



Phonetic and lexico-grammar influences of the french language on the english learning process in beninese secondary schools

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Abstract

Benin EFL learners face some challenges in the teaching/learning process. One of the most remarkable difficulties in this process is the pronunciation problem. This paper explores the phonetic and lexico-grammar influences of the French language on the English Learning Process in Beninese Secondary Schools. The methodology adopted during the investigation is quantitative and qualitative one. It consists in collecting information from EFL teachers and learners through the means of classroom observation and questionnaires. The data obtained from questionnaires have been analyzed and discussed in order to draw out relevant conclusions. The results obtained reveal that learners are facing challenges in the English language skills such as: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Taking into account what has been said so far, ways and means have been suggested to reduce the negative influences of the French language on Beninese EFL learners.

Keywords: pronunciation, difficulties, influence, English language, foreign language

Introduction

Les apprenants béninois étudiant l'Anglais en tant qu'une langue étrangère, rencontrent certains défis dans le processus enseignement-apprentissage. La difficulté liée à la bonne prononciation demeure l'une des difficultés les plus remarquables. Cette étude se propose d'analyser les influences phonétiques et lexico-grammaticales de la langue française sur le processus de l'enseignement de la langue anglaise dans les collèges au Bénin. Les méthodes quantitative et qualitative, consistant à collecter des informations chez des enseignants d'Anglais et apprenants à travers des visites de classes et questionnaires, ont guidé cette étude. Les données collectées à base des questionnaires ont été analysées et discutées afin de tirer de conclusions pertinentes. Les résultats obtenus révèlent des défis dans les habiletés de la langue anglaise, notamment l'écoute, le parlé, la lecture et la production écrite. Tenant compte de tout ce qui précède, des voies et moyens ont été proposés pour réduire l'influence négative de la langue française sur les apprenants

Mots-clés

prononciation, difficultés, influence, langue anglaise, langue étrangère.

Introduction

Human beings are part of God's creatures leaving on the earth. They need one another in numerous domains so that they can communicate; this may be through gestures or language according to the case. Language is commonly known through acquisition or learning processes in a natural or an artificial way, without any knowledge about grammatical rules gathering its functioning. Treating of language acquisition and learning, Haynes (2005) ^[11] states: Children acquire language through a subconscious process during which they are unaware of grammatical rules. This is similar to the way they acquire their first language. They get

a feel for what is and what isn't correct. In order to acquire language, the learner needs a source of natural communication.

... Young students who are in process of acquiring English get plenty of "on the job" practice. They readily acquire the language to communicate with classmates. Language learning, on the other hand, is not communicative. It is the result of direct instruction in the rules of language. (p.47)

However, globalization, human relationships and the progress of technology make people more and more connected to one another, nowadays. Thus, countries can hardly live in autarky and learning foreign language, more specifically the English language, has become a necessity. In this respect, learning and understanding English becomes very important because English helps to communicate easily and it has become the most spoken worldwide language, nowadays. The learning and the understanding of the English language is therefore a great tool against linguistic barriers in many countries all over the world. But, this learning of English and its understanding is not without difficulties especially in countries where French is established as a first official language in schools and universities. English is introduced in the educational system as a foreign language. Vocabulary is in fact crucial in expressing ideas and thoughts when communicating in any language and more especially in English but Beninese EFL learners face many challenges related to the English language learning, especially in the domain of pronunciation. They mispronounce many English words due to the interference of the French language on the former, and the discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation in English which make them non competent.

One of the most remarkable difficulties in this process is the pronunciation problem. While holding a conversation in English with students, miscommunication often occurs due to mispronunciation and on the second hand, while asking them to read a text or passage of text in classroom situation.

They wrongly pronounce many words even when they have an adequate level in grammar and vocabulary (in the first case). It has been noticed in Beninese secondary schools that many students are unable to read English words correctly while speaking either with one another or with their teachers; they pronounce many English words like French words.

Focusing on the problems stated above, this research work aims at answering the following two research questions:

- How does the French language influence students who learn English as a Foreign Language?
- How can we classify these influences?
- Basing on the above questions, I have come to assume that:
- Benin EFL learners face difficulties in pronouncing English words because they are unaware of rules gathering this language;
- They also face difficulties because of some features of linguistic interference. Students mix up French and English languages rules. These interferences are many but they can be classified as phonetic or phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic and environmental.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Manifestations of the Linguistic Interferences on the English Learning Process of French Learners

2.1.1 Pronunciation Interferences

Phonetics and phonology are concerned with speech, the way in which humans produce and hear speech. Therefore, pronunciation has to do with oral or verbal communication. It is at this level that most of Beninese learners face more difficulties especially those acquiring English as a foreign language (EFL) as well as some teachers. Frankly speaking and without exaggerating teachers are also concerned with pronunciation challenges. But, it is worse at the level of learners because they do not try to better or improve their pronunciation as some teachers do every day across dictionaries, reading and browsing on internet. However, choral and individual repetitions (that some teachers neglect) which are methods and strategies used to teach pronunciation in Beninese secondary schools by teachers are not sufficient for the acquisition of the Received Pronunciation (RP). The table below shows some deviant usages in the pronunciation of some monophthongs and diphthongs vowels.

The spelling under L1 stands for the sound under Deviant Pronunciation (D.P) which simply means that when a Beninese EFL learner is reading or taking a dictation from his or her teacher, he/she resorts usually to the French language symbol sound and does the same thing while holding conversation with his/her fellows or in writings. This principle is a very misleading guide and it accounts for a great number of Beninese students' errors on spelling. Stress has been put on the baffling nature of the pronunciation on some English monophthongs and diphthongs which are both vowels. They are not easy to predict and these generate atrocity errors with awkward sounds to ears. The consonants, on the contrary do not give much stress to the students, assuming that the French and English consonant sounds are almost the same expect:

- /ŋ/: voiced, velar and nasal consonant sound where we encounter students' weak level in mastering this English consonant sound. An instance of this is the mispronunciation of "bank"; it is realized as [bæŋk]

instead of *[bænk].

- /θ/: voiceless, dental and fricative consonant sound. As illustration the "throat" is realized as [θrəʊt] instead of *[frəʊt], here the consonant sound is replaced by the voiceless labio-dental and fricative consonant sound /f/.
- Etc.

Learning a language requires a good understanding of its linguistics structures and morphemes. As far as the English language is concerned, the influences of the French language in this field must be taken into account. In fact, though some alphabetic letters of both languages are the same, their pronunciation differs from a language to another and from a word to another one.

The letter "a" for instance is pronounced /a/ in French and in any word but in English, it varies according to words. It is realized as:/eɪ/ in "data",/ɑ:/ in "bar", /ɪ/ in "village", /æ / in band,/ə/ in vista, etc.

From these above examples, it is clear that an English word pronounced according to French phonetics may completely lose its meaning as George H. V. (1972:88) has stated it: "When a learner fails to observe the distinction in pronunciation, the distinction in meaning will also be lost." Thus, during an interaction, if the English word "baker" is pronounced as *[bake] in French rather than ['beɪkə] in English, the interlocutor will understand nothing, and then its meaning is lost. Likewise, if "headache" is pronounced ['hɛdɑʃ] according to French pronunciation rather than ['hedeɪk] in English, the word may not be understood by the interlocutor.

2.1.2 Lexical Deviations

The second type of interference is the lexical one. It occurs when the vocabulary of learners is wrongly inserted in the new language they are learning.

Let us consider the following sentences for better understanding:

1. I *assisted* to a football match yesterday
2. she wears her new dress *to attire* her friends
3. He is *actually* sleeping inside
4. I *demand* my visitor's name

From the above sentences, it is clearly understood that there are some problems at the level of lexis. A student uttering such sentences simply wants to express his desire or feeling but lexically, errors or miscommunication occur. If he or she had great background in English as in French, he would be able to make differences at certain words' meaning. In that vista, he may say:

1. *I *attended* a football match yesterday.
"To assist" means "to help" so it is not welcome in the sentence. "Attended is the most convenient word because it means "participated".
2. *She wears her new jacket *to attire* her friends
"To attire" in English means "to wear" in French then there is a lexical problem. The suitable word is "to attract".
3. *He is *actually* sleeping inside
In this context "presently" fits the sentence than "Actually"
4. *I *demand* my visitor's name
"To demand" means "to require" then "ask" should be used. These examples of lexical interference errors are just a few of the numerous ones made by French pupils learning English as a foreign language.

2.1.3 Grammar Deviations

As it is previously said, grammatical interferences affect the structure of the target language and its syntax that is to say, the way words are arranged in meaningful sequences. Through this research work, some of widespread grammatical errors in our students' assignments have been described so far and still continuing. These ones being the most persistent are associated with: syntax (words order), preposition, personal and relative pronouns, inflexions, negation.

2.1.3.1 Syntactic Errors

The fundamental rules for sentence building in English are unknown to our students. The tendency to resort to French sentences patterns is obviously in the following examples.

- Sandra plays often handball instead of *Sandra often plays handball.
- Peter goes always to school on time instead of *Peter always goes to school on time.

These given examples reveal the awkwardness in the arrangement of the words.

2.1.3.2 Misuse of Preposition

Let's start with the following illustrations:

- Richard is going to school = Richard va à l'école
- *Richard is to schools = Richard est à l'école

In the first sentence, the preposition "to" is well used because in English, it indicates movement thus expresses a direction. But in the second sentence, "to" is misused. Here, it is a matter of position not of direction thus "in" or "at" should be used. "in" is within a place, area, district or country whereas "at" is for a very specific place then "at" is convenient. As correction, best sentences are:

- Richard is going to school = Richard va à l'école
- Richard is at schools = Richard est à l'école

2.1.3.3 Deviant Usage of Personal and Relative Pronouns

- *Our father gives *we* breakfast every day = notre père nous donne le petit déjeuner chaque jour.
- *The car *who* colour is blue is mine = le véhicule qui a la couleur blue est le mien.

In the first sentence, the misuse of "we" instead of "us" makes the sentence incorrect; this fact is due to the interference of the French language's structure in English. That is, literal translation is done. "we" and "us" mean "Nous" in French thus for students, personal pronoun does not change whether it is a subject or object.

In the second example, we still have problem but at relative pronoun; "who" is used for subject (person) so "whose" should be used in the sentence. Then, the right sentences are:

- Our father gives *us* breakfast every day = notre père nous donne le petit déjeuner chaque jour.
- *The car *whose* colour is blue is mine = le véhicule qui a la couleur blue est le mien.

2.1.3.4 Wrong Use of Inflexions

Let's again look the following sentences:

- *These bags are expensive.
- *We like ours parents.

These deviant usages involve mainly adjectives probably because in French, they can be either singular or plural. They take the "s" inflexion when the noun they qualified is plural. That is the only case an adjective can be inflected in French and this is not applicable in English. This French rule, applied by French learners of English as a foreign language, impacts them negatively and they transfer the rule in English, as in the above sentences.

However, in English, there is no inflected form for adjectives except for the comparative if the adjectives are monosyllable. Correct sentences are:

- These bags are expensive.
- We like our parents.

2.1.3.5 Wrong Construction of Negative Sentences

Let's once again examine these sentences:

- *Nobody *did not* see the thief = personne n'a vu le voleur.
- *He couldn't have *no* problem = il ne pourrait avoir aucun problème.
- *I haven't never been in Kétou = je ne suis jamais allé(e) à Kétou.

Errors of these types also occur sometimes as lapsus linguae when we are interacting in French but, they are much common among the first cycle drop out from school. They are called double negation errors.

Students are sometimes aware of this type of double negation; that it is seen as mistake, in French. But the matter is that they barely know how to avoid them (double negation errors) in English sentences as it is literary translated; because they could not avoid these types of double negation even in French. They could simply say, in an accepted way:

- Nobody saw the thief or anybody did not see the thief.
- He couldn't have any problem or he could have no problem.
- I haven't ever been in Kétou or I have not been in Kétou.

2.1.3.6 Deviant Use of the Future Tense in Adverbial Clauses of Time

A clause is a group of relative words containing a given verb, but forming part only of a sentence. The adverbial clauses of time which we have dealt with are introduced by when, as soon as, etc.

Here are illustrations through literary sentences:

1. *I will give you your money as soon as my mother *will come* back = je te donnerai ton argent dès que ma mère sera de retour.
2. *Jacob will buy a car when he *will be* rich = Jacob achètera une voiture quand il sera riche.

These sentences are wrong sentences because of the use of future tense in the adverbial clause of time. The error derives from a literal translation from French rules, which is not acceptable in English. English has also its own rules: if a verb is already in future, the adverbial clause will be in simple present tense; therefore, they could simply say or write in a correct way:

1. I will give you your money as soon as my mother *comes* back
2. Jacob will buy a car when he *is* rich.

After dealing with manifestations that negatively influence the learning process of English as foreign language of

French learners, let’s now define some conceptions or terms that will be helpful through this research.

3 Methodology of the Research

3.1 Research Population and Sampling

This study is chiefly based on the English as a foreign language learning in the townships of Adjohoun, Ifangni (Houmbo) and Sèmè-Podji; including EFL teachers. To observe the use of oral narrative composition, EFL teachers and learners were mainly implicated. In total, one hundred and ninety-nine (199) learners are chosen and thirty-seven (37) EFL teachers were sampled from the school.

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires have been addressed to thirty-seven (37) teachers selected from the schools selected, and to one hundred and ninety-nine (199) students.

3.1.2 Classroom Observation

After addressing questionnaires to teachers and students of Adjohoun, Houmbo and Sèmè-Podji secondary schools, some visits have been paid to some teachers to observe the lessons delivered to learners. This classroom observation has as purpose to see how the French language affects the students’ learning of English as a foreign language with a view to proposing remedies to it on the first hand; and to seek for teacher attitudes when students falls into errors (when French affects their English skills); whether they make correction automatically or later round, in a pacific way or by discouraging them; on the other hand. After each class observation (at the end of the lesson), floor was given to us for a brief talk. This talk helps us to exchange with the students in another way and to confirm their provided answer on the questionnaire sheets. After students’ interview, teachers are the next. The staff rooms have served for the gathering and discussions about the “lecture” on the influence of the French language on the English learning process as a foreign language.

4. Presentation, Interpretation and Discussion of the Findings

4.1 Presentation and Data Analysis

4.1.1 Feedback on the Teachers’ Questionnaire

Table 1: The way learners pronounce some English words

Suggested answers	Participants	Percentage (%)
Frequently	25	67.56
Sometimes	12	32.44
Never	00	00
Total	37	100

From table 1, 25 out of 37 that is 67.56% of the participants have declared that their students frequently pronounce some English words like French words whereas 12 out of 37 that is 32.43% said that pupils sometimes make the error. The following figure displays the frequency of French speaking by learners during English classes.

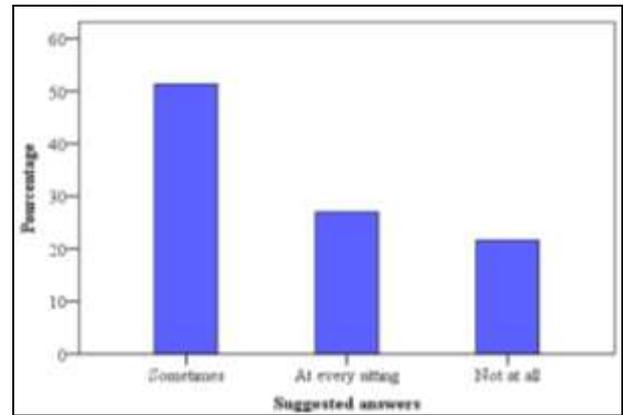


Fig 1: Frequency of French speaking by learners during English classes

The figure 1 shows that 19 teachers sometimes teach English in French with a percentage of 51.35%. 10 others with 27.03% said that, it is done at every sitting while 08 others dislike this attitude; they hate speaking French in classroom while teaching English to students. The next table shows the way learners write English words which sound like French words.

Table 2: The way learners write English words which sound like French words

Suggested answers	Participants	Percentage (%)
Frequently	13	35.13
Sometimes	24	64.87
Not at all	00	00
Total	37	100

The table 2 shows that 24 teachers out of 37 who have submitted their questionnaire that is 64.87% reveal that students sometimes write English words like French words which have the same or almost the same sound while 13 that is 35.13% said that it is frequent. The coming figure indicates the way learners translate French words or expressions into English. This aims at finding out if their students make word per word translation from French expression into English.

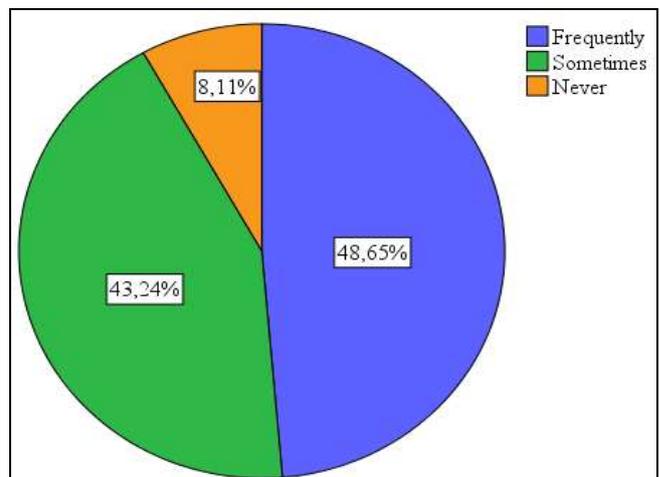


Fig 2: The way learners translate French words or expressions into English

The figure 2 indicates that 18 teachers out of 37, with 48.65% have revealed that students frequently translate literally French words or expressions into English; 16 other teachers (43.24%) declared that it is translated sometimes and 3 teachers said that some learners never do it. The next figure analyses the difficulties you encounter while teaching English as a foreign language.

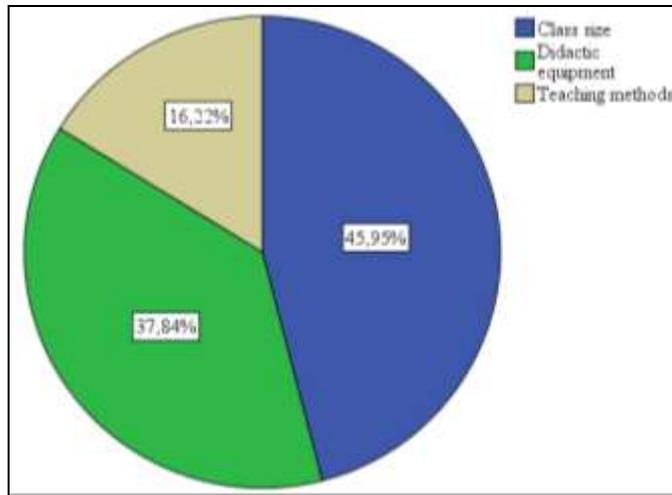


Fig 3: The difficulties you encounter while teaching English as a foreign language

As it can be noticed in figure 3, 45.95% of teachers complained about the class size. Moreover, 37.84% complain about didactic equipment such as teachers' books, students' books, dictionaries, language laboratories as well as pedagogic books which is helpful in teaching and will make the later easier. Combining the lack of pedagogic books and the lack of training, 16.22% also complained about teaching methods. Thus, some teachers suggested that phonetics and phonology should be taught in Benin secondary schools in order to reduce the influence of French language on the learning of English as a Foreign Language. Others said that language laboratory will help students to communicate. Apart from those three suggestions, teachers have also dealt with other aspects amongst which we can quote: be more familiar to the dictionary, class trip to English countries, starting teaching English since the public primary schools as some private schools do.

4.1.2 Feedback on the Students' Questionnaire

Table 3: The way learners pronounce some English words

Suggested answers	Participants	Percentage (%)
Frequently	113	56.78
Sometimes	82	41.21
Never	04	2.01
Total	199	100

From table 3, 113 out of 199 which is 56.78% of the students have declared that they frequently pronounce some English words like French words while 82 out of 199 that is 41.21% confessed that they do it sometimes. However, 4 of them with a percentage of 2.01 completed the never place with a stick. So it can be concluded that most of them use French phonetics to pronounce English words.

Table 4: The way learners read English words which sound like French words

Suggested answers	Participants	Percentage (%)
Frequently	129	64.82
Sometimes	64	32.16
Not at all	06	03.02
Total	199	100

The table 4 proves that the majority of the students read English words like French ones through this statistic: 129 learners out of 199 who submitted their questionnaire that is 64.82%; write very often English words like French words which have almost the same sound and sometimes 64/199 do it while 06 with 03.02% denied.

Table 5: The way learners translate French words or expressions into French words

Suggested answers	Participants	Percentage (%)
Frequently	102	51.26
Sometimes	95	47.74
Rarely	02	01
Total	199	100

From table 5, it can be noticed that 102 students out of 199, that is, 51.26% have revealed that they frequently translate literally French words or expressions into English; 16 others confessed that it is translated sometimes and 02 students declared that they rarely do it. From the statistics above, it is gleaned that a great majority of learners translate French words into English literally. As conclusion, almost of the students make literary translation of French words or expression into English.

4.2 Interpretation of the Findings

4.2.1 Questionnaire to Teachers

The data process of the first table shows that the majority of learners (67.56%) pronounce English words like French ones according to their teachers' daily experiences. Teachers have confessed that their learners very often pronounce English words like the French ones though they are taught the English alphabet letters at the beginning of their English learning. The conclusion is that the francophone environment in which Beninese learn English influences their English pronunciation.

As far as the second table is concerned, through teachers' quizzes, despite the fact that lessons are copied on the board, learners made use of the French phonemes that they had in mind; that is, they write English words like French words, declared 24 teachers with a percentage of 64.87. An example of this error is the written of the English word "circumstance"; they often write it like the French word "circonstance". It is true that learning a language is not an easy affaire though we had enough to do; we should not then combine both languages.

By combining the first two tables, it can be deduced that the French language easily hinders or disrupts the learning process of English as a foreign language in many ways: at the pronunciation, the writing, the spelling and the semantic - meaning levels. As matter of fact, those are the principle factors worrying our students and under which our topic takes place. In another term, the environment in which students are leaving and learning EFL (French place) influences their English pronunciation, their writing and others aspects while acquiring that language.

In the same regard, while interacting, expressing opinion, giving order even through classroom tests (commonly known as quiz); students made literal translation. They are haunted by French linguistic notions and no more care about French ones. They translate French words into English, told a great number of teachers. For frequently, 46.65% of teachers said so and 43.24 said that it was sometimes. As matter of fact students are not going to be much blamed because talking of translation, it is not a simple affaire. Translating a word is not at all easy and there is no a standard method of translating words from English to French. The Google can also have an influence on this fact. If one tries to search for translation of a passage or a text on “Google traduction” he or she would mislead and pass aside the answer if the person does not have a good background, because it also contains much lack.

It can also be remarked that an important number of teachers are untrained. They did not receive any training before starting teaching English in Benin secondary schools. After three years spent at university, they got License degree and ran into teaching yard. We are then in presence of non-qualified teachers teaching English basing on their academic background and they had been doing this for a relatively short period. Moreover, 51.35% of them teach English in French in classroom and this strategy is the opposite of the pedagogical rules. This is surely in one or another way, the repercussion of being non trained teacher, and this may impact students.

Tackle their encounter difficulties 78.38% deplore or regret the class seize while 45.95% talked about lack of didactic materials, for question number 6. Can one imagine that some teachers have around 85 students within the same class? In such a case, how can a teacher successfully transmit notions? According to Approach Based on Competence (ABC), the top seize of a class is 25 but in Benin, it is totally the opposite. It is even better at teacher’s level because the victims are students. Among those victims, some students make a mess; others are turbulent, lazy, busybody, etc. This kind of students cannot follow their teachers and not only the impact will spring on them but also they will prevent good diligent learners from paying attention to their teachers’ explanations.

For the encountered difficulties relative to the lack of didactic materials, didactic materials especially laboratory languages are indeed crucial tools in teaching a successful language. Students ought to have in front of them their books, teachers with their ones and especially the pedagogic book, which is not quite a reality in all colleges. There are even some schools whereby teachers are spared from their rights as far as documents are concerned. Other schools don’t get libraries and reading book becomes a hardship task for learners because of scarcity of financial means and difficulties faced by parents, lack of English dictionaries, language laboratories ...

As for suggestions, a great majority of teachers talked about teacher’s motivation. This can be explained by the relationship (conviviality) that ought to exist between members of the board and teachers, bonuses for teachers from the government, and the enrollment of the temporary teachers. All those aspects are included in motivation and contribute to the success of learners. Indeed, motivation is of great value in the rank of teachers as well as learners because without it, success is not often observed in the domain of teaching and in other domains. Students have to

be rewarded and motivated so that they could be exited in working. Moreover, motivation mentioned by untrained teacher is first of all their enrollment. They ought to be known to the government and this will spare them from combining schools which makes them sometimes non competent and impact learners. Another group of teachers suggested inserting phonetics and phonology in Benin secondary schools in order to better our students’ pronunciation and to remedy the influence of the French language on English.

4.2.2 Questionnaire to Students

The data analysis of table 3 reveals that more than the half of the students (56.78%) pronounced frequently English words like French ones; so French words influence the students. Though they may have the will of good pronunciation, as words look like each other and they were not told that their French pronunciation was wrong, they just apply it in English.

For question 4, in the same regard, 52.76% of the students semantically mix up English words and French words; that is, words which have the same or almost the same spelling are given the same meaning. An instance of this is *severe* and *sevère*. “Severe” (an English word) means “grave” in French whereas “sevère” (a French word) means “stern” in English. The two words have the same spelling but do not have the same pronunciation; they do not also have the same meaning. From that point, the same conclusion is drawn as above.

Moreover, 64.82% students have exposed their failure in writing English words which have the same or almost the same sound as French ones and in translating others from French into English. From this experience a majority of students apply French rules in building English sentences. They forget or pay less attention to the discrepancy existing between both languages; and for not being overloaded in structures; French language’s structures are applied in English by them.

From table 5, it can be noticed that 102 students out of 199, that is, 51.26% have revealed that they frequently translate literally French words or expressions into English; 16 others confessed that it is translated sometimes and 02 students declared that they rarely do it. From the statistics above, it is gleaned that a great majority of learners translate French words into English literally. As conclusion, almost of the students make literary translation of French words or expression into English. Similarly, the majority of the students approved the discrepancy between both languages and declared that the worldwide and most spoken language is English. However, the question that could come across one’s mind is to know why despite the fact that they are aware of this discrepancy they still mix up words syntactically, semantically, grammatically, lexically... we can provide a ‘suitable’ answer by saying that it is due to the lack of English notions (low level in English linguistic and in English phonetics and phonology); what makes me confirm what their teachers have previously said. To simply remedy this influence of French language on English language, government in relation with authorities in charge of education have to insert in secondary schools’ program, the English pronunciation starting with the insertion of phonetics and phonology in program after the learning of English alphabet that is being taught, as being suggested. Also the English language learning has to be inserted in

primary schools as do already some private schools already.

4.3 Discussion of the Findings

It has been previously asserted that students learning English as a foreign language fail during their English learning process, mostly in pronouncing correctly English words, in translating some French words or expressions into English and in writing some English words; due to the influences of the French language on the English one. The analysis of the data has revealed a lot of challenges of pronunciation interferences, lexical deviations, grammar deviations (syntactic errors, misuse of preposition, deviant usage of personal and relative pronouns, wrong use of inflexions, deviant use of the future tense in adverbial clauses of time). The discussion is mainly going to take into account three main points: (1) the English words pronunciation, (2) the translation of French words or expressions into English and (3) the writing of English words, as mentioning above.

4.3.1 The English Words Pronunciation

Learning a language requires, as it is stated in my problem statement, a good understanding of the way its words are organized and pronounced. This fact is not always true for some reasons. From the findings of our investigations, it is noticeable that both teachers and students have agreed that learners mispronounce English words. They use French phonetics to pronounce them though there are taught English alphabet letters. It is then obvious that teaching students just the English alphabet letters followed by the repetition of some words is not sufficient to expect from them a good pronunciation of the English words. In our secondary schools, after being taught the English alphabet letters, students are not given consistent rules on the reading English speech sound, that is, they are not followed with concrete examples on consonants as on vowels. So, most of them find difficult the pronunciation of English words. This lack of pronunciation prevents them from reading English texts. Some are even ashamed when they are asked to read English texts because they are sure that they will mispronounce many words and they may be laughed at. As they avoid the reading of English texts, their vocabulary is getting poorer and they are also ignorant of the English expressions, and their grammatical rules.

Emphasizing the importance of pronunciation in communication, Hugues (2013:78) says that Gilakjani (2012:120) has made the following development:

As English increasingly becomes the language used for international communication, it is vital that speakers of English, whether they are native or non – native speakers, are able to exchange meaning effectively. In fact, in recent discussions of English language teaching, the unrealistic idea that learners should sound and speak like native speakers is fast disappearing, (Burns 2003).

The speaking difficulties encountered by learners may also be a consequence of bad listening competence from some of their teachers. After analysing the collected data, it clearly appears that the majority of the English teachers have not been trained. Most of them have become teachers because they didn't find the job for which they have been trained for. Therefore, it is necessary for the educational authorities to create many teachers training colleges in order to solve this problem. Because those untrained teachers do not often know what to teach to their pupils as far as listening skill is

concerned and how to teach it. Some learners also copy some mispronunciations from songs made up of some English words. In fact, some singers just use English words without any phonetic rule and learners will just copy them. This aspect can also negatively impact the learners' speaking ability. One thing leading to another, they are finally bound to do literal translations of French expressions and of some of its words into English.

4.3.2 Translation of French expressions and words into English

French expressions are most of the time literally translated into English by our students. In fact, this is confirmed through data collection by incommensurable number of students and teachers; they have accepted that students often translate literally French expressions into English. One can agree that translation is not an easy activity for everybody and particularly cannot be an easy task for our secondary school students because it requires a lot of competences and good skills in the language that they may not have. So learners are not to be too much blamed for the bad translations they very often do from French into English. But if nothing is done to help them, they will be used to doing literal translations and that will affect both their speech and written abilities in English.

As for the translation of the English words into French or vice - versa, the results of our investigations show that learners have recognized that they often give to the English words, which look like French ones, the same meaning as the one they have in French. As matter of fact, French words such as “*balance*”, “*avis*”, “*actuel*” (and many other words...) are respectively translated into English by “*balance*” “*advice*” and “*actual*” etc whereas their real meanings are, scale, opinion and current. This shows their weak level in English and their literal translation. Those mistakes are due to the fact that students don't know that some French words may look like some English words without having the same meaning as them. Indeed, a word has a meaning unless it is used in a context.

4.3.3 Writing of some English Words

The end of a second or a foreign language learning is the ability to comprehend and to produce that language in its spoken and or written form. It involves the acquisition of some or all of the receptive and productive skills traditionally categories as listening, speaking, reading and writing. The best written form of the English words is then an important of its learning.

From our investigations, students most of the time write English words like French words which have similar spelling. This is due to the fact that they don't pay attention to the way those words are written in English and also to their lack of reading.

The writing of living foreign languages is not often easy for students especially for those who don't like reading. They usually fail in texts which require a high level of best writing. The case of dictation texts in French is an illustration. Most of students fail in this subject. They usually get zero over twenty in it. The text under consideration is now replaced by reading comprehension one.

So, students should be helped as far as the correct writing of English words is concerned, without neglecting translation and pronunciation.

5 Suggestions

In Benin secondary schools where the official language is French, the learning of the second language (English) poses some problems. Learners face difficulties in pronouncing English words, translating some of them in writing and in finding words' meaning, due to the interferences of the first language on the second one. In order to confirm this allegation, I have carried out my research work on Phonetic and Lexico-Grammatical influences of the French language on the English learning process and through the questionnaires addressed to teachers and learners, this statement is confirmed. For remedying those difficulties, suggestions are addressed to teachers and to learners themselves.

Experiments have demonstrated that motivation and perseverance on the part of students and good planning on the part of a good and sympathetic teacher are more reliable criteria of success in language learning. So teachers should make an effort to pay careful attention to lessons planning and to create a pleasant and productive language class by their enthusiasm and their attitude towards their students. As the English learning process of our EFL learners is influenced by the French language, teachers should help them to be aware of the errors due the negative interferences between both languages in phonetics, grammar, lexis, semantic, graphic and environmental areas. This is important because without the learner's awareness of the presence of an error, it is difficult for the teacher even to approach a strategy for its being remedied. A part from helping their students to be aware of the errors, teachers should also develop some strategies, which can help students to avoid them.

For the teaching of sound segment, teachers can have individual student repeat the same word or the same sentence. They should do that after choral and group repetitions by starting with their more able students. In that way, their less able students will have more time to listen and to repeat silently a reasonably correct word or sentence. Those less able students should also be helped to read conveniently the English phonetic symbols as the others. To reach the goal, it has been suggested the teaching of English in primary schools as do already some private schools on one hand, and one the second hand, the insertion of phonetics and phonology in secondary schools in order better students' pronunciation. As far as secondary schools are concerned, teachers should give their students just after the alphabet letter the following rules about the pronunciation of some letters. Each of the rules should be followed with examples.

Here is a sampling of strategies that can be exploited to help students overcome their difficulties especially in pronunciation and hence to communicate fluently. Moreover, in the lexical area, teachers should make their students know that there are many English words looking like French ones without carrying the same meaning as them. There are fake friends commonly called "faux amis" in French. Here is the list of some of them and the list can be submitted to learners for enriching their vocabulary.

English words	French words	French words	English words
To abuse	insulter	abuser	to exaggerate
Account	compte	acompte	deposit
To achieve	accomplir	achever	to complete
Balance	équilibre	balance	scale
Ballot	élection, vote	ballot	bundle
Band	orchestre	bande	gang
Candid	franc	candide	artless
Cave	caverne	cave	cellar
Character	personnage	caractère	temper
Data	données	date	date

This is not a full list of false friends, rather than it we try to gather some of them. In the domain of semantics, learners should know that the literal translation of words, expressions, idioms and the like from a given language into another leads often to mistakes, misunderstand and confusions. Teachers should put emphasis on these realities while delivering their courses. They should tell their learners the differences between the way some ideas are expressed in English and in French and let them notice through concrete examples that the literal translation is not always good.

As far as grammar is concerned, emphasis should be put on the differences between English and French grammatical structures, which follow similar rules. The formation of the perfect tenses such as the present perfect, the past perfect and the future perfect etc; can be used as an illustration. The auxiliary "to have" is used in both languages to form the perfect tense. But unlike in English, the auxiliary "to be" is used in French instead of "to have" to form the perfect tenses of some non transitive verbs such as to go, to come, to become etc; whereas the English grammar uses only the auxiliary "to have" to form the perfect tenses of any verb whether it is transitive or not. Without knowing these grammatical differences between both languages, pupils will say "I am come" instead of "I have come" or "you are gone" instead of "you have gone". So, teachers should put more emphasis on these kinds of grammatical differences between English and French structures.

As for the spelling and the writing of the English words, learner's attention should be attracted to the fact that some English words may look like French words without sharing the same spelling as them. Teachers should not feel tired of telling students to pay great attention to the spelling of those English words. It may also be useful to have them write all the cognates they know to make a list of which will be progressively as long as possible. Indeed, a great task was done by Tallard E. (1975:36) as far cognates words are concerned because he has listed the most recurrent cognates in his book *candidate's companion*. It is then left to us to lengthen the list and make use of it profitably. Some words extracted from the list are as follows:

English words	French words
Abbreviation	Abréviation
Abnormal	Anormal
Address	Adresse
Admiral	Amiral
Adventure	Aventure
Baggage	Bagages

As far as parents are concerned on the suggested part, they have a great responsibility to fulfill. First of all, they should provide money to their children for buying the required books and documents; many students don't dispose any English book to read including the one they have to study in class. That is a great hindrance to their English learning process. So parents are exhorted to buy documents to their children. In addition, they must ensure their children's well being; children should not be worried or starved because *the hungry man is an angry man*. If they are starved they will not be concentrated and in such a case, nothing could be done. Finally, they must be overlooked especially as far as their home works are concerned. Approach Based on Competence does not prevent parents from checking their children's book note, copybook, exercise book, schedule and other necessary materials.

6. Conclusion

Dealing with Phonetic and Lexico-Grammar influences of the French Language on French Speakers Learning English as a Foreign Language, my work has covered various aspects of the English language which are: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, semantic, and environment. It has greatly been confined to cataloguing the recurrent and the common errors in each case finding their root causes at times, and trying to suggest remedies through the teaching of the tricky items.

English is well known to be a language, which has developed with the scientific, technical and commercial development of humanity and which has a reputation that has made it the first international language of the communication. This has been favoring its expansion everywhere worldwide. As a result, English is included in our educational system. But, its learning by French speaking students is faced with some linguistic difficulties that have been discussed throughout my research work. These difficulties encountered by learners are pronunciation difficulties, translation difficulties and writing difficulties; to make long story short. To be more concrete, Beninese learners are facing difficulties while holding conversation or reading texts; they also encounter difficulties when translating some French words or expressions in English, and vice-versa, especially cognate words. Finally, these errors and difficulties are also remarked at writing stage. Most learners and some may not be conscious of the source of these difficulties. Taking into account what has been said so far, we should find ways and means to reduce the influences of French language on our EFL learners, learning English is very important in our educational system in this area of globalization.

Moreover, the reduction of the influences of the French language on French speaking students learning English as a foreign language needs some obvious means. So, our secondary school should be pedagogically equipped, well equipped with adequate materials for the teaching of English, as suggested by some teachers. Teachers should also be trained as well as their living condition should also be improved to allow them to do their best as far as their teaching task is concerned. This will help our French speakers' students who really want to learn the English language to master it.

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