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Vowel and Consonant Replacements in the Spoken French of Ijebu Undergraduate French Learners in Selected Universities in South West of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Substitution is a phonological process in language. Existing studies have examined deletion in several languages and dialects with less attention paid to the spoken French of Ijebu Undergraduates. This article therefore examined substitution as a dominant phenomenon in the spoken French of thirty-four Ijebu Undergraduate French Learners (IUFLs) in Selected Universities in South West of Nigeria with a view to establishing the dominance of substitution in the spoken French of IUFLs. The data collection was through tape-recording of participants' production of 30 sentences containing both French vowel and consonant sounds. The results revealed inappropriate replacement of vowel and consonant in the medial and final positions in the spoken French of IUFLs.

Key words: Consonant substitution, Ijebu dialect, IUFLs, vowel substitution.

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1.0 Introduction

By listening to the spoken French of a Nigerian, it is possible to predict the part of the country such a person comes from and this is because the accents of most speakers of French differ depending on the region they come from or their dialect (Iyiola, 2014:2). Existing studies have identified phonological

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variation features of Nigerian French with inadequate attention paid to the Spoken Ijebu French in spite of the shared phonological features between ID and SF. This study, therefore, deletion as a major phonological feature in the spoken French of Ijebu Undergraduate French Learners (IUFLs) in selected universities in the South West of Nigeria with a view to establishing the linguistic variables substituted and positions of substitution and causes of substitution in their spoken French.

2.0 Substitution

Substitution refers to the ability to replace a phoneme in a word with another phoneme to form a new word. This is a very important step in the development of literacy, as well as general language development. In Ijebu dialect, phonological process occurs when words are juxtaposed at a morpheme boundary, thus resulting in a change of the segment of these neighboring words. In other words, the changes that take place in segment in environment such as initial, final, intervocalic and when morphemes combine to form a word are called phonological processes (Schane, 1968:49). Phonological processes such as nasalization, labialization, and epenthesis among others that occur in Ijebu dialect can be said to be either assimilatory or non-assimilatory. Substitution is a general tendency to preserve sounds from deletion and it tries to reshape the word closer to the input form, but at the same time because some sound combinations are not allowed in the recipient language and undergo certain adaptations. In substitution, an item is replaced to the phonetically-close phonemes in the recipient language (Hock, 1991). Substitution is a general tendency to preserve sounds from deletion and it tries to reshape the word closer to the input form, but at the same time because some sound combinations are not allowed in the recipient language and undergo certain adaptations. In substitution, an item is replaced to the phonetically-close phonemes in the recipient language (Hock, 1991). However, the focus of this article is on instances of some vowel and consonant substitution noticed in the spoken French of Ijebu Undergraduate French learners (IUFLs).

3.0 Methodology

The respondents for this study were purposively selected from Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Osun State University, Ikire Campus, Osun State and Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. The participants were selected from 400 levels because it is believed that they would have attained a considerable level of proficiency in French language.

The data collection was through tape-recording of participants' production of 30 sentences containing both French vowel and consonant sounds. Scoring of correct and incorrect productions were done and analyzed statistically by converting to percentages.

4.0 Vowel substitution

This research has discovered that what constitutes phonological variations goes beyond vowel reduction or deletion as opined by Francis (1989:35), it also includes vowel insertion. These vowels include /ə/, /i/, /u/ and /ɛ/ at different positions (initial, medial and final).

Occurrences of vowel insertion in this research are as a result of vowel replacement. In other words, some vowels sounds were deleted and replaced by another. Thus, we would prefer to call it vowel replacement. The examples are shown in the table below.

Instances of vowel substitution in the data collected

Gloss	Phonetic Representation	Variables	Variants	Possible Phonological Processes
Jean (Nom)	/ʒã/	/ã/	/ʒin/	Replacement of vowel nasal /ã/ by diphthong /in/
Repos	/Rəpo/	/ə/	/Repo/, /Rɛpo/	Replacement of sound /ə/ by vowel sounds /e/,

			/Ropo/	/ɛ/ and /o/ at the initial position
Repas	/Rəpa/	/ə/	/Repa/, /Rɛpa/, /Ropa/	As above
Trop	/tRo/	/o/	/tɔ/	Replacement of round vowel sound /o/ by round vowel sound /ɔ/ at the final position
Fenêtre	/fənɛtR/	/ə/	/fɛnɛtR/, /fonɛtR/	Replacement of vowel sound /ə/ by both oral vowel sounds /ɛ/ and /o/ at the initial position
Du	/dɥ/	/ɥ/	/du/	Replacement of /ɥ/ by /u/
Mesure	/məzɥR/	/ə/	/mozɥR/, /mɛzɥR/	Replacement of vowel sound /ə/ by vowel sounds /o/ and /ɛ/ at the initial position
Tête	/tɛtɥ/	/ɥ/	/tɛtu/	Replacement of vowel sound /ɥ/ by /u/ at the final position
Surtout	/sɥRtu/	/ɥ/	/suRtu/	As above
Offrir	/ɔfriR/	/ɔ/	/ofriR/	Replacement of round vowel sound /ɔ/ by round vowel sound /o/ at the initial position
Veuf	/voef/	/oe/	/vof/, /vɔf/, /vɛf/	Replacement of vowel sound /oe/ by vowel sounds /o/, /ɔ/ and /ɛ/
Sœur	/soeR/	/oe/	/sɔR/, /sɛR/	Replacement of vowel sound /oe/ by vowel sounds /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ at the medial position
Lecteur	/lɛktœR/	/oe/	/lɛktɔR/, /lɛktɛR/	Replacement of /oe/ by /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ at the final position
Décéde	/desede/	/e/	/deside/	Replacement of /e/ by /i/ at the medial position
Les	/le/	/e/	/lɛ/, /le/	Interchange of sound /e/ by sound /ɛ/ though this is acceptable in French dictionaries
Feu	/fɸ/	/ɸ/	/fo/	Replacement of /ɸ/ by /o/
Bœufs	/bɸf/	/ɸ/	/bof/, /bɛf/	Replacement of sound /ɸ/ by /o/ and /ɛ/ at the medial position
Dieu	/djɸ/	/ɸ/	/djo/	Replacement of vowel sound /ɸ/ by /o/ at the final position
Sot	/so/	/o/	/sɔ/	Replacement of the round vowel /o/ by round vowel sound /ɔ/
Rue	/Rɥ/	/ɥ/	/Ru/	Replacement of sound /ɥ/ by /u/ at the final position
Vu	/vɥ/	/ɥ/	/vu/	As above
Faim	/fɛ̃/	/ɛ̃/	/fã/	Replacement of nasal sound /ɛ̃/ by nasal sound /ã/
Zéro	/zeRo/	/e/	/zɛRo/	Replacement of spread vowel /e/ by spread vowel /ɛ/
Seul	/soel/	/oe/	/sɔl/, /sol/	Replacement of sound of /oe/ by round vowel sounds /ɔ/ and /o/ at the medial position
Aveugle	/avoegl/	/oe/	/avɔgl/, /avogl/	As above
Secteur	/sɛktœR/	/oe/	/sɛktɔR/, /sɛktɛR/	Replacement of /oe/ by /ɔ/ and /ɛ/
Violet	/vjɔlɛ/	/ɛ/, /ɔ/	/vjɔle/, /vjole/	Replacement of vowel /ɔ/ by /o/ at the initial position and vowel sound /ɛ/ by /e/ at the final position
Cheveux	/ʃəvø/	/ə/, /ø/	/ʃovo/	Replacement of round vowel sound /ə/ by /o/ at the initial position and /ø/ by /o/ at the final position
Payer	/pɛje/	/ɛ/	/peje/	Replacement of /ɛ/ by /e/ at the initial position
Demain	/dəmɛ̃/	/ə/	/domɛ̃/, /demɛ̃/	Replacement of /ə/ by vowel sounds /o/ and /e/ at the initial position
Faisable	/fəzabl/	/ə/	/fezabl/, /fɛzabl/	Replacement of vowel sound /ə/ by /e/ and /ɛ/ at the initial position
Guichet	/gijɛ/	/ɛ/	/gije/	Replacement of spread vowel sound /ɛ/ by /e/
Pôle	/pol/	/o/	/pɔl/	Replacement of round vowel sound /o/ by vowel sound /ɔ/ at the medial position
Trône	/tRon/	/o/	/tɔn/	Replacement of vowel sound /o/ by /ɔ/

Lundi	/loedi/	/oe/	/lɛ̃di/, /lɔ̃di/	Replacement of nasal vowel sound /oe/ by nasal vowels /ɛ̃/ and /ɔ̃/ at the initial position
Oeuf	/oef/	/oe/	/ɛf/, /of/, /ɔf/	Replacement of /oe/ by vowel sounds /ɛ/, /o/ and /ɔ/ all at the initial position
Noeud	/nø/	/ø/	/no/, /noe/	Replacement of round vowel /ø/ by /o/ and /oe/
Prodige	/pRɔ̃diʒ/	/ɔ/	/pRodiʒ/	Replacement of round vowel sound /o/ by another round vowel sound /ɔ/
Ensuite	/ãsuɪt/	/ã/	/ɛ̃suɪt/, /ɔ̃suɪt/	Replacement of nasal sound /ã/ by nasal sounds /ɛ̃/ and /ɔ̃/
Pourvu	/puRvɥ/	/ɥ/	/puRvu/	Replacement of vowel sound /ɥ/ by /u/
Chuchoter	/ʃɥʃɔte/	/ɥ/, /ɔ/	/ʃuʃote/	Replacement of vowel /ɥ/ and /ɔ/ by /u/ and /o/ at the initial and final position respectively
Œuvre	/œvR/	/œ/	/ɛvR/, /ovR/	Replacement of vowel sound /œ/ by vowel sounds /ɛ/ and /o/ at the initial position
Pieuvre	/pjœvR/	/œ/	/pjevR/, /pjo vR/	Replacement of vowel sound /œ/ by vowel sounds /ɛ/ and /o/ at the medial position
Fleur	/flœR/	/œ/	/fleR/, /floR/	Replacement of round vowel /œ/ by vowel sounds /ɛ/ and /ɔ/
Prévenu	/pRevənu/	/ə/	/pRevenu/	Replacement of vowel sound /ə/ by vowel sound /e/ almost at the end of the word
Quoique	/kwakə/	/ə/	/kwake/, /kwako/	Replacement of vowel sound /ə/ by /e/ and /o/ at the final position
Briquet	/bRikɛ/	/ɛ/	/bRike/	Replacement of spread vowel /ɛ/ by spread sound /e/ at the final position
Octante	/oktãt/	/o/	/ɔktɔ̃t/	Replacement of vowel sound /o/ by /ɔ/ at the initial position and nasal vowel sound /ã/ by /ɔ̃/ at the final position
Mainte	/mɛ̃t/	/ɛ̃/	/mãt/	Replacement of nasal sound /ɛ̃/ by nasal sound /ã/ at the medial position
Untel	/oetel/	/oe/	/ɛ̃tɛl/, /ɔ̃tɛl/	Replacement of nasal vowel sound /oe/ by nasal vowel sound /ɛ̃/ and /ɔ̃/ at the initial position

From the above table, 70% of the IUFLs replaced vowel sound /ã/ by /i/ in word like “jean /ʒã/” which is pronounced by some of our informants as /ʒi/ due to their contact with English. Also, 78% of the participants replaced the schwa sound /ə/ by /ɛ/, /e/ and /o/ respectively in words like “repos /Rəpo/” and /Rəpa/ and “fenêtre /fənɛtR/” having three variants such as /Rɛpo/, /Repo/, /Ropo/ and /Rɛpa/, /Repa/, /Ropa/ respectively. 80% of the IUFLs replaced the vowel sound /ɥ/ by round vowel sound /u/ in words like “du /dɥ/, mesure /mɛzɥR/, tête /tɛtɥ/ and surtout /sɥRtu/” These substitutions occurred because the Ijebu dialect (ID) does not have the sounds replaced.

5.0 Consonant substitution

However, we were able to discover instances of consonant replacement in the spoken French of our subjects which were revealed in the reading of the systematic text, prompt sentences and word list which shall be shown in the table below. By consonant replacement, we mean that some of our informants were unable to pronounce some consonant sounds the way they should and thereby replacing such seemingly difficult consonants with another. These are shown in the table below.

Instances of consonant substitution

Gloss	Correct phonetic representation	Variable	Variants by respondents	Possible Phonological Processes
Jean (Nom)	/ʒã/	/ʒ/	/jã/	Replacement of palatal sound /ʒ/ by semi-consonant /j/ and palatal sound /j/ at the final position
Bonjour	/bɔ̃ʒuR/	/ʒ/	/bɔ̃juR/, /bɔ̃ʃuR/	Replacement of palatal sound /ʒ/ by semi-consonant /j/ and palatal sound /j/ in the medial position
Belge	/bɛlʒ/	/ʒ/	/bɛli/, /bɛlj/	Replacement of palatal sound /ʒ/ by semi-consonant

				/j/ and palatal sound /j/ at the final position
Mesure	/məzɥR/	/z/	/məsɥR/	Replacement of voiced sifflant /z/ by voiceless sifflant /s/ at the medial position
Rose	/Roz/	/z/	/Ros/	Replacement of voiced sifflant /z/ by voiceless sifflant /s/ at the final position
Chauve	/ʃov/	/v/	/ʃof/	Replacement of voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ by voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/ at the final position
Oiseau	/wazo/	/z/	/waso/	Replacement of voiced sifflant /z/ by voiceless sifflant /s/ at the medial position
J'ai	/ʒɛ/, /ʒe/	/ʒ/	/jɛ/	Replacement of palatal sound /ʒ/ by semi-consonant /j/ at the initial position
Manger	/mãʒe/	/ʒ/	/mãje/, /mãfe/	Replacement of palatal sound /ʒ/ by semi-consonant /j/ and palatal sound /j/ in the medial position
Silloner	/sijɔ̃ne/	/j/	/silɔ̃ne/	Replacement by lateralisation of the semi-consonant /j/
Janvier	/ʒãvje/	/ʒ/	/jãvje/	Replacement of palatal sound /ʒ/ by semi-consonant /j/ at the initial position
Veuve	/vœv/	/v/	/vœf/	Replacement of voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ by voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/ at the final position

In the table above, substitution of voiced palatal /ʒ/ by semi-consonant /j/, voiced sifflant /z/ by voiceless sifflant /s/ and voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ by voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/ were dominant in the French pronunciation of the IUFLs. For example, 65% of the participants substituted /ʒ/ by semi-consonant /j/ at the medial position in words like “bonjour/ bɔ̃ʒuR/” changing to /bɔ̃juR/, “Belge/bɛlʒ/” changing to /bɛlj/ while 72% of them substituted /z/ by voiceless sifflant /s/ in words like “Rose/Roz/ changing to /Ros/, “mesure/məzɥR/ changing to /məsɥR/ among many others. Also, 62% substituted the voiced sound /v/ by /f/ in words like “chauve/ʃov/ changing to /ʃof/ and “vœf/vœf/” changing to /fœf/. Absence of the sounds the voiced sounds in the ljebu dialect was responsible for the instances of substitution.

6.0 Conclusion

The instances of vowel and consonant substitution occurred in the spoken French of the ljebu Undergraduate French learners because of the absence of the sounds the voiced sounds in the ljebu dialect and their contact with English language. However, we would like to suggest that, the teaching of phonetics and phonology of French language be emphasized especially in the Anglophone setting for better mastery of speech production of French sounds and words though it may not be totally possible to eradicate errors in speech production but it could be minimized.

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Appendix

The prompt sentences

1. Jean dit bonjour au Belge.
2. Ton père prend trop de repos.
3. Le garçon a mis son repas sur la fenêtre.
4. Le vendeur mesure du riz à l'homme tête.
5. Le fruit devient mou surtout quand il est sous la pluie.
6. N'offre pas du thé une fois à un veuf.
7. Il met le mouchoir sur la chaise en regardant le match.
8. On voit la rose et l'oiseau au zoo.
9. Le lecteur a fait l'erreur seul.
10. Nous voyons le mouvement d'un homme avec une tête chauve.
11. J'ai vu les décédés à la télé.

12. Que faisons-nous par la fenêtre?
13. Il a oublié le lait à la maison. C'est une erreur.
14. Comme il fait chaud à l'hôpital, il boit de l'eau dans le sot.
15. Bien, c'est le sain qui paye l'impôt.
16. Un jeune homme porte un pantalon brun.
17. Adam, dis le temps en français!
18. Bonjour à tous. Touche le front et le menton!
19. La fille est la plus brillante dans la famille.
20. Le fils salaud porte des bagages lourds.
21. Tout le monde aura sa moisson sous le soleil.
22. T'as pas la radio.
23. Je veux parler du sujet.
24. Je parle avec mon ami.
25. J'ai mangé.
26. Nous avons cours.
27. Je suis étudiant.
28. Tout le monde sont dans la classe.
29. J'ai compris la leçon.
30. Ce n'est pas bon.