



French for Professionals: Translation and Interpretation as Panacea

ABIODUN ABOSEDE OSHIN

Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo, Nigeria

Abstract. Over the years, efforts have been made by the Nigerian governments to train professional translators and interpreters in the country; yet studies continue to point out deficiencies in the translations of words from English language to French language among the trained professionals. In this wise, this study, therefore, appraises the effectiveness of the French curriculum of the Nigerian French language Village and Ekiti State University (EKSU) from the students' points of view. This is to determine the correlation between students' linguistic needs and what they are being offered. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Through a simple random sampling technique, 50 postgraduates were selected from the examined schools respectively. A self-structured questionnaire entitled: Efficiency of French Curriculum for University Students' Questionnaire (EFCUSQ) and ten unedited manuscripts translated by ten postgraduate students were used for the study. Among other findings, the study revealed that students have positive attitudes towards the French translation curriculum, but lack the key words that best suits each word. Similarly, the study indicated that students have limited cultural knowledge of the French language, due to many domains being introduced and taught in the curriculum, which are not useful to their professions. Thus, the study recommends that a Need Assessment (NA) should be conducted at the beginning of each session to know the linguistic needs of each student.

Keywords: FSP, Professionals, Translators, Interpreters, Needs Analysis, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Humans are social creatures; hence, they are in constant search for ways to communicate their needs, feelings, ideas with people. The need to learn a language(s), therefore, becomes the only viable solution to fulfil these needs. Language is significant to man and serves to fulfil his communicative needs.

People learn a language(s) for varying reasons – business, education, economy, and prestige, amongst others. Objectively, a people may learn a particular language, due to the function it serves them and the vacuum it fills. Therefore, teaching a functional and context-based language to such people becomes apposite.

There are over 400 indigenous languages in Nigeria. These 400 indigenous languages are the first languages of the 250 ethnic groups in the country. Yoruba is the first language of the great majority of the Yoruba, Igbo the first language of the Ibo and Hausa the first language of the Hausa and so on, just as English is the first language of the English people, Chinese the first language of the Chinese and Japanese the first language of the Japanese Tsu J. (2022). For the reason that Nigeria was colonised by the British, English language was adopted as the country's official language and national language to sustain the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern Protectorates of Nigeria in 1914 by Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard. As time goes by, the Nigerian government's vision to boost the international, cultural, economic, and political relations informed the reason for bonding with the four neighbouring African countries – Republic of Benin, Cameroun, Chad, and Republic of Niger whose official language is French. To meet these needs, government began to advocate for the teaching of French in Nigerian schools.

The development of French in Nigeria can be dichotomised into three phases: According to Omolewa (1981) in Ojelade (1999:13), the first phase took place in the 19th century. In that period, it was individual decision that motivated the quest to acquire competence in French language. The second phase of French in Nigeria began in 1909 and ended in 1995. This period witnessed the re-introduction of French in Nigerian schools. After independence in 1960, the Nigerian government adopted it as a subject of study in public schools on the ground that Nigeria needed to foster cooperation and understanding with her

francophone neighbours on the one hand, and to facilitate communication with France and other French speaking countries of the world on the other hand, as documented by Syed S.A. (1984). The third phase of French in Nigeria began in 1996 following the vision of the late General Sanni Abacha. The then head of state looked at French beyond being a medium that will facilitate communication between two or more countries but as a medium of communication between the multi-various ethnic groups in the country. Thus, bilingualism becomes the mission of French as conceived by Sanni Abacha.

To a reasonable extent, the teaching and learning of the French language in Nigeria have been progressive. Some teachers of the language and other professionals have enjoyed the benefits of attending work related training and workshops in the French-speaking countries. According to Opaluwa, A. (2022), French-language students have enjoyed the language improvement opportunity of their Compulsory Immersion Programme in Institutions like the Nigeria French Language Village, the neighbouring Republic of Benin and Togo. Some students even go as far as traveling to France.

Globalisation has placed the world in constant flux because of economic, business, and social structural changes. As the marketplace becomes more connected, professionals in different fields of endeavours begin to recognise the necessity of acquiring alternative communication skills. Better cross-cultural interaction between business networks has made international language such as French a pivotal means of effective communication in all life endeavours. French as an international language is used to facilitate commercial activities, science and technology, information sharing, and global travel, thereby sparking an increase in courses and textual emphasis. According to the Professional French Institute, (2023), FSP is a specialised approach to language learning, tailored to meet specific professional or academic needs. Studies and casual observations have shown that professional translators in Nigeria have realized their competence in general French is insufficient to successfully execute job roles to their satisfaction (Alhamad, 2018; AlTokhais, 2016). However, professional translators in non-native environment like Nigeria could misuse a French word in a context that could lead to disastrous consequences. This amongst others made researchers to point out the pivotal importance of teaching and learning FSP. FSP epitomises the instruction and training in the French language for individual betterment, professional growth, or general business use as affirmed by Udoh in Bani (1998).

The introduction of French for Special Purpose in Nigeria has been a laudable and practical idea in ensuring that more professionals in Nigeria are indoctrinated in the art of understanding, reading, writing, and speaking basic French. Even with the introduction of FSP in some institutions like the University of Lagos, the competencies of professional translators in Nigeria are still worrisome, especially those that work at the Nigerian borders. As professionals, every French language student should be treated as having a specific need: the need for continuous learning of a second language in the class, the environment and learning the French language online. French will have to be tailored towards a common Special Purpose. Teachers of the French language and the French language curriculum and programme developers will have to brainstorm for recreating the French language curriculum for Nigerian students, particularly in the tertiary institutions.

The current study examines the French language needs of professional translators in Nigeria by evaluating actual foreign language use by the employees. The purpose of this study is to examine the competencies of professional translators in Nigeria. The study addresses the following questions a) How are French skills used among professional translators in Nigerian borders? b) What are the translators' professional experiences with French learning courses? c) How can French learning courses be improved to strengthen the use of French in workplace settings?

2. Concept of Language Translation

Language translation can be defined as a text derived from another text but expressed in another language, showing all the qualities of equivalence of that source text to produce a substitute for the original text in purpose and action. A translation is a text of words arranged in sentences and sub sentences in a non-arbitrary way according to the conventions of language with the main purpose of communicating the message. Mughtar M. (2018). A speech actor otherwise known as the translator constructs a version of the text in his own understanding with a purpose, expecting a reaction from the target audience. The translator, when producing another text, aims to produce something in equivalence to the original text to make the text significant and reasonable to a new audience that could not be reached by the original source text. In other to have a similar meaning, the translator has to take the aspect of interpretation into account in addition to the choice of word that will be utilised (Jacobson in Oshin, 2018).

A successful translation is achieved when all the active participants, including the source and the target, are satisfied that their purposes of communication have been accomplished. However, translation is less than successful if one or more of the participants are uncomfortable and dissatisfied with the product of the translator. A successful translation will be received by the audience as one that is considered ‘theirs’ that can be assessed. The translation can then be seen as a functional equivalence of the original text.

For instance, the Bible was not originally written in other languages like French, English, Spanish, German, even in indigenous languages like Yoruba, Efik, Igbo, Hausa, but was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, but today, by virtue of translation, the French, English, German and the Spanish speaking audiences as well as the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Efik speaking audiences can read the bible translated in their various languages. What this means is that the translation was successful because the bible is now available to all the above-mentioned countries’ speaking audience. Basnett (1990) presumes that all texts being part of a literary system are “translations of translations”: every text, although, is unique but it is also the translation of another text. No text is entirely original because language itself is already a translation from one language to the other.

3. French for Professional Development

The concept “French for Specific Purposes” (FSP) thus designates those corpuses of specialised or specialist discourse forms and usages with which speakers of the French language communicate in the course of transacting the business of specific fields or domains of human activity. The teaching of FSP in different European languages – English for Specific Purposes, German for Specific Purposes, etc. – was developed within the framework of foreign language teaching, in contradistinction to mother tongue teaching. This development followed the realisation of the fact that foreign learners who had to use their languages of adoption in professional, occupational and intellectual activities, had language and communication needs that were different from those of the common users of the language. The development of materials for the teaching of the special language usage thus began by determining communication needs of the foreign language learners in various domains of professional fields, science and technology, commerce and industry, finance and management, agriculture, medicine, law, etc.

For an effective teaching of FSP in the Bachelor’s degree programme in Nigerian universities, students

should be able to comprehend, or be in the position to comprehend, the “conceptual system” (to repeat Crystal’s terms), of the field or discipline in which they are studying. In a more practical term, students should have studied the language to an advanced level beyond the Senior School Certificate. A Potential translator of French must spend a longer period learning French translation in the university than the current practice of one or two years of two hours of lecture a week. This further shows that, throughout the duration of the Bachelor’s degree programme, the students only studied translation for less than six months from the four-year course as opined by Battestini (1971). It would take more than three years of study to gain mastery of the French language in other to become a professional translator. Students for FSP should be those who have interest in both the French language and translation as a specialty; such that neither of these will appear to be an imposition on them. The search for an approach to the teaching of FSP designed for the proposed duration of learning, and for students with background knowledge of the discipline, naturally brings to mind the possibility of a curriculum that combines the study of French with the study of a special discipline like translation and interpretation, literature, grammar, and so on, throughout the duration of the degree programme. A combined honours degree programme with either a double major or major/minor syllabus structure could be introduced.

A programme with such syllabus, would enable students to have a good knowledge of both the area of specialisation and the French language, thus, making them to easily master their field of study, and become a professional. Bani (1998). It is also advisable to espouse a syllabus for the combination of French and Biochemistry, Chemistry, Geology, Mathematics, Banking, Economics, Management, Marketing, Computer Science or any of the branches of Engineering; this is undoubtedly useful because of the Nigerian geographical location in west Africa, being an Anglophone country in the midst of francophone countries. In Nigerian Universities, these combinations already exist with Education, English, German, History, Philosophy, Portuguese, Chinese, and Italian etc.

4. Results

This section examines the interpretations and translation given by students who are studying French for professional development purposes. Purposively, the researcher administered ten sentences in English/French and requested that the students

translate them. The extracts as obtained from the translators are listed as follows:

Extract 1:

French version given to the students: Concernant l'aspect d'impôt, essayez de lire bien avant de signer parce-que 'c'est une affaire délicate'.

Translated Version by the students: Concerning the import duty, try to read well before signing because it is a very delicate business

Suggested Translation: Concerning the aspect of import duty, read well before appending your signature because it is an important issue.

Explanation/Discussion: The meaning was clear with the emphasis laid on the importance of tax or import duty in the proposed business, 'affaire délicate' The French aspect meant that payment of import tax is an issue which should not be taken with levity, but the version translated by the student made it sound as if it was the business that was being referred to as delicate and not the import duty. The word 'affaire délicate' in this context does not mean delicate business but rather means either delicate issue or important issue. Danica Seleskovitch postulated that successful written and oral translation (interpreting) is based on an understanding of the message in the source language and the restatement of that message in the target language. The focus should be on the sense and not simply on the words of the original but the register and style of the statement should be considered.

Extract 2:

French version: *Ah, la vache!*

English version: You cow!

Suggested Translation: Oh my God!

Explanation/Discussion: This statement 'Ah, la vache!' was accurately constructed in the French language but was wrongly interpreted by the students because they have just the general knowledge of French. Ordinarily, the meaning of *vache* in English is a cow. In this context, the student displayed a general knowledge of the language without really understanding the deep meaning and structure. *Ah la vache* is an idiomatic expression.

Extract 3:

English version given to the student: If anyone is caught urinating here, he/she will be arrested and locked up in the barracks.

Translated French version by the student: *Si on attrape quelqu'un entrain de uriner ici, on va l'arrêter et le met en barrique.*

Explanation/Discussion:

The English version is written in simple Standard English. Simple message that can easily be understood by all, there is no ambiguity. The word barracks exists in the context in which it is being used that is, 'Army Barracks', the intension was to instill fear in the minds of intending offenders. Barracks means *la caserne* in French. The French version is misleading because *barrique* in English means booth or hut. A hut ordinarily is a habitable place. If the offenders were to serve their punishment by being locked up in a hut, then they will gladly urinate in the prohibited area. The version presented in French did not bring out the intended message of the source as a result of wrong use of language. The translation process shows that there was more focus on the word rather than on the sense/meaning, therefore the register and the style was not considered.

Extract 4:

French version: "*Arête ton char!*"

English version: "*Stop your chariot*".

Suggested Translation: Stop bluffing

Explanation/Discussion: "Stop your chariot" that the student gave as the translation of *Arête ton char!*" was a wrong interpretation. This translation and interpretation were done word for word and this could lead to feud and conflict. The correct translation is, stop bluffing.

Extract 5:

English Version given by the researcher: It is time for the band to sing along with the Priest. Listen and be blessed.

French Version by the student: *Maintenant, c'est l'heure pour la bande de chanter avec le Prêtre. Que Dieu vous bénisse en écoutant.*

Suggested Translation: *Maintenant, l'Orchestre chantera avec le Prêtre. Ecoutez et soyez bénis.*

Explanation/Discussion: The English version was well constructed and adequately structured. The word band means *orchestre* in French and not *bande*. *La bande* on the other hand means gang (gang of thieves, rubbers, crooks etc). The student lacks cultural and linguistic competence. He should know that *band* in this context means choir band and not a set of *bandits*. The translation was not based on the understanding of the message in the source language.

Extract 6:

Original Message/Statement: *Idowu a tombé dans les pommes*

Translated Version: Idowu has fallen into the apples

Suggested Translation: Idowu lost consciousness/
Idowu fainted

Explanation/Discussion: The French version was precise and well structured; it can easily be understood by only someone with good background knowledge of the French language and the French culture. Though, the statement “*tomber dans les pommes*” sounded too ordinary because apples do not have any harmful part. The correct version of the English interpretation that is, Idowu lost consciousness/ Idowu fainted sounds more harmful and within the context. It is a form of expression.

Extract 7:

English Version: You are hereby informed that the date for teachers’ application into the school has been extended.

French Version: Vous Êtes informé de l’êteindre de la date d’emploi de lettre des professeurs.

Explanation/Discussion: The English version was well structured and clear. The information was well understood. The French version by the student will mislead the applicants because the verb *êteindre* was used instead of verb *étendre*.

Êteindre means closed while Étendre means extend. This was a clear case of misuse of language. The translator’s linguistic knowledge was low and she lacked enough sense of vocabularies.

Suggested Translation: Vous êtes informé de l’étendre de la date d’inscription des enseignants à l’école. Or Vous êtes informé que la date d’inscription des enseignants à l’école a été prolongée.

Extract 8:

Original Message/Statement: Donne toujours un coup de main à ta femme

Translated Version: Always give your wife a punch
Correct Translation: Always give your wife a helping hand.

Explanation/Discussion: *Un coup de main* to the students meant a punch which was the direct translation. The French version of the statement was written in a proverbial manner. While the English version was too direct in nature. *Coup de main* is either taken as a strike, a knock, a hit, a bang etc. hence the interpretation given to it by the translator in the English language.

Extract 9 :

French Version: *Le juge a décidé de renvoyer les deux parties dos à dos*

Translated Version : The judge decided to send the two parties back to back.

English Version: Judgment will be pronounced in the absence of both men.

Explanation/Discussion: The French version was written in standard French. Although, the language was a little bit technical and proverbial, all the same, a seasoned interpreter and translator must have a background knowledge of the source and the target languages. The students who interpreted it had a little knowledge of French. He probably interpreted the statement based on the word -‘*dos à dos*’. ‘*Dos*’ means back, therefore ‘*dos à dos*’ will mean ‘back-to-back’.

Extract 10:

Originl Message/Statement: *Je me prends un râteau*”

Translated Version: I am taking the rake.

Explanation /Discussion: “*Prendre un râteau*” is a statement used mainly by the French. It is common within the French culture. It is a familiar statement made in French but the statement in this context is strange in English version. The English version if translated word for word will not make any sense in this context. When one says he/she is taking the rake in English language, what readily comes to mind is “one is going to work in a garden or someone needs the rake for environmental sanitation exercise.”

Correct Translation: Call it quit/ Refusal to go out with one/ ending a relationship.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Nigerian French language curriculums should be tailored along the communication needs of the students, though, this partially has been put to place, but it needs to be effected more into the university and higher institution generally.

At the point of entry, students’ needs must be assessed before teaching them. They should be interviewed if need be, so as to specialize from the first degree level up to the Ph.D level. In the Federal University of Technology, Akure, students studying Cyber Security course specialise from first degree to Ph.D. This will really give a worthy result.

In addition to the French Language Immersion Programme, students should go out on essential excursion programmes. This should form an integral

part of their course so as to have adequate practical knowledge of what is being taught in the classrooms.

There is a need to reduce the teaching of grammar/literature in the teaching of French translation. Translation and interpretation theories and practice should be explored and focused on while French serves as the medium of instruction.

The federal government should borrow a leaf from what is happening in other parts of the globe in terms of developing a viable language policy that will favour the teaching of French and other foreign languages in Nigeria.

The study of French should begin at the early stage of a child's academic training.

References

- Akale et als (Eds). (1998). Vision and Mission of Education in Nigeria. The challenges of the 21st Century. National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Kaduna. Nigeria. (60-69).
- Bassnett, S. (1990). *Translation studies, London & New York: Routledge.*
- Bani T. (1998). The vision and mission of special education in Nigeria. In K. Isyaku, M. A, G. and Udoh J.I. Global Academic Group. <http://www.globalacademicgroup.com>>>nard>jos.
- Jacobson R. (1959). Linguistic Aspect of Translation. Havard University.
- Ojelade K. (1999). An analysis of the historical development of French language in Nigeria: Proposals for the next millennium. p.13
- Opaluwa Adeyola, (2022). *Journal of Education Research and Rural Community Development*
- French Language Teaching and Learning at the Tertiary Level in a Pandemic Lockdown Nigeria: Pressures and Prospects. Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 1-12. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4023086
- Professional French Institute. French for Specific Purposes (FSP) September 26th, 2023. www.professionalfrenchinstitute.com Accessed on the 6th march, 2024.
- Sodipe N.O., Nwemyanwu J. et als (Eds), (1999). Education In Nigeria: A Futuristic Reflection (132-151), Abeokuta, Visual Resources
- Omolewa (1981). in Ojelade K. (1999): An Analysis of the Historical Development of French Language in Nigeria. Proposals for the next millennium. In N.O. Sodipe, O. J. Nwemyanwu et als (Eds), Education In

Nigeria: A Futuristic Reflection (132-151) Abeokuta, Visual Resources.

Muchtar Muhizar, (2018): Basic Theory of Translation-1 buku repository.uinsu.ac.id. Accessed on the 3rd march, 2024.

Syed Salahuddin A. (1984). Political and Diplomatic Interactions between Nigeria and Niger

Pakistan Horizon [Vol. 37, No. 4 \(Fourth Quarter 1984\)](#), pp. 54-67. Published By: Pakistan Institute of International Affairs.

Tsu, Jing (2022). Kingdom of Characters: The Language Revolution That Made China Modern. New York: Riverhead Books. [ISBN 9780735214729](#).