

PERFECT MOTHER TONGUE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS IN KINSHASA

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ABSTRACT

While searching for an appropriate language to apply during translanguaging strategy in teaching English to new comers of the faculty of economics in the University of Kinshasa, twenty of them filled out the questionnaire copies. By using the procedure suggested by Nsimambote (2023) which establishes perfect mother tongue. This procedure is similar to Grosjean's (2012) analysis of multilingualism. Findings reveal that French is the easier and emotional expression language of the new comers. Thus, French is the true expert language of the new comers which will facilitate understanding, once applied in translanguaging in the teaching of English.

Keywords: *Teaching, multilingualism, translanguaging, perfect mother tongue, expert language, easier language of the learner, emotional expression language of the learner*

RESUME

Dans la découverte de la langue à intégrer dans l'enseignement de la langue anglaise, vingt étudiants, tous nouveaux dans la faculté des sciences économiques et de gestion de l'université de Kinshasa, ont été interviewées. L'application du procédé établissant la langue maternelle parfaite suggéré par Nsimambote (2023) a permis de déceler le français comme la langue d'aisance et d'expression émotionnelle de ces enquêtés. Par conséquent, elle est la vraie langue d'expertise pouvant faciliter la compréhension, une fois intégrée dans l'enseignement de la langue anglaise.

Mots-clés : *Enseignement, multilinguisme, stratégie de translanguaging, langue maternelle parfaite, langue d'expertise, langue d'aisance, langue d'expression émotionnelle*

INTRODUCTION

In the literature on the use of mother tongue in EFL context, there are scholars favouring the use mother tongue in teaching English as a foreign language and those who are against it. [Auerbach (1993), Harbord, J. (1992), Koucka, A. (2007)]. Yet, an EFL teacher confronts difficulty concerning the selection of the language to be qualified as mother tongue for all the learners in teaching English as foreign language to multilingual learners. There is a need to select systematically one of the languages in the repertoire of the multilingual learners. This is exactly the interest of this current study whose concern is to identify systematically the perfect mother tongue of the multilingual learners. This mother tongue facilitates understanding while teaching English.

Twenty new comers of the faculty of economy in the University of Kinshasa were interviewed. They were randomly selected and the interview was recorded in order to facilitate the audio contents analysis. In the analysis, the procedure for establishing perfect mother tongue suggested by Nsimambote (2023) was applied.

The paper aims at uncovering the learners' language acting as a true expert languages ie perfect mother tongue on the basis of the language use and language proficiency.

The work targets the identification of both the emotional expression and the easier languages of the learners.

A question seeking answers is the following:

-What are the emotional expression and easier languages of the learners?

The above major question was broken into minor questions used in the survey questionnaire attached as appendix. For evident reasons, these minor questions were asked in French.

I. ON MULTILINGUALISM AND PERFECT MULTILINGUALISM

While defining multilingualism, two factors are taken into account: language use and language proficiency or competence. In the literature, there are scholars who took into account either of the two factors and those who took into account both factors. The three groups are mentioned below:

To start with the first group of those who prevailed language use, Weinreich (1968), Mackey (2000) and Larissa (2002) are mentioned. The former two define multilingualism as the use of two or more languages (or dialects) in everyday life. The latter introduces a slight difference as she increased the number of

languages to three or more. This view does not focus on how proficient are the multilinguals in those languages either two, three or more.

In the second group, two authors are mentioned: Francois Grin (2003) and Li (2008). As a starter, Francois Grin (2003) defines multilingualism as the ability of an individual to speak, understand, read and write in multiple languages at native or near native level of proficiency. They are languages of a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances and context in which language is used. For him, they are the perfect mother tongues or true languages expert in multiple languages. This way of defining multilingualism by mentioning the true languages expert is called perfect multilingualism. Li (2008) states that a multilingual is anyone who communicates in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive through (reading and writing). These four skills make part of language proficiency which distinguishes him from the above mentioned authors. What is interesting is the way he integrates the four language skills in his definition.

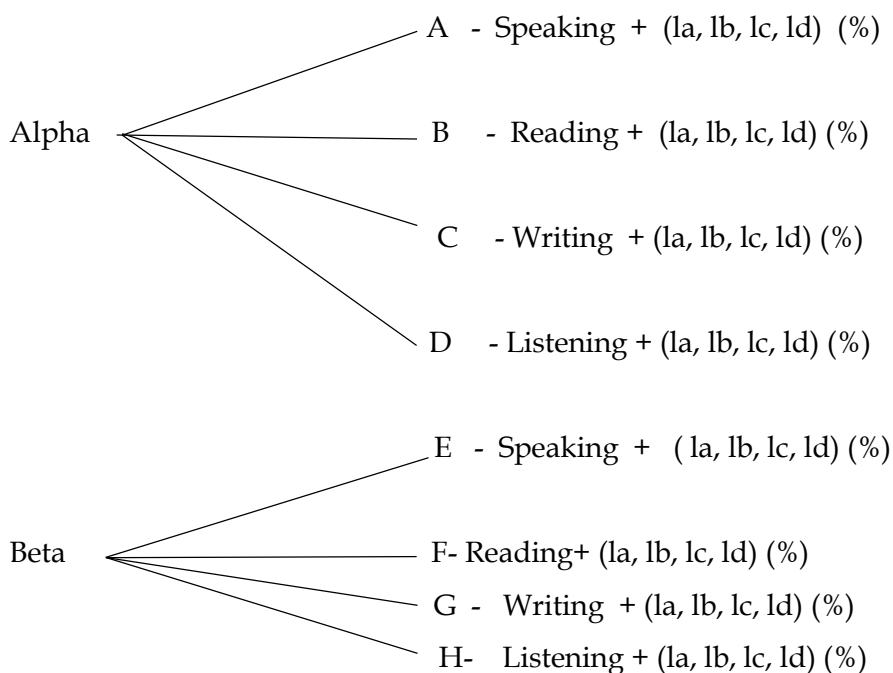
There are also two scholars in last group: Grosjean (2012) and Nsimambote (2023). The former took into account both language use and language proficiency factors. He points that languages in bilingualism wax and wane. For him, it is misconception to see bilinguals as two monolinguals in one person. This implies fluency of languages of the bilinguals or multilinguals differs from one language to another over time. The following table provides his view of bilingualism or multilingualism:

Language use	Daily		Lc		La	La= French Lb= English Lc = German Ld= Spanish Le= Swiss German
		Le		Lb		
		Lc		Ld		
	Never					
	Low	Language proficiency			High	

In this table, the languages are labeled as follows: La English, Lb German, Ld Spanish and Le Swiss German. Vertically, the language use is characterized in terms of frequency in use: daily and never. Horizontally, we have language proficiency in terms of low and high. For example, the language a is positioned daily in terms of language use and high in terms of proficiency. The language a, which is English is the language of deeper understanding that is to say perfect mother tongue.

Taking into account both language use and language proficiency, Nsimambote (2023) suggested a model for establishing perfect mother tongue. He uses ten research variables related to the language use on regular basis. These variables are related to the two socio-psycholinguistic parameters and four language skills presented vertically in the table below. A survey and a semi-structured interview, which served for illustrating the model, involved twenty students of the Department of English, Business and Computer Science of the university of Kinshasa. The findings have revealed that they have French and Lingala as perfect tongues and most of them speak Kinshasa Lingala native like. His synthetic table is provided contains two parameters, the related skills and variables are presented vertically while the languages and the proportion provided by the surveyed respondents are presented horizontally. The four skills are integrated for the language proficiency in the following ten situations of the language use: (1) languages expressed in a quarrel (2) languages expressed in trouble (3) languages expressed while dealing with intimacy (4) languages expressed in a court (5) languages of smooth expression (6) languages of fast and smooth reading (7) languages confided in writing (8) languages of easy understanding (9) languages of dreams and (10) languages of mass media. For example, the respondents' attitudes towards languages of easy understanding indicates French (70%) and Lingala (10%) with listening skill. This reveals that the respondents listen more easily to French than Lingala. It has been noticed that the author did not submit the respondents concerned to a formal proficiency test. To validate these attitudes, the semi structured interview served for that purpose. A glance at what is presented horizontally shows eight language strings, among which French and English have the highest scores: French (550) and Lingala (180). Similar to Grosjean (2002), the languages scoring the highest are the perfect mother tongues of the surveyed respondents. They are the true expert languages of the respondents referring to (Francois Grin 2003).

Nsimambote (2024) schematized the same procedure for establishing perfect mother tongue in the following way:



In the schema, alpha and beta stand for the two parameters, namely easier languages of the speakers and languages of emotional expression of the speakers. The alphabetical variables help access the parameters as for example A can stand for a language expressed in a court. All the variables are based on the four skills. The languages selected by the surveyed respondents (la, lb, lc, ld) are integrated in the table in terms of proportions that is to say the frequency they have been selected in proportions.

The formula for establishing the Perfect Mother = Language x selected with the highest proportions in the total of Alpha and Beta. Taking into account the findings of the study he conducted in 2023, French has the highest proportions with (550%), it is thus, the perfect mother tongue of the surveyed respondents.

II. ON THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The results of the investigation have revealed that twelve males and eight female participated in the investigation. Among them fourteen belong to the age group of 18 to 24 and the remaining six belong to the age group ranking from 25 to 27. They were the first year students. The results from the SPSS package indicate that all the twenty students provided responses for the research interest variables. The results are synthesized in the following table adapted from Nsimambote (2023) and Nsimambote (2024).

PARAMETERS	RELATED SKILLS	VARIABLES	LANGUAGE STRINGS								
			FRENCH	FRENCH AND LINGALA	LINGALA	KIKONGO	KISWAHILI	OTETELA	CILUBA	ENGLISH	FRENCH AND KIKONGO
LANGUAGES OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION OF THE LEARNERS	SPEAKING	in a quarrel	80	10	10						
		in trouble	30	5	60				5		
		intimacy expression	70	10	20						
EASIER LANGUAGES OF THE LEARNERS	SPEAKING	in a court	25	10	55	5			5		
		smooth expression	60	30	5			5			5
	READING	fast and smooth reading	90						5	5	
	WRITING	Confidence in writing	75	15	5	5					
	LISTENING	easy understanding	50	10	25	10	5				
		In dreams	55	10							
		mass media	90							10	
	Total of language strings			535	100	140	20	5	5	20	15

It can be noticed that there are nine language strings. Among them, two strings have mixed French with Lingala and Kikongo. All the four national languages are mentioned. Otetela occurs as a vernacular language. English is also mentioned among them language of fast and smooth reading and mass media. This is evident as the English language today is used by youth. The fact is mentioned by Buhendwa (2010) who while scrutinizing multilingualism in DRC found out that English was in rise. Evidently, the study respondents belong to the youth category. The total indicate French, French +Lingala and Lingala with higher proportions, but with the accumulation of the three

language strings, French has the highest proportions with (675%). It is the perfect mother tongue of the concerned students.

Examining the parameter, emotional languages of the speakers, most of the learners quarrel in French and they express their intimacies, in French, too. Many of them express in Lingala while they are in trouble. A few quarrel in Lingala and express their intimacies in it. This can prove that French is the emotional language of the learners concerned. This variable is related to speaking skill.

For the parameter, the easier languages of the speaker, all the four skills have been integrated. Here again, French is the easier languages of the learners. A great majority of them read fast and smoothly in French and they also listen to mass media in it. Most of them write with confidence in French. Many of them express smoothly in French. In a court, a considerable number of them express in Lingala and they dream, understand easily in French. Lingala and French + Lingala are mentioned by a few learners for these activities. In sum, French is the language and easier and emotional expression of the surveyed learners.

CONCLUSION

Multilingualism is often defined superficially as the use of multiple languages in a community. Studies on multilingualism have led to take into account both the language use and language proficiency factors. An individual using four languages for examples, English, French, Arabic and Spanish, in case he or she is more proficient in English and not in others, may we call him a multilingual? The answer will be yes and No. Yes, if we take into account the language use factor, the way many authors define a multilingual as a person using two or more languages. In case, we answer negatively, it leads to take into account both language use and proficiency factors. By applying the two factors, we may assume that the multilingual person speaks all the languages of his repertoires with equal proficiency. There will be languages or one language that is or are used proficiently by individuals in a community. Moreover, this proficiency may increase or decrease over time.

The current paper studied the multilingualism of the students of the faculty of economics. As the author referred to Grosjeans (2012) and Nsimambote (2024), different questions were asked to collect opinions of the learners concerning both language use and language proficiency. They were not submitted to a formal test to unveil the language proficiency, something which will require more time and means. In the table of the two socio-psycholinguistic parameters and languages provided, mentioned above, French, French+Lingala, Lingala and French+Kikongo respectively indicate the total of (535), (140), (100) and (5). If we accumulate language strings, French has a total of (680) and Lingala (240). The true expert language of the learners or their perfect mother tongue is French.

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APPENDIX**SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (FRENCH)**

1. Votre sexe :
 - A. Masculin
 - B. Féminin
2. Votre âge :
 - A. 18 à 22 ans
 - B. 23 à 27 ans
 - C. 28 ans et plus
3. En quelles langues préférez-vous vous exprimer au tribunal devant les juges pour vous plaidez non coupable ?
4. En quelles langues préférez-vous parler à la personne avec qui vous vous querellez lors d'une querelle ?
5. En quelles langues, lors de la communication, vous vous sentez beaucoup plus à l'aise et les idées viennent d'elles-mêmes ?
6. Lorsque vous êtes en difficultés et le secours est plus que nécessaire pour vous, En quelles langues exprimez-vous ?
7. En quelles langues adressez-vous à votre partenaire pour exprimer vos intimités ?
8. En quelles langues sentez-vous l'aisance et la rapidité dans la lecture ?
9. En quelles langues, souhaitez-vous que les notions d'un sujet beaucoup plus complexe vous soient transmises ?
10. Souvenez-vous de langue (s) de transmission de vos rêves
11. Quelle (est) / sont la (les) langue(s) favoris de vos émissions télévisées ou films ?
12. En quelle(s) langue (s) rédigez-vous avec beaucoup plus de confiance sans avoir peur de commettre des erreurs d'orthographe ?