
DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN THE TEACHING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE BY FRANCOPHONE TEACHERS OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN CAMEROON.

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Abstract

This study aims at earmarking some related issues regarding the teaching of English language to francophone pupils by francophone teachers. As regard the theoretical framework, the connectionism, acculturation and teaching-learning theories was used. The methodology in this study is the quantitative and qualitative approach and the random sampling technique is used in the selection of the population under study. The research instruments that are used are the interview and observation. The instruments were administered taking into consideration the pronunciation of sounds (phonology) pluralisation of nouns, sentence construction, the use of articles and tenses (morpho-syntax). A total of 73 teachers from six primary schools were interviewed and observed. The frequency distribution technique is used for analyzing data. Analyzing the data collected proves that the francophone teachers have difficulties in pronouncing some sounds in the English language. The teachers equally have difficulties in putting some nouns in their plural forms, constructing of sentences and correct use of articles and tenses. From the findings, the researcher made some recommendations. That a solid foundation should be laid during the initial training on the teaching of the English language. Secondly, in-service training should be encouraged for teachers already in the field. The researcher also suggested that Pedagogic Inspectors in charge of bilingualism should organize regular pedagogic seminar on English language for the francophone teachers.

Keywords: Difficulties, ELT, Francophone Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is the transmission of thoughts, skills and actions by the teacher to the learners. This concept can also said to be an activity that has the intention to bring about learning, and not a facilitative act. Klauer (1985:20). Cameroon's educational system is made up of two sub-systems, the Anglophone sub-system and the Francophone sub-system with her two official languages French and English. Formal teaching and learning is done using these official languages at the primary, secondary and higher levels.

Formerly at the basic level, the francophone teachers were expected to teach all the subjects in French except the English language. Like wise Anglophone teachers taught individual subjects in English excluding the French language. In order to realise a true bilingual Cameroon and the

dreams to become real bilingual, it was necessary for the two official languages to be handled by the teachers in the primary schools as initiation to enable the young learners have a good base of the languages

The aim of this study generally is to provide treatment to some of the difficulties already earmarked during the teaching of the English language by the francophone teachers in the primary schools.

1. To identify the different performance of the teachers and learners in the aspect of phonology and morpho-syntax.
2. To identify some of the causes of these poor performances
3. To sort out some remedial strategies the teachers adapt when faced with these difficulties.
4. To identify some effects on both the teachers and the learners.
5. To propose some remedial solutions.

We noticed some linguistic problems faced by Francophone teachers in the primary schools in the teaching of the English language in the areas of phonology and morpho-syntax.

As regards phonology, some of the sounds identified are treated under three sub-headings such as consonants, vowels and diphthongs. For consonants, sounds we identified / θ /, / tʃ /, / ð /, / ŋ /, / h /; for vowels we identified long / a: / and short / u /, and for diphthongs we have / av /, / ai /, / oɪ /. During the teaching –learning process the sounds change their forms at the initial, midian and word final positions.

For morpho-syntax, the difficulties identified are treated under noun morphology with complementary headings such as pluralisation of nouns, articles and prepositions. The teachers face difficulties in using plural markers on nouns such as the suffix ‘s’ and ‘es’. This problem mostly comes up when nouns with ‘y’ at the word final position needs to become ‘i’, ‘f’ becomes ‘v’ before the inclusion of the plural marker ‘es’. For morpho-syntax, the difficulties identified are treated under noun morphology with complementary headings such as pluralisation of nouns, articles and prepositions. The teachers face difficulties in using plural markers on nouns such as the suffix ‘s’ and ‘es’. This problem mostly comes up when nouns with ‘y’ at the word final position needs to become ‘i’, ‘f’ becomes ‘v’ before the inclusion of the plural marker ‘es’.

There are some situations with exceptions whereby nouns with ‘f’ need only an ‘s’ to pluralise them and uncountable nouns where plural forms remain unchangeable. Some regular nouns where whole vowel sounds are changed completely when pluralisation takes place such as ‘a’ becoming ‘e’, ‘oo’ becoming ‘ee’.

Articles are equally viewed. We observed that the francophone teachers in the primary school face problems in using the right articles and equally teaching them during the English language lessons. There is mix up between definite and indefinite articles. The ‘a’ is used instead of ‘an’.

As regard prepositions there is this confusion between ‘on’ and ‘in’ in its usage. We noticed that the francophone teachers when teaching English place ‘on’ instead of ‘in’ in a sentence, ‘at’ instead of ‘to’ and ‘to’ instead of ‘in’. The use of preposition of time and place is poorly used.

Verb morphology is also handled and concerns only tenses such as the present simple tense where teachers construct sentences and omit the third person singular marker ‘s’, the present continuous tense which is the most frequently used, where teachers tend to omit the suffix ‘ing’ at the final position of verbs and also do a lot of direct translation (French to English). As for the present perfect tense the teachers leaves out completely the ‘s’ morpheme on the verbs. For the past simple tense, the teachers use most often the present form of verbs instead of the past, for instance ‘come’ instead of ‘came’.

From our interviews and observations on the part of the learners, some of these difficulties could also be proven from the way the pupils themselves pronounce and construct sentences during

English lessons and interaction with their peers in the neighbouring bilingual primary schools. This can equally be seen from their evaluation sheets when it comes to grammar and vocabulary as well as writing.

Theoretical Framework

In this study three theories were used, the constructivism, connectionism and the acculturation.

1. Constructivism Theory by Krashen (2007)

The constructivism theory of second language acquisition was propounded by Stephen Krashen and has a large impact in all areas of second language research and teaching since the 1980s. This linguist in this theory brought out five main hypotheses:

- The Acquisition-Learning hypotheses
- The Monitor hypotheses,
- The natural Order hypotheses,
- The Input hypotheses and
- The Affective Filter hypotheses.

According to the linguist, Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most fundamental of all the hypotheses in his theory and the most widely known among linguists and language practitioners. Krashen (2007:49) says there are two independent systems of second language performance: ‘the acquired system’ and the “learned system”. The acquire system or acquisition is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language – natural communication – in which speakers are concentrated in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act.

The ‘learned system’ or learning is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge ‘about’ the language, for example knowledge of grammatical rules. According to this linguist, ‘learning is less important than ‘acquisition’.

The Monitor hypotheses, according to Krashen, explains the relationship between acquisition and learning and defines the influence of the latter on the former. The monitoring function is the practical result of the learned grammar. The acquisition system is the utterances initiator, while the learning system performs the role of the ‘monitor’ or the ‘editor’. The ‘monitor’ acts in a planning, editing and correcting function when three specific conditions are met: that is, the second language learner has sufficient time at his or her disposal, he or she focuses on form or thinks about correctness, and he or she knows the rule.

It appears that the role of conscious learning is somewhat limited in second language performance. According to Krashen, the role of the monitor is or should be minor being used only to correct deviations from ‘normal’ speech and to give speech a more ‘polished’ appearance. The Natural Order hypothesis is based on research findings which suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a ‘natural order’ which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. This order seemed to be independent of the learners’ age, first Language background and conditions of exposure. There are similarities that reinforced the existence of a Natural Order of language acquisition. Krashen however points out that the implementation the natural order hypothesis are not that a language programme syllabus should be based on the order found in the studies. In fact, he rejects grammatical sequencing when the goal is language acquisition.

2. The Siemens Theory of Connectivism (2005)

This theory as propounded by Siemens (2005:23) is a combination of cognitivism and constructivism views. Connectivism is the integration of principles explored by chaos, network, complexity and self-organisation theories. Learning is a process that occurs within nebulous environments of shifting core elements – not entirely under the control of the individual. Learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organisation or a database), is focused on connecting specialised information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing.

3. The Acculturation Theory by Schumann (1978)

This theory was proposed by Schumann (1978) which he says is the process of becoming adapted to a new culture. In some respects, language learning involves the acquisition of a new identity. Therefore, learning the second official language or becoming bilingual in this same context is often viewed as second culture learning because the learner has to learn completely different characteristics.

Schumann (1978:63) underscores this when he says “*Language is one aspect of culture and the degree to which a learner acculturates with the target language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language*”. This theory is governed both by the degree of social and psychological distance between the learner and the target culture.

The social and psychological distance presupposes the degree to which learners are socially close to or apart from each other. In this view, it is presumed that when social and psychological distance are large, the learner may fail to progress very far in learning the OL2. On the other hand, when the social and psychological factors are positive, learners may learn the second language with less difficulty.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative and qualitative approach was used in this study and the random sampling technique used in the selection of the population under study. Our sample population in this study is drawn from teachers precisely Government francophone primary schools. Out of the six schools (73) teachers were involved. The data for this study was collected using three instruments, the interview and observation guides for the teachers and evaluation checklist for the learners.

Two instruments were used in collecting the data for this study, the interview and observation guides and evaluation checklist. These instruments were administered at different periods though the objectives were the same. The interview was done face to face with each teacher and also with teachers in groups. The observation was done in two phases. The outside hearing and the class participation. For the outside hearing the investigator stayed out of the classroom where she listens to teachers teaching English and sounds pronounced wrongly were taken note of and in class participation the researcher took part in the lesson as a learner thereby jotting down wrongly pronounced sounds. These instruments were administered taking into consideration the pronunciation of sounds (phonology) pluralisation of nouns, sentence construction.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following the analysis of the results a number of statements can be made. First, the training schools of these teachers should ameliorate their teaching methods and techniques to enable future francophone teachers to be able to teach the English language with less difficulties in the years ahead. Second, more pedagogic seminars on English language should be organised more often to enable the francophone teachers ameliorate their methods. Third, refresher courses and pilot

schools should be placed at the disposal of the francophone teachers to enable them have better notions on how to handle the English language lessons. Forth, the difficulties already identified should be looked into. In discussing the findings the researcher has examine two variables used in the study phonology and morpho-syntax. For phonology, some of the sounds teachers and pupils face difficulties in pronouncing which also leads to poor spellings will be treated below followed by morphosyntax.

1. PHONOLOGY

From the table both the teachers' pronunciation has been indicated because the learners repeat what they here from their teachers especially in this situation that the language is a second language to both the teachers and learners.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Teachers According to Poor Pronunciation of Consonants.

CONSONANTS	TEACHERS	%
/ θ /	67/73	91.78
/ tʃ / :	63/73	86.30
/ð/,	65/73	68.04
/ŋ/	70/73	95.89
/h/	73/73	100

The above table shows the total number of teachers who have difficulties in pronouncing the consonants mentioned. sound/ θ / 67/73 teachers giving 91.78% ,sound/tʃ/ 63/73 teachers making 86.30%, sound/ð/ 65/73 teachers giving 68.04% ,Sound /ŋ/ 70/73giving 95.89%, 73/73 teachers have difficulties in pronouncing the sound/ h/ making 100%. The part of the pupils have not been stated because it will be a repetition of the existing percentages of the teachers.

Table 2. Recapitulation of Teachers According to Poor Pnunciation of Vowel Sounds.

VOWEL SOUNDS	TEACHERS	%
/a:/	65/73	89.04
/u /	62/73	84.93

From the above table we notice that 65/73 teachers have difficulties in pronouncing the long /a:/ and the long /u/ sounds giving an 89.04% and 84.93% respectively

Table 3. Recapitulation of Teachers/ Pupil According to Poor Pnunciation of Diphtongs.

DIPHTONGS	TEACHERS	%
/ av/	66/73	90.41
/aɪ/	67/73	91.78
/ɔɪ/	58/73	79.45

It can be noticed from the above table that the three diphtongs mentioned posses a big problem to the teachers during the teaching learning process of the English language. 66/73 teachers have difficulties in pronouncing the sound / av/giving a 90.41%, 67/73 on sound /aɪ/ making a 91.78% and 58/73 teachers on sound /aɪ/ making 79.45%.

2. Morpho-syntax

Noun Morphology

In the course of our investigation, we realised that, the francophone teachers apply one of the morphological rules which states an ‘s’ should be added to a noun to pluralise it. Below are some examples .

Suffix ‘s’

<u>Singular forms</u>	<u>Plural forms</u>	<u>Teachers’/ pupils’ spellings</u>
Book	Books	Books

<u>Singular nouns</u>	<u>Plural nouns</u>	<u>Teachers’/ pupils’ spelling</u>
Class	Classes	Class
Box	Boxes	Boxs

Some nouns having ‘y’ at word final position changes. ‘y’ becomes ‘i’ before the ‘es’ is added in order to pluralise such words. Some examples of such nouns are listed below.

<u>Singular nouns</u>	<u>Plural nouns</u>	<u>Teachers’ / pupils’ spelling</u>
Lady	Ladies	Ladys

There is another rule which states that ‘f’ at word final position becomes ‘v’ and the suffix ‘es’ added to it when putting the noun in its plural form. Below are some of those nouns.

<u>Singular nouns</u>	<u>Plural nouns</u>	<u>Teachers’/Pupils’ spelling</u>
Thief	Thieves	Thiefs
Loaf	Loaves	Loafs

However, there are some nouns which do not take any plural morpheme. This is very common with uncountable nouns. Some examples are as follow;

<u>Singular nouns</u>	<u>Plural nouns</u>	<u>Teachers’/pupils’ spelling</u>
Air	Air	Airs
Dust	Dust	Dusts

We got some sentences in the continuous tenses whereby the last suffixes of the verbs are not being pronounced in the teaching and learning process.

George drinkin water.

George is drinking water.

Verb Morphology

Verbs are the central elements in any human speech. This section focuses on the morphological manipulation of the verbs by teachers and pupils of Francophone primary schools. Linguistically, we acknowledge the view that the morphology of verbs is determined by the relationship it has with other elements in the sentence. The researcher, during investigation, noticed that the teachers had difficulties in teaching verbs in various forms.

- 1) The present continuous tense
- 2) The present perfect tense
- 3) The simple past tense
- 4) Articles
- 5) Prepositions

Present Simple Tense

The present simple tense is used to talk about repeated actions or habits. It was noticed that, most often there is the presence and at times omission of the third person singular marker 's' during the teaching and learning process of English by the Francophone teachers. Below are some sentences involving such omissions.

I plays football.

I play football

Present Continuous Tense

This tense is used to express an action still going on. We observed that, there is omission of the prefix (ing) on the verbs when the teachers and pupils try to construct sentences in the present continuous tense. We got some sentences in the continuous tenses whereby the last suffixes of the verbs are not being pronounced in the teaching and learning process.

George drink water.

George is drinking water

Present Perfect Tense

The verb in this tense tells us that an action has just been done or completed. The word 'have' or 'has' is being used and the teachers and pupils confuse as to which to use. There are these difficulties of when to change some of the verbs from the present simple to the present perfect tense.

He give his book to Mary

He gave his book to Mary

Past Simple Tense

The past simple tense is used to talk about things that have already happened or taken place. The sentences below are in two different forms. The first is the poorly constructed sentence and shows the errors the teachers make during exercises of this nature. The second sentence is the correct form that was supposed to be taught to the pupils.

The girl come to school late yesterday.

The girl came to school late yesterday.

Articles

Articles pose a problem during the construction of sentences on both the part of the teachers and the learners. We observed that there is poor use of indefinite articles such as "a", "the" and in some situations the articles are omitted completely. There is also the use of French articles such as 'une' and 'le' during the teaching and learning process of the English language in Francophone primary schools. Some examples of poor use of indefinite article are listed below.

The Use of Indefinite Articles

Looking at the sentences below the first sentence is in the wrong form while the second is in the correct form.

I want to eat a apple.

I want to eat an apple

The Use of French Articles "une" and "le"

This case came out mostly from the learners who do not want to spend time while constructing. When questioned why they hurry, some pupils responded that it is because it serves

the item they want to identify. Below are some sentences involving the French articles “une” and “le”.

Using French articles instead of English articles

I want un book

I want one book

Paul gave me deux pencil

Paul gave me the pencil

Prepositions

There is that frequent use of “on” instead of “in”, the use of “in” instead of “to”, the use of “at” instead of “to” and the use of “to” instead of “on”. Pupils also have that tendency of using the prepositions wrongly. Examples of sentences having these problems are listed below while the correct sentences are written below each.

Using “on” instead of “in”

On the morning, he wears his uniform.

In the morning, he wears his uniform.

On the afternoon, I will buy my books.

SOME FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE DIFFICULTIES

The linguistic situation of Cameroon has contributed enormously on the difficulties the francophone teachers face in the pronunciation of some sounds in the second official language as has been mentioned above. We are going to look at some of the factors on the part of the teachers and the pupil followed suit by the effect on teachers and pupils performances.

1) Cultural factor

Most of the teachers had acquired their first language (national language) before acquiring the French and English language they use in transmitting information to the learners in the classroom. These three languages already place the teachers under what Tadadjeu (2007) refers to as ‘trilingualism’. The sound systems of these languages are different and therefore push the teacher to have ideas of varied sounds which can easily confuse the teacher during the teaching process of the English language.

2) Social Factor

In relation to our study, we will look at the different forms of bilingualism in order to bring out some social effects.

a) Asymmetric Bilingualism

Asymmetric bilingualism is when there is unequal knowledge of the languages spoken. This means that the competence rate of one of the languages is higher than the other. Evidently, there seems to be unanimity on the pursuance of school or individual bilingualism through the school medium. However, this category of bilingualism appears not only hard to achieve in the country in the short term but also has the risk of creating a communication vacuum as the teachers who have a good base in French will not be able to teach the second official language (OL2) English.

Most of the francophone teachers during their social activities make use of the French language which they are competent in to buy and sell, during pedagogic seminars and communicating within the home and school milieu. This means that the competence rate of

French language is higher than that of English language to the francophone teachers which permits them to make use of the French language more than the English language.

b) Contrastive Analysis

Some of the teachers and pupils both have their first and second languages which they have already acquired (French and a mother tongue) which have an influence on the third language (English) teaching and acquiring. The structure of the first language is a contrast to the second and also to the third. These differences cause the teachers to find difficulties in teaching the third language as they are faced with new grammatical elements

c) Pedagogic Training

Teachers are expected to undergo training through a teachers training college before they enter the classrooms to teach as professionals. The pedagogic training which teachers receive from the training colleges is very important especially when the goals of the training schools are met.

The Internal Structure Two Official Languages

One of the causes of the difficulties teachers and pupils face in the pronunciation of some sounds and construction of sentences is the differences that exist between the internal structures of the French language which is the Francophone teachers' first official language OL1 and English which is second official language (OL2). The two languages (English and French) have separate grammatical rules and the Francophone teachers become mixed up and confused when teaching the children certain aspects in the English language especially on grammar.

The teachers teach English using some French aspects especially in oral exercises which they claim is to guide the learners understand better what they are teaching. The reasons the Francophone teachers explained why the use of French words while teaching English ties with what Grant (1978) says about teaching and learning of children.

CONCLUSION

First, the Ministry of Basic education should motivate the teachers by providing enough time and finances for teachers to go for refresher courses in the Pilot Linguistic Centre that some teachers complained of not making an attempt to visit the pilot centre because of lack of financial support. Secondly, Teachers in the teacher training colleges should put more efforts in training the future teachers such that within a short period of time the state will have effective Francophone teachers for English language. Thirdly, the Francophone teachers already in the field should endeavour to change their attitude towards the use of the second official language and be prepared to embrace bilingualism. They need to develop interest for the language, make extra efforts to speak, read and write in order to be effective.

This study does not claim to be complete or have covered all the difficulties the francophone teachers have in the teaching of English language to francophone pupils. The following suggestions for further research are therefore important. The investigation on more difficulties is crucial to enable Cameroon be perfectly bilingual as it ought to.

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