

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF FRENCH LANGUAGE FOR AN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHER: AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

The role and knowledge of foreign language is a vital component of any advanced research studies that needs to be published either nationally or internationally. Indeed, Language plays a pivotal and significant part in various aspects of human endeavour. The role of language is not only limited to communication or interactive scenes, rather it extends into the vast branches of knowledge and human science and research. Language is a veritable tool for developing human knowledge and extending it for the benefit of human kind (Adejimola, 2008; Adebayo, 1999).

The French language is evolving, re-inventing itself, changing and becoming a multifaceted language, changing and adapting to modernity and cultural realities in the 21st century. With 274 million speakers, French is the 5th most spoken language in the world and benefits from demographic growth in sub-Saharan Africa where educational institutions, though encountering difficulties, continue to give it pride of place, (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, 2014). According to Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, French language is said to be the 4th most used language on the internet, 3rd in business, 2nd in international information and the media, the 2nd working language of most international organisations and the 2nd most learned language in the world. French remains one of the most reliable seedbeds of cultural and linguistic diversity that must be recognised and promoted to ensure an inclusive dialogue between men and women, between traditions and cultures and different types of human societies (OIF, 2014).

The 21st century witnesses the ascendancy of French in academic writing and international research; hence, its importance for international researcher. French has become the language of not only science, computing, diplomacy, tourism, aviation but also research and academic writing (Suleiman, 2017). It is widely accepted that French language has become the language of choice for many international scholarly journals. The trend is on a rise as the academia increasingly publishes in French in contemporary times. In this respect, academic French, for the majority, means both an opportunity and a threat. It is listed as the official or co-official language of many countries and is spoken extensively in other countries where it has no official status. French plays a part in the cultural, political, or economic life of the many countries in contemporary times.

The significance of languages generally justifies the need for a scientific and objective study of the relationship between French language and research works in the 21st century. Put differently, the general importance of language underlines and justifies the need to interrogate the importance of French language for an international researcher. To this end, this paper attempts a rigorous analysis of the importance of French language to international researcher. The paper is divided into five segments. The first segment is the introductory part of the paper. The second examines the history of French language and the historical context of international French. A brief history of milestones paving the way for this language in gaining its international status as a world language in academic writing is captured here. The third segment examines the attitude of international researchers towards French. The fourth section analyses the importance of French language for an international researcher. The last segment is the conclusion.

Historical Origin and Evolution of French Language

In order to be able to establish a true picture of the growth, stability, dynamism, potentials and prospects of the French language in international scholarship, research and academia, it is pertinent to first situate the language in the annals of history. The import of this is underpinned by the theory which states that languages can exist, grow or flourish and die. Of course, every language is a product of evolution with its peculiar points of convergence with and divergence from other languages. The French language is no exception to this theoretical understanding.

With the exception of English language, very few international languages can boast of such a robust and rich history and documentation as the French language. It enjoys, more than many other languages, tremendous prestige and internationality as it is arguably at par with English in its status as a major language of business at the United Nations (Simeon, 2007). Historically, the origin and evolution of French language is traceable to Indo-European linguistic family. French is a Romance language that descended primarily from Vulgar Latin which evolved out of the Gallo-Romance dialects spoken in northern France. From its Latin origins in the early Middle Ages, it grew through various levels of development and standardisation before assuming its final standard form in the 18th century (Simeon, 2007).

The spread of Roman rule and civilization laid the foundation for the origin and development of French language. In other words, the French language, civilization and culture, as they stand today, have their roots in Latin and the Roman culture and civilization. With the expansion of the Roman rule to Western Europe particularly, Gaul, Latin was gradually adopted by the inhabitants of the region, and as the language was learned by the common people it developed a distinct local character, with grammatical variations from Latin as spoken elsewhere. This local variety evolved into the Gallo-Romance tongues, which included French and some other languages especially Arpitan (Aitchinson, 1991). Available evidence indicates that the Gaulish language survived into the 6th century, despite considerable spread of Roman civilisation. Coexisting with Latin,

Gaulish helped shape the Vulgar Latin dialects that developed into French, with effects including loanwords and calques. This is why France is often described as a country of Latin language and culture.

Most peoples of the world today have adopted the languages of their masters, either through conquest or through colonization (Simeon, 2007). Through conquest by Roman forces, the French language was developed by the people of Gaul (as France was then called). Historical sources indicate that by 52 AD, Caesar (Roman ruler) had completely overrun Gaul (France) and established administrative or political dominion over that part of Western Europe. The implication of the overrunning of Gaul was that the Franks, the original inhabitants of Gaul, had to adopt Roman religion, legal system and language, which, of course, was Latin (Price, 2005). Of course, Latin necessarily went with Roman culture and was naturally vehicled by it (Price, 2005). On the evolution of the French language from Roman culture and civilization, Simeon (2007) noted that:

...the adoption of a language is not usually a clear-cut process. It is not usually observable in the immediate but only after sometime when changes are noticed. French was a child of necessity which evolved from Latin through a process of simplification and vulgarization of Latin. The man on the street found the classical Latin rather difficult, especially the grammar with all its inflections and the word order of the basic structure. Even at the phonetic level vowel clusters and diphthongs were dropped. For example *aurum* in Latin, meaning gold, became *or* (French). The initial process of pidginization and simplification lasted some seven centuries before the earliest version of what could be called French was documented in 842 (Simeon, 2007: p. 96).

Historical Context of International French and its Use across the World by Global Organizations and Various Nations

A major condition for a language to become international and global is political power and its standardization over a period of time as well as its intrinsic quality. By implication, the globalization and internationalization of French as a language is a product of a number of factors. Put differently, its international status as a global language of literature arises from colonial power status of France, scientific standards, international organizations including the United Nations, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the World Trade Organization, the International Olympic Committee, and the International Committee of the Red Cross is partly a product of some factors. An x-ray of some of these factors is key to the discourse on the importance of the language for an international researcher.

As an international language, French has a long history spanning several centuries ago. In 12th century, there was a massive growth and development of literary texts in old or middle French. These literary texts which appeared in the 12th century propelled in spread of French language as an important language. In line with our objective to treat English here as a sister, albeit rival language which shared identical history and experiences, let

us hasten to mention here that with the Norman conquest of England in 1066, Anglo-Norman, a French based language, was imposed on the English court as official language.

The 16th century represented a significant landmark in the development of French as an international language. It is important to state that the collapse of the Roman Empire produced an immediate impact on the development of the new vernaculars (French inclusive) which were tied to the Roman Empire and its Latin. With the fall of Latin, French language just like other vernaculars spurred by Latin rose and developed significantly. The fall of Latin was to serve as a catalyst to the rise and development of the emerging French language in the 16th century, a period which witnessed most of the legal, political, social and structural instruments and foundations for the proper establishment of the French language (Simeon, 2007). It was in the 16th century that Ronsard, Joachim du Bellay and other members of the Pléiade, a radical intellectual group fighting for the growth of French, mounted the defence of the French language, a defence clearly unprecedented in the history of languages (Simeon, 2007). The series of advocacy programmes and defence for the standardisation and globalisation of French has not even abated today, especially when it is faced with an ever tougher competition with an ever growing rival, English. The efforts made by the leadership and members of Pléiade contributed in no small measure to the growth and globalisation of French as a language.

One major factor for the internationalisation of the French language was the French colonial expansion policy that began at the beginning of the 17th century. As stated earlier, a major condition for a language to become international and global is the political power of the 'aboriginal nation' of that language. In other words, the history of the export of the French language to the international arena or scene is traceable to the expansionist French colonial policy which truly began on 27 July 1605, with the foundation of Port Royal in the colony of Acadia in North America, in what is now Nova Scotia, Canada. By 1608, Samuel De Champlain had founded Quebec, which was to become the capital of the enormous, but sparsely settled, fur-trading colony of New France (also called Canada). It should however, be noted that French had made early attempts at establishing colonies in Brazil, in 1555 at Rio de Janeiro but to no avail. However, the most recent export of French language on the global landscape happened in the 19th century. This marked a period of vehement push for colonisation commonly. At this point, the major target for French powers was Africa because of its vast resources which had then been discovered.

The expansion of French colonial power led to the introduction and enforcement of the policy of assimilation which contributed to the globalisation of the language. The concept of assimilation referred to the ideological basis of French colonial policy in the 19th and 20th centuries where the French subjects (not citizens) were taught that they could become Frenchmen if they adopted French language and culture as their own. The first man to adopt the "French Assimilation" concept was the philosopher Chris Talbot in

1837 and it was based on the idea of expanding French language to the colonies outside of France in the 19th and 20th centuries (Chidozie, 2013). In many cases, the assimilation policy of the French colonial power led to language endangerment, in which French as a language assumed the status of a “killer language” which replaced all other languages in the colonies. Thus, the French colonial power has usually been invoked as an important factor that has favoured the French language over those of the dominated, hence the internationalisation of the French language. Indeed, French colonization has undeniably spread French language to territories where they were not spoken many centuries ago. With the rush for colonisation eventually France had linguistic influence on her colonies even after independence as it led to the adoption of French as lingua franca (official language) of those polities.

The inherently beautiful or logical structure of French language accounts for its international success. Although the globalization of French is not only to be attributed to any intrinsic quality, we believe that the flexibility of French people in borrowing from other languages in the historical process is another factor in the global diffusion of French language. It is obvious that the most common way that languages influence each other is the exchange of words. Much is made about the contemporary borrowing of French words from other languages, but this phenomenon is not new, nor is it done very often by historical standards. The large-scale importation of words from Latin and other languages into French in the 16th and 17th centuries was more significant in its international success.

Importance of French Language for an International Researcher

In its role as a global language, French has become one of the most important academic and professional linguistic tools for international researchers. French is increasingly recognised as one of the most important languages to learn by the international community. This is a fact that seems to be irreversible. French has become the official language of the business and scientific world, and in academic and scientific communities, formal French usage is prevalent. With creative and flowery use of the language at high levels, the development of International French often centers on academic and scientific communities. Thus, international researchers derive immeasurable benefits from their understanding of the French language. This section interrogates the importance of French for an international researcher.

French as a Working Language for Specific Purpose and for International Conferences, Seminars, Symposia and Workshops

In an incisive and educative article Mike & Nkoyo (2009) were categorically emphatic on the changing role of the French Language from a vehicle of French culture to a vehicle of Science, Technology, Commerce and Diplomacy, the teaching of French as a foreign language (FFL) around the world and the shifting of emphasis from literary studies to what has come to be known as French for Specific Purposes (FSP); seen essentially as the specialist forms and usages of the French language in specific professions, disciplines,

and fields of human activity. But it was bedeviled with some problems. These problems include, lack of an in-depth knowledge of the language and materials that could be used in teaching effectively the language. In other to solve these problems and others, Dubious (1962), writing on the teaching of French as a foreign language (FFL) observed: "Ceux qui aujourd'hui dans le monde viennent au français veulent surtout y trouver un moyen d'accès aux progrès scientifiques et techniques » (Hutchinson, 1970).

To counter the various problems envisaged in connection with the learning of French by various beginners both from professional in academics and those outside academics-French for Specific Purposes was developed and materials began to provide for the programme according to Mike & Udong (2009). Materials such as (Mauger et Charen (1958); Phall (1971); Masselin Delson et Dauchaigne (1971), Cresson (1972); Delporte et Lascier (1972) began to appear.

Although, it must be stated that the teaching of FSP as a course was due to the intensive efforts of Battestini (1971) who convinced his colleagues at the Department of Modern Languages at University of Ibadan during the 1969/70 academic session to teach a course titled "French as an Ancillary Subject" to students of Faculties Of Science, Social Sciences, and Agriculture. The aim of this course was to make the students acquire la maîtrise en français de leur spécialité (Battestini, 1971), and this clearly made it an FSP course. Other Nigerian Universities subsequently began to teach the course. To further underlie the imperative importance of French language for an international researcher, the Dakar-based International Research Organization -Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) publishes its articles and newsletter, magazines in both French and English. Here at the University of Ilorin intensive efforts were equally made not only to enhance the teaching of the Language but also to educate workers of the university and outsiders of the importance of the language when Immersion Centre for the learning of French was established in 2008. Again, in 2012 the University went further by establishing the Institute of Translation of Arts. The outlook of the Institute to include the following activities:

- A. Translation of abstracts (e.g. theses, articles, International conference papers, inaugural lectures, etc)
- B. Translation of landmark texts (e.g. 50th Independence Anniversary Book of Reading
- C. Translation of Certificate results
- D. Translation and Interpretation of International Conferences
- E. Translation of Film texts and subtitles
- F. Translation of film texts and subtitles
- G. Translation of Manufactures and brochures
- H. Translation of handbills, notices and brochures of hotels
- I. Translation of historical documents.

The Institute is also getting prepared to provide short term capacity building programmes for practicing translators especially in the Nigerian media in the industries. It equally provides languages in Arabic, English and Yoruba. The centre has also been affiliated to the Nigerian Institute of Translators, (NITI), Abuja.

Generally, the usefulness of French language as a working tool has been recognized at schools, Universities, International conferences, workshops seminars symposia, workshops and by researchers. Its recognition by researchers in terms of publication for academic purposes has been the desire to share results and disseminate knowledge across different linguistic backgrounds as attested to by Bloch and Von Wartburg, 1994). To further widen the use of French language among academics, peer reviewed journals, newspapers; magazines are written in French Language. That the French Language is a critical component part of International research studies necessary to enhance an understanding of research in a bilingual country was the experienced faced by the author while carrying out his sponsored (CODESRIA) research studies at the Lebanese Emigration Research Centre, Notre Dame University, Zouk where he had to pay \$100 Dollar per lecture on French Language that he was being taught by a Lebanese Professor in order to carry out his research activities on Lebanese-Nigerian returnees. Unfortunately, the Arab-Israeli war of 2006 terminated the study and he had to return to Nigeria. The author encountered other difficulties in other countries due to his inability to speak French.

These examples evidently made him to realize the importance of the French language for both local and international medium of communication. Still on this issue, we have to give a lot of credit to the guest for whom this book is being written-Professor Tunji Ajiboye, for his tenacity of purpose in championing the publication of series books and articles on French for both the beginners and advanced learners. A further discussion on the international importance of the language is further embarked below.

French as a Working Language of Conversation among Academics from Different Nationalities, Both in the Virtual and Real World

The 21st century academia is seen as an intercultural discourse community in which members work together to establish intercultural relationship through the transmission and exchange of knowledge and research findings. The use of French as the lingua franca of the academic community in a variety of specialized fields such as medicine, engineering, science and the humanities, only to quote a few, occurs in an international context that transcends the framework of national cultures to become a vehicle of communication among researchers. As such, French as an academic language is used within a shared professional culture that transcends national cultures and can serve as a binding force during academics from different nationalities, both in the virtual and real world. Put differently, French serves as a language of interaction among international researchers from different nationalities, both in the virtual and real world. The French

language has thus developed as a lingua franca in the social integration of international researchers all over the world.

French as a Working Language for Locating and Selecting Research Paper Sources

Conducting research is the first and most exciting step in a researcher's journey towards becoming an established or aspiring academic of international repute. In academic research, research report writing is based on using sources one has read. Research papers can be fascinating and enjoyable especially when researchers dig up unique and noteworthy research paper sources in different languages. Research paper sources may be letters, official records, interviews, survey results, or unanalyzed statistical data, print media, books, brochures, journals, magazines, newspapers, and electronic sources, such as the Internet and the World Wide Web. They may also come from interviews and surveys you or someone else had designed. However, these sources come in different languages including French. In fact, research paper sources written in other languages are a valuable repository for much locally relevant subject matter and in most countries today, these sources are accessible through free, automated translation services. As such, research paper sources which come in French language are easily accessed by an international researcher who has an understanding of the French language. A clear example of this was evident in the Lebanon example where I had to beg students of Notre Dame University to interpret some French documents for me. This fact evidently lends credence on the need to be knowledgeable in French language in order to be able to clearly interpret documents written in foreign language for an international researcher. A further discussion on this embarked below.

French as an International Academic Language of Reaching a Wider and Larger Audience

For an international researcher to reach a wider audience in international conferences, seminars, symposia and workshops, bilingual capacity in more than one lingua franca, including French, is pertinent especially in a country that is bilingual country such as Lebanon where French plays an important role. While it is a truism that in the academic or research world there is an unspoken rule that researchers must be fluent in English in order to obtain international recognition for their works, there appears to be a growing need for researchers to have some level of understanding of French language so as to reach out to French audience which constitutes a significant population in the research community such as Lebanon. Articles and other research papers written in French are accessible to larger research communities through publication in international, peer-reviewed and prestigious journals. Reaching a larger audience which in turn translates into higher citation indices, is often more appealing since publishing journal articles and other research texts in a language other than an international lingua franca such as French means restricting knowledge dissemination to highly specialized and closely knit research communities.

Thus, transmission of knowledge, research findings and innovations to the French speaking world becomes easier for an international researcher who is proficient in the use of French language. Consequently, lack of proficiency in French language by international researchers may pose not only some limitations in reaching French-speaking research community but more importantly affect his or her research studies especially when dealing with bilingual countries such as Lebanon, Cameroun, Canada, Syria and others. Another useful French research institute based in Nigeria which has impacted a lot on international researchers is the Institut Francais de Recherche en Afrique/French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) based at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. Publications of the Institute are normally in English and French. It is a non-profit Institute set up to promote research in the social sciences and humanities as well as enhance collaborative studies between scholars in France and West Africa and was established in 1990. It promotes excellent, pertinent and cutting -edge 'Made-in-Nigeria' research in Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Ibadan. It equally fosters research and international collaborative research projects written in both French and English languages respectively.

Working Language of Publishing

The importance of publishing research bilingually cannot be over-emphasized. International researchers who have proficiency in French also stand in a position of opportunity to explore the potential of the market of books and journals produced in French language. A good number of books and journal articles (in print and digital formats) are organized in post-colonial languages of English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and even Arabic. The market for books, journals and other publications is by far one the largest and is driven by vigorous marketing. French publishers such as Gallimard, Grasset, le Seuil, Albin Michel, Elyzad, Barzakh among others have huge and organized book market which can be explored by international researchers who can write in French language. This publishing firms have continued to develop and establish fair and mutually commercial ties with different countries of the world particularly in Francophone countries. What this suggests is that international researchers who can write in French can explore this kind of publishing market. Besides, many journals are published in French. There are also journals that require French abstracts (but publish papers in English) as non-French speakers. This creates some limitations or problems for international researchers who do not have understanding or proficiency in French language.

The inability of an international researcher to write in French could be challenging, especially while trying to publish in some journals that require French abstracts. The French abstract is the exact translation of the English abstract sentence by sentence with nothing more or less. To this end when a researcher has proficiency in French language, he crosses the hurdle of translating from English or any other language to French.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown the growth and developement of French language to an internationally and globally accepted language used in various international organizations. Again, the usage of the language in international conferences, workshops, seminars as well as in publication of articles for journals and books have aided the wide spread of the language globally. Indeed, French is both a working language and an official language of the UN, the European Union, UNESCO, NATO, the International Olympic Committee, the International Red Cross and several international legal bodies. More importantly, the advantages of understanding the language are numerous. Indeed, understanding it offers the chance to hear an alternative view of the world through the international French language media. (TV5, France 24, Radio France Internationale). Again, learning a second-language has been shown to have a positive impact on intellectual growth. In fact, studies suggest learning a second-language can enhance cognitive and intellectual abilities. Also, learning French helps one to understand other people and their culture.

It is evidently clear that In view of the global usefulness of the language, intensive efforts should be made by the Nigerian Government to continue to enforce the official policy initiated by the late Nigerian military head of state-General Sani Abacher of making French as a second language 'as laid down in section 1 no 10. of the National Policy on Education (1998). This is more imperative when it is viewed against the background of the fact that Nigeria is surrounded by francophone countries. The policy actually emphasised that 'for a smooth interaction with our francophone neighbors, its desirable for every Nigerian to speak French'.

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