

A Contrastive Analysis of Word Formation Processes in French and Yorùbá: Areas of Convergence and Divergence

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Abstract

The paper attempts to find answers to the following questions: are there areas of convergence/divergence in the word formation processes in French and Yorùbá? In what areas are the convergence and divergence? And if there is divergence, does it possess any learning difficulty for Yorùbá learners of the French language? To answer the questions, the paper ventures into the contrastive analysis of word formation processes in French and Yorùbá. Adopting the literary and historical-analytic methods, it takes a close at the various processes of word formation in both languages and points out areas of convergence and divergence. The paper further analyses the import of divergence regarding the mastery of the word formation process in French by the Yorùbá French learners and concludes by offering some didactic approaches that could make the word formation process in French easier for the Yorùbá learners of the French language.

Keywords: Language, French, Yorùbá, Word formation, Convergence, Divergence, Contrastive analysis.

Introduction

Sapir (1970, p.8) defines language as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires through voluntarily produced symbols.” de Saussure (1995, p.54) agrees by saying “un ensemble de convention necessaires adoptees par le corps social pour permettre l’exercice de cette faculté chez les individus.” Hall (1968, p.158) holds that it is “the institution whereby humans communicate and interact

with each other employing habitually used-oral-auditory arbitrary symbols.” It has been a very powerful tool in society because apart from being the most important vehicle of a people’s culture, it is also the most distinctive of all traits that separate human beings from any other being conceivable (Oyelaran, 1990, p.22) and a common phenomenon that cut across all human societies (Akoha, 2010, p.25).

Nigeria like most sub-Saharan African countries has a very complex linguistic situation. Royer (2012) cited in Usman (2014, pp.90-118) argues that more than five hundred languages are spoken in Nigeria. Similarly, Adesola (2010, pp.44-45) posits that English remains the official and administrative language in Nigeria, with prominent indigenous languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yorùbá, Efik, Edo, Ijaw, etc. The relationship between languages has been a major focus of language study in the country (Kwofie, 1995; Amosu, 1995; Igbeneghu, 2010; Shan & Kehinde, 2010). At a global level, we have Lado (1957); Capo (2004); and Rabadi and Udeh (2010), to mention a few. This article is a contrastive study of the formation of words in French and Yorùbá, It points out the areas of convergence and divergence and the implication of the mastery of French words by the Yorùbá learners of the French language in Nigeria.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical model on which this study is anchored is Robere Lado’s (1957) contrastive linguistics analysis. The theory is based on the study of two languages, one foreign and the other native. Comparing the elements of the two languages, Lado establishes that where two languages and cultures are similar language difficulties regarding those two languages are ruled out. However, there are difficulties where there are differences. Hence, to identify and find a solution to an area of difficulty a particular foreign language will present to a native speaker of another language, a systematic comparison of two languages is recommended to find a solution to any linguistic interference that may occur. In this research, a contrastive analysis of the formation of words in both French and Yorùbá was carried out to find out the level of similarity and dissimilarity and its consequence on the mastery of the process of French words by Yorùbá learners of the French language.

French Language

French language known in French as “le français” is a Roman language belonging to the Indo-European family. According to Dubois and Lagane

(1995, p.6), its evolution dates back to the middle age and from Ade-Ojo (200, p.1), it was first adopted in France as the country's official language in 1539 through a special linguistic degree known as *ordonnance de Villers-coterets* passed by François 1er (Francis the first). Apart from being the official language of all our neighbouring countries (Benin, Cameroun, Niger and Tchad), the French language is one of the working languages of international Organizations like ECOWAS, UNO, UNESCO and NATO. Based on Bello Osagie's (2020, p.21) observation, globally, the French language is spoken by more than 280 million people. According to Kwofie (2008, p.4), the presence of the French language in Africa dates back to 1624 when it was first introduced in Dakar, Senegal followed by Madagascar in 1643 and Reunion in 1663. Adelekan (1983) cited in Araromi (1996, p.226) asserts that the presence of French in Nigeria as a subject to be taught in schools goes back to 1859 when it was introduced as a subject to be taught in the first secondary school established in Lagos.

Yorùbá Language

Yorùbá language (natively Ede Yorùbá) is a native mother tongue of Yorùbá people spoken principally in Nigeria, Benin and Togo with communities in other parts of Africa, Europe and America. It is a language spoken by one of the largest African ethnic groups in the south of the Sahara known as Yorùbá that constitute more than 20% population of Nigeria (Adesola, 2010, p.43). According to Ajani (2019, pp.10-11), Yorùbá speaking states in Nigeria are Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos. It is also the mother tongue in some parts of Kwara and Kogi states.

Capo (2004, p.19) claims that the Yorùbá language belongs to the language family of Benue-Congo/Niger-Congo phylum. Igue (2009, p.2) points out that, apart from the fact that Yorùbá language belongs to the group of the fortunate African languages to be studied by eminent African/European linguists, it is the mother tongue of more than thirty million people spread across three countries in West Africa, namely Nigeria, Benin and Togo while globally based on Bello Osagie's (2020, p.21) submission, it is a mother-tongue of 37.84 million people.

Word Formation Process in French

In the French language, words are formed through different methods, namely: Borrowing: This is a process of borrowing words from other languages of the world into the French language. According to Dubois and Lagane (1995, p.7), over 80% of French words have their origin traced to

the Latin language. Dubois and Lagane (1995) further assert that many foreign words known as 'emprunts' featured in the French language such as *Algebre* (Algebra), *alcool* (alcohol) are from the Arabic language, *Jazz* (Jazz), *film* (film) are from the English language, *Banque* (Bank), *carneval* (carnival) are from the Italian language while words like *fiesta* (fiesta), *tabac* (tobacco) are from the Spanish language. The French language even borrowed from a Malinke language that is the mother tongue in African countries like Guinea Conakry, Mali and Cote d'Ivoire and a typical example of such words is "Boubou" referring in French to all kinds of male African attire. **Blinding:** This is a word formation process in French where two existing words are merged to become one and leading to a new word. Example: *bon* (good) + *homme* (man) lead to "bonhomme" (a gentleman) or (a nice man), *Jeune* (young) + *homme* (man) lead to "Jeune homme (a young man), *salle* (room) + *a manger* (to eat) lead to "salle a manger" (dining room).

Affixation: This is a process where a secondary morpheme in the French language is added to an already existing morpheme either at the beginning (prefix) to form another word which may be a noun, an adjective or an adverb. A typical example: is a word conjunction (conjunction) where the prefix 'con' is added to 'jonction' and form a word (conjunction). It could be at the middle known as suffixation, example, 'suile a manger' (dining room), or at the end known as suffixation and a typical example is a suffix form merged with the unit and leading to 'uniform' (uniform), a suffix *venue* (arrive) merged with 'bien' (nice) and lead to a word *bienvenue* (welcome), etc. **Acronyms:** This is a process in the French language where words are formed by removing the initial letters of meaningful existing expressions and forming a word out of the letters. Good examples are the following acronymes: *FLE* (français langue étrangère), *UA* (Union africaine), *CEDEAO* (Communauté Economique des Etats de l'Afrique Occidentale), *N U* (Nations Unies), *OMS* (Organisation Mondiale de la Santé).

Clipping: This is a process of formation of words in French where a part of a word is removed and the remnant remains a word and has some meaning as the original word. Example: *le fac* for *la faculté* (faculty), *les maths* for *les mathématiques/mathematics*, *l'info* for *l'information* (information), *l'auto* for *l'automobile* (automobile). **Neologisms:** This is a process where certain words are put in place to suit the immediate need of the speaker and as time goes on, they become part of the French word. Example: a computer word like 'e-mail'. **Onomatopoeia:** This is known in

French as onomatopoeia which is a process where sounds usually made by certain animals or things are incorporated into the groups of French words. Good examples are: le tic-tac (sound associated with wall clock), le brouhaha (sound).

Word Formation Process in Yorùbá

In the Yorùbá language, words are also formed through different methods, each of which we analysed below. Borrowing: According to Ogunsiji (2013, p.134), borrowing of words is an occasional use of items from one language in the utterances of another language. There are many borrowed words from other languages, from English, Arabic, Hausa and even French languages that over time have become Yorùbá words. Some of these borrowed words have gone through a series of derivations but still maintain their original spellings. For example, while Yorùbá words like ‘wàhálà’ (problem), fitilá (lantern), àlááfíà (peace), etc., are borrowed from the Hausa language (Ogunsiji, 2013), words like ‘àlùbòsà’ (onion) are from the Arabic language while words like ‘fèrèsé’ (window) are from the French language (fenêtre). Similarly, words like ‘Pálò (parlour), ‘béèdì (bed), ‘rìwáyà’ (rewire), ‘fótò (photo), to mention a few, are from English but are now used in Yorùbá language. Combination of morphemes:

This is a process where some morphemes are copied in part or wholly to form new words. A typical example is the combination of verbs and adjective, i.e., adding a verb to an adjective to form a new word.

	Verb	Adjective	Formation
	New word		
i.	Mu (drink) mìmu (drinking)	mí	mí+mu
ii.	je (to eat) jìje (edible)	jì	jì+je
iii.	dòtí (be dirty) dídòtí (dirty)	dì	dì+dòtí
iv.	pón (be ripe) pìpon (ripe)	pì	pì+pón

Compounding: According to Yusuf et al. (2011, p.78), in the Yorùbá language, this is a process of putting together two or more Yorùbá words to form a new word. Examples:

Words	Combination	New words
	Meaning in English	

i.	Ilé (house) + Olorun (God) Church / Mosque	Ile Olorun	
ii.	Orí (head)+ Okè (mountain) Hilltop	Oríòkè	
iii.	Orí (head) + Ade (crown) Traditional ruler	Oriade	
iv.	Ọmọ (child) + Kékeré (small) Small child	Ọmọ kékeré	
v.	Ilé (house) + Iwe (book)	Ilé ìwé	school
vi.	Bàbá (father) + rere (nice/good)	Bàbá rere	nice father
-	Duplication of verbs Verb + Verb Meaning		New word
i.	Jagun+Jagun Warrior		Jagun-jagun
ii.	Kólé (build house)+ kólé (build house) Builder	Kólé + kólé	
iii.	Paná (put off the fire)+paná (put off the fire) Fire fighter	Panápaná	
-	Duplication of Nouns Nouns + Nouns Meaning		New word
i.	Oṣù (month) + oṣù (month) Every month	Oṣoṣù	
ii.	Ọdún (year) + Ọdún (year) Every year	Ọdọdún	

Furthermore, according to Igue (2009, p.6), other ways of forming new words in Yorùbá is by adding the following prefix with a verb.

-	Prefix with a verb Prefix Meaning		Verb	New word
i.	à we go	+	lo (go)	àlo
ii	á we are back	+	bó)to come back (á bo
iii.	a writer	+	kọ wé (to write)	akọ wé

iv.	ĩ	+	kórè (harvest)	ĩkórè
	harvesting			
v.	ĩ	+	rìn (to walk)	ĩrìn
	walk			
vi.	ò	+	şışé (to work)	òşışé
	worker			
vii.	ò	+	şèlú (to govern)	òşèlú
	politician.			

- Prefix with a noun

	Prefix with a Noun			New word
	Meaning			
i.	a	+	yò (rejoice)	ayò
	joy			
ii.	é	+	şẹ (offend)	é şẹ
	sin			
iii.	i	+	jo (to dance)	ijó
	dance			
iv.	é	+	yẹ (befitting)	é yẹ
	honour.			

Word Formation Processes in French and Yorùbá: Area of Convergence and Divergence

S.P. Corder (1967) cited in Soetan (2013, p.303), contends that when a learner has made an error, the most efficient way to teach him or her the correct form is not by simply pointing the errors to him or her, but by letting him discover the source of the error. This idea informs this paper concerning the area of convergence and divergence in word formation processes in French and Yorùbá languages. From this study, one could see that at the level of convergence about the formation of words in both languages (French and Yorùbá), there are many areas of coming together such as: Borrowing: This is a process common to both languages, while French borrows from English, Latin, Arabic, Greek and even African languages and because of that, we have words like Boubou, mathématiques, alcool, etc., borrowed into the French language. The Yorùbá language similarly borrows from other languages such as Arabic language, Hausa language, English language and even French language and due to that, we have words like 'Fèrèsé, Anfàni, Pálò, Alùbósà' borrowed from other languages into Yorùbá language.

Blinging: This is a process where words are merged to form a new word. This a common phenomenon to both French and Yorùbá. In the French language, we have cases like 'Jeune (young) merged with homme (man) and becomes 'jeune homme' (young man), jeun (young) merged with fille (lady) and becomes 'jeune fille' (young lady), similarly, in Yorùbá language, we have similar cases 'ó dọ ' (young) merged with 'òkùnrin' (man) and becomes 'ó dọ mọkùnrin' (young man), 'òdó' (young) merged with 'obìrin' (lady), becomes 'ó dọ mọbìrin' (young lady). Furthermore, in Yorùbá, we have cases where two verbs merged and give us a complete word. For example, 'jagun' (to fight) with another 'jagun' (to fight) gives us 'jagunjagun' (a fighter), 'paná' (to put off light) with another 'paná' (to put off light) gives us 'panápaná' (firefighter).

Compounding: This is another process of word formation common to both languages. It is a process where some morphemes that exist as independent words are merged to form a single word in both languages. Typical examples in both languages are the following: In the French language, we have words like 'montre + bracelet' which becomes 'montre-bracelet (wristwatch), 'vice + president' gives us 'vice president' (vice president), 'vice + chancellor' and brusse + dents' gives 'brosse a dents' (toothbrush). Similarly, in the Yoruba language, 'ago' (watch) + 'owó' (hand) gives us (watch), 'igbákejì + are' (vice president) gives us 'Igbákejì Are (vice president) and 'Ifo (washing instrument) and 'eyin' (teeth) becomes 'ifoyin (toothbrush), etc.

However, at the level of divergence as regards the word formation processes in French and Yorùbá. While the French language, has the following processes of word formation, in the Yorùbá language they do not exist. Acronyms: This is a situation in French where words are formed by removing the initial letters of a meaningful expression and forming a word out of the letters. A good example is the case of the following French words.

- FLE: This is a word taking from expression (français langue étrangère). French as a foreign language).
 - CEDEAO: Taken from expression Communauté Economiques des Etats de l'Afrique Occidentale (Economic Community of West African States).
 - CFA: Taken from Communauté française en Afrique (French Community in West Africa), etc.
- ii. **Clipping:** This is another area of divergence and it is a situation in French language where a part of the word is removed while the

remnant remains a word and bears the same meaning bore by the former word. Good examples are the following French words. La Fac: Taken from la faculté (faculty), L'info: Taken from l'information (information).

iii. Neologism: It is also another area of divergence between French and Yorùbá languages when it comes to the process where certain words are put in place to satisfy the need of the speaker at that particular moment and in French language. Examples of such word are:

- E-mail, browse, software. They are common in computer technology. However, in Yorùbá rather than adopting a neologism style, Yorùbá language resultd in language engineering which according to Capo (1990, p.1) is:

[...] that domain of applied linguistics concerned with the design and implementation of strategies (i.e. the conscious and deliberate steps) toward the rehabilitation and optimal utilization of individual languages.[...] it is a mechanism of language planning that recognizes problems and proceeds to engineer solutions to such problems.

Based on language engineering, once a new terminology/word is out, Yorùbá linguists move ahead in finding adequate Yorùbá terminology/word to replace such foreign terminology or words in the Yorùbá language. Hence, we have words like *ímo-iràwò* (astronomy) virus *'kòkòrò àwon àirí'*. Associate professor *ó jọ gbọ n onípòkẹjì*, doctor (*onìşègùn/ó mó wé*) etc.

iv. Prefix/suffix

This is another area of divergence when it comes to the process of word formation in Yorùbá and French. In the French language while a suffix could be added to an existing independent word and that word becomes another word when 's' is added to *garçon* (boy) that word changes to *'garçons'* (boys), in Yorùbá language, what makes the word 'boy' (*ọkùnrin*) to change to 'boys' is the adding of prefix *'àwon'*, which is a qualifying adjective in Yorùbá, hence when *'àwon'* (some) is added to 'boy' (*ọkùnrin*) it becomes a new word *'àwon ọkùnrin'* (some boys).

In addition, in the Yorùbá language, when the prefix 'I' is added to an existing word like 'jo' (to dance), it leads to another word 'ijó' (dance), when the letter 'I' is added to 'rìn' (to walk), it

becomes 'irin' (walk) and when the letter 'o' is added to 'sise' (to work), it becomes 'osise' (worker). Finally, another area of divergence is the duplication of a noun in Yoruba usually leads to the formation of a new word. Typical examples are 'osu + osu' (month + month), which gives us 'ososu' (every month), 'odun + odun' (year + year) and that gives us 'ododun' (every year), *dié + dié* leads to *dié dié* (slowly).

The Implication of the study

In Bloor and Bloor's view (1997, p.226), the question of how to speak or write more effectively is an area that has been a centre of discussion among linguists all over the world for many years. It is based on the above that this paper ventures into a contrastive analysis of word formation process in French and Yoruba to establish convergence and divergence in the word formation processes in both languages. Looking critically at the level of divergence, it has a lot of learning implications on the part of Yoruba learners of the French language when it comes to the process of word formation in French language. Let us start with the acronyms, a majority of Yoruba French learners find it difficult to recognize French acronyms. Hence, words like FLE coined from français language étrangère (French as a foreign language), ONU coined by the organization des Nations Unies (United Nations Organisation) not only look strange but they find it difficult to be called as a single word. The word FLE [FLə] is realized by calling separately the three letters that formed FLE. Hence, FLE (FLə) is realized as F.L.E by a majority of Yoruba learners of French and instead of saying 'je vais en classe de FLE' [ʒəvɛãkLãsdəfLə] becomes [ʒəvɛzãkLãsdəf.L.E].

Another problematic area when it comes to the area of divergence is the case of the suffix 's' in French language and when added to a word in French changes that word from singular to plural, which does not exist in Yoruba language rather for a singular word to become plural prefix 'awon' which qualifies adjective is added to a word. Typical examples are the following words: 'garcon' (boy) when the suffix 's' is added, it becomes 'garcons' (boys). 'Livre' (book), when the suffix 's' is added, it becomes 'livres' (books). In the same words, in Yoruba 'okunrin' (boy) when the prefix 'awon' (some) is added to 'okunrin' (boy), it becomes 'awon okunrin' (boys) and in 'iwé' (book), when suffix 'awon' is added, it becomes 'awon iwé' (books).

Another area of divergence is the area of clipping in French that sometimes lead to the formation of a new word in French like 'l'auto' from l'automobile (automobile), l'info from l'information (information), 'tele' from television (television) also look strange to a typical Yorùbá learner of French language because such clipping system does not exist in their mother tongue, which is Yorùbá language. In the Yorùbá language, there is no short form for 'ìròyìn' (information) or 'é rọ amóùn máwòrán' (television). Furthermore, the neologism process of word formation that exists in French where words may be in place to satisfy the immediate purpose of the speaker is very rare in Yorùbá. Rather in the Yorùbá language whenever a word appears, an effort will be put in place to get suitable word for it hence computer terminology words in French like 'votre e-mail' (your e-mail). 'J'aime le software' (I like the software) will look strange to a typical Yorùbá learner of the French language because he/she is expecting to hear French words for e-mail and software.

Recommendation

Based on the works of Chomsky and other transformational generative grammarians, Filani (2013, p.534) asserts that infants are endowed with a Language Acquisition Device (L.A.D), which enables them to acquire their first language and also a second language. Given this, the following recommendations are put forward. Teaching of French grammar in French classes in Nigeria, especially in Yorùbá speaking areas should go beyond the level of grammatical appropriateness. This implies that Yorùbá learners of the French language should constantly be exposed to various forms of process of word formation in French so that at any point in time, they should be in a position to identify any French word. The social knowledge of contrastive analysis on the part of the teacher is another point. Once a contrastive analysis is on the ground, it will enable the teacher to lead his/her students to identify similarities and dissimilarities between the languages in contact concerning word formation processes among Yorùbá learners of French. A knowledge of contrastive analysis will enable the teacher and the learners to identify areas of similarity and dissimilarity in the word formation processes in Yorùbá and French and area of difficulty that Yorùbá French learner may face when it comes to the recognition of French words. Lastly, to help students in the area of the word formation process, the functional language teaching approach should be used by French teachers. What this means is that in teaching students the word formation process in French, the teaching-learning

should not be a teacher-centred approach. Rather, we should make learners active through practical demonstrations that could lead to a series of production of French words by the students.

Conclusion

An attempt was made in this paper to cast a reflective focus on word formation processes in two languages, one foreign (French) and the other one native (Yoruba). The divergence in words formation in both languages constitutes a learning difficulty for the Yoruba learners of the French language. To find a solution to the learning difficulty, the study ventured into various processes of the formation of words in both languages. It points out areas of convergence and divergence to note areas of difficulty encountered by the Yoruba learners of the French language on words formation in French language. The study concluded by offering some didactic approaches that could make words formation process in French easier for the Yoruba learners of the French language.

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