

Multilingualism and Language Interferences in Learning English among Grade four Students in Lycee Moderne Bingerville

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Abstract: This study analyses linguistic interference in the learning of English among Grade 4 students at the Lycée Moderne de Bingerville – Côte d'Ivoire. Its purpose is to show that multilingualism can help students learn English. A questionnaire was administered to Grade 4 students of Lycée Moderne Bingerville as a data collection instrument. A quantitative data analysis inspired by Y. K. Singh (2012) reveals a positive influence of multilingualism on investigated students who learn English. In other words, multilingualism can contribute to the learning of English in Côte d'Ivoire. Acknowledging that multilingualism is an asset, this research presents an opportunity for national education stakeholders to view all languages as an advantage in learning English in Côte d'Ivoire. This should lead the decision makers to develop pedagogical strategies to make learning English easier in Côte d'Ivoire.

Keywords: Multilingualism, English, Language, Learning, Acquisitions, Interference, Fourth-Year Students, High School, L2 Learners.

Résumé: Cette étude analyse les interférences linguistiques dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais pour les élèves de quatrième du Lycée Moderne de Bingerville – Côte d'Ivoire. Cette étude a pour objet de montrer que le multilinguisme peut aider à l'apprentissage de l'anglais chez les élèves. Un questionnaire a été utilisé comme instrument de collecte de données. Une analyse des données quantitatives inspirée par Y. K. Singh (2012) a permis de révéler certaines influences multilingues dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais parmi les élèves de quatrième en Côte d'Ivoire. Les résultats indiquent que le multilinguisme peut contribuer à l'apprentissage de l'anglais en Côte d'Ivoire. Les résultats de la recherche montrent que certains apprenants rencontrent des difficultés pour parler anglais en tant que langue étrangère sans interférences d'autres langues. En admettant que le multilinguisme est un atout, cette recherche est une opportunité pour les acteurs de l'éducation nationale à percevoir toutes les langues comme un atout dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais en Côte d'Ivoire. Cela devrait conduire les acteurs du système à développer des stratégies pédagogiques pour rendre l'apprentissage de l'anglais plus aisé en Côte d'Ivoire.

Mots clés : Multilinguisme, Anglais, Langue, Apprentissage, Acquisitions, Interférences, Élèves de Quatrième, Lycée, Apprenants L2.

Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire is a multilingual country with over 60 ethnic groups (B. A. Boutin, 1982), each with its own language. French serves as the lingua franca. It is used in educational institutions, while English is increasingly recognized as an essential global language. Students in Lycée Moderne Bingerville come from various linguistic backgrounds, which can lead to both positive and negative language interferences during English language acquisition.

In Côte d'Ivoire, where multiple languages are spoken due to the rich linguistic diversity, students often navigate between their mother tongues and French, the official language of instruction. As a result, the learning environment at Lycée Moderne Bingerville, a secondary school, presents unique challenges and opportunities for fourth-year students who are learning English as a foreign language. The learners' native languages and any additional language they may speak often influence the process of learning a second language, such as English. This influence, known as language interference or transfer, can manifest in various ways, affecting pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and overall communication skills.

Despite the challenges posed by language interference, multilingualism can also serve as an asset in language learning. Students who speak multiple languages may develop enhanced cognitive skills, such as improved problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. Additionally, their familiarity with language learning processes can facilitate their acquisition of English.

This work on "English language learning and language interferences among Grade 4 students in Lycée Moderne Bingerville," aligns with the aim to demonstrate that multilingualism can contribute to facilitate the English language learning in Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire is characterized by its linguistic diversity, with French as the official language and sixty local languages spoken (M. A. Boutin, 1982). This multilingual environment can facilitate or hinder English language learning. According to A. Ouane and C. Glanz (2010), exposure to multiple languages can enhance cognitive flexibility but may also lead to interferences when learners draw from their native languages during English communication. Language interference occurs when elements from a learner's first language (L1) affect their use of a second language (L2). According to T. Odlin (1989), such interferences can manifest in phonology, syntax, and lexicon. For instance, Grade 4 students at Lycée Moderne Bingerville may substitute Ivorian lexical items for English words, impacting their fluency and accuracy in both spoken and written English.

Research indicates that language interference can be a significant barrier to effective English language learning. A study by A. Khamkhien (2010) found that students often resort to their L1 in an attempt to communicate in English, resulting in incorrect sentence structures and vocabulary choices. Similarly, a study conducted by S. M. Gass and L. Selinker (2008) emphasized the importance of understanding interlanguage phenomena, where learners create a transitional linguistic system influenced by their native language.

The study of English language learning and interferences among Grade 4 students at Lycée Moderne Bingerville is essential for enhancing language acquisition by identifying specific challenges and developing targeted teaching strategies. Additionally, it contributes to better understand some cultural factors affecting language learning, thereby fostering a more effective and inclusive educational environment.

In the context of Abidjan, students are primarily exposed to French in both their academic and social environments, while also using local languages such as Dioula, Ebrîé, Agni, Bété Baoulé etc. at home or in their communities. This multilingual environment often leads to linguistic interferences at various levels of English language learning, including pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage. The core questions are: Can multilingualism contribute or hinder the English language learning in Côte d'Ivoire? Can multilingualism be promoted as an asset to improve English learning in Côte d'Ivoire?

It can be hypothesized that multilingualism is an asset in a process of learning a foreign language like English. The theoretical finding of S. Krashen (1992) Input Theory and the Multilingualism will be of interest on this study as a theoretical foundation. According to S. Krashen (1982), "the second language acquirer, child or adult, is also an "acquirer", just like the child acquiring first language. In S. Krashen's (1982) Input hypothesis, there is a natural order of acquisition for second language as well as first language, so we can talk about the second language acquirers' $i + 1$ as well." In other words, students acquire L2 as the way they acquire L1.

Research indicates that language interference, often stemming from the structural and phonetic characteristics of a learner's first language, impacts the acquisition of a second language (L. Selinker, 1972). Studies have shown that students may struggle with pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage in English due to direct influences from their native languages, which can lead to errors and miscommunication (S. M. Gass & L. Selinker, 2008). Furthermore, sociocultural factors play a crucial role in language learning, as students'

attitudes toward English and their cultural background can affect motivation and engagement (L. Vygotsky, 1978). This highlights the importance of considering both linguistic and cultural dimensions in understanding language acquisition processes.

Additionally, various pedagogical approaches have been explored to address these challenges. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been shown to promote effective interaction and engagement, allowing students to practice English in meaningful contexts while drawing on their existing linguistic resources (J. C. Richards & T. S. Rodgers, 2014). Furthermore, research emphasizes the need for teacher training that equips educators with strategies to recognize and mitigate language interference, fostering a supportive learning environment (P. M. Lightbown & N. Spada, 2013). By integrating these findings, educators can better tailor their teaching methods to meet the needs of multilingual students, ultimately enhancing their English language proficiency and overall academic success.

1. Methodology

The methodology describes the different methods used to answer questions about multilingualism and interferences on the English language learning among the Grade 4 students in Cote d'Ivoire. The chapter discusses a variety of techniques that are used to gather and analyse the data. To investigate multilingualism and language interferences as an asset in learning English in Côte d'Ivoire, the current research relies on quantitative method. As defined by Y. K. Singh (2006): "Research methodology involves the systematic procedures by which the researcher starts from the initial identification of the problem to its final. The role of the methodology is to carry on the research work in a scientific and valid manner." (K. Singh, 2006, p.79).

The investigation is based on questionnaire (Appendix) as the data collection instrument. The participants are two hundred and seventy-four (274) males and females from Grade 4 in Lycée Moderne Bingerville in the academic year 2024-2025. This total concerns three classrooms. The three classrooms, which are 3è2, 3è4 and 3è6, learn German as L2. These students have firstly been selected because they are intermediate learners. They have at least four (4) years' experience in learning the English language. Another reason, which can account for this choice is that the researcher is also their teacher of English language. He had the opportunity to observe them in classroom situation during the survey. It helps to keep data updated and save time. This population is more responsible due to their age and the fact that

they were more concerned with the preparation of their final exam, which correspond to the O' Level. C.H. Kennedy & R. Bolitho (1984) refers to that when saying, "the older the learner is the more likely he is to have his own definition ideas on what he is learning English."

The second population concerns five teachers of the school. Among them, three teachers of English and two teachers of German to highlight some of the aspects of the research.

In quantitative study, sampling and sample size are crucial for the relevance of the results.

The sample size has been determined in line with Brown's sampling requirements. According to M. Brown (2001), if the sample size is in the range of twenty (20) to thirty (30), the distribution is considered normal, and its results can be generalized.

However, this study has some limitations. First is the respondents' attitude to the questionnaire. According to Y. K. Singh (2006): "the major disadvantages of questionnaire are the possibility of the misinterpretation of the questions. Misinterpretations are due to the respondent willingness or impersonality." Y. K. Singh (2006, p.122). From this quotation, it is clear that the respondent can provide answers that do not always correspond to reality as they can misunderstand some questions. The questionnaire is also subjective when it concerns answers.

In addition, the sample size considered only three (3) classes out of ten (10) with two hundred and seventy-four. Larger samples may produce different results. Furthermore, the questionnaire and interview with teacher are used as data collection instrument. It can cause the study to face challenges related to the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Further research can build on this study to provide more solutions in learning English besides the other languages in Côte d'Ivoire. In spite of all the mentioned limitations, the findings are reliable ground for further research.

2. Findings

2.1. The questionnaire

As mentioned in the methodology, the questionnaire was administered to two hundred and seventy-four (274) males and females from Grade 4 in Lycée Moderne Bingerville during the academic year 2024-2025. Among them, forty-seven (47) were males and two hundred and twenty-seven (227) were females. The questionnaire revealed that seventy-six (76) of the respondents were aged between thirteen (13) to fourteen (14) years. Hundred and ninety-eight (198) were aged between fifteen and sixteen years. The demographic data from Lycée

Moderne Bingerville Grade 4 students indicate for the three classes a gender distribution of seventeen % (17%) for male students and Eighty-three % (83%) for females. About the age, the students between 13 to 14 years are twenty-eight % (28%) while seventy-two % (72%) fall in the range fifteen to sixteen year. The distribution shows only two age range among student due to the Grade Four students who are almost in the same range and the same level.

After the identification, the next question was learners' proficiency and the consequence of interferences. It highlights learners' strengths and areas of interference in learning English as a foreign language. The analysis was on their proficiency at English, the number of languages they can speak, their preference in terms of foreign language, the frequency at which they use English, the challenges their face in using English and the language interferences that can occur. From the table, students' proficiency level in English is assessed. The findings reveal that though at the same level, fifty-seven point six per cent (57, 66 %) of the students acknowledge that they have a bad level at English. It represents a population of hundred and fifty-eight (158) students. Seventy-four (74) out of the two hundred and seventy-four (274) think they have an average level at English while forty-two (42) of them representing fifteen point three two % (15, 32%) are fluent. These data show that it is necessary to improve the proficiency level of students preparing the O' Level.

Concerning the number of languages students can speak, they all confirmed to be multilinguals. Among the two hundred and seventy-four students, thirty-two (32) can speak three (3) languages. It represents eleven point six seven % (11, 67%). Ninety-seven students use four (4) languages. Their number represents thirty-five point forty per cent (35, 40%). The other one hundred and forty-five (145) representing forty-nine point twenty-seven % (49, 27%) speak more than four languages due to the national language French and the two foreign languages, English and German they learn at school and some local languages they can speak. Ivoirian leave in a multilingual setting. Inquiring on their preference in terms of foreign languages, two hundred and forty-six (246) students selected English. It represents the significant percentage of eighty-nine point seven eight % (89, 78%). Seventeen (17) selected German for a percentage of six point two zero % (06, 20 %). Eleven (11) of the students selected other language. It represents four point oh one % (04, 01 %). For the frequency of the use of English, sixteen students spend one hour per day in contact with the language.

This number represents five point eight three per cent (5, 83%). fifteen of them spend two hours or more in contact with English. This population represents five point four seven

per cent (05, 47%). A large majority of 236 students use English language during class sessions. This number represents eighty-six point one three %. The students were asked to mention the challenges they face in using English in class or during the assignments. One hundred and eighteen (118) of the respondents agreed on the lack of confidence in speaking as their main problem. They represent forty-three point zero six % (43, 06 %). Those who acknowledged their poor vocabulary are a hundred and two or thirty seven point twenty two % (37, 22 %). when using, a hundred and eighty nine (189) have a bad pronunciation due to the existence of the other languages. They represent sixty eight point nine seven % (68, 97%). Some respondents find it difficult to memorise what they learned before. Two hundred and five (205) of the participants fall in that category. Their number represents seventy four point eight one % (74, 81%). The participants who are exposed to mixing the language are two hundred and twenty six (226) or eighty two point four eight % (82, 48 %)

A large majority of the participants think that the presence of many languages interfere with the English language. This majority is two hundred and seventy-one (271) which represent ninety-eight point nine oh % (98, 90 %). Only three participants or one point oh nine % (1, 09%) think that there is no linguistic interference with the other languages.

2.2. The Teachers' Interview

The interview was conducted with three teachers of English and two teachers of German from the school. The venue for this interview was Lycée Moderne Bingerville.

Experienced teachers were relevant for the study. B. M. Miles and A. M. Huberman (1994) suggested selecting a large sample and narrowing it down to the desired size to add credibility to the process. Thus, the selection of the participants was based on their expert knowledge and experience in instructing students at Lycée Moderne Bingerville. Criteria such as degrees, years of teaching at the school were all considered. Combining such criteria should lead to a “maximal variation sampling” (J. W. Creswell, 2012). A purposeful sampling is required when the sampling directly relates to the purpose of the study and will lead to yielding rich information (M. Q. Patton, 1990). Consequently, the sample was made up of three (3) teachers of English and two (2) teachers of German. Two (2) English teachers have a Master Degree with another teacher with a Bachelor Degree. One (1) German teacher owns a Master Degree when the other is a Bachelor Degree teacher. Teachers are from six (6) to eleven (11) years of experience.

All the teachers confirmed that the existence of many languages is helpful. The reason is that a language can contribute to highlight aspects, which seem difficult to understand in another language. They all admitted that using different languages impact positively the L2. The consequences all the teachers revealed were related to the interferences students face when they are writing or speaking English, German or French during class sessions. They also agree that using different languages is a source of linguistic interferences. Teacher 1 gives the examples of students who write or say “ist” to refer to “is” in English. Teacher 2 gives the example of “Freitag” instead of “Friday”. Teacher 3 referred to the example of (J. V. Pavlik 2004:51) I was at the “concert” that becomes “Ich bin im **concert*** while the correct spelling is “Konzert”). Teacher 4 mentions the fact that some student will say “Guten Morgen” instead of Good morning when greeting him. Teacher 5 referred to the months of the year: “Januar, Februar, März, April, Mai, Juni, Juli, August September, Oktober, November, Dezember” in German which are like cognates with the months in English.

As example, Teacher 1 proposed to separate the time of instruction between English, French and German lessons to avoid confusion. English in the timetable come just before or after German. This can result in a confusion for students. Teacher 2 suggested that differences should be well explained to learners to help them avoid confusing. Teacher 3 suggested that the English, Spanish or German should be optional to avoid confusion. Teacher 4 suggested that more or three (3) or four (4) hours should be devoted to English as the L2 and less or two (2) hour should be dedicated to the learning of German.

Teacher 5 thinks that the pedagogy needs to be reviewed by enabling teachers to conduct their teaching without imposing a binding methodology on them. Interferences between English and languages like German and French in learning English in Côte d’Ivoire can manifest in several ways, including phonetic, lexical, and grammatical aspects. Learners who are already proficient in German may struggle with certain sounds in English that do not exist in German. For example, the “th” sound in English (as in “this” or “think”) does not exist in German, which can lead to confusion and mispronunciation.

False friends between German and English can create vocabulary issues. For instance, the German word “Gift” means “poison,” while in English, it means “present.” Learners may make vocabulary mistakes due to these misleading similarities.

Grammatical structures can also lead to interferences. For example, German has a different sentence structure, particularly concerning the position of the verb. A learner might directly translate sentences from German to English, resulting in incorrect constructions.

The rules regarding word order in English differ from those in German. A learner may apply German rules to English, which can result in poorly constructed sentences.

In Côte d'Ivoire, English is often learned as a second language, and German is taught as a third language in secondary schools. German may influence English learners. To minimize these interferences, it is crucial to encourage regular practice of English, utilize diverse resources, and emphasize the differences between the languages. Phonetic exercises, vocabulary activities, and targeted grammar lessons can also help learners overcome these challenges.

3. Discussion

This situation exemplifies L. Selinker's (1972:212) statement that "attempted learning" does not necessarily mean "successful learning". After learning English for four years, most of the respondent forgot some key notions they learned during the previous year of learning. Two hundred and five (205) respondents representing seventy-four point eighty-one % (74, 81%) confirmed that they forget what they learned before. In S. Krashen's hypothesis, there is a natural order of acquisition for second language as well as first language, so we can talk about the second language acquirers' $i + 1$ as well." In other words, students acquire L2 as the way they acquire L1. When they forget the notions they learn before, it cannot enable a good and sustainable learning to take place.

The opinion is also that German and English are close because both vocabulary/spelling recognition and pronunciation/phonetic recognition are important. However, a clear distinction is necessary for the learning process to take place. In multilingual setting, interferences may create confusion, which ends in the lack of confidence when speaking. In line with that, some respondents can mix languages like German and English in some cases. The questionnaire revealed that the frequency of using English is not enough. Even if two hundred and forty-six students prefer English to the other foreign languages, the majority of the respondents only use English in formal situation. Two hundred and thirty-six are concerned with using English only in class. This figure represents eighty-six point thirteen % (86, 13%). Fifteen (15) to sixteen (16) students use English one hour or more per day. It represents only five point forty-seven % (5, 47%) to five point eighty-three % (5, 83%).

This situation shows the conditions of learning of Grade 4 students of Lycée Moderne Bingerville.

As the proponent of the Input Hypothesis, S. Krashen's (1982) work lays the foundation for understanding how comprehensible input is essential in language learning. One hundred % of the respondents think that a language policy which includes local languages and other languages can contribute to English language learning in Côte d'Ivoire. His theories can help understand how multilingualism can help foreign language learner to learn a new language and use the interferences as an opportunity to acquire a new language based on the multilingual prerequisites. Since S. Krashen theory is built upon $i+1$, the first knowledge of the learner will serve as the ground for any other learning. Thus, French and mother tongue will help the learner to learn a new language like English. This could have been more challenging if there is no previous language.

M. Long's Interaction Hypothesis complements the Input Hypothesis by highlighting the role of interaction and negotiation of meaning in language learning. His work suggests that learners can overcome linguistic interferences through meaningful communication, which can be particularly relevant in a multilingual context like Côte d'Ivoire.

R. Ellis (1985)'s research on second language acquisition emphasizes the importance of input and interaction. He discusses how learners' first language can interfere with their acquisition of a second language, and his insights can be applied to the Ivorian context, where French and local languages may influence English learning. While the specific context of Côte d'Ivoire concerns English as a foreign language, the principles laid out by the authors can provide valuable insights into understanding linguistic interferences in learning English. By applying the Input Hypothesis and related theories, educators and researchers can better address the challenges faced by Ivorian learners and develop strategies to enhance their language acquisition processes. While it may be difficult to generalize from these results due to the small number of informants, it is interesting to consider this issue. It is possible that the results can be generalized to L2 and L3 learners and especially English and German learners.

Conclusion

The findings of this survey reveal some linguistic interferences among the Ivorian Grade 4 learners in the English language. The survey underscores some difficulties and possible conflicts encountered by learners in a multilingual context. Addressing this issue

leads the researcher to use quantitative method to back his research. Negotiating solid knowledge of local languages and French while gaining new knowledge in other languages may result in a conflict in the process of mastering the English language

As a multilingual country, Côte d'Ivoire perceives linguistic diversity as an asset. The exploration of multilingualism and language interference in learning English among Grade 4 students at Lycée Moderne Bingerville highlights the complex dynamics that influence language acquisition. S. Krashen's Input Hypothesis provides a valuable framework for understanding how learners acquire a second language. According to S. Krashen (1982), language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly above their current proficiency level ($i+1$).

In a multilingual context like that of Lycée Moderne Bingerville, students are often exposed to multiple languages, which can both enrich and complicate their English learning experience. While their existing linguistic repertoire can facilitate understanding and usage of English, it can also lead to interference where elements from their first languages manifest in their English, potentially causing errors in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

Despite these challenges, multilingualism is a significant asset in the learning process. When educators recognize and leverage students' linguistic backgrounds, they can provide tailored support that aligns with Krashen's principles, ensuring that input is comprehensible and engaging. This approach can mitigate the negative effects of language interference and promote a more effective language acquisition process.

Ultimately, fostering an environment that appreciates multilingualism while addressing the challenges of language interference is essential for enhancing English language learning outcomes among students. By applying the principles of the Input Hypothesis, educators can create strategies that not only acknowledge the complexities of multilingual contexts but also harness them to facilitate successful language acquisition in young learners.

However, promoting multilingual education programme through multilingual activities and school language clubs can help learners appreciate the opportunities offered by multilingualism to learners who can speak many languages. This can increase the students' interest in using many languages.

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APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

I - IDENTIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS

1. Age

[13-14]

[15-16]

2. Gender Male

Female

II. STUDENTS LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND INTERFERENCES

1. What is your proficiency at English?

Fluent

Average

Bad

2. How many languages can you speak?

Three

four

more than four

3. Which foreign language do you prefer

English

German

other

4. How often do you use English in your daily, academic or personal life?

One hour

Two hours and more

during class only

5. What specific difficulties do you face when using English in class or during assignments?

Lack of confidence

poor vocabulary

bad pronunciation

I forget what I learned before

Always mixing languages

6. Does the presence of many languages interfere in your English?

Yes

No

7. Could a language policy mainstreaming other languages contribute to the learning of English language?

Yes

No

Thank you for answering these questions

APPENDIX II**2.1.1. Demographic data**

		Absolute value	Relative value
Gender	M	47	17%
	F	227	83%
Age	13-14	76	28%
	15-16	198	72%

Students Language Proficiency and Interferences

	Number of respondents	Percentage
What is your proficiency at English?		
Fluent	42	15,32
Average	74	27,00
Bad	158	57,66
How many languages can you speak?		
Three (3)	32	11,67
Four (4)	97	35,40
More than four (4)	145	49,27
Which foreign language do you prefer?		
English	246	89,78
German	17	06,20
Other	11	04,01
How often do you use English in your daily, academic or personal life?		
One hour	15	05,47
Two hours and more	16	05,83
During class sessions only	236	86,13
What specific difficulties do you face when using English in class or during assignments?		

Lack of confidence in speaking	118	43,06
Poor vocabulary	102	37,22
Bad pronunciation	189	68,97
I forget what I learned before	205	74,81
Always mixing languages	226	82,48
Does the presence of many languages interfere in your English?		
Yes	271	98,90
No	3	01,09
Could a language policy mainstreaming other languages contribute to the learning of English language?	274	100
Yes		
No		

APPENDIX III

Interview questions

Q1. Does the existence of many languages help to teach English? Explain.

Q2. Do you think using different languages positively impacts the L2 learning classroom? Explain.

Q3. What are the consequences of teaching in a multilingual setting?

Q4. Do you think using different languages in L2 learning classrooms causes interferences? Give some examples.

Q5. Could a language policy mainstreaming other languages contribute to the learning of English language?