The introduction of information technology to the teaching of the French language

T. U. Onuko
Department of Modern European Languages
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

Language is the vehicle of communication among individuals and communities. Through it, meaningful interaction takes place in the fields of culture, science and education. When these ideas are developed and applied they enhance individual and societal progress. It is in view of scientific and technological advancement that many societies now encourage their citizens to acquire the knowledge of some very vital foreign languages. However, foreign language learning has always been a matter of serious concern to individuals and government alike. Thus the writer of this paper advocates that the new information technology be introduced into the teaching of the French language.

1.0 Introduction

According to Bolander (2000:497), information is the communication of news; knowledge, a fact or facts communicated, knowledge obtained by search, study etc. He further explains that technology is the science of technological processes in a wide, though related, field. Thus, information technology refers to the more modern tools and techniques of disseminating information.

The essential feature of language is communication. Man has always had the need to express his own views, beliefs, and sentiments and be acquainted with other people's opinions and ideas. He needs to interact with other members of the society economically and politically. No individual or community can afford to isolate himself or its people from meaningful relationships with his or their neighbours since everybody needs other human beings in order to facilitate societal development and realize their dreams of self-actualization.

Generally technology has helped to transform the lives of many people and communities. For example modern transportation systems like cars, trains and aeroplanes facilitate the movement of commodities and people alike to solve the problem of speed and space. Electricity has helped to make life more comfortable for many people and increase the production capacity of many industries and

business organizations. Just imagine what life would have been like without some of these technological advances.

Similarly modern information technology has come into the market to enhance communication. Roger and Albert-Hesse (1984:14) comment:

> Springing from the deepest roots of man's history, spreading its branches throughout the ages; the tree of communication has now reached the stars. Man and communication are inseparable. The astonishing multiplicity of messages is now complemented by the no less astonishing techniques for preserving them: the storage of sound opened up an extra-ordinary new cultural era.

People are becoming more inquisitive, and there is hunger for information about what is happening around the world. Many people want to learn about the latest discoveries in the field of science and business. It is observed that electronics have virtually transformed the world into a "global village". This is demonstrated by Agba (2002:vii):

> Thanks to the advances in communications technology, the entire world has shrunk into a small community. Thus one's neighbour is no longer only the fellow who lives next door. He could be in the remotest part of the hemisphere separated from one not only by time and distance, but also by differences in language, culture, norms and values. Yet what happens to one is known by the other and vice versa within a split second.

Through the use of vehicles of information such as radio, television, records, films, cameras, videocassette recorders, telephones, facsimile (fax), telex, cable systems with numerous channels; the computer, electronic mail system (E-mail) and the Internet, the dissemination of information is enhanced in all aspects of life. Take for instance, the case of news reporting. The world had live and immediate transmission of the Gulf War on radio and TV in 1991; and some very important events like the World Cup '98, the World Cup 2002 and 2008 Olympic Games, which took place in France, Korea/Japan and China respectively. This was made possible through the satellite communications and international news agencies like the CNN (Cable News Network).

Also, in most advanced countries like USA, Britain and France expert advice is now based on accurate information in health sector. The diagnosis and treatment

of certain disease are based on data collection from computer-controlled laboratories. For example, the treatment of bacteremia (infection that involves bacteria in the blood) and meningitis can be quite complicated and difficult, and requires special attention. Stair and Reynolds (1998:19) highlight this thus:

> Diagnosis and treatment of these diseases are complex enough that an attending physician usually seeks the advice of specialists. The expert system called Mycin was developed at Stanford University in the early 1980s. It was designed to be consulted by physicians to determine whether patients had meningitis. Mycin had provided advice as effective as the medical specialists provide at the Stanford Medical Center.

Equally in the business sector, accurate information is critical to achieve certain desired objectives. Finance houses use the computer to calculate and transfer large sum of money. Industries and business establishments instead of depending on manual labour now use computer controlled machines to maximize their production and profits. Data gathered on employees are used to calculate the exact amount to be paid workers or budget, plan, spend and keep records on any project to embark on. Many goods and services are also advertised and offered through the internet.

The information system enhances communication, and, as a result improves planning, marketing strategies ad decision-making. It is now easier to assess the growth of businesses. As Stair and Reynolds (1998:19) put it, "Organizations use a wide range of information systems to improve worker productivity, control costs, provide information, support decision making and gain competitive advantage".

This paper is of the position that the great advantages connected with information technology should be harnessed in the teaching of the French language in the country. Obviously, this will make for effective teaching of the language. Consequently, achievement in learning the language will be successful. The sections below identify a few information technology tools suitable to teaching a language and explain how they can serve the purpose in the teaching of French in Nigeria.

2.1 Use of radio and television in the French class

There are interesting foreign radio and TV programmes in French. Such programmes can be recorded and used by the French teacher in the French class, especially to facilitate listening and speaking skill that is comparable to those of

native speakers. Richards and Rodgers (1995:71) corroborate this in the following words:

> If the teacher is not a native speaker of the target language, the tape recorder provides accurate models for dialogue or drills. A language laboratory may also be considered essential. It provides the opportunity for further drill work to receive controlled error-free practice of basic structures. It also adds variety, by providing an alternative to classroom practice.

Moreover, playing such recorded programmes will engender lively discussions and arouse the interest of the learners to learn the language. Of course, the programmes will be got from the satellite systems, which today is cheap to access. Alternatively, subscription arrangements can be made with foreign stations like the TV5, the France – Inter (the leading French television and radio station) and other radio and television stations from the francophone countries. With such arrangements the stations can release copies of their recorded programmes. This would check wave interferences that could occur if the programmes were recorded while they are aired.

2.2 Use of computer and the Internet

There are CD-ROMs containing French songs, poems, and oral or grammar exercises in the market today. Such CD-ROMs can be acquired and used in the French class. What this means is that such class should hold in the language laboratory where there are computers. Working with the computers will make the learners very active in the class.

Commenting on the use of CD-ROMs, Onuko (2000) points out that they help to eliminate boredom in the class. Again, it saves the time of the teacher and creates the opportunity for learning to take place at the students' free time. For example, he or she can go to the language laboratory and by using the programmed lessons do his/her phonetics and pronunciation exercises. The Internet complements the importance of the computer. This is because it provides a wide range of possibilities such as connecting with bodies and persons interested in teaching and learning French, accessing downloadable audio and visual materials on the French language, instant messaging, which can be employed by teachers and learners in communicating with native speakers who are specialists in the language etc. Leloup and Ponterio (2000:1) capture these and more thus:

> The instant worldwide connections enabled through the Internet have changed the way people everywhere

> think about communication, information, and doing business. Although internet applications are really just computer programs ..., we view them as an extension of the world to our finger tips. We can share well all sorts of thing with the world; get authentic materials from anywhere, and interact with people in distant locations as never before.

Furthermore, they point out:

> Hundreds of lists of interests to language teachers are available on the Internet. Some are service lists, such as , LLTI , (Language Learning Technology International Discussion Forum) which distributes information about all aspects of the technology used in language teaching; and IECC (Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections, K-12), which provides a service for teachers seeking partner classrooms for international and cross-cultural electronic mail exchanges.

Truly, the importance of the computer and the Internet in the effective teaching and learning of the French language in Nigeria cannot be overstressed.

4.0 The problems of teaching the French language in Nigeria

There are some difficulties that confront the French language teacher. They include lack of adequate textbooks, the high cost of electronic equipment such as the computers, televisions, radios and the satellite dish. However, the resourceful and creative teacher could procure materials from some of the sources highlighted above. For instance, there are many commercial cybercafés where the teacher can go and make necessary connections with foreign professionals in the language or download audio or visual file or other materials that could help him to execute his duty efficiently.

Moreover, there are many homes today that are connected to the satellite television and radio systems. The resourceful French teacher can arrange with such homes to record programmes in French from televisions or radio stations that broadcast in French. Sometimes, a few learners in the teacher's class may come from such homes and this makes the arrangement easier.

Good education needs funding and somebody has to pay for it. The Nigerian and French governments should do more in the area of giving grants to our institutions of learning. These grants would help procure the needed tools.

Certainly, the use of some of these tools in the classroom would make the French language teaching and learning more interesting and lively. They would also help the teacher to acquire new experiences and information. The teaching and learning process in modern times should no longer depend on the available textbooks since almost any kind of information can be obtained instantly and at affordable costs, using information technology. By proper use of IT, learning the French language will become more challenging and rewarding.

5.0 Conclusion:

This paper has so far studied some modern tools of information technology and their use in different human endeavours. It has also highlighted how they can be applied to the teaching of the French language to produce better results. A resourceful teacher should try to make his class more lively and interesting by venturing into some of them, without waiting for the much awaited government support. However, the government should live up to their statutory responsibility in matters concerning the teaching and learning of the French language in the country.

References

Agba, P. C. 2001. *Electronic reporting: Heart of the new age.* Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press.

Blander, D. (ed.) 2000. *The new Webster's dictionary of the English Language.* USA: Lexicon Publications Incorporated.

Leloup J.W. and R. Ponterio. 2000. *Enhancing authentic language learning experiences through Internet technology.* ERIC Digest, Edo-FL-00-02, Washington DC, Eric Clearing House on Languages and Linguistics.

Onuko, T.U. 2001. Enhanced French language learning in the tertiary institutions. The *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities 3*, 71-81.

Roger, D. and J. Albert-Hesse. 1984. *The communication tree.* Paris: UNESCO.

Rodgers, S. T. and J. C. Richards. 1985. *Approaches and methods in language teaching: A description and analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stair, R. M. and G. W. Reynolds. 1998. *Principles of information systems: A managerial approach.* Cambridge: Course Technology International.

Notes to Contributors

Awka Journal of Linguistics and Languages is an annual publication. It requires quality articles on any areas of linguistics and languages. Articles that have a literary bias, reviews of articles, books and research reports also make the journal. For information concerning submission of manuscripts write to: **The Editor-in-Chief/Awka Journal of Linguistics and Languages/Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka/P. M. B. 5025 Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. Alternatively, e-mail ajillvols@yahoo.com or call the Editor-in-Chief on 08033548805 or the Editor on 08035611899.**

Specifications for Manuscript

i. Each manuscript should not be more than 13 pages. Use A4; double space normally but quadruple space between sections; use Times New Roman 12 point font size even in titles and sub-titles; leave margins of one inch on all four sides of the paper. Avoid line-end hyphens; only the first letter of titles and sub-titles should be capitalized. However, proper nouns and proper adjectives may be capitalized anywhere.

ii. A concise and precise abstract is required. Particularly, the abstract should not be more than 200 words.

iii. Use double quotation marks to enclose quotes. The single ones should be used within quotes; indent quotations of 40 or more words only; give citations in parentheses, consisting of the author's surname, the year of publication and page number(s). For articles, or chapters contributed in books, pages are not necessary. Pages may also be unnecessary if the thrust of a book, project report etc is given. Note that if a cited publication has more than two authors, the surname of the first author is used followed by *et al*; if author's name is part of the text, use this form: Anagbogu (2002:192) comments ...; do not hyphenate words containing prefixes unless misreading will result. However, hyphenate if the stem begins with a capital letter, e.g. non-Nigerian. Indicate ellipsis by three periods, close set with a blank space before and after, e.g. He emphasizes ... books; use a period after any abbreviation ending in a small letter, but not capital letter.

iv. Place charts, diagrams or any other special illustrative objects in their positions well labeled. Insert diacritics in the exact position and form that they are meant to assume in print.

v. Provide gloss for all examples from other languages. The gloss should be in single quotation marks with no comma preceding or following it; unless necessary; type each numbered item on a separate indented line with the number in parentheses; indent after the number; use lowercase letters to group sets:

(2) a. Nye m mmiri 'Give me water'
b. O gara nke oma 'It went well'

Refer to numbered items as 2. 2a, 2a,b, 2(a-c). Align word for word or morpheme by morpheme glosses of example phrases or sentences with the beginning of each word:

(3) Ada si na ya ga-abia.
Ada say that she will come.

Place a hyphen between morphs within words in the original and a corresponding hyphen in the gloss:

(4) fog-okfel próbál-ni olvas-ni
will-1sg try-inf read-inf

If one morph in the original corresponds to two or more elements in the gloss (cumulative exponence), separate the latter by a period, except for persons; there is no period at the end of word:

(5) es-tis be-2PL.PRES.IND.ACT

Gloss lexical roots in lower case roman type; persons as 1, 2, 3, and 4, and all other grammatical categories abbreviated in small capitals. List the abbreviations in notes.

vi. Arrange entries in references alphabetically by surname of authors; list multiple works by the same author in ascending chronological order; use suffixed letters a, b, c, etc to distinguish more than one item published by a single author in the same year; list a journal or a book as a separate entry under the editor's name if more than one article or chapter is cited from the journal or book. Each entry should contain the following elements: for books, author's given name(s) or initials; given name and surname of other authors, year of publication, full title of the book, place of publication and publishers; for a project report, thesis or dissertation, full title is followed by name of degree and the name of the institution for which the project report, thesis or dissertation has been written; for a journal article, the full name of the journal follows the title which is followed by the volume number and page numbers for the entire article; for a chapter contributed in a book, the following form: title of the chapter, in [full name(s) of editor(s)], title of the book, place of publication, publishers and page numbers of the entire chapter; for monographs, the edition, volume or part number (if applicable) and series title (if any) should be indicated following its title; for a work from the Internet, its title is followed by the following form: Retrieved on [date] from [website]; note that an entry for a dictionary should begin with name of its editor; an entry for a work by an organization should begin with the name of the organization:

Ayuwo, Jones G. I. 2003. The teaching of Kiswahili in Nigeria: The journey so far. In Ndimele ed. In *In the linguistic paradise: A festschrift for Nolue Emenanjo*. Aba: NINLAN, 421-426.

Eme, Cecilia A. 2005.A syntax of Igbo monosyllabic conjunction. *Awka Journal of Linguistics and Languages, I*, 95-103.

Eyisi, Joy. 2003. *Common errors in the use of English*. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Limited.

Knoetze, J. G., 1997. *Educational research*. Retrieved on: 5-7-2003, from http://hagar.up.ac.za/cie/bed/modules/rgo785/tools/educationalresearch.htm.

United Nations Organization. 1975. *Report of the world population conference*. Paris: UNESCO.

All the specifications are largely based on the Linguistic Society of America Language Style Sheet. Comply with them. AJILL considers them seriously.
GOODLUCK!