CHALLENGES OF NIGERIANS FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE PROPER ARTICULATION OF THE "ADJECTIF QUALIFICATIF"

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Abstract

An adjective is a word that expresses a quality of beings or things. It is also used to make comparison between beings or things. The usage of this linguistic element varies from a language to another. For instance in English the qualifying adjectives cannot change the meaning, form, or place unless when it expresses comparison. But in French, it changes according to the gender and number of the noun or pronoun it qualifies. This work will analyse the difficulties of Anglophone French language learners while learning the qualifying adjectives. The difficulties that we will try to sort out concern the morph syntactic aspect and the position of these adjectives in the sentence

Key words: challenges, Nigerians, French, learners, articulation, adjectif, qualificatif

Introduction

The qualifying adjective is generally defined as every element that is indicating the quality that is attached to a noun to characterize it. According to Chevalier (1964): *il qualifie la substance* (it qualifies the subsistence). Collins easy French grammar (2004:25) mentions that: *an adjective is describing word that tells more about a person or thing such as their appearance, colour, size, or other qualities*. The qualifying adjectives vary according to the gender and number of the noun it qualifies. According to their functions, the adjectives can be: *epithete, attribut, mis en apposition*. We may experience some exceptions in the general rules governing the adjectives, for instance sometimes the number of the noun and the adjective it qualifies may be different. This and many other exceptions are creating confusion in most of the French language learners. Most of the difficulties faced by the learners while learning the qualifying adjectives are morph syntactic difficulties.

Difficulties on the placement of qualifying adjective

According to their functions we have three types of adjectives: epithet, attribute, and apposition. The epithet is directly linked to the noun it qualifies. Almost all the learner's confusion concerns the placement of the epithet before or after the noun. Most of the French languages learners have already learnt two or three languages before being initiated to French language; apart from the mother tongue, the official status of English and the compulsory status in the secondary schools. Most of the challenges are due to their background in the mother tongue and English which are interfering in the process of learning French.

In English, the qualifying adjectives epithet is generally placed before the noun without any exceptions. On the other hand in French language, although it is placed generally after the noun; there are some adjectives that are never used in this position. This is causing serious problems to French language learners.

In French grammar the rules governing the position of a qualifying adjective epithet are categorize under three factors: rhythmical, syntactic, and semantic.

a- Rhythmical factor

In this factor, we count the number of syllable of the adjective and the noun. Under this, the adjectives are divided into three groups:

- A monosyllabic adjective is placed before a polysyllabic noun. But there are exceptions with the adjective of form (rond), colour (vert), nationality (nigerien), and religion (islamique). These exceptions create confusion in the learners of the language.

- When a polysyllabic adjective is qualifying a monosyllabic noun, the adjective is placed after the noun. But there are adjectives that are excepted in this rule: vilain, grand, haut, mauvais, gros, bon, beau, vrai, vaste, vieux, meilleur, joli, moyen, petit and numeral adjectives.
- Polysyllabic adjective with polysyllabic noun can be placed before or after the noun.

The placement of French language adjective is very different from the one of English, because the French language adjective changes according to the number of syllable of the adjective and the noun it qualifies; and even with many exceptions from which occur the confusion of the Anglophone French language learners while learning this grammatical aspect.

b- Syntactic factor

From the syntactic factor, we mean the place that every constituent occupies in a grammatical structure. There are four conditions in this category:

- When the adjective epithet is followed by a complement, it comes after the noun. Example: c'est un chef difficile a comprendre.
- When the adjective is accompanied by an adverb, it is placed after the noun. Example: c'est une personne vraiment mechante.

But if the adjective is accompanied by the adverb of intensity like: tres, fort, bien, si, assez, moins, plus; the adjective is placed before the noun. Example: Fati est la plus grande dame.

- If the past participle are used as adjective. The adjective is placed after the noun. Example: il a une jambe cassee.
- If the adjective (epithet) qualifies a noun which is accompanied by a complement of noun. There are three options:

i- Before the noun. Example: un vieux chien de chasse.
ii- After the noun. Example : un chien de berger intelligent.
iii- In between the noun and the complement. Example: une affaire serieuse de marriage.

These conditional placements of the adjectives in the grammatical area are the sources of difficulties in Anglophone French language learners.

c- Semantic factors

This factor deals with the meaning of the qualifying adjective that can change the meaning according to its position to the noun it qualifies. If the adjective comes before the noun, it expresses a secondary meaning. In this case the adjective will carry emotional, subjective or

emphatic values. But when it comes after the noun the adjective expresses a proper meaning. In this case, it has a qualifying, objective or neutral values. Examples:

Un pauvre homme: an unfortunate man

Un homme pauvre: a poor man

Une ancienne maison: a former house

Une maison ancienne: an old house

The examples show that the two adjectives (pauvre, ancienne) change their meaning according to their position to the noun.

Morphological difficulties

The morphological aspect of qualifying adjective concerns the changes that may occur in gender and number.

1- The difficulties of gender

Generally a qualifying adjective agrees in gender with the noun it qualifies. But there are some exceptions for the words like "gens", "amour" which are either masculine or feminine in the singular form but feminine in plural. So we can use a masculine or feminine adjective to qualify this noun in singular, and a feminine adjective for this noun in plural: "l'amour maternel","des folles amours". These variations in gender of adjective may create problems to Anglophones French language learners.

Another problem in this category of gender deals with the morphology of the feminine of qualifying adjective. The general rule of forming the feminine of French qualifying adjective from the masculine is to add "e" to the masculine: grand – grande, petit – petite, intelligent – intelligente. In most of the cases, this is provoking some modifications in the area of prononciation especially if the masculine of the adjective is ending with a silent consonant. By adding "e" at the end of the adjective in the feminine gender, the final consonant becomes pronounce. But there are some adjectives that are excepted in this rule:

- Some adjectives double the final consonant: sot – sotte, pareil – pareille
- There are adjectives that are ending with the same way in masculine gender but the feminine is formed differently: coquet – coquette, complet – complete
- Those that are ending with "x" in masculine make their feminine by adding "se or ce" with the exceptions of "faux" and "roux" that are making their feminine by adding "sse" : heureux- heureuse; doux – douce; faux – Fausse, roux –rousse.

These variations of gender of adjective can cause serious problems to Anglophones French language learners in the sense that English doesn't have this kind of complications in the usage of qualifying adjective and also there is no stable rule in the formation of feminine gender of qualifying adjective in French.

2- Difficulties in number category

Generally the plural of most of the French qualifying adjective is formed by adding "s" to the singular (masculine or feminine) form. But in English the category of numbers is not reflected in the grammatical aspect of qualifying adjectives.

In English and even French the category of number is almost the same for the noun, most of them make their plural by adding "s". Examples: the boy – the boys; le garcon - les garcons. But this category is not reflected in the grammatical aspect of English qualifying adjective, while in French the adjective agrees in number with the noun it qualifies. The formation and usage of the qualifying adjective in the plural form seems to be very difficult because of the variations that happen in different ways. For example the plural of "beau "is "beaux "for a masculine gender." Un beau garcon" – "des beaux garcons" . the same adjective "beau" when it determines a feminine plural noun, becomes « belles » because the singular is "belle". Also if this adjective is qualifying a masculine singular noun starting with a vowel or a mute "h";" beau" becomes "bel". "Un bel homme", "un bel arbre". A learner may think that the plural will be automatically "bels hommes, bels arbres". But this is not correct in French. The correct plural is beaux (hommes, arbres). The reason for these variations is due to the phonetic liaison in between the noun and the adjective. Even though the reason given is challenging because one may ask why not leaving "bels" since the liaison may be possible in between the adjective "bels" and the nouns "hommes, arbres". The same thing happens to the adjective "nouveau".

Nevertheless the adjective "vieux" is giving problems different from the ones of "beau and nouveau" to qualify a noun that is starting with consonant, we use "vieux". "un vieux professeur". But with a masculine singular noun starting with a vowel or a mute "h" it will become "vieil". "Un vieil homme", "un vieil ami ''. The plural will be " des vieux hommes '', '' des vieux amis ''.this variation is to differentiate the singular to the plural especially in oral.

All like in the category of gender, the category of number of qualifying adjective contains many irregularities in its formation. These irregularities can be seen in the adjectives ending with "al". the plural formation of these adjectives in this category is not following a specific rule. For that reason learners are facing difficulties while using the adjective like: "naval, royal, tonal etc...While the plural of "royaux" when it qualify a masculine noun. And "royales" when it qualifies a feminine noun like "final , naval, fatal" take "s" in the

masculine and "es" in the feminine. All these irregularities of forming qualifying adjective are the causes of difficulties of Anglophone French language learners.

Difficulties in the usage of adjectives of colors

Like all other qualifying adjectives, the adjectives of color agree in gender and number with the noun it qualifies. Example: une chemise verte – des chemises vertes. But when the adjective of color is compounded it remain invariable in plural. As a result of this, to say "ils portent des chemises bleues claires" is not correct in French. But we will say "ils portent des chemises bleu clair". While it is the French grammatical system that allow the agreement of compounded adjectives if it is composed of two adjectives; like in the following correct sentence:

"il donne des paroles aigres-douces"

We find that in this sentence the compounded adjective agree in gender and number with the noun it qualifies.

The exception of the adjective of color can be a great source of confusion for the Anglophone French language learners.

Conclusion

From all we have examined so far, we observe that the learning of the grammatical class of French qualifying adjective is not an easy task. There are many problems that are associated with the learning of this French grammatical aspect. As we have shown, these problems are link to the internal structure and even the usage of these grammatical aspects called qualifying adjectives.

Apart from the problems created by the French language itself, there are many other problems coming from other sources. Having already learned English language which the adjectival system seems to be easier than that of French, the Anglophone French language learner will try to consider that the two languages have the same system. That is why we are facing problems while learning this aspect of French grammar. These morph syntactic problems lead to semantic problems.

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