A TOOL TO EVALUATE GRAMMATICAL SPELLING SKILLS OF NATIVE FRENCH ADULTS: A TYPOLOGY BASED ON THE CAUSES OF ERRORS FRENCH GRAMMATICAL SPELLING

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To cite this version:

Ngoc Trang Luong. A TOOL TO EVALUATE GRAMMATICAL SPELLING SKILLS OF NATIVE FRENCH ADULTS: A TYPOLOGY BASED ON THE CAUSES OF ERRORS FRENCH GRAMMATICAL SPELLING. Languages, Literature and Literacies, Jun 2015, Odense, Denmark. halshs-01168695

HAL Id: halshs-01168695
https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01168695

Submitted on 26 Jun 2015

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A TOOL TO EVALUATE GRAMMATICAL SPPELLING SKILLS OF NATIVE FRENCH ADULTS: A TYPOLOGY BASED ON THE CAUSES OF ERRORS

FRENCH GRAMMATICAL SPELLING
French language has a variety of derivational and inflectional morphemes that makes its morphology very rich (Catford, 1964). French morphology is not written as it is pronounced (Jaffré, 2004). Adding to its difficulty for its speakers, most of the inflectional morphology is in particular silent. Dutesse, 2006).

Ex.: the ADJECTIVE "bare" - /nas(0)/ - au (ennitent) - both pronounced [y]

This orthographic depth mainly explains why we find most of spelling errors in that particular area of written French (Jaffré, 2008: Luc, 1964, 1994).

Among the variety of forms that French inflectional morphology can display, our study case focuses on a particular linguistic stress that is how one transforms plural and gender terms from the word that triggers the agreement to the one that receives it. In other words we will specifically evaluate grammatical spelling skills (Gauvin, 2001).

Ex.: Le monde basse est montre (the high tide has risen)
The MOON - moves - gives singular and feminine traits to the ADJECTIVE -basse- and the PAST PARTICIPLE -montre- and the 3rd person singular trait to the Aquarius -est-.

WHY WOULD ONE MAKE AN AGREEMENT ERROR?
We classify, sometimes several at the same time, may lead to a mistake in the transfer of agreement traits. Some of them are covered by our evaluation tool:

1. Declarative knowledge (Jarder, 1985): declarative knowledge is not properly learnt and/or grammatical analysis is not precise enough to understand the rule and not trigger its application.

2. Declarative knowledge is acquired but revision skills are not enough through, leading one to make a mistake while one knows the rule and how to apply it (Large, 2001; Delisle, 2006).

3. Cognitive resources management lead to a mistake: an automatic procedure is triggered to avoid working memory overload in multitasking instead of applying the rule (Fayol, 1999; Fayol, Largy, 2001; Fayol, Racot, 2005).

4. A typology based on the causes of errors might reveal a scale of expertise more obviously than a typology based on grammatical categories.

COMPOSITION OF THE EVALUATION

An agreement receiver is tested: NOUN, ADJECTIVE, VERB, PAST PARTICIPLE, ADVERB, PAST PARTICIPLE and INFINITIVE VERB (conclusion agreement).

Each receives 3 categorical variables:

- distance between the word that gives and the one that receives the agreement traits.
- Inversion of the typical order when the error is placed before the word that triggers the agreement.
- existence of an homophonic word of a different grammatical category - presence of a candidate to trigger the agreement in the proximity zone.

Leading to 45 linguistic configurations + 43 sentences

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

STUDY POPULATION:

2 classes of 20 students each, all of them were picked out by their teacher because of their various difficulties in French spelling and writing in general.

GROUP 1: 1st year of Bachelor degree in Modern French Literature (18-21 year old). Students' background = graduated High School.

GROUP 2: 1st year of Bachelor degree in Agronomic Engineering (20-23 year old). Students' background = 2 years in Preparatory Class (in Chemistry, Biology or Mathematics)

2. Sentence writing task (Large, 2001; Largy, 1994) - transposing right after the brainstorming process (Fayol, Hargé, 1991).

3. Prolific task (Fayol, Got, 1991; Large, Got, Largy, 1994) - multiktasking to load the working memory.

4. Instant reproduction task (Fayol, Got, 1996) - if one can replicate a mistake, one understands the rule.

5. Grammatical analysis and use of metalinguage:
The instructions of each exercise are here described:

In the evaluation tool is tied to 5 exercises:

1. Sentence writing task (Large, Fayol, Largy, 1994) - transposing right after the brainstorming process (Fayol, Hargé, 1991).

2. Prolific task (Fayol, Got, 1991; Large, Got, Largy, 1994) - multiktasking to load the working memory.

3. Revision task

4. Instant reproduction task (Fayol, Got, 1996) - if one can replicate a mistake, one understands the rule.

5. Grammatical analysis and use of metalinguage:
The instructions of each exercise are here described:

COMBINATION OF RESULTS = DIAGNOSIS

We add up the results to each sentence of each task for each student. The combination of the results leads to a broad diagnostic as follows:

SIN.SENTENCE WRITING TASK

The student has to recall an entire sentence dictated once. The aim is assessing their memory, not their spelling skills.

Ex.: Surtel le restaurant la rue de la place. (La rue, - of place)

His parents think some of his friends are weird.

In each little square, the number represents a specific structure of agreement so that the student and the teacher can spot specifically the linguistic context where the error occurred. Vertically, this table is sorted according to the cause of errors that each student makes for each linguistic structure.

Scale of expertise

In terms of remediation, if we consider that teaching declarative knowledge needs more resources than enhancing revision skills for example, a scale of expertise may be established according to the depth of deficiencies. This scale is very viable with TABLE 2.

If we compare TABLE 1 on the left with TABLE 2 above, it appears that it is easier to assess the skills of a class if we use a typology based on the causes of the errors rather than the grammatical categories. We might then want to reconsider how sequences are built in remediation: it probably has to differ from how the same skills are acquire at school, one rule after another.

Hypothèse 2 - A typology based on the causes of errors might reveal a scale of expertise more obviously than a typology based on grammatical categories. Is validated but still needs to be discussed as it requires class interventions using a typology based on the causes of errors to assess the efficiency of such a scale of expertise.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


