

# Intertextuality as a Didactic Game for the Teaching of Written Expression in a Class of French as a Foreign Language in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Intertextuality is a literary theory which postulates that no text is an entity. The theory formed in the 60s by Julia Kristeva postulates that every text is a collection, a mosaic of quotations from other texts. It is the effective presence of other texts in another text. Though Kristeva and all the precursors of this theory approached it in perspectives of poetics to describe the origin of a text. However, Georges Perec in his works has demonstrated the use of intertextuality as a narrative device with which he uses to write his works. It is common knowledge that teachers face a lot of problems in the teaching of writing skills so since the communicative and action-oriented approaches allows the teacher to be eclectic and creative in teaching, the main aim of this paper is to explore the possibility of using intertextuality for the teaching written expression in a class of French as a foreign language. We have discussed ways that intertextuality can be used as a didactic game to teach students to develop their writing skills. This study also teaches how transforming what one has read into writing can become a way of grasping the means of writing from the inside. Using the communicative method and leaning on the action-oriented approach, we came to the conclusion that intertextuality used as a didactic game will help learners develop implicit knowledge of the language that will enable them to participate easily and naturally in written expression in the classroom and outside.

**Keywords:** *Action-oriented approach, Communication Skills, communicative approach, Didactic Games, Intertextuality*

## Introduction

Intertextuality is a literary theory coined by Julia Kristeva in the 60s. According to Kristeva, every text is a permutation of other texts, a mosaic of quotations from other texts. Kristeva established in her theory of intertextuality that a text is constructed out of already existent discourse. Authors create their texts from compiling pre-existent texts. According to her, there is no original text, a text is “a permutation of texts “in which

several utterances, taken from other texts intersect and neutralise one another” (Kristeva, 1986, pp.36). Intertextuality serves as one of the means of formation of a literary text, as the author intentionally or not uses other people’s statements.

Intertextuality is compared to a didactic game because a didactic game is a ludic task oriented game used in the teaching of a particular subject. A didactic game is construed as some sort of game where set rules

are observed. An important aspect of the game is to achieve a strictly defined score.

According to the communication approach and the action-oriented approach, teachers of French as a foreign language are encouraged to use various teaching styles in a manner as required by the learner's needs. It is to this light that this paper considers the importance of incorporating didactic games in the classroom. Didactic games are important in enhancing memory, retention, creating positivity around the lesson, motivating students with their participation and creating a positive attitude towards learning. "Play is our brains favourite way of learning" (Ackerman, 1999).

The main aim of this paper is to contribute to the strategies of teaching and learning French language as a foreign language. This paper explores how intertextuality can be used as a didactic game in the teaching of written expression which is one of the communicative skills in the learning of French as a foreign language in Nigeria. Intertextuality is used here as an exercise in line with the communicative and action-orientated approaches approved for the teaching of language by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and adopted for the teaching of French as a foreign language in

Nigeria. The CEFR is the result of more than twenty years of research. It is a framework of reference that provides tools, guidelines, and resources for the development of language curricula, textbooks, assessments tools, and programs to support the teaching of languages.

### **Didactic games and their use in the classroom**

A didactic game is any game used by the teacher in a classroom for the purpose of impacting knowledge to the students on a given topic. A didactic game could be role-play, a song or an exercise. It is used in the learning or teaching process and always has an educational goal. A game that is an effective classroom game used to teach students in a way that even students who are unable to organize their work and depend on the teachers for instructions are carried along. It is also used to teach basic skills of reading and writing. Using games in a lesson as part of teaching and learning helps to create positivity around the lesson, motivating students with their participation and creating a positive attitude towards learning. Games can also create a positive memory and experience of learning for students in the classroom. Classroom games provide fun ways to engage students in academic learning, without them even realising!

In the teaching of French as a foreign language like in every other language there are many classroom games in existence such as the cadavre exquis, lost in the translation, anagramme, lipogramme, charades, hangman, puzzles, Pictionary, just to mention a few. In this paper we are looking at improving on already existing games by adding the use of intertextuality to the board.

Consalvo (2003) defines intertextuality in digital games as a “sophisticated understanding of the ‘text’ and its place in the greater media marketplace” (p. 327). We can apply this definition to intertextuality in classroom games. Intertextuality as a literary theory and as a tool for writing will be briefly explained before we go to the possibility of using it as a didactic game.

### **Intertextuality as a literary theory**

Intertextuality as a theory was founded by Julia Kristeva to explain how texts comprise of other texts and like every other literary theory, it is a way to critique, explain, describe, understand and identify problems of literary texts. The term “intertextuality” was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to describe the ways texts relate to and reference other texts, through devices such as allusion, quotation, pastiche, and parody. For her, the notion of intertextuality replaces the notion of

intersubjectivity, when one realizes that meaning is not transferred directly from writer to reader but instead is mediated through, or filtered by, “codes” imparted to the writer and reader by other texts. Knowledge is not simply transferred from author to reader, but its significance is instead interpreted through the lens of reader experience and cultural codes developed from other texts. Text can appear in different ways, as written words, or even as representations of such in a physical article such as clothes, sign posts, recipes, or architecture. Intertextuality can comprise an author's borrowing and transformation of a previous text or to a reader's referencing. It eradicates the traditional notions of authorship and originality. Intertextuality as a literary theory is the ways in which texts can be systematically interpreted and understood. Intertextuality as a theory has exposed us to the fact that there exists an interconnectivity between texts. In this paper the notion of intertextuality is used not as a literary theory but as a didactic game to motivate students to improve on their written expression skills.

### **Intertextuality as a tool for writing.**

Intertextuality is a sophisticated literary device used in writing. It is a textual reference within some text that reflects the text used as a reference. Instead of employing referential

phrases from different literary works, intertextuality draws upon the concept, rhetoric or ideology from other texts to be merged in the new text. It may be the retelling of an old story, or rewriting old popular stories in modern context as it is the case with James Joyce's very famous novel *Ulysses* where he retells the story of *The Odyssey*, Georges Perec uses the same style of Agatha Christie's *Neufs petits nègres* and Stendhal's *la Chartreuse de Palme* to write his book « 53 jours » (“53 days”) Intertextuality uses the reference of the full story in another text or story as its backbone.

Writers use intertextuality to tell the readers an alternative tale and also to put a spin on it in order to express the themes of power, slavery and colonialism. When readers read the new text with reflection of another literary work, all related assumptions, effects and ideas of other text provide them a different meaning and changes their interpretation of the original piece. Since readers take influence from other texts, and while reading new texts they sift through archives; this device gives them relevance and clarifies their understanding of the new texts. For writers, intertextuality allows them to open new perspectives and possibilities to construct their story. Thus, writers may explore a particular ideology in

their narrative by discussing recent rhetoric in the original text.

### **Teaching French as a foreign language in Nigeria**

Since in the 1996, the teaching of French language was made compulsory in all junior secondary schools in Nigeria but due to numerous challenges facing the teachers and students, progress is not satisfactory. Research has been going on to improve on the learning and teaching of French as a foreign language where a number of methods and approaches have been proscribed to be used in schools especially in circles of educators of teachers “formateurs des formateurs”. Research to improve the teaching and learning of French language as a foreign language is ongoing at Centres for French Teaching and documentations. There is a research centre in each of the three geopolitical zones of the country: CFTD Jos, CFTD Ibadan and CFTD Enugu where workshops are held for teacher on the amelioration of teaching the language and orientation for the teaching methodologies.

According to Noiroux and Simons (2016), teaching of foreign languages requires many techniques to support learning for the students and the support is centered on the text written by the student and corrected by the teacher. The teaching of French language cannot be

successful without written expression and the hope of achieving desirable and specific objectives in any teaching and learning depends largely on the techniques and innovation of the teacher and his ability to motivate the students.

The teaching of FLE has witnessed series of teaching approaches, from the traditional methods to the communicative approach (approches communicatives) in the 1990s and now the most recent action-oriented approach (approche actionnelle). Piccardo, E., & North, B. (2019) are of the opinion that many people seem to be convinced that language methodologies have not progressed beyond the communicative turn, and that all more recent developments are just a refinement or extension of the communicative approach and that many who are familiar with the CEFR think that it simply promotes the communicative approach and provides a set of levels to define competence in the four skills. Language activities and strategies are presented under four modes of communication in the CEFR: reception, production, interaction, and mediation.

### **Action-Oriented Approach**

The action-oriented approach (AOA) is one of the pillars of the CEFR's framework for the learning, teaching and assessment of languages which signalled a major shift in language

education, moving it away from a linear process focused mainly on language structures to one organized around completing real-life, collaborative tasks whose primary focus is not language (Council of Europe, 2020). With the AOA, users/learners don't merely learn about the language, they live the language, they have a motivation to communicate. The motivation to communicate is enhanced through having a genuine purpose: "a task to be accomplished, a problem to be resolved, an obligation to be fulfilled, or an objective to be achieved" (CEFR, 2001, pp. 10). According to Marianne Jacquin, the perspectives privileged in this recent approach is of an action-oriented type in that it considers above all, the user and the learner of the language as social actors having to accomplish tasks (which are not only linguistic ones) in certain circumstances and a given environment, within a particular field of action. For a teacher who wants to engage in this method of teaching, he will require to design a task as authentic as possible, encouraging learners to take an action as it would take place in real life, thus transforming the classroom into a kind of test laboratory which will immerse the students in an exercise preparing them to become social actors. The task should be oriented towards a concrete result and designed in a way that the students can implement a set of competences peculiar to

language communication. What should matter in the classroom is the learning process, more than the outcome. A teacher of French as a foreign language must be eclectic in motivating the right learning process in order to get the right outcome through adopting different techniques. A teacher can be eclectic only when he is constantly researching new ways of ensuring learning process and that is why in this paper the possibility of using intertextuality as a didactic game is considered.

### **Using intertextuality as a didactic game**

The CEFR suggest the use of the action-oriented approach as teaching methodology for learning languages. This approach consider the student as an active participant in the learning process and a user of the language. Communication is understood as a social activity designed to accomplish specific tasks. Following this approach the language is acquired by performing a set of meaningful tasks in a real-social environment. It is with this in mind that we are exploring the use of intertextuality as a didactic game in the teaching of written expression. Here we are going to use already existing writing games in a way that they can help in the systematic development of the four skills of language communication (reading, writing, speaking and listening) through activities (individually, in pairs or in a group), i.e. games, role-plays

and more. Literature books and storytelling have a powerful impact on learning, intertextuality used as a didactic game can show how literature can be utilized in form of games, from fairy tales to novels, to help students grow in confidence to use the language especially in written expression. Literature provides access to real materials, and social and cultural interactions in any language. There are different possible ways to make intertextuality a didactic game but we will consider incorporating it in just these six games:

#### **1. Lost in the Translation**

Here the teacher will get a quote from a French novel or a fairy tale, depending of the level of the students, and ask them to translate in English, then he will ask them to translate their English version of the quotation back into French and make similar sentences. For example let us take this quotation:

« Il y a plus de cinquante ans que Smautf est au service de Bartlebooth. Bien qu'il s'intitule lui-même maitre d'hôtel, ses fonctions ont plutôt été celles d'un valet de chambre ou d'un secrétaire : ou, plus exactement encore, des deux en même temps » (Perec, 1978, p 88).

In English my translation will be thus:

“Smautf has been working for Bartlebooth for more than fifty years. Even though he calls himself his butler, his tasks are rather that of a houseboy or of a secretary, or better still, the two in one.”

If I am translating this back into French, there are possibilities of changing some words or even meaning from the original quotation. Let us look at my possible new translation:

“Smautf travaille pour lui depuis cinquante ans, même s’il se dit son majordome, ses tâches sont plutôt celle d’un garçon de maison ou celle d’une secrétaire ou mieux encore, les deux à la fois”. The teacher can ask the students to use their understanding of this piece and write a short description of someone else in this way.

Using the lost in translation game will help build empathy with individuals who are learning a new language and empower them with a myriad of new cognitive skills. By reinforcing their narrative power, and overcoming tasks, they are challenged to obtain more words in the new language.

## 2. Le Cadavre Exquis

Le Cadavre Exquis, literally translated in English from French as exquisite cadaver, is a method by which a collection of words or images is collectively assembled. Each collaborator adds to a composition in sequence, either by following a rule. Cadavre exquis is a game in which players write in turn on a sheet of paper, fold to conceal what they have written, and pass it on to the next player it’s adapted for writing workshop. Here after dividing the students in five groups, the teacher gives each group a different passage from a novel and ask each group to choose sentences randomly from their passage, each group reads their passage and pick their sentences and pass the passage to the next group. They continue like that until each group gets back their original passages. With the sentences chosen from the passages, the teacher asks them to construct their own stories. Players contribute to a passage without seeing what the others had done. This type of exercise will motivate a very high level of participation and

cooperation. The end task is to practice written expression in the words of others. Task-based learning; moving away from teacher-centered lessons and encouraging students to work together, support and help one another are all vital components in modern language teaching today. The Exquisite Corpse game stimulates creativity through collaboration.

### 3. Rewriting a Story

The teacher gives a short story to the students and asks them to rewrite the story in their words, changing the intrigues as they want. It could be changing a tragic story into a happy ending or continuing from where the story ends. This game will help the student's imagination and literary creativity. It will help them build new words using the dictionary.

### 4. Imitation

This game is based on imitation. The teacher asks the students to imitate the way a sentence is written, or a story is written, or even an author's style of writing. For instance, based on Georges Perec's *I Remmember* the teacher asks the students to write down things they

remember following the way Perec wrote his fragmented book. Example: I remember when my French teacher taught me the song, *un drôle de restaurant*.

### 5. Dada Poem

Learning how to write with a dada poem is another intertextual didactic game that can be used for the teaching of written expression in a French class. To make a Dadaist poem, the teacher will encourage the students to do the following:

Take a newspaper.

Take a pair of scissors.

Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag.

Shake it gently.

Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag.

Copy conscientiously.

The poem will be like you.

This form of intertextual writing will help the student to learn how to write poems or stories that are infinitely

original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming.

#### 6. The Metro

The metro is an oulipien game for writing a poem. It is composed during a journey in the metro. The poet must use the following rules: board a tube train; ponder the first line of your poem as you travel to the next stop on the line; at the next stop; write down that line; as the train moves on; ponder the next line; at the next stop; write down that line; repeat this cycle throughout the journey; if changing trains, allow yourself a new stanza; at your destination, alight and write down the final line

Since we are where there are no trains, we can use our means of transportation to construct this type of poem. Let's take the bus then. The number of stops will determine the number of lines. If you change bus before getting to your destination, start another stanza. The number of buses you enter gives you the number of stanzas.

There are a whole lot of other existing didactic games that intertextuality can be introduced into to make very interesting games for the teaching/learning of written expression in a class of FLE but we will limit to these few. In summary, intertextuality is the use of borrowed words and in conjunction with the

task oriented teaching approach for FLE which upholds eclecticism in teaching, intertextuality is considered to be a useful practice in the classroom as a didactic game for the learning of French as a foreign language in Nigeria.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The aim of teaching foreign language is to realize the four competencies in language studies which are the ability to read, the ability to write, the ability to speak and the ability to understand. Achieving this goals depends on the creativity of the teacher. Having explored the possibilities of using intertextuality as a didactic game for the teaching of written comprehension, we have concluded that using intertextuality will impact in many ways the teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria as enumerated below:

- i. Increase confidence in using different techniques to teach French as a foreign language
- ii. Enhance methodological approaches for classroom practice and management
- iii. Better understanding of students' needs and behaviour in the classroom
- iv. Improve French language skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening, fluency and accuracy
- v. Acquisition of techniques to improve students' motivation and the role of learner autonomy in language learning

- vi. Enhance teamwork and interpersonal abilities
- vii. It will help Improve the teacher's knowledge in using technological software, hardware and the internet as a teaching resource especially by exploiting texts as a language teaching resource
- viii. Increase knowledge of French culture and literature.
- ix. It will help learners develop implicit knowledge of the language that will enable them to participate easily and naturally in communication. The learners get the form and use of the target language without being explicitly taught. The role of the teacher is to design tasks by replicating and creating the conditions for language learning and for communication that exists outside the confines of the classroom. The aim is that the learners' interlanguage will gain implicit language knowledge while doing tasks.
- x. Much of our everyday learning is incidental. The didactic game provides opportunities for unplanned learning. Completing a real-world task allows the acquisition to take place without any deliberate intention on the part of the learner or the teacher.
- xi. Meaningful communication occur during the accomplishment of tasks.

It is highly recommended that teachers use intertextuality as a didactic game in class not only for the teaching of written expression but for all the other language communicative skills, namely, oral expression, written comprehension and oral comprehension. Teachers should exploit texts from all forms of literature in order to be creative in their use of the Action-Oriented approach for the teaching of FLE. Seeing learners as “social agents” puts them at the center of learning. It implies actively involving them in the learning process and allowing them to use all their resources to accomplish the task. It also requires recognizing the social nature of language use, in which meaning is co-constructed, and the interaction that occurs between the social and individual dimensions in the learning process (Council of Europe, 2020).

What makes a task action-oriented is when the situation is authentic, there is an open-ended task to be completed and it involves an interaction (meaningful communication!) Nowadays the real-social environment of our students includes the interaction through social networks. They have grown up using technology and they are used to social-networking technology in their daily lives as a way of communication. Social networking is not limited to the personal sphere, it can be used to collect authentic material that can be

used for the didactic games. Intertextuality as a didactic game a very important game for the learning of French language as a foreign language especially with the pronouncement of the action-oriented approach by the Common

European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as the approved methodology for the teaching of French as a Foreign Language.

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