

Interference and code switching in the English classes of Licence 2 and Licence 3 at the German studies department in Omar Bongo University

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Abstract:

This research paper deals with the analysis of interference and code switching based on learners experience at Omar Bongo University. Data have been driven from first and second year students in the German studies Department. It comes out from discussion and data interpretation that the contact of English, French and German bring out some cases of interferences which influence the learning of a second language. For the sake of this work, it appears that French and German have a negative impact on the learning of English language.

Keywords: interference, code switching, English classes, Licence1/2, German department

Résumé

Cet article offre une analyse des cas d'interférences et de code switching des apprenants de l'Université Omar Bongo. Les données ont été collectées auprès des apprenants de Licence 1 et de Licence 2 du Département d'études germaniques. Il résulte des discussions et interprétations des données que le contact des langues anglaise, allemande et française crée des phénomènes d'interférence qui influencent l'apprentissage de deuxième langue. Pour ce travail, il est démontré que les langues allemande et française ont un impact négatif sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais.

Mots clés: interférence, code switching, cours d'anglaise, Licence 1/2, département d'allemand

Introduction

Multilingualism is a requirement for most people leaving in one of the former African colonies. People speak different indigenous languages and a variety that is different from the language of the former colonizer. This leads to a situation where, for all those countries, multilingualism is a complex concept with various implications. In fact, those countries present a linguistic landscape where the speakers pertain to a hybrid genre in terms of language behavior. For the case of Gabon, people call themselves bilingual if they are able to speak another European language than French. If a person only speaks French and his/her native language, that person will not consider himself/herself as a bilingual. The education system also emphasizes this situation because foreign languages are part of the curricula as early as primary school. The pupils then grow up learning English or other foreign languages, while French stands as a first language (Mabika Mbokou, 2006:4). This situation has some consequences on the way those languages are taught and learned. Not to mention that, language contact originating in linguistic communication of individuals from different languages; and its consequences, starting with mutual

linguistic influences, occurs during the study of any foreign language. This appears crucial in a geographic region like Gabon, with mutual contacts of several cultures and of many local languages¹⁰.

Not only foreign languages are taught at a very early age in Gabon (around 3 or 4 years olds), but those languages find their way in the higher education system. Most universities curricula in Gabon offer foreign languages as subject and do have foreign language departments such as the English department, Spanish department, and so on. Omar Bongo University, the first Gabonese institution of higher education, holds three departments of Foreign Languages Studies, namely: the Department English Studies (Département d'Études Anglophones); the Hispanic Studies Department (Département d'Études Ibériques); and the German Studies Department (Département d'Études Germaniques). The average student population ranks between 17 and 30 years. This part of the Gabonese population has French as mother tongue (Idiata 2005, Mabika Mbokou 2006, 2014), when they reach university, they have been exposed to at least two foreign languages. Thus, the students who chose to register under the mentioned foreign studies departments, often do so because they learned the language of the chosen department in secondary school, they had good marks and/or like it, the motivation for registration being the level of proficiency of the student.

Although the environment in which the Gabonese students learn those foreign language logically pertains to the field of foreign language learning, we believe it mainly falls in favor of phenomenon pertaining to bilingualism such as interference and code switching. Grass and Selinker (2009:4) said about second and third language acquisition that it draws from many disciplines, among which sociolinguistics, because the answer to why do second language (L2) learners do not achieve the same degree of knowledge and proficiency in the language they learn, as they do in their native language, is linked to the fact that language learning involves learning to express communicative needs (Grass and Selinker op. cit.). Grass and Selinker works in the domain of second language acquisition which differs from foreign language learning because, for second language acquisition, the focus is on questioning the acquisition process of nonnative speakers in an environment that is not the one of their native language (children of migrants living in a foreign country). For foreign language learning it is the mechanisms and methods of teaching and learning in a classroom environment that are investigated and implemented. Our case study is designed from theoretical insights from second language acquisition studies and sociolinguistics (Grass and Selinker 2009, Wardaugh 2008). The reason behind that choice lays in the fact that sociocultural context and teaching/learning process are closely linked. In linguistics, any study leads to the comprehension of the functioning of a specific language at a specific period according to the society which uses it. Comprehending the mistakes made by the students in during their learning process of the English language using a sociolinguistic approach add to dynamic dimension of the English language in Africa. Like Ibouanga (2015: 26-27), we think that being a multilingual country, the presence of many languages in the Gabonese territory easily causes differences due to the balance of power between languages. This statement lines up with Wardaugh (2008) who reminds us that modern sociolinguistics focuses on social factors such as age, gender, social class, etc., and their influence on language use. It is the influence of French on the foreign languages the student are learning that is questioned in the present contribution.

Gabon is the case to be studied in this article, and we are going to look at some of the mistakes made by second (Licence 2) and third year (Licence 3) students of the German Studies Department of the Omar Bongo University in their learning process of the English language. A student in a language classroom is expected to memorize the rules of the learned language, apply them into sentence constructions, then translate those sentences from the native language to the language being learned and vice versa. The study is a quantitative research on interference mistakes and it was conducted to comprehend the process by which the mistakes are made. Before explaining the process of those mistakes in further details, we will give a brief overview of the framework as well as the linguistic environment of the students.

¹⁰ The estimated number of Gabonese languages is around 60 and 62.

1. The Fieldwork

Bilingual classrooms most often have strict language arrangements about when and who should speak what language to whom. This practice responds to bilingual conceptualizations in a complex discursive practice of multilingual classroom. This article presents two cases of concrete experimentation of the exploitation of a multilingual situation in the teaching of English as special subject at university. The German Studies Department where we lecture was our field. The teaching of the English language there is challenged by a hybrid environment due to the strong presence of French and the first subject language that is German.

2. The methodology

During our lectures, we noticed that some of the students were having difficulties during the reading and oral sessions. Those difficulties were affecting the comprehensiveness of their speech because the English sounds were not properly pronounced. When that was happening, we often had to ask the student to repeat him/herself to be able to guess words. The situation really strokes us because we knew that most of the students registered for that lecture had at least 7 or more years of English as subject language. This was even stressed by the spelling mistakes that we found while marking essays, translation exercises, research works, and so on. Our curiosity grew up and we decide to make a record of all the spelling and grammatical mistakes we will encounter during the marking process, as well as all the errors and mispronunciations we will face during the oral session of the lecture. Thus we started to observe and pay more attention to what was said and what was written.

Our investigation was conducted both quantitative- and qualitatively. First, we exploit the copies of the assignments of the students in a period of 6 academic years. In second, several students were asked to pronounce words in isolation as well as read small texts. The students who were recorded were chosen based on the mistakes found in the copies. A second group of the students were recorded based on their English proficiency. The production of both groups was analyzed.

As already mentioned, our study was conducted over 6 academic years – 2014-2015; 2015-2016; 2016-2017; 2017-2018; 2018-2019; 2019-2020— and had two phases;

- i. The first test consisted in the observation of the oral proficiency and the writing performance of the students during the lecture. At this stage, the student did not know that they were being evaluated because we did not want to influence their language behavior. Then the students were asked to pronounce isolated sentences and write short text where the mistaken utterances were found. This phase was conducted to check the results obtained in the preceding phase.
- ii. For the second phase, the mistakes observed were classified according to: the period or age at which English was learned; the context of teaching/learning in which the student were exposed to; and the language distance among French, English and German. For the second phase, the students were aware of the investigation.

After the first phase, we came up with the hypothesis that French language being the dominant and/or first language for those students, its privileged status would affect their encoding and speech production. This hypothesis was extended to German, as this language is the main subject language of the department. Students spend more time speaking French in their family realm and daily environment, they spend more time speaking German in the lectures, English is an optional subject for those wanting to pursue translation studies and interpretation cursus. Thus, we wanted to discover what was the mechanism behind the mistakes we noticed.

3. The Linguistic environment

The linguistic Gabonese landscape has changed from what it looked like after the independencies. French has become the first and/or native language most of the young generation because it is the language of administration, of business, and the major lingua franca. And With French being the sole official language and the major lingua franca in Gabon, Gabonese people do not use their native languages the way they used to because most of those languages are facing diglossia. Like noticed by Pambou and Mbindi Aninga (2023:49), for children living and growing up in the cities (mainly Libreville the capital), the foundation of the language inherited from the parents only comprises French. Most daily conversations are done in French among members of the same family.

Most researches on the history of French in Gabon dated its appearance around 1800s. At that period, not only French from France arrived in Gabon, but the country saw a valse of western countries such as USA, Portugal, Nederland, Germany, Spain, to name a few. Some even came before French people and they all brought their language with them. Evidences of the contact the Gabonese population had with those countries are found the lexicon of Gabonese local languages (Mavoungou). Thus, Gabonese children, and in our case, Gabonese students have always lived in a multilingual environment involving foreign languages.

Co-existing languages are often in a process of rapid change. Where many languages exist, there is often language shift. This is one of the reasons why, somehow, the complexity of defining the concept of bilingualism is due to one's decision on how much knowledge of the second language (L2) one must possess. There certainly exists a difference between a person who can master an L2 and the ability of using it. The person might struggle with the speaking proficiency while the writing proficiency is perfect, and vice-versa. Most of the second language (L2) users control a different range of registers and styles in the two languages. For this reason, a person can have a bilingual knowledge while being a monolingual. And yet, when someone uses more than one language, he/she must internalize the L2 or the third language (L3) in such a way that he/she can use it for different functions and at different levels. It is generally accepted that even if a person masters two or more languages, that person very seldom master them in an equal degree of mastering. There will often be a situation whereby one language is dominant, and the others are weaker. As such, the linguistic situation and function of the mastered languages must be considered in the description of the linguistic environment of the studied student. In the following lines, a record is made of the different mistakes made by the students in the learning process of English, based on the influence French and German have on them, languages that they learn and speak at the same time.

4. Key concepts

When an individual's understanding of one language has an impact on his or her understanding of another language, that individual is experiencing language transfer. Language interference is thus the effect of language learners' first language on their production of the language they are learning Wardaugh, 2008:76). It means that the speaker's first language influences his/her second or and his/her foreign language. The effect can be on any aspect of language: grammar, vocabulary, accent, spelling and so on. Language interference is considered as one of error sources (negative transfer), although where the relevant feature of both languages is the same it results in correct language production (positive transfer). The greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative the effects of interference are likely to be. It will inevitably occur in any situation where someone has not mastered a second language.

4.1. Interference

In the field of language contact, interference is a bilingual phenomenon implying the transference of elements of one language to another. In situation of bilingualism, it is not rare to see words, sounds, or other structural linguistic elements of a first or dominant language L1, affecting the structure of the linguistic elements of the second language L2. Such situations have been described and studied by linguists and sociolinguists. In that regard, several definitions and theoretical approaches were developed. A common definition is that interference in language contact, is the result of the intrusion of a learner's first language while learning a second or third language. For this article, we will line up with the definitions of Wardaugh, and Grey-Thomason and Kaufman. We agree with them because we believe that their approach towards interference is more appropriate to the Gabonese classroom situation.

- According to Wardaugh (2008), linguistic interference also called language transfer, refers to the property of a user of a language to apply the knowledge from his/her native language to a second language. In our case, the Gabonese students of the German Studies Department (GSD), being influenced by French in their learning process of the English language, named here L2. From this viewpoint, he defines linguistic interference as follows:
- The automatic transfer, due to habit, of the structure of the L1 onto the structure of the L2 (ex. The use of female pronoun she/her for things for a French speaker person speaking English);
- The influence of that the learner of a language has on the learnt language (speaking a L2 with the syntax of one's native language);
- The potential manifestation of the mutual contact of cultures and of their conflict and interaction that can be realized as a change in one, both or all of the participating contact languages;
- A language borrowing element from another language and adapting them to its own system (case of integrated borrowings);
- A unidirectional influence on one language;

- A mutual influence of languages in contact.

The diverse definitions and characterizations of linguistic interference proposed by Wardaugh can be divided into several basic groups:

1. Linguistic interaction between two different languages consisting of the impact of linguistic forms and/or system on another (Ibouanga, 2015);
2. Language penetration, which is the penetration of linguistic elements from one language into another, or mutual penetration of linguistic forms/systems;
3. A new linguistic phenomenon arising from linguistic contact, common to both/all contact language forms/systems;
4. Modified linguistic norms;
5. Linguistic system arising from the penetration of the L2 linguistic structural elements;
6. Appearance of an innovation common to both L1 and L2.

For Grey-Thomason and Kaufmann (1991), it is the sociolinguistic history and background of the speakers that determines the linguistic outcome of language contact. They say, and we agree with them, that linguistic interference is conditioned by social factors, and that both the direction and the extend of interference are socially determined in the same way the elements transferred from one language to another are (Grey-Thomason and Kaufmann 1991: 35).

Given these theoretical approaches, we can add that when an individual's understanding of one language has an impact on his or her understanding of another language, that individual is experiencing language transfer. Language interference is thus the effect of language learners' first language on their production of the language they are learning. It means that the speaker's first language influences his/her second or and his/her foreign language. Grammatical interference is when the first language influencing the second in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determinants, tense and mood. Interference at a lexical level provides for the borrowing of words from one language and converting them to sound more familiar to the learner. In the meantime, orthographic interference includes the spelling of one language altering another. Those are the types of mistakes we observe during our English lecture. The students tend to use more familiar sounds and/ or syntactic structure to express themselves in the learned language, which is in our case, English.

Indeed, multilingualism is a requirement for most people leaving in one of the former African colonies. People speak different indigenous languages and a variety that is different from the language of the former colonizer. This leads to a situation where, for all those countries, multilingualism is a complex concept with various implications. In fact, those countries present a linguistic landscape where the speakers pertain to a hybrid genre in terms of language behavior (Mbindi Aninga, 2019: 212). Besides, language contact originating in linguistic communication of individuals from different languages; and its consequences, starting with mutual linguistic influences, also occur during the study of any foreign language. This appears crucial in a geographic region with mutual contacts of several cultures and of many national languages. In that regard, the environment in which the students of the German department of the Omar Bongo University falls in favor of phenomenon pertaining to the field of contact language, such as interference and code-switching.

4.2 Code-switching

Because we investigate the production of both written and oral utterances, we encounter the bilingual phenomenon named code-switching. For some authors (Hock 1996, Mounin 2013) code switching is not a language interference on the basis that it supplements speech. Where it is used due to an inability of expression, code switching provides a continuity in speech rather than presenting an interference in language. However, in our case study, we noticed that the mistakes lead by that phenomenon also impeded the comprehensiveness of the discourse. During the oral expression exercises we observed two situations. In the first one, the listeners had difficulties understanding what their classmate was saying because they were using French or German words in their English sentences; the second one was that the exercise was interrupted because the listener had noticed that the speaker placed a French or German word in the conversation. For that reason, we believe that code-switching can be regarded as an obstruction to communication.

We estimate that the record of the mistakes due to code-switching were not as relevant as the ones due to interference. Although we said few words on the topic, we chose to only present the outcomes of French and German interfering on English.

5. The French Influence

French and English lexicons have considerable areas of overlap since the two languages are bound historically. However, there are some differences that can cause interference in the production of English. A typical problem when it comes to non-English speakers having French as first of main language, will reside in the pronunciation of some sounds as, the vowel system of English present sounds that do not exist in the vocalic system of French and vice-versa. There are frequent occasions when words may look alike, they are written the same and the only difference is seen in the pronunciation. Some of those common words are taken as sample in the following table:

Words	French pronunciation	English pronunciation
table	[tɑbl]	[teibl]
important	[ɛ̃pɔ̃tɑ̃t]	[ɪmpɔːtənt]
visibility	[vizibilite]	[vɪzɪbɪləti]
large	[la:rʒ]	[lɑ:dʒ]
cound	[rɔ̃]	[raʊnd]
couple	[kupl]	[kʌpl]
observation	[ɔbsɛvasiɔ̃]	[ɒbzəveɪʃən]
llusion	[ilyziɔ̃]	[əluʒən]
gang	[gɑ̃g]	[gæŋ]
famine	[famɛn]	[fæmɪn]
posture	[pɔstyr]	[pɒstə]
question	[kɛstjɔ̃]	[kwɛstʃən]
cable	[kabl]	[keɪbl]
nation	[nasjɔ̃]	[neɪʃən]
obstacle	[ɔbstakl]	[ɒbstəkəl]
patient	[pasjɑ̃]	[peɪʃənt]
impossible	[ɛ̃pɔsibl]	[ɪmpɒsɪbəl]
omnipotent	[ɔmnipɔtɑ̃]	[ɒmnɪpətənt]
martial	[marsjal]	[mɑːʃəl]
calcium	[kalsjɔ̃]	[kælsɪəm]
magic	[majik]	[mædʒɪk]
lamentation	[lamɑ̃tasjɔ̃]	[læmənteɪʃən]
palace	[pɑlɑs]	[pælɪs]
magazine	[magazin]	[mægəziːn]
obsession	[ɔbsesjɔ̃]	[əbseɪʃən]
influence	[ɛ̃flyɑ̃s]	[ɪnflʊəns]
malaria	[malɑrja]	[məleəriə]
nature	[natyr]	[neɪtə]
rage	[rɑʒ]	[reɪdʒ]
cage	[kɑʒ]	[keɪdʒ]
variation	[variasjɔ̃]	[veəriəɪʃən]

Although the record presented is not exhaustive¹¹, when looking at the table, words in French are similar in writing and seem identical to that of English. The resemblance in writing leads to mistakes in pronunciations. French interferes in the apprenticeship because student's pronunciation is built on pattern pertaining to the French linguistic system. The examples below illustrate the point.

(1)

“illusion” pronounced [ilyʒən] like in French instead of [əluʒən]

“posture” pronounced [pɔstjʁ] like in French instead of [pɒstə]

“famine” pronounced [famɛn] like in French instead of [fæmɪn]

“cable” pronounced [kɛbəl] instead of [keɪbəl]

“question” pronounced [kɛstjən] like in French instead of [kwɛstʃən]

¹¹ For matter of space and in order to meet the editorial requirement, we chose to present only few of the words of our corpus.

The above examples show that the students mix both the English and the French pronunciation. The sounds in bold reveal that if the words they had to read seemed or sounded familiar to them, they switched to the French sound they know the most (“cable”, “famine”, “posture”).

Another aspect revealed is that, because French sound system does not admit certain sound such diphthongs, learners have problems is pronouncing them. In the same way, they interfere in their pronunciation adding sound that do not exist in English. This situation is particularly seen with nasal sounds, [ɛ̃], [œ̃], [ɔ̃] et [ɑ̃]. Students pronounce the nasal sounds instead of the nasalized ones in a systematic way, especially when those sounds are placed at the beginning the word, like presented in the following examples

(2)

“important” pronounced [ɛ̃pɔ̃ʁtant] instead of [ɪmpɔːtant]

“impossible” pronounced [ɛ̃pɔ̃sibl] instead of [ɪmpɔːsibl]

“linguistics” pronounced [lɛ̃gɥwɪstɪks] instead of [lɪŋgwɪstɪks]

“long” pronounced [lɔ̃ŋ] instead of [lɒŋ]

“example” pronounced [egzɑ̃mpl] instead of [ɪgzɑːmpl]

The following lines present a more detailed record of some of the mistakes we noticed while marking assignments, research works and essays. The French influence we observed was seen at both phonetic and syntactic levels. We did not explore its influence on the morphological structure of the language of the students, though we think we could have found some interesting facts.

5.1. Influence at a phonetic level

The pronunciation of words comprising the letter “a”

Whether it is French or German, the letter “a” is pronounced [a] or [ɑ]. The students tend to pronounce all the words containing the mentioned letter at the beginning of an English word, the same as in French

Words	Standard English pronunciation	Student’s pronunciation
Abandon	[əbændən]	[abændən]/ [abɑdən]
Approach	[əprəʊtʃ]	[aprotʃ]
Abortion	[əbɔːʃən]	[abɔːʃən]
Avoid	[əvɔɪd]	[avɔɪd]
Astonishment	[əstənɪʃmənt]	[astənɪʃmənt]

Some cases were observed with the same pronunciation when the letter “a” was in other positions.

Words	Standard English pronunciation	Student’s pronunciation
Amazing	[əbændən]	[amaziŋ]
Formation	[fɔːmeɪʃən]	[fɔːmɑʃən]
Impact	[ɪmpækt]	[ɪmpakt]
Apparent	[əpærənt]	[əparənt]/ [aparənt]

The pronunciation of the words comprising the complex letter “in” pronounce like the French nasal vowel [ɛ̃]

Word	Standard English pronunciation	Students’ pronunciation
Impossible	[ɪmpɔːsɪbəl]	[ɛ̃mpɔːsɪbəl]
Linguistics	[lɪŋgwɪstɪks]	[lɛ̃ŋgwɪstɪks]
International	[ɪntənæʃənəl]	[ɛ̃tənæʃənəl]
Input	[ɪnpʊt]	[ɛ̃pʊt]
Impede	[ɪmpiːd]	[ɛ̃piːd]

The pronunciation of the sequence letter “am/n” or “em/en” like the French nasal sound [ɑ]

Word	Standard English pronunciation	Students' pronunciation
Ambulance	[æmbjʊləns]	[ɑ̃bylaʃ]/ [ɑbylaʃ]
Ambassador	[æmbæsədə]	[ɑ̃bæsədə]/ [ɑbæsədə]
Ambition	[æmbɪʃən]	[ɑ̃mbɪʃən]/ [ɑbɪʃən]
Ab an don	[əbəndən]	[əbəɑ̃dən]/
Sil en t	[saɪlənt]	[saɪlaʃ]
Pat ien t	[peɪʃənt]	[peɪfaʃ]
Cl ien t	[klaɪənt]	[klaɪaʃ]/ [kliɑʃ]
Import an t	[ɪmpɔ:tənt]	[ɪmpɔ:taʃ]
Pot en tial	[pəʊtenʃəl]	[pəʊtaʃəl]/ [pətaʃəl]

5.2. Influence at a syntactic level

The order of the words in sentences and phrases follows the syntactic French pattern. This is done through an analogical process. Analogy is a calque used by a user of a language A while speaking a language B. The speaker tends to copy the pattern he/she finds in his/her language and adapt it to the other language. In the case of the German studies' students, they use analogical levelling, which consists in maintaining and/or modifying the internal structure of a language through the calque of a dominant linguistic pattern pertaining to another language (Holms, 1995; Mabika Mbokou, 2019). The French pattern forms they are used to, replaced the English linguistic pattern. The phenomenon was observed when students had to use adjectives in their speech/written production. The following lines present a record of some of the mistakes taken from written assignments.

English sentences	French translation	Student production
I came to have some news.	Je suis venu prendre de tes nouvelles.	I came to take news
The blue-eyed lady/ with the blue eyes just disappeared from the scene.	La dame aux yeux bleus disparu de la scène.	The lady with the eyes blue just disappeared from the scene
I don't understand what is the text about	Je ne comprends pas de quoi parle le texte	I don't understanding the texte about
People have been very hot since the beginning of summer because of global warming	Les gens ont très chaud depuis le début de l'été à cause du réchauffement climatique	During since the beginning of summer, people have very hot because hot climate/ People are very hot because of the warming of the climate
The evolution of the English language considers different historical events	L'évolution de la langue anglaise prend en compte différents événements historiques	The evolution of the English language considers events historic different / The evolution of English consider different events historical
[...] there are morphological, phonological, syntactic, semantic and phonological levels	[...] il y a les niveaux morphologiques, phonologiques, syntaxiques, sémantiques et phonologiques	[...] there are the morphological, phonological, syntactical , semantical and phonetic.
Good health depends on the choice of healthy food	La bonne dépend du choix de bons aliments	Good health depends in the choice of healthy food.
Human activities are at the center of global warming	Les activités humaines sont au centre du réchauffement climatique	Human activities are in the centre of global warming
They chose the large red dotted table cloth for the party.	Ils ont choisi la grande nappe de table rouge à pois.	They chose the large table cloth red with dot

6. The German influence

With German and English being genetically related we noticed that the type of interference observed among the students resulted in the transfer of writing habits or conventions of the German languages to the English one. This

occurred with students who were not very fluent in English and were not accurate in its orthography. Those students systematically applied the German spelling or were tempted to follow their perception of the less known language (English).

6.1. German sounds influence

words comprising the letter “u” pronounced [u] like in German.

Words	Standard English pronunciation	Student’s pronunciation
nature	[neɪtʃə]	[neɪtʃur]/ [natur]
posture	[pɒstʃə]	[pɒstʃur]
murmurs	[mɜ:mə]	[murmur]/ [mɜ:mur]
culturally	[kʌltʃərəli]	[kultʃərəli]/ [kultʃərəli]
culture	[kʌltʃə]	[kultʃur]
adventure	[ədventʃə]	[ədventʃur]/ [adventʃur]

The above examples show that it is the letter “u” that drives the change in pronunciation. In English, the mentioned written utterance as different sound realization, namely [ə], [ɜ] and [ʌ] like seen in “culture”, “murmurs” and “nature”. The students systematically assimilate the letter “u” to the German [u].

The pronunciation of [s] sound as [z]

For the production of the voiceless fricative sound [s], we noticed that only transparent words, words that share the same spelling and are similar in sounds underwent a phonetic change.

Words	Standard English pronunciation	Student’s pronunciation
seldom	[seldəm]	[zeldəm]
several	[sevərəl]	[zevərəl]/ [zevərəl]
also	[ɔ:lsoʊ]	[ɔ:lzəʊ]/ [alzəʊ]
so	[səʊ]	[zəʊ]/ [zəʊ]
super	[su:pə]	[zu:pə]
six	[sɪks]	[zɪks]

Words like “section, selfish, sea, that do not share any similarities in spelling with German words are pronounced in a correct way

Complex consonants [sp] at the beginning of a word pronounced [ʃp]

Words	Standard English pronunciation	Student’s pronunciation
special	[speʃəl]	[ʃpeʃəl]
specific	[spəsɪfɪk]	[ʃpəsɪfɪk]
spectacular	[spɛktækjʊlə]	[ʃpɛktækjʊlə]
spoil	[spɔɪl]	[ʃpɔɪl]
spread	[spred]	[ʃpred]
speed	[spi:d]	[ʃpi:d]

Complex letters “tion” at the end of a word pronounced [tsion] instead of [ʃən]

Words	Standard English pronunciation	Student’s pronunciation
Deportation	[di:pɔ:teɪʃən]	[di:pɔ:teɪtsion]/ [deɪpɔ:teɪtsion]
Observation	[əbzəveɪʃən]	[əbzəveɪtsion]
Motion	[məʊʃən]	[məʊʃən]/ [mɔ:tsion]
mystification	[mɪstɪfɪkeɪʃən]	[mɪstɪfɪkeɪtsion]
Adoration	[ədɔ:reɪʃən]	[ədɔ:reɪtsion]
communication	[kəmju:nɪkeɪʃən]	[kəmju:nɪkeɪtsion]
Variation	[veəriəʃən]	[veəriətsion]/ [vəriətsion]

7. Discussion

As already mention in section 2, the paper intended to showcase the mistakes made by the student of the German Studies Department. The number of mistakes we reported during our analysis is only a sample of our corpus. We chose to only present some of the mistakes based on:

- i. The appearance frequency. The mistake had to be repeated more than 10 times through at least 3 academic years, and it had to be made by more than 50% of the investigated students both levels alike.
- ii. The level of English proficiency. The group of students with less skills in the English language did not receive the priority as we wanted to check whether linguistic interference was at the core of the mistakes.

The outcomes of the analysis are as follow:

- Most of the interference phenomenon observed were linked to the fact that the teaching process of foreign language in Gabon does not make room for proper communication purposes. The previous years of learning English did not allow them to be fluent nor to master the rules of that language, although they started from an early age (some of the student did have 8 years of learning English by the time they reached the German Studies).
- Although the mistakes recorded from the copies were less than the ones noticed during the oral expression exercises, their number confirm the weakness of the teaching process. In secondary schools, the aim is the acquisition of grammar rules and vocabulary. But the pupils don't have enough time to apply them in real situation communication. This can explain why some of the students had difficulties in writing correct grammatical sentences and tend to follow the syntactic French system (use of prepositions, place and ordering of adjectives).
- For some cases, we noticed that the choice of phonetic utterances did not follow a particular rule, while for others the students seem to have drawn a particular pattern. This did not help in preventing the mistakes during our lectures.

Interference phenomena are non-predictable. It is not possible to say which form of the L2 linguistic system will be subject to interference or when it will appear. They can occur at a phonetical level, a morphological level, and on a syntactical level. It is not possible to say with certitude up to which extend the L2 will be affected during the speech/text production and what will be the innovating element. Because of the dominant position of both French and German (French acting as a native language and German as main subject language), there exist a transfer of forms paradigms during the learning process of English. The greater the differences between two languages are, the more negative the effects of interference are likely to be. The distance language between French and English falls in favor of mistakes and translation errors. For example, it often happens that when a student was asked to interpret one of his/her classmate, that student was trying to find the meaning of a particular sentences by adding together the words of the sentence, based on isolated meaning. That process resulted in a wrong choice of both lexical items and syntactic structure. Surprisingly, surveys conducted using the copies have shown the same phenomenon.

To put an end to that section, we want to emphasize the fact that language contact is resulting from the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time. Any definition of language contact bears three fundamental criteria: (i). having more than one language; (ii). speech communities undertaking the contact; (iii). the socio-cultural setting where the contact occurs. For the case of students of the German department, the penetration of linguistic elements from French and German languages into the English one results in modified linguistic norms and/or systems. For example, if a phonetic record of the way those students speak English was made, it would contain sounds unknown to the standard English linguistic system, because mispronunciation (French [y] as in the pronunciation of words like "manuscript", "picture", "formula"; French nasal vowels [ɛ], [ɔ], [ɑ], like in the words "abandon", "tragion" "potential", "linguistics", and so on).

We are aware of the fact that the investigations we did on the mistakes made by the students of the German Studies Department are not exhaustive. Further analyses should be done to highlight other bilingualisms phenomena and unveil the mechanisms behind them. But we believe that the present paper has laid the path for further researches in foreign language teaching in Gabon, especially at university level.

Conclusion

When languages come into contact, for the speakers of one speech community to integrate words and/or linguistic units coming from the other language, those words or linguistic units often meet pattern already existing in the language. For example, forms that can be constructed from minority or majority patterns already existing in the language as well as from a foreign linguistic system that is more familiar to the speakers. Thus, they often go from most complex forms to simple ones. In the case of the students of the German studies department, our investigation has shown that the simple forms they turn to are existing forms found in their native language, French, and in German, the subject language they use for communication during the lecture and among themselves. Our hypothesis was that French and German had an influence on the learning process of English as subject language in that department. Through structural and lexical examples of interference, the observations made have shown the appearance of new forms that are not part of the standard English system. The result of such situation has an influence on the phonetic and syntactic writing system of that language.

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