Applying Selinker's Theory to Error Correction among Learners of French: Sacred Heart Catholic College, Ijebu-Ode as a Case Study

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Abstract

This study examines the pedagogical application of Larry Selinker's interlanguage theory (1972) in the correction of errors exhibited by SS 1 learners of French as a Foreign Language (FFL), from the Sacred Heart Catholic College, Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria with Igbo and Yoruba first-language (L1) backgrounds. Embedded in the theoretical framework of interlanguage, the study investigates how learners construct a dynamic and evolving linguistic system that reflects both their L1 structures and developing knowledge of the target language. Adopting a qualitative, context-based analytical approach, the research draws on learners' written and oral productions to identify recurring error patterns and to interpret them as evidence of structured developmental processes rather than random deviations. The study concludes that integrating Selinker's theoretical insights into classroom practice enhances diagnostic precision and corrective effectiveness, thereby contributing to more sustainable and cognitively informed FFL pedagogy in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: *Interlanguage, error analysis, FFL, corrective strategies, L1 transfer*

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1.Introduction

In today's increasingly multilingual and interconnected world, understanding how learners acquire a second language remains a central concern in applied linguistics. Within this field, error analysis has long been recognized as a valuable tool for examining the developmental processes underlying second language acquisition. Corder (1967) famously observed that "errors are not random; they are evidence of the learner's evolving system" (p. 167), highlighting those errors provide insight into learners' internalized rules. Similarly, Ellis (2008) notes that "studying learners' errors allows us to understand the processes by which learners internalize the target language" (p. 52).

In multilingual African classrooms, French as Foreign Language (FFL) learners often operate within complex linguistic environments. Many learners possess Igbo or Yoruba as a first language (L1) and English as an additional language before encountering French as a second or third language. Bamgbose (1991) argues that "the multilingual African learner negotiates multiple linguistic systems, which often interact in ways that shape second language learning outcomes" (p. 34). This layered multilingual background creates fertile ground for cross-linguistic influence. Consequently, learners frequently produce systematic errors reflecting L1 transfer, overgeneralization of L2 rules, structural simplification, and, in some cases, fossilization of persistent forms. As Selinker (1972) explains, "the

interlanguage is a dynamic, evolving linguistic system, distinct from both the L1 and L2, which explains the systematic nature of learners' errors" (p. 219).

This study focuses on seven Senior Secondary School One (SS1) learners — four Igbo speakers and three Yoruba speakers — analyzing both their written and oral productions in French. The data include spontaneous oral responses, structured written tasks, and translation exercises from English-to-French and L1-to-French. The central objective is to classify and examine learners' errors through the lens of Selinker's interlanguage theory (1972). As Gass and Selinker (2008) emphasize, "understanding why learners make errors is as important as identifying what the errors are, because it informs effective correction and teaching strategies" (p. 45). By interpreting errors as manifestations of an evolving linguistic system rather than isolated inaccuracies, the study seeks to demonstrate how theoretical insight can inform constructive, stage-appropriate correction.

Interlanguage theory posits that second language learners develop an independent and dynamic linguistic system that is distinct from both the L1 and the target language (L2). This evolving system is shaped by processes such as language transfer, overgeneralization of target language rules, simplification strategies, communication strategies, and fossilization. Odlin (1989) states that "transfer is only one of the many factors affecting the interlanguage; overgeneralization and

simplification play equally significant roles" (p. 102). Viewing learner's language through this framework allows educators to move beyond identifying when errors occur and towards understanding why they occur. Such understanding is crucial for designing corrective feedback that aligns with the learner's developmental stage rather than merely addressing surface-level deviations (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 91).

By situating classroom error correction within a theoretically grounded model of language development, this study contributes to applied linguistics, FFL pedagogy, and multilingual education in African contexts. Nassaji (2017) observes that "effective error correction requires both theoretical understanding and practical intervention; addressing only surface errors is insufficient" (p. 77). This study highlights the importance of interpreting learners' errors systematically and demonstrates how interlanguage-informed correction can reduce fossilization and promote progressive restructuring of the learner's linguistic system. Ultimately, the study argues for a more cognitively informed and developmentally sensitive approach to FFL teaching in multilingual settings.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, contrastive research design grounded in the systematic analysis of learners' productions from seven Senior Secondary School One (SS1) learners — four Igbo L1 speakers and three Yoruba L1 speakers — studying French as a Foreign Language (FFL) at Sacred Heart Catholic

College, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria. The school context provides a representative multilingual learning environment in which French is offered as an elective alongside Yoruba language and Food and Nutrition, in addition to the compulsory English language curriculum.

The selection of seven participants reflects the total number of SS1 students in this school who opted to study French. Out of a total cohort of 120 SS1 students, 32 are in the Arts department, from which students intending to pursue higher education in fields such as Law or Mass Communication choose a language elective. Among this group of learners, only seven students opted for French, comprising four Igbo L1 speakers and three Yoruba L1 speakers. This purposive sampling strategy allows for an in-depth examination of individual learner interlanguage systems and the identification of recurrent patterns in a multilingual context.

Data were collected through a series of structured classroom tasks designed to elicit both spontaneous and controlled language production. These tasks included L1-to-French translations, English-to-French translations, guided written compositions, and short oral responses. The tasks were specifically selected to encourage the emergence of grammatical and lexical structures commonly associated with L1 transfer, overgeneralization of L2 rules, structural simplification, and fossilization.

The analytical framework is based on Selinker's (1972) interlanguage theory. Learners' errors were first identified and coded, then classified according to their probable source: L1 transfer, overgeneralization, simplification, or fossilization. Classification was guided by contrastive comparison between learners' L1 structures and standard French forms, as well as by reference to establish descriptions of French grammar. The analysis focuses on systematic and recurrent patterns rather than isolated deviations. The objective is not to produce an exhaustive inventory of learners' errors, but to illustrate how understanding the internal logic of learner's interlanguage can inform developmentally appropriate and pedagogically constructive corrective strategies.

Data were presented through detailed examples to ensure analytical transparency and pedagogical clarity. Ethical considerations were respected, and participants' identities/names remain anonymous throughout the study.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Selinker's (1972) interlanguage theory, which conceptualizes second language acquisition as the development of a dynamic and evolving linguistic system distinct from both the learner's first language (L1) and the target language (L2). It is however noteworthy that French represents the third language or L3 of the SS1 learners of this target language where Igbo /Yoruba is the L1 while English constitutes the L2 respectively. Selinker posits that learner's language is

systematic and internally structured, reflecting cognitive strategies rather than random deviation. Errors, therefore, are not signs of failure but evidence of rule formation within an intermediate linguistic system.

According to interlanguage theory, learner's production is shaped by identifiable psycholinguistic processes, including language transfer (from L1 or another acquired language), overgeneralization of target language rules, simplification strategies, communication strategies, and fossilization. These processes interact to form what Selinker terms the interlanguage — a transitional yet structured system that evolves as learners gain exposure to and practice in the target language. Recent research confirms the continued relevance of this construct where Mabekoje (2026) and Barone (2024) argue that "the concept of interlanguage... continues to play a central role in understanding learners' evolving linguistic systems and their implications for language teaching" (p. 81). Similarly, Ndlovu and Chikosi (2023) note that "interlanguage provides a critical lens for diagnosing learner's errors and developing pedagogically sound corrective strategies" (p. 45).

A central principle of the theory is that interlanguage development is systematic but variable. At any given stage, learners operate with internally coherent rules that may differ from both L1 and L2 norms. For multilingual learners, such as those in the present study who speak Igbo or Yoruba and have prior knowledge of English before learning French, multiple

sources of transfer may influence interlanguage construction. Recent studies emphasize that interlanguage is shaped by both L1 and previously acquired L2 influences, highlighting the need for contrastive analysis in multilingual contexts (Akpan & Adeyemi, 2022, p. 112; Mbatha, 2025, p. 97).

By applying this framework to the written and oral productions of seven SS1 learners — four Igbo speakers and three Yoruba speakers — this study interprets learners' errors as manifestations of developmental processes rather than isolated inaccuracies. Interlanguage theory provides the analytical foundation for classifying errors according to their source and for understanding how certain forms may stabilize and risk fossilization if not addressed appropriately. As argued by Tamba (2022), "understanding the system of interlanguage is essential for designing effective instructional interventions that facilitate sustained language development" (p. 66). This perspective supports pedagogically informed correction strategies aimed at restructuring the learner's evolving system and promoting progressive, sustained language acquisition.

3. Error Analysis: Application of Interlanguage Theory

This section provides a structured examination of the errors produced by seven SS1 students studying French as a Foreign Language (FLE). The data analyzed consist of written compositions, oral responses, and translation exercises from English into French as well as from the learners' first language (L1) into French. The identified errors were categorized based

on the principal processes proposed in interlanguage theory, namely:

i. L1 transfer (influence from Igbo or Yoruba)
ii. L2 transfer (influence from English)
iii. Overgeneralization of French grammatical rules
iv. Simplification
v. Fossilization

Each category is illustrated through authentic examples drawn from the learners' productions. In every case, the learner's output is compared with the correct French form, the likely origin of the error is examined, and its cognitive and pedagogical significance is discussed. The analysis focuses primarily on recurring and systematic patterns of errors rather than on isolated mistakes, in order to demonstrate how insights into learners' interlanguage development can inform more effective instructional and corrective practices.

3.1 Transfer (Influence of the First Language)

L1 transfer occurs when learners rely on structures from their first language while producing the target language. As Selinker (1972) notes, language transfer is a key process in the development of a learner's interlanguage system. For learners whose L1s are Igbo or Yoruba, differences in article usage, verb conjugation, and sentence structure can affect their French output. The example below illustrates a genuine instance of L1 transfer.

i. Student 1 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feedback: Je aller stade ce jour

Target Form: Je suis allée au stade ce matin.

Error Type: L1 Transfer

Analysis: In Igbo, verbs typically appear in their base form, with tense indicated by separate adverbs rather than verb inflection. The learner applies this structure to French, using the infinitive "aller" without the auxiliary "être" to mark passé composé.

Pedagogical Implication: Providing explicit instruction on auxiliary verbs in compound tenses, combined with guided oral practice, can help learners internalize correct tense marking and produce more accurate past-tense forms.

ii. Student 2 (Igbo, written)

Learner's feedback: Nous mangons riz

Target Form: Nous mangeons du riz

Error Type: L1 Transfer

Analysis: In Igbo, there are no articles, so learners often omit them when writing in French. The absence of the partitive "du" before "riz" reflects direct transfer from the learner's L1. Additionally, the verb is misspelled (mangons instead of mangeons), showing overgeneralization of a regular pattern, but the primary error stemming from L1 influence is the missing article.

Pedagogical Implication: Instruction should explicitly address the use of French articles, especially partitive articles,

while also reinforcing correct subject-verb agreement in the present tense. Repetitive exercises and written drills can help learners internalize these forms and reduce persistent L1-based omissions.

iii. Student 3 (Yoruba, oral)

Learner's feedback: Il venir semaine prochaine

Target Form: Il viendra la semaine prochaine

Error Type: L1 Transfer

Analysis: In Yoruba, verbs typically do not change form to indicate tense; temporal meaning is usually conveyed through context or explicit time markers rather than through verb inflection. The learner transfers this L1 feature to French, producing the infinitive "venir" instead of conjugating it in the future tense. This illustrates how the learner's interlanguage relies on L1 strategies to communicate meaning, even when there is a mix-up with the grammatical requirements of the target language. It also highlights a tendency to simplify tense marking by relying on temporal adverbs alone. Such patterns are systematic rather than random and reveal an underlying cognitive strategy in the learner's developing French.

Pedagogical Implication: Teachers should provide targeted instruction on future tense conjugation in French, including guided oral and written exercises. Contrastive examples between Yoruba and French tense marking can help learners internalize the need for verb inflection, while

contextualized practice encourages correct usage in spontaneous speech.

iv. Student 4 (Yoruba, written)

Learner's feedback: Elle manger repas

Target Form: Elle mange le repas

Error Type: L1 Transfer

Analysis: In Yoruba, noun phrases typically appear without determiners equivalent to French articles. Consequently, the omission of "le" in the learner's production reflects the direct influence of the L1 grammatical structure. This error illustrates how L1 patterns regarding determiners can shape French output.

Pedagogical Implication: Teachers should provide targeted exercises emphasizing the use of articles in French noun phrases to ensure learners internalize the necessity of determiners.

v. Student 5 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feedback: Je parler avec père

Target Form: Je parle avec mon père

Error Type: L1 Transfer

Analysis: Igbo lacks possessive determiners similar to French, so learners often omit them when producing French sentences. Here, the absence of "mon" shows a transfer of the learner's L1 structure into French, resulting in incomplete noun phrase formation.

Pedagogical Implication: Activities focusing on possessive determiners, including oral drills and sentence construction tasks, can support learners in producing grammatically complete French phrases.

vi. Student 6 (Yoruba, written)

Learner's feedback : Nous aller école demain

Target Form: Nous allons à l'école demain

Error Type: L1 Transfer and Simplification

Analysis: This learner's production reflects both L1 transfer and structural simplification. In Yoruba, similar constructions do not require verb conjugation or prepositions to indicate tense and location. As a result, the learner omits the preposition "à" and uses the infinitive "aller" instead of the correctly conjugated form "allons," demonstrating the combined effect of L1 influence and simplification strategies.

Pedagogical Implication: Contrastive teaching that explicitly compares Yoruba and French sentence structures, especially for verb conjugation and preposition usage, can help learners produce accurate sentences.

vii. Student 7 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feedback : Elle avoir seize ans

Target Form: Elle a seize ans

Error Type: L1 Transfer and Simplification

Analysis: The learner's use of the infinitive "avoir" rather than the conjugated form "a" highlights an L1 influence, as Igbo verbs do not reflect for tense or agreement in the same way as

French verbs. This simplification of the verbal structure results in an incomplete sentence that deviates from standard French grammar.

Pedagogical Implication: Guided oral practice emphasizing correct verb conjugation, particularly for high-frequency verbs like "avoir," can reinforce accurate morphological usage and reduce L1 transfer errors.

Transfer (English Influence)

A noticeable pattern in the learners' productions is the influence of English on their French output. Across both oral and written tasks, the seven SS1 students demonstrated instances where structures from English were transferred into French. These examples highlight how prior knowledge of English, as a previously acquired language, shapes the development of their interlanguage system in French.

i. Student 1 (Igbo)

Learner's feedback: Je suis écouter

Target Form: J'écoute

Error Type: L2 transfer and overgeneralization

Analysis: The learner inserts the auxiliary verb "être" in an attempt to mirror the English present progressive construction "I am listening." In French, however, the simple present tense is sufficient to convey ongoing actions. This reflects both an L2 transfer from English and overgeneralization of its syntactic rules to French. The error demonstrates that learners often rely

on familiar structures from previously acquired languages when confronted with unfamiliar target language patterns.

Pedagogical Implication: Instructors should explicitly contrast French present-tense constructions with English progressive forms and provide targeted oral exercises that reinforce the correct use of simple present verbs. Frequent modeling and corrective feedback can reduce fossilization of such transferred structures.

ii. Student 2 (Igbo)

Learner's feedback: Je suis quatorze ans

Target Form: J'ai quatorze ans

Error Type: L2 transfer and overgeneralization

Analysis: The learner literally translates the English phrase "I am fourteen years old," resulting in the misuse of the verb "être" instead of the idiomatic French "avoir." This indicates a reliance on English syntactic patterns and an overgeneralization that treats French structures as equivalent to those of English. Such errors highlight the influence of a previously acquired L2 on the learner's developing French interlanguage system.

Pedagogical Implication: Teachers should emphasize the idiomatic use of "avoir" in French age expressions and design written and oral drills that repeatedly contrast English and French structures. Corrective feedback should reinforce the rule until the target form becomes internalized.

iii. Student 3 (Yoruba)

Learner's feedback: Je suis jouer au basketball

Target Form: Je joue au basketball

Error Type: L2 transfer and overgeneralization

Analysis: The learner applies the English auxiliary "to be" to form the present continuous ("I am playing basketball"), resulting in the erroneous use of "être" with the infinitive "jouer." French present tense does not require this construction, demonstrating that learners often overgeneralize rules from a previously mastered L2. This error illustrates the complex interplay of cognitive strategies and L2 interference in shaping interlanguage.

Pedagogical Implication: Focused instruction should highlight verbs that do not take "être" in French and reinforce correct simple present usage. Oral practice, guided role-plays, and immediate corrective feedback can help learners internalize the appropriate structure.

iv. Student 4 (Yoruba)

Learner's feedback: Je suis faim

Target Form: J'ai faim

Error Type: L2 transfer and overgeneralization

Analysis: The learner directly translates the English expression "I am hungry," producing "être" instead of the correct French "avoir." This error demonstrates both L2 transfer and overgeneralization, revealing how learners map familiar English syntactic and semantic patterns into French. It also underscores the tendency to treat idiomatic expressions in the L2 as structurally similar to the L1.

Pedagogical Implication: Teachers should provide contrastive exercises that distinguish French constructions for learners. Repetition, modeling, and corrective feedback can guide learners to internalize the correct use of "avoir" in such expressions and prevent fossilization of transferred structures.

v. Student 5 (Igbo)

Learner's feedback: Je suis écouter la musique

Target Form: J'écoute la musique.

Error Type: L2 transfer and overgeneralization

Analysis: The learner erroneously inserts the auxiliary verb "être" with the action verb "écouter," mirroring the English present progressive construction "I am listening to music." This overgeneralization indicates reliance on English syntax, where the progressive requires an auxiliary, and shows that the learner has not yet internalized the French rule that simple present forms suffice for ongoing actions. The persistence of this pattern demonstrates how previously acquired L2 structures can shape interlanguage development.

Pedagogical Implication: Teachers should provide repeated practice with French action verbs in the simple present tense, emphasizing that auxiliary verbs are not required. Oral drills, modeling, and corrective feedback should be integrated to ensure learners differentiate between English and French tense constructions.

vi. Student 6 (Yoruba)

Learner's feedback: Nous sommes bien

Target Form: Nous allons bien.

Error Type: L2 transfer and simplification

Analysis: The learner substitutes "sommes" for the idiomatic French expression "allons" to convey wellbeing, likely influenced by the English structure "We are well." This reflects both simplification and L2 transfer, as the learner attempts to map a familiar English pattern onto French without accounting for idiomatic usage. The error illustrates the interplay between structural transfer and semantic misalignment in interlanguage.

Pedagogical Implication: Teachers should explicitly teach idiomatic expressions of well-being in French, contrasting them with equivalent English constructions. Corrective exercises, guided repetition, and contextualized dialogues can reinforce appropriate verb usage and reduce fossilized errors.

vii. Student 7 (Igbo)

Learner's feedback: Je suis aller à l'école

Target Form: Je vais à l'école.

Error Type: L2 transfer and overgeneralization

Analysis: The learner applies the English present progressive pattern "I am going to school" by using "être" with the infinitive "aller." This reflects a common L2 transfer error and overgeneralization, as French requires the simple present "je vais" for habitual or immediate actions. The error demonstrates that interlanguage development is influenced by prior L2 knowledge, and learners may temporarily rely on familiar syntactic rules when producing target language forms.

Pedagogical Implication: Instruction should focus on the contrast between English progressive constructions and French simple present forms. Targeted oral and written exercises, with explicit corrective feedback and modeling of appropriate tense usage, can help learners internalize correct French structures and prevent fossilization of transferred patterns.

3. Simplification

Another pattern evident in the learners' productions is simplification. In this process, learners tend to reduce grammatical complexity by omitting elements such as auxiliary verbs, agreement markers between subjects and verbs, or required prepositions. Such reductions serve as strategies that help learners manage the structural demands of French while their linguistic system is still developing. Rather than being random mistakes, these forms reveal systematic features of the learners' evolving interlanguage system. The following examples, drawn from both written and oral tasks, illustrate instances of this phenomenon.

i. Student 1 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feedback: Ils est aller école

Target Form: Ils vont à l'école

Error Type: Simplification

Analysis: The learner produces a reduced sentence structure in which several grammatical elements are either omitted or incorrectly realized. The auxiliary and appropriate verb form expected in the present tense are not used, and the

preposition "à," which introduces the location "l'école," is absent. In spontaneous speech, learners often simplify morphosyntactic structures by relying on basic lexical items while omitting function words that require additional processing. This reduction illustrates a common strategy in developing interlanguage systems, where learners prioritize communicative meaning over grammatical structures.

Pedagogical Implication: Teachers can address this tendency through structured oral activities that encourage complete sentence production. Repetition drills, guided dialogue practice, and corrective feedback can help learners gradually incorporate necessary grammatical markers such as prepositions and correct verb forms.

ii. Student 2 (Igbo, written)

Learner's feedback : Il bois eau

Target Form: Il boit de l'eau

Error Type: Simplification

Analysis: The learner omits the partitive article "de l'," which is required in French when referring to an unspecified quantity of a substance such as water. This omission reduces the morphological complexity of the noun phrase and reflects a simplification strategy in the learner's written production. In early stages of acquisition, learners frequently focus on content words while excluding grammatical elements that appear less essential for conveying meaning. As a result, the sentence retains

its communicative value but lacks grammatical completeness according to standard French structure.

Pedagogical Implication: Instruction should emphasize the use of partitive articles in French, particularly in contexts involving food and drink. Contrastive exercises and guided writing activities can help learners recognize when such grammatical markers are required.

iii. Student 3 (Yoruba, oral)

Learner's feedback: Nous aller maison

Target Form: Nous allons à la maison

Error Type: Simplification

Analysis: In this production, the learner simplifies the sentence by using the infinitive form "aller" instead of the correctly conjugated verb "allons," and by omitting the preposition "à," which is required before the noun phrase "la maison." These omissions illustrate a strategy of structural reduction in spoken language. Learners often rely on simplified forms when attempting to communicate quickly, especially when the correct morphological structures have not yet been fully internalized. Such patterns demonstrate how interlanguage systems evolve through gradual acquisition of grammatical markers.

Pedagogical Implication: Oral classroom activities that focus on verb conjugation and prepositional usage can help learners strengthen their control of these grammatical elements.

Immediate corrective feedback during speaking exercises may also improve accuracy.

iv. Student 4 (Yoruba, written)

Learner's feedback: Elle finir devoir

Target Form: Elle finit son devoir

Error Type: Simplification

Analysis: The learner employs the infinitive "finir" instead of the conjugated verb "finit" and omits the possessive determiner "son," which specifies the relationship between the subject and the noun "devoir." These omissions reflect a simplified sentence structure that reduces morphological marking. Such simplification is common in developing interlanguage systems, where learners initially prioritize lexical meaning while gradually acquiring the grammatical features necessary for fully formed sentences in the target language.

Pedagogical Implication: Written practice focusing on subject–verb agreement and possessive determiners can support learners in producing grammatically complete sentences. Exercises that require learners to reconstruct simplified sentences into full grammatical forms may also reinforce these structures.

v. Student 5 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feedback : Je voir films

Target Form: Je vois les films

Error Type: Simplification

Analysis: In this example, the learner uses the infinitive form "voir" instead of the correctly conjugated present tense form "vois." In addition, the definite article "les" is omitted before the plural noun "films." These omissions reduce the grammatical complexity of the sentence and illustrate a simplification strategy often observed in developing interlanguage systems. Learners at this stage tend to rely on lexical meaning while minimizing morphological markers such as verb inflections and articles. Although the message remains understandable, the sentence lacks the grammatical features required in standard French.

Pedagogical Implication: Oral practice focusing on verb conjugation in the present tense and correct article usage can help learners produce more complete sentence structures. Repetition exercises, short dialogues, and guided sentence formation tasks can reinforce these grammatical elements.

vi. Student 6 (Yoruba, written)

Learner's feedback: Tu lire livre

Target Form: Tu lis le livre.

Error Type: Simplification

Analysis: The learner simplifies the sentence by using the infinitive form "lire" instead of the conjugated form "lis," and by omitting the definite article "le." Such reductions are characteristic of early stages of language acquisition, where learners prioritize conveying the main idea while minimizing grammatical complexity. The absence of the article and the lack

of subject–verb agreement indicate that the learner has not yet fully internalized the morphological rules governing French sentence structure.

Pedagogical Implication: Structured writing exercises that emphasize verb conjugation and article placement can support learners in producing grammatically accurate sentences. Activities such as sentence completion, guided rewriting, and corrective feedback may help reinforce these forms.

vii. Student 7 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feednack : Nous aller parc ce jour

Target Form: Nous allons au parc aujourd'hui.

Error Type: Simplification

Analysis: The learner employs the infinitive "aller" instead of the correctly conjugated form "allons" and omits the prepositional contraction "au," which is required before the noun "parc." These omissions illustrate a simplification strategy in which the learner reduces the number of grammatical elements in the sentence while still attempting to convey the intended meaning. Such patterns are common in spontaneous speech, where learners often rely on simplified structures when the appropriate morphological forms have not yet been fully acquired.

Pedagogical Implication: Oral storytelling activities and guided conversational practice can help learners develop greater control over verb conjugation and prepositional usage. Regular modeling of complete sentence structures, combined with

corrective feedback, may gradually improve grammatical accuracy.

4. Fossilization

Fossilization refers to the phenomenon where certain errors in a learner's interlanguage become fixed and resistant to correction, even after repeated exposure to the target language. These errors are usually systematic and recurrent, demonstrating stable patterns rather than occasional slips. Fossilized forms can appear in both oral and written language, as illustrated by examples from seven SS1 students learning French.

i. Student 1 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feedback: Je suis manger

Target Form: Je mange

Error Type: Fossilization with L2 transfer

Analysis: In this example, the learner continues to apply the English progressive structure in oral French, despite repeated correction. The persistent use of "je suis manger" shows that the error has become entrenched in the learner's spoken interlanguage, reflecting a partially fossilized form influenced by the native language.

Pedagogical Implication: To address this, consistent oral practice and corrective feedback are necessary, emphasizing the correct use of French present-tense verbs to gradually replace the fossilized pattern.

ii. Student 2 (Igbo, written)

Learner's feedback: Je suis quatorze ans

Target Form: J'ai quatorze ans

Error Type: Fossilization with L2 transfer

Analysis: This written error demonstrates the learner's repeated substitution of "être" for "avoir" when expressing age, likely influenced by English structures. The recurrence of this mistake indicates a fossilized pattern that persists in the learner's written interlanguage structure.

Pedagogical Implication: Instruction should focus on explicit contrastive teaching between French and English constructions. Repeated written exercises highlighting the correct use of "avoir" in age expressions can help gradually reduce fossilization.

iii. Student 3 (Yoruba, oral)

Learner's feedback: Je suis aller à l'école

Target Form: Je vais à l'école

Error Type: Fossilization with L2 transfer

Analysis: Here, the learner continues to use the wrong auxiliary verb in spoken French, reflecting a fossilized influence of English grammar. The repeated use of "je suis aller" instead of "je vais" shows that the learner's interlanguage has stabilized around an incorrect pattern.

Pedagogical Implication: Focused oral drills and immediate corrective feedback are essential. Repetitive

modeling of the correct present-tense form can help learners gradually overcome the fossilized structure in their speech.

iv. Student 4 (Yoruba, written)

Learner Production: Je vous manque

Target Form: Vous me manquez

Error Type: Fossilization with overgeneralization

Analysis: In this example, the learner produces the sentence "Je vous manque" instead of the correct structure "Vous me manquez." The error reflects a restructuring of the sentence based on a generalized subject–verb pattern in which the speaker is assumed to be the grammatical subject of the verb. However, the verb 'manquer' in French requires an inverse argument structure where the person experiencing the feeling functions as the subject, while the person who is missed appears as an indirect object. The learner's production suggests that the interlanguage system has stabilized around a simplified rule that aligns with more common subject–verb constructions. This stabilization indicates a form of fossilization, where the learner repeatedly applies an internalized rule despite the target language requiring a different syntactic configuration.

Pedagogical Implication: To address this type of fossilized error, instruction should focus on raising learners' awareness of verbs that require non-canonical argument structures in French, such as 'manquer' and 'plaire'. Providing contextualized examples and structured written practice that contrasts these verbs with more regular subject–verb patterns can help learners

restructure their interlanguage system. Continuous feedback and exposure to authentic usage may gradually facilitate the replacement of the fossilized form with the correct target structure.

v. Student 5 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feedback: nous sommes aller au marché

Target Form: Nous allons au marché.

Error Type: Fossilization with overgeneralization

Analysis: In this example, the learner produces "nous sommes aller au marché" instead of the correct present tense form "Nous allons au marché." The learner appears to construct the sentence using an auxiliary verb followed by an infinitive or past participle, a pattern that is common in compound tenses in French. This suggests that the learner has overgeneralized the auxiliary-based structure when attempting to express an action. The repeated use of this pattern in oral production indicates that the learner's interlanguage system has internalized an incorrect rule for verb formation. The persistence of this structure despite exposure to the correct form suggests a degree of fossilization within the learner's spoken interlanguage.

Pedagogical Implication: Instruction should emphasize the distinction between simple present forms and compound tense constructions in French. Guided oral drills, sentence reformulation activities, and immediate corrective feedback can help learners recognize when auxiliary verbs are required and

when simple conjugated forms should be used. Regular exposure to correct models in communicative contexts may gradually help learners restructure their interlanguage and reduce the persistence of this error.

vi. Student 6 (Yoruba, written)

Learner's feedback: Je suis faim

Target Form: J'ai faim

Error Type: Fossilization with overgeneralization

Analysis: In this instance, the learner produces "Je suis faim" instead of the correct expression "J'ai faim." The error suggests that the learner interprets the state of hunger as an adjectival condition that should be expressed with the verb 'être'. However, in French, hunger is expressed through the verb 'avoir' followed by the noun 'faim'. The learner therefore restructures the sentence according to a more familiar subject–copula pattern, applying a generalized rule in which states are expressed with 'être'. The persistence of this construction in written production indicates that the learner's interlanguage has stabilized around an incorrect rule, reflecting a form of fossilization reinforced by overgeneralization.

Pedagogical Implication: Teaching should emphasize common French expressions that require the verb 'avoir' to describe physical states, such as avoir faim, avoir soif, and avoir peur. Through guided written practice, contextual examples, and corrective feedback, learners can become more aware of

these fixed structures and gradually adjust their interlanguage system to align with the target language pattern.

vii. Student 7 (Igbo, oral)

Learner's feedback: Je parlée avec frère hier

Target Form: J'ai parlé hier avec mon frère

Error Type: Fossilization with overgeneralization

Analysis: In this example, the learner produces "Je parlée avec frère hier" instead of the correct form "J'ai parlé hier avec mon frère." The error demonstrates two persistent issues in the learner's interlanguage: the incorrect use of the past participle ending -ée instead of -é, and the omission or misuse of the auxiliary verb 'avoir' required in the 'passé composé'. Additionally, the placement of temporal and object elements reveal a simplification of French sentence structure, reflecting an overgeneralized rule from prior learning. These recurrent patterns indicate that the learner has stabilized an incorrect rule in the spoken interlanguage, a clear case of fossilization.

Pedagogical Implication: Targeted oral exercises that emphasize correct auxiliary usage and past participle formation, combined with explicit instruction on proper word order in compound tenses, can help learners restructure their interlanguage. Providing immediate corrective feedback during storytelling activities or guided practice can gradually reduce the persistence of these entrenched errors.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the practical application of Selinker's interlanguage theory (1972) in analyzing and correcting errors among Senior Secondary School One (SS1) learners of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) at the Sacred Heart Catholic College, Ijebu-Ode, who have Igbo and Yoruba as their L1. By examining both oral and written productions, including L1-to-French and English-to-French translations, the research highlights the systematic nature of learners' errors and the cognitive processes underlying the development of their interlanguage system.

The analysis showed that learners' errors are not random deviations but rule-governed manifestations of L1 transfer, L2 transfer, overgeneralization, simplification, and fossilization. These errors reflect learners' attempts to apply known rules, reduce linguistic complexity, or transfer structures from previously acquired languages. Some errors persisted across modalities, indicating fossilization, while others demonstrated active attempts to internalize and generalize French grammar.

By situating error analysis within Selinker's theoretical framework, this study offers pedagogically significant insights. Understanding the mechanisms of learner's interlanguage system enables teachers to implement targeted corrective strategies that address the root causes of errors rather than merely surface-level inaccuracies. For example, recognizing L2 transfer in oral productions or overgeneralization in written

tasks can guide the design of exercises, drills, and modeling practices that prevent fossilization and foster accurate language acquisition.

Effective classroom interventions should integrate both oral and written corrective practices, explicitly contrast L1 and L2 structures, provide repetitive drills, and model accurate linguistic forms. Such strategies promote the systematic development of learners' interlanguage, enhancing both accuracy and fluency.

Overall, this research underscores the value of interlanguage-informed error analysis in multilingual classroom contexts. It demonstrates that combining theoretical understanding with practical corrective strategies can significantly improve FLE teaching, supporting learners in developing a more accurate, coherent, and flexible interlanguage system. Future studies could build on these findings by examining interlanguage processes in larger population of learners or across additional African languages, thereby enriching our understanding of multilingual second or third language acquisition.

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