

# Introducing Linguistic Counseling in the Undergraduate French Language studies in the Nigerian Universities

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## Abstract

This study is geared towards the search for a more productive approach to facilitate the teaching and learning of French in Nigerian Universities through the use of Linguistic Counseling. Our worries are the down trends of French learning in our Universities where students of French seem not interested any longer in learning the language as shown in the research results and observations presented in this study. The purpose is to create an awareness of the possible introduction of Linguistic Counseling in the Departments of French. As contribution to knowledge, areas and methods of the counseling exercise were carefully presented. Consequently, there will be tremendous improvement in the output of graduating students of French provided the methods suggested herein are adhered to by the teachers of French in our Universities.

**Keywords:** *Linguistic Counseling, Undergraduate French Language Studies, Nigerian Universities.*

## I. Introduction

This study is all about solving the problems related to the learning and teaching of French in our universities through what we call linguistic counseling. There has been a lot of complains about the lackadaisical attitude of students towards the learning of French both in the universities and in The Nigeria French Language Village, Badagry. Some studies carried out in the area of linguistic progress as regards the study of French in Nigeria have continued to show a downward trend in the level of French as a foreign language in the Nigerian Universities. Research works have been carried out with the view to improve the teaching methods in order to encourage and enhance the teaching and learning of this language. Our experiences tend to make us believe that students, in their majority, might not have been interested in the study of French, ab initio, even prior to their admissions into the Universities. Despite all efforts made to encourage students to attend lectures, it is apparent that many do not attend classes regularly.

The following studies have been carried out, and findings have consistently shown that students do not have much idea about expressing themselves in many areas of French language. And we wonder whether all these could be because they lack interest in the language or do not attend classes as they should? Could it possibly be that the teachers are not teaching well or not even interested in the academic wellbeing of the students. Or could there be something else lacking in the services rendered to the students?

In the following studies, Odoh (2023:257-266; 2023:219-318; 2022:123-134) Odoh and Asadu (2020:102-113), Odoh and Aziegbé (2019. 93-114), we can easily discover the rate at which French studies have been declining in our Universities despite the fact that we still have students to admit into our French departments.

In Odoh (a. 2023:257-266), problems of translation of possibility and probability expressions from English to French were highlighted. Results showed that the acceptable productions of students in the expression of possibilities and probabilities are only 15% while that of unacceptable expressions take 85%. The study concluded that there are some visible difficulties in the expression of this aspect of French language among the students of French at The Nigeria French language Village: students who have already finished their second year in the University.

Odoh (a. 2023:219-318) analyzed “faux-amis” as a major obstacle in the learning of French as a foreign language by university students on Language Immersion programme at the Nigeria French Language, Badagry. With the big margin between the acceptable and unacceptable productions of

25.3% and 77.7% respectively, it was concluded that disturbing difficulties manifest in the expression of “faux amis” among French language students at The Nigeria French Language Village.

Similar findings are applicable in the study by Odoh (2022; 123-134), where, the results showed 10.5% of acceptable productions while 89.5% was for the unacceptable productions. These results corroborated the presence of difficulties in the expression of obligation among Nigerian students on language Immersion Program in the Nigeria French language Village, Badagry.

Likewise, Odoh and Asadu, (2020:102-113), examined the problems in the use of conjunctions in apposition among Nigerian students of French. Results indicate that students have a very high level of difficulties in the area of expression of this aspect of language. In the 132 answers collected from the subjects of research, only 01 is acceptable.

Also in Odoh and Aziegbe (2019 93-114), the summary of the results showed that only 06.6% of the students’ productions was acceptable while the rest 93.4% was not; indicating a good level of difficulties in their expression of prepositions and conjunctions in apposition in French.

Students of French in our universities in Nigeria can be said to have a lot of difficulties in expressing themselves in French. This may equally account for their lack of interest in making use of the language they are learning in their day-to-day communications.

The implication is that the learning of this language is going down to a level where a graduate of French may likely not be able to express him/herself well in the language he has spent four solid years to study.

This research tends to look for a means to remedy this ugly situation. It is also our belief that apart from the suspected lackadaisical attitudes of students who whole heartedly applied to study French, there seem to be another group who never applied to study French and who did not like French before their admission. This group has openly confessed to teachers that they were forced to study French since the French department was the only department that had spaces for admission. This situation, which, from our interaction with students, has been proven to be valid, constitutes a variable in affecting negatively the interest and performance of our students both in the oral and written aspect of the language. We believe strongly that these students’ dispositions, apparently negative, contribute in their lack of interest in the learning and use of French Language.

It is our thinking that an introduction of Linguistic Counseling in our French Departments would go a long way in opening the minds of our students. Linguistic counseling could be defined as all the advisory energy spent and information offered in love and objectivity, both privately and in group that could motivate student/students into developing high interest in the language they are learning; in our case, the French language. This type of counseling might either be private or public, in the classroom for instance.

Motivational class room talks on the importance of creating an ambition for oneself and encouraging students to target in future a particular profession he/she loves, could do a miracle in getting them highly interested in the language that holds their future for them. Let us look at these few areas of interest which can motivate the students; namely, French for business purposes, Need for Translators/Interpreters, Jobs in French Companies, Jobs/Appointments at French Embassies, Air hostess jobs, Lecturing/Teaching career, Job capacity duplication, which means being able to use two international languages to enhance your profession. It is not out of place to also get them to know; through good approach and teaching styles how easy it is to learn a language.

The Igbo-business-man language learning theory can help here. For the Igbo business man who relocates to another new language area, it takes him few months, for some, just weeks to learn the new language and do his business and make money. Our survey showed some insisting on only few weeks. He is motivated by the money he wants to make, given that his feeding, house rent and other important sudden expenses depend on how much he makes. A learner of a new language such as French should be made to know the importance of the language he is learning and that his future depends on it; especially if he wants to live a comfortable life with it in future. He should also be made to understand that if the Igbo man can learn and speak a language within a space of few months, then it means that any new learner can also learn the language fast provided that he sees the importance as seen by the Igbo-business-man.

He should be made to know what he stands to gain after studying and succeeding in speaking and writing French well, as well as what they stand to lose if they come out empty as graduates of French language.

Opening up areas of French language learning, which can make them very easily understand the differences between English and French, is a sine qua non. This is because every language does not express the same information or ideas in the same manner but does this in their different cultural manners called world views.

We can also, as linguistic counselors, always speak French to our students. We find it difficult to encourage someone to speak French when we do not use the language to communicate to them. Let us not forget that “c’est en forgeant qu’on devient forgeron” as it is said in French.

Counseling them on the easy way of learning conjugations in all the tenses by summarizing the use of the endings and encouraging them to practice on their own, could be a good strategy. An example is the endings of “imparfait” and “conditionnel” which are the same; the little difference is the stem. One is added to the stem of First person plural to form “l’imparfait” and the same ending is added to the infinitive of verbs ending in “er” and “ir” and the stem of very few other irregular verbs like “être”, “avoir”, “aller”, “venir”, “devoir” etc, to form “le conditionnel”. All these suggestions are possible areas of motivational and practical counseling strategies which can enhance the study of French in our Universities.

In a summary, apart from the other motivational counseling mentioned above, counseling the students on the easy way of absorbing pronunciation, vocabulary, expressions and conjugations in all the tenses will be useful. Learning of the verbs, which could be done through summarizing the endings and ways of uses, goes a long way to help the students speak French. These can be easily absorbed through Simple French songs, Simple drama in French, Recitations, ‘Jeux de rôles’ and The Nigeria French Language Village Solution, through the Village on-line lectures available to everyone irrespective of location. These areas highlighted above are the major areas of difficulties which our counseling efforts could either solve or drastically reduce.

Having presented our problems/purpose of study, let us start the literature review by first taking a look at who a counselor is. According to Odoh E, “a counselor is he/she who helps others to solve their problems, be it personal-social, educational or vocational, be it the young or old”(5). In this case we are seeing the teachers of French as counselors as far as the learning of French language is concerned. They are better placed to know the benefits of knowing and speaking French and the best way of learning the language. In the Educational and Vocational Guidance theory of Tunde Ipaye (1986) in his presentation on the role of education in career and vocational development, S.E. Okon in his introduction writes;

*To many students in secondary schools, the future may be seen as an exciting glorious adventure in which they are always successful. Many of them have the idea that they would be able to work as managers in the public and private establishments as soon as they complete secondary education...Students in secondary schools, like many other young adults, are always worried about ‘what they will do with their lives’ and ‘what kind of adults they will be or eventually become’. Many of them are very much concerned about early entry into the occupational world and finding productive and rewarding places in our rapidly, fast changing society where wage employment is unlikely to be available on a scale sufficient to absorb than a small fraction of the young people when they do arrive at the labour market.(P.75)*

Surely the questions raised above apply also to our French students. As a teacher, do we let them know the opportunities they are likely to have as graduates of French? Or do we say, as good graduates of French? This is because, what you have determines what you can give, which goes further to determine what you will get. From our experiences, it is noticed that most students are not likely having any ambition in mind that propels them into making reasonable effort to learn the language. This is why it is important to make them reason in other to create one for themselves. As it is said in French, ‘celui qui veut rêver, ne doit pas dormir’. Those who dream of better jobs as lecturers, as translators or interpreters, as workers at the embassy, as international business men, as

workers in French Companies or even as owners of Schools of French language would most readily braise up knowing already what they are expecting themselves to be in future.

Tunde Apaye, (1990), in his introduction, explains it all;

*All over the world, Education has become a big industry, and in fact, the biggest industry in the so called third world countries. Inherent in the concept 'industry' are issues like investments, industrial relations, bargaining etc. In fact most parents in developing nations see education as an investment. To this extent, parents struggle to educate one child thoroughly with the hope that he or she will eventually carry the responsibility of educating others (xii)*

The question is 'how do we harness the knowledge of French language in other to get what we want in future? Odoh E; quoting King Solomon reminds us that "without counsel, plan go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established"(3) The need for linguistic counseling in French studies cannot be over emphasized especially given the down trend in the practical production of French language students in expressing themselves in the language they have spent years to acquire.

In language learning, it has been established that the sound system of a language is very essential in acquiring a language. Stones E, (136) writes that;

*The acquisition of the correct speech forms, although only one aspect of language, is undoubtedly very important, for without the ability to discriminate finely among the speech sounds of others and among his own imitations of these sounds, the child could never build up a recognizable set of speech sounds.*

Stones E (210) insists that, "during the time when the child is moving towards fluency in reading, he should, as has been suggested above, be having considerable practice in the use of spoken language". This argument supports the use of French as a very important means of communication among learners and this is why teachers should, not only speak French to students but also compulsorily encourage the students to speak French.

Most of the time, French teachers tend to limit language teaching more to grammatical construction and vocabulary. This is likely to be the case among some French teachers even in Nigeria. This is seen in the fact that students find it difficult to express any message that goes beyond normal word-to-word grammatical expressions. This is why we should take a lead from Vinay and Darbelnet (1977), in their work on Comparative Stylistics English-French. They have provided us with an in-depth study of Comparative Stylistics English-French. This aspect of French studies should normally form part of the content of the linguistic counseling process since most of our students, given our experience, are not generally aware of these details of language study. Suffice it to say that this is why students subject all their oral production to basically English syntax; ignorant of the fact that English and French do not see and present facts and realities the same way. This constitutes a difficulty and obstacle in their French language learning. We are therefore presenting the work on Comparative Stylistics of Vinay and Darbenet which we consider pertinent to our study. These two authors teach French and English through language analyses presented in form of translation known as *Stylistiques Comparées du Français et de l'Anglais*. We present here just a summary before we go into the areas where we need to render some sort of linguistic counseling to our students.

Their linguistic comparison procedures are divided into two levels: the "Direct translation" and the "Indirect translation". In the direct approach, we have the word-to-word translation where sentences can go word to word and still retain their messages, for instance 'I go to school' translated as 'Je vais à l'école'. There is the calking where expressions or compound nouns are rendered directly word to word, for instance, 'science fiction' translated 'science fiction' in French. The third is the borrowing technique where a term that does not exist in the target language is borrowed into the target language, however with a short explanation in form of foot notes. The second approach is the indirect translation where word to word does not work. The first is called "transposition". This is seen where a part of speech is seen expressing the message of another part of speech in the target language. An example is 'when I come' translated 'à mon arrivée'. The second is known as "Modulation". Here there is a change of point of view in expressing the same message. If the English says 'I am hungry' and French says 'J'ai faim', there is a change of point of view. The third is what they call

“Equivalence”. Here, translators search for cultural equivalents to express what the target culture may not understand due to differences in the cultures of the languages; proverbs and idiomatic expressions are examples of this. The final one is ‘Adaptation. Here there is a search of a cultural symbol which can translate correctly the message embedded in another cultural symbol strange to the target language. An example is the Yoruba use of white cotton wool to translate ‘snow’ in the Christian bible.

It will also interest us to note that there are several other areas of language comparison English-French that Vinay and Darbelnet analyzed. We will make effort to present some of them we consider most needed by our students at their stage of language learning as examples. We may not be able to present examples to all of them for space but we shall try to communicate our objectives.

The English and French have almost the same conjugations in the indicative mood but they do not exactly use these tenses the same way even when their conjugations are the same.

Example: I have been eating since morning-je mange depuis le matin.

He showed me where he left my book-Il m’a montré l’endroit où il avait laissé mon livre. etc.

There are also difficulties related to the use of prepositions, conjunctions in apposition and demonstrative pronouns.

Greet him for me-Dis-lui bonjour de ma part. I don’t know when he is coming this evening-Je ne sais pas l’heure de son arrivée ce soir.

The difficulties associated with false friends (faux-amis) present themselves also as obstacles in French language learning.

Apart from words and expressions that are complete false friends, there are also Stylistic false friends, Metaphorical false friends, structural false friends etc. Example “he is my maternal uncle”-il est mon oncle maternel” “I have a nursery school”-“j’ai une école maternelle”

Another area is the aspect of use of voice (active/passive voice) English/French.

The French tends to avoid the use of passive voice in their daily expressions while the English appears to be in love with Passive voice. The French avoids the passive voice by the use of pronominal voice and the indefinite pronoun ‘On’. “salad is eaten raw”- la salade se mange crue”. “It was announced in the Church”, On l’a annoncé à l’église’. The French uses the passive voice where they consider it necessary.

Other areas include the study of mood which Vinay and Darlenet call ‘la ‘modalité’.

This, according to Vinay et Darbelnet (137) « indique l’attitude du sujet parlant à l’égard de son énoncé, suivant qu’il le considère, comme exprimant un fait, une supposition, une nécessité, etc». (This indicates the attitude of the subject speaker in relation to what he wants to say, depending on whether he is expressing a fact, a supposition, a necessity etc)

Grevisse (611) says that «la modalité est «l’attitude prise par le sujet à l’égard de l’énoncé». (For Grevisse, this is the attitude of the subject speaker in relation to what he wants to say)

Here, aspects like obligations, possibilities, probabilities, certainties, permission, negation, journalistic statements (les dire), imperatives etc are well studied emphasizing on their importance in truly expressing one’s innermost thoughts. These are found from page 46 to page 56 of their book (Stylistiques Comparées du Français et de l’Anglais (1977).

Ballard M, presents the verbs of «modalité» (mood) as follows « pouvoir, savoir, vouloir, devoir, falloir» and remarks that «pouvoir» .is the most frequently used verb of mood in French language. (191)

Having presented our theoretical background, our objective is therefore to see the relevance of and suggest the possibility of introducing linguistic counseling to learning and speaking of French among our university undergraduate students of French.

## **II. Methodology**

Our study is not in form of practical research that requires survey or practical tests in the classroom and our methodology will not take the shape of that of a search for physical data to be presented and analyzed. Our methodology will simply involve presenting methodically areas and ways to affect the linguistic counseling in its different facets to bring the students, not only to love the language but also to learn and enjoy the speaking and use of the language.

### **Linguistic Counseling Techniques**

Here, our data come in form of ways and procedures adoptable for linguistic counseling. We start by suggesting the qualities of a linguistic counselor.

### **Qualities of a Linguistic Counselor**

Before we go into the methods adoptable in Linguistic Counseling, let us take a look at the qualities of a Counselor which a teacher of French language should have, to be able to achieve his/her objectives. A linguistic Counselor should, a part from being competent in French language he/she teaches, should

Be worthy of trust

Have respect for the clients (students) secrets

Be gentle, soft and kind to the clients (students)

Show interest and love for clients progress in his/her studies

Be a parent to the client

Does not correct all errors (this can discourage him/her)

Re-enforce every positive linguistic production

Be a linguistic model (if possible)

Ways/Methods adoptable for linguistic counseling for French students

### **Helping the Students to identify their Ambitions in Future**

The client (student) should be able to give an answer to the question; what do you want to be in future? We should believe that the consciousness of his/her target in studying French will go a long way to push him/her into making reasonable efforts to learn the language. He/She should be made to realize that he, who has two international languages, has two international heads. His scope of operation in life is limitless.

Helping the client realize that French is not difficult to learn; in fact, that learning of a language is easy.

The Igbo-business-man's theory could help here. An Igbo business man, who relocates to another strange land, does not need more than few weeks/months to learn and speak the language of the people to enable him sell his goods and make his money. He achieves this because he has an ambition and an important objective. Any other person can.

Counseling the student on the infinite usefulness of the internet in facilitating the learning and speaking of the language in no time.

Students tend to spend a lot of money on data for Instagram, face book, Tik Tok and other seemingly distracting apps in the internet while we have an uncountable sites and documents which can help in learning French easily. Talking to them about these links and using them in class will go a long way to motivate them and facilitate their French language learning.

Students tend to be afraid of conjugations. They need counseling in this area too.

Letting students know the simple techniques of learning conjugations can go a long way to help them. Let the students realize that the irregular verbs are few and that simply knowing their present tenses and their future stems is enough for them to be at ease with using them; they only need to know the future endings and the conditional endings which they add to the same stem to be able to express the future and conditional. For regular verbs, they all generally need the addition of future or conditional endings to the infinitive to express the future and the present conditional. This is quite simplified. For almost all the "imparfait", we need to just add the same endings of the conditional to the stem of the first person plural, except for "être"; and you are good to go.

For the other compound tenses, the student simply needs to know the present tenses of "être" and "avoir" and the past participle of the main verb, to express the passé composé. The "imparfait" of "être" and "avoir" and the past participle of the main verb are all you need to express the "plus-que-parfait". For "futur antérieur", we simply need the future of "être" and "avoir" which we place before the past participle of the concerned verb. Careful and practical counseling friendly explanations can bring out the students from their dungeon of fear of conjugations. Most importantly, the students must be made to understand the concepts of these tenses. Many do not know even the different "present

tenses” of English. They appear not to know the differences between the «past tenses”; the same is applicable to those of the “future tenses”; talk more of the “conditional tenses”. This aspect is paramount since they cannot apply what they do not understand.

The teachers, as linguistic counselors, should realize that a student is happier when he/she is able to express his inner feelings and thoughts. This he/she cannot do with the tenses alone. These areas include the study of ‘la modalité,’ which includes the study of the expression of ‘l’ obligation’ in their different moods and tenses, the expression of ‘la possibilité’, ‘la probabilité’ and ‘la certitude’. Others include ‘les dire’, ‘la négation’, ‘la permission’ et ‘l’impératif’ anglais français. This is important because different cultures have different ways of expressing their inner feelings. This aspect should constitute a very important aspect of the linguistic counseling. Without this aspect of the language learning, the learner will always be afraid to express him/herself.

5 Other useful activities that counselors (French Teachers) can advise students on include;

Forming private small groups of French speaking friends

Formation of Small French drama/songs groups both on private and departmental levels.

This means, as teachers of French as a foreign language, we have a lot to do beyond entering the classrooms to teach our courses. Counseling is for every teacher irrespective of what you teach. All the teachers can encourage the students in one way or the other in form of linguistic counseling.

### **III. Summary and Conclusion**

In this study the interest has been geared towards introducing Linguistic Counseling for the students of French language in our Nigeria Universities.

The study unveils the reasons behind students’ apparent lack of interest in the learning of French language. It went further to highlight the areas of difficulties where they seriously need Linguistic Counseling. For the teachers to be able to position themselves as true counselors, there are qualities suggested in this study that could help in winning a student’s confidence to be able to harness the fruit of the counseling exercise.

Extracurricular activities which teachers can harness to help the students are also suggested. It is our conviction that this paper would help open up other avenues to lead our students to the promised land of their ambitions in life through active participation in the learning of French language.

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