

High and Low in Contemporary French: A Syntactic Study

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Abstract:

In France, two distinct varieties of the French language are used. The two varieties serve different social functions. One variety, referred to as High (H), is used only under formal and public circumstances, while the other one, called Low (L), is used in normal daily-life events. The two varieties are largely overlapping, but not totally identical. The (L) is acquired in early childhood, while the (H) is learned at school, after the age of 6. This socio-linguistic phenomenon is called diglossia. The present article, aims to compare the syntactic differences between the Low and High varieties in the contemporary French. To this end, felicitous data, collected from the two varieties, are compared and classified within the framework of Surface Strategy Taxonomy.

Key words: *Diglossia, High, Low, Language variety, Surface Strategy Taxonomy.*

1. Introduction

French people develop two varieties of the French language. The two varieties are massively overlapping but not identical. They are used in different social settings. One variety, marked High (H), is used only on formal and public occasions, such academic lectures, church sermons, Judicial verdicts and so on, while the other one, marked Low variety (L), is used under normal, everyday circumstances. The (L) is acquired in early childhood, while the (H) is learned at school, after the age of 6. This phenomenon is called *Diglossia*. The present article aims at a surface register contrastive analysis of the Low and High varieties in contemporary French.

2. Literature Review

The term "Diglossia" was first introduced into the literature by Ferguson (1959). He identified Diglossia as a distinctive phenomenon. i.e., "a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards),

there is a very divergent, highly coded (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety" (p. 336). In other words, diglossia is "a particular kind of language standardization where two distinct varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the speech community (not just in the case of a particular group of speakers, such as Scots or Blacks) and where each of the two varieties is assigned a definite social function" (Trudgil, 2009, p. 113).

A key point is that in diglossia "One variety, referred to as Low (L), is used at home or in other informal situations, however, if someone needs to give a lecture at a university or in any formal circumstance, (s)he is expected to use the other variety, referred to as High (H). The two "varieties cannot be interchangeably used.]..... [You do not use an H variety in circumstances calling for an L variety, e.g. for addressing a servant; nor does one use an L variety when an H variety is called for, e.g., for writing a serious work of literature" (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 90).

In a diglossic situation "most linguistic items belong to one of the two non-overlapping sets" (Hudson, 2005: 55). The differences between H and L are manifested in (1) grammar, (2) lexicon and (3) phonology. According to Dittmar (2000):

"1-L has fewer grammatical (morphological) categories and a reduced system of inflection; H has a greater grammatical (morphological) complexity.

2- H and L have, in the main, a complementary lexicon. It is a particular characteristic of the diglossic situation that pairs are used situation-specifically with the same meaning in the H variety and the L variety.

3- H and L share one single phonological system, in which the L phonology represents the basic system and the deviant characteristics of the H phonology from a subsystem or parasystem"(p.120).

Fishman (1971, p. 75) refers to Paraguay as an example of a diglossic community, in which the two varieties do not belong to one language, but are Spanish and Guarani. However, the most notorious example of a diglossic situation is an Arabic speaking community. In an Arabic-speaking diglossic community, the two varieties are, on the one hand, Standard Arabic (H) and, on the other, the various regional colloquial Arabic dialects (L). For example, this "diglossic situation may also be found in Egypt, where both classical Arabic and colloquial Arabic is used" (Finch, 2005, p. 214). "Dialects of Arabic form a roughly continuous spectrum of variation, with the dialects spoken in the eastern and western extremes of the Arab-speaking world being mutually unintelligible" (Watson, 2002, p. 8).

2.1. Surface Strategy Taxonomy

Researchers have noticed that surface elements of a language are changed in specific and systematic ways. "Surface strategy taxonomy highlights the ways surface structures are altered:

Learners may omit necessary items or add unnecessary ones; they may misformed items or misorder them" (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p. 150). According to the Surface Strategy

Taxonomy, errors are divided into the following categories: (1) omission, (2) additions, (3) misformation, and (4) misordering. (Dulay et al, 1982, p. 155).

3. Data of the Study

The data of the Low variety are mainly collated from French-speaking media. They are assessed against well-formed sentences of the standard French (the High variety) as per reliable French language books.

4- Scope and Method

The sentences violating the syntactic rules of the Standard French were detected and collected. The violations of the standard rules were categorized according to the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, a perspective which "highlights the ways surface structures are altered" (Dulay et al, 1982, p.150). Classifying linguistic items according to the surface strategy taxonomy helps researchers analyze linguistic alterations, in more details. "Learners may omit necessary items or add unnecessary ones; they may misform items or misorder them" (Dulay et al, 1982, p. 150). To this end, (1) The Colloquial French sentences, labeled (**CF**), were introduced on the left, (2), on the right, the corresponding standard French sentences, reconstructed according to the patterns introduced by French reliable sources were shown under the label (**SF**), (3), sentences, being maintained syntactically, were simplified lexically for the ease of argumentation, (4), a rough literal (morpheme-based) translation of the (French) examples into English was added, to help the non-French speaking reader follow the discussions, (5) the English translation of the French examples was given under (**ET**), and when needed, (6) necessary explanations were provided.

5. Data Analysis

Classifying linguistic items according to the surface strategy taxonomy helps researchers analyze linguistic alterations, in more details. "Learners may omit necessary items or add unnecessary ones; they may misform items or misorder them" (Dulay et al, 1982, p. 150). In other words, according to the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, errors are divided into the following categories: (1) omission, (2) additions, (3) misformation, and (4) misordering. (Dulay et al 1982, p. 155)

5.1. Omission

Omission means that an item which must be present in a well-formed utterance is absent. There is an evidence that grammatical morphemes (e.g. noun and verb inflections, articles, prepositions) are omitted more often than content morphemes which carry the meaning (Dulay et al, 1982, p. 154-155). For instance, in the sentence **My father plumber* the grammatical morphemes *is* and *a* are omitted.

5.1.1. Negative Element Omission

CF

(1) Jean ø vient pas
Jean comes not.

SF

Jean ne vient pas.
Jean NEG comes not.

ET: Jean is not coming.

5.1.2. Reflexive Pronoun Omission

CF

(2) Je ø lave les mains
I wash my hands.

SF

Je me lave les mains.
I me wash my hands.

ET: I me wash my hands.

5.1.3. Definite Article Omission

(3) C'est le pont ø plus vieux de la ville.
This-is the bridge oldest of the city.

C'est le pont le plus vieux de la ville.
This-is the bridge the oldest of the city.

ET: This is the oldest bridge of the city.

It is worth mentioning that the deletion of the definite article "la" in (13) alters the superlative adjective to a comparative one, and does not necessarily make the sentence ungrammatical.

5.2. Addition

Addition is the opposite of omission. It means the presence of an extra item which mustn't be present in a well formed utterance is characteristic for additions (Dulay et al, 1982, p. 156). Dulay et al. divide additions into three categories: (a) double markings, as in **Did you went there?*, (b) regularization, e.g. **sheeps*, **cutted*, and (c) simple addition, which contains the rest of additions (1982, p. 156-158).

5.2.1. Pronoun Addition

CF

(5) On fait beaucoup de ski en Suède, on pratique aussi beaucoup d'autres sports.

One does very much of ski in Sweden, one practices also very much of -other-PL sports.

SF

On fait beaucoup de ski en Suède, ou pratique aussi beaucoup d'autres sports.

One does very much of ski in Sweden, or practices also very much of -other-PL sports.

ET: One does ski in Sweden, or practices other sports very much.

5.3. Misformation

Misformation refers to “the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure” (Dulay et al, 1982, p.158). There are three types as well: (a) In regularizations an irregular marker is replaced by a regular one, as in **sheeps* for sheep: (b) Archi-forms refer to the use of one member of a class of forms instead of using all the members, e.g. using *this* in the situations when either *this* or *these* should be used. (c) Alternating forms are represented by “free alternation of various members of a class with each other”, as in **those dog* and *this cat* used by the same learner (Dulay et al. (1982, p. 157).

5.3.1. Erronous Adverb

CF

(6) Il n'a pas déjà réservé sa place.

He NEG' has not already reserved his place.
reserved his place.

SF

Il n'a pas encore réservé sa place.

He NEG' has not yet

ET: He has not reserved his place yet.

CF

(7) C'est un homme bien connu.

This-is a man well known.

SF

C'est un homme très connu.

This-is a man very known.

ET: This is a well-known man.

CF

(8) J'ai visitée le Musée du Louvre aussi le Musée d'Orsay.

I've visited the museum of the Louvre also the museum of the Orsay.

SF

J'ai visité le Musée du Louvre ainsi que le Musée d'Orsay.

I've visited the museum of the Louvre as well as the museum of the Orsay

ET: I (have) visited the museum of the Louvre as well as the museum of the Orsay

5.3.2. Erronous Preposition

CF

- (9) Voir un film sur la télévision.
See a film on the television.

SF

- Voir un film à la télévision
See a film at the television.

ET: Watch a film on television

- (10) C'est l'étudiant le plus grand dans la classe. C'est l'étudiant le plus grand de la classe.
This is the student the tallest in the class. This is the student the tallest of the class.

ET: This is the tallest student of the class.

- (11) Chez la famille Gandhi.
Near the family Gandhi

- Dans la famille Gandhi.
In the family Gandhi

ET: In the Gandhis.

CF

- (12) L'auteur du crime est un mineur, par conséquence le procès se tient à huis close.
The perpetrator of–the crime is a minor, by consequence the trail is held at camera

SF

- L'auteur du crime est un mineur, en conséquence le procès se tient à huis close.
The perpetrator of–the crime is a minor, as consequence the trail is held at camera

ET: The perpetrator of the crime is a minor. As a consequence, the trail is held in camera.

5.3.3. Erronous Verb

CF

- (13) Il a eu beau faire de nombreuses démarches, il n'a pas gagné de visa pour ce pays en guerre.

This journalist has had well done of numerous steps, he NEG-has no gained of visa for this country on war

SF

Il a eu beau faire de nombreuses démarches, il n'a pas obtenu de visa pour ce pays en guerre.
This journalist has had well done of numerous steps, he NEG-has no gained of visa for this country on war

ET: He has well had taken numerous steps, but he has not obtained any visa for this warring country.

CF

- (14) Le temps fait beau.
The weather does nice.

SF

- Le temps est beau.
The weather is nice.

ET: The weather is nice.

In French, the weather can be described two ways. If the subject is the NP "Le temps" (meaning the weather) it occurs with verb is "est" (= is), however, if the pronoun "Il" (=it) is used instead, it occurs with the verb "fait" (= makes), and the reverse results in ungrammatical sentences.

- (15) Il fait beau. = Le temps est beau.
(16) * Le temps fait beau.
(17) * Il est beau.

5.3.4. Erroneous Tense**CF**

- (18) Patrice était en Espagne, il y avait deux ans.
Patrice was in Spain, it there had two years.
years.

SF

- Patrice était en Espagne, il y a deux ans.
Patrice was in Spain, it there has two years.

ET: Patrice was to Spain, two years ago.

The source of error in (18) is the fact that the linguistic form "il y a" (literary *it there has*), has two functions; it can mean "There is" if it occurs in the beginning of a sentence:

- (19) Il y a vraiment beaucoup de monde à la plage.
There are really many people on the beach.

(20) Il y avait vraiment beaucoup de monde à la plage.
There are really many people on the beach.

However, if it occurs before a time quantity as in (18), it functions as a preposition meaning "ago", which does not undergo any change with regard to the tense.

CF

- (21) Mon père longtemps travaillait à l'étranger comme conseiller militaire.
My father longtime worked at the abroad as advisor military.

SF

Mon père a longtemps travaillé à l'étranger comme conseiller militaire.

My father has longtime worked at the abroad as advisor military.

ET: My father worked abroad as a military advisor for a long time.

5.3.5. Inappropriate Voice**CF**

(22) J'ai été demandé de venir par le directeur.
I've been asked of come-INF by the director.
INF.

SF

Le directeur m'a demandé de venir.
The director me has asked of come-

ET: The director asked me to come.

(23) J'ai été offert un foulard.
I've been offered a scarf.

On m'a offert un foulard.
One me-has offered a scarf.

ET: Someone has offered me a scarf.

Sentences (22 CF) and (23 CF) are not ungrammatical, though in French "it is preferred not to use the passive form when the agent complement is a personal pronoun"(Dlatour, et all, 2007, p. 104, my translation from French).

5.3.6. Subject-verb Non-agreement**CF**

(24) Ma famille étaient à Paris.
My family were at Paris.

SF

Ma famille était à Paris.
My family was at Paris.

ET: My family was to Paris.

(25) C'est Marc et moi qui ont fait ça.
That's Mark and me who have-THEY done that.
that.

C'est Marc et moi qui avons fait ça.
That's Mark and me who have-WE done

ET: It's Mark and me who did that.

5.3.7. Erroneous Connective**CF**

(26) Le voleur a pris les bijoux cependant tout le monde dormait.

The thief has taken the jewels yet that all the world slept.

SF

Le voleur a pris les bijoux pendant que tout le monde dormait.

The thief has taken the jewels while that all the world slept.

ET: The thief took jewels when all the world slept.

5.3.8. Using Interrogative Word for Connective

(27) Il demande est-ce qu'il pleut.

He asks is-it that it rains.

Il demande s'il pleut.

He asks if-it rains.

ET: He wants to know whether it's raining.

5.4. Misordering

Misordering happens where a morpheme or a group of them is incorrectly placed, as in **I get up at 6 o'clock always*, where *always* is misordered (Dulay et al. 1982: 162).

5.4.1. Misordered Adverb

CF

(28) Toujours il vient à midi.

Always he comes at noon. He comes always at noon.

SF

Il vient toujours à midi.

ET: He always comes at noon.

(29) Je souvent fais cette faute.

I often make this mistake.

Je fais souvent cette faute.

I make often this mistake.

ET: I often make this mistake.

(30) Peut-être il viendra demain.

Maybe he will come tomorrow

Il viendra peut-être demain.

He will come maybe tomorrow.

ET: Maybe he will come tomorrow.

(31) Ils sont souvent sortis ensemble.

They are often left-Pl. together.

Ils sont sortis souvent ensemble.

They are left-Pl. often together.

ET: They often go out together.

5.4.2. Misordered Pronoun

<u>CF</u>	<u>SF</u>
(32) Je <u>la</u> sais faire.	Je sais la faire.
I it know do.	I know it do.
<u>ET</u> : I know how to do it.	

6. Conclusions

The data of the study manifest a good number of differences between Standard and Colloquial French. The errors made in Colloquial French were of the four main categories of Omission, Addition, Misformation and Misordering. The Omission errors included the Omission of Negative Element, Reflexive Pronoun and Superlative Article. The Additions Errors were the addition of Interrogative Word and Pronoun. The Misformation errors found were Erroneous Adverb, Verb, Preposition, Inappropriate Tense and Voice, and Subject-Verb Non-agreement. Misordering errors included Misordered Adverb and pronoun.

7. Suggestion for Further Studies

Differences between the High and Low, referred to as Diglossia, is not limited to French. Studies on the Diglossic situation in other languages such as Persian, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, etc. is suggested

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