


## PHONOLOGICAL PROBLEMS CONFRONTING STUDENTS OF YORÙBÁ ORIGIN IN THE STUDY OF FRENCH LANGUAGE: A CASE STUDY OF FRENCH NASAL SOUND /ɲ/

Ajani, Akinwumi Lateef <sup>1</sup> 

French Department

College of Language and Communication Arts Education

Lagos State University of Education, Oto/Ijanikin,

Lagos State, Nigeria

[ajanial@lasued.edu.ng](mailto:ajanial@lasued.edu.ng)

### Abstract

The issue of language inconsistency is one of the major linguistic problems confronting Nigerian Yorùbá learners of French language. This study investigated the phonological problem confronting Yorùbá learners of French language in the area of oral production of French consonant nasal sound /ɲ/. To have a deep knowledge of the problem, data were collected from Nigerian Yorùbá French learners in four Higher institutions all located in the South West of Nigeria involving forty five students (45), thirty (30) females and fifteen (15) males. Haven presented the problem, some didactic recommendations were put forward to move the teaching and learning of French language forward in Nigeria, most especially in the yorùbá speaking areas.

**Keywords:** Language, Learners Linguistic Interference, Phonology, Sound.

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author : Ajani, Akinwumi Lateef    ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6809-271X>

## 1. Introduction

The concept of language inconsistency is not new or strange to language scholars all over the world. When we are talking of language in contact, one such will be an indigenous language like Yorùbá, Hausa or Igbo in Nigeria, while the other is foreign language like French, Arabic or German language in Nigeria. When two languages interact, the effect of one is always on the other in form of linguistic interference which many scholars all over the world have looked into such as (Mackey 1968, Weinreich 1972, Kwofie 1995, Mfon 1995, Garba 2012, Igbeneghu 2012, Ajani & Odoh 2021).

In Nigeria, both French and Yoruba occupied a unique position, unique in the sense that while French language serves as the Nation window to the International communities such as Benin, Niger, Tchad, Cameroun, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and even France (Araromi 1996, p. 232, Ade-Ojo 2002, Atewologun 2009, p. 42 and Ajani 2015), Yoruba on its part is one of the major Nigeria languages spoken as a mother tongue in five (5) states of the South West of Nigeria, namely: Oyo, Oṣun, Òndó, Èkìtì, Lagos and part of Kwara State and Kogi State. And spoken by more than 36 million people in Nigeria (Ajani 2015, p. 75).

However, despite the unique position of the two languages (Yoruba and French), even though a language is learnt by contact, what we discovered is the linguistic interference of the Yoruba language sounds system on the production of some French words due to lack of certain French sounds in Yoruba sounds system. The result identified by Ihenacho (1983, p. 304), Kwofie (1995, p. 2) and Ajani (2009, p. 64) is that many Nigerian learners of French language find it difficult to be fluent orally in French language due to their poor pronunciation of French words.

This study is set to look at the difficulty facing Nigerian Yoruba learners of French language in the oral production of French sound /ɲ/ defined by Adeleke (2018, p. 30), Ondo-Mebiame (2013, p. 57) as a nasal, occlusive, dental and palatal French consonant sound.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Yoruba learners of French language experience difficulty in the pronunciation of a given set of French consonantal sounds and one of those French consonant sounds is a French nasal consonant sound /ɲ/, thus Yoruba learners of French language experience difficulties in pronouncing very well French words where the sound appeared like the French word *igname* [ɲnam] which is 'isu' in Yoruba and 'yam' in English language. This study is aimed at finding out the source of this problem by given out to selected Yoruba learners of French language in selected Higher institutions in the South West of Nigeria some French words containing French nasal sound /ɲ/ and asked them to call out those words and get them recorded to identify the source of the problem.

### 1.2 Objective

To find out problems encountered by the Nigeria Yoruba phone learners of French language in their effort to pronounce the sound /ɲ/ and proffer solutions which would help them to overcome this problem in their effort to learn and speak fluently French language.

### 1.3 Significance of the study

This study will not only be a form of basic reference material for further study but also contribute to the teaching and learning of French language in the Yoruba speaking areas of Nigeria in particular.

### 1.4 Theoretical model

The theoretical model on which this study is anchored is transferring learning theory. According to Carles (1983, p. 14), this theory is founded on the assumption that L2 learners will tend to transfer to their L2 utterances the features of their L1. Furthermore, based on Lado (1954, p.

2) in Ajani (2011, p. 54) and Ajani (2015, p. 249), individual tends to transfer the forms and meaning and the distribution of forms and meaning of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

- Language: Language according to Hall (1968, p. 158) is “the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other using habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols”. While Sapir (1921, p. 8) sees languages as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotion and desire utilizing voluntarily produced symbols.

Furthermore, language according to Cook (1996, p. 1) “is one of the most important ways of expressing our love or our hatred for people and a vital instrument to achieve many of our goals and careers”. And based on Mekilieuwa (2020, p. 6), “apart from the fact that language can be used to communicate knowledge, ideas and information from one person to another (Vehicle of thought), it is also used to persuade people to do something”.

- Linguistic interference: According to Ogunsiji (2013, p. 13), linguistic interference is a popular phenomenon that refers to the use of features belonging to one language while speaking or writing another. And based on Debyser (1970, p. 31), “a linguistic interference is a typical language error committed by a foreign language learner due to the impact of the structure of the mother tongue already acquired by the learner”. Also from Kwofie (1995, p. 2) point of view, “linguistic interference is a deviation from the normal structure of a foreign language due to the influence of the structure of either L1 (Mother tongue) or L2 which is a second language already acquired by the foreign language learner”.

Generally, linguistic interference takes place at different levels, namely:

- Semantic interference, which occurs as a result of familiar phenomenon and experience that have been classified differently in another language interfering with the other (Ogunsiji 2013, p. 133).
- Lexical interference, which has to do with the introduction of foreign form into the speech of bilingual.
- Syntax interference, which is the introduction of unit and structure of foreign parts of speech and grammatical categories into the speech of bilingual.
- Phonetic/phonology interference, which has to do with the transfer of the rules of production of the speech sounds of one language to the sound and speech of another language within a speech environment and this is the focus of this study.
- Phonology: Bagari (1986, p. 15), Makechnie (1990, p. 756), Akmajian (2008, p. 66), Olofoyeku (2008, p. 18) and many others have defined the term phonology in their own respective ways. However, Adeniyi and Adebajo (2013, p. 4) define phonology as: “The study of significant units of sounds that are capable of distinguishing one word from another in a language, such units of sounds in a language is called phonemes”. While Sanni (1989, p. vii) further stated that:

Phonology is a branch of linguistic which deals with the way in which the sound of a language work in that language... and that every language of the word has an independent phonological system reflecting the different sorts of sounds that it has, the various possible combination of those sounds to form a word and the likely changes that may take place therein under such circumstances.

Based on Sar'bi (2021, p. 4), looking at the above definitions on phonology, we can really agreed that every language of the world has its own phonology and phonological system of one language cannot be the same with another one.

### 3. French and Yoruba Consonant Sounds

Consonant sounds according to Adeniyi and Adebajo (2013, p. 40) “are sounds that are produced when there is an obstruction in the air stream. The obstruction can be partial or total”. According to Leon (2019, p. 27), Adeleke (2018) and Ondo Mebiame (2013) french consonant sounds are made up of eighteen sounds and this could be seen from table No 1 below:

**Table 1.**

*French Consonant Sounds System*

Lieu d'articulation Mode d'articulation	Labial sourd sonore	Alvéolaire sourd sonore	Palatal sourd sonore	Vélaire sourd sonore
Oral occlusif nasal	p b m	t d n	ʃ	k g  (ŋ)
Fricatif	f v	s z	ʒ	
Latéral liquide vibrant		i r		

**Source :** Leon (2019).

Looking critically at the above table, french consonant sounds could be oral like consonant sound /p/ in ‘pere’ (father) could be nasal like sound /m/ in ‘mere’ (mother), it could also be fricative sound like sound /f/ in ‘frere’ (brother). Furthermore, it could be a, lateral sound like sound /L/ in ‘lait’ (milk) or and a vibrant sound like sound /v/ in ‘voiture’ (car). Also, French consonant sound could be occlusive like sound /p/ in ‘igname’ (yam) or a liquid sound like sound /R/ in ‘Roi’ (king).

#### 3.1 Yoruba consonant sounds

According to Bamgbose (1990:12), a consonant sounds known in Yoruba language as ‘Kóńsónáńtì’ and it is made of eighteen sounds. The table below shows those Yoruba consonant sounds.

**Table 2.***Ate Kòṣónáńtì (Yoruba consonant sounds system)*

	Afetepe	Afeyin-fetepe	Aferigipe	Afuja-perigipe	Afajape	Afafasepe	Afafase-fetepe	Afifun-ansape
Asenupe	b		t/d			k/g	p/gb	
Afunupe		F	s	s				h
Asesi				j				
Aranmupe	m		n					
Afarehon			r					
Afegbe enu pe			i					
Asesetan					y		w	

**Source:** Bamgbose (1990, p. 12).

From the above table, one could see that like French language, Yorùbá consonant sounds system contains occlusive sound known in Yorùbá as “Asenupe” such as sound [p/gb] in words like “papa – (field)”, “ìgbà-(time)”, Affricative sounds known in Yorùbá as “Afenupe [s]” in words like “ṣòṣì – (church)”, “Ìṣe-(culture)”, nasal sound such as [m] in Yorùbá words like “imú-(nose)”, “màmá – (mother) a lateral sound like [l] in Yorùbá words like “ilú-(town), ilù-(drum)”, a vibrant sound [R] in word like “ìrònú-(thinking). However, while Yorùbá consonant sounds system has sounds like [gb] in Yorùbá word like “ìgbà-(time/season), French consonant sounds system has sound like [ɲ] in French words like “igname-(ijam), [ʒ] in French word like “chez [ʒe], [ʒ] in French word like “Je-[ʒe].

However, from the two tables showing Yorùbá consonant sounds system and French consonant sounds system, one will agree with Amosu (1995:2) point of view that from the linguistic perspective, the two languages are somehow related, but this does not say that there is no area of divergence and one of these areas of divergence is the case of sound [ɲ] in French consonant system that does not exist in Yorùbá consonant system as already pointed out and this always lead to many phonetical errors among Nigerian Yorùbá learners of French language when pronouncing orally some French words where sound [ɲ] appeared.

#### 4. Data Collection

For this study, data were collected from Nigerian Yorùbá learners of French language in four Higher Institution located in Yorubaphone environment, namely: Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos State, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State, Osun State University, Ikire Campus, Osun State, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. Forty-five students were involved, thirty females and fifteen males. Age ranges from nineteen to twenty six. The Collection of data was done through a close observation of utterances of the speakers. Their utterances were recorded and analysed to get to the root of French words badly

uttered due to the presence of French consonant sound [ʒ] and below is the table showing French expressions containing sound [ʒ] that are wrongly pronounced and their correct version.

**Table 3.**

*French Expressions with the [ʒ] Sound: Common Mistakes and Corrections*

S/ N	Stated Expression	Oral Expressions Realised From Students	Expected Correct Oral Expression From Students
1.	Le pagne coute cher	[ləpagnəm kuteʃɛR]	[lə paŋkuteʃɛR]
2.	L'igname est dans la cuisine	[lijname dɔ̃lakuzin]	[lijname dɔ̃lakuzin]
3.	Mon ami a gagné le prix	[mɔ̃ami agamelePRi]	[mɔ̃ami aɣaneləPRi]
4.	Le medecin nous a soigné	lə mɛdsɛ̃nuaswagnəm	lə [mɛdsɛ̃nuaswɔ̃ne]
5.	Le peigne est où	[ləpeɣnemɛu]	[ləpeɣne ɛ u]
6.	Voici notre pagne	[vwasinɔ̃tRpagnem]	[vwasinɔ̃tRpɔ̃neɣ]
7.	Mon seigneur, c'est Dieu	[mɔ̃sɛ̃ɣnœRsɛdjø]	[mɔ̃sɛ̃ɣnœRsɛdjø]
8.	Voici la ligne devant vous	[vwasilaligmdɔ̃vɔ̃vu]	[vwasi la lijndɔ̃vɔ̃vu]
9.	Nous allons tous a la campagne	[nuzaLɔ̃tuz a la kampɔ̃gm]	[nuzLɔ̃tuz à la kaɣpaɣ]
10.	Nous allons faire régner l'ordre dans la classe	[nuzałɔ̃fɛR ɛɣne loRdR dɔ̃laklas]	[nuzałɔ̃fɛR ɛɣne loRdR dɔ̃ la klas]
11.	Je vus chez H.O.D pour signer mon document	[ʒɔ̃vɛʃɛHODpuRsingnem mɔ̃dɔ̃kɥ mɔ̃]	[ʒɔ̃vɛʃɛHODpuRsingnem mɔ̃ dɔ̃kɥ mɔ̃]
12.	C'est un aqneau	[sɛʃɔ̃ɣno]	[sɛʃɔ̃no]
13.	Mon ami est un ignoble individu.	[mɔ̃ami ɛʃiɣnɔ̃bleɛdividu]	[mɔ̃ami ɛʃiɣnɔ̃blɛdividu]

## 5. Data Presentation

From the data collected from the informants, one could see that Nigerian Yorùbá learners of French language have problem with the realization of French consonant sound [ɲ] because this sound does not exist in Yorùbá language consonant sound system and since the sound does not exist, the two letters [gn] forming the sound are separately articulated and this eventually lead to a wrong pronunciation of French word that contain the two letters follow each other. A good example is the French word “igname-[ɲam] which is equivalent of ‘yam’ in English language. The two letters ‘g’ and ‘n’ give sound [ɲ] in French language and since consonant sound [ɲ] does not exist in Yorùbá language, majority of Yorùbá learners call French word “igname-[ɲaɲ], [ɲnam] and this is a wrong pronunciation of the word “igname” in French language.

## 6. Summary and Conclusion

The study explores the phonological problem confronting Yorùbá learners of French language in their attempt to realize French consonant sound [ɲ].

Our findings discovered that hardly could one see a Yorùbá learner of French language utter correctly French words where this sound appears.

Haven seen from this study phonological problem Yorùbá learners of French language encounter on how to pronounce fluently French nasal sound [ɲ], how to solve the problem should be a thing of concern to French language teachers, and this could be done without getting to the root of the problem because based on Awoniyi (1993:238), “mother tongue is like a shadow, once one has mastered one’s mother tongue, it becomes part of one’s personality. Because of the fact that it has become part of one personality, the sound system of one’s language, its structure, meanings associated with its words will continue to affect the acquisition of any other language”. And this is really what is happening to majority of Yorùbá French in their attempt to master French language. And this could be seen from the table where French language words containing French consonant nasal [ɲ] are wrongly pronounced.

On the basis of our findings, the following recommendations are hereby suggested.

- The use of contrastive analysis: This study is of the opinion that teachers of French language need to be equipped with the knowledge of a contrastive analysis which according to Carles (1980:4) is a linguistic enterprise aimed at contrasting two or more languages so as to be able to show their point of divergence and problems. And based on Gleason (1978:64), it is what enable experience language teacher to predict with reasonable success, what part of the language will present the greatest difficulty to language teachers. Furthermore, while Filani (2013:529) opines that a contrastive analysis is one of the major linguistic tools that language scholars often use to access and improve learners’ performance, Carles (1983:9) sees contrastive analysis as what is concerned with the way in which N.L (Native Language) affects F.L (Foreign Language) learning in the individual.

Based on all the above submission on contrastive analyses, one could see that with the help of contrastive analysis, teacher teaching French language will be able to predict and determine the area of difficulty and the cause of such difficulty like the case of the difficulty of French consonant nasal [ɲ] among the Nigerian Yorùbá learners of French language and the root of the problem.

In addition to the above, making use of short French story books (les contes) that contained the problematic sound [ɲ] should be encouraged. French teachers teaching French should take it upon themselves to read out those short stories to the hearing of their students and ask them to pay attention to the stories. In reading it, more attention should be devoted to the identified problematic sound and ensure that the sound is well articulated whenever the learners are asked to pronounce the sound and whenever error is detected, a proper correction should be done.

Finally, in addition to the above recommendations, Yorùbá learners of French language should be encouraged to listen to French television stations like: France 24, TV 5, RTI and Radio stations like: Africa numero 1, Radio France international (RFI). All these will go a long way in correcting the Nigerian Yorùbá French learners on how to pronounce French words where French language consonant sound [ɲ] appeared.

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