | Types of Errors and their Definitions   | Reasons for the Errors                             |
|---------------------|---|---|--|
| /ʒ/                 | Target:<br>Jean /jɑ̃/<br>Bonjour /bɔ̃ʒu ʁ /<br>Belge /bɛlj /<br>Géomètre /jeomeʁ/<br>Mangeons /mɑ̃ʒɔ̃/<br>Déjà /deʒa/<br>Janvier /jɑ̃vje/<br>Manger /mɑ̃ʒ/<br>Prodige /pʁɔ̃diz/ | Error: Substitution. The palatal sound /ʒ/ in French is substituted by the semi-vowel sound /j/ in Yoruba phonetic sound. | Interference of mother tongue (Yoruba)             |
| /ʊ/                 | Target:<br>Du /du/<br>Mesure /møʁyʁ/<br>Tête /tɛt/<br>Vu /vu/<br>Bruit /bʁyɛ/<br>Reçu /ʁøsy/<br>Ensuite /ɑ̃sɛit/<br>Pourvu /pʁyvy/  | Error: Substitution. The round vowel /u/ in Yoruba is substituted by the round vowel /ʊ/ in French.                       | Interference of mother tongue (Yoruba)             |
|                     | Une /iyn/   | Error: Addition. Addition of spread vowel sound /i/ at the initial position.  | Interference of mother tongue (Yoruba)             |
| /ɲ/                 | Target:<br>Pagne /paɲi/<br>Digne /dinɲ/<br>Signe /sinɲ/   | Error: Addition. Addition of spread vowel sound /i/ at the final position.  | Interference of mother tongue (Yoruba)             |
| /ɲ/                 | Pagner /pɛɲje /   | Error: Addition. Addition of spread vowel sound /i/ in the mid position.  | Low proficiency                                    |
| /j/                 | Target:<br>Camping /kɑ̃pẽ/<br>Standing /stɑ̃dɑ̃/<br>Meeting /mitɛ̃/<br>Parking /paarkɛ̃/<br>Smoking /sm ɔ̃kɛ̃/   | Error: Replacement. The /j/ in French and English is replaced by French nasal vowel sound /ɛ̃/.                           | Replacement: One linguistic item replaces another. |

|      |   |  |  |
|------|---|--|--|
|      | Marketing /maarkɛ/  |  |  |
| /j/  | Target:<br>Fille /fi/ /<br>Brillante /bʁiljãt/ /<br>Famille /famil/ /<br>Sillonner /sjilɔne/  | Error: Replacement. The lateral /l/ sound in French and English replaces the semi-vowel /j/ in French language in the mid and final positions respectively.                        | This replacement happens as a result of carry-over from English as the 'll' is pronounced as /l/ in English. |
| /ʃ/  | Brillante /bʁiljãt/   | Error: Addition and Replacement. Addition of spread vowel sound /i/ in the mid-position and replacement of semi-vowel sound /j/ by the spread vowel sound /i/ in the mid position. | Interference of the equivalence of "brillante" in the English language.                                      |
| /œ/  | Target:<br>Sœur /sœ/ / /sœʁ/ /<br>Seul /sœ/ / /sœl/ /<br>Lecteur /lœktœʁ/ /<br>/lœktœʁ/ /<br>Erreur /œʁœ/ / /œʁœʁ/ /<br>Fleur /flœʁ/ / /flœʁ/ / | Error: Replacement. The vowel sounds /œ/ and /ø/ replace the French vowel sound /œ/ in the initial, mid and final positions respectively.  | The sound /œ/ does not exist neither in Yoruba nor English but in French.                                    |
| /ɔ/  | Target:<br>Fenêtre /fonɛtʁ/ /<br>Secrétaire /sokʁetœʁ/ /<br>Faisons /fæzɔ̃/ / /fæzɔ̃/ /<br>Demain /demɛ̃/ / /domɛ̃/ /                           | Error: Replacement. The vowel sound /ɔ/ is replaced by vowel sounds /o/, /ø/ and /e/ at the initial position.  | The sound /ɔ/ does not exist in Yoruba and English.  |
| /ø/  | Target:<br>Boeufs /bo/ /<br>œufs /œ/ /<br>Nœud /no/ / /nœ/ /<br>Peu /po/ /  | Error: Replacement. The French vowel sound /ø/ is replaced the French vowel sounds /o/, /ø/ and /e/ in the initial, mid and final positions respectively.                          | The sound /ø/ neither exists in Yoruba nor in English.   |
|      | Gueux /guo/   | Error: Addition. Addition of vowel sound /u/ in the mid-position.  |  |
| /s/  | Target:<br>Frère /frɛ/ /<br>Bonjour /bɔ̃ʒuʁ/ /<br>Voir /vwa/ /<br>Père /pɛ/ /<br>Garcion /gɑsɔ̃/ /  | Error: Deletion. Deletion of consonant /s/ in the mid and the final positions respectively   | The sound /s/ is hardly pronounced at the end of the words in Yoruba and English.                            |
| /z/  | Target:<br>Rose /ros/ /   | Error: Substitution. The voiceless consonant sound /s/ substitutes the voiced consonant /z/ at the final position.   | Linguistic interference  |
| /v/  | Chauve /ʃof/  | Error: Substitution. The voiceless consonant sound /f/ substitutes the voiced consonant /v/ at the final position.   | Linguistic interference  |
| /f/  | Target:<br>Veuf /vœ/ /  | Error: Deletion. The voiceless fricative /f/ is deleted in the final position.   | Overgeneralisation of the idea that consonants at the end of French words are not pronounced.                |
|      | Target:<br>Boeufs /bøf/ /   | Error: Addition. The voiceless fricative /f/ is added at the final position.   | Low level of proficiency.  |
| /j/  | Target:<br>Chaise /ʃiz/ /   | Error: Addition. The spread vowel sound /i/ is added at the initial position.  | Low level of proficiency.  |
| /ʃ/  | Target:<br>Match /mach/ /<br>Chaise /chɛz/ /  | Error: Substitution. The voiced English sound /ch/ substitutes the voiceless palatal sound /ʃ/ in the initial and final positions respectively.                                    | Interference of English sound /ch/.  |
| /ɔ̃/ | Target:<br>Oignon /wanɔ̃/ /   | Error: Replacement. The French sound /ɔ̃/ replaces the round vowel sound /o/ at the initial position.  | Overgeneralisation of the French sound /w/ when there is the combination of letters 'oi' in any French word. |



To Nemser, Pitt Corder and Selinker, in language transfer, the learner uses her own L1 as a resource. This used to be looked upon as a mistake, but it is now recognised that all learners fall back on their mother tongues, particularly in the early stages of language acquisition, and that this is a necessary process. On the issue of overgeneralization the learner uses an L2 rule in situations in which a native speaker would not. This can occur at a number of levels thus at the phonetic level, for example, our subjects of study overgeneralised the pronunciation of "ll" in words like mille as /mij/. However, not all effects of language transfer are negative. Indeed, we may consider that without some language transfer, there would be no second language learning. Where languages are historically and linguistically related to each other, the positive effects of transfer may be obvious. French-speaking learners of English and English speaking learners of French quickly come to realise that they share an enormous amount of vocabulary, for example - there are far more 'Vrais Amis' than there are 'Faux amis', and it makes sense to take advantage of this.

### Conclusions

In this article, we have discussed the place of interference in Second language Acquisition and we have analysed typology of errors namely: substitution, deletion, addition and replacement errors which is our contribution to the research from the data collected and also, we have highlighted possible reasons for these errors in the table above. We would like to suggest that, the teaching of phonetics and phonology of French language should be emphasized especially in the Anglophone setting for better mastery of speech production of French sounds and words' however it may not be totally possible to

eradicate errors in speech production but it could be minimized.

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