EFFECTS OF VERBAL AND NON VERBAL INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES ON FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract

If the learning of a language is the learning of a set of skills, language teaching should therefore be different from the teaching of a content subject as the role of direct sensory experience in language learning is viewed differently. The pertinent aspects of language teaching include an organized concept designed to harness the basic components that govern the language structure and use. These components however must be acquired and developed to enhance the learning abilities. This article is intended to expose certain strategic elements that would enhance efficiency in teaching and learning processes for good performance.

Keywords: interference, teaching strategies, transfer of competence, bi-plurilingualism

Introduction

The teaching and learning process gives opportunities for expressions of various educational activities. Educational activities assure the modeling and shaping of learners behaviours, the imparting and acquiring of new knowledge, ideas, values and skills. Teaching and learning of language is one of the educational activities that demand special skills for enhanced performance. Wilkins (1974: 26) states that "language learning takes place where the exposure is structured through language teaching". This is to say that, language teaching contains special approaches or methods that must be employed to enhance language learning. This also implies that the teaching of language does not deal only on the subject content but also on the system through which the contents are expressed. This system consists of an efficient use and the articulation of words of a given language in the expression of ideas or concepts in the content of a subject. An individual learner

acquires learning skill in the language teaching through the use of an effective instructional strategy. Instructional strategy implies teaching or certain strategic activities that facilitate the impartation of knowledge.

However, Nigeria is a multicultural and multilingual country. It is obvious that everybody in this country is to a certain degree a bilingual. Cuq (2003: 35) explains that "le bilingue est quelqu'un qui a une maitrise parfaite de deux langues" (a bilingual is someone who has a perfect mastery of two languages). This implies in the context of Nigeria, that every child born acquires mother tongue (L_1), and English or pidgin (L_2) which is the language of instruction in Nigerian schools. French language in this case, becomes a foreign language with interesting acceptable structures, vocabularies and sounds. The learning of this language therefore requires special attention for the type of instructional method to be used and motivation of the learner. In other words, the learning of French language(L_3) in an environment where it is not widely spoken is a huge task that requires special skills in its teaching and learning. With this understanding, in this work, we shall examine certain instructional methods, techniques and strategies that facilitate teaching and learning of French as a foreign language.

Role of instructional methods, techniques and strategies in French teaching

Instruction in its simplest meaning is teaching. It constitutes a set of detailed guidelines on the information that would enhance knowledge. In the same vein, Robert Gagné et al (1988: 3) see instruction as,

> *A set of events that affect learners in such a way that learning is facilitated. Normally, we think of these events as being external to the learner – events embodied in the display of printed pages or the talk of a teacher.*

This definition explains the fact that teaching of language cannot be done in emptiness. There must be an existing event that will help understanding and building of knowledge. Events must be established for instruction to be effective in the learning process of French language; it must be planned and carried out systematically to facilitate learning. In addition, instructional strategy gives an outline of how instructional activities will relate to the accomplishment of the predetermined objectives. The instructional methods, techniques and strategies are the necessary approaches a teacher needs to employ during teaching process with clear intention to achieve the stipulated aims and objectives. Instructional method can be referred to as a broad, basic and coordinated procedure

in the teaching of a given subject matter. Thus, lecture, discussion, discovery, demonstration, fieldtrip are few examples of teaching methods.

Teaching techniques are referred to as specific and fractional procedures which could be employed to stimulate and sustain interest in the lesson, and which, however may not be sufficient if used only in the teaching and learning process. Thus, questions, illustration, reinforcement approaches, class and equipment arrangement and others can be used within broader procedure like lecture method, discussion method, demonstration method, etc, to achieve teaching and learning objectives.

An instructional strategy recounts the use and how the teaching methods and techniques are applied in the teaching and learning process. Robert Gagné et al (1988: 27) highlight that instructional strategy is "a plan for assisting the learners' with their study efforts for each performance objective. This may take the form of a lesson plan (in the case of teacher - led instruction) or a set of production specifications for mediated materials". With this assertion we can say that instructional strategies are grouped under verbal instructional strategy and non verbal instructional strategy. This is because a teaching strategy can be speech base method or demonstration base method such that contains visual activities and practical activities with discovery intents.

Functions of verbal instructional strategy

The primary function of language is to communicate ideas. Verbal instructional strategy can be considered as a verbal representation of ideas, concepts or facts. It implies teaching procedure that makes use of speech in the transmission of knowledge. In this type of instructional procedure the teacher employs oral communication in lesson delivery. Robert Gagné et al (1988: 79) affirm that "verbal information may be presented to the learners in various ways. It may be delivered to their ears in the form of oral communication or to their eyes in the form of printed words and illustrations". Verbal instruction is the most quickest and effective way to communicate ideas. However, verbal instructions cannot be complete with speech alone. It is therefore important to employ non verbal cues that accompany speech, for example facial expressions, touch and body contact, body movements and gestures. The verbal instructional strategies include lecture method, discussion method and others.

Lecture method

Lecture method is considered as conventional talk and chalk method of teaching. It is called explaining method in teaching and learning process. George Brown (1983: 47) advocates that some basic skills of lecturing includes the explaining abilities such as giving understanding, using examples and illustrations; orientation such as opening a lecture, introducing a topic or theme; using audiovisual aids which includes the effective use of blackboards, overhead projectors, slides and models, etc. In using lecture method the teacher is active; he does most of the activities in terms of talking and writing while the students are slightly involved or passive. Lecture method is most of the time, a one way verbal communication. It requires the teacher to be skillful or tactful in the use of language. In other words, he must have a good and clear command of language. The use of simple and clear language for easy understanding is of paramount importance. Lecture method also enables the teacher to captivate learners' attention and to stimulate their interest. However, avoidance of bad characteristics of speech such as shouting, wrong voice ton, etc, by the teacher is very important.

Discussion method

Discussion method in teaching and learning process entails sharing of ideas, information and experiences. This type of teaching method is a two way verbal communication. It can take place between the teacher and the learners or between the learners while the teacher acts as the moderator. It is also important to know that an effectively guided discussion brings about orderly exchange of ideas and adequate contributions to the topic of discussion. The teacher in this type of teaching method ensures that the topic under discussion is at the level of the learners. He ascertains also that the learners have previous knowledge on the topic to be discussed; and the teacher summarizes frequently in order to guide learners toward understanding the main concept.

Functions of non verbal instructional strategy

Non verbal instructional strategy is a teaching procedure that employs less speech and more visual elements, audio elements and practical activities. The teacher in this type of teaching method uses visual materials such as pictures, symbols, graphics, diagrams, sounds, body movements, gestures, events, people, living or preserved materials in the lesson delivery. These materials help learners understand the lesson. It attracts learners' attentions, stimulate and sustain their interests to the lesson. Some of the ways that non verbal instructional method can be carried out are through:

Discovery method

Discovery method consist of instructional strategy that allows learners to engage in certain mental processes such as observing, analyzing, classifying, measuring, experimenting, formulating, making assumption and generalization. It is usually organized in such a way that the learners discover certain concept and principles on their own using their mental processes. Nevertheless, the teacher plays his role by guiding the learners through the process of their inquiry activities. This method can promote self confidence and self reliance among the learners by providing activities that encourage every learner to learn on his own pace.

Demonstration method

Demonstration method refers to showing or to exhibit certain abstraction in the teaching and learning process. Demonstrations are done to provide an opportunity to the learners' new exploration and visual tasks performance from a different perspective. Demonstration reinforces memory retention because it provides connections between presentation of facts and personal experience. A demonstration may be used in the circumstance of proving conclusively a fact as by reasoning or showing evidence. When the learners cannot only hear but see what is being taught, it is more likely they will believe and fully grasp what is being taught. With this type of teaching method, manipulative skills can be developed among learners. Demonstration method as a part of non verbal instructional strategy can be classified into activities under the use of visual materials and laboratory materials.

Visual materials

Visual materials of instruction are relevant materials that engender effective teaching and learning. They comprise graphics, pictures, charts, blackboard drawing, and dramatization, audio-visual materials like films etc. Corder (1966) declares that visual elements are relevant for teaching a piece of language. This means that language cannot be taught effectively without the use of visual materials. Audiovisual aids of instruction according to Brown (1983:49) "mean any equipment or materials which a lecturer may use in a lecture. Handouts, the blackboard, audio-recordings, video-recording, and films are examples". The skilful use of visual aids as stated in this definition, in teaching and learning process enhances learning, sustains attention and improves performance among learners.

Laboratory materials

Laboratory materials enable learners to carry out experiments that produce practical facts and encourage the learners to make a concrete evaluation of ideas received in a classroom lesson. Bush and Allen (1964:37) define laboratory as "those physical facilities for which special equipment and tools are needed to enable students work independently and in small groups and to practice skills, to experiment, and to apply ideas suggested in large-group instruction". This definition expresses that the use of laboratory encourages development of skills and clarification of ideas. Materials in an audio-lingual language laboratory for example enable learners to develop pronunciation skills, acquire vocabularies for oral expression. In addition, Ralph Cable (1979:71) explains that "the language laboratory is a battery of tape recorders, up to a total of about thirty, each linked to a control panel operated by the teacher". Each tape recorder in the language laboratory is placed in separate booth which gives each student some privacy.

In making sure of the right choice of teaching strategy in language learning, it is also important for the learners to acquire basic skills that will facilitate the effective learning of the language. These skills enable them to understand the language and use the language elements appropriately.

Basic skills for learning language

The following are basic skills learners of language (French) need to acquire for enhanced performance in learning language:

Semantic skill

According to Sadri and Flammia (2011:129) "Semantics is the study of the meaning of words. Words have both denotative meanings and connotative meanings". Semantic skill has to do with the abilities to express or to understand what is thought of as meanings. Words of a language have to be used in an acceptable manner and in a context to give appropriate meanings. In simple words, Corder (1966:10) affirms that "acceptable words strung together in the acceptable patterns of the language do not by that fact alone have meaning. They have still to be used in the right circumstances to have meaning of an effective sort, in other words to communicate or produce the desired result in the hearer". Talking about context in the meaning interpretation of words Mills (1990:62) says that "the meanings of words are formed and sustained by the interactions of human collectivity, and thought is the manipulation of such meanings". Thought development proceeds more often from the acquired knowledge and experiences

The word order in the use of language helps in the interpretation of meaning. In the use of adjectives especially adjective of color in French comes usually after the noun, eg: *livre rouge*, *poulet brun*. While in English, the color precedes the noun, eg: *red book*, *brown chicken*. When confusion occurs in the word order, it may lead to confusing the meaning of expression or it may render the expression meaningless. Long adjectives in French usually precede the noun eg: *femme intelligente*, whereas, in English, noun precedes adjective eg: *intelligent woman*. Learners of French must be able to distinguish the word order of French from that of English which they have already acquired and use it accordingly.

The use of some verbs in French is completely different from that of English. For instance, *I am 60 years old* is expressed thus in French *J'ai 60 ans*. French uses the verb 'avoir' which means 'to have' instead of être [to be] and which, when translated literally to English will mean *I have 60 years old*. French style of verb conjugations according to tenses and personal pronouns, style of negation should be considered carefully because they are very different from that of English. Consequently, these can pose problems to the learners of French who are already English speakers.

Phonological skill

Phonological skill is the mastery of the phonology of a particular language. Phonology according to Sadri and Flammia (2011:129) refers to "the most basic unit of any language, the individual units of sound that account for all the words spoken in a given language. The individual units are called phonemes'. Phonological skill is the ability to use speech sounds of a language effectively. For a learner to acquire the correct pronunciation of speech sound of a language, it requires a careful and continuous study of the phonetic alphabets and their place and manner of articulation. The phonetic alphabets of French constitute 37 phonemes which consist of 12 oral vowels, 4 nasal vowels and 21 consonants. Some of these phonemes do not exist in English and others that are similar to some English phonemes do not have the same place and manner of articulation. Hence, the learners of French have to understand this and develop their abilities in the use of appropriate French sounds.

The distribution differences of sound pose problems to the multi-lingual learner. Considering the differences in vowel distribution, the most obvious difference manifests itself in the length/quality of the vowel. For instance, short and long /i/, /u/ are found in English but French has only the short form of /i/, /u/. Certain differences in some vowel sounds in English and French are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Differences in the distribution of some vowel sounds in English and French

English	**French**
/i:/ see	/i/ livre (text book)
/ɔ:/ law	/ɔ/ école
-	/œ/ peur (fear)
-	/o/ peau (skin)
-	/ø/ creux (hollow)
/u:/ pool	/u/ poudre (powder)
-	/y/ vue (sight)
No nasal vowel	Nasal vowels
Diphthongs	No diphthongs

Learners of French should take note of the approximate area of the mouth in which a portion of tongue is raised during the pronunciation of the sound of English and French languages. The difference in tongue elevation is discussed below:

Table 2: Differences in tongue positions during the production of vowel sounds of English and French

Tongue elevation from the:

	Front vowels		**Central vowels**		**Back vowels**	
	English	French	English	French	English	French
High	i:	i	-	-	u:	-
	i	-	-	y	u	u
Semi low	e	e	ɜ: ə	œ	ɔ:	o
Low	æ	ɛ	ʌ	ə	a	ɔ
Very low	-	a	-	ø	a:	a

Consonants on the other hand play important roles in the sound of words. Here are some consonant sounds that could pose problems to the learners of French language. These include the consonant cluster, for instance, the English word example /igza:mpl/ has a consonant cluster, so does the French word example /egzãpl/.

Consonant assimilation exists in French as well as in English. The only difference is at the level of phoneme characteristics. Grevisse (1969: 11) in his explanation states that "consonant assimilation occurs when two consonants are found in phonetic contact; they tend to assimilate each other". In French one of the consonant influences and changes the second consonant to another consonant, in English the consonant overshadows or deletes the second consonant. Assimilation can

be progressive when the first consonant imposes its characteristics to the second according to sonority. For instance, the word *subsister* (to survive) is pronounced as *subzister* /sybziste/. The consonant voiced sound /b/ changed /s/ which is voiceless by nature to /z/. In English *comb*, *plumber* is pronounced as *com* /kəum/, *plumer* /plʌmə/. Contrarily, consonant assimilation can be regressive. For example, *absent* is pronounced as *apsent* /apsã/. The consonant voiceless sound /s/ changed /b/ which is voiced sound by nature to /p/. In English, the word *doubt* is pronounced as *dout* /daut/. French and English have some similar consonant sounds but with different places and manners of articulation. We have for example:

Table 3: Differences in the distribution of some consonant sounds in English and French

English	**French**
/ʃ/ shoe	/ʃ/ chaise (chair)
/ʧ/ chief	-
/ð/ they	-
/θ/ think	-
-	/ч/ huil (oil)
-	/л/ gagner (to gain)
/ʒ/ leisure	/ʒ/ bonjour (good morning)

Lexical skill

Lexical skill refers to the ability to use right words in the right order in an expression of idea. Certain verbs in French are accompanied by preposition while others are not. For instance, the French verb *renoncer* is accompanied by preposition *à* unlike English verb *renounce*. Thus we say *renoncer à se marier* [to renounce the idea of getting married]. The English verb *to wait* is mostly accompanied by prepositions such as (for, behind), we can say: *wait for me*, *wait behind*; unlike the French *attendre* which does not need any preposition. Thus, we say *attends-moi* (wait me), etc.

The preposition *à* in French can also pose some problems to the learners. This is because in an expression of idea, *à* can play the role of some English prepositions like *to*, *at*, *over*, *before*, *in*, *etc*. For instance, *présider à la reunion* [to preside over a meeting], *se presenter à l'audience* [to appear in court], *aller à l'école* [go to school], etc.

Orthographic skill

Orthographic skill deals with the capability of spelling words correctly orally or in writing. The mastery of alphabet letters and some combination of some letters that give a particular sound is very important to the learners of French. For example the combination of [eau] as in [beau] which means *handsome,* gives the sound /o/, [eux] as in [deux] *two* gives /ø/, etc. English and French are part of Indo-European language family tree. French belongs to the Roman group of languages while English belongs to the Germanic group. As such, some linguistic aspects of French and English are fully provided with the elements of similarity and dissimilarity. For example, there are some words which are similar in spelling in both languages but in most cases with slightly different pronunciation as shown below:

Table 4: Differences in the pronunciation of some similar English and French words

	English	**French**
Age	/eidʒ/	/aʒ/
Exact	/igzækt/	/ɛgzakt/
Table	/teibl/	/tabl/
Cause	/kɔ:z/	/koz/
Accident	/æksidənt/	/aksidã/
Village	/vilidʒ/	/vilaʒ/
Medicine	/mɛdisən/	/medsin/
Vocalise	/voukəli:z/	/vɔkaliz/
Impossible	/impɔsəbl/	/ɛpɔsibl/
Communication	/kəmju:nikeiʃn/	/kɔmynikasjõ/

English and French have also some words that are not exactly but closely related in spelling and pronunciation. That is to say that these words are spelt and pronounced almost in the same way. For example:

Table 5: Some closely related English and French words in spelling and Pronunciation

English	French
Function /fʌŋkʃən/	Fonction /fõksjõ/
Remarkable /rima:kəbl/	Remarquable /rəmarkabl/
Measure /meɜə/	Mesure /məzyr/
Gentle /dɜentl/	Gentil /ɜãti/
Dignity /digniti/	Dignité /diɲite/

Table 5 has shown another area that need not be ignored in the process of teaching and learning. This will also go a long way to prevent confusion and language interference and to encourage learners develop skills required for the language acquisition.

Conclusion

We are of the opinion that the acquisition of competence in mother tongue is very important, followed by a second language, a third language, etc. Although not all Foreign language teachers consider it such a pressing problem for now, the analysis of the corpus for this study has shown that although the lack of mastery of the learners' mother tongue may not be such a serious obstacle, there are of course problems that can be attributed to this lack- teacher competence, teacher linguistic background and context of teaching/learning.

For the researchers and experts in the field of didactics, phonetics and translation, this study has opened the way for comparison of mother tongue/L1 versus Foreign or 3rd language. All these languages in the learner' or teacher's repertoire should be considered in the bi-plurilingualism of any language graduate in order not to be subjective in evaluating a learner;s oral or written production. Interferences will surely occur but taking into account the source and target languages of the learner will enhance the competence of the learners and facilitate the teaching methods of the teacher.

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