

Pronunciation of French Words: The Yoruba and English Interfaces

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Abstract

The idea bilingualism has today become a general phenomenon to the extent that almost every country of the world tends towards bilingualism. There is no gainsaying in the fact that English and French languages are the world leading international languages. Obliviously, almost every country of the world is officially attached to the language of their colonizers. The importance of the colonizers' language is that it joins the colonized to the rest of the world or to the comity of nations with the fact that our local or indigenous languages are yet to be recognized internationally. It is expedient for a modern man to develop his linguistic interactive capacity as the visionary man of today always has the desire to tour the world without any linguistic interactive barrier. Touring the world with the knowledge of just one international language (e.g. English Language only) might not be enough, most especially as the world today is adopting English and French languages, and particularly the African countries, as languages to be used during international summits, seminars, workshops, reports and conferences. The aim of this paper therefore, is to examine the varieties of French Language sounds in conjunction with that of the Yoruba and English languages to enable the Yoruba or English speakers pronounce French words properly This is achievable considering the theory of transliteration and pronunciation of words as concerned with the teaching and learning of foreign languages. To this effect in line with the theory applied, The areas where the three languages intercepted or interfaced will therefore be brought out in order to ease the pronunciation of French words by the English or Yoruba Language speakers who must have got some basic knowledge of the latter sounds.

Keywords: French, English, Yoruba, interface, pronunciation, communication

Introduction

Both the English and Yoruba Language speakers need to be introduced to French language most especially since both languages, French and English, are dynamic and interwoven. English is Germanic, that is, it has its roots in the languages of Germanic peoples of northern Europe while French is Latinic, that is originated from the Vulgar Latin of the Roman Empire, French evolved from Gallo-Romance, the Latin spoken in Gaul. The Yoruba Language spoken by the Yoruba's assumed to have developed out of a group from Volta- Niger populations by the 1st millennium BC. The first speakers are assumed to correspond to those found in some part of Niger Area from about the 4th Century BC, espe-

cially at Ife Nigeria. One begins to imagine words like client, route, table, television, orange, morgue, centre, poison, bus, serpent, evident, prudent, salutation, education and many other words have the same root and meaning. What is left to the English or Yoruba speaker is to be able to pronounce such French words properly without interference from other languages. The fact still remains that the French Language is spoken by many non-native speakers of the language. Akinpelu Michael & Yegblemenawo Stella (2023) advocate the teaching and learning of French Language, most especially in the areas of proper pronunciation by non native speakers. According to baker (2020), transliteration necessitates some basic knowledge of foreign language accusation. The brochure of The Nigerian French Language Village, Ajara Badagary (1992:3) affirms thus:

...Nigerians qui auraient besoin du français dans leur vie privée, publique ou professionnelle. Par exemple, des personnels administratifs et militaires, des hommes politiques, des hommes d'affaires, tout professionnel, tout individu a titre privée, ou femme au foyer.

[...Nigerians who would need French Language in their private, public or professional life. For example, the administrators and the soldiers, the politicians, the business men and women, all professionals, every private individual and housewives.]

An article on French Language with the title Home Encyclopedia: cited in [http://www.net/encyclopedia/French Language](http://www.net/encyclopedia/French%20Language) puts it that French is also an official or administrative language in several communities and international organizations such as the European Union, International Olympic Committee, World Trade Organization, World Anti-Doping Agency, United Nations, African Union, International Secretariat for Water, International Association of Political Science, International Bureau of Weights and Measures, European Broadcasting Union, Universal Postal Union, Interpol and so on, and among the six official and the two working languages of the United Nations and all its agencies.

French is a very pleasant and sound-based language but it can pose problems from the point of view of pronunciation. We have, however simplified the problems by using Hugo's method of imitated pronunciation as indicated in his book, *French in Three Months: Your Essential Guide to Understanding and Speaking French-Fast!*

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework for this work is premised on Cronin's (2003) theory of transliteration and pronunciation. According to him, languages share com-

mon phenomenon and there is no language that is inherently minor; but it is the diachronic or spatial relation between languages that puts a language in a minority position. Transliteration is a process in which Source Language (SL) graphological units are replaced by the Target Language (TL) units. This according to him gives us three steps:

- a. SL letters are replaced by SL graphological units; this is the normal literate process of converting from the written to the spoken medium.
- b. The SL phonological units are translated into the TL phonological units.
- c. TL phonological units are converted into the TL letters or other graphological units.

These processes are followed up in this work.

Methodology

The descriptive method is utilized. Phonetical description of French phonemes are noted and interfaced with the phonemes of English and Yoruba languages in order to facilitate pronunciation of French words through transliteration process.

The French language

The phoneme /p/

This sound is characterized with p, pp in words and this is very similar to the pronunciation of p in English word like pepper; the first p and the consonant cluster pp. Other examples are pawpaw, apple, appetite etc. We could have examples of French words like papa, père, peuple, développement. appartement etc. as counterparts.

The phoneme /b/

This sound has the same feature like the sound /p/. The way we pronounce *b* in English in a word like baby is the same in French words, like bébé, bon, bras, bonjour, belle, bateau, abbaye, abbe, etc.

The phonemes /m/ and /n/

Both sounds could also be clustered or not. The importance here is that when seen in English words, they are pronounced the same way like in French words, but they sound differently when they precede consonant sounds and vowels. They give us nasal sounds. Examples are:

<i>man</i>	(<i>English</i>)
<i>madame</i>	(<i>French</i>)
<i>madam</i>	(<i>English</i>)
<i>mummy</i>	(<i>English</i>)
<i>femme</i>	(<i>French</i>)
<i>ennemi</i>	(<i>French</i>)
<i>penny</i>	(<i>English</i>)
<i>trente</i>	(<i>French</i>)

When the sound ‘t’ (the second ‘t’) is preceded by the consonant **n** and in conjunction with the vowel sound **e** it therefore produces a nasal sound /ã/ in Yoruba/French. Other examples are pendant, cent, genre etc. but this is not always the case in English Language. In a word like ‘lent’ in French, **i** is added to the nasal sound **n** to give us (/î/) sound in Yoruba language. In English, then equally produces nasalization. E.g. lent - lent. The French Language combines the vowel and the consonant just like the Yoruba. For example

pin (Yoruba), prince (French)

When **m** or **n** is preceded by a vowel like **e, o, a, i, _** and followed by a consonant, the nasal sound is produced, taking its root from the vowel combined with the consonant. For example:

<i>Chambre</i>	/ã/	<i>French</i>
<i>Pompe</i>	/ô/	<i>French</i>
<i>semble</i>	/ã/	<i>French</i>
<i>simple</i>	/ê/	<i>French</i>
<i>singe</i>	/ê/	<i>French</i>
<i>fin</i>	/ê/	<i>French</i>

The sound recorded here could be compared with the Yoruba nasal sounds /ê/, /ã/, /î/, /ô/ only that the sound /î\ in Yoruba is pronounce as /ê/ in French.

We shall study more of this under vowels sounds /e/ in French. It is also pertinent to mention that when **a** and also precede sounds like in, im. we also have nasalized sounds. For example:

faim /fê/ this also sounds /fe/ in Yoruba. Other examples are:
 pain /fê/
 sein /Sê/

frein /fRÈ/

The sounds c/s and /k/

The sounds c/s and k in French are very similar to English in their characteristics and function unlike in the case of Yoruba where the sound c does not exist at all.

It is important to note here that the sounds s and k have the same phonemic characteristics in the three languages. For example:

<i>Saint</i>	- French (the last consonant not pronounced)
<i>Saint - English</i>	
<i>sansan</i>	- Yoruba (the meaning in Yoruba differs from others above)
<i>sept</i>	- French (sound p here is silent)
<i>soon</i>	- English
<i>sibe</i>	- Yoruba
<i>classe</i>	- French
<i>class</i>	- English
<i>bilisi</i>	- Yoruba

The phoneme c could sound as k as seen in example: class/classe in both languages, that is in French and English when it precedes a consonant sounds. But when it precedes a vowel sound it gives sound s.

Example:	<i>ciment</i>	-	<i>French (t, silent)</i>
	<i>Cement</i>	-	<i>English</i>
	<i>Celeste</i>	-	<i>French</i>
	<i>Celestial</i>	-	<i>English</i>

The phoneme k always produces the sound k in all respect.

Example:	kaki	-	kaki
	kilometre	-	kilometer
	Exception in English	-	knock.

Yoruba Language also maintains the sound k. Example in words like ka, ke, ki and so on.

The sounds ch, sh, and s in Yoruba words and in French are characterized by

the sound **ch** and related in pronunciation to English Language words with **sh** and **ch**, and as well as the Yoruba words characterized by the sound **s**.

Examples are:

- chef - French (consonant 'f' here sounds)
- chief - English
- ṣiṣe - Yoruba
- ṣire - Yoruba
- shoe - English
- shrine - English
- chest - English
- choix - French ('x' not pronounced)

It is important to note here that French does not have the combination of **s** and **h(sh)** to produce a morpheme, except in some borrowed words like short, shooter and shunter.

The morphemes f, ff, ph

The sounds **f** and **ph** are similar in French and English, that is they sound the same.

Examples

- Enfant - French (t, silent)
- Infant - English
- Elephant - French (t, silent)
- Elephant - English
- Different - French (t, silent)
- Different - English
- Phrase - French (the last e, silent)
- Phrase - English
- Photographe - French (the last e, silent)
- Photograph - English

The phoneme /h/

This sound functions differently in French, English and Yoruba, This is because the Yoruba sounds are not characterized by the aspirated **h** or mute. For example, in English, the **h** in these words are aspirated.

a hospital, a hostel, a hotel, a home, a house and so on. But an hour, an honest man, an heir.

The same goes in French

la houe, le hameau

The **h** in French however has no phonetic value.

Under the non-aspirated we have the following examples

l'hôpital, l'hôtel, l'homme, l'habitude

We should note here that this falls within the norms of both three languages. Dictionary could be contacted in order know more examples of such words.

Phoneme /g/ and /j/

The sound **g** shares the same pronunciation in the three languages: French, English and Yoruba in the following regards.

Guêpe - French

Gorille - French

Gamine - French

Gaulois - French

Gap - English

Get - English

Goal - English

Goolu - Yoruba

Gẹgẹsi - Yoruba

Gẹgẹbi - Yoruba

It is therefore necessary to note that when the sound **u** is preceded by **g** (**gu**) in French, the sound above is equally produced:

guêpe, guère, guerre, guichet

In English and French languages, 'g' changes sound when it precedes vowels like **eI**, alsoy. Examples

géographie (F), geography (E) giste (E), giraffe (E) giraffe (E), gymnastique (E), gymnastics (E)

Exception in English: gynecologist

When the sound **g** is combined with **n** (gn), the combination gives us a different sound as in these examples: *pagne, digne, igraine*. the sound here is as in yes, you; **gn** = **y**.

It is equally to be noted that the sound **g** can also sound similar to **j** in French words as we have in the examples below: English does not have this particular sound.

Examples :

Géologie /ʒeoloji/ French

Joli /ʒoli/ French

Gentil /ʒãtij/ French

geste /ʒɛst/ French

jugé /ʒyʒ/ French

gens /ʒã/ French (the last alphabet 's' is not pronounced).

English language does not have this particular sound.

The phoneme /r/ & /s/

The sound **r** is very special to the Frenchman as when it is pronounced; the sound comes from the throat. Examples—*raison* (E), *rare* (E), *roi* (F), *oral* (E)

The sound **s** shares the same characteristics with the sounds like **d**. Examples—*dos* (F), *do* (E), *dandan* (Y).

But in a case where we have the phoneme **s** in between two vowels like **i**, **o**, the sound **z** is produced, that is **s** becomes **z**. Examples—*maison, division, mauvaise*

When we have **ss**, that is, when **s** is doubled and preceding consonants, the normal **s** sound is maintained. Examples—*mission, permission, masse, classe*.

The phoneme l/t

These two sounds share the same characteristics with **p**, **b**, **d**.

The phoneme q

The sound **q** in a word like *coq* sounds **k** and when **q** is combined with **u** (*qu*), the same sound **k** is repeated. Examples—*chaque, marque, disque, Afrique*

The Vowel Sounds

The vowel sounds as we have done with the consonant sounds shall be treated in a way to ease pronunciation problems in French Language. Therefore, the comparative study of the sounds in the three languages shall be adopted. The vowel sounds *in* French are very similar to that of Yoruba.

Owolabi (1989:145) states the Yoruba oral vowels which could be vividly compared with that of French:

Oral Vowels

Yoruba	French
ɪ	i
e	e
ɔ	è
a	a
o	o
ɔ	ɔ
u	u

The table above indicates that the sounds **i, e, a, o**, as written are pronounced the same way in both languages.

Other characteristics of sounds **e** in French are *é, thé, blé, café, er*; generally, when **er** ends a French word it sounds *é* as day in English.

Examples: *parler, chanter, donner, panier* and so on.

Also the combination of **e** and **z** (**ez**) give *é* sound :*donnez, rez-de-chaussée*. The combination of **a** and **i** in some cases, produces *é* sound

Examples: *maison*

Je mangerai (simple future tense, 1st person singular).

The sound **a** in Yoruba as in *papa* is the same in French—Baba (Y), papa (F)

The same sound is produced in English words like *fat, cat, bat* and so on.

The sound **e** with the accents ' or ^ at times without any accent gives the sound /ɛ/ as in *get* of English. Examples: *père, frère, fête, mettre, élève, pêche*

Exception: *poêle* /pwal/

It is also important to state that when **e** precedes **mm** (*emm*) the **e** produces

the sound **a** as in cat of English and baba of Yoruba. Examples: *femme* /fam/, *évidemment*, *récemment*

When **a** is combined with **u** (au), the au is pronounced in French Language as **o**. Hence, apart from having **o** as o in French we also have **au** as o.

Examples are: *épaule*, *haut*, *dos* (s not pronounced) , *saute*, *chose*, *sauf* (f here is pronounced)

We also have the same sound **o** when letter e precedes **au** (eau). Examples—*l'eau*, *beau*, *seau*, *fleau*, and so on.

The following words in English and Yoruba are pronounced the same with the identified sound.

<i>boat</i>	English
<i>goat</i>	English
<i>l'eau</i>	French
<i>koko</i>	Yoruba
<i>faux</i>	French (letter x not pronounced)
<i>opo</i>	Yoruba
<i>oro</i>	Yoruba
<i>show</i>	English
<i>chaude</i>	French
<i>dos</i>	French (letter s, not pronounced)

When **I/Ille** is combined with **i** (**il/ille**), the phonetic sound /j/ in English = y in Yoruba, hence, we have the same sound in the three languages

<i>iyó</i>	<i>Yoruba</i>
<i>ayaba</i>	<i>Yoruba</i>
<i>yes</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>papaya</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>fille</i>	<i>French</i>
<i>soleil</i>	
<i>pareil</i>	
<i>abeil</i>	
<i>papaye</i>	
<i>rail</i>	
<i>travail</i>	

Exceptions:

fil /fis/

ville /vil/

When **i** is combined with **o** (oi) this gives us directly the morpheme ‘wa’ in Yoruba— oi wa

Examples

moi (French) /mwa/

oiseau (French) /wazo/

roi (French) /rwa/

bois (French) /bwa/ s; silent

When **o** is combined with **u** (ou) it gives us the sound u, like in the following Yoruba and English words.

put	English
buru	Yoruba
suuru	Yoruba
soupe	English/French
superb	English
glue	English
boubou	French and so on.

The Nasal Sounds

According to Owolabi (1989: 85), the Yoruba nasal indicators are:

/in/ *pinpin, fin, ipin, ešinšin, and so on*

/en/ *iyen*

/an/ *akan, ina, pasan*

/un/ *ikun, sun, ebun, egun*

/on/ *ibon, pon, gbon, dibon and so on*

Monique Leon and Pierre Leon (1997:21) give the French nasal graphemes thus:

in/im/ein/ain/aim as in *fin, simple, saint, faim, sein*

an/am/en/em as in *jambe, chamber, enfant, ensemble*

un/un/ as in *parfum, humble, un, brun*

on/om as in *bombe, pompe, bonbon*

With close study of the two categories of sound (Yoruba and French) above, it is obvious that the two categories have some areas of intersection or interface as in the illustrations below:

pain (F), *iyen* (Y), *yen* (Y), *faim* (F), *fin* (F), *simple* (F), *frein* (F), *singe* (F), *gbon* Yoruba, *son* (F), *bonjour* (F), *ibon* (Y), *bombe* (F/E), *pompe* (F/E), *ina* (Y), *pasan* (Y), *ensemble* (F), *blanche* (F), *danser* (F), *itansan* (Y), *maman* (F)

A sound like /î/ of Yoruba does not occur in French. Cases of this sound in Yoruba words like pin, fin, din in Yoruba turns to /ɛ̃/ in French. Examples are prince, grain, faim, singe and so on as discussed above.

French Language does not have the sound /u/ at all as it appears in Yoruba words like fun, kun, dun and so on.

It is pertinent to note that the last 'e' that comes last of any French word is not pronounced; examples in words like *parle*, *dire*, *Claire*, *boire*, *patte* and so on. This corroborates the view of La touche Lucaino (2022) that French has many silent letters at the end of its words. In the same way, the 'ent' that comes last of French verbs in the third person plural is not pronounced. Examples:

Ils parlent.

Elles dansent.

Ils chantent.

Elle mangent, and so on.

Letter **e** is not pronounced in French when it comes last in any word except there is an accent on it.

Examples: *parle*, *regarde*, *lettre* and so on.

Any consonant that comes last in French words is not pronounced. Except in rare cases.

Examples: plat 't' silent

trois's'silent

fois 's' silent etc.

Exception: *fil*- 's' here is pronounced.

The letter **u** in French does not sound the same in English nor Yoruba Languages. As we have previously discussed when **o** is combined with **u** (*ou*) we have the Yoruba sound **u** for example in *buburu*. The **u** sound in French comes in between **I** and **u** of Yoruba Language. Examples in French are: *sur*, *pure*, *lu*, *bu*, *mur*, *cru* and so on.

In words where we have graphemes like **ei**, **eur**, **œur**, in French Language, their pronunciation is familiar with the sound **ε** in Yoruba. For example the

word **ebe** in Yoruba and the English word set. In French Language we can have illustrative like *pareil, professeur, l'heure, l'oeil, soeur, chercheur* and so on.

We also have the phoneme 'eu' that could also be familiarised with the alphabet sound **e** in a word like *ewe* in Yoruba and the sound /ei/ in a word like *play* in English language. Examples :

pneu

ceux 'x' silent

veux 'x' silent and so on.

The **e** in determiners like *le, de, ce, te, me* and so on are partially pronounced as they sound very low.

Conclusion

In this work, virtually all the French phonemes have been presented and discussed. We have also highlighted their interface in English and Yoruba. It is believed that this work would prove some levels of relationship in Yoruba, English and French and equally enhance reading in French, particularly for the beginners around the world that have the knowledge of Yoruba and English language sounds.

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