



Comparative Study of the Structures of French and Yoruba Idiomatic Expressions

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Abstract. Yoruba and French languages are so rich in the use of idiomatic expressions which lend themselves easily in the hands of those who know the two languages, through limitless improvisation of idiomatic expressions. In friendly, family and societal conversations, idiomatic expressions occupy a unique place. Their importance cannot be over emphasized as they add beauty to the speeches that employ them and provide knowledge and wisdom for better and clear understanding of the messages being projected. This paper therefore, examines idiomatic expressions in both languages at different fora. The paper hinges on Cognitive Linguistics which claims that idiomatic expression, which is motivated by metaphor, is not merely a figure of speech, but a specific mental and neural mapping that influences a good deal of how people think, reason and imagine in everyday life. It was complemented with Conceptual Metaphor Theory which postulates that human thought process are largely metaphorical, and human conceptual system is structured and defined in a metaphorical way. The examples of Yoruba idiomatic expressions used in the paper were taken from two authentic Yoruba text books; Yoruba idioms by M.A. Fabunmi and Asayan Akanlo Ede Yoruba by Ademola Olopade while French idiomatic expressions were taken from Dictionnaire Des Expressions Et Locutions, second edition by Allain Ray et Sophie Chantreau. Our findings reveal that, the idiomatic expressions in both languages have similar characteristics, similar functions and at times have mutual equivalence. Also idioms in both languages can have the same word patterns but different lexical items due to different cultures.

Keywords: Yoruba, French, idiomatic expressions, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory.

, et parfois elles ont des équivalences mutuelles mais des différences se produisent dans leur structures et

leurs éléments lexicaux a cause des cultures différentes.

Mots clés: Yoruba, French, expressions idiomaticues, linguistique cognitive, métaphore conceptuelle.

1. Introduction

One of the most important aspects of language (French and Yoruba) is idiomatic expression. They are frequently used in a variety of situations, from friendly conversations and business meetings to more formal and written contexts. Idiomatic expressions belong to a group of word called ‘fixed collocation’. According to Jimoh (2009:168) a fixed collocation refers to “*a group of words which is often used together to form a natural sounding combination*”. In other words, such arrangement is fixed because it is not possible for anyone to alter the arrangement, to delete any lexical item from it, or include ‘external’ lexical item into it. It is therefore, a phrase or an expression which means something different from the meaning of the lexical items that make up the phrase or the expression. Idiomatic expressions, on the one hand, are considered as one of the most peculiar parts of the language; and on the other hand, they are difficult because of their unpredictable meaning and grammar. Idiomatic expressions, thus, require special attention in language teaching as they have been identified to be a challenge to both teachers and learners of French. Despite numerous linguistic works that have been written on idiomatic expressions, there is no general agreement on the exact definition of idiomatic expression. According to Fellbaum (2007:349), idioms are classes of multi-word units “*which pose a challenge to our understanding of grammar and lexis that has not yet been fully met*”.

It is therefore, our interest in this write up to examine idiomatic expressions in French and Yoruba

languages, compare their structures in order to find out their areas of convergence and divergence, examine whether there are linguistic relativism while using idiomatic expressions in the two languages and discover the place of culture in this venture. The question that arises from this exploration therefore is this: Are there relationships between these languages when it comes to the use of the idiomatic expressions? The answer to this question will form the crux of our observation in this work. Yoruba and French languages are defined based on different points of views of scholars, different definitions of idioms according to different views and perspectives of scholars, the classifications of idioms, their roles or functions, their characteristics and others. Since idiomatic expressions are motivated by metaphor, we shall look at Cognitive Linguistics and Conceptual metaphor theory to foreground our discussion. It is equally our interest to find out whether the idiomatic expressions in the two languages have similar lexical items or vary and whether their structures are the same or different at one point or the other. However, before we delve into all these, let us briefly examine the concept 'language', a knowledge of which will provide the basis for further discussion about idiomatic expressions that is the focus in this work.

2. Language

Language, both foreign and indigenous, is a universal phenomenon because wherever human beings exist there is bound to be language. Primarily, it is meant for communication within the country among the various diverse ethnic groups. It also serves the purpose of performing the same social interactive functions across the boundary thus promoting national and international governance, politicking and commerce.

Language is a creation of man's social needs. Society depends upon language for its very existence like all other living creatures that depend on the air, water and earth for their survival. It is used to perform interactional function in the society. Humans use language to interact with each other, socially or emotionally: how they indicate friendliness, cooperation, or hostility, or annoyance, pain, or pleasure. Apart from interactional function, language is also used to perform transactional function, whereby humans use their linguistic abilities to communicate knowledge, skills and information. Language and human culture are intimately related and the one is indispensable to the other. Language, like society, is constantly evolving and is subject to growth and change"

Language is restricted to human beings. The communication system used by other animals is too restricted in one way or the other to be given the name language. Not only is language specific to the human race, but all human beings have language. Communicating by means of language is the most characteristically human of all man's behavior patterns.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word language as "the whole body of words, used by a nation, people, or race; a "tongue".' The word *tongue* in this definition reminds us that language exists in spoken as well as written form.

There are different definitions put forward by scholars and linguists depending on their perspectives and persuasion on language. We shall therefore, consider some of these definitions presented by Fodoro, J.O. (2007:3). One of the best known and most comprehensive is that of the linguistic philosopher Edward Sapir (1921:8) who defined language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced vocal symbols. These symbols are, in the first instance, auditory and they are produced by the so - called organs of speech". The importance of this definition lies in its emphasis on language as a specifically human attribute, capable of expressing ideas and emotions as well as the more fundamental desires which man may have in common with other animals. It also stresses that language operates as a system of symbols, of which the spoken form is of primary importance.

Noan Chomsky (1959:13) defined language as a 'a set (finite and infinite) of sentences each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements`. This definition points out the area of specialization of Chomsky in linguistics (a syntactician).

Considering the social function of language, where the role of language is narrowed down to human interaction, Block and Trager (1942:5) defined language "as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates".

Viewing language as a social behavior, Halliday. McIntosh and Stevens (1964:4) opines that "language is regarded as a form of activity i.e. the activity of human beings in societies. This is why Greenberg. J.H. (1956) views language as "a system of signals conforming to the rules which constitute its grammar or a set of culturally transmitted behavior patterns shared by a group of individuals". The definition

reveals the anthropological background of the author because the definition focuses its attention on the relationship between language and culture.

Ladd, R. (1954:32) opines that “language is primarily an instrument of communication among human beings in a community”. The definition talks about the communicative function of language in the community.

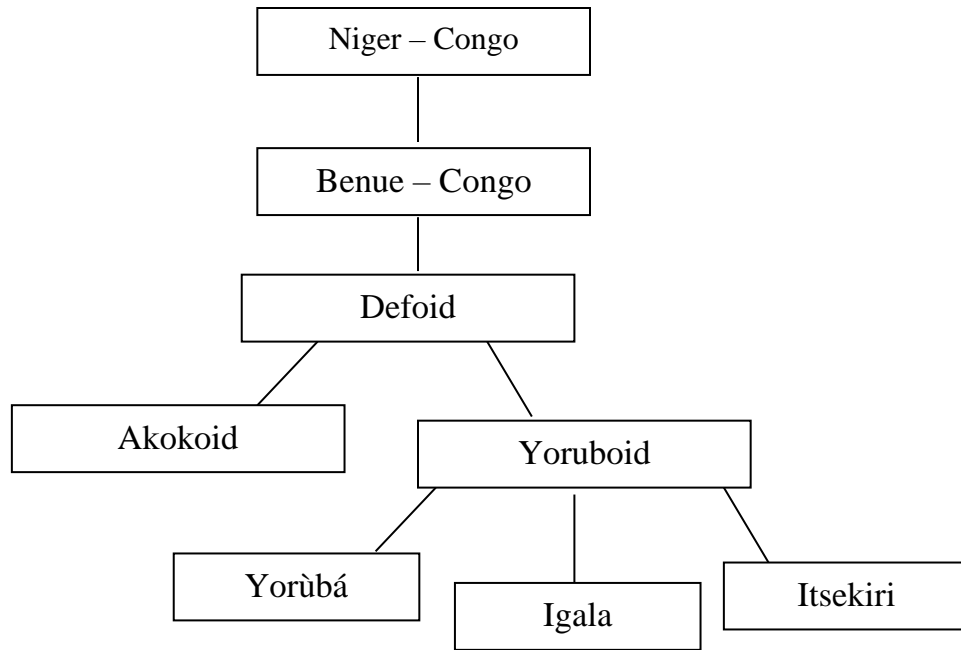
William Francis (1968:4), according to him, “to the linguist, language may be a form and not a matter, or it may be a system of hierarchies or even a hierarchy of systems”. This definition points to the systematic

nature of language i.e language is highly systematic from the phonetic to the phonological, morphological and syntactic levels.

From the definitions given above, we can clearly see that language is a significant practice in a society. It is a special gift of God to mankind. It is gift which every human being is endowed with for effective communication. With this knowledge of language, it is apposite at this juncture to talk briefly on the two languages concerned in this paper. We will begin with Yoruba language.

2.1 Yorùbá Language

Yorùbá belongs to the Defoid group of languages, a sub group of Benue Congo languages. (Capo 1989:275)



(The diagram showing the linguistic family of Yorùbá)

It is spoken principally in the South-Western part of Nigeria, especially in Òyó, Ògùn, Òndó and Òsun states. Yorùbá is also spoken in some parts of Kwara, Kogí and Edo states. It is equally spoken by a large number of speakers in the south - western part of the Benin Republic, while in Togo; it is also natively spoken by certain sections of the population (Oyetade 1998:17).

Oyetade (1998:17) quoting Adetugbo (1967) divided Yorùbá dialects into three major dialect areas according to linguistic and ethno-historical bases. These are first, North-Western Yorùbá (NWX)

comprising Òyó, Òsun, Ìbàdàn and the northern part of Ègbá. The second division is South- Eastern Yorùbá (SEY) with Òndó, Òwò, Ìjèbú and dialects spoken in and around Òkitìpupa (i.e. Ìkálè, Ìlájè and Ìjò-Àpòì as representatives). The third dialect group is Central Yorùbá (CY) and it is made up of Ifè, Ìjèsà and Èkitì. Each dialect grouping has particular features which distinguish it from others. Having examined the Yoruba language, we may as well consider the other language, French, which is also pivot to our discussion in this work.

2.2 French Language

French is a part of a group of languages known as Romance Languages (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian) because they descended from Latin, the language of the ancient Romans. Although there are great differences between these language groups, they all nevertheless derive from the same family of languages called Indo-European languages. French is an important world language; it is in fact the 5th intercontinental world language after English, Spanish, Arabic, and Portuguese in terms of its sheer number of speakers who are found in all the five continents. It is the second most important language of the world coming after English, with the two endowed with the potentials and a past history of privileged acceptance and usage in interpersonal, diplomatic, business and socio-cultural relations all over the universe. French is the language with the second largest number of speakers in the European Union (EU), coming after German. It is one of the three languages (with English and Arabic) that are used by the African Union (AU) for its official transactions and publications. It is actively and competently spoken by more than 140 million peoples in the world and gladly learnt and used by another 300 million in non-francophone countries who have been 'somehow' exposed to the learning of French and who can (manage to) express themselves in it. (Ade-Ojo, 2003:3)

It is the second most widely learned language after English and the second most widely taught language after English and is taught on every continent. From the site; La francophonie dans le monde, it was discovered that:

128 million francophonies: speak French as a native or adopted language fluently and use it on regular basis.

72 million 'partial' francophonies: live in a francophone country but do not speak French regularly, due to limited knowledge.

100 – 110 million students of all ages: do not live in a francophone country but have learned or are learning French in order to communicate with francophone.

It must also be mentioned that French belongs to the enviable Club of 12 of the world's 5440 languages that are spoken by more than 100million International organizations, including the United Nations (UN) and its agencies, in which the knowledge of French is a sine qua non for employment and in which French plays the role of a most indispensable medium of communication for official transactions. It is also a fact that more than a third of the delegates of all the

members of United Nations (UN) at the General Assembly are French speaking. Moreover, French is one of the working languages in many international organizations, including: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), African Union (AU), Amnesty International (AI), Médecins Sans Frontiers (doctors without border), World Trade Organisation etc. It is, together with English and Arabic, one of the languages of the Islamic Conference as well as the Arab League.

Up to the end of the First World War, French was the only diplomatic language in use in all European countries. It is worthy of note too that, French was for several countries, recognised as the universal language, to the extent that foreign monarchs invited well known French writers to their courts. Among such monarchs were Queen Christina of Sweden (who associated with Descartes), Frederick the Great of Prussia (who invited Voltaire to his court).

Furthermore, within the ECOWAS countries, French is the official language of 8 of the 15 member countries of ECOWAS (after the exit of the Mauritania in December 1999). Not only that, it is equally the official language of 24 of all 53 African countries including the eight of ECOWAS.

According to a demographic projection led by the Université Laval and the Réseau Démographique de l'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, French speakers will number approximately 500 million people in 2025 and 650 million people, or approximately 7% of the world's population by 2050. Estimates in 2013 suggested that French speakers will reach 1 billion by 2060. (Wikipedia the free encyclopedia

Nigeria attaches great importance to learning of foreign languages in the educational institutions of the country and French is granted a special status. French language is the second international language after English. French has been adopted as second official language of the country as stated in 1998 National Policy on Education, and from time to time, there are different educational programmes organized by French Embassy to encourage the teaching and learning of the language. Both teachers and learners are always encouraged to have linguistic competence of the language. Communicative competence of learners implies an ability to exercise communicative functions, to understand L2 culture, to comprehend and utilize conventional set expressions like idiomatic expressions in their spoken and written language.

Having said this, this paper will now delve into the theories that serve as underpinning for this work

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Cognitive Linguistics

In CL, metaphor is regarded as one of the several kinds of idealized cognitive model (ICM). According to Lakoff (1987: 68), “*Idealized Cognitive Model is the way in which human beings organize knowledge*” and therefore, it may be postulated as cognitive structures whose purpose is to represent reality from a certain perspective. (Grant and Oswick, 1996) in Njoroge (2015: 59). As a process, metaphor involves combining language and thought to develop new non-literal meaning that enhances our reality. Cognitive linguistics emerged in the 1970s as a reaction against the dominant generative paradigms, and specifically the Generative Grammar and Montague Grammar, which were then dominant in the disciplines of linguistics and philosophy. Cognitive linguistics provides a framework within which metaphors can be described and understood. Cognitive linguists claim that metaphor is not merely a figure of speech, but it is a specific mental and neural mapping that influences a good deal of how people think, reason and imagine in everyday life. In cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, or cognitive metaphor, refers to the understanding of one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another. Since many idiomatic expressions are motivated by metaphor, interpreting their actual meaning sometimes becomes difficult for people. Cognitive linguistics postulates that the meaning of idiom is motivated by conceptual mechanism like metaphors, which implies that researchers should always bear in mind the relations between the conceptual system and the linguistic system (Csabi, 2002: 249 – 54).

Metaphor, as a widespread feature of everyday thought and language (Goalty, 1997:1, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:10), represents a central issue for both instructors and learners of French as a second language (Sacristán, 2004:115-131). This is particularly so in the teaching of French idioms. Straksiene (2009:13-19) note this of idioms:

Idioms are considered to be one of the hardest and most interesting parts of the English or French vocabulary. On the one hand, they are considered one of the most peculiar parts of the language; on the other hand, they are difficult because of their unpredictable meaning and grammar (p. 13).

From the quotation above, idioms, thus, require special attention in language teaching as they have

been identified to be a challenge to both teachers and learners of language. Cooper (1998; 59), for example, notes that the difficulties connected with teaching idioms can be avoided if suitable methods that make the learners more aware of potential problems in using idiomatic language are used

3.2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Metaphor is common to all languages and cultures. It plays an important role in everyday life and is grounded in culture. Writers and speakers use metaphor to express abstract, difficult-to-talk-about concepts in term of concrete entities which are easier to understand (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:99). Metaphorical expressions (MEs, hereafter) are the cream of a language. They reflect the relationship between language and culture. Metaphoricity is the main feature of all human languages. In fact, a language or any form of language, without metaphorical traits is nonexistent (Goalty, 1997 in Abass & Ghafel 2011:211). It is not confined to language. It runs through all veins of man’s everyday life, including language, thought and action.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory indicates that human thought processes are largely metaphorical, and human conceptual system is structured and defined in a metaphorical way. Therefore, metaphor is defined as cross-domain mapping between source and target domain. A mapping is the systematic correspondence between constituent elements of the source and target domains. The target domain is an abstract domain while the source domain is a concrete concept of which one can have direct sensory experience. This relationship is in the form of ‘TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN’. They are stored together in the mind (Lan& McGregor 2009: 11-24). However, under different cultures, cultural considerations play a crucial part while conceptual mapping is carried out.

One of the relevances of Conceptual Metaphor Theory is that, it enables people uncover the systematicity in many concepts that were believed to be unstructured (Sorano, 2003: 107 – 122). Second, if the conceptual metaphor pervades the way we think, speak or act, then, it should also have some influence on the way we learn. This is because the Conceptual Metaphor Theory assumes that many motivated idioms are based on conceptual metaphors (Li, 2010: 206 - 210). Similarly, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) posit that idioms are not arbitrary and accidental strings of words, but are totally rooted in human thought. Metaphoricity is therefore, the main feature of all human languages. In fact, a language or

any form of language, without metaphorical traits is nonexistent. (Goalty, 1997:1). It is not confined to language. It runs through all veins of man's everyday life including language thought and action.

Investigating conceptual metaphoric systems across cultures is enlightening in more than one aspect. It tells us whether the metaphoric concepts that shapen our lives are similar to, or different from the other nations. Abass et al (2011: 211) state that if the same conceptual metaphors are used to structure our lives, despite our belonging to different cultures (in our study French and Yoruba), we are conceptualizing the concept in the same way; and in the case of different conceptual metaphors that structure our lives, the study of our respective metaphoric systems will highlight how we model our reality and how the understanding of these systems may contribute to further intercultural understanding.

To clarify, we can focus on the expression "pot calling the kettle black". It is a metaphorical expression that is used in English when someone who criticizes someone else is as guilty as the person he or she criticizes. The construction of this metaphoric expression originated from the fact that when cooking was done over fire the smoke made cooking pots turn black. In French it is expressed as "la poêle qui se moque du chaudron" while the Yorùbá will say:

"eni tó gbé mààlù tó ñ dájọ ẹni tó gbé adiyẹ"

Literary Translation: someone accusing another person of that which he is guilty of.

The underlying conceptual metaphor for the expression in English is people are things metaphor (pot calling the kettle black) (Kovecses, 2006). The other metaphoric concepts that are embedded in the expression is that BLACK IS BAD and subsequently BEING GUILTY IS BLACK.

Metaphor is not a special use of language, but pervades all interactions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2000). They claim that metaphor in language is the result of analogical nature of human conceptualization. It is a conceptual phenomenon with external manifestations in everyday language and a key to the metaphorical nature of mind. It is argued that metaphor is conceptual and that a great number of our reasoning and thought processes are guided by metaphorical conceptions although we may not realize it (Lakoff, 1995).

In this connection, our ways of thinking, our experiences and our activities are all a matter of

metaphor-phenomena which is more or less automatically dealt with in everyday life.

4. Idioms

Idiomatic expression is defined by different scholars and the majority of these defined idioms as semantically complex, compositionally permanent, morphologically and syntactically fixed. There may be exceptions to the general rule: some idiomatic expressions appear to vary lexically, morphologically and syntactically. But the semantic structure of idioms is not subject to semantic variation (Fellbaum, 2007, cited by Abdramanova 2012:1): it is not derived from the meaning of its constituents.

Dictionary of Language and Linguistics (2008:236) defines idiom thus: a term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic viewpoint, the meanings of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts, e.g. it's raining cats and a dog does not permit variability, it's raining a cat and a dog/dogs and cats. Dictionaries provide rather general and brief descriptions of idioms. Linguistics works, on the other hand, which specialize in this particular field of idioms, take into consideration various aspects of idioms and thus can appear to be more descriptive.

Palmer (1997:98) submits that idioms "involve collocation of a special kind...the meaning is not related to the meaning of the individual word, but is sometimes (though not always) nearer to the meaning of a single word." For instance, kick the bucket which equals die. s. This rather broad understanding of an idiom is more restricted by Moon's concept of "a particular kind of unit that is fixed and semantically opaque or metaphorical, traditionally, not the sum of its parts" (Moon 4). Kavka (2003:2) understands idioms as "lexically and syntactically heterogeneous complexes which, on the other hand, work as single forms, further indivisible, and, on the other hand, appear as analyzable syntactic structures, even though, sometimes a little deviant, representing a continuum of various dimensions".

Crystal (2008:236) defines idioms as:

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of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts, e.g. it's raining cats and dogs does not permit, it's raining a cat and a dog/dogs and cats

Describing idioms further, Crystal (ibid) gives another name of idioms according to some linguists as “*ready made utterances*” because of their lack of internal contrastivity. A point which has attracted considerable discussions on idioms is the extent to which degrees and kinds of idiomaticness can be established. Some idioms do permit a degree of internal change, and are somewhat more literal in meaning than others. For example it's worth her while/the job will be worth my while. This shows that, there may be exceptions to the general rules: some idioms appear to vary lexically, morphologically and syntactically, but semantic structure of idiom is not subject to semantic variation. Buttrressing the fact above, Peters (2007:235) in his current research, opines, idioms are not necessarily so fixed in their formulation, but may vary in terms of such things as number and tense without losing their idiomatic identity. For instance; a red herring/red herrings, fell foul of/fallen foul of. Some idioms tolerate a limited amount of lexical alteration for example wreaked/wrought havoc.

4.1 Classification of Idioms

Researchers interested in idiomatic expressions have tried to classify them according to different criteria. The main feature that differentiates between the different kinds of idioms is the degree of idiomacity that an idiom carries. Idiomatic expressions are categorized in a continuum from transparent to opaque called “the spectrum of idiomacity” (Claudia, 2006:5).

4.1.1 Transparent Idioms

These idioms have a very close meaning to that of the literal one. Hence, transparent idioms are usually not difficult to understand and translate, because their meaning can be easily inferred from the meanings of their constituents, both components have a direct meaning but the combination acquires figurative sense. Fernando (1996:35) phraseological combinations are commonly included in this category. E.g. to see the light (to understand).

To see red (to be annoyed)

4.1.2 Semi Transparent Idioms

The idiom usually carries a metaphorical sense that could not be known only through common use. i.e., the meaning of its parts has a little role to play in understanding the entire meaning.
e.g. Break the ice = relieve the tension.

4.1.3 Semi Opaque Idioms/semi idioms

This type refers to those idioms in which the figurative meaning is not joined to that of the constituents words of the idiom. Thus, the expression is separated into two parts; a part with a literal meaning, and another part with a figurative sense. Phraseological unities belong to this category.

e.g. To know the ropes = to know how a particular job should be done.

To pass the buck = to pass responsibility

4.1.4 Opaque Idioms/pure idioms

Opaque idioms are the most difficult type of idioms, because the meaning of the idiom is never that of the sum of the literal meanings of its parts. So, it would be impossible to infer the actual meaning of the idiom from the meaning of its components, because of the presence of items having cultural references. These culture-specific items have a great influence on the comprehensibility of idiomatic expressions.

e.g. To burn one's boat = to make retreat impossible

Kick the bucket = to die

Spill the beans = reveal a secret.

4.2. Characteristics of Idioms

Claudia (2006:5) identifies certain features which are essential in the recognition of idioms. Some of these features are:

4.2.1 Alteration of Grammatical Rules

The idiomatic expression is not always grammatical, but it is established, accepted and used by native speakers of the language with a fixed structures and meaning. For example:

It's ages since we met (singular with a plural nouns)

4.2.2 Conventional Phrases

Idioms are special expression which are almost known and agreed by all the members of a particular community.

E.g. How are you doing? (Expression used to ask someone about his health).

Once in a blue moon (rarely, infrequently).

4.2.3 Alteration of Word Order

Idiomatic expressions in English, usually, do not respect the English word order.

E.g It may be well ahead of time (normal word order)

It may well be ahead of time (probably): idiomatic expression.

4.2.4 Figurativeness

The main feature that characterizes idiomatic expressions is that the words are used metaphorically. Therefore, the surface has a little role to play in understanding the meaning of the whole expression. For example, in 'to bury the hatchet', meaning "to become friendly again after a disagreement", the meanings of the words "to bury" and "the hatchet" are different from the meaning of the whole expression.

4.2.5 Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are the most common type of idioms in English. Many of them carry idiomatic meanings that cannot be inferred from the form, unless the phrase is already known.

E.g After war began, the two countries broke off diplomatic relations (discontinue).

Most automobile companies bring out modals each year (to show or introduce).

In addition to all these features that are important in the recognition of idioms, Baker (1992: 63 and Palmer 1997: 59) identify the grammatical and syntactic restrictions of idioms. For them, a speaker or a writer cannot normally do any of the following with an idiom:

4.2.5.1. Addition: A large number of idioms contain a verb and a noun, but although the verb may be placed in the past tense, the number of the noun can never be changed. For instance, there can be "kick/kicked the bucket, but not *kick the buckets, put on good face but not *put on good faces. Adding any word to an idiomatic expression would alter its meaning, or remove its idiomatic sense. Thus, adding the adverb 'very' to the adjective 'red' in 'red herring' (very red herring) affects the figurativeness of its meaning completely.

4.2.5.2. Deletion: Deleting the adjective 'sweet' and the article 'the' from the expressions have a sweet tooth and spill the beans would change totally their

meanings. Hence (* have a tooth and *spill beans) have no idiomatic sense.

4.2.5.3. Substitution: Idioms accept no replacement of words even if those words are synonyms. For example, "the long and short of it" means the basic facts of a situation. The adjective 'long' cannot be substituted by another adjective, like tall; despite they have nearly the same meaning.

4.2.5.4. Modification: Any change in the grammatical structure of an idiom leads to the destruction of the idiom's meaning. For instance the expression (*stock and barrel lock) is no more idiomatic because of the altered order of the items in the expression 'lock, stock and barrel' completely.

4.2.5.5 Comparative: Adding the comparative form "er" to the adjective 'hot' in the expression 'be in hot water' changes the conventional sense of the idiom which has the meaning of 'be in trouble'. Palmer (1997:58) also adds that adjective cannot be comparative as in *redder herring.

4.2.5.6. Passive: Some idioms according to Palmer (ibid) have passives, but others do not. For instance, there could be "the law was laid down", "the beans have been spilled" are all right (though some may question the latter) but * the bucket was kicked is not allowed. But in no case could we say: itwas the-beans that were spilled, law that was laid down, and bucket that was kicked).

The restrictions vary from idiom to idiom. Some are more restricted or 'frozen' than others. All these restrictions should be taken into consideration since they affect the degree of idiomaticity of lexical items, and they may remove their main features of figurativeness

4.3 Functions of Idioms

Knowledge of idiomatic expressions will ensure fluency in communication, comprehension of texts and will develop verbal and written communication skills (Irujo, 1986:287-304).

As a part of national cultural inheritance, idioms will assist in the development of cultural and intercultural knowledge and enhance learners' awareness of the ways native speakers conceptualize the surrounding world and their experiences (Yorio 1980:433-422; Yano 1998: 129-137).

Many idiomatic expressions contain metaphors in their structure; familiarity with those expressions will provide an insight into the way and the nature of thinking of native speakers (Abdranova 2012:5).

As a part of Lexis, "*idioms can serve as additional means of learning vocabulary, practicing grammar*

and improving pronunciation skills”. Thus, the importance of idioms should be accordingly estimated as far as they serve as an additional instrument for learners in obtaining L2 competence and awareness, in acquiring conversational fluency skills, and understanding the culture of the target language.

5. Yoruba Idiomatic expressions

Yorùbá language like other languages such as English and French is rich in idiomatic expressions and lends itself easily in the hands of those who know the language. Idiomatic expressions occupy a unique place in friendly, family and societal conversations, Their importance cannot be over emphasized because they add beauty to the speech that employ them, give them more knowledge and wisdom, make words better and clearer etc. Some examples of idiomatic expressions in Yoruba are:

- Fera ku= to be pregnant
- Rugi oyin= to be in trouble
- Ta teru nipa= to die
- Fori jale agbon= in trouble
- Je ori ahun= stingy
- Akara tu sepo= the secret has been leaked
- Tu ifun oro= Make unnecessary enquiry.

6. French Idiomatic expressions

French is a highly idiomatic language, relying on many culturally-specific phrases to communicate meaning. The French word for idiom, “idiotisme” which can also mean “idiocy”, is perhaps highly appropriate, since the figurative, metaphorical meanings of many French phrases are often bizarre and comic.

Some examples of French idioms are:

- Avoir la main haute= to have upper hand
- Avoir un poil dans la main= to be lazy
- Rire jaune= False laugh
- Voir la vie en rose
- Avoir du sang bleu

The above examples signify sampled idiomatic expressions in both languages (Yoruba and French), we can now go ahead to compare the use of idioms in both languages.

7. Structural Comparison of French and Yoruba Idioms

French and Yorùbá languages belong to different language families (Indo-European and Niger-Congo family). Therefore, there are certain differences in the way idioms are structured, perceived and used in the two languages. Those differences are caused by geographical, historical, political, social and cultural features of the two countries.

Structural Comparison of French and Yoruba Idioms

Group A

| S/N | Yorùbá | French | Meaning of the expressions |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Wà ní ìrowọ̀ rọ̀sẹ̀ V + Prep + adv | Etre dans ses roses V + prep + N | A state of happiness/ be at ease |
| 2 | Fì òòlù lù V + N + V | Donner le feu vert V + N + adj. | To authorise or to approve something |
| 3 | Wò tìkà – tẹ̀gbìn V + adv. | Faire un oeil noir V + N + adj | A disapproval look |
| 4 | Tú kẹ̀kẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀ V + N + N | Parler son cœur V + N | To speak for a long time on an issue |
| 5 | Tẹ ọ̀kà n`irù mólẹ̀ V + N + N + N | Tirer le diable par la queue. V + N + N | To cause a problem for one self |

Giving a close attention to the table above, it is discovered that, the idiomatic expressions in both languages have similar characteristics but differ structurally. To first talk about their similarity, the Yorùbá idiomatic expressions started with ordinary verbs and this could also be said of the French idiomatic expressions.

Group B

The categories of idiomatic expressions in this group are those with verb-nominal combinations. Their examples can be seen in the table below

| S/N | Yorùbá | French | Meaning of the expressions |
|-----|------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | Wàjà (wọ + àjà) V | Casser sa pipe V + N | To die. |
| 2 | Lawọ̀ (là+ ọ̀wó) V. | Avoir le cœur sur la main. V + N + N | To be generous. |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 3 | Fara ya (fa + ara) V + vb. | Voir rouge. V + adv. | To be angry. |
| 4 | Yínmú (yín + imú) V | Avoir quelqu'un dans le nez V + N + N | To despise someone. |
| 5 | Rérìn ín ìyàngì (rín + èrìn) V + adv. | Rire jaune V + adv | An ungeniue laughter |
| 6 | Sòjú abẹ nńkó (sọ+ojú) V + N + N | Appeler un chat un chat V + N + N | To go straight to the point that matters in a case. |
| 7 | Bẹşẹ sòrò (bá+şẹşẹ) V. + V | Prendre ses jambes à son cou. V. + N. + N. | To run away from a place. |

From the above examples, the verb nominal combinations take their cognate objects which are nouns. We can see here that, assimilation and contraction have taken place in the examples. Bámgbósé (1986:24) called these verbs “verb-nominal combinations” because verb-nominal combinations are written as single words in Yorùbá orthography, e.g. “lówó”(to be rich) and “korin” (to sing), and also very often because of the English translation of the combinations, many traditional writers on Yorùbá language regard these contracted verb-nominal combinations as verbs. (Bámgbósé, 1986: 24). The French idiomatic expressions in this second group also started with verbs in infinitive forms placed at the beginning of the sentence which is the same in Yorùbá but the cognate objects were not joined together with them.

A comparative analysis of idioms as seen above is based on a comparison of a source and target language with the aim of finding parallel lexical items. According to Kvetko (*Frazeológia 101*), idioms of two different languages can be approached either from the systematic linguistic point of view (contrastive approach) or from the point of view of translating idioms in literary texts (translation approach).

In the contrastive approach, idioms of L1 are compared with idiom of L2, the focus being placed on the mutual equivalence and language interference. Differences may occur in the form, context, meaning and usage of individual words and expressions. Contrastive phraseology reveals that when comparing idioms of two different languages, two types of equivalents are recognized – phraseological or non – phraseological (word, collocation or periphrasis). An idiom either has its idiomatic counterpart in the target language or an idiomatic equivalent is not available because it either does not exist or the reality described by the idiom is not known in the target language. Such an idiom can be then substituted by a non – idiomatic counterpart, periphrasis or calque. As far as the degree of equivalence is concerned, Kvetko proposes three basic types:

Absolute equivalence – idioms that literally correspond in several languages and come from the

same source allowing for some variations, however, mutual correspondence prevails.

Relative equivalence – idioms have identical or very close meaning on different lexical item.

Non equivalence – idioms that do not have their idiomatic equivalent and need to be substituted by a word, collocation or description.

Within the sphere of absolute and relative equivalence, Kvetko further distinguishes between the identical and close equivalence on the one hand, and partially and totally differentiated equivalent on the other hand (*Frazeológia 103*).

Based on Kvetko’s broad distinction and with regard to the continuum of absolute and relative equivalence, the degree of similarities and differences between the idiomatic expressions has been explored in this thesis. Based on the above explanation given in the text mentioned above, there is a relative equivalence between the Yorùbá idioms and their French counterparts. They have identical meanings but different lexical items.

8. Conclusion

Metaphorical expressions (MEs, hereafter) are the cream of a language. They reflect the relationship between language and culture. Metaphoricity is the main feature of all human languages. In fact, a language or any form of language, without metaphorical traits is nonexistent (Goalty, 1997 in Abass & Ghafel 2011:211). It is not confined to language. It runs through all veins of man’s everyday life, including language, thought and action.

Idiomatic expressions as a part of metaphorical expressions, on the one hand, are considered as one of the most peculiar parts of the language; and on the other hand, they are difficult because of their unpredictable meaning and grammar. The meaning of the idiomatic expressions goes beyond the meaning of each word. Idiomatic expressions, thus, require special attention in language teaching as they have been identified to be a challenge to both teachers and learners of French. It is equally discovered that, idiomatic expressions can express similar realities, aims and objectives in the two languages but their structures and lexical items may differ. The socio-

cultural and socio-linguistic realities were taken into consideration.

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