

Full Length Research Paper

Competence in French connected speech: A study on Tanzanian pre-service secondary school French teachers

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Abstract

This paper discusses the competence of Tanzanian pre-service French teachers in connected speech. The study particularly aimed at measuring the extent to which they are capable of comprehending the message through the stream of words from French native speakers and producing a text naturally with liaison and enchaînement. The study was conducted at the University of Dar es Salaam covering 46% of 2014/2015 academic year B.A. Education finalists who were randomly selected. Data were collected through watching a video-clip, and oral discourse test (ODT). As for the analysis, interpretive content analysis was used with the aid of tables. The results show that the subjects scored excellently at 17% in both liaison and enchaînement but had more challenges in enchaînement than in liaison as the scores in the production of liaison ranged from 60% to 77% while that of enchaînement ranged from 53% to 73%. However, the comprehension of native speakers' conversation was excellent at 33% implying that the subjects were better at understanding than producing the aspects of the French connected speech. The inability of the subjects to comprehend and produce precisely the said features was caused mainly by the influence of the learner's Bantu L1 and L2 which are deprived of the liaison and enchaînement, lack of enough oral exercises, contact with native French users and poor learning environment. The study recommends that all the factors should be dealt with severely through communicative approach which is the best in the today's modern teaching-learning process.

Keywords: Connected speech, liaison, enchaînement, French pre-service teachers

Introduction

This research paradigm is in line with the foreign language acquisition as French for the Tanzanians involved in the study is their fourth after their ethnic community languages (ECLs), Kiswahili and English. The introduction of this work contains linguistic situation of Tanzania, studies on French connected speech in Tanzania, and contextualisation of the study. The methodology highlights sampling design and sample size, and data collection methods. The work further gives the findings, conclusions and eventually recommendations of the study.

Linguistic Situation of Tanzania

Tanzania is blessed with 164 languages (Languages of Tanzania Project, 2009). However, Tanzanians are

rather swahilophones as their vehicular language is Kiswahili. The use ECLs is so minimal as the current generation does not take trouble to learn the respective languages and those claiming to be speaking them do code mix or code switch with Kiswahili, and thus only a few speak a "pure" version of these languages (Janson, 2002; Batibo, 2005; Petzell, 2012). This has almost been a custom due to the fact that the first President of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, with his intention to unify Tanzanians, favoured Kiswahili, a Bantu language, as a national language (Petzell, 2012: 137). Most Tanzanians tend to code switch, code mix, or intra-word switch using English and Kiswahili codes even in official meetings, seminars and workshops prepared in English [or very rarely French]. Sometimes the switching becomes severe to the extent of completely abandoning English and using Kiswahili as

the main language of these settings (Chiwanga, 2014: 150).

Regarding the statuses of languages in Tanzania, Chiwanga (2014:150) informs further that Kiswahili has high (H) status in rural and semi-rural areas and low (L) status in urban and semi-urban areas. English, with high (H) status, is spoken prestigiously by a few educated people nationwide while ECLs, with low (L) status, are predominantly spoken in most rural areas of the country. To supplement, all foreign languages that are taught or spoken in the country such as English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Japanese and Chinese by a very minority number of elite people are regarded as having a high (H) status.

Kiswahili is used as a medium of instruction (Mol) in public primary schools, English serves as an Mol from secondary school to university (Lwaitama and Rugemalira, 1990). However, today English is also used as an Mol in English-medium primary schools while Kiswahili also serves as an Mol in some tertiary institutions such as Tanzania's Vocational Education Training Authority (VETA), Pasiansi Institute of Wildlife Management, and Teachers' Training Colleges (TTC) for certificate programmes. Apart from lower levels, Kiswahili is today taught in the country at Bachelor's and Master's degree levels in which this very language is the only Mol.

Apart from English and Kiswahili, French has been a lesson taught in Tanzania since 1960's. It was introduced in 1963 to the University of East Africa - today the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) (Swilla, 1980 as cited in Chipa, 1983: 4) after it was advocated to all Africans during a conference of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) - today African Union (AU) in May 1963 in Addis Ababa as a way of uniting the whole Africa. Later (in 1966) French was introduced to a few secondary schools (David, 1975 as cited in Chipa, 1983:3) where it is taught as an optional subject. French is optionally offered mostly right from secondary school to university. Today French is taught in a total of 212 learning institutions countrywide as a third or fourth language (Chiwanga, 2014: 150).

Studies on French Connected Speech in Tanzania

Pronunciation ability is important since it is not only needed for intelligible communication but can also influence individuals psychologically in that accent is a central component of face-to-face interactions and is consequently part of the process by which speakers present an image of themselves to others (Pennington and Richards, 1986).

Studies regarding pronunciation difficulties encountered by Tanzanian learners of French have been documented (Chipa, 1983; Omary, 2001). However, these studies focused exclusively on the contrastive sounds which seem impeding the learners from acquiring French proficiency. No serious attention, so far, has been drawn on the specific difficulties pre-service teachers of French encounter on the use of connected speech. Therefore, the present study intended to specifically find out how competent the Tanzanian pre-service teachers of French in comprehending and producing connected speech in

French. It was designed essentially to address two interrelated research questions: 1. To what extent do learners make use of *liaison*, and *enchaînement* phenomena? 2. To what extent do learners comprehend French connected speech? It was evident that such understanding would have important pedagogical implications for the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) particularly phonetics to non-native learners especially at the university level.

Contextualisation of the Study

One of the pronunciation difficulties encountering foreign language learners is the production and comprehension of words in connected speech. It is all about production of reduced speech or simplified speech which some researchers (such as Norris, 1995; Griffee, 1995; Moh-Kim, 1997; Rogerson, 2006) characterise as "naturally occurring talk" or "real spoken language".

Foreign language learners find it difficult to locate and recognise words when listening to connected speech (Aquil, 2012). They produce their speech as if a talking dictionary, where individual words in their speech are produced in isolation. This situation makes their speech sound weird (Shoemaker and Wauquier, 2013). Since this study intended to measure the level of future teachers whose level is estimated to be B1, we could not deal with acoustic phonetics to measure physical properties such as sound wave signals, frequency, intensity and duration but rather focused on articulatory phonetics (production of sounds) and auditory phonetics (hearing of speech sounds) and limited the study in features of connected speech notably linking (*liaison* and *enchaînement*) which are a base for natural talk in French.

Liaison

French *liaison* is a phenomenon whereby a silent word-final consonant is pronounced at the beginning of the following word if this word is vowel-initial. In other words, it refers to linking of two adjacent words when the first ends in a consonant sound while the next one starts with a vowel or a mute *h* (Chiwanga, 2008). For example, the word sequence *les enfants* 'the children', pronounced in isolation as [le] and [ɑ̃fɑ̃], is pronounced as [le.zɑ̃.fɑ̃] where [z] is the liaison consonant, which is used as the onset of the following syllable (Boula de Mareuil, Adda-Decker and Gendner, 2003). There are six liaison consonants ([z, n, t, v, p, k]) in French (e.g. [z] as in *nous avons* [nuzavɔ̃] 'we have', [n] as in *On est trois* [ɔ̃.ɛ.tʁwa] 'we are three', [t] as in *c'est impossible* [sɛ.tɛ.po.si.bl] 'it's impossible'; *grand écran* [ɡʁɑ̃.te.krɑ̃] 'big screen', [v] as in *premier acte* [pʁe.mje.ra.kt] 'first act', [p] as in *trop aimable* [tʁo.pɛ.ma.bl] 'too kind', [k] as in *long hiver* [lɔ̃.ki.veʁ] 'long winter'). The first three [z, n, t] are common in every day speech while the second three are rather rare (Pagliano & Laks, 2005; Mallet, 2008; Durand and Lyche, 2008).

Depending on certain environments, liaison can be obligatory, optional, or forbidden. For instance, liaison can be obligatory between a determiner and a noun (e.g. *un ingénieur* [œ.nɛ̃.ʒe.njœʁ] 'an engineer'), between a determiner and adjective and

noun (e.g. *les autres entreprises* [le.zo.tʁə.zã.tʁə.pʁi.z] 'the other businesses'), between a subject or object pronoun and a verb (e.g. *nous arrivons* [nu.za.bi.võ] 'we're arriving'; *nous les avons* [nu.le.za.võ] 'we have them'; *allez-y* [a.le.zi] 'go ahead'), and between two pronouns (e.g. on *nous en donne* [õ.nu.zã.dõ] 'we are given some'), after *être* (almost always required) (e.g. *Nous sommes ici* [nu.sõm.zi.si] 'We're here'). Liaison is also obligatory after a preposition (e.g. *chez eux* [[e.zø] 'at their place') or after a one-syllable adverb (e.g. *très heureux* [tʁɛ.zø.bø] 'very happy'), after the verb in inverted questions (e.g. *arrivent-ils ?* [a.biv.til] 'are they arriving?'), after the relative pronoun *do* (e.g. *dont on parle* [dõ.tõ.paʁ.l] 'about which we speak'), and in certain idiomatic expressions or compound words: *accent aigu* [aksãtɛg] 'raising accent', *pas encore* [pa.zã.kõ.b] 'not yet' *avant-hier* [a.vã.tjɛ.], *petit à petit* [pø.ti.ta.pøti] 'little by little' *de temps en temps* [dø.tã.zã.tã] 'from time to time,' *de plus en plus* [dø.ply.zã.ply] 'more and more,' and *tout à coup* [tu.ta.ku] 'all of a sudden' (Tranel, 1987).

Liaison is forbidden after a subject pronoun in inverted questions (e.g. *sommes-nous allés?* [sõm.nu.ale] 'did we go?'), after a subject noun phrase in declarative sentences (e.g., *les enfants arrivent* [le.zã.fã.a.biv] 'the children are arriving'), after the main verb in declarative sentences (e.g. *il prend un café* [il.pʁõ.ẽ.ka.fe] 'he is drinking a coffee'), after an adverb, conjunction, or polysyllabic preposition (e.g. *tantôt on partira* [tã.to.õ.paʁ.ti.ra] 'soon we will leave'), after the conjunction *et* 'and' (e.g. *vingt-et-un* [vẽ.te. ẽ] 'twenty-one'), between an adjective and a preposition (e.g. *bon à rien* [bõ.a.bjẽ] 'good for nothing'), between noun and adjective (e.g. *un client honnête* [ẽ.kli.jã.õ.nẽt] 'honest client'), between proper noun and verb (e.g. *Pierre est policier* [pjɛʁ.ẽ.põ.li.sjɛ] 'Peter is a policeman'), after an interrogative adverb (e.g. *Quand est il arrivé?* [kã.ẽ.ti.la.bi.ve] 'When did he arrive?'), and before *h*-aspire (e.g. *la haine* [la.hẽn] 'the hatred') (Boula de Mareüil *et al.*, 2003).

Liaison can be optional between auxiliary verb, modal verb and principle verb (e.g. *vous êtes arrivé* [vuz.ẽt(z)av.i.ve], 'you have arrived', *on doit apprendre* [õ.dwa(t)apʁ.ãdɛ] 'we must learn', after adverbs (e.g. *vraiment inutile* [vrẽ.mã(t).inyt.il] 'really useless'); between prepositions and nouns (e.g. *chez Anne* [je(z)an] 'Anne's home', *sans Henri* [sã(z)henʁi 'without Henry'), between plural nouns and adjectives (e.g. *les romans anglais* [le.ʁõ.mãz ã.gle] 'French novels' (Boula de Mareüil, Adda-Decker and Gendner (2003). Liaison can also be optional after *trop*, *pas*, *plus*, (e.g. *pas honnête* [pa(z)õnẽt] 'not honest'; *plus utile* [py(z).y.til] 'more useful'; *trop ambitieux* [tro(p).ãbi.sjø] 'too ambitious') (Français Interactif, 2011).

Enchaînement

French *enchaînement* is the linking of a pronounced consonant at the end of a word to the initial vowel of the next word, without the consonant's pronunciation being modified. In other words, enchaînement occurs when the final letter of the first word in two adjacent words is always heard and it is now linked to another word beginning with a vowel sound. Like liaison, the two words are pronounced as if they are one entity. For

example, the word sequence *sept amis* 'seven friends', pronounced in isolation as [set] [a.mi], is pronounced as [sɛ.ta.mi]. It should be noted that the main difference between the two phenomena (i.e. liaison and enchaînement) is that liaison occurs when the first word ends with an unpronounced consonant as in *les*, *un*, *deux*, *petit*, etc. while enchaînement occurs when the first word ends with a pronounced consonant as in *sept*, *cet*, *huit*, *avec*, *sud*, etc. (Fougeron and Delais-Roussarie, 2004; Chiwanga, 2008; Masson, 2010).

Methodology

Sampling Design and Sample Size

The present study was conducted at University of Dar es Salaam involving six out of thirteen (13) pre-service teachers [finalists] (46%) who were doing B.A. Education majoring in French, and random sampling was used to select them. The teachers had almost the same level in French proficiency as they had studied French for 9 years from their O-level secondary schools to university. All the subjects could speak their ECLs as their first language (L1), Kiswahili (L2) and English (L3), and French was their fourth language (L4). However, communication among Tanzanians is mostly done in Kiswahili and the subjects avowed to have little knowledge of their L1 and L3, but the highest competence in L2.

Data Collection Methods

The data were collected through oral discourse test (ODT) which involved reading texts, and watching a video-clip with native speakers' conversations. To start, the researchers selected three French texts from *Taxi 1* that they deemed easy for all the participants to read without difficulty and make comments about them. The subjects were then tested their ability to produce and comprehend the connected speech altogether, basing specifically on *liaison* and enchaînement. To achieve this, the ODT was used whereby the participants were given three simple texts and requested to read them as naturally and loudly as possible. The subjects tested were recorded with a Sony ICD-AX412 Stereo Digital voice recorder and the outputs were transcribed basing on the standard French phonemes (13 vowels, 18 consonants and 3 semi consonants) highlighted by Abry and Chalaron (1994). The researchers, thereafter, asked the participants to watch a French native speakers' conversation video-clip (accessed from *Français interactif*, 2011) and then asked them to answer some questions basing on the same to measure the receptive skills of these participants. The meeting with each individual lasted for about 30 minutes. The study used a Likert scale to measure the competence of the subjects tested: Excellent = 70-100, Very good = 60-69, Good = 50-59, Average = 40-49, Poor = 34-39, and Very poor = 0-34.

Findings of the Study

It should be noted that two methods were used in this study i.e. ODT, and watching a video-clip. The latter was

used to measure the re-service teachers' receptive skills (listening and comprehension skills) while the former was used to measure their speaking competence; notably liaison and enchaînement as highlighted below.

Liaison

The texts used for measuring the competences contained a total of 47 possible liaisons. The findings as summarised in Table 1 indicate that all the participants scored with a range from 60% to 77%. This is to say, 83% of the participants followed under "very good" while only 17% was "excellent".

Table 1: Number of possible liaisons produced while reading

| Texts | Part.1 | Part.2 | Part.3 | Part.4 | Part.5 | Part.6 |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Text1 | 7/9 | 6/9 | 7/9 | 6/9 | 5/9 | 7/9 |
| Text 2 | 12/16 | 12/16 | 14/16 | 12/16 | 12/16 | 13/16 |
| Text 3 | 13/16 | 13/16 | 15/16 | 12/16 | 12/16 | 14/16 |
| Total | 32/47 | 31/47 | 36/47 | 30/47 | 29/47 | 34/47 |
| Total (%) | 68% | 60% | 77% | 64% | 62% | 64% |

Source: Field Data, 2014

Enchaînement

The texts contained a total of 15 possible enchaînements. The findings as presented in Table 2

indicate that the subjects performed well ranging from 53% to 73% in which 50% was good, 33% was very good, and 17% was excellent.

Table 2: Number of possible enchaînements produced while reading

| Texts | Part.1 | Part.2 | Part.3 | Part.4 | Part.5 | Part.6 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Text1 | 1/3 | 2/3 | 2/3 | 1/3 | 3/3 | 2/3 |
| Text 2 | 6/8 | 4/8 | 5/8 | 5/8 | 6/8 | 5/8 |
| Text 3 | 2/4 | 2/4 | 4/4 | 2/4 | 2/4 | ¾ |
| Total | 9/15 | 8/15 | 11/15 | 8/15 | 10/15 | 8/15 |
| Total% | 60% | 53% | 73% | 53% | 67% | 53% |

Source: Field Data, 2014

Receptive Skills

In this component, the researchers sought to determine learners' ability to comprehend French spontaneous

speech full of liaison and enchaînement linking phenomena. The findings, summarised in Table 3, indicate that 33.33% was good, 33.33% was very good, and 33.33% was excellent.

Table 3: Pre-service teachers' comprehension of French connected Speech

| | Subj.1 | Subj.2 | Subj.3 | Subj.4 | Subj.5 | Subj.6 |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Text | 3/5 | 3/5 | 3.5/5 | 2.5/5 | 2.5/5 | 3.5/5 |
| Total | 60% | 60% | 70% | 50% | 50% | 70% |

Source: Field Data, 2014

Discussion

The data presented and analysed above indicate that the pre-service teachers of French were generally good at French connected speech as no one scored less than 50%, the score that was considered as good in this study.

To elaborate, the use of liaison ranging was performed very well by the majority (83%) of the participants and only 17% was excellent. This implies that, though the future teachers are not native speakers, they could perform very well. However, given that they had been taught and practising French for nine years, it was expected that they could perform better than they

did. With regard to enchaînement, it was found that, though they performed well, their competence in enchaînement was lower than in liaison since half of them (50%) scored well while 33% did very well as opposed to the liaison in which the scores were 83% for "very good", and no one was in the level of "good". In addition, though it was found that no one failed in the production of liaison and enchaînement, yet no one scored above 80%. This indicates that the participants had more challenges with enchaînement than liaison. Again, getting 17% of "excellent" in the production of both liaison and enchaînement and 33% in the comprehension of native speakers suggest that the

tested subjects were better at understanding than producing the aspects of the French connected speech.

As a reminder, the subjects tested had been studying French for 9 years: four years of ordinary level of secondary school, two years of advanced level of secondary school, and three years of university studies. Regardless of these, the inability of the participants to comprehend and produce precisely the connected speech at the level of excellent (70-100%) was high and this was revealed to have been caused by the following factors:

Influence of the Bantu Language of the Learners

The first and upmost cause which we can link with this phenomenon is the influence of their Bantu languages (ECLs and Kiswahili) especially their phonology. The researchers were of the view that the learners' languages differ significantly in structure with French which is to them their L4. Thus, difficulties the pre-service teachers might encounter from understanding and producing connected speech might have been imposed by interference from their Bantu languages which do not have liaison and enchaînement. However, though English is taught in Tanzania and the pre-service teachers could speak it, we cannot associate the English influence to these errors since, as hinted earlier, Tanzanians are rather Swahilophones and use Kiswahili as a vehicular language and for cross-tribal communication (Eleuthera, 2007; Chiwanga, 2014).

Lack of Contact with Native Users of French

Lack of contact with native speakers is one of the causes of the problem. Meeting and talking with native speakers of any language makes a lot of linguistic changes either through acquisition or learning of the new linguistic system. In the course of the study, it was noted that there was no future teacher who had lived in France or any Francophone country before. It is evident that living in a francophone world would definitely make a lot of phonological changes in the learning process; hence, the subjects would understand better the language spoken by the native users and, in turn, produce accurately the connected speech features.

Lack of Enough Practice and Oral Exercises

This is one of the challenges that the study revealed. It is obvious that the future teachers had no enough practice in terms of the connected speech. Benjamins (2007) says "you are what you eat phonetically" (p. 406). This implies that the better you are taught and the more you practise a language orally, the better the oral communicative competence you attain, that is practice makes perfect. If the pre-service teachers had been well trained and given enough exercises on the particular topic, they could have scored higher than what they did. The study found further that students (future teachers in this context) had limited practice outside classes among themselves; they could interact in French only with the teacher during class hours.

In connection to this, there has been a tendency in education system in the Tanzanian milieu where oral

tests and examinations are not given priority but the written ones, and as this is done, the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), a regulator and a supportive agency for the growth, development and coordination of proper functions of higher education system in Tanzania is silent.

Lack of Language Laboratory

Language laboratory has always been a challenge in the teaching/learning of foreign languages in Tanzania. This finding implies that the expected teachers were not well trained by using the communicative approach to capture thoroughly well the French phonology and particularly the connected speech. Difficulties in understanding the texts by native speakers and inability to produce liaison and enchaînement suggest that the subjects tested had not mastered well the topic even if their performance surpassed 50%.

This therefore made them end up guessing some of the sounds. The study revealed further that the pre-service teachers were always trained in normal classes as there was no language laboratory where they could get enough oral practice and exercises with the aid of audio-visual facilities but more importantly headphones, video watches, and the like in the properly set environment that prevents unnecessary noises from outside. The use of audio-visual facilities especially the authentic materials are very important in modern teaching methodology. These are normal texts which were firstly not intended to be used for language teaching but linguists or language teachers use them for that purpose. They can be recorded talks of street people, conversations at the market, on the phone, or speeches by presidents or any other officials, and so on.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, we can now argue that pre-service teachers had some problems with the production and comprehension of French liking (liaison and enchaînement), an important element in connected speech. The factors contributing to such a challenge include influence of Bantu languages they have been speaking, poor training as a result of few teaching-learning facilities including audio-visuals and lack of a language lab, lack of enough exercises and practice, and lack of face-to-face encounter with native users of French.

It could be recalled that, the study did not cover all elements of connected speech in this study since the focus was to find out how much the pre-service teachers could be competent to understand native speakers and make use of the two elements (liaison and enchaînement) which are considered a base for French connected speech. Therefore future studies can be conducted on more features of connected speech including assimilation and elision (articulatory and auditory phonetics), but also on acoustic phonetics which was not studied at all in the current study. This can be done among students of different levels, pre-service teachers, and or on-service teachers.

Recommendations

In order to improve in the teaching-learning of FFL, the study recommends the following basing on cognitive behaviour involved in foreign language teaching:

- a. Language teaching should involve communicative approach in which all competences are covered starting with the oral ones as these are more natural, and it is in these that liaison and enchaînement are found.
- b. Future teachers should be highly encouraged to practise the foreign language among them and with any French speaking person they come across to reduce the Bantu interferences and have French mastery.
- c. Artificial environment of native land should be created through a language laboratory for smooth teaching-learning of the language when there is no chance of being immersed in a foreign or Francophone country.
- d. TCU should make sure that the oral tests and examinations are given a good room in all universities since oral communication counts a lot in today's business as people might not meet physically; yet they can talk through Skype.
- e. The government should set aside good budget for French learners to learn the language through immersion in Francophone countries where they could go for field attachment or exchange programmes or scholarships for French on-campus studies.

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