

A Contrastive Analysis of Pluralization Process of Nouns in French and Yorùbá

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Abstract

In Nigeria like any other English speaking country, French language remains a foreign language and unlike a mother tongue Yorùbá language that is acquired from the home, Nigeria learners of French language most especially, the Nigeria Yorùbá learners of French get in contact with French language in schools. In their attempt to learn French language, they are confronted with a series of linguistic problems and one of these problems is associated with a process of pluralization of French nouns that is highly complex and complicated when compared to a similar process of pluralization of nouns in Yorùbá language. In order to solve the problem, this paper did a contrastive analysis of pluralization of nouns in French and Yorùbá by consulting relevant Yoruba and French grammar textbooks. The result revealed that there are similarities and differences in the pluralization process of noun in both languages. At the level of similarities, the two languages possess a noun and a noun markers used to differentiate singular nouns from plural nouns. At the level of differences, while Yoruba language has three pluralization markers namely: awon (they), Numerical qualities such as meji (two), meta (three) and Partitif qualifies like Die (few). French language has different types of pluralization process and the nature of this complexity makes the language to be difficult to Yoruba learners of French language. The paper put forward the following recommendations namely: The use of contrastive analysis, the use of structure grammar approach, exposure of Yoruba French learners to French grammar and finally, the kind of socio-educative programme organized in French village for French students on immersion programme should be copied by French departments in all our institutions to give French learners ability to constantly interact with French language and added to this is that they should be encouraged to visit a Francophone environment once in a while. Furthermore, the study was anchored on Lado (1957) contrastive linguistic analysis theory.

Keywords: language, nouns, pluralization, contrastive analysis, didactic approach

Introduction

Language is defined by Palmer (1968 :9) as a medium by which thoughts are conveyed from one person to another. Based on Amosu (2015:6), it is estimated that there are over four thousand languages in the world. (There are over 6,500 languages in the world) Out of these, four thousand languages in the world based on Amosu (op.cit), one of these languages is French language. The origin of its teaching and learning in Nigeria according to Adelekan (1983) cited by Araromi

(1996:226) could be traced to the year 1859 when “it was among the earliest subjects introduced in the first secondary school founded in Lagos in 1859”.

Furthermore, Adelekan (op.cit) opines that when the Wesleyan High School and Training Institution were opened, French language was one of the Modern European languages taught in that school. Since its introduction in Nigeria school system, its teaching and learning has have been confronted with series of problems, such as problems of French sounds [y] and [ø] Jimoh (1997), among Yorùbá learners of French, Kizito (1995) problem of French pronouns, Mfon (1995) problem of a linguistics interference among Ibibio French language learners, Bariki and Oshounniran (2012) problem of French personal pronoun and Ajani and Sodiq (2017) problem of linguistics interference among Hausas learners of French language.

According to Alo (1999), for a way forward in the teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria, solutions must be found to all the above problems and others not stated in this study. This paper is therefore set to look into the problem of pluralization of French nouns among Nigeria (n) Yorùbá learners of French language and offer some didactics suggestions in an effort to move the teaching and learning of French language forward in Nigeria schools.

Theoretical framework

The models on which this study is anchored is:

Lado (1957) contrastive linguistic analysis theory that is based on the study of two languages, one foreign and the other one native. From Lado's point of observation, when two languages and cultures are similar, learning difficulty are ruled out, however, the greater the difficulties there are differences. Therefore, to solve the areas of difficulties, a systematic comparison (contrastive analysis) is highly recommended and this is what we intend to do in this work.

French and Yorùbá

While from Kwofie (2008:3), French language belongs to the Romance group of the Indo-European family along with Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and Catalan and based on Bello-Osagie (2020:21), the fifth most spoken world languages. And further based on Kwofie (op.cit:4), a language whose expression outside French took place between 17th and 20th centuries and got to Africa Senegal in 1624, Yorùbá language on the other hand according to Bello-Osagie (op.cit) is a native language of 37.84 million people in the world and ranked 39 position and from Capo (2004:18) point of observation, Yorùbá language belongs to Niger-Congo language family. Here in Nigeria, It is a mother tongue in five states, namely: Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Ondo. It is also a mother tongue in some part of Kwara and Kogi States. In addition, in West African sub-region, according to Capo (op.cit:

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19), Yoruba language is a major mother tongue in two French speaking countries, namely: Benin and Togo. (It is also spoken as second language by over 20 million speakers around the world)

Pluralization of nouns in Yorùbá

According to Bamgbose (1990:95), a noun in Yorùbá language is known as ọ̀rọ̀-orúkọ and in phrases like ilé-ọ̀ba (king's house), ọ̀kùnrin-olówó (a rich man), ilé (house) and ọ̀kùnrin (man) are nouns. For the realization of a plural noun in Yorùbá language, based on Ore (2011:88), no suffix is attached to a singular noun, rather plural noun in Yoruba language is realized in two ways.

- i. Adding of a full isolated word “àwọn” which is a qualifying adjective to a singular noun. For example:
 - Èranko (animal) – àwọn èranko (animals).
 - Obìrin (a lady) – àwọn obìrin (ladies).
 - - Èrọ̀ asọ̀rọ̀mágbèsì (television) – àwọn èrọ̀ asọ̀rọ̀mágbèsì (TV).
 - Tábilì (table) – àwọn tábilì (tables).
 - Ìwé (book) – àwọn ìwé (books)
- ii. Adding of numerical qualifies or partitive qualifies: In Yorùbá language, another way of forming plural is either by adding a partitive qualifies such as “diẹ (few) and púpọ̀ (many)”, or numerical qualifies such as “mẹ̀jì (two), márún (five) or ogún (twenty)” to a noun. Examples:
 - Ọ̀mọ̀ ilé ìwé kan (a student), ọ̀mọ̀ ilé ìwé diẹ̀ (few students), ìwé kan (a book), ìwé diẹ̀ (few books), yàrá kan (a room), yàrá púpọ̀ (many rooms), ọ̀mọ̀kúnrin kan (a boy) ọ̀mọ̀kúnrin mẹ̀jì (two boys), ọ̀mọ̀bìrin kan (a girl), ọ̀mọ̀bìrin mẹ̀wá (ten girls).

Pluralization of nouns in French

In French language, a noun according to Bayo and Bavencoffe (1999:24) is known as “le nom” and in French language, nouns are classified into two, namely: nom common (common noun) and nom propre (proper noun). Furthermore, according to Ade-Ojo (2002:109), in French language nouns are divided into males and females. On the pluralization of nouns in French language, according to Dubois and Lagane (1995:30-33), the under-listed are the processes by which singular nouns are changed to plural nouns:

- a) Pluralization of common French nouns: By adding suffix “s” to a singular noun. Example: garçon (boy) – garçons (boys), table (table) – tables (tables), voiture (car) – voitures (cars), livre (book) – livres (books). However, a noun already ending with the following letters does not take another “s”: -s, -x, -z. examples:

Singular Plural

- nez (nose) nez (noses)
 - bus (bus) bus (buses)
 - noix (nut) noix (nuts)
- b) Common nouns ending in “-al” at singular level change to “aux” at plural level. Example:
- Cheval (horse) changes to chevaux (horses) at plural level. However, the following common nouns take “s” to form their plural.
 - Chacal (chacal) – chacals (chacals)
 - Choral (choral) – chorals (chorals)
 - Festival (festival) – festivals (festivals)
 - Recital (recital) - Recitals (recitals).
- c) Common nouns ending in “-eau, -au, -eu or -oëu » form their plural by adding “x”. Examples:
- Veau (calf) - veaux (calves)
 - un feu (afire) - des feux (fires)

However, the following common singular nouns in French are exceptional cases.

- Landau (baby carriage) - landaus (baby carriages)
 - Bleu (blue) - bleus (blues)
 - Pneu (tire) - pneus (tires)
- d) Singular common French nouns ending in “-ou” form their plural by adding ‘s’ to the noun. Examples:
- Un cou (neck) - des cous (necks).
 - Un chou (cabbage) - des chous (cabbages)

However, the following nouns at the plural level take ‘x’. Example:

- Bijou (jewel) - bijoux (jewels)
 - Caillou (stone) - cailloux (stones)
 - Genou (knee) - genoux (knees)
 - Pou (louse) - poux (lice)
- e) Singular common nouns in French ending in “-ail” form their plural with “-ails”. However, French common nouns such as travail, vitrail, email, corail, vantail etc. end in “aux”. Examples:
- Un rail (rail) - des rails (rails)
 - But un travail (a work) - des travaux (some work).
- f) Common singular nouns like “aïeul” (ancestor), ciel (sky) and oeil (eye) have irregular forms of pluralization. Examples:
- L'aïeul (ancestor) - les aïeux (ancestors)
 - Le ciel (sky) - les cieux (skies)

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- L'œil (eye) - les yeux (eyes)
- g) Pluralization of borrowed foreign nouns into French.
- Un referendum (a referendum) - des referendums (referendums)
- Un maximum (a maximum) - des maxima or des maximum (some maximum)
- Un gentleman (a gentleman) – des gentlemen (some gentlemen)

Pluralization of proper nouns

- a) Pluralization of geographical nouns: For pluralization of a geographical nouns, the letter 's' is added to the singular nouns. Examples:
 - La Guyane française – Les Guyanes françaises.
 - L'Amérique – les Amériques.
- b) Pluralization of family names: for the pluralization of family names, the following points should be noted. According to Ade-Ojo (2002:111), while simple family names are pluralized by using a plural article and retaining the singular form of such names like: Les Okonkwo et les Aina sont toujours intelligents (The Okonwos and the Ainas are always intelligent). For the historically famous families (especially ruling dynasties) as well as important biblical and ancient personalities, a letter 's' is added to obtain the plural form. Examples:
 - Les Oyekans, les Onis et les Akrans ont joué un rôle capital dans l'histoire des Yorùbás – (The Oyekans, the Onis and the Akrans played a major role in the history of the Yorùbás).
 - Les Stuarts, les Tudors, les Condés et les Bourbons sont historiquement importants (The Stuarts, the Tudors, the Condés and the Bourbons are historically important).

Pluralization of compound nouns

According to Dubois and Lagane (1995:31-32), compound names written together form their plurals by adding letter 's' to the singular form like:

- Un entresol (entresol) – des entresols, (entresols)
- Un gendarme – (a policeman) – des gendarmes (policemen)
- Un passeport – (a passport) – des passeports (some passports).

Plural nouns composed of different words either joined by hyphen, written as two distinct words which only joined together in meaning from their plural based on the under listed conditions.

- a) A compound noun formed by an adjective and a noun, a plural marker is added to form plural. Examples:
 - Un sage-homme (wise-man) – des sages homme (wise-men)
 - Un franc-type (a free man) – des francs types (free men).

- Une belle-mère (sister-in-law) – des belles mères (sisters-in-law).
- Un beau père (a father-in-law) – des beaux pères (fathers-in-law)

From the above, the plural marker is letter “s” and letter “x”.

b) A compound noun by two opposite nouns, the two takes plural markers.

Examples:

- Un chef lieu (headquarter) – des chefs lieux (headquarters).
- Un état-major (chief of staff of army) – des états-majeurs (chief of staff)

c) When a preposition is used as a link between two nouns, the subordinated word takes the plural form. Example:

- Un chef-d'œuvre (master piece) – des chefs-d'œuvre (master pieces).
- Un timbre-poste (postage stamp) – des timbres poste (postage stamps).
- Un hôtel de mort (mortuary) – des hôtels de mort (motuaries).

However, a compound noun like ‘une grande-mère (grand-mother) ‘ change to “des grandes mères (grands mothers)” at the plural levels, etc.

d) If the compound noun is made of a verb + noun, the noun takes the plural form. Examples:

- Le couvre-lit (bedspread) – les couvre-lits (bedspreads).
- Le porte-drapeau (colour bearer) – les porte drapeaux (colour bearers).
- Le pique-nique (picnic) – les pique-niques (picnics).

According to Ade-Ojo (op.cit:115), the following compound nouns: verbs + noun do not change in their plurals:

- Le porte-monnaie (purse) – « singular » - Les porte-monnaie (purses) – « plural ».
- Le porte-parole (spoke person) – « singular » - Les porte-parole (spoke persons) – « plural ».
- Le gratte-ciel (sky scrapper) – « singular » - Les grattes-ciel (sky scrappers) – plural.

Furthermore, based on Ade-Ojo (op.cit), some compound nouns (verb + noun), which take an “s” in the singular remained unchanged in their plurals. Some of them are:

- Le cure-dents (toothpick) - “singular” – Les cure-dents (tooth-picks) « plural ».
- Le porte-clé (keyholder) – “singular” – Les porte-clé (key-holders) – « plural ».
- Le porte-serviettes (towel rail) – « singular » - Le porte-serviettes (towel rails) – « plural ».

e) Pluralization of Nouns + adverb or Preposition: When a compound

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noun is made up of a Noun or an invariable word, such as adverb or preposition, it is only the noun that take the plural markers “s”. examples:

- Un en-tête (headed paper) – “singular” – Des en-têtes (headed papers) – « plural ».
- Un haut-parleur (loudspeaker) – « singular » - Des haut-parleurs (loudspeakers) – « plural ».
- Une arrière-boutique (backshop) – “singular” – Des arrière-boutiques (backshops) – “plural”.

Findings

Analysis of pluralization process of a noun in French and Yorùbá languages show that there are similarities and differences in the pluralization process of noun in both languages.

- i. Similarities
 - a) The two languages possess a noun
 - b) The two languages possess plural markers used to differentiate singular nouns from a plural noun.
- ii. Differences

At the level of differences, there is a significant morphological difference in the French and the Yorùbá plural markers, namely: While Yorùbá language has three plural markers, namely:

- a) The use of “àwọn” (they), which is a qualify adjective in Yorùbá and always placed before a singular Yorùbá noun so as to change the singular noun to plural nouns. Example:
Ọmọdẹ – enfant (child) – “singular” – Àwọn ọmọdẹ – des enfants (children) – « plural ».
Ọlọpá – policier (policeman) – « singular » - Àwọn ọlọpá – des policiers (policemen) – « plural ».
- b) The use of a numerical qualifies, such as “mẹ̀jì (deux), mẹ̀ta (trois), mẹ̀rin (quatre), ogún (vingt), ọ̀gọ́ta (soixante). While numerical qualify from 1-19 are placed after the singular noun to render such singular noun to a plural noun. Example: Ọmọ mẹ̀jì (two children). Ìwé márún (five books). From (20) twenty upward are placed before the singular noun to make it a plural noun. Examples:
 - Ogún ìwé (twenty books).
 - Àádótá ọmọdẹ (fifty children).
 - Ọgórún obirin (one hundred women).
- c) The use of partitive qualifies like “Diẹ ‘dìe’ ‘few’ (peu)”, “púpò ‘many’ (beaucoup)”. In Yorùbá language, partitive qualifies like “diẹ, púpò” are placed after Yorùbá noun so as to change the singular noun to a plural noun. Example:

- Ọmọ diẹ (peu d'enfants)- Ọmọ púpọ (beaucoup d'enfants).
- Ìwé diẹ (peu de livres) – Ìwé púpọ (beaucoup de livres).

The French language has different types of pluralization process and the nature of its complexity makes its learning to be difficult to Yorùbá learners of French language and this eventually leads to many French grammatical errors on the part of Yorùbá learners of French when it comes to the area of identification and the use of pluralization process in French language among the Nigeria Yorùbá learners of French language.

Recommendations

Based on Lado (1957:2) that “individual tends to transfer the forms and meaning of their native language and culture to the foreign language, both productively when attempt to grasp and understand the language... as practicalised by the natives”, there is no doubt that the pluralization process of noun in Yorùbá language will negatively affect Yorùbá learners of French language in their attempt to master the pluralization process of noun in French language.

On the basis of the findings of this study as regards to the pluralization process of noun in both languages (French and Yorùbá) and its implication on Yorùbá learners of French language when it comes to the mastery of pluralization process of nouns in French language, the following pertinent didactics approaches hereby put forward.

- i. The use of contrastive analysis approach: According to Fries (1945:9), that in a foreign language class:

The most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned carefully compared with a description of the native language of the learners.

This study hereby suggests to French teachers in Nigeria, most especially in the Yorùbá speaking areas, the use of contrastive analysis which according to Crystal (2001:90) is the analysis of two languages, which gives room to identify and study potential difficulties that learners might face and possible solutions to those difficulties.

- ii. The use of structure grammar approach: This is another didactic approach that could be used in solving Yorùbá French learners' difficulty in the area of pluralization process of French noun. According to Cook (1991:17) Structure Grammar (S. G.) is a form of teaching a language grammar based on the concept of phrase structure which shows how some words go together in the sentence and some do not go. For example: in French sentences like: “j'ai vingt livres (I have twenty books) - (mo ní ogún ìwé), the word livre (book)

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is not marching with the number of book while the number is more than one, the *livre* is only one. Here, there is a negative input of Yorùbá grammar structure on pluralization process of French language. Grammatically, the correct structure in French is “j’ai vingt livres” (I have twenty books). Furthermore, “les journaux” sont sur la table (the newspapers are on the table). In French language, the plural of journal is wrong, it supposed to be “les journaux sont sur la table”. The possible source of error here is English language. With structure (structural) grammar, it will give an insight into how words are linked together when it comes to pluralization process of noun in French language.

- iii. Exposure of Nigeria French learners (Yorùbá French learners inclusive) to French grammar exercise. This is an area that needs to be encouraged among our learners. Teaching them French grammar in the class is not enough, they need to put what they learnt into practice either in the class during their free periods or at their individual homes. And for them (There is also the need) to cultivate the habit of constant practice, they need to be equipped with enough French grammar text books both locally produced and foreign ones such as: A comprehensive revision handbook of French grammar by Prof. S. Ade-Ojo. A companion to French grammar (guided workbook for Anglophone students) by Prof. Tunde Ajiboye. Collins easy learning of French grammar. Grammaire by Jean Dubois and Rene Lagane. La grammaire française by M.C. Bayol and M. J. Bavencoffe just to mention few.
- iv. Finally, the kind of socio-educative programme organized in French Village for French students on immersion programme should be copied by French departments in all our higher institutions to give French learners ability to constantly interact with French language and added to this is that they should be encouraged to visit a Francophone environment once in a while.

Conclusion

A French teacher who is involved in a contrastive study like the case of French and Yorùbá has a lot to gain. He will not only know the similarities and differences between two languages, he will also be in a position to predict students learning problems as regard to learners’ linguistic capability and what really constitutes those problems and various didactic measures that could be put in place to solve those linguistic difficulties

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