

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

#### 5.1 Error Analysis

The general findings of the error analysis indicate that the use of some French past tenses, namely the *passé simple*, constitutes a big problem among Arab students of French because this tense does not exist in the Arabic language. The use of the *passé composé* and the *imparfait* is easier for Arab students because these tenses exist in the Arabic language.

The contrastive analysis that was carried out showed that the Arabic past tenses are very different from those in French and that the morphology of the French past tenses is more complex. Some tenses that are used in French do not exist in Arabic like the *passé simple*. The *passé simple* and the *plus-que-parfait tenses* could not be easily grasped by Arab students and this results in a high incidence of improper use of the two tenses. The elaborate system of agreement of morphological forms in French proves to be problematic in the use of the *plus-que-parfait* because it is a more complicated tense. Generally they have no problem with other tenses because of the existence of agreement in gender and number in Arabic. Sometimes the agreement creates a problem because the gender is different in Arabic. This supports Lado's assumption that "Those elements that are similar to his (the learner's) native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult." (1957:2)

In the analysis of errors, we discovered that sometimes, there is transfer of forms from Arabic and English to French. This is to be expected as the students' second language is English and their mother tongue is Arabic.

In Arabic, the simple past is used with a different meaning, for example, the imperfect is the action that is completed in the perfect tense. You may also call this the past tense because the action is completed before the present so it belongs to the past. In English, the simple past tense is used in many contexts whereas in French there is a distinction between the use of the *passé composé* on the one hand, and the *imparfait*, and *plus-que parfait* on the other. The *passé composé* is used for a one-off completed action or event and the *imparfait* is used for a description of the state of affairs or physical or mental conditions. The *plus-que-parfait* is used to express an action which follows another past action. In addition to this, English uses the simple past or “would” or “used to” to express a habitual action while French uses the *imparfait*, which is also used as a past progressive. In Arabic, the *imparfait* tense also exists but with a different inflection system. This partial correspondence in the use of the Arabic, English and French past tenses causes some confusion. The students tend to fall back on their experience with English and Arabic languages when they make their choice. We discovered that many errors in the choice of tenses were the results of interference from Arabic and English.

It is sometimes difficult to decide whether overgeneralization or transfer is the cause of errors. To base our analysis on the fact that the majority of French verbs are conjugated with *avoir* or *être* to form the *passé composé*, we could conclude that the students have generalized the use of the auxiliaries in favour of *avoir*. However, as Arabic is the learners' first language and English is the second language, the errors produced here, could also have been caused by the transfer of the Arabic representation of the *plus-que-parfait* ( و كان أخواتها) and the English perfect tense (have + past participle). It is also highly probable that the two processes occur simultaneously and thus reinforce each other.

Another significant finding is that errors in the past participle forms are intralingual errors. The learners generalized by modelling the past participle form of some verbs on the past participle of other verbs with the same ending in the infinitive. There are also many cases of incomplete application of rules and ignorance of rule restrictions. This is another developmental strategy whereby the students fail to learn the more complex type of structure as they find that they could still get the idea across by using relatively simple rules. This applies to many other categories of errors. Only a few respondents fail to apply the rules of agreement of the past participles of verbs formed with *être* and *avoir*. This reflects the impact of the Arabic language on the learners as agreement in gender and number is also found in Arabic.

The analysis also reveals that the majority of the students find the application of subject verb agreement involving the *imparfait* relatively easy. However, there is a small number of students who fail to carry out the agreement. This is another instance of incomplete application of rules. The incorrect spelling of the stem to which the *imparfait* endings are added shows confusion on the part of the students which is the result of incomplete application of rules.

The errors made by Arab students of French in the French past tenses cannot be attributed to any specific process. Different processes overlap and work together to cause these errors. Transfer and overgeneralization represent aspects of the same underlying strategy of using previous knowledge to make sense of new experience which is useful in the case of agreement in gender and in number. Incomplete application of rules, ignorance of rule restrictions and false concepts hypothesized are other developmental strategies that learners resort to, to overcome their problems. Errors committed by students should not be looked upon as negative indicators of language learning. They are manifestations of the learners'

attempt at approximation of the target language. Corder (1967) states that errors are evidence of the learner's strategies rather than signs of inhibition. He claims that a systematic study of errors would provide information useful to textbook writers, teachers and learners.

## **5.2 Pedagogical Implications**

Tenses are one of the most difficult aspects of French grammar. The complex system of verbal inflections is compounded by the non-correspondence of the concept of time in the two languages. The present findings have confirmed this view. However the difficulties that Arab learners of French encounter could be reduced to a minimum by various teaching and learning strategies.

The verbal inflections could be taught by the inductive approach using many examples and pattern drills for sufficient practice. At the end of the practice-learning session, the students need to learn and memorize the rules of conjugation of the *imparfait*, *passé composé*, *passé simple* and the *plus-que-parfait*. Verbs with similar patterns in the past participle should be grouped and learned together. To remember the verbs that form their *passé composé* with *être*, strategies such as the use of acronyms, a story chart using those verbs or the pairing of verbs that contrast each other, could be employed to better remember them. The agreement of the past participle with the subject should also be taught through analogy. Sufficient practice and exercises should be given after which the students could be guided to deduce the rules for recapitulation.

The grammar in context approach could be used to introduce the use of the past tenses. The students are asked to observe the different endings of the verbs and to locate examples of them. As the rules of usage of these tenses are not easy to deduce for students who are

exposed to them for the first time and with time constraints, we need to teach them the rules. Practice should then be in various forms of structural exercises where the two tenses are brought into contrast. The different aspectual uses of the four past tenses should be practiced. The exercises could be at sentence level graduating to short passages. For subsequent exercises, the students are then asked to analyze their answers and the rules are deduced for recapitulation.

The students should be encouraged to read more to reinforce what they have learned. More reading materials of graded levels of difficulty should be at their disposal. They should also be guided to seek learning and reading materials on the Internet which is a rich source of information.

For the students to learn beyond the classroom, they should be motivated. One important factor is the teacher, who should create among his students a positive attitude towards the learning of French. The teacher needs to vary his teaching methods and activities by using audio-visual aids, role-play, and real-life situations to make his lesson an interesting and rewarding experience. Encouraging the learners to keep a diary where their past activities are noted in French could be another way to make them practice the French that they have learned, especially the past tenses. Songs and poems can also be exploited for variation and to reinforce learning of the tenses.

### **5.3 Limitations**

Some limitations to the study have to be acknowledged. The study is limited only to the sample students who were taught the four French past tenses in Anajah National University. Some errors could have been caused by faulty teaching or materials e.g. some distinctions between the *passé composé* and the *imparfait* may not have been clearly explained or

exemplified. The test did not include enough items on the negation and the agreement of the past participle with the subject or a preceding object pronoun. Hence, the results can only be tentative and limited to the study and not generalizable to the greater population of Arab students of French in Palestine.

#### **5.4 Directions for Further Research**

This study was carried out among students studying French in Anajah National University. Studies should also be done among students in other institutions, which could serve to confirm or refute the findings of the present study.

The *passé composé*, *imparfait*, and the *plus-que-parfait* are conversational past tenses and they are used in relation to the present. Future studies should include other tenses in the French verbal system.

Since the forms given by the students are sometimes difficult to interpret, an interview should be conducted to determine the causes of errors. A test of an objective nature can also be carried out to further reveal the areas or situations of the use of each of the two tenses that the students are weak in. We will thus discover in more details how the knowledge of English and Arabic is facilitative or inhibitive.

A more elaborate test on the use of a preceding pronoun object with the *passé composé* and the use of the negation should also be carried out to confirm the findings of the present study.

It is also proposed that the number of subjects be increased. A larger sample size would render more conclusive results. The number of students with a good command of English and those with an average command of English should be the same. This would lend

greater validity to the findings. A similar study can also be extended to all Palestinians learners of French.