A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF LEARNERS' WRITING ERRORS IN FRENCH

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Abstract

Several scholars have carried out investigations on writing errors in second language learning. However, longitudinal studies that focus on the linguistic development in general and lexical competence of the anglophone learners of French, in particular, are still very scarce. An investigation of this sort will give a concise scope of the language development of the anglophone learners of French and some of the factors that are responsible for the errors found in their writing. This study investigates the writing errors of the Obafemi Awolowo University learners of French. The subjects who participated in the study were 14 beginner students. The learners were monitored from their first year of study at the University all through the end of their third year of study. An essay writing exercise was administered on the subjects at the end of their first academic year in 2015/2016. By the end of their second year at the university in 2016/2017 and the end of their third year in 2017/2018, the same essay writing exercise was administered to the same set of students. The study found out that Obafemi Awolowo University learners of French-made frequent errors in their writing. They made repeated errors ranging from wrong spellings, determinants, prepositions, choice of words, overgeneralization, and wrong analogy. The study thus suggested that the learning techniques, teaching methods, and teaching curriculum be regularly reviewed to reflect the language needs of the learners.

Keywords: writing, error, error analysis, interlanguage, Nigerian learners of French.

Introduction

As it is widely known, writing is one of the vital aspects of the four skills in language learning. Writing is a symbolic representation of ideas, thoughts, opinions, feelings, and emotions for visual interpretation. In other words, it is a systematic representation of mental pictures, ideas, thoughts, and feelings using orthographic symbols or signs for reading. We can then say that the main purpose of writing is reading. Writing in French is a complex process for anglophone learners. In the process of learning the French language, learners are required to engage in writing that comes in form of essays, compositions, articles, etc. Thus, learners are expected to engage in the skill of writing to communicate their thoughts in a foreign language as accurately as possible. In the process of engaging in this exercise, learners often commit errors that have serious impacts on their lexis, grammar as well as communication. Othman and Mohamad (2007) mentioned that writing, unlike other language skills such as speaking, reading, and listening, has created a lot of problems among learners of English as a Second Language. We are of a similar point of view that writing in French creates a lot of problems for Anglophone learners of French as a foreign language. Anglophone Learners of French encounter difficulties ranging from inadequate vocabulary, inability to connect grammar rules, wrong spellings, wrong analogy, generalisation as well as an inappropriate prepositions. In most cases, most of the errors made by these learners are traceable to second language interference. Kaweera (2013) citing Reid (1993) explained that

there are other variables apart from the first language interference that account for learners' errors and that such errors are generally traced to generalisation and the level of difficulty. According to Lalande (1982:140) cited by Kaweera (2013:9), he opined that even though learners have studied certain grammar rules, they still commit the same type of errors from one essay to another.

Similarly, the Obafemi Awolowo learners of French exhibit the same problems. The learners commit repeated errors in their writing skills that show a greater level of deficiency and incompetency in their communication in French. That sort of undesired consistency in error usually frustrates both the teachers and the learners. This is because readers usually pay more attention to errors in writing than speaking because writing stays longer than speaking, hence the learners need to give extra attention to their writing to produce text that is free of errors that can hinder effective communication.

Despite the numerous researches that focused on errors and problems in language learning, there exists largely a view that the problem is still under-researched. This, according to McCarthy (1990), is due to an open system problem because many items are not rule-based. The conclusion one can draw from this is that the problem that accounted for errors is complex and complicated. Many researchers and experts in Applied Linguistics have researched the influence of the first language and second language acquisition on foreign language learning. In this present study, we will be engaging in a longitudinal study to investigate the nature of the learners' errors and the errors that are repeated in the 3 years of composition writing of the Obafemi Awolowo University learners of French with the view of giving a concise account of their language development, factors that are

responsible for the errors found in their writing and suggest possible technique or methodology to use by the learners and instructors to eliminate the errors.

This study employs a multidimensional approach to language teaching and learning in the domain of Applied Linguistics. Applied Linguistics according to Schmitt and Celce-Murcia (2002:1) cited by Khansir (2012:1027) is using what we know about (a) language, (b) how it is learned, and (c) how it is used, to solve some problems associated with language teaching and learning in the real world.

Research Problems

For about 10 years of French language teaching and also supervision of final year learners of French, the researcher observed that a large number of learners of French commit several errors when they write their assignments, test, examinations, and as well as their final year Long Essay. Even though the learners have been exposed to an average of 360 hours per academic session, they still demonstrate insufficient knowledge and mastery of basic lexical competence and grammatical structures in their writing skills in French. Their writing is filled with errors which show that their language development is weak and inconsistent. Such writing errors to a large extent hurt the learners' communication in French and success in language learning. It is in the light of the foregoing that we consider the need to address the issue of errors made by the learners. To identify the specific nature of the errors, and the factors that are responsible for them, and suggest a methodological approach that will assist both the instructor and the learners in correcting them.

Relevance of the study

Error as we know is an essential part of teaching and learning. It helps to measure the language competence and language performance of a learner. Error assists language teachers to identify areas of difficulties in the teaching and learning of a learner. Brown (2007) opined that error in writing is a natural process of learning and is considered part of cognition. Being the first 3 years longitudinal study to be carried out on the absolute beginners' learners of French in the Department of Foreign Language at Obafemi Awolowo University, undertaking this study to investigate learners writing errors in French will help language instructors, the learners, and well as methodologists to understand the nature of the errors made by the learners, the specific linguistic cause of the errors, as well as the methodological approach that could be used to reduce or eradicate such errors in writing.

The researcher hopes that the results of this study will help curriculum designers, and language instructors at the Department of Foreign Language, to adapt and modify the materials and methodology used in teaching the French language to meet the language needs of the learners especially writing correctly in French. Finally, the researchers hope that the results will be helpful for teachers of French in Nigerian schools, colleges, and universities.

Research Questions

The following are the questions asked to guide the study:

i. What is the nature of the OAU learners writing errors?

ii. What are the most frequent or repeated errors in the OAU learners' writing?

iii. What are the possible causes of the errors?

iv. What are the possible ways to eradicate such errors?

Theoretical Framework
Over time, Contrastive Analysis (CA), Error Analysis (EA), and Interlanguage (IL) have been major language theories employed in analyzing the language problems that learners encountered. Since our focus in this study is on learners' errors, we must discuss briefly the notion of contrastive analysis.

Contrastive Analysis (CA)
Between the 1950s and 1960s in the field of Applied Linguistics, Contrastive Analysis Theory (CAT) became a favored theory for second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language acquisition (FLA). Mair (2018) defines Contrastive Linguistics (CL) as the theoretically grounded, systematic, and synchronic comparison of usually two languages, or at most no more than a small number of languages. James (2001:4) defines Contrastive Linguistics (CL) as ''a sub-discipline of linguistics concerned with the comparison of two or more languages or subsystems of language to determine both differences and similarities between them''. CA theory is anchored on the comparison of the structure of two or more languages to identify their similarities and differences. The languages compared could share similar origins or different origins. Those that share a similar origin or are related typologically are believed to be similar in structure, which in a way aid the learning of a second language (SL) or a foreign language (FL); while those with a difference in origin or are not related typologically pose difficulty for the learner. Contrastive

Analysis thus focuses on the difference in L1 or L2 as the major source of error in L3 learning. For this theory, the concentration is on interference as the only source of error in language teaching and learning, and other factors such as age, learning environment, method of instruction, etc. which also affect learning are not considered. Over time, CA theory was criticized by scholars because it did not provide a comprehensive solution to problems associated with second and foreign language teaching and learning. The theory has only contributed to the advancement of the theory of translation, language typology, and lexicology among others. Between the 1960s and 1970s, there was another development in the applied linguistics domain as linguists were now interested in other sources of errors in second language teaching and learning. Some extra linguistics phenomena which have greatly contributed to research in second language learning were taken into consideration, hence Error Analysis (EA) was propounded.

Error Analysis (EA)
Error Analysis theory is based on linguistics and psycholinguistics criteria as sources of language problems. The theory reveals that learners' errors were not only traceable to first language interference but also other universal strategies. It focuses more on learners' performance and the second language learning process. This theory is diagnostic by trying to describe learners' errors in the process of second language acquisition rather than focusing on the structural similarities and the differences in languages. In other words, EA involves systematic identification of learners' errors, then classify the errors contained in the sample of learners' spoken or written production, and finally interpreting the errors identified. James (1998:1) cited by Al-Khresheh (2016:50)

defines EA as "the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes, and consequences of unsuccessful language". EA deals with the way second language learners learn and uses language. It tries to investigate learners' language development. Therefore, EA considers other linguistics factors such as interlanguage and intralanguage factors as the sources of Second or foreign Language learners' errors. Scholars as different sources of errors in second or foreign language acquisition equally consider these two main factors. (Richards, 1974; James, 1996; Brown, 2000; Abi Samra, 2003; Khansir 2012).

Interlanguage Error

Interlanguage errors as the name implies are the errors that have the features of at least two other languages. In other words, they are the errors committed because of the contact between learners' source language (SL/MT/FL/L1 hereinafter) and their target language (TL/FL/L2/L3 hereinafter).

Previous studies have attributed a huge number of second and foreign language learners' errors to the influence of their first language. (Al-khresheh, 2010, 2011; Noor, 1996, Mahmoud, 2005; Richards, 1974; Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989; Lim, 2003). This confirms the important role L1 plays in L2 and L3 language learning. This theory implies that it is very impossible for learners not to have recourse to their L1 in the process of learning and perfecting their competencies in L2 or L3 language. Therefore, two major transfers occur during the learning strategies employed by learners; positive and negative transfer. The transfer is negative when the learner engages in inappropriate application or overgeneralization of L1 rules in L2 or L3 language or inappropriate application or overgeneralization of L1 and L2 rules

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in the L3 language. In such a situation, learners commit errors referred to as interlanguage errors. A sort of transitory error is committed by learners in the process of acquiring a second (L2) or foreign language (FL/L3). Learners of second or foreign language preserving the features of their first or second language developed the errors; which they used to overgeneralize rules in the second or foreign language. Therefore, interlanguage errors are independent of the learners' L1, L2, and or L3. Interlanguage error can be summarized as follow:
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First Language → Interlanguage → Second Language
Second Language → Interlanguage → Foreign Language
First Language + Second language → Interlanguage → Foreign Language

$$FL \rightarrow IL \rightarrow SL$$
$$SL \rightarrow IL \rightarrow FL$$
$$FL + SL \rightarrow IL \rightarrow FL$$

In this study, we focus on Nigerian learners of French. In Nigeria, the English language has the status of ''lingua franca''. Before a Nigerian child began his/her mandatory formal course in English in pre-primary and primary education, he/she has already been exposed to the acquisition of his/her mother tongue through listening to his/her parents and people around him. For the learning of English, the child also picks up some basic words and expressions in the language through watching television, listening to the radio, his/her parents, etc. This process in a way facilitates the learning of English as an official language. French on the other hand is considered the second official language of the country after English. However, unlike the English language, the

Nigerian child does not learn the French language until after his/her 6 years of mandatory primary education. In order words, the obligatory exposure to French language learning for a Nigerian child is during the first year in the Junior Secondary School. French language in Nigeria is a foreign language because it is only accessible to a Nigerian child in the classroom. Before a Nigerian child is exposed to the learning of French, he/she has already acquired a minimum of 2 languages; his/her mother tongue (L1) and English Language (L2).

In this present longitudinal study, our focus is to track the learning development of the Nigerian Learners of French (NLF) to identify the type of errors repeatedly committed by the learners in their writing; factors that sufficient account for the errors, and suggest a methodological approach in eradicating the identified errors. Our assumption in this study is that the linguistic repertoire of Nigerian learners FL+SL→IL→FL may account for the interlanguage errors in the writing of the learners.

Literature Review

Mistakes and errors made by the second language (L2) and foreign language (FL/L3) learners in the process of acquiring the languages have been a great concern to linguists and researchers. Their interest is majorly in investigating the factors that are responsible for the mistakes and errors made by the learners. In the context of second or foreign language learning, an error is an integral part of the learning process. It is the proof of learners' interlanguage when they make efforts in mastering the linguistic system of a second or foreign language. Salem (2003) considers error as an integral part of learners' language learning output. Alhaysony (2012) in his studies, investigated the writing errors of

English -major students. He explained that errors are beneficial and significant devices that can assist learners in their learning process. Accordingly, Hasyin (2002) argued that errors are advantageous for both learners and teachers because they provide information to the teachers on learners' errors. Hasyin's point of view is supported by AbiSamra (2003) who pointed out that errors also contain useful information on learners learning strategies that can be used to identify the teaching problems that might be the cause of the learners' errors, to predict some possible difficulties the learners may encounter in writing and very important information that will help to prepare effective teaching-learning material that will take into consideration the learners needs and problems.

Gurtubay (2009:140) in her study "lexical errors analysis in the written production of students of English as a second language: a pilot study", explained that learners' errors (intralinguistic and interlinguistic) in L2 are an indicator of learning problems in a foreign language. She proposes that good communication at the lexical level should be deployed by instructors in the process of teaching a foreign language.

Al-Khresheh (2016:57) in her study "A review study of error analysis theory" reviewed and discussed error analysis theory from the point of view of a theoretical foundation. He concludes that errors can be helped by providing good feedback to both teachers and students.

Granger and Monfort (1994) in their study, did a critic of methodological approaches that are deployed by researchers in investigating lexical errors in language learning which is mainly on error analysis. They argue that error analysis should be based on empirical investigation and well-defined categories. They

explained that if that is done, the results will be an extremely useful tool to describe learners' lexical competence, providing psycholinguistics and methodologists with necessary details. They suggested the combination of lexical error analysis and semi-automatic processing as two methodological approaches to evaluating learners' lexical errors.

In applied linguistics, an error is considered as a pattern of production (oral or written) that show incomplete or incorrect knowledge of a language. According to Richards (2002) error is defined as the use of a linguistic item in a way that a native speaker of the language regards as faulty or incomplete. In the light of understanding, we decided to investigate the errors made by Obafemi Awolowo University Learners of French in their essay writing.

Methodology
Participants

The participants for this study are 14 beginner students in the Department of Foreign Languages at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun state who studied the French language between 2015 and 2018 as shown in the table below. The subjects are absolute beginner learners of French (ABLF) who learned French at the Junior Secondary School level and did not sit for French in their final Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSCE). The average age of the participants is 17-23 years old. They made up of 5 males and 9 females being the total number and sex of students in that class.

Table I   **Presentation of Participants and Corpus Analysed**

Academic Sessions	Male	No of corpus	Female	No of corpus	Total corpus
2015/2016	5	10	9	18	28
2016/2017	5	10	9	18	28
2017/2018	5	10	9	18	28
Total	**15**	**30**	**27**	**54**	**84**

Instrument

The study is a corpus-based one and to achieve a corpus that is representative, the writing was guided by 2 main questions on 2 essay topics: 1. *La carrière de mon rêve* and 2. *Ma ville natale*. A total of 84 corpora of French written compositions by 14 students (5 males and 9 females) of the Department of Foreign Languages, Obafemi Awolowo University, and learners of French were collected and analysed. The composition was part of the course registered for by the students who are taught in the second semester of their first year in the university (FRN108: Introduction to French Composition).

Data Collection Procedure

The procedure for this study constitutes three main stages: beginner, pre-intermediate and intermediate. The study was carried out by asking the subjects (14 university learners of French as a foreign language) to write a composition of not less than 200 words on each topic ''1. *La carrière de mon rêve* and 2. *Ma ville natale*'. The first writing task was given at the end of the second semester 2015/2016 academic session and part of the first-year examinations. The writing of the subjects was collected and error analysis was carried out on it to identify some of the errors and difficulties encountered by the students.

Next, the same 14 research subjects were again asked to rewrite a composition of not less than 200 words on the same topics ''1. *La carrière de mon rêve* and 2. *Ma ville natale*'. The second writing task was given at the end of the second semester 2016/2017 academic session which marks the end of second-year examinations and pre-intermediate level. The writing of the subjects was again collected and error analysis was carried out on it to identify some of the errors and difficulties encountered by the students in their first writing. Attention was paid to some of the repeated errors and new errors committed by the learners.

A year after the second writing, the same subjects were asked to write another composition of not less than 200 words on the same topic 1. *La carrière de mon rêve* and 2. *Ma ville natale*. The third writing task was given at the end of the second semester 2017/2018 academic session which marks the end of third-year examinations at the Nigeria French Language Village. The writing task was given when the learners returned from their mandatory immersion programme. The stage, in a way, represents the end of the learners' intermediate level and the beginning of

their advanced level. The writing of the subjects was again collected and error analysis was carried out on it. The purpose of the exercise is to find out if some of the errors and difficulties encountered by the students in their first year and second year writing have improved or if they are repeated. Also, to find out if the learner makes new error types different from the previous ones. The three compositions: Composition 1 (C1), Composition 2 (C2), and Composition 3 (C3) constitute the primary data for this study.

Results

This paper discusses the errors found in the writing of the subjects based on the study research questions. Answers are provided to the nature of the learners' errors, the most frequent and repeated errors of the learners, as well as the possible causes of the errors among others. This is done to give a precise scope of the learners' language development and the factors responsible for the errors committed. The errors produced by the learners were analysed using frequency and percentage. The results of our findings are presented in the table below.

Table 1: *Nature of the writing errors made by the Obafemi Awolowo learners of French*

Nature of Errors	Year 2015 Frequency	Year 2016 Frequency	Year 2017 Frequency	Total
(1). *Lexical Errors*				
Wrong Spellings	139	152	147	438
Wrong Accent	15	112	110	237
Wrong Apostrophe	14	15	13	42
Total	**168**	**279**	**270**	**717**
2. *Structural Errors*	127	101	113	341
Wrong Word	110	119	116	345
Wrong Tense	17	116	114	247
Subject-Verb	115	120	118	353
Agreement	136	152	158	446
Wrong Preposition	115	113	102	330
Wrong	15	18	16	49
Determinant	17	15	15	47
Wrong Adjective	**652**	**754**	**752**	**2158**
Wrong collocation				
Wrong Analogy				
Total				

From table 1 above, we discovered that the learners made both lexical and structural errors in their writing. The lexical errors made are wrong spellings, wrong use of accent as well as wrong placement of the apostrophe. As for the structural errors, we observed the use of wrong words, wrong tense, errors in subject-

verb agreement, wrong use of prepositions, wrong use of determinant, wrong use of the adjective, wrong collocation as well as a wrong analogy.

Table 2: *Most frequent errors in the Obafemi Awolowo University learners' writing.*

Nature of Errors	Year 2015		Year 2016		Year 2017	
	Frequency	**%**	**Frequency**	**%**	**Frequency**	**%**
(1). *Lexical Errors* Wrong Spellings Wrong Accent Wrong Apostrophe **Total**	139 15 14 **168**	82.7 9 8.3 100	152 112 15 **279**	54.5 40.1 5.4 100	147 110 13 **270**	54 41 5 100
2. *Structural Errors* Wrong Word Wrong Tense Subject-Verb Agreement Wrong Preposition Wrong Determinant Wrong	127 110 17 115 136 115 15 17 **652**	19.5 16.9 2.6 17.6 20.9 17.6 2.3 2.6 100	101 119 116 120 152 113 18 15 **754**	13.4 15.8 15.4 16 20 15 2.4	113 116 114 118 158 102 16 15 **752**	15 15.4 15.2 15.7 21 13.6

| Adjective Wrong collocation Wrong Analogy **Total**				2 10 0		2.1 2 100

As shown in Table 2 above, we observed under the lexical errors made by the learners, that wrong spellings are the most frequent and repeated errors; 82.7%, 54.5%, and 54% in the years 2015, 2016, and 2017 respectively. Whereas under structural errors, wrong use of determinant is the most frequent and repeated error; 20.9%, 20%, and 21% over the three years under study.

Figure 1:
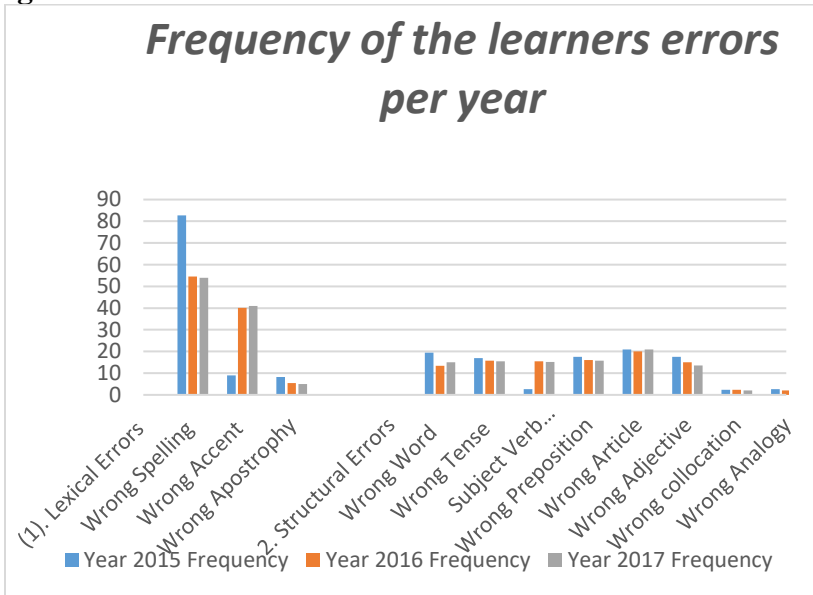
The figures show the frequency of the learners' errors per year

Figure 2

Percentage of the learners errors per year
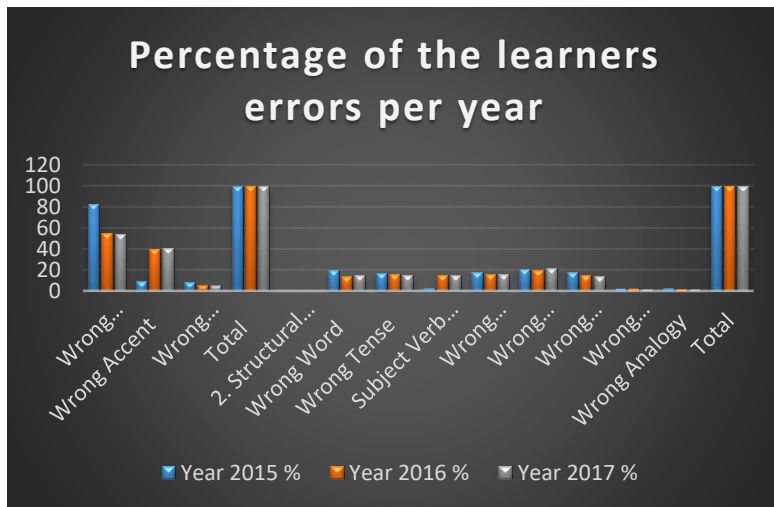
The figure above shows the percentage of errors made per year by the learners.

Discussion

The tables and the figures above show the nature of errors made by Obafemi Awolowo learners of French in their writing. They equally reveal the frequency of the errors made per year by the learners. The errors are categorized into two: lexical errors and structural errors. Under lexical errors, we have wrong spelling errors and wrong use of accent as the most frequent errors while wrong determinants and wrong prepositions are the most frequent

structural errors among other errors in their writing. Examples of these errors in the writing of the learners are presented below.

i. Wrong Spellings

1. Je pourrais de prendre mes affaires *internationelle.* « *internationale* »
2. …c'est une grande *privilege* d'utiliser ce que j'ai *apprenti* dans le *universite. « privilège »* « *appris* » *« université»*
3. Une ambassadrice est une personne qui *travail* à *l'embssade* ou qui *travail* dans une autre pays pour l'avantage de son pays. *« « travaille » « l'ambassade »*
4. Je *cros* que cette *une advantage* pour moi ? *« crois»* *« avantage »*
5. Osun est un du rapide *developement* état au Nigeria. *« développement »*
6. …beaucoup des étudiantes qui veulent d'être *profesionnel* dans ses champs des études. « *professionnel* »
7. **…**cette profession vient avec beaucoup de *responsibilité.* **«** *responsabilité* **»**

The above spelling errors can be attributed to the interlanguage of the learners. They are errors made as a result of the interference of the learners' knowledge of the English language, their second and official language. These errors attest to the definition of interlanguage by Richards (1997:28) cited by Na Phuket & Othman (2015:99) as errors made by learners as a result of drawing a connection between what they already know and what they do not know. In other words, they are the errors consciously

or unconsciously made by the learners in the process of perfecting their knowledge of a target language in this case French language. The interlanguage errors committed in this case by the learners are a result of what they know in their second language (English) and do not know in the Foreign Language (French) hence they created their language which is neither found in English nor French languages.

ii. Wrong accent

The wrong accent under the lexical errors is the second most frequent and repeated error in the writing of the learners representing 9%, 40%, and 41% in 2015, 2016, and 2017 respectively. These errors are due to the interlanguage of the learner. The learner's inability to use the accent is a result of their ignorance of the functions and the roles the accent play in French language learning.

Examples of such errors found in the writing of the learners are presented below.

1. Je serai bien *etudier*…« *étudier* »
2. …avec de bon *grace* de dieu. « *grâce* »
3. J'aimerais d'être une ambassadrice *apres* mes *etude a* l'*universite*. « *après* », « *étude* » « *à* » and « *université* »
4. Une ambassadrice est celui qui *represent* son pays dans les affaires d'autres. « *représente* »
5. … pour *ameliorer* les bons relations. « *améliorer* »
6. *…*on doit habille *elegant* et parle raisonable. *« élégant »*

iii. Wrong use of determinant

The frequency of this error as shown in the table above is 20.9% (2015), 20% (2016) and 21% (2017). Examples of these errors discovered in the writing of the learners are:

1. Il y a deux grands *l'hopitaux* à Ibadan. « *les hôpitaux* »
2. Quand *le maladie* est grève, les maladies sont toujours en remerciement pour être envie. « *la maladie* »
3. Je suis en deuxiem année *a la departement* de langue etrangere. « *au département* »
4. Je suis *une etudiante a* la *Obafemi Awolowo University*. *« Je suis étudiante »*
5. Une personne qui travail dans *une autre pays.* *« un autre pays »*
6. *Ce profession* m'avait aidé pour voir la beauté de la vie d'une autre perspectif. *« Cette profession »*
7. On doit travail dur dans *cette establishment*. *« cet établissement »*

In the English language, a definite article shows definiteness and the article does not exhibit agreement in number and gender with the noun it precedes. Whereas in the French language, a definite article exhibits agreement in number and gender with the nouns it precedes. However, in the data of the learners, we observed examples like [*l'hopitaux*] instead of *[les hôpitaux]* – (the hospitals*), [le maladie]* instead of *[la maladie]* (the illness), [*une autre pays]* instead of *[un autre pays]* (in another country). In doing this, the learners transferred their knowledge of English

where a definite article does not agree in number and gender with the nouns it precedes. We can say here that L2 interference accounts for this type of error made by the learners. We also observed that the learners make use of articles that they should have omitted the use of the article. Such examples are, [*Je suis une etudiante]* instead of [*Je suis étudiante*], and [*la Obafemi Awolowo University*] instead of [*Obafemi Awolowo University*]. This is equally a result of the interference of the knowledge of English where the use of the article is required.

iv. Wrong use of preposition
1. Il y a beaucoup des bonne autoroute <u>en </u>Ibadan. « *à* »
2. Il y a trois majeur religions <u>dons</u> Osogbo « *à* »
3. Il y a plusieur professions <u>dans</u> Osogbo « *à* »
4. Beaucoup des gen <u>en</u> Ibadan sont cultivateur. « *à* »
5. La premiere universite <u>du</u> Nigeria c'est situee a Ibadan. « *au* »
6. Je suis interese <u>de</u> ce qui se passe au monde. « *à* »
7. J'ai commencé <u>d'</u>acheter les voiture. « *à* »

Preposition in French is used to indicate the position of a thing or a place in a sentence. A preposition is also used with a verb. Its usage is for 2 main reasons: (1) to actualize the infinitive form of the verb it precedes or (2) to serve as a linking word between the verb and its object. The errors the learners committed in the incorrect use of preposition is attributed on one hand to the overgeneralization of the rules that dictate the use of preposition in French with some verbs. This overgeneralization error confirms the definition of Brown (2000:95) cited by Yusuf that to generalize means to infer or derive a law, rule, or conclusion,

usually from the observation of particular instances. Overgeneralization is an intralingual error whereby the learner incorrectly applies the previously learned second language structure or rule to a present second language context. In other examples, L2 knowledge interferes with the learning of the French language. For example: « ll y a plusieur professions *dans* Osogbo » instead of « Il y a plusieurs professions *à* Osogbo ». This error is a result of interference with the knowledge of English. Other examples are: « Je suis interese *de* ce qui se passe au monde. » instead of « Je suis intéressé *à* ce qui se passe au monde. », « J'ai commencé *d'*acheter les voiture. » instead of « J'ai commencé *à* acheter les voitures. »

Therefore, there is need for the learners to be familiar with verbs in French that do not necessarily take preposition and those that compulsorily take preposition. Our observation here is that the learners overgeneralize the rules by placing preposition before verbs that do not take it. Example:
i. « Je n'aimerais pas *de* travailler pour quelqu'un » instead of « Je n'aimerais pas travailler pour quelqu'un. »
ii. « J'aimerais *d'*etre professeur. » instead of « J'aimerais être professeur. »

Possible causes of the errors
Second language learning researchers have identified two sources of errors in language learning; interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors occur as a result of learners' application of their first language knowledge (rules/structure) in the learning of their second or third language. In order words, learners in the process of perfecting (L2) or (L3) learning, unconsciously transfer the previous knowledge of their L1 (which may not be accepted

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or exist in the target language) in the L2 or L3 learning thereby committing an interlingual error. Intralingual error on the other hand is a process of transfer whereby learners consciously transfer the rules they have successfully learned in L2 or L3 into another context in L2 or L3 language. This error is made as a result of a faulty application of rules of the target language. Richards (1974) cited by Tizasu (2014:73) says "… intralingual errors are those which reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply". Research proved that most learners' errors, contrary to what behaviorists believed, were intralingual, Dulay and Burt (quoted in Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

In our longitudinal analysis of the learners' errors, we observed that interlingual factors account for most of the errors made by the learners. This interlingual factor manifests both at the lexical and structural level of the learner's errors.
We presented below some other examples of interlingual errors of the learners:

i. Mes souhaites viendront de passé, instead of « ***Mes rêves se réaliseront*** »
ii. Si je travail dans ***une agence commercial***…, instead of « Si je travaille dans ***une agence commerciale*** »
iii. Je voudrais chercher ***pour*** un emploi, instead of « Je voudrais chercher un emploi »

iv. Il y a beaucoup ***des carrières*** qu'on peut faire aujourd'hui, instead of « Il y a beaucoup ***de carrières*** qu'on peut faire aujourd'hui »

v. ***En*** university of Ibadan, il y a un…, instead of « ***A*** University of Ibadan, il y a un…»

vi. Il y a ***des grand industriel*** a Ibadan, instead of « Il y a ***de grandes industries*** à Ibadan. »

vii. ***Beaucoup des gens en*** Ibadan sont ***chretiene***, instead of « ***Beaucoup de gens à*** Ibadan sont ***chrétiens.*** »

viii. C'est un ***travaille*** que est ***tres interesant*** et ***a meme temp educative***, instead of «

 C'est un ***travaille très intéressant*** et ***en même temps éducatif***. »

Apart from the interlingual errors which are the dominant source of errors in the learners' writing, the learners also committed an error of collocations and wrong analogy. Meanwhile, these categories of errors were very few hence we did not concentrate our analysis on those errors. Future research may consider analyzing those errors in detail.

Conclusion
In this longitudinal study of the errors in the writing of Nigerian learners of French, we analysed the nature of the errors committed by the learners in their writing. We discovered that the learners made different types of lexical and structural errors. The result of the study helped in a way to shed light on the development of French language lexical proficiency of the learners within three years under study. The corpus revealed that there is no significant improvement in the mastery of the rules and structure of French in

the learners' writing. Not only did the overall analysis of the composition show that wrong spelling and wrong use of determinants are the most pervasive errors, but it also presents wrong use of accent, the wrong substitution of prepositions, and wrong use of tenses among others as the most frequent and recurrent errors. This suggests that serious attention must be paid to the writing skills of learners of French at Obafemi Awolowo University.

The errors discovered in the compositions to a large extent affect negatively the writing of the learners and distort the meaning of their message. The findings also revealed that learners' errors are systematic because the errors produced by the subjects varied across the three years under study. The difference in the errors attests to the fact that the learners employed diverse learning techniques in the process of trying to perfect their knowledge of French. Techniques such as overgeneralization, paraphrasing, and wrong application of rules account for some of the errors observed in the writing of the learners.

Furthermore, the interlanguage factor whereby the learners unconsciously transfer the rules and structure of their second and official language (English) in French is identified as the major source of the learners' errors.

Recommendations

Therefore, the study recommends that teachers of French in the Nigerian institution should review their teaching methods. The use of the French language as the only language of instruction in the classroom will help the learners to get familiarised with the French language lexicon and the teacher becomes a model to the

learners. Effective use of audio-visual materials, the internet, and other applications and software in French language class will help to improve not only the oral and aural competence of the learners but also their ability to identify French words. The word a learner can identify, he/she will be able to write correctly and use satisfactorily in context. Teachers of French should focus more on the evaluation and correction of the linguistic accuracy in the written production of the learners. This will help to reduce the level of errors the learners commit in their writing. Instructors should encourage learners to read different texts and documents in French to develop their vocabulary, spelling, etc. since exposure to reading has been identified as a channel through which a learner can get familiar with words in a language. It will also help them to know the definition of a word and be able to select an appropriate word in context.

Learners should develop a better learning technique that will help develop their lexical competence in French. They should engage more in speaking and practicing the French language within and outside the classroom environment, especially among their colleagues who speak the language. Since overgeneralization is one of the factors that militate against sufficient knowledge of the students in French, more attention should be paid to the rules and structures of the French language and every act of over-generalisation should be downplayed.

French language teaching curriculum should be regularly reviewed to reflect the language needs of the learners. Since language is not static it evolves with time, hence there is a need to regularly review the curriculum to keep the learners abreast of the new lexicons in the language. Limiting the teaching of

composition in French to the first and second year of learners in the Obafemi Awolowo should be revisited. The study recommends that composition writing should be made compulsory across all levels of French language learning. This will help to improve the writing skills of the learners. In addition to this, the teaching of the French language lexicon should be made imperative in the French language learning curriculum in Nigerian institutions and across all levels.

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