

**UTILISATION OF THE FRENCH BANDE DESSINÉE AND THE JAPANESE MANGA
AND ANIME AS PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS**

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Abstract

Comic books called Bandes Dessinées in French are effective instructional aids in a language class. The Communicative Approach methodology of teaching the French language often employs them as “Document authentique”. The French Bande Dessinée, such as Spirou, Papyrus, and Astérix et Obélix, among others, rivals the Japanese Manga such as Naruto and Sasuke, among others. This paper explores the pedagogical dynamics of these comic books in the acquisition of foreign languages such as French and Japanese in Nigerian schools. The paper identifies problems such as misappropriation of comics as instructional materials and inaccessibility of editions. The paper also recommends pedagogical workshops for teachers and liaison with the linguistic and cultural centres of the foreign languages, as possible solutions to some of the problems.

Keywords: *Bande Dessinée, Manga, Anime, pedagogical material, Nigerian schools.*

Introduction

When we were young, we usually gravitated towards anything that has to do with comic books or cartoons (FluentU, 2019). Even now, recent discovery focuses on making learning fun through the use of cartoons and comics, in this case the French Bande dessinée and the Japanese Manga and Anime. This subject is trending, and the internet is replete with various endeavours of attempting to teach foreign languages through the use of this medium. Currently in Japan, ‘One Piece’, a Japanese Anime and Manga, has over 300 million viewers, while in France, Astérix tops the animation chart (Jessica, 2014; Houy, 2019). This paper lends its voice to the use of this medium in foreign language acquisition in Nigeria. Already there is an ongoing project to theorise the

learning of language through Manga. The theory is known as the ‘Soft Power Pedagogy’ (Armour, 2011).

Definitions of terms employed

For clarity in this paper, contextual definitions of the terms employed are rendered as follows:

Bande Dessinée

Grove (2010) defines Bande dessinée’ as “French language mixture of images and written text that together form a narrative.” They are comics that are originally in the French language, and abbreviated as BD. They are mostly created for readership in France and Belgium. Popular examples are Astérix, Les Aventures de Tintin, Spirou et Fantasio, Lucky Luke, and Papyrus among so many others.

Manga and Anime

Manga is essentially a Japanese comic book or graphic novel made in Japan, or created by a person using the Japanese language and adhering to a method developed in Japan in the 19th century. Manga cuts across the young and older generations as a genre. In scope, Manga has gone beyond Japan to become an Asian heritage. They are sometimes influenced by the West in theme and style. Anime is hand-drawn and computer-generated animation that is originally from or linked to Japan. It is usually the animated version (cartoons) of the most popular Manga, but is not limited to Manga. (Yamamoto, 2023; Lent, 2015; Gravett, 2004)

Pedagogical Materials

Eboh (2005), quoted in Inyang-Abia (1988), as defining pedagogical materials to be:

All the resources which may be used by the teacher or learner, in isolation or in combination formally or informally, to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills or values. These included messages, people, materials, devices, techniques and the environment.

The communicative method/approach

This method was introduced in the early eighties, and it is the most recent. It is arguably the most effective and beloved, in the sense that it combines all the strengths of the former methods and none of their weaknesses. The method allows for occasional translation via gestures and guesses; it downplays rigorous grammatical rules, allowing the learners to discover the rules for themselves. It employs the use of various audio-visual materials earlier mentioned, and ultimately focuses on the learner’s need to communicate, rather than forcibly construct endless incoherent grammatical sentences. It dwells more on meaning than structure, allowing learners to

communicate first before mastering grammatical rules. With this method, learners can acquire proficiency faster with fewer linguistic inhibitions. Commenting on the efficacy of this method, Yekini (2011) observed in Yekini (2004):

This fourth method takes so much into consideration, which allows for simplification while maximising proficiency. It also underplays aspects of language that had served as obstacles in previous methods.

Documents Authentiques

These are print or audio-visual materials that are not pre-fabricated for use in the classroom, but are used as pedagogical aids for the facilitation of learning (Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD), 2004; Onimole, 2000).

Nigerian schools

In the context of this paper, Nigerian schools mean both public and private schools, from nursery to tertiary levels of education.

The inadmissibility of comic books and cartoons as serious academic resources and references has shortchanged academia and deprived it of access to these great sources of information and knowledge. The growing spirit of the ‘brave new world’ is breaking down barriers and removing limitations in the modes and means of carrying out research in contemporary times. One such is the consideration of cartoons and comic books as texts, albeit meta-texts. Not so long ago, social media also made its incursion into academia as valid and acceptable sources of literary references in serious writings and oration. Before now, materials fabricated for pedagogy such as realia, print and audio-visual aids are common in language classes. The use of comic strips or animations that were not intended for the classroom as instructional materials was unheard of. Until recently, when *Bande Dessinée* (BD) such as *Astérix*, *Les Aventures de Tintin*, *Spirou et Fantasio*, *Lucky Luke* and *Papyrus* among so many others, started appearing as instructional aids in language classes. Likewise, *Mangas* and *Animes* too became increasingly favoured as language learning resources all over Japan and beyond. Among such *Mangas* and *Animes* are *One Piece*, *Golgo*, *Detective Conan*, *Doraemon*, *The First Step*, *Naruto*, and *Sasuke* among others (FluentU, 2019)

This paper looks at the implications of employing comic books in the teaching of the French and Japanese languages. It explores the gap created through the wrong methodology of using comic books as teaching aids, and the gap created by limiting language teaching only to pre-fabricated teaching materials/aids. “Documents Authentiques” have to their advantage the element of surprise, adventure, curiosity, and innovation compared to the teacher’s usual or traditional instructional materials. They create a sense of uniqueness and reality in the teaching of language

in the classroom. They add authenticity and validity to the teaching, since the materials were not initially conceived for the classroom.

These instructional aids in the language class often include the *Bande dessinée* or comic strips, which combine graphic features that are pleasing to the eyes and are easy to read. People would often read or study materials just because they are illustrated in cartoon forms. This quality of comic books makes it a favourite as a teaching aid in a language class. Various French and Japanese websites and social media platforms, such as the Japanese MOFA and French Teacher Carlito on YouTube, employ comic strips and cartoons to pass across information or teach the populace.

Approaches Communicative and Soft Power Pedagogy as viable Teaching Methodology

Where a tutor lacks the proper approach to teaching the language, a learner can easily lose interest, get discouraged, and eventually drop out of the proficiency class. Various methods over the years have been experimented with in order to obtain the best result. From the traditional method of the Middle Ages to the contemporary and more effective communicative method or approach, a balance has been struck. The erstwhile impediments that made language appear difficult to learn, such as the “No Translation” and the “No Mother Tongue” policy of the Direct Method of teaching, have been underplayed. Also, the incessant structural and grammatical drills in language learning have been circumvented. Now, with the combination of Audio-visual aids and the unrestricted communication between the teacher and the learner, a beginner can attain mid-level proficiency in no time. The challenge of ascertaining the right methodology in language acquisition lies in the domain of the instructor. Yekini (2011) posits:

The place of the teaching methodology cannot be Overemphasized, since learners feed mostly off the teacher’s competency to teach. The preparedness of the teacher must meet with the learner’s Readiness. The pedagogic aura of the teacher must meet his prowess and ability to impart effectively via a time tested and result trusted methodology.

There is an ongoing project to theorise the use of Manga and Anime as teaching methodology in language teaching and learning. William Spencer Armour of the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia looks into the pedagogy of language through comic books such as Manga. He identifies Manga and Anime as great resources for “curriculum designers, material developers and classroom teachers” (Armour, 2011).

Through Manga and Anime, learners could learn intermediate-level Japanese. This methodology improves learners’ reading, listening, and speaking proficiencies. The methodology aims at increasing learners’ vocabulary scope by associating sounds and images, which triggers speech acts. The use of grammar skills is also taught through this methodology (Institute for the International Education of Students, 2019). This method of teaching Japanese also employs ‘Role-

plays', just as the Approche Communicative calls it "Jeu de rôles". They also share features such as conversation practice and fixation via repetitions of sentences in dialogues. Approche Communicative also focuses language acquisition through "Les Quatres Compétences" which are the four basic language skills: Expression Orale (E.O)/Oral Expression, Expression Écrite (E.E)/Written Expression, Compréhension Orale (C.O)/Oral Comprehension, and Compréhension Écrite (C.E.)/Written Comprehension (Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD), 2004). Both French and Japanese languages use similar methodologies to teach these linguistic competences.

Many foreigners have mastered Japanese speaking through exchange programmes, Manga, and television programmes. Also, Manga and Anime are very effective resources for foreigners to learn the Japanese language. Testimonies abound on the ease with which readers of Manga comics and watchers of Anime pick up the language. Since Manga have more pictures than words, mimesis makes it easier to teach Japanese. This makes it a perfect tool for teaching Japanese to language learners. Textbooks use more words than pictures to teach language, which could be tiring and difficult. In recent times, language learning textbooks adopt the incorporation of comics and animation (C.D. Rom) in their teaching methodology, and among such textbooks for the learning of the French language are Nouveau Sans Frontier, Studio 100, Café Crème, Tempo and Panorama, among others. Many of the textbooks are authored with the consciousness of the "Couleurs Locales" [local colours], and the African reality and peculiarities in mind. Following the huge success of the illustrated text "Le Petit Nicolas" ["Little Nicholas" in Europe and the United States], the comic character created by René Goscinny and Jean-Jacques Sempé (1994) has been adapted into a French language teaching methodology globally.

Manga's acceptance by both the younger and older generations makes it socially compliant with both age groups. Manga uses short sentences that carry illustrations of speech acts. Bande dessinée also uses what is called "Acte de Parole" [Speech Act]. This simplifies communication into simple words and expressions, while downplaying the rigorous grammatical rules that characterize language classes. In addition, Manga uses Furigana, a reading aid that facilitates correct pronunciation of words. Although it is often used for young Japanese learners, it is very helpful for foreigners. For Anglophone learners of French as a Foreign Language [Français Langue Étrangère (FLE)], language teachers also employ a type of furigana, in the use of phonetic elements to aid reading or pronunciation of words. The curriculum for French language proficiency acquisition developed by the CFTD, which employs "Acte de parole" in Approche Communicative, targets easier mastery of beginners without the habitual language acquisition impediments.

Moreover, the stories in the comic books and animations are quite interesting and engaging; hence, readers of all ages enjoy them and learn vocabulary from them.

FluentU (2019), an online language learning site, uses Manga and Anime as language teaching resources. It prescribes six easy steps to learning Japanese through the use of manga. FluentU

advises that the learner familiarizes themselves with an entire Manga book. Secondly, the learner searches for Japanese vocabulary in the Manga. Thirdly, taking reusable notes as the Manga is read. Fourthly, rereading the Manga with better understanding due to the taken notes. Fifthly, reading the Manga without notes and finally allowing some time to pass and re-reading the Manga book again (without notes).

Benefits of Bande Dessinée and Manga to the teaching of indigenous Nigerian languages

The aim is to render language learning easier and fun; the Institute for the International Education of Students (2019) and FluentU (2019) agree with Armour (2011) on this. Armour foregrounded the contest of efficacy between text-based learning resources and those that use Manga and Anime. In the use of Manga and Anime in a language teaching class, Armour identifies authenticity, the rapport of the teaching material (Manga or Anime) with the learning of the language by learners, especially as not all Manga or Anime are designed for the classroom. He highlighted the construction of the identities of the learner and the teacher via the use of Manga, since foreigners relate differently to language learning experiences. Soft Power Pedagogy as a methodology is used to teach both language and culture (Armour, 2014).

Recommendations

In light of the ongoing, the following suggestions are given as recommendations for easier language acquisition and proficiency through the use of Bande Dessinée (BD), Manga and Anime:

1. African educators and researchers should pick up the challenge to develop language teaching methodologies and theories that account for African realities and peculiarities, just like researchers like Armour (2011).
2. Since indigenous Nigerian Comic books and Cartoons exist, an incorporation of the use of comics and cartoons into the indigenous language teaching methodology is suggested. The world is discovering more effective language teaching and learning resources in this era of New Media. As text-based language learning textbooks are fast becoming obsolete, Nigerian curriculum designers, material developers, and teachers are therefore encouraged to upgrade to this method.
3. Parents should encourage their children to learn foreign languages such as French and Japanese through the reading of Bande Dessinée and Manga comics, and the watching of anime, rather than seeing these resources as mere entertainment.
4. Language learners of all ages and levels should consider comics and cartoons as resources that facilitate language learning, and should therefore take advantage of them.
5. Curriculum and teaching materials developers, teachers, and learners should be careful and intentional in their choice of Manga and Anime. In order to avoid unnecessary cultural conflicts and shocks, adequate knowledge of Manga and Anime is required by the language teacher. Armour (2011) cited such challenges in the conversation between a French learner of Japanese and her indigenous Japanese teacher.

Conclusion

A paradigm shift is necessary in the language teaching and learning methodology in Nigeria, and the use of Bande Dessinée and Manga comics could be the means to achieve this. Positive, remarkable results in this methodology of teaching language across the world, from Japan to Europe and the United States, are a testament to its effectiveness. All language learning actors and stakeholders in Nigeria are expected to key into this innovation and improve language learning efforts in the nation. Moreover, multimedia resources are available in print and audio-visuals, even on the internet. Material support abounds on the net for the endeavour of upgrading the language learning methodology to include BD, Manga and Anime.

However, as much as the peculiarities of foreigners often clash with the perks in foreign languages, curriculum and teaching materials developers, teachers and learners alike should be careful in the choice of comics and cartoons adopted as instructional aids in language classes.

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