

DEVELOPING FRENCH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

Following the changing role of the French Language from a vehicle of French culture to a vehicle of Science, Technology, Commerce and Diplomacy, the teaching of French as a foreign language (FFL) around the world has shifted emphasis from literary studies to what has come to be known as French for Specific Purposes (FSP), seen essentially as the specialist forms and usages of the French language in specific professions, disciplines, and fields of human activity. Following this trend, Nigerian universities, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world teaching FFL, have been teaching FSP to students in the Bachelor's degree programme of various disciplines seen as trainees in various professions, careers, and occupations. Teaching FSP to students in the first year or the first two years of the Bachelor's degree programme of other disciplines than French has not yielded the required result in terms of mastery of the specialist language of the respective disciplines, and the reasons for this have been discussed in this article. The article has also shown reasons why the proposal by Simire (2002a and 2002b) to teach FSP to students of the B.A. (French) programme as currently organised in Nigerian universities, cannot also yield the required result. A different approach to the teaching of FSP in the Bachelor's degree programmes, and which can yield the required result has been proposed in this article; it consists of studying French with other disciplines in a double major or a major/minor honours degree curriculum

KEY WORDS: FFL, FSP, B.A Programme, Specialist Language, Various (Academic) Disciplines.

FRENCH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

In a chapter titled Language for Special Purposes (LSP), Crystal (1997:382) observed:

As society develops new facets, so language is devised to express them. In recent times, whole new areas (forms?) of expression have emerged in relation to such domains as computing, broadcasting, commercial advertising, and popular music. Over a longer time-scale, special styles have developed associated with religion, law, medicine, and science.

Observing the functioning of the French language in particular, with respect to the phenomenon

highlighted above, Porcher (1995:42) has noted:

Le français fonctionne différemment dans ses règles comme dans ses usages, dans ses instruments comme dans ses formes selon le secteur de spécialité.

The appellation "French for Specific Purposes" (FSP) thus designates those corpuses of specialised or specialist discourse forms and usages with which speakers of the French language communicate in the course of transacting the business of specific fields or domains of human activity. The reality known as FSP has, at different times, been known in

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French as Français instrumental, Français fonctionnel, Français de spécialité and Français sur objectifs spécifiques, this last appellation being the most widely used at present.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FSP

The teaching of LSP in different European languages – English for Specific Purposes, German for Specific Purposes, etc. – was developed within the framework of foreign language teaching, in contradistinction to mother tongue teaching. This development followed the realisation of the fact that foreign learners who had to use their languages of adoption in professional, occupational and intellectual activities, had language and communication needs that were different from those of the common user of the language. The development of materials for the teaching of these specialist usages thus began by determining communication needs of these foreign language learners in various domains of specialist activity, science and technology, commerce and industry, finance and management, agriculture, medicine, law, etc.

Two categories of foreign learners of languages of advanced Western and European countries in particular, soon become distinct: those who had been trained in or had been practising their respective specialisations in their home countries before migrating to these advanced countries, and needed languages of their host countries to integrate themselves in the practice of their specialisations there and those who had to learn languages of these advanced countries in order to acquire the advanced knowledge, techniques, and skills developed in these countries in various specialist fields. Dubious (1962), writing on the teaching of French as a foreign language (FFL), had this second category in mind when he observed:

Ceux qui aujourd'hui dans le monde viennent au français veulent surtout y trouver un moyen d'accès aux progrès scientifiques et techniques (cf. Hutchinson, 1970).

The foregoing brief overview of the origins and development of the teaching of specialist usages in European languages clearly shows that FSP has its place within the framework of the teaching of FFL, as distinct from the teaching of French as a mother tongue. Indeed, Beacco and Lehmann

(1990:4) have presented FSP as: "l'enseignement du français comme langue étrangère à des publics dits spécifiques..." Time there was when every foreign learner of French – the practising engineer, the future lawyer, the present or future teacher of French – was taught the French language with extracts from les plus belles pages, or with whole works, of the best writers of French literature. Examples to illustrate good grammar, passages for comprehension exercises, and model passages for good composition writing, were all taken from the works of acknowledged successful French creative writers. This approach to the teaching of FFL was aptly presented by Debyser (1971) as follows:

Pendant longtemps, l'étude d'une langue vivante.. n'a été que le complément de la culture humanisante et classicisante...: le but de l'enseignement de l'anglais, de l'allemand, de l'espagnol ou de l'italien était de permettre à l'élève, de lire, ou tout au moins de savoir traduire Shakespeare, Goethe, Cervantes, et Dante...De meme,des générations d'élèves étrangers ont appris, non pas à parler français, mais à lire Corneille, Racine ou Chateaubriand.

All the French that foreign learners could acquire from such materials hardly made them able to accomplish even the most basic or routine communication task in their specialist areas of professional or occupational activity – write out a clinical diagnosis, write out the report of a laboratory experiment or of a research project, discuss an audit report, plead a case in court, write out a legal opinion on some incident, or deliver a sermon, etc. Following the identification of the communication needs and discourse features in the diverse fields of specialist professional and occupational practice, teaching materials which were aimed at the development of competence in such specialist discourses were developed, and that was how materials for the teaching of FSP began to appear such as Mauger et Charon (1958); Phal (1971); Masselin, Delson et Dauchaigne (1971), Cresson (1972), Delporte et Lascar (1972), to mention but these ones. Understandably, the teaching of FSP in its early days, was limited to those FFL programmes designed for foreign learners of French who needed the language to make a career in non-

language specialisations. In some cases, such people had their professional training, and sometimes had obtained University degrees in other disciplines than French – engineering, the pure sciences, social sciences, management sciences, law, medicine, etc. – before coming to learn the French language; while in some other cases, they were learning the French language preparatory to having such professional training. On the other hand, those foreign learners of French who envisaged a career and specialisation in French language, and perhaps needed a university degree in French, were trained with a curriculum that continued to provide “la culture humanisante et classicisante” through a literature dominated syllabus. This was the situation when the teaching of FSP began in Nigerian university Bachelor’s degree programmes.

FSP IN BACHELOR’S DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

It is important to recall at this point what FSP essentially is: those corpuses of specialised or specialist discourse forms and usages with which speakers of the French language communicate in the course of carrying out the business of specific fields or domains of human activity. It has also been pointed out that the teaching of FSP was developed within the framework of FFL teaching. Naturally, therefore, FSP has been of interest to Nigerians as foreign learners of French.

The teaching of FSP actually began quite early in the history of the teaching of French in Nigerian universities. Battestini (1971), having extensively substantiated the need for FSP, as it was felt, at that time among Nigerian and indeed African intellectuals, tells us that in response to that need, his colleagues and he, in the then Department of Modern Languages of the University of Ibadan, had begun from 1969/70 academic session to teach a course titled “French as an Ancillary Subject” to students of Faculties of Science, Social Sciences, and Agriculture. The aim of this course was to make the students acquire la maîtrise en français de leur spécialité (Battestini, 1971), and this clearly made it an FSP course. Other Nigerian universities did not delay in developing and teaching such courses. Today, there is hardly a Department of French in a Nigerian university that does not teach a course or courses envisaged as FSP, particularly as French courses are being prescribed by the National

University Commission Minimum Academic Standards document for Bachelor’s degree programmes in many disciplines. But the teaching of FSP is generally restricted at present to non-French major students.

PROBLEMS OF TEACHING FSP IN NON-FRENCH MAJOR BACHELOR’S DEGREE PROGRAMMES

The teaching of FSP in the non-French major Bachelor’s degree programmes in Nigerian universities has a number of limitations. One of these has been the issue of insufficient time for the adequate training of the students for optimum results. Battestini (1971) had observed this limitation which existed right from their first attempt at teaching FSP at Ibadan.

Les étudiants du “French Ancillary” reçoivent 75 heures de cours en une année, D’un point de vue logique et académique, il est vain de vouloir leur apprendre en 75 heures ce qu’il faudrait leur apprendre en 3, 4 ou 5 ans: la maîtrise en français de leur spécialité.

Battestini’s course and other such courses in Nigerian universities of that time were taught only in the first year of the 3-year or 5-year Bachelor’s degree programmes. These days such courses are taught up to the second year of the standard 4-year or 5-year or 6-year Bachelor’s degree programmes. The maximum of 2 lecture hours a week commonly allotted to French for non-French major students in Nigerian universities is still insufficient. In concrete terms, this translates to a maximum of (2 hours) x (a maximum of) 12 (weeks of actual teaching in a semester) X 2 (semesters) = 48 hours of teaching in a year, and 96 hours in two years. Practical experience has shown that students have hardly been able to know and use the basic everyday French well enough within this time, in order to proceed to tackle profitably and appreciate the specialist French of their disciplines, particularly in the context of current large class sizes and poor facilities in our universities.

Another problem in the teaching of FSP in the non-French major Bachelor’s degree programmes in Nigeria arises from bringing together in the same class, under the same teacher, students from a diversity of disciplines.

The authors of this article for instance, have taught in the same class, students majoring in Communication Arts, English, History and International Studies, Linguistics, Land Surveying, Architecture, and Biochemistry. In the circumstances, it is difficult to give adequate attention to the specialist language of each of the different disciplines, even if there were enough time to do so for any one discipline.

One other limitation suffered by the teaching of FSP as generally done at present in the Bachelor's degree programme comes from the very fact of restricting such teaching to the non-French major programmes. A considerable number of the students concerned see the courses as an imposition on them, of a subject alien to their areas of specialisation. And the practical experience of the authors of this article has shown that the argument that a knowledge of the language is important for some aspect of the future practice of their specialisation does not make much impression on the students, particularly as they are not even taught much of the specialist French of their respective disciplines throughout their period of studying the languages, mainly because of insufficient time and the diversity of specialist disciplines to be catered for in the same class. This view of French as an intrusion of an alien subject in their area of specialisation, has greatly affected the interest of the non-French major students in French courses, with a resultant negative effect on whatever can be achieved in French.

Due largely to the factors explained above, the teaching of French in the non-French major Bachelor degree programmes in Nigerian universities has been FSP only with the intention to examine how it has fared.

FSP IN THE B.A. (FRENCH) DEGREE PROGRAMME

It had been pointed out earlier in this article that when FSP was developed in France, it was taught to foreign learners of French specialising in disciplines other than French. Foreign learners of French, who majored in French, were trained with virtually the same literature-dominated syllabus with which the native speakers of French majoring in French were trained. This syllabus was virtually replicated for those who majored in French when French studies came into the University curriculum in Nigeria. The important point for us here, however, is that the syllabus of French-major students (those in the B.A. (French)

programme) in Nigeria is still very much literature-dominated, as many scholars have noted elsewhere (cf. Emordi (1992) and (2000); Anyaehie (1997), and Simire (2002 a) and (2002 b) for instance). Indeed, the course content for modern languages (French) in the most recent Draft Benchmark and Minimum Academic Standards for Arts brochure circulated to universities in 2004 by the National Universities Commission is still very much literature-dominated. However, from the 1980s, and more acutely from the 1990s, the exclusively literary specialisation of the B.A (French) curriculum could no longer readily guarantee its graduates a job in the labour market, apart from teaching jobs in schools which most of these graduates seriously detest and avoid. Job openings in government services – The Foreign Service, the Armed Forces, the Intelligence, Customs, Immigration, and Police Services, and the various units of Ministries in which the knowledge of French is necessary, and which readily absorbed graduates of the B.A (French) programme that numbered less than a hundred across the country in the 1960s and 1970s, and a few hundreds in the 1980s, can now absorb only a little fraction of the thousands that pour out yearly from Departments of French since the 1990s. Job opportunities in the private sector which require a knowledge of French have generally not been able to readily absorb any significant number of these graduates largely because the almost exclusive competence of these graduates in literary French is almost of no use in a good number of these private sector jobs and careers. The above situation had triggered off a search for an alternative approach to the B.A (French) programme which would equip the graduates with competence in the discourse of other fields of endeavour than literature, and thus make them more readily employable in other jobs than teaching.

It is pertinent to mention here that the need to introduce FSP courses into the hitherto literature-dominated B. A. (French) curriculum in order to make the graduates more readily employable has not been a uniquely Nigerian experience. It has also been felt in other FFL teaching nations across the world. A far back as 1995/96, the University of Swaziland Department of Modern Languages was teaching courses entitled:

- Business French 1: Commercial Correspondence

- Business French 11: Advertising and Commercial Literature

These were among the optional courses prescribed for what was known as “Group A Specialisation: (Linguistics, Culture, and Business French),” as distinct from, and opposed to “Group B Specialisation: (Literature).” Students specialise in the third and fourth (final) years of the programme by taking optional courses of either group in addition to core courses, (cf University of Swaziland Calendar 1995/96, p.147). To cite just one other example, this time outside Africa, the 2000 Undergraduate Prospectus of Lancaster University in Great Britain contains the following FSP courses in the B. A. (Hons) French Studies syllabus:

- Language in Image and Advertising
- Language in French Business
- Le Français d' Enterprise

In Nigeria, a serious thought about the development of FSP in the B.A. (French) programme, as an alternative to the exclusively literary curriculum of this programme is found in Simire (2002 a) and (2002 b). In the opinion of the authors of this article, however, the three options proposed in Simire (2002 a) and the one proposed in Simire (2002 b) come to one and the same thing: they are all focusing on the acquisition of the specialist languages of diverse disciplines, without considering the acquisition of the knowledge of these disciplines, which would facilitate the acquisition and use of their specialist languages. For indeed, as Simire (2002 b) has pointed out, with the type of students who usually register in the B.A (French) programme as currently designed in Nigerian universities,

nous n'avons pas affaire à des professionnels dans un domaine donné et qui n'ont besoin de la langue de spécialité que pour la compréhension de documents.

Nous avons plutôt affaire à des apprenants qui auront aussi besoin des compréhensions sémantiques ...qui ne pourront être obtenues grâce à un dictionnaire sectoriel bilingue.

Majority of the students who come into the B.A (French) programme as commonly designed in Nigerian universities at present, are generally people who studied secondary school subjects leading to the humanities. They, therefore, have little or no knowledge at all, of some of the

specialist disciplines (like Management, Accounting, Law, the various branches of Engineering, etc) in the specialist languages of which the FSP courses seek to train them. As long as the students only learn the specialist languages of these disciplines, but do not learn and understand the concepts expressed in the language (i.e. do not possess what Simire (2002 b) calls *compréhensions sémantiques* above), the specialist language so learnt can only be superficial, and can, therefore, only be used with difficulty. As Crystal (1997:382) has rightly pointed out:

analysis (and mastery) of the language used (in a field) would require an exposition of the conceptual system that gave rise to it. (Words in parentheses are those of the authors of this article to better clarify Crystal's idea).

It is to say that a thorough grasp of the specialist language of any discipline or field of activity requires a thorough grasp of the specialist knowledge that gave rise to the specialist language. Students' lack of such knowledge is the major weakness of approaches commonly proposed (by Simire (2002 a) and (2002 b) for instance) for the teaching of FSP to students in the present – day B. A (French) programme of Nigerian universities.

The weaknesses identified above in the actual teaching, or in the proposals made for teaching, of FSP to Bachelor's degree students majoring in other disciplines than French or majoring in French, as the case may be, necessarily call for an alternative way to the teaching.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF FSP IN THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAMME.

For an effective teaching of FSP in the Bachelor's degree programme in Nigerian universities, students should be people who understand, or who are in a position to understand, the “conceptual system” (to repeat Crystal's terms), of the field or discipline the specialist language which they are learning. In practical terms, they should be people who have studied or are studying these disciplines to an advanced level beyond the Senior School Certificate. Their study of French in the university should also take a longer period than the current practice of one or two years of two hours of lecture a week. This means that they study

French for a three or four year period i.e. throughout the duration of the Bachelor's degree programme, for as Battestini (1971) had pointed out as cited earlier in this article, it would take 3 or 4 or 5 years of study to gain mastery of the specialist French of a discipline. Students for FSP should be those with an interest in both the specialist disciplines and the French language, such that neither of these will appear to be an imposition on them.

The search for an approach to the teaching of FSP designed for the proposed duration, and for students with a knowledge of the specialist disciplines the language of which is being taught, naturally brings to mind the possibility of a curriculum that combines the study of French with the study of the specialist discipline throughout the duration of the degree programme. We are here thinking of something like a combined honours degree programme with either a double major or major/minor syllabus structure.

Such a programme, with such a syllabus, would enable students to have a good knowledge of both the specialist discipline and the French language, and, thus, make them able to easily master the specialist French of their disciplines of specialisation. It should be possible to organise and manage the syllabus for the study of French together with Biochemistry, Chemistry, Geology, Mathematics, Banking, Economics, Management, Marketing, Computer Science or any of the branches of Engineering for instance, just as it has been possible up to now in Nigerian universities to organise and manage the syllabus for the study of French together with Education, English, German, History, Philosophy, Portuguese, etc. It is important here to briefly touch on some aspects of such syllabus organisation and management.

Like the student of the combined honours degrees already operational in Nigerian universities, and which generally combine disciplines in the Humanities, students of the combined honours degrees proposed above would study the core courses of French and of the other discipline. Further studies or professional practice would afford them the opportunity to make up in any of the peripheral courses they could not study in any of the subjects of combination during the Bachelor's degree programme.

For French, the students would concentrate in language courses (including FSP courses at the appropriate time), as opposed to

literature courses. The workload devoted to literature courses in the current B. A (French) syllabus would be taken up by courses in the other subject of combination. In the process of studying this other discipline and coming to terms with the "conceptual system" of that discipline, it would be easy to appreciate its specialist discourse in French and develop competence in it through the literature of that discipline written in French. As students assimilate the "conceptual systems" of their respective specialist disciplines, it would be easy for them to internalise the linguistic units and structures and the communicative patterns and techniques which express these systems in the respective disciplines. This would be done in the FSP classes where the teacher would be leading the students in the study of such units, structure patterns and techniques peculiar to a given discipline or field of activity.

FSP, is therefore, not just the combined study of French and some other discipline, nor does it just come about automatically from such a combined study. The combined study only offers a favourable condition for a profitable and effective study and easy acquisition of FSP. Beyond the mere combined study of French or any other foreign language for that matter, together with some other discipline, there must be the conscious study of the specialist language of such other discipline using the pedagogical methods and techniques that have been developed for such study, and under the expert guidance of a teacher trained in these methods and techniques, as well as in the specialist language of the discipline.

The existence of such combined subjects degree programmes as we have proposed above in other FFL teaching nations of the world, and their success in facilitating the effective teaching of FSP, attest to the feasibility of our proposal. Indeed such combined degree programmes are in great currency in European countries and America where French is taught as a foreign language. In Lancaster University in Great Britain, to cite but just one example, French (and indeed other European languages like German, Italian and Spanish) can be studied together with Chemistry or Computer Science or Geography or Mathematics or Psychology in the School of Science and Engineering; with Accounting and Finance or Economics or Marketing in the School of Management; with Philosophy or Politics in the School of Social Sciences; as well as with English or History or Music or Theatre Arts or

with any other foreign language in the School of Arts and Humanities. Besides, the multidisciplinary subjects of European Management, or International Business in the School of Management, and European Legal Studies in the School of Arts and Humanities, all have a very strong foreign language component, including French, all through the duration of study, in a major/minor syllabus structure.

The approach we have proposed here for the effective development and teaching of FSP in the Bachelor's degree programmes of Nigerian universities certainly raises some questions in the face of certain realities of these Bachelor's degree programmes, in particular, and of our education system in general. One of such questions is where or how to find students with the requisite qualifications to study French and other disciplines, particularly in the science based disciplines, given the fact that the Nigerian school system makes people begin rather early (from the secondary school) to orientate themselves towards the science, or humanities or management-based disciplines in the university. Simire (2002 a) and (2002 b) have revealed some possible answers to the question.

The first is that in recent years, many of the students registered in the B.A (French) programme are people who initially wanted to study disciplines other than French, but having failed to score enough points at the University Matriculation Examination (UME) to be admitted to study the disciplines of their choice, have come to study French through the Absolute Beginners' Programme (ABP), since they mostly did not study French at all or did not study it to the required level in the secondary school. The fact that some of these people have performed creditably in the B.A (French) programme, shows that they could do well studying both French and their discipline of first choice. It is to say that the ABP could be used to get people who are already qualified to study other disciplines, to gain university entry requirements in French, and then to proceed to study French together with another discipline and, thus, be able to develop the specialist French of such other discipline.

Another answer to the question of how to get people with requisite qualifications for the combined Bachelor's degree programme in French and another discipline comes from the fact that a number of students who study other disciplines in the university had studied and passed French creditably in the secondary school. Some of these people would welcome the

opportunity to continue the study of French provided it does not rob them of the opportunity to study the discipline they have opted to study in the university. It would appear that all that has to be done to attract such people to study French just to offer them the opportunity by creating such combined degree programmes proposed above.

The number of people who decide to study French together with another discipline can be considerably increased with the two categories of potential students just presented, through a well organised campaign of sensitisation as suggested by Simire (2002 b), a campaign which would highlight career advantages which await graduates and specialists in certain disciplines and, indeed, in all disciplines who also possess a good knowledge of the French language which will enable them to practise their field of specialisation in a French speaking country as effectively as they do in an English-speaking country. The above-mentioned sources can supply enough qualified students for the combined degree programmes proposed above.

Another question that arises about the feasibility of teaching FSP effectively through the combined degree programme proposed above goes back to the issue of having students of diverse disciplines or fields of specialisation in the same class. As already seen earlier in this paper, this does not make for adequate study of the specialist discourse of the respective disciplines. This problem can be avoided if individual Departments of French limit the number of disciplines to be combined with French to those ones in the language of which the Department has qualified teachers. That way, students of a particular discipline or group of closely related disciplines can work together under the tutorship of a teacher who is competent in the language of that discipline or group of disciplines. Disciplines to be combined with French would then increase as specialist lecturers are available.

One other question about the feasibility of the effective teaching of FSP through the type of Bachelor's degree programmes proposed above concerns the issue of the Language Immersion Programme (LIP), which students used to undergo in French-speaking countries, and commonly called the "Year Abroad programme". The goal of the development and effective teaching of FSP through combined degree programmes in French and other

disciplines hold very exciting possibilities for an innovative Year Abroad Programme.

In this regard, there is the experience of University Departments of French in other FFL teaching nations for us to follow. Let us again cite the example of Lancaster University which we have used all along in this discussion. Lancaster students combining French with any other discipline for a bachelor's degree spend one year over and above the normal number of years for the Bachelor's degree concerned. Thus, students in a normal three year programme have to spend four years, with the third year spent on the LIP in France, or Belgium, or the French-speaking region of Switzerland or Canada, working in firms and industries or research establishments or studying in educational institutions engaged in activities or study of the students' respective fields of specialisation. Such attachments are based on bilateral agreements and cooperation between the students' home universities and the students' host establishments abroad.

Through such agreements between their universities and firms, industries, and educational institutions in Nigeria's neighbouring French-speaking countries, Nigerian students combining French and other disciplines for a Bachelor's degree can spend the LIP period in firms and other establishments involved in their areas of specialisation in those countries. There can be no doubt whatsoever as to how far the LIP can go in enhancing the acquisition of the specialist French language of a student's discipline or field of specialisation – the FSP of that discipline or field.

CONCLUSION

We can only conclude this discussion with a plea that various proposals made in this and other studies, be given concrete attention by French teaching authorities in Nigeria, rather than letting them end in conference halls or on the pages of journals. This attention can begin by drastically reviewing along the lines of these and other proposals, the recently circulated Draft Bench-mark and Minimum Academic Standards document as it concerns French and, indeed, other foreign languages.

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