INTERPRETATION OF SPOKEN FRENCH IN CHAD FROM SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL POINTS OF VIEW

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Abstract

The study is about the interpretation of spoken French built on themes: coded message, relative, delinquency, hospitality, meeting, corruption, superstition, syntax, phonetics, etc. which give some ideas of a double set of sociolinguistic and cultural context of words and expressions in French. By applying the variational and systemic approaches, it is possible to explain why language changes in meaning from one part of the world to another. It is hoped that this study will permit non Chadians to understand what could be described as "specific French" spoken in Chad compared with "global French" which is known as standard French.

Keywords: *spoken French, interpretation, sociolinguistics, cultural context, themes.*

1. Introduction

In Chad French is a language for administration and education and it was brought in this country through French colonization which began in 1900. The Frenchs established schools, and used their language as a means of assimilating Chadians into their culture. The French colonialists also created the Arab-French secondary school in the kingdom of Ouaddaï (Lycée National Franco-Arabe d'Abéché).

The sociolinguistics which can be defined as "the study of language in relation to society"[1] also implies different interpretation of languages in relation to culture. In addition, the standard French which is said to be one of the official languages of Chad as stated in the Constitution: "les langues officielles sont le Français et l'Arabe" (the official languages are French and Arabic) (Article 9), there are several other languages and dialects which reflect the rich variety of culture and ethnic composition of the country.

We formulated two null hypotheses as follows:

(1) Chadians will not have any problem with spoken French regardless of their ethnic composition.

(2) Chadian cultures will not have influence on French language.

2. Methodology

The study is undertaken from the double concept of the systemic and variational approaches. By this is meant the way language varies. The variational approach which, according to L. Hewson and J. Martin[2], is applicable to translations of texts coming from different fields should also be taken at lexical, syntactic, phonetic, register levels, etc. This reflects the point of view of Akmajian *et alii*[3]: "No human language is fixed, uniform, or unvarying; all languages show internal variation. Actual usage varies from group to group, and speaker to speaker, in terms of the pronunciation of a

language, the choice of words and the meaning of those words, and even the use of syntactic constructions".

The systemic approach is increasingly being recognized as providing a very useful descriptive framework for viewing language as a strategic, meaning-making resource[4]. The systemic approach to language is functional in two main respects: "because it asks functional questions about language: systemicists ask how do people use language? Because it interprets the linguistic system functionally: systemicists ask how is language structured for use?"[5].

In order to collect data, we used random sampling method to select 15 spoken French words and expressions in five Chadian towns: N'Djamena, Bongor, Kelo, Moundou and Doba. Through observation and conversation on various topics with different categories of people, we were able to identify words and expressions that do not have their usual meanings.

3. Sample presentation, analysis of data and results
3.1. The coded message

(a) Some young people in Chad use coded words when conversing among themselves in the presence of their parents. They usually use these words so that their parents don't know whom they are talking about:

«Mon *vieux* est très sévère. Ma *vieille* me comprend. Mes *petits* sont à l'école».

For instance, *vieux* refers to father, *vieille* stands for mother, and *petits* refers to junior brothers.

«Je *mets* (allume) la radio Tchad».

«J'ai *tapé* (obtenu, eu) une très bonne note en anglais».

(b) In Chad, culturally speaking, the child of your aunt or uncle is said to be your sister or brother. The reason behind this is that Chadians believe in extended family:

«La fille de ma tante est ma *soeur*».

(c) In Chad, the coded message can be used to refer to:

- the delinquency:

"C'est un *colombien*".

Colombien here is not the inhabitant of Colombia, but someone who is addicted to drugs and steals.

- the hospitality:

«*Avancez*, nous sommes à table».

Avancez used during mealtime simply means join us for dinner.

"Ton cheval est rapide".

> This expression is usually used during mealtime. When you say to a friend or a visitor that *ton cheval est rapide*, you mean he is not a lazy man. So he can join you for a meal.

"Tu as fait mon *étranger* aujourd'hui".

> This is purely a literal translation of Chadian languages and dialects. *Étranger* meaning *stranger* should be taken in the sense of *welcome, kind behavior towards visitors* involving eating and drinking.

- the corruption:

"Le ministre *mange*, je *mange* aussi".

> *Mange* (eat(s)) here means *embezzlement*. The verb is used where corruption by politicians or people who work for the government is being practiced.

- the prostitution:

«Toutes ces jeunes filles debout devant le bar font la *bordelerie*».

> The word *bordelerie* does not exist in French. This is simply the transformation of *bordel* meaning *brothel* in English. Therefore, *bordelerie* is not the house where men pay to have sex with women, but prostitution.

- a superstition:

«Mon ami, tu es malade? Je pense que ce serait un *lancement*».

> It has always been believed that misfortune, accident or illness do not just happen like that. They are said to be manipulated by wicked spirits, witches or person who possess demonic powers. So, *lancement* refers to spell or even poisoning.

- a meeting:

"C'est l'heure africaine".

> Chadians have the habit of attending meetings late. L'heure africaine literally means African time. This expression is opposite in meaning to time is money in English, and therefore, denotes Lateness. This attitude is also manifest in the Chadian administration.

3.2. The particular syntax and spelling

In Chad, the Francophone people use sometimes a special syntax, for example:

(1) «Je *l'*ai dit de venir me voir ce soir».

> *Dire* is a transitive verb which can take a direct object or an indirect object. In this sentence, *lui* or *leur* would have been used before the

verb *dire* in the perfect indicative instead of *l'* because the verb takes an indirect object. With *l'*, the sentence is meaningless.

(2) "Je *leurs* ai dit de faire attention".

The use of *leurs* is correct, but the *s* would have been taken away. It seems as if the speaker does not distinguish between the invariable personal pronoun *leur* and the variable possessive pronoun *leur* which can take *s* before a plural noun. It should be noted that *leur* never takes *s* before a verb. This common error is even noticed among highly educated people.

«C'est moi qui *a* lu la lettre» (pour «C'est moi qui *ai* lu la lettre»).

«C'est moi qui *est* parti au marché hier» (pour «C'est moi qui *suis* parti au marché hier»).

«Ce sont des choses qu'il faut *les* faire» (pour «Ce sont des choses qu'il faut faire»).

«L'ami *que* j'ai fait l'accident *avec lui* est à l'hôpital» (pour «L'ami *avec qui* j'ai fait l'accident est à l'hôpital»).

3.3. The particular pronunciation

Words containing the French phonemes /f/, /v/, /ʒ/, /ʃ/ and /y/ pose problems of pronunciation for some ethnic groups in rural areas as shown in the following examples:

"Ma *pame* est allée au champ à *bello*».

In this sentence, the speaker has a problem associated with the pronunciation of *femme* (*wife* or *woman*). He substitutes the initial phoneme /f/ for /p/. That is why *femme* sounds like *pame*. This pronunciation difficulty is common to non educated Ngambaye, Sara and Mongo people in the southern Chad. The initial sound of *velo* is articulated as /b/ as in *bello* meaning that they cannot make the sound /v/.

"*Zé* porte une *semise*".

Similarly, in this example, the phoneme /ʒ/ has been substituted for /z/, as in the pronoun *je*, and /ʃ/ is pronounced as /s/ as in the word *chemise*. Therefore, the Marba speakers in Mayo Kebbi also have difficulties in pronouncing /ʒ/ and /ʃ/. Marba belongs to Massa group which is a Chadic language.

«Les *chaussires* coûtent cher cette année».

Making the sound /i/ instead of the French sound /y/ as in the pronunciation of *chaussure* is typical for Goran and Zaghawa communities in Northern Chad.

4. Conclusion

In no way is this paper intends to be an entire study of spoken French in Chad as the scope of the study is the range of five towns only. Given that the examples are in French, we wished to translate them into English for the English-speaking readers, but the limited number of pages will not allow us to do so. However, this study is expected to help in understanding about the use of spoken French in Chad taken in terms of sociolinguistics and culture. And this type of spoken French could be called "specific French" which may not be understood by native speakers.

Notes
[1]Hudson, 1996, p. 1.
[2]Hewson *et alii,* 1991.
[3]Akmajian *et alii,* 2007, p. 275.
[4]Eggins, 2000.
[5]Eggins, 2000, p. 1.

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