

## Exploring French Interference Errors Made by EFL Students at FLSL

Moussa dit M'Baré THIAM  
Faculté des Lettres, des Langues and des Sciences de Langage (FLSL),  
ULSHB- Bamako  
[moussaditbare@yahoo.fr](mailto:moussaditbare@yahoo.fr)

**Abstract:** This study aimed at exploring the essay scripts of the EFL students at the Faculty of Literature and Language Sciences (hereafter referred to as FLSL) and the French interference errors they made in their written essays. This study used the qualitative approach design. This study was designed to identify and to describe the French Interference errors committed by students in their essays in the EFL classroom at FLSL. The participants in this study were fifty (50) male and female third year students in the English department at FLSL. The instrument used was an essay test. EFL students' essay scripts were collected, scored, and examined by the researcher. The analysis concerned: grammatical errors, spelling errors and Vocabulary errors. The findings showed that FLSL students had difficulties in grammar (verb tense, adjectives, prepositions, subject - verb agreement), vocabulary, and spelling. The results then revealed the nature and significance of those errors. Based on the study results, the researcher could notice that students made more grammatical errors than errors of other types. Furthermore, it was found that these errors could be attributed to interlingual errors; that is, French Language Interference. Finally, the researcher in this study made some recommendations for further research studies. It is hoped that EFL teachers of composition will take advantage of this paper to make more objective decisions about how to go about adopting appropriate teaching strategies to help EFL students at FLSL to write better essays.

**Keywords:** EFL Writing, Error Analysis, Essay, French Interference, FLSL.

**Résumé :** Cette étude vise à explorer les erreurs d'interférence du Français commises par les étudiants en troisième année d'Anglais comme langue étrangère de la Faculté des Lettres des Langues et des Sciences du Langage (FLSL). Le chercheur dans cette étude a utilisé l'approche qualitative pour collecter et analyser les données. Cette étude a pour but d'identifier les erreurs d'interférence du Français commises par lesdits étudiants dans leurs essais. Les participants de cette recherche étaient cinquante (50) étudiants (hommes et femmes) de la troisième année du département d'Anglais de la FLSL. L'instrument utilisé était un test d'essai. Les copies d'essais des étudiants ont été collectées, corrigées et examinées par le chercheur. L'analyse a concerné les erreurs de grammaire, de vocabulaire, et d'orthographe commises par les étudiants. Les résultats ont révélé que les étudiants de la FLSL ont des difficultés en grammaire (temps des verbes, adjectifs prépositions, accord sujet-verbe), en vocabulaire et en orthographe. Sur la base des résultats obtenus, le chercheur pouvait remarquer que les étudiants d'Anglais comme langue étrangère ont commis plus erreurs d'interférence en grammaire que dans d'autres catégories. En outre, les données ont révélé que les erreurs étaient dues à l'interférence de la langue française dans les écrits des étudiants en Anglais. En définitive, le chercheur a fait des recommandations pour les recherches futures. Il est à espérer que les professeurs de composition profiteront de cette étude pour prendre des décisions plus objectives quant à

l'adoption de stratégies pédagogiques mieux appropriées afin d'aider les étudiants de la FLSL à écrire de meilleurs essais.

**Mots clés :** Analyse d'Erreur, Essai en anglais, Interférence du Français, FLSL.

## **Introduction**

This study focuses on exploring French Interference Errors made by EFL Students at FLSL. The foregoing topic has been selected for its significance. It is significant because it would contribute to the existing body of knowledge as far as error analysis is concerned. It would also contribute to enrich the field by showing what interference errors are most commonly committed by EFL students at FLSL. It would finally help EFL teachers of Composition to recognize and identify their students' difficulties in writing and to take remedial actions to reduce the students' essay writing problems. These are some of the reasons which actually motivated the study of such a topic. Yet, from the outset it is axiomatic to understand that writing skill is one of the most difficult and complex language skills to master. The FLSL students study English writing for different purposes: they are regularly assessed in writing; they also need writing for taking exams, and writing their compositions. In fact, writing in foreign language context is even more complicated. EFL students at FLSL are making considerable efforts to be good at essay writing; that is, they are still struggling to attain the acceptable standards in writing. Research states that there is a tendency for EFL students to make Interference errors while writing their essays in English. Therefore, the study seeks to explore FLSL students' essay writing and the French interference errors they commit in their written essays.

According to De Marcos (2015), error analysis was born in the 60s as an improvement of Contrastive Linguistics. Error analysis, as Sawalmeh (2013) puts it, "is a type of linguistic study that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in target language (TL) and within that TL itself" (p. 2). Besides, Intan (2019) stated that error analysis was carried out to obtain information on common difficulties faced by students in writing English sentences. In the view of Brown (2002), there exist two main sources of errors: interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer. Interlingual or Interference errors are those errors that are traceable to first language interference whereas the intralingual errors result from faulty or partial learning of the target language rather than language transfer (Xie and Jiang, 2007). Moreover, Wilkins (1972) explained as it follows:

The transfer may prove to be justified because the structure of the two languages is similar - this case is called 'positive transfer' or 'facilitation', or it may prove unjustified because the structure of the two languages is different - that case is called 'negative transfer' or 'interference' (Wilkins, 1972, p.199, as cited in Sawalmeh, 2013).

Many scholars in the field of Error Analysis indicated the importance of errors for both learners and teachers. Corder (1967) contended that students' errors were significant in three ways:

First, to the teacher, in that they show how far towards the goal the learner has progressed. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn (Corder, 1967, as cited in Heydari & Bagheri, 2012, p. 161).

Intan (2019) pointed out the importance for the teacher to give error analysis in students' writing. He stated that error analysis was needed for students to show the errors they made, to know the source of their errors and how to learn from those errors in order that they would not make some errors repeatedly. In addition, it could help teachers to know the type and the source of errors the students made. For him, if the errors were identified, the teacher could change the teaching method and technique used, and he could develop a remedial teaching plan. In order to analyze students' errors, it is crucial to make a distinction between 'error' and 'mistake' (Xie & Jiang, 2007). According to Brown (2007), a *mistake* refers to a performance error in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly while an *error* is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner. For him, that recognition process was followed by error description process. Then, learners' sentences were compared with the correct sentences in target language to find the errors. Davis & Pearse (2002) explained that errors were integral part of language learning and not evidence of failure to learn. For them, those errors should be analyzed because they gave a contribution in understanding the process of language learning. From their errors, learners could get feedback which could be used to find new attempts to achieve the goal of learning (Davis & Pearse, 2002, as cited in Intan, 2019, p. 19). Similarly, Sharma (2018) stated that "error analysis must be regularly performed for improving language skills in students" (p. 30).

In regard to the above, the overall objective of this study is to explore the French interference errors in the essay scripts of FLSL third year students. Therefore, the specific objective is to identify and to describe the most common French Interference errors made by students in their essays in FLSL classrooms. In consistence with the foregoing objective, the below research question will guide the study: What French interference errors do EFL students commit at FLSL? Structurally, the paper is split into two main parts. The first part focuses on presenting and describing the methodology of the study. The second part which serves as the end of the study presents and discusses the findings of the study.

## **1. Methodology**

In this section, the researcher presents the research methodology used in this study and gives information about the population and the sample. Then, the data collection instrument is described along with the method of analysis.

This study used the qualitative approach. The population in this study was the third year students from the English department of FLSL. The *population* is the larger group from which the representative group was selected. This is the group you would like to sample from because this is



the group you are interested in generalizing to. The term *population* is not used for *people* only. It is used to mean an individual, item, event; that is, the group of interest of the researcher. The sample is the subset of the population. In this study, a sample consisting of fifty (50) students was selected from FLSL third year students' population. To select the participants in this study, a purposive random sampling technique was used because it is regarded as one of the most reliable methods to obtain a representative sample. The instrument used was an essay test. Different topics were given the FLSL students among which they should choose one topic and develop it into an argumentative essay. All the participants were required to write on one of the following topics: ***Owning a car in a big city; Benefits of Living Alone; Benefit of Farming; and Dangers of Smoking.*** In order to find answers to the research questions, the essays scripts of the participants were collected and analyzed as research data.

The validity of an instrument is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. To ensure the validity of the study instrument, the researcher asked two of his colleague composition teachers to evaluate the given topics. Finally, in order to analyze EFL students' essay scripts, the researcher in this study identified the sample errors, and then he described them.

## **2. Findings and Discussions**

In this section, the researcher presents and discusses the findings of the study. First, interference errors made by the EFL students at FLSL were collected; then, the errors were identified and described with illustrative examples; and finally, some of the errors made by FLSL students were corrected by examples. Thus, to answer the research question, fifty (50) essay scripts written by third year University students were explored in order to identify French Language Interference errors made by FLSL students. In the essays, different kinds of writing errors related to French interference were identified. Research findings revealed that FLSL students face problems in relation to Grammar, Spelling, and Vocabulary mostly due to French Interference.

### **2.1. Grammar:**

Research data revealed that grammatical errors occurred most frequently in the EFL students' writing. By grammar, it is meant such notions as sentence building, *correct use of tenses, adjectives, prepositions, idiomatic use of auxiliaries, and building negative sentences in the essays.* Unfortunately, the FLSL students are still struggling to build correct sentences. Some aspects of the French Language Interference in FLSL students' writing are as follows:

#### *a/ Idiomatic Use of Auxiliaries "to be" and "to have".*

FLSL students have difficulties in using the auxiliaries "to be" and "to have" appropriately, especially when it comes to their idiomatic use. This relates to the students' knowledge of the French language. For example, French would sometimes use the auxiliary 'to have' where the English Language prefers the auxiliary 'to be'. For instance, to be hungry or be sleepy is translated

in French by to \*have hungry or \*have sleepy. Here are some examples of students' written sentences.

If you live alone, you can eat whenever you \*have hungry. You don't have to wait until the family gathers at lunch time.

*Correction: If you live alone you can eat whenever you are hungry. You don't have to wait until the family gathers at lunch time.*

You can sleep whenever you \*have sleepy.

*Correction: You can sleep whenever you are sleepy.*

*b/ Building Negative Sentences:*

Some typical errors of FLSL students in writing are due to the difference between English and French patterns of negative sentences. Many of the EFL students have difficulties in putting ordinary verbs in the negative forms. Instead of building negative forms of ordinary verbs using the auxiliary "do" or "did" plus the negation "not", they often build the negative sentences with the ordinary verbs directly followed by "not" like in French. Consider these Examples:

\*They not agree to let me go.

*Correction: They do not agree to let me go*

\*When you have a car, you not go to work late.

*Correction: When you have a car, you do not go to work late.*

*c/ Using Correct Prepositions:*

Certain English verbs require the use of a preposition after them whereas in French the same verbs are not normally used with a preposition, or use a different preposition. So, most of the FLSL students have difficulties in the correct use of such prepositions.

\*Dependance to cigarette is very dangerous.

\*Every day we watch at TV that smoking is not good.

There were also a few cases of the use of prepositions after adjectives that can be seen in the following examples. Some students wrote:

\*synonymous to instead of synonymous of.

Smoking is \*synonymous to lung cancer

\*preoccupied by instead of preoccupied with.

When you live alone, you are not \*preoccupied by the order, you put things wherever you want.

*d/ Use of Adverb of Quantity Many and Much:* In French there is only one adverb [beaucoup] that is used whereas in English "many" and "much" are used, which makes FLSL students confuse because they use many where much should normally be used and vice versa.

For example, someone would use \*many money instead of much money.

Farming allows you to have \*many food.

*Correction: Farming allows you to have much / a lot of food.*

*e/ Subject-Verb Agreement:*

This is another category of the French Language Interference. Many of our EFL students still have difficulties in using the correct verb form, and like in French, they would omit the 's' in the third person singular of the simple present tense. Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject (the person or thing doing the action) is singular, its verb (the word representing the action) must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

Example: \*Farming develop the country. *Correction: Farming develops the country.*

\*Smoking cause illnesses even death. *Correction: Smoking causes illnesses even death.*

\*Owning a car facilitate the business. *Correction: Owning a car facilitates the business.*

*f/ Order of Adjectives:*

As a result of French interference, many FLSL students transpose French Grammar rule to English. In French the adjective comes after the noun which is not generally the case in English. For example, instead of placing the noun "thing" after the adjective "important" like "the most important thing", they would put it the following way:

\*The money is the thing the most important.

*Correction: money is the most important thing.*

Another example of adjective misuse is that some of FLSL students put an 's' to the adjective in plural or make it feminine whereas adjectives are normally invariable in English.

\*People practise differents activities. *Correction: People practise different activities.*

\*Cigarette is very dangerouse and contain many substances toxiques.

*Correction: Cigarette is very dangerous and contains many toxic substances.*

## **2.2. Spelling:**

After Grammar, spelling is the second field where French interference occurred most frequently in FLSL students' writing. The researcher has identified several instances of misspelled words in the students' essay scripts. Most of the students use the French spelling thinking that it is the same in English. For example,

\*Dependence to cigarette is very dangerous.

*Correction: Dependence on cigarette is very dangerous.*

\*Smoking changes our teeth coulour. *Correction: Smoking changes the color of our teeth.*

\*College Education permet to do many recherc.

**Correction:** *College Education permits us to do a lot of research.*

Here are a few examples of those words found in the essays of EFL students at FLSL. \*Confortable (comfortable), \*exemple (example), \*exercice (exercise), \*principe (principle), \*limites (limits), \*campagn (campaign), \*family (family), \*nom (noun), \*possede (possess), \*ponctual (punctual), \*changement (change), \*developpement (development), \*mouvement (movement), \*environnement (environment), \*positif (positive), \*mariage (marriage).

### **2.3. Vocabulary:**

By vocabulary is meant the use of 'proper words in proper places' because the choice of words is very important in essay-writing. For instance, the EFL students at FLSL have a limited stock of vocabulary in English from which they have to choose the correct words to say what they mean in writing. As a proof of poor vocabulary, research findings of this study have shown that many FLSL students resort to French words that they use in their essays in case they do not know the English equivalents of the same words. Furthermore, many other students would simply write in French and try to translate the written text into English, which may take substantial amount of time. The problem with translation is that every language has its own idioms. It is only very occasionally that the idioms coincide completely in two languages. In most cases, they do not coincide. This is in line with Sekyi-Baidoo (2002) who pointed out that the same words may have different meanings or images in other languages. Therefore, the word for word translation is somehow dangerous for it may convey totally different images. For instance, the following sentences were selected from FLSL students' essays:

\*Farming contribut on the plan economic and social.

\*In cas of maladie, you can go to hospital very fast if you have your proper car.

\*Gouvernement must stop smoke in place public.

\*The car is before all a good moyen of transport. You can do your deplacement easily.

\*Smoking conduit to toxicomani. It killed you smol a smol.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore the French interference errors that FLSL students made in their written essays. The researcher, in this study, described in detail all the data taken from the students' works. Based on the findings and the examples given, it could be concluded that the FLSL committed interference errors in grammar (subject/verb agreement, adjectives, prepositions, and pronouns), spelling, and vocabulary. Research findings showed that the most frequent of FLSL students' interference errors were in grammar. The French interference with FLSL students indicate that EFL teachers at FLSL should take special care of the interference of the French in their students' written essays. In short, it is recommended that future researchers consider other categories of errors in FLSL students' writings different from the interference errors identified in



the present study. The researcher also recommends that EFL teachers give more grammar feedbacks during their composition classes so that FLSL students' grammar errors may be reduced in writing.

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