



Reflection on Conjugation of the Verbs ‘Avoir and Etre’: What do learners know? What do they not know? And what do teachers need to know?

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Abstract. This article considers tests and examinations as tools for feedback and corrective feedback. Tests results have been observed to be used in the Nigerian Defense Academy (NDA) Kaduna, Nigeria mainly for promotion or relegation of learners (cadets). This article argues that such uses constitute a superficial and an underutilization of these two functional measurement tools. Data for the study was elicited from written tests on conjugation of two verbs: ‘avoir’ (to have) and ‘être’ (to be). Sixty-three (63) first year cadets learning French as a foreign language and as a general course for beginners (A₁) drawn from three Departments constitute the population for the study. Chomsky’s Minimalist Program and its ‘select and merge’ principles were used as a Theoretical Framework. Using Error Analysis, data was analyzed on the basis of: complete non conjugation, correct, incorrect and incomplete conjugation of the two verbs. The results presented in tables, percentages and in pie charts showed higher occurrences of deviant conjugations compared to correct ones. Results showed that tests and examinations are useful not only for promotion and relegation but can most importantly reveal what learners know, what they know not and what instructors need to know to initiate corrective feedback.

Keywords: feedback, ‘avoir’, ‘être’, corrective feedback, conjugation.

1. Introduction

French remains a foreign language in Nigeria despite the 1996 decree promulgated by the late Head of

State, General Sani Abacha, upgrading it to a second official language. As a foreign language, it is learned in a controlled classroom environment. The process of language learning in such a context poses many challenges to learners in Nigeria. Some of the challenges include those of: government policies, manpower, students’ enrolment, instructional facilities, infrastructure, contact periods allotted to it on the curriculum and many others. There are also sociolinguistic issues like: multilingualism, cross linguistic interferences, cultural and religious biases among many others. Structural features of the French language itself can be daunting to the faint hearted. These constitute some of the realities confronting the Nigerian learner of French who also has to sit for tests and write examinations as part of the training package obtainable in any training institution. This article looked at the use of tests as a functional feedback mechanism for effective corrective feedback which is necessary in enhancing learners’ performance. The study examined performances of a group of cadets in the conjugation of the French verb ‘avoir’ (to have) and être (to be) in the present simple tense. The cadets, also called respondents are mainly French language learners who are beginners at the A₁ level of competence according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) European Council 2001, (Mraz, 2017).

1.1 Background, Concepts and Previous Findings.

Languages have different syntactic features, structures and combinatorial properties which come into play when expressing meaning. Learners who have already acquired a first language and are in the

process of learning an additional one especially at adulthood often encounter cross linguistic interferences (CLI) between structures of the acquired/learned languages and those of the target language. Most of the respondents used in this study already have a mother tongue, (L1) and in addition, speak one or two other Nigerian languages apart from English the official language. These learners are also expected to have a working knowledge of French before the end of their academic training. In the course of learning French which has the status of a foreign language in Nigeria, the learners produce what Macaro (2010, p.138) quoting (Selinker, 1972), describes as 'interlanguage' which is a 'separate linguistic system... the learner's language system... a developing system in its own right.' The present discourse is an investigation into as aspect of learners' interlanguage and adopts the Minimalist Programme (MP) proposed by (Chomsky, 1993) and (Chomsky, 1995) as the Theoretical framework and Error Analysis (EA) as the analytical tool. Speaking on the Minimalist Theory, Liceras (2010 p.249) says:

Chomsky (1993; 1995) proposed that the content of functional categories is defined by bundles of features. Features also have a crucial role in the operations merge, agree, and move. While these operations are assumed to belong to Universal Grammar (UG) and to be innate, not all features are activated or organized in the same way in all languages. Therefore, it is how learners activate and organize the features of the target language, as well as how they make them interact with the operations merge, agree, and move, that may be problematic for the second language (L2) learner. In other words, in order to acquire the grammar of a given language, the L2 learner has to combine elements from the target lexicon to form a derivation by means of the structure-building operation merge.

Chomsky's 1995 Minimalism which was developed in the last years of the 20th century, as well as the subsequent versions (Chomsky, 2001; 2007; 2008) ...have set the pace for the formalist research in second language acquisition (SLA) (Liceras, 2010, p.248). The descriptive components of the MP consist of four operations which according to Chomsky constitute the main building block of most languages. They include operations select, merge, move and check. In practical terms, communication requires a speaker to first select appropriate lexical items which are compatible with the idea to be expressed. The selected items are then merged according to the distributional and combinational properties of the language in question. Certain adjustments or movements may be required after the merging operation in consonance with the rules of the

language. The structure generated as a result of operation 'select, merge and move' is then 'checked' to ensure grammatical and semantic 'convergence' with the rules of the target language. On this, Koster (2013, p.13) says "all words have a valency, predicting in which syntactic environment they may occur." Therefore, a structure such as (a)*'The mans is ate the class,' feature selection and merging of constituents of sentence (a) which are incompatible both grammatically and semantically with the rules of English. In order for sentence (a) to converge with the structure of the target language, some of its constituents will have to move or be adjusted. If the noun phrase 'the mans, subject of the sentence is intended to be plural, the 'a' in 'mans' will have to move and give way for the selection of 'e' which merges with 'm' to the left and 'n' to the right, forming a new lexical item 'men.' The 's' is no longer compatible with the new structure 'men' and is therefore moved. The checking process progresses to the verb phrase where the previously checked item 'men' becomes incompatible with the verb 'is' which has to also move to enable the selection of a compatible verb 'to be' which has plural features that will correctly merge and converge with the item 'men' to produce a sentence in the present tense. However, if the sentence is intended to be in the past, the verb 'is' will be moved to give way to the structure (b) 'the men ate...' the processes of selection, merging, movement and checking continue until all the constituents converge and produce a grammatically and semantically correct structure based on the syntactic rules of the given language. The same principle applies in a French structure like the following produced by a learner.

(c)* Elles est.....

In (c) above, the plural subject pronoun 'Elles' selected and merged with a singular verb 'est' is incompatible with the syntactic rules in French. This combination renders the phrase ungrammatical. In order to obtain a grammatically correct sentence, the singular verb 'est' needs to move to give way to the plural form of the verb which is 'sont' to enable it merge and converge with the plural subject pronoun 'Elles.' Based on the theoretical postulates of the Minimalist Programme, we find its principles adequate, simple and sufficiently rigorous to apply as a Theoretical framework in describing learners' output.

2. Current Practices

The years spent in training and testing French language learners in the Department of Languages, Nigerian Defense Academy, Kaduna have shown that

tests and examinations are mainly used to promote or relegate learners at the end of every session. The practice of analyzing tests and examinations for corrective feedback is virtually nonexistent. Examination scripts are marked, assessed and retained by the examiners who are mainly concerned with the scores generated by learners. Scores are important in learners' assessment, however, going by the current practices, French tests and examinations are grossly underutilized as they show only a superficial and a one sided aspect of learners' performances. Emphasis is rather placed on test and examination scores as the basis for promotion or relegation of Learners. Minimal attention or none is paid to tests and examinations by French teachers for corrective feedback. This article therefore seeks to show that analyzing learners' interlanguage, generated from language assessments can provide actionable feedback on what learners know (their competence), what they know not (the gaps) and what their instructors/teachers need to know (feedback) in order to devise intervention strategies (corrective feedback) to fill the observed gaps.

This article presents the results of an analysis of the 'interlanguage' generated by beginners in the course of an assessment in conjugating the verb 'avoir' and 'être,' which are two primary verbs in French. They are primary in the sense that they also serve as auxiliary verbs to other main verbs in French. Adger (2003) in (Liceras, 2010, p. 250) describes such features as 'atoms of language' while (Liceras, Zobl & Goodluck, 2008) in (Liceras, 2010, p.250) refer to such features as the 'DNA' or 'base pairs' of language. Learners of French are therefore exposed to the two 'base pairs' of 'avoir' and 'être' early in the course of learning French. In the course of adapting to the structure and features of the two verbs, learners produce an 'interlanguage' as 'a feature of learners' language called 'idiosyncratic' by (Corder, 1971). Dawaele (2010, p.14) describes them as "learners, grammatically - based syllabus... which seems communicatively necessary, early in the acquisition process." (Selinker,1972, p.214) and (Hummel, 2014, p.65) recognize learners' language as a true system with its own regularities, called an interlanguage (IL) which they describe as a "separate linguistic system based on observable output that results from a learner's attempted production of a Target Language (TL) norm." Bialystok & Smith (1965, p.101) define interlanguage as "a systematic language performance by second language learners who have not achieved sufficient levels of analysis of linguistic knowledge or control." (Corder, 1973), (Selinker, 1972) and (Martin, 2021, p.1) refer to interlanguage as an intermediate brand of language

produced by learners who are grappling with the task of learning a new language. This article presents the results of an analysis of the 'interlanguage' generated by beginners in the course of an assessment in conjugating the verbs 'avoir' and 'être,' which are two primary verbs in French. They are primary in the sense that they also serve as auxiliary verbs to other main verbs in French. Mastery of conjugation of the verb 'avoir' and 'être' is therefore a foundational skill for any learner of French. Learners' developing system is described as 'learners' language', 'approximative system' and 'idiosyncratic dialect'. (Hummel, 2014) The term 'interlanguage' is widely used to refer to learners' evolving second language... which defers in systematic ways from that of the native speaker' (Hummel, 2014). The data used in this study is generated from a 'learning' situation rather than an 'acquisition' context. Van Patten & Benati (2010, p. 60) state that "learning refers to conscious effort at learning rules from books and teachers while acquisition involves processes by which learners internalize language from exposure to input." They describe input as "samples of language heard or read in the course of communication" (Van Patten & Benati (2010, p. 60). White (2003, P.26) in (Doughty & Long, 2003, p. 2), draws attention to (Bley-Vroman, 1987) 'comparative fallacy' which states that work on the description of learners' language can be seriously hindered or sidetracked by a concern with the target language. Learners' system is worthy of study in its own right, not just as a degenerate form of the target system Learners' interlanguage representation is often expected to converge on the grammar of native speakers which is a misconception (White, 2003, p.4). (Lakshmana & Selinker, 2001) describe it as those behavioral events where learners attempt to express meanings which they may already have in a language that they are in the process of learning (that is, attempted meaningful performance in an L2).

Hummel (2014, p.65) argues that "errors are important in providing a glimpse into the learning process." Corder (1967, p.167) pointed out that "learner's errors...are significant in that they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language." Llach (2011, p xii) notes, Ignorance or imperfect knowledge of lexical items leads to errors. The notion of error has changed from a negative view to a positive one as an inevitable phenomenon in the process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). It helps us to understand how language acquisition proceeds and where it does not proceed smoothly, what stages it goes through, what

processes are at stake, and in particular, at which moment of acquisition the learner is.

Ellis (1997b, p.15) adds “finding out the what, why and when of lexical errors can be very valuable and useful in determining how to remedy them and get a successful performance.” LLach (2011, p.9) alludes to the select, merge, check principles contained in Chomsky’s Minimalist theory, which is the theoretical underpinning of this discourse and reiterates that “learning vocabulary involves developing a set of associations...a semantico-formal network that reorganizes itself with every new word learned”. The literature which featured in this article covered some of the researches conducted on second language acquisition. Reference materials such as (Bescherelle, 1998) which focus on the art of conjugation also exist. However, such reference materials are rather prescriptive as their focus is on correct usages while this article’s focus is investigating actual usages by learners of French language. The aim is to highlight areas of correct and deviant usages and call on teachers to incorporate corrective feedback in the process of teaching.

3. Feedback/Corrective Feedback

On corrective feedback, (Valizadeh, 2020), (Gabrijela, Pižorn, and Jurišević, 2014) dwelt on learner centered corrective feedback, also called negative feedback. They describe it as information provided to learners about the ill-formedness of their L2 production. It is basically an intervention strategy that focuses on helping learners improve their linguistic competences. (Lowen, 2012, p.24), (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012), explain that feedback can take any of these forms. It can be written corrective feedback which is described as grammar/error correction wherein the wrong word is crossed out and the right word is given through direct feedback. The process can also be indirect, whereby an explanation, an example or a hint is given, but not the correction itself. Bitchener & Ferri (2012) add that “focused feedback occurs when only one or a smaller number of errors are corrected while the unfocused feedback is seen where all errors are corrected.” Speaking on the function of feedback, (Nassaji, 2016), notes that it helps learners notice the gaps in their representation of the second language being learned. Richer (2003, p.6) adds : « L’évaluation se présente dans la séquence didactique comme un principe de régulation de l’enseignement et de l’apprentissage qui intervient aux différents moments de la séquence didactique en mettant en jeu des modalités diversifiées, qui permet de mesurer l’efficacité de la démarche d’apprentissage et les acquis. » In this paraphrase,

(Richer, 2003, p.6) describes evaluation as a principle of regulation of teaching and learning using various modalities (...) at different moments of the teaching and learning process to measure the effectiveness of learning and achievements. He stresses the essence and need for frequent evaluation as a tool for measuring the process and achievements in learning, but omits to add that evaluation is expected to also measure gaps in learning. This article seeks to evaluate not only the competences of cadets but also attempts to look at the gaps in order to provide a holistic picture of learners’ competence and difficulties in conjugations of the verbs ‘avoir’ and ‘être.’

Judging from the literature consulted, corrective feedback is a learner centered exercise which seeks to address known gaps/ errors or difficulties in learners’ performances. The relevance of this article lies in its perspective of viewing feedback as a need assessment process whereby post training difficulties/deficiencies of learners are identified. The vital information derived from learners’ tests and examinations enables teachers to plan and implement corrective feedback (remedy) based on learners’ observed deficiencies. This approach, which this article considers as fundamental to the remediation of learners’ errors has been observed to be relegated to the background in the literature consulted on language teaching and learning as well as in the actual practices of French language teaching in NDA. There is therefore the need to first identify the difficulties/challenges which learners confront before proceeding on corrective feedback. This is the approach proposed and constitutes the rationale for undertaking this study.

A number of concepts which feature in this discourse include ‘conjugation’, ‘feedback’ and ‘corrective feedback’. Conjugation is defined by Merriam Webster’s dictionary at www.merriam-webster.com as a “schematic arrangement of the inflectional forms of a verb...the change that takes place in a verb to express tense, mood, person, number and gender.” In other words, conjugation reflects the changes which occur in a verb to enable it to express a different person, number, tense, aspect or gender. Feedback is described as “the return of information about the result of a process or activity, an evaluative response” (www.yourdictionary.com). It is also defined at www.collinsdictionary.com as someone “telling you how well or badly you are doing.” Corrective feedback on the other hand “involves a learner receiving either formal or informal feedback on understanding or performance on various tasks by an agent such as a teacher or employer.”

(en.m.wikipedia.org). www.teachhub.com defines it as “correction of errors made by students.”

4. Methodology

Sixty-three (63) respondents, spread across three Departments made up of 14, 17 and 32 cadets respectively participated in the study. The three groups have classes together at the same venue with the same instructor. Data is generated from a test consisting of conjugations exercises covering the verb ‘avoir’ (to have) and the verb ‘être’ (to be) in the simple present tense. A complete conjugation of each of the verbs yields eight occurrences. Error Analysis (EA) is used to analyze data. EA has been described by Hummel (2014, p. 65) as an “approach in Second Language (L2) research which involves the description and classification of errors to gain an insight into the learners current underlying knowledge of the L2 system.” Respondents’ tests output is analyzed according to four criteria which include: (a) complete non conjugation (non-usage) of each of the verbs, (b) correct conjugation (usage), (c) incorrect conjugation (usage) and (d) incomplete

conjugation. The total performance from each category was counted and recorded for each Department. The number for each category was thereafter divided by the total number of occurrences of each of the verbs and multiplied by one hundred in order to obtain the percentage for each category. The results are presented in tables and in pie charts.

5. Presentation and Analyses of Data

Due to ethical considerations the identities of respondents are not divulged. The three groups totaling 63 respondents take French lessons together. The written test required the learners to conjugate separately two verbs, namely the verb ‘avoir’ and the verb ‘être’ in the simple present tense. A complete and correct conjugation of the verb ‘avoir’ by a learner will yield eight entries as indicated in Table 1a. Samples of ‘deviant’ conjugations of the verb ‘avoir’ are shown in Table 1b. Similarly, a complete and correct conjugation of the verb ‘être’ by a learner will also yield eight entries as indicated in Table 2a. Samples of incorrect conjugations of the verb ‘être’ are shown in Table 2b.

Table 1a: Complete and correct conjugations of the verb ‘avoir’

Serial Number	Singular forms	Serial number	Plural forms
1	J’ai	5	Nous avons
2	Tu as	6	Vous avez
3	Il a	7	Ils ont
4	Elle a	8	Elles ont

Table 1b: Samples of deviant conjugations of the verb ‘avoir’

Serial number	Singular forms	Serial number	Plural forms
1	* je suis avoir	5	*Nous allon, nous illons, nous avon
2	*Tu va, tu es, tu a avoir	6	*Vous avon , vous aves, vous onz, vous avier
3	*Il as, ill va, ill a, il à, il sont	7	*Ils sont, ille ant, ils vont
4	*Elle vas, ella, elle ont, elle à	8	*Elles sont, elles vont,

An asterisk * denotes a deviant production.

Table 2a: Complete and correct conjugation of the verb ‘être’

Serial Number	Singular forms	Serial number	Plural forms
1	Je suis	5	Nous sommes
2	Tu es	6	Vous êtes
3	Il est	7	Ils sont
4	Elle est	8	Elles sont

Table 2b: Samples of deviant conjugations of the verb ‘être’

Serial Number	Singular forms	Serial number	Plural forms
1	*Je sius, je suis avoir, je suise	5	*Nous somme, nous avon,
2	*Tu en, tu est.	6	*Vous etrès, vous estes, vous êtes,vous été, vous aves
3	*Il et, ille st	7	*Ils sonts, ill est, ils ant,ills sommes
4	*Elle sont, elle es, elle	8	*Elles sonts, ells ant, elle sont, elle sommes.

(An asterisk * denotes a deviant production.)

Learners' responses were classified into four categories which included:

- Complete non conjugation of a verb. This category recorded cases where a respondent completely failed to conjugate any of the eight entries of the given verb.
- Correct conjugation of a verb. This refers to correct conjugation of a given verb.
- Incorrect conjugation of the verb. This group covered instances where a given verb was wrongly conjugated.
- Incomplete conjugation. This group features cases where not all the eight conjugated forms of a given verb featured.

Analyses of data was based on the four classifications lettered a to d above and were intended to answer the following questions.

- What is the post training performance of a group of first year General French language learners in conjugating the verb 'avoir' and the verb 'être'?
- What post training gaps subsist among a group of first year General French language learners in conjugating the verb 'avoir' and the verb 'être'?
- What feedback can French language teachers obtain from learners' performance in conjugating the verb 'avoir' and the verb 'être' to enable the teachers plan and implement corrective feedback'?

6. Results

The first question of this study is: What is the post training performance of a group of first year General French language learners in conjugating the verb 'avoir' and the verb 'être?'. Table 3 to Table 8 show respondents' post training performances in figures, percentages, and pie charts.

The second question is: What are the post training gaps which subsist among a group of first year General French language learners in conjugating the verbs 'avoir' and 'être?.' The results are shown in Tables 1b, 2b, 3 to 8.

The third question is: what feedback can French language teachers gather from learners' performances in conjugating the verbs 'avoir' and 'être?' Table 9 and Table 10 show the performances of learners across the three Departments, divided into groups A, B and C. The performances covered four areas namely: complete non conjugation, correct conjugations, incorrect and incomplete conjugation of the two verbs 'avoir and 'être.

Table 3 to Table 8 show the gaps, classified into three categories which subsisted among a group of first year General French language learners in conjugating the verbs 'avoir' and 'être.' The gaps also called 'deviant conjugations' were observed to be in the areas of complete non conjugation, incorrect conjugation and incomplete conjugation of the verbs 'avoir 'and 'être'

The results of conjugations of the verbs 'avoir' and être' by respondents of group A which is one out of the three Departments is shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: Performance of group A in conjugation of verb 'avoir'

Number of respondents	Complete non conjugations	Correct conjugations	Incorrect conjugations	Incomplete conjugations	Total occurrences	Deviant conjugations
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
17	48	50	22	16	136	86
%	35.2%	37%	16.1 %	11.7%	100%	63%

NB: Values of columns b, d and e make up values in column g, tagged 'deviant conjugations.' 'Deviant' connotes usages not compatible with the norm.

Table 3 indicates the performance of 17 respondents of group A in conjugating the verb 'avoir' which yielded a total of 136 occurrences. The number of correct conjugations which were 50 or 37% were higher than all the other entries in columns b, d and e respectively. These figures give the impression that the learners have performed well. On a closer look however, the number of complete non conjugations, added to those of incorrect conjugations as well as those of incomplete conjugations which are named 'deviant,' account for 86 out of 136 occurrences or 63% as depicted in Pie Chart 1.

Pie chart 1: Showing conjugations of verb ‘avoir’ for group A.

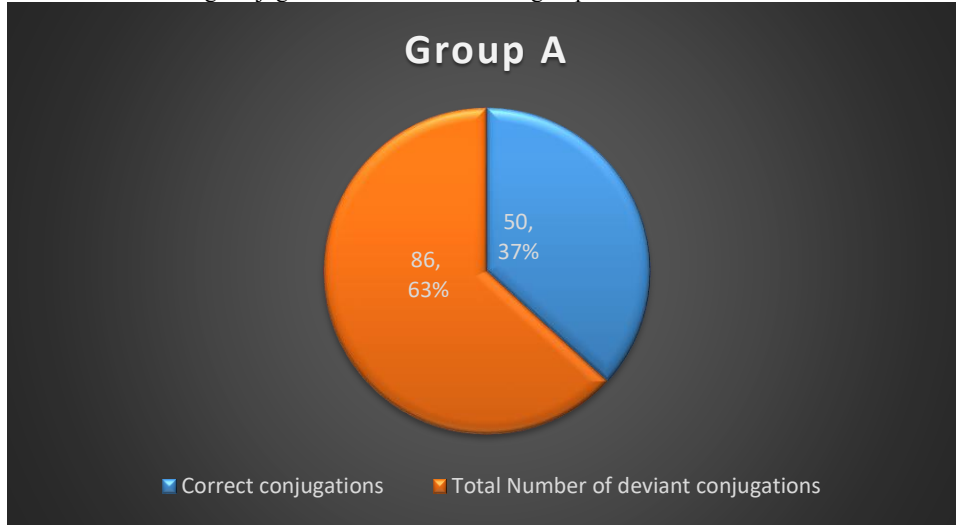


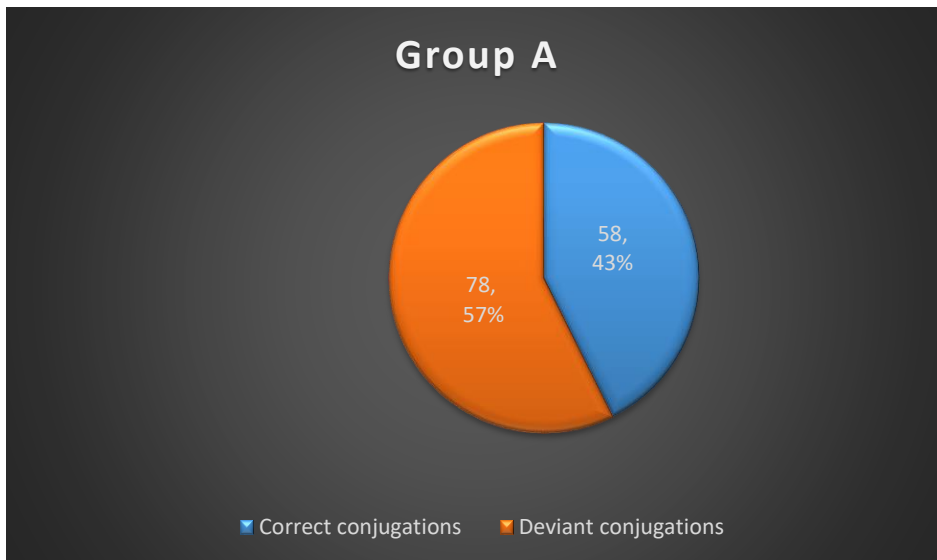
Table 4: Conjugation of verb ‘être’ for group A

Number of respondents	Complete non conjugations	Correct conjugations	Incorrect conjugations	Incomplete conjugations	Total occurrences	Deviant conjugations
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
17	40	58	17	21	136	78
%	29.4%	43%	12.5%	15%	100%	57%

(NB. values of columns ‘b, d and e’ in Table 3 to Table 8 make up the values in column ‘g’ of the respective tables. Values in column ‘g’ are tagged ‘deviant’ conjugations and refer to usages not compatible with the norm.

Table 4 depicts the performances of respondents in group A in conjugating the verb: ‘être’. Correct usages amounted to 58 or 43% while deviant usages were 78 or 57% as shown in Table 4 and in Pie chart 2. The correct usages of the verb ‘être’ in Table 4 were slightly higher than what was observed in conjugating the verb ‘avoir’, recorded as 50 or 37% in Table 3. In Table 4, correct conjugations in column c were higher than the other entries in columns b, d and e. The total number and percentages of deviant conjugations in column g which are 78 or 57% respectively are higher than correct conjugations recorded as 58 or 43% as shown in pie chart 2.

Pie chart 2: Showing conjugations of the verb ‘être’ for group A.



Performances in the conjugations of the verbs ‘avoir’ and ‘être’ for group B, comprising 32 respondents are depicted in Table 5 and 6. Table 5 shows that correct conjugations occurred 132 times representing 52% while deviant conjugations depicted in column g amounted to 124 or 48% as illustrated in pie chart 3. The margin between correct and deviant conjugations is less than 5% showing that learners in group B had minimal difficulties in conjugating the verb ‘avoir.’

Table 5: Conjugation of verb ‘avoir’ for group B.

Number of respondents	Complete non conjugations	Correct conjugations	Incorrect conjugations	Incomplete conjugations	Total occurrences	Deviant conjugations
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
32	30	132	65	28	256	124
%	11.7%	52%	25.4%	10.9%	100%	48%

Pie chart 3: Showing conjugations of the verb ‘avoir’ for group B.

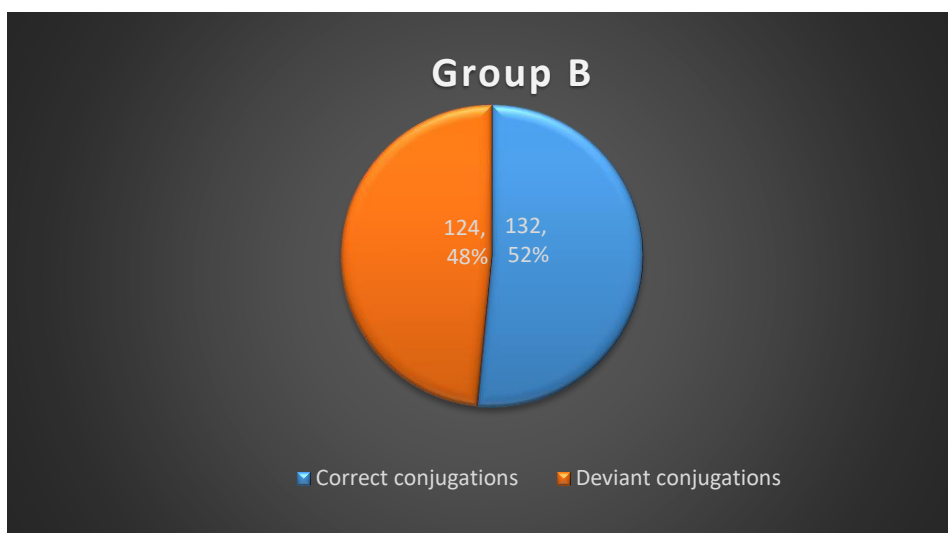
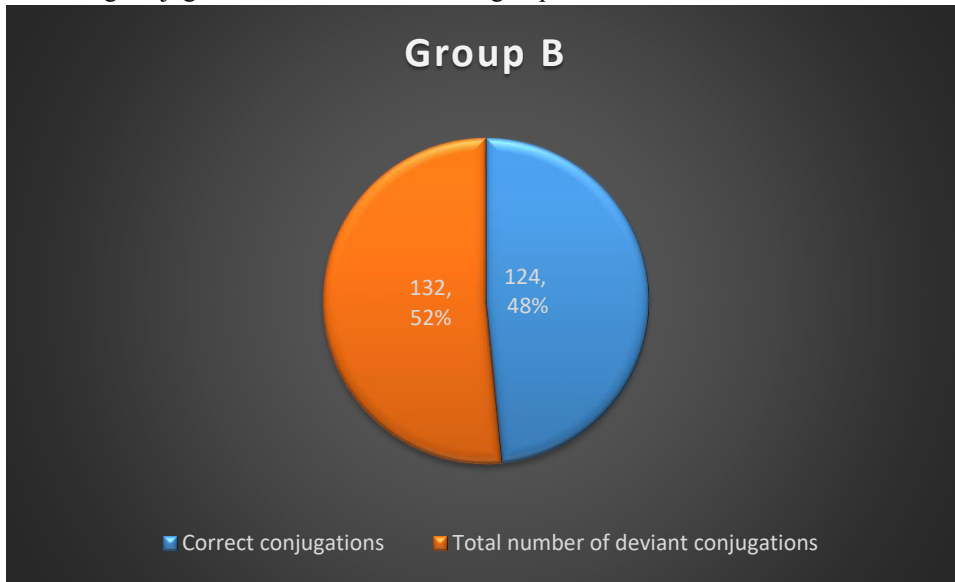


Table 6 indicates that conjugations of the verb ‘être’ posed some challenges to learners in group B. Deviant conjugations were 52% while correct conjugations were 48% as reflected in Pie chart 4. This suggests that although learners had some difficulties in conjugating the verb ‘être’, the margin between correct and deviant conjugations was narrow.

Table 6: Conjugation of the verb ‘être’ for group B.

Number of respondents	Complete non conjugations	Correct conjugations	Incorrect conjugations	Incomplete conjugations	Total occurrences	Deviant conjugations
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
32	40	124	54	38	256	132
%	15.6%	48%	21.1%	14.9%	100%	52%

Pie chart 4 : Showing conjugations of the verb ‘être’ for group B.

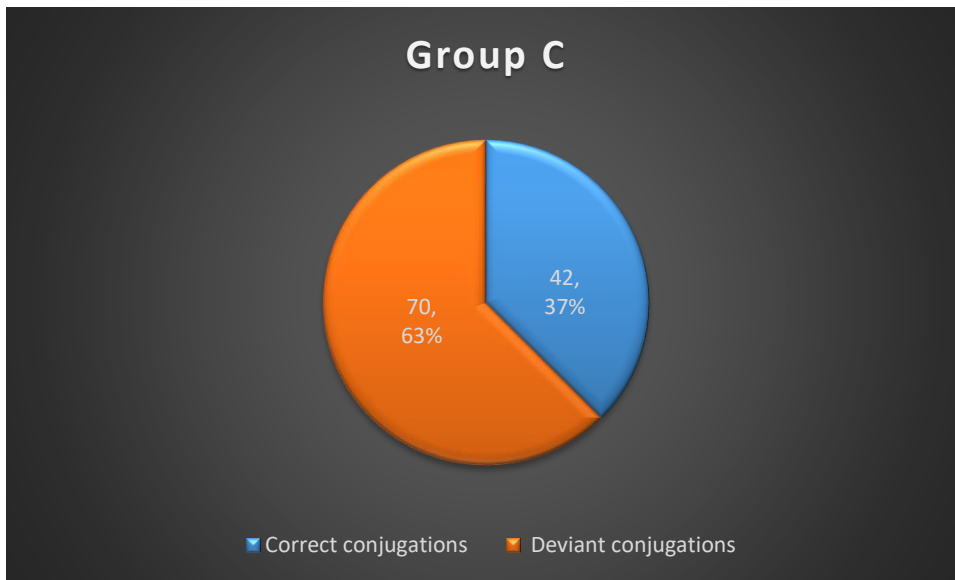


In Table 7 correct conjugations of the verb ‘avoir’ occurred 42 times and represent 37 % of the total occurrences. Complete non-conjugations occurred 33 times representing 29.5% which raised some concerns. Deviant conjugations in column g were cumulative occurrences of columns b, d and e. The deviant conjugations put together stood at 70 out of a total of 112 or 63% as seen in Pie chart 5. Deviant conjugations are also high in this group for the conjugation of the verb ‘avoir’

Table 7: Conjugations of the verb ‘avoir’ for group C

Number of respondents	Complete non conjugations	Correct conjugations	Incorrect conjugations	Incomplete conjugations	Total occurrences	Deviant conjugations
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
14	33	42	30	07	112	70
%	29.5%	37%	26.8%	6.2%	100%	63%

Pie chart 5: Showing conjugation of verb ‘avoir’ for group C.

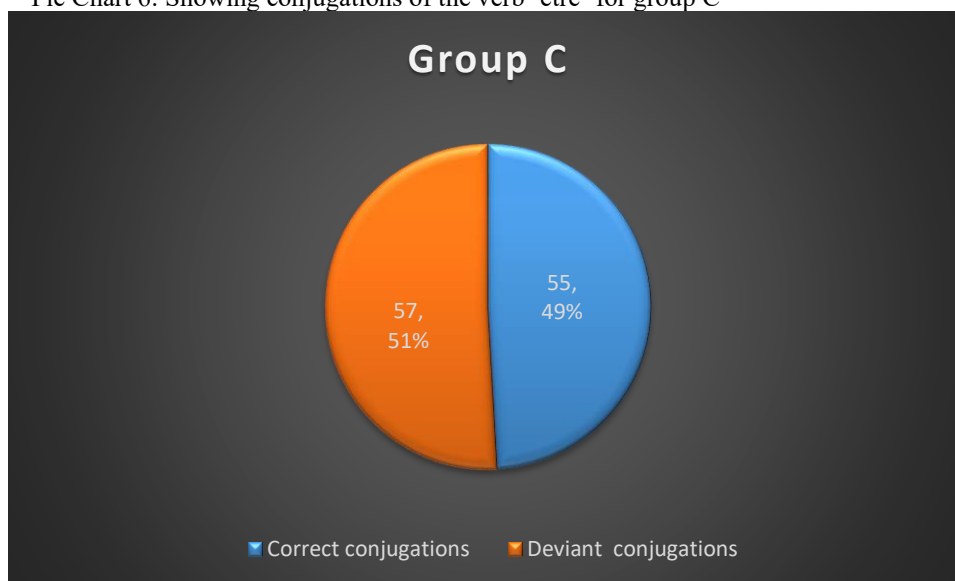


In Table 8, the number of correct conjugations in group C for the verb ‘être’ was 55 out of a total of 112 which was 49%. The performance was higher when compared to other entries in column b, d, and e, even though the percentage was below 50% compared to the deviant conjugations which cumulatively stand at 57 or 51% respectively as Pie 6 indicates.

Table 8: Performance of group C in conjugation of verb ‘être’

Number of respondents	Complete non conjugations	Correct conjugations	Incorrect conjugations	Incomplete conjugations	Total occurrences	Deviant conjugations
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
14	39	55	16	02	112	57
%	34.8%	49 %	14.3%	1.8%	100%	51%

Pie Chart 6: Showing conjugations of the verb ‘être’ for group C



7. Discussion and Implication of Findings / Results.

In Table 9, the summary of performances of the three groups in the conjugation of the verb ‘avoir’ showed that deviant conjugations of 63% for groups A and group C in serial 5b, columns ‘c and e’ were higher than correct conjugations which are only 37% as shown in serial 1b, columns ‘c and e’ respectively. However, for group B, column ‘d’, serial 1b, the results showed that correct conjugations were 52% compared to deviant conjugations which were 48% as indicated in serial 5b, column ‘d.’ The margin between the deviant and correct scores is less than 5%. The figures of 63% deviant production compared to only 37% correct conjugations in two out of three groups suggest that learners have more difficulty in conjugating the verb ‘avoir.’

Table 9: Summary of occurrences and percentages of conjugations of the verb ‘avoir’ for group A, B & C.

S/no.	Type of conjugation	Group A No. & %	Group B No. & %	Group C No. & %
a	b	c	d	e
	Correct conjugation	50	132	42
1b.	Percentages	37%	52%	37%
	Complete non conjugation	48	30	33
2b	Percentages	35.2%	11.7%	29.5%
	Incorrect conjugation.	22	65	30
3b	Percentages	16.1%	25.4%	26.8%
	Incomplete conjugations.	16	28	07
4b	Percentages	11.7%	10.9%	6.2%

	Total number deviant conjugations in serial 2, 3 & 4 above	86	124	70
5b	Percentages	63%	48%	63%
	Total number of occurrences of serial no. 1,2,3 & 4 above	136	256	112

The summary of performances of groups A, B and C in the conjugation of the verb ‘être’ shown in Table 10 indicates that correct conjugations by respondents in groups A, B and C were 43% ,48% and 49% respectively as depicted in serial number 1b, in columns ‘c, d and e’. Conversely, the percentages for deviant productions depicted in serial number 5b in columns ‘c, d and e’ were 57%, 52% 51% respectively. It is interesting to observe that the margin between correct and deviant conjugations of the verb ‘être’ was not as wide as that observed in the conjugation of the verb ‘avoir.’ The results suggest that learners have more difficulties conjugating the verb ‘avoir’ than they have with the verb ‘être.’ Furthermore, a comparison of performances of learners in Table 9 and 10 suggests that the respondents have mastered better the conjugation of the verb ‘être’ than the verb ‘avoir’. This knowledge, derived from analyses of tests scores provides a clue to both teachers and learners on what the learners know and what they know not and what remedy the teachers need to adopt to improve learners’ performance.

Table 10: Summary of occurrences and percentages of conjugation of the verb ‘être’ for Group A, B & C.

S/no.	Type of conjugation	Group A No. & %	Group B No. & %	Group C No. & %
a	b	c	d	e
1	Correct conjugations	58	124	55
1b	Percentages	43%	48%	49%
2	Complete non conjugation.	40	40	39
2b	Percentages	29.4%	15.6%	34.8%
3	Incorrect conjugation.	17	54	16
3b	Percentages	12.5%	21.1 %	14.3%
4	No. & % of incomplete conjugations.	21	38	02
4b	Percentages	15%	14.9%	1.8%
5	Total number of deviant conjugations in serial 2, 3 & 4 above	78	132	57
5b	Percentages	57%	52 %	51%
6	Total number of occurrences of serial no. 1,2,3 & 4 above	136	256	112

8. Conclusion

This article has shown the frequency and percentages of correct and deviant conjugations of the verb ‘avoir’ and ‘être’ observed among three groups of military cadets learning French at a Military Academy in Nigeria. The article has equally highlighted the structure and frequency of the deviant conjugations and subsisting gaps for the attention of the learners themselves and the teachers/instructors. In other words, the research which produced this article has revealed to learners and teachers what they know, what they know not and what they need to know on the conjugations of the verbs ‘avoir’ and ‘être.’ The discourse has also shown that tests and examinations can be used not only for promotion or relegation purposes but that they can also serve as an evaluative resource for corrective feedback. The article therefore concluded that French tests and examinations are

presently being underutilized as their current usage is primarily skewed towards promotion and relegation of cadets. These tools are potential indicators of what learners know, what they know not and what teachers need to know in order to plan and implement intervention measures. The article recommends that tests and examinations should not only be used for promotion and relegation purposes but should also be used as materials for corrective feedback and quality assurance to enhance cadets’ performance not only for French language but for other courses in the Nigerian Defense Academy.

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