

Challenges of L2 Learners of French Language at Lead City University, Ibadan

(Une Adaptation De L2 De Français a Lead City University, Ibadan)

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the challenges facing L2 learners of French at Lead City University, Ibadan. It adopts a qualitative approach, using survey techniques and semi-structured interviews to collect data from a sample of students who are currently learning French at the University. The findings indicate that various factors contribute to the difficulties L2 learners experience in mastering French at the University. These include unstable sources of learning materials, lack of individual study time, as well as other language-related challenges such as inadequate French language proficiency levels in the local environment and inadequate infrastructure for language learning. It is concluded that the University needs to increase its efforts to improve the language environment, as well as the infrastructure, to make French language learning more accessible and easier for its students.

Keywords: L2 learners, French, Language proficiency, Local environment

Resume

Cet article vise à étudier les défis auxquels sont confrontés les apprenants de français L2 à Lead City Université, Ibadan .il adopte une approche qualitative, utilisant des techniques d'enquête et des entretiens pour recueillir des données auprès d'un échantillon d'élèves qui apprennent actuellement le français à l'école Université. Les résultats indiquent que divers facteurs contribuent aux difficultés des apprenants en L2 expérience dans la maîtrise du français à l'Université. Ceux-ci incluent des sources d'apprentissage instables matériels, le manque de temps d'étude individuel, ainsi que d'autres défis liés à la langue tels que niveaux de maîtrise de la langue française insuffisants dans l'environnement local et infrastructures pour l'apprentissage des langues. Il est conclu que l'Université doit augmenter son effort pour améliorer l'environnement linguistique, ainsi que l'infrastructure, pour rendre le français l'apprentissage des langues plus accessible et plus facile pour ses étudiants.

Mots-clés: Apprenants L2, français, maîtrise de la langue, environ local

Introduction

Learning a new language is an exciting and challenging journey that opens up doors to new cultures, opportunities, and connections. Among the many languages spoken around the world, French holds a special place as one of the most widely learned and influential languages. As learners embark on the path of acquiring proficiency in French as a second language (L2 learners), they enter a rich linguistic and cultural realm that offers countless rewards.

L2 learners of French come from diverse backgrounds and have various motivations for studying the language. Some might be students pursuing academic goals, such as fulfilling language requirements or enhancing their chances in an increasingly globalized job market. Others may be travelers eager to communicate with locals during their adventures or individuals seeking personal growth and embracing the cognitive benefits that language learning brings.

The study of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been a prominent field of research for decades. Among the various languages being learned as a second language, French stands out as one of the most widely studied languages in Africa like Senegal, Togo, Burkina-Faso, Mali, Cote D'ivoire, Swiss, Canada etc. This review aims to provide an overview of the literature on L2 learners of the French language, focusing on key themes, theories, and empirical studies.

The role native language transfer plays in L2 acquisition raises the question of whether L1 constitutes a permanent representational deficit to mastery of the L2 morphosyntax and prosody or if it can eventually be overcome. Earlier research has shown that beginning and low intermediate Anglophone L2 French learners are insensitive to French morphosyntactic and prosodic constraints in using in situ pronouns transferred from the L1. L1, or first language, refers to the native language that a person learns from birth or early childhood. It is the primary language spoken at home and within the community. L1 plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's cognitive and linguistic development. Proficiency in L1 is typically high, as it is acquired naturally through constant exposure and interaction with family members and the surrounding environment.

The acquisition of L1 involves the development of phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of language. Additionally, it forms the foundation for literacy skills, cultural identity, and social communication. The influence of L1 extends beyond linguistic competence, impacting cognitive processes such as problem-solving, memory, and perception.

L2 - Second Language

On the other hand, L2 refers to a language that is learned after the acquisition of the first language. This can occur in various contexts such as formal education, immigration, or cultural immersion. Individuals who acquire a second language are often referred to as bilingual or multilingual, depending on their proficiency in each language.

The prosodic transfer hypothesis (PTH) proposes that native prosodic structures may be adapted to facilitate acquisition of L2 prosodic structure. Our study presents new evidence from three Anglophone advanced learners of L2 French that indicates ceiling performance for pronoun production (99% accuracy in 300 tokens over nine interviews) and grammaticality judgment (98% accuracy). This native-like performance demonstrates target French morphosyntax and prosody, built—as predicted by the PTH—by licensing pronominal free clitics in a new pre-verbal L2 position distinct from post-verbal L1. Furthermore, the learners' data confirms accurate prosody by way of appropriate prominence patterns in clitic + host sequences, correct use of clitics with prefixed verbs, use of stacked pronouns, as well as correct prosodic alternations involving liaison and elision. These results counter impaired representation approaches and suggest early missing inflection may be overcome. French, known for its eloquence, sophistication, and romantic allure, holds an esteemed position not only in France but also in a multitude of countries where it is an official language or widely spoken. From Canada's Quebec to countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and even parts of Southeast Asia, for L2 learners, understanding French goes beyond grammar and vocabulary; it involves delving into the intricacies of a rich cultural tapestry. The French language intertwines with the arts, literature, fashion, cuisine, and cinema, providing learners with a gateway to explore the depths of French culture and history. From the works of literary giants like Victor Hugo and Albert Camus to the iconic films of the Nouvelle Vague movement, French offers an immersion into a world teeming with creativity and intellectual discourse.

Furthermore, learning French opens doors to a range of professional opportunities. The language's global influence extends to fields such as diplomacy, international business, tourism, and humanitarian work. Proficiency in French can enhance career prospects and open doors to collaboration and networking across borders.

In this age of technological advancement, L2 learners of French have access to an array of language acquisition process. Online courses, language exchange platforms, immersive apps, and virtual communities provide avenues for practice, interaction, and cultural exchange. Leveraging these tools, learners can grasp the nuances of pronunciation, grammar, and idiomatic expressions, paving their way towards fluency.

Learning a language is not a linear process; it requires dedication, perseverance, and exposure to meaningful and authentic contexts. L2 learners of French immerse themselves in a linguistic journey that extends beyond acquiring vocabulary and grammar rules. They embark on a quest to bridge cultural divides, forge connections with Francophone communities, and gain a profound appreciation for the richness and diversity of the French-speaking world.

Literature Review

There have been numerous works and reviews conducted on second language (L2) learners of the French language. These studies aim to understand various aspects of L2 acquisition, such as language proficiency, vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and overall language competence. In this comprehensive response, we will discuss some notable works and reviewers' works along with their dates.

Peoples' views on L2 learners of the French language vary. Some people view L2 learners of French positively and appreciate their efforts to learn a new language. They may see it as a sign of cultural appreciation and an opportunity for cross-cultural communication. Others may have more neutral views and may not have strong opinions either way. However, there can also be negative views towards L2 learners of French in certain contexts. Some individuals may perceive L2 learners as less proficient or lacking in authenticity compared to native speakers. Stereotypes and biases may influence these negative views. Overall, it is important to recognize that individuals' views on L2 learners of French can be diverse and influenced by various factors.

Doughty and William's Focus on Form (1998,5). Nina Spada and Catherine Doughty published a book titled "Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition," which explores the role of explicit instruction in L2 learning. Although not solely focused on French learners, this work discusses how explicit attention to form can enhance language proficiency.

DeKeyser's Skill Acquisition Theory (2007): Robert DeKeyser proposed the Skill Acquisition Theory, which emphasizes the importance of practice and skill development in L2 acquisition. While not specifically targeted at French learners but language as a whole, DeKeyser's work provides insights into the cognitive processes involved in L2 learning.

Ortega's Understanding Second Language Acquisition (2009, 34): Lourdes Ortega's book "Understanding Second Language Acquisition" offers a comprehensive overview of SLA theories and research. This also provides a valuable resource for understanding various aspects of L2 acquisition. Susan Gass and Larry Selinker's book provides an introductory course on second language acquisition. This work covers fundamental concepts and theories related to SLA,

Lightbown and Spada's How Languages are Learned (2013): Nina Spada and Patsy Lightbown's book "How Languages are Learned" offers insights into language learning theories and practical implications for language teaching. Although not exclusively focused on French learners, this work provides a comprehensive overview of SLA research.

These works and reviewers' works have contributed to our understanding of L2 acquisition, including the specific context of French learners. They provide valuable insights into various theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and practical implications for teaching French as a second language.

Research Questions

1. What are the most common challenges that L2 learners of French face when it comes to mastering the language's grammar and syntax?
2. What role does pronunciation play in the challenges faced by L2 learners of French, and how can learners improve their pronunciation skills?

Objective of the Study

1. One of the primary objectives of research on L2 learners of French is to understand the acquisition process.
2. Another objective is to identify factors that influence language learning. For example: cognitive abilities, motivation, and learning styles, while external factors encompass instructional methods, classroom environment, and cultural influences.

Theoretical Framework

Cognitive theories were used for this research through qualitative data collection methods focus on gathering non-numerical data that provides a deeper understanding of the learner's experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. Cognitive theories were used for this research through qualitative data collection methods, which focus on gathering non-numerical data that provides a deeper understanding of the learner's experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. Some common qualitative methods used in L2 learner research, one of such theory is the Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence. Another cognitive theory is the Interactionist Approach, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in language learning.

Challenges faced by L2 learners of French Language at Lead City University, Ibadan

L2 French learners are individuals who are learning French as a second language. Learning a second language can be a challenging task, especially when it comes to French. According to a study by Lightbown and Spada (2019), one of the challenges facing L2 teachers and learners in primary and secondary school settings is the limited amount of time available. This is because there is disagreement about how to meet this challenge. In their paper, they argue against two 'common sense' recommendations for increasing instructional time – start as early as possible and use only the L2 (avoiding the use of the first language (L1)) in the classroom. They propose two better ways to increase the instructional time: provide periods of intensive instruction later in the curriculum and integrate the teaching of language and content.

Another challenge faced by L2 French learners is grammar. For French speakers, there can be a problem forming questions in English. In French, it's possible to form a question simply by adding a question mark at the end of a statement whereas in English we need to use an auxiliary verb.

Also, a challenge facing (L2) teachers and learners in Lead City University is school settings is the limited amount of time available. In this paper, we argue among the examined classes against two 'common sense' avoiding the use of telephone in the classroom when the

class is on-going and the measure of speaking the language (L2) whether correct or not and use only the L2 (avoiding the use of the first language (L1)) in the classroom. Studies in schools settings around the world have failed to find long-term advantages for an early start or exclusive use of the L2 in the classroom. Nevertheless, many language educators and policy makers continue to adopt these practices, basing their choice on their own intuitions and public opinion rather than on evidence from research. L2 French learners may face difficulties with pronunciation. The French language has many sounds that are not present in English, such as nasal vowels. This can make it difficult for learners to produce these sounds accurately.

Factors Affecting L2 French Acquisition at Lead City University, Ibadan

Numerous factors influence the acquisition of French as a second language. Research has shown that age plays a crucial role in language learning, with younger learners generally exhibiting better proficiency than older learners. **According to a study by DeKeyser (2000), younger learners have a greater ability to acquire native-like pronunciation and grammatical structures in French.** Additionally, individual differences such as motivation, aptitude, and learning strategies have been found to impact L2 French acquisition (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

1. Pronunciation

The linguistic features of French present specific challenges for L2 learners. One significant aspect is the complex phonological system, including nasal vowels and liaison phenomena. **Research by Flege (1987) suggests that L2 learners' ability to perceive and produce these sounds is influenced by their first language background.** Morphosyntax is another area where L2 learners in lead city university encounter difficulties, particularly with verb conjugation and agreement rules (White & Genesee, 1996). **Studies by Paradis (2004) and Hawkins and Chan (1997) highlight the role of transfer from the learners' first language in shaping their acquisition patterns.**

One of the primary challenges for L2 learners of French language in Lead City University is mastering its unique pronunciation. The French language has specific sounds and phonetic rules that may differ from those in the learner's native language. This makes it difficult for L2 learners to accurately reproduce French sounds and difficult to be understood by native French speakers. For example: French nasal vowels are a unique feature of the French language. Nasal vowels occur when air flows through the nose while producing vowel sounds.

In French, there are three nasal vowel sounds: /*ɑ̃*/, /*ɛ̃*/, and /*ɔ̃*/. These nasal vowels are represented by the letters "*an*," "*en*," "*in*," "*on*," and "*un*" in written form. The first nasal vowel sound is /*ɑ̃*/. It is represented by the letter combination "an" or "am" in words such as "*champagne*" (/ʃɑ̃paɲ/), meaning champagne, and "*enfant*" (/ɑ̃fɑ̃/), meaning child. The second nasal vowel sound is /*ɛ̃*/. It is represented by the letter combination "in" or "im" in words like "*vin*" (/vɛ̃/), meaning wine, and "*important*" (/ɛ̃pɔ̃rtɑ̃/), meaning important. The third nasal vowel sound is /*ɔ̃*/. It is represented by the letter combination "on" or "om" in words such as "*bonjour*" (/bɔ̃ʒuʁ/), meaning hello, and "*homme*" (/ɔ̃m/), meaning man.

In addition to nasal vowels, French also has a phenomenon called liaison. Liaison occurs when a normally silent consonant at the end of a word is pronounced because the following word begins with a vowel sound. This phenomenon helps to maintain the flow of speech and avoid pauses between words.

There are different types of liaison in French. One type is mandatory liaison, where the consonant must be pronounced.

For example, in the phrase "*les amis*" (the friends), the final "s" in "*les*" is pronounced because the following word "*amis*" begins with a vowel sound. Another example is in the phrase "*un homme*" (a man), where the final "n" in "un" is pronounced before the vowel sound of "*homme*."

There is also optional liaison, where the consonant may or may not be pronounced depending on the speaker's preference or the level of formality. For instance, in the phrase "*petit enfant*" (little child), some speakers may pronounce the final "t" in "*petit*," while others may not. The best one is to pronounce the last consonant 't' with the the vowel 'u' beginning another word. Furthermore, there are forbidden liaisons, where certain consonants cannot be pronounced even if they would typically be followed by a vowel sound.

For example, in the phrase "*grand homme*" (great man), the final "d" in "*grand*" cannot be pronounced before the vowel sound of "*homme*."

Overall, nasal vowels and liaison phenomena are important aspects of French pronunciation. Mastering these features can greatly enhance Lead City University students irrespective of the class the ability to speak French fluently and accurately. Recognizing and using correct pronunciation: French pronunciation can be challenging for L2 learners, particularly when it comes to vowel sounds and diphthongs. For example, the letter "e" can be pronounced differently in different words, such as "é" (eh) in "*petit*" (small) and "è" (eh) in "*parlé*" (spoken).

2. Verb Conjugation

French verb conjugation is complex and differs significantly from English or other languages. L2 learners often struggle to memorize the different verb forms and tenses, leading to errors in communication and written expression. For example, let's take the verb "*aimer*" (to love) in the present tense:

- *Je aime* (incorrect)
- *Tu aime* (incorrect)
- *Il/elle/on aime* (correct)
- *Nous aimons* (correct)
- *Vous aimez* (correct)
- *Ils/ells aiment* (correct)

As shown above, each subject pronoun requires a specific ending to correctly conjugate the verb "*aimer*." This complexity can be confusing for L2 learners who are accustomed to languages with simpler conjugation systems.

Verb Agreement

Another challenge faced by L2 learners at Lead City University is understanding and applying verb agreement rules in French. In French, verbs must agree with their subjects in terms of gender and number. This means that the ending of the verb must change depending on whether the subject is singular or plural and masculine or feminine.

For example, let's consider the verb "*parler*" (to speak) in the present tense:

- *Je parle* (I speak)
- *Tu parles* (You speak)
- *Il/elle/on parle* (He/she/one speaks)
- *Nous parlons* (We speak)
- *Vous parlez* (You speak)
- *Ils/ells parlent* (They speak)

In the above examples, the verb "*parler*" changes its ending to match the subject pronoun. This agreement rule can be challenging for L2 learners who are not accustomed to such grammatical features in their native language.

Some of the students are coming across the 3rd person singular pronoun '*On*' for the first time. During their secondary school days, they never taught them '*On*' except '*il/elle*'. (*l'art de conjuger*)

3. Vocabulary Acquisition

Building a strong vocabulary is essential for effective language acquisition through consultation of our dictionary especially French-English and English-French. However, L2 learners face the challenge of acquiring a vast amount of new vocabulary in French. Additionally, gender assignment to nouns can also be confusing and requires careful attention to detail.

Understanding word gender: French nouns are either masculine or feminine, and this can be confusing for L2 learners who are not used to this concept. For example, the word for "book" is "*livre*," which is masculine, while the word for "pencil" is "*crayon*," which is feminine.

Mastering verb conjugation: French verbs change form depending on the subject and tense, which can be difficult for L2 learners to master. For example, the verb "*aller*" (to go) changes from to "*va*" when the subject is "*je*" (I), "*tu*" (you), or *vous* "*il/elle/on*" (he/she/it/they)

Some of the students that this research was conducted on do not have basic knowledge of French. Some of the students who participated in this research did not have a basic knowledge of French. Some did it up to senior classes in their different secondary schools while some didn't do it at all.

Building vocabulary through reading and listening: L2 learners of French may struggle to build their vocabulary through reading and listening, particularly if they are not exposed to enough authentic materials. This can limit their ability to understand and express themselves in French.

4. Grammar Structures

French grammar can be intricate, with various rules, exceptions, and exceptions to exceptions. L2 learners often find it challenging to internalize these rules and apply them correctly in their spoken and written communication. Gendered Nouns: French nouns are gendered, meaning that some nouns are masculine, feminine, or neuter. This can be confusing for L2 learners who are not used to this gender system.

For instance, the word for "table" is "*une table*" (a feminine noun), while the word for "chair" is "*une chaise*" (a masculine noun).

Adjective Position: In French, adjectives generally follow the noun they modify, which can be difficult for L2 learners to get used to, especially if they are more familiar with languages that place adjectives before nouns.

For example, "*une femme intelligente*" (a smart woman) instead of "an intelligent woman."

Verb Conjugation: French verbs have many irregularities and exceptions, which can be challenging for L2 learners to master.

For instance, the verb "*être*" (to be) has multiple forms, such as "*je suis*" (I am), "*tu es*" (you are), "*il/elle/on est*" (he/she/it is), "*nous sommes*" (we are), "*vous êtes*" (you are), and "*ils/elles sont*" (they are).

5. Cultural Awareness

Learning a language goes beyond grammar and vocabulary; it also involves understanding the cultural nuances and context. L2 learners of French need to familiarize themselves with French customs, traditions, and social norms to achieve fluency and effective communication.

Linguistic Features and Challenges

Instructional Approaches and Strategies

Various instructional approaches have been employed to facilitate L2 French language acquisition. Traditional methods often focused on grammar instruction and translation exercises. However, more recent approaches emphasize communicative and task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2003). **Research by Swain (1985) suggests that providing learners with opportunities for meaningful interaction and negotiation of meaning can enhance their oral proficiency in French.** Additionally, the use of technology, such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), has gained popularity in recent years, offering interactive and individualized learning experiences (Chapelle, 2001).

Linguistic Environment: The linguistic environment in Nigeria also poses a challenge to L2 learners of French language. Most Nigerians are more comfortable speaking English or their native languages than French.

Language Learning Contexts

The context in which L2 French is learned also influences the acquisition process. Classroom-based learning is the most common setting, but immersion programs and study abroad experiences have gained recognition for their potential benefits. **A study by Kinginger (2009) explores the impact of study abroad on L2 French learners' linguistic and cultural development.** The findings suggest that immersion experiences can lead to significant gains in oral proficiency and intercultural competence. The 300 level students now 400level Adejumo Nifemi Okediji Oluwatosin Temilade and Eva that went for immense program which we call a year abroad is a living testimony. They came back with a change in French Language awareness, structured and constructive sentences and a change in culture. Greetings is part of French culture. French people greet whether they know you or not.

6. Individual Differences and L2 French Acquisition

Individual differences among L2 learners play a crucial role in their acquisition of French. Research has examined factors such as language aptitude, motivation, and learner beliefs. **Gardner's socio-educational model (1985) proposes that motivation is a key determinant of success in L2 learning.** Furthermore, research by Dörnyei (2005) highlights the importance of learner beliefs and self-regulation strategies in predicting achievement in L2 French.

Language Policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria

The language policy of the federal government also poses a challenge to L2 learners of French language. The policy requires that every Nigerian child learns one Nigerian language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) and French as a second official language. However, this policy has not been effectively implemented. It was laudable during the time of Military President Mohammed Abacha but it was not monitored.

Here are some benefits of learning French

International Language: French is spoken by over 300 million people worldwide and is an official language in 29 countries. Learning French can help you communicate with people from different parts of the world.

Access to Culture: French is the language of culture, fashion, cuisine, and art. Learning French can help you appreciate and understand the rich cultural heritage of France and other French-speaking countries.

Career Opportunities: French is an important language in international business, diplomacy, and tourism. Learning French can open up new career opportunities for you.

Higher Education: France is home to some of the world's top universities and research institutions. Learning French can help you gain admission to these institutions and pursue higher education.

Brain Exercise: Learning a new language can improve cognitive function, memory, and concentrations. It can also delay the onset of age-related cognitive decline.

Travel: If you plan to travel to a French-speaking country, learning French can make your trip more enjoyable and rewarding.

Personal Growth: Learning a new language can be a fun and rewarding experience that can boost your confidence and self-esteem.

Here are Some Quotes on L2 learners of the French Language

1. "Learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things but learning another way to think about things." - Flora Lewis
2. "To have another language is to possess a second soul." – Charlemagne
3. "The limits of my language are the limits of my world." - Ludwig Wittgenstein
4. "Language is the key to the heart of people." - Ahmed Deedat
5. "One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way." - Frank Smith
6. "No one realizes how beautiful it is to travel until he comes home and rests his head on his old, familiar pillow." - Lin Yutang
7. "Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going." - Rita Mae Brown
8. "You live a new life for every new language you speak. If you know only one language, you live only once." - Czech proverb
9. "To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world." - Chinese proverb
10. "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." - Lao Tzu

Possible Solutions

To improve the present state of French language teaching in Lead City University and Nigeria generally, some possible solutions include:

Provision Of Adequate Learning Materials: There should be an effort to provide adequate learning materials such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, etc., to enhance effective learning.

Increased Funding: There should be an increase in funding for French language education.

Motivation: Students should be motivated through various means such as scholarships, awards, etc., to enhance their interest and performance.

Language Policy Implementation: The federal government should ensure effective implementation of its policy on French language education. The policy requires that every Nigerian child learns one Nigerian language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) and French as a second official language. However, this policy has not been effectively implemented. It was laudable during the time of Military President Mohammed Abacha but it was not monitored.

In conclusion, L2 learners of French embark on journey to acquire proficiency in a language steeped in history and culture. Their pursuit of French language skills not only expands their linguistic repertoire but also exposes them to a myriad of opportunities, both personally and professionally. By embracing French, learners become part of a global community that values the beauty of language and the profound impact it has on shaping our collective human experience.

Conclusion

The literature on L2 learners of the French language at Lead City University provides valuable insights into various aspects of second language acquisition. Factors such as age, linguistic features, instructional approaches, learning contexts, and individual differences all contribute to the complexity of L2 French acquisition. Understanding these factors can inform pedagogical practices and help optimize the learning experience for L2 French learners.

L2 learners of French language in Lead City University embark on journey to acquire proficiency in a language steeped in history and culture. Their pursuit of French language skills not only expands their linguistic repertoire but also exposes them to a myriad of opportunities, both personally and professionally. By embracing French, learners become part of a global community that values the beauty of language and the profound impact it has on shaping our collective human experience.

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