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An Assessment of Social Interaction Responsiveness of Selected Online Resources for French Vocabulary Learning by Foreign Learners

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the appropriateness of Internet-based learning resources in the acquisition of French vocabulary by foreign learners using the framework of the social interaction theory of learning. Five online French language learning platforms are randomly selected and an assessment of their responsiveness to the framework of the social interaction theory of foreign language learning is carried out. Findings show that the five online resources, although not on the same level of interactive effectiveness, would be of great assistance to foreign learners of French in their quest to acquire adequate vocabulary. Finally, far-reaching recommendations are made to developers of online vocabulary learning resources on how to best present their learning contents for optimal results. Recommendations are also made to French teachers and learners on ways by which the use of online platforms can be optimally utilized to facilitate the acquisition of French vocabulary.

Key Words: Social interaction, more knowledgeable others, zone of proximal development, French vocabulary, online learning resources.

1. Introduction

The question of Language acquisition / learning process has always attracted the attention of great scholars since the days of Lev Vygotsky through Burrhus Skinner to Noam Chomsky. The consensus that can be deduced from the perspectives of these scholars is that language development in both children and adults is a function of the mutuality of biological and sociocultural factors: biological because every child born to this world comes with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which enables him or her to acquire any language at all, and sociocultural because the biological device needs a conducive social environment to produce expected linguistic results. Very critical to foreign language learning, therefore, is the availability of appropriate sociolinguistic atmosphere that can facilitate the learner's interactive task. How can the Internet provide the much-needed sociolinguistic

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environment for a foreign learner of French to acquire adequate vocabulary? This is the research question that forms the basis for this study. The guiding hypothesis here is that the Internet has the capacity to facilitate an interactive vocabulary acquisition by individuals who learn French as a foreign language.

Generally, the use of technology in foreign language teaching and learning dates to the 60s with the use of audio-based language laboratories (Singhal, 1997). However, in recent times, language learning tools developers have gone beyond audio-based devices to integrating the multimedia characteristics of the Internet in developing their tools. Arguably, the Internet appears to be the latest in the series of the new technologies of information and communication and has today become an indefatigable tool in the hands of practitioners in practically every sphere of human endeavours, the teaching and learning of foreign languages not exempted. From the standpoint of the cumbersome nature of learning a foreign language, scholars have since the 80s been exploring the roles the Internet can play in simplifying the tasks of learners. In the same vein, many online language learning tools have been developed. Commenting on the use of ICTs in foreign language teaching, Padurean and Margan (2009:100) suggested four fundamental advantages they have over traditional classrooms: capacity to control presentation (which marks the difference between computers and books), novelty and creativity (a teacher can use various materials for each lesson), feedback (the computer interacts with learners by giving immediate response to their activities), and adaptability (teachers adapt computer programmes to suit learners' need per time). Although these advantages were not specifically attributed to the Internet, but generally to computers, it must be pointed out that it is only through the paraphernalia of the Internet that the four functions can be optimally realized. The advantages mentioned above are substantially in line with the views of other experts (Blake, 2000; Warschauer, 2001; Wang, 2006; Nguyen, 2011; Barrs, 2012, just to mention a few). Particularly on the implication of the Internet for vocabulary acquisition by foreign language learners, Abraham (2008) reported that computer-mediated glosses had a large effect on incidental vocabulary learning.

Arising from the foregoing, the overall objective of this paper essentially is to examine the social interaction characteristics of online vocabulary acquisition platforms designed for learners of French as a foreign language. The study begins with a literature review of social interaction theory of foreign language learning in general and vocabulary acquisition, in particular, and then the place of vocabulary acquisition in foreign language learning as well as the Internet-based approach to vocabulary acquisition in foreign language learning. At the core of the study, the authors assess five Internet-based resources devoted to the learning of French vocabulary in order to probe their appropriateness to facilitate the vocabulary acquisition task of learners of French as a foreign language in line with the theoretical framework of social interaction in foreign language learning. The study concludes with recommendations, firstly, to online vocabulary portal developers on how to develop online learning resources that could guarantee optimal development of learners and secondly, to teachers and learners of French as a foreign language on how best the examined platforms, and similar others, can be used to maximize the teaching and learning of French vocabulary.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In this section, a review of relevant literature is carried out to clearly delineate the research domain of the study and to take a cursory look at the works already done in this area of research. Conceptual and theoretical issues which include social interaction theory of foreign language learning, the place of

vocabulary in language learning and the Internet-based approach to vocabulary acquisition in foreign language learning are reviewed using the works available to the authors.

2.1. Social Interaction Theory of Foreign Language Learning

The social interaction theory is one of the numerous language acquisition theories which emphasize how children and adults learn language. This theory, in particular, looks at the interface between environmental and socio-biological factors in the process of acquiring a language.

The social interaction theory of learning, in general, can be traced to the Soviet Lev Vygotsky (1978) who developed sociocultural principles of learning which include principally the principle of social interaction (SI), and complementarily the two principles of more knowledgeable other (MKO) and zone of proximal development (ZDP). The totality of these principles is to the effect that language acquisition / learning is a cognitive phenomenon and that cognition matures in learners when they have the opportunities of interacting with others who are in a position to instruct them and guide them as they develop in their learning process; the interaction should also happen in the zone where learning process can accelerate. Vygotsky principles have been developed to account for the learning of human behaviours which should include the learning of foreign languages or second language in general, (see Kinginger (2002); Lantolf and Thorne, 2006) and vocabulary acquisition in particular. Social interactionists assume that vocabulary acquisition is influenced by interaction of both biological and social factors which include physical, linguistic, cognitive, and social (Cooter & Reutzel, 2004). They argue that human beings have innate capacity in form of powerful brains that mature slowly and predispose them to acquire new understandings that they are motivated to share with others (Shaffer, et al., 2002). Human beings possess the ability to share intentionality and acquired knowledge with other humans. This is described as being the core of the evolution of verbal language (Tomasello, 1995; Pinker, 2010). In other words, vocabulary acquisition is possible through the interaction of learners' biological make-up and the impact of their environment (Polloway, Miller, & Smith, 2004).

Vygotsky's model of interaction learning has been associated with collaborative learning (Shaffer, et al., 2002). Collaborative learning is the idea that conversations with more knowledgeable others can help learners both cognitively and linguistically (Shaffer, et al., 2002). In fact, the adherents of the social interaction theory believe that foreign/second language learners begin to develop vocabulary through social interactions with other users of the target language. Language can be described as a dynamic group of social resources that is connected to the social and historical contexts of the user. Vitanova (2005:2) viewed language as being constantly renewed through social activity, and constitutes central forms of life in which it is used to represent our cultural worlds, as well as being a "central means by which we bring our worlds into existence, maintain them, and shape them for our own purposes"

The centrifugal argument of social interaction adherents, therefore, is that much of the learners' purposes for learning language are socially related. From career and occupational usage to interaction purposes in social settings, learners influence the behaviours of users of the target language with their quest and need to communicate, body gestures, and facial expressions. These people in turn respond to these communicative actions with verbal language, establishing the roots for future vocabulary development. When the learners begin to produce verbal language sounds, the speakers respond with more complex forms. Then the learner imitates/acquires the more complex form, and so on. Learners may pronounce words clearly, have a large vocabulary, use long, complex sentences and correct grammar, but have difficulty adapting or changing their language to suit the social context of the

interaction, have little variety in language use, or may say inappropriate or unrelated things during conversations. This implies that language learners need to develop not only social and communication skills, but also need to understand when these skills should be used (e.g. different skills are required when speaking in a gathering to those used in an official setting). These skills, like all language skills, need to be learned.

2.2. Vocabulary in Foreign Language Learning and How it is Learnt.

The place of vocabulary in language learning, be it first or second language, has remained paramount. It is widely believed by experts in language learning that a language learner would manage to pass his message across with adequate vocabulary even without much grammatical competence. This view is at the back of Wilkins' (1976: 111) remarks when he asserts that "*while without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.*" In the same vein, Elshout-Mohr and Van Daalen-Kapteijns (1987: 64) argue that "the proficiency of the high verbal person is directly associated with the availability of a great number of well-structured word meaning units." One can therefore opine that vocabulary acquisition is the most fundamental task in second / foreign language learning and acquisition, even though greater attention is being paid to pronunciation and grammar learning in many of the foreign language learning settings. Morgan and Rinvolucri (2004:5), for instance, note that most of language teachers place emphasis on the teaching of grammar and pronunciation, thereby relegating the teaching of vocabulary to the background ie. to "a very poor third". Consequently, it must be noted that lack of enough vocabulary would result in communication barriers or expressive failures because without the mediation of vocabulary, no amount of grammatical or other types of linguistic knowledge can be employed in language communication. Going by the aforesaid, vocabulary acquisition in foreign language learning must be given the attention it deserves. How is vocabulary learnt by foreign language learners?

Worthy of note is the fact that vocabulary learning in foreign language takes a gradual process because words are not instantly learnt, especially where adult learners are involved. Retention gradually takes place over a period with numerous exposures such as recognizing, practising and understanding a word when discovered in a text, heard in a conversation or glossed through a systematic platform designed for vocabulary acquisition. Learning a word involves two processes which culminate into receptive knowledge and productive knowledge (see Schmitt, 2000). The receptive knowledge occurs when a learner recognizes the form of a word and understands its meaning. In the case of productive knowledge, it occurs when the same learner begins to use the recognized word to communicate as required. Critically, therefore, vocabulary acquisition depends on the contextual meaning in most cases and not on the dictionary meanings. Dictionary definitions at times are not necessarily effective for providing meaningful connections to words because their usage may be out of dictionary context, or are very condensed or abstract (see Carlisle 1993, Watts 2006). Dictionary meanings only refer to other words such as synonyms or antonyms and thereby creating difficulties for foreign language learners to achieve their explicit meaning. Vocabulary is best acquired not in isolation but in context through incidental means. This is the more reason it is widely understood that vocabulary is systematically learnt through reading and comprehension both aural and written. In view of the preponderant position of vocabulary and the conceptual and theoretical intricacies involved in its acquisition in a foreign language learning context, what does Internet have to offer a foreign language learner who is desirous of acquiring adequate vocabulary?

2.3. Internet-based Approach to Vocabulary Acquisition in Foreign Language Learning

It should not be presumptuous to aver that the Internet has today become a very big pool containing very large deposits of both oral and written language performance in many of the languages of the world. This large pool characteristic of the Internet coupled with the ease at which it can be assessed makes it a veritable tool for the learning of vocabulary by foreign language learners in the first place. Looking at it from social interaction model of vocabulary acquisition, the question that arises here is how can the Internet fit into the principles of SI, MKO and ZDP. As earlier noted, the MKO refers to people (language instructor, teacher, peer etc) who have a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner. We assume that the available platforms meant for vocabulary learning on the World Wide Web are designed by experts in the affected languages. We also assume that social interaction (SI) between the contents of online language learning resources and learners is quite possible on the Internet. In the same vein, Internet has undoubtedly a virtual environment where foreign language learners can self-develop as well as get assistance from more knowledgeable others, thereby satisfying the principle of ZPD.

Research findings have shown that interaction in the target language (TL) is one of the ways in which learners obtain data for language learning (Long, 1996). Before now, several studies in computer-mediated communication (CMC) have reported the benefits of internet-based interactive resources in vocabulary acquisition through diverse approaches one of which is negotiation of meaning in synchronous interaction on L2 development (Chun 1994; Blake 2000; Pelletieri 2000; Salaberry 2000). There are proofs that text-based interaction online can effectively be substituted for face-to-face interaction (Blake 2000; Pelletieri 2000; F&M, 2003; de la Fuente 2003; Smith 2003). A study conducted by Esit (2011) on Turkish learners of English shows that the students exposed to computer-assisted reading acquired more vocabulary than their mates who were exposed to conventional reading materials. A similar study carried out among 17 Turkish learners of French by Aslim-Yetis (2010) reveals that the students obtained better scores in vocabulary quizzes using the Internet when compared to quizzes conducted with other means. In a similar vein, Mustafa et al (2012) conducted a study among 30 English learners in Malaysia. The students were divided into experimental and control groups. While the experimental group was exposed to reading via the Internet, the control group was to read using printout texts. The study eventually showed that the experimental group recorded a higher score in a post-test compared to the students in the control group. The conclusion that can be deduced from these studies is that the internet not only facilitates social interaction between learners and online texts, but also increase the motivation of the learners. Going by the instances alluded to above, there is, therefore, enough justification for the applicability of social interaction theory in the acquisition of French vocabulary by foreign learners using internet resources.

It needs to be pointed out at this juncture that much of the studies that have been conducted in the area of computer-assisted vocabulary learning, as can be figured out from those earlier cited in this paper, have focused on the online reading of texts. The reason is however not farfetched: reading and vocabulary have become so intimate that it is very difficult to separate them. It is widely accepted that for reading to be comprehensively effective, the reader needs to have acquired sizeable volume of vocabulary in the concerned language. It is also understood that a language learner who reads a lot should not find it difficult to acquire enough vocabulary in order to communicate effectively in the language he is learning. We must, however, say that to the best of our knowledge not much has been done in the area of assessing the learning suitability of the online resources dedicated to the learning

of vocabulary of foreign languages. While it is true that some of the available online French vocabulary learning resources incorporate reading into their strategies, it needs be noted that some make use of incidental annotations, imagery, video and audio strategies (see Chun & Plass, 1996; Chanier & Selva, 1998).

3. Methods

For the purpose of the assessment carried out in this study, five online French learning resources have been selected, and they are *Bonjour de France*, *Le Lexique*, *Podcast Français Facile*, *Lingolia français* and *TV5MONDE*. The authors would like to state here that the choice of these online learning platforms was not based on any specific criterion. They were randomly selected from the several online platforms developed for the purpose of teaching and learning of French language. However, they have been carefully selected to include those with vocabulary acquisition contents and were created and are being maintained by French native speakers. The five resources are first presented and the procedure for the assessment of their responsiveness to the social interaction theory is elaborated.

3.1. Presentation of The Five Internet-Based French Vocabulary Learning Platforms

Bonjour de France (<http://www.bonjourdefrance.com>), created and maintained by French teachers with *École Azurlingual* in Nice, France, is an educative cyber-magazine created to assist learners and teachers of French as a foreign language; subject areas covered by it include grammar, comprehension, vocabulary, business French, French civilization etc. In the case of *Lexique FLE* (<http://lexiquefle.free.fr>), it is an online portal solely devoted to the learning of French vocabulary. The online resource was created and is being maintained by a French family, *la famille Perrot* (M. Thierry Perrot and Mme Anne Fournier Perrot together with their two children Marion and Romain Perrot). *Podcast Français Facile* (<http://www.podcastfrancaisfacile.com/>) is, like the other resources just mentioned, an online programme which is solely devoted to the learning of French language covering learning areas such as grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, poetry and short stories; it was created and is being updated by a French teacher: Vincent Durrenberger. *Lingolia français*, (<https://francais.lingolia.com/fr>) is an online platform created for the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language., the portal is updated regularly, and it presents four major aspects of French teaching and learning which are grammar, vocabulary, writing techniques and culture and civilization of French-speaking world. Learn French with *TV5MONDE* (<http://apprendre.tv5monde.com/en>) is an online French learning resource developed by the popular French television station to assist French learners all over the world with its learning contents divided into four levels, namely A1, A2, B1 and B2 covering learning subjects such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, conversation, culture and media education.

Looking at it from the French language learning subject areas, only *Lexique FLE* is restricted to vocabulary; the remaining four resources have pages for other areas such as grammar, comprehension, phonetics, culture and civilization of France etc. Nevertheless, what concerns the researchers in this study is the learning of vocabulary. In Table 1, the scope of French vocabulary covered by each of the five online resources under assessment are represented:

Table 1: Scope of French vocabulary covered by five online portals

Online Resource	Scope of French Vocabulary	Levels of learner
<i>Bonjour de France</i>	<i>les nombres, les couleurs, les mois, les saisons, les ustensiles de la cuisine, les sports, voyager en train, l'ordinateur, la vie étudiante, préfixation et suffixation, le travail, forme et figure géométrique, les costumes, le militaire, le théâtre et la parfumerie, les sigles, le vin français, la troncation, fruits et légumes, catastrophes naturelles, la peinture, les vacances, la musique, la science, hébergement touristique et la matriochka.</i>	<i>categorized into débutant, élémentaire, intermédiaire et avancé</i>
<i>Lexique FLE</i>	<i>le corps, la famille, les chiffres, l'Europe, à la gare, en ville, ma maison, les heures, l'alphabet, les animaux, au téléphone, les vêtements et le calendrier</i>	<i>not categorized by the authors</i>
<i>Podcas Français Facile</i>	<i>la famille, l'appartement, dans la classe, à l'hôtel, le voyage, les animaux, l'informatique, le transport, la banque, les expressions idiomatiques, les qualités et les défauts.</i>	<i>not categorized by the author</i>
<i>Lingolia Français</i>	<i>les nombres, les fractions, l'heure, la date, les saisons, le corps humain, en ville, voyage, jours de fêtes, sport, la maison</i>	<i>not categorized by the author</i>
<i>TV5MONDE</i>	<i>Les sentiments, l'entreprise, les métiers, la vie urbaine, la famille, les achats, l'habillement, la vie quotidienne, l'enseignement supérieur, la carte d'identité, les nationalités, les loisirs, la culture, au restaurant, les dates et les saisons, les objets, les élections, les sciences et les techniques. La littérature, les voyages, la politique, le sport, la cuisine, le cinéma, le monde du travail, les aliments, l'informatique, l'être humain, expressions idiomatiques, l'économie, la vie rurale etc.</i>	<i>A1, A2, B1 and B2</i>

Having presented the five selected French vocabulary learning platforms, it is necessary to present the procedure of their assessment within the dictates of the social interaction theory of language learning.

3.2. Procedure of Assessment

As earlier mentioned, the three fundamental principles underlining the social interaction theory of foreign language learning are SI, MKO and ZPD. The five online portals are assessed based on these three principles. A vocabulary lesson content was randomly selected for each of the five resources and the contents were subjected to an assessment using each of the underlying principles. The five selected vocabulary lessons used for the assessment are as follows: *les ustensiles de la cuisine* for *Bonjour de France*, *à la gare* for *Lexique FLE*, *une famille internationale* for *Podcas Français Facile*, *au restaurant* for *Lingolia Français*, and *les loisirs* for *TV5MONDE*. Tables were used in the assessment to visually represent the level of responsiveness of each of the online resources to the identified principles of social interaction theory.

4. Assessment, Findings, and Discussions

The assessment carried out in this study is based on the three principles of social interaction theory of foreign language learning. Simultaneously with the assessment of the five online portals, findings are shown and are discussed.

4.1. Social Interaction (SI)

Social interaction is generally viewed as any interaction between two or more individuals; it can also be between groups of people. In the interaction theory of foreign language teaching and learning, the SI is the main underlying principle leaving the other two (MKO and ZPD) to play complementary roles. In the first place, how does the internet enable social interaction? This is the question that readily comes to mind looking at the thrust of this study. Scholars have identified computer mediated communication (CMC) systems such as e-mail, chat, online forums and communities as platforms whereby interactions occur virtually (see Harasim et al, 1996; Kanuka & Anderson, 1998; van Dijk, 2006). In the case of the five online resources under assessment, are there mechanisms put in place by their developers to guarantee social interaction between the materials presented and the learners? In Tables 2, 3 and 4, the authors' assessment on the social interaction mechanisms in the five resources are represented:

Table 2. Social Interaction Mechanisms in Bonjour de France and Lexique FLE

Online Resource	Image/Video Interaction	Audio Interaction	Autocorrected Exercises	Discussion Forum
<i>Bonjour de France</i>	<p>Lesson: <i>les utensiles de cuisine</i></p> <p>There are images of words to be learnt: <i>un couteau, une fourchette, un verre, une cuillère, une assiette, un bol, un économie / un éplucheur, une poêle, une tasse, une casserole, un fouet, un saladier, un écumoir, une cuillère en bois.</i></p>	<p>Lesson: <i>les utensiles de cuisine</i></p> <p>By clicking on the audio sign, learners can listen to the pronunciation of each of the kitchen utensils</p>	<p>Lesson: <i>les utensils de cuisine</i></p> <p>Two types of exercise available:</p> <p>(1) Having gone through the lesson, learners are to match images with their name.</p> <p>(2) There is a short passage whereby learners fill in gaps with provided options. The exercises are autocorrected instantly, which gives immediate feedback to learners.</p>	<p>Lesson: <i>les utensils de cuisine</i></p> <p>Having successfully gone through the lesson, learners have the opportunity to post their comments and even ask questions on the lesson.</p>
<i>Lexique FLE</i>	<p>Lesson: <i>à la gare</i></p> <p>There are animated images of the words to be learnt: <i>la gare, un billet, le guichet, la billetterie automatique, le panneau d'affichage, aller-retour, aller simple, une place fumeur ou non</i></p>	<p>Lesson: <i>à la gare</i></p> <p>The lesson is presented using a recorded dialogue in which words and expressions are</p>	<p>Lesson: <i>à la gare</i></p> <p>Two types of exercise available:</p> <p>(1) Having learnt the vocabulary related to <i>à la gare</i>, learners are to complete a dialogue with missing words.</p> <p>(2) There is also an audio-based exercise whereby five audio recordings are</p>	<p>Lesson: <i>à la gare</i></p> <p>There is no provision for discussion forum.</p> <p>However, learners have the opportunity of subscribing freely to receive online, update</p>

	<i>fumeur, une correspondance, une réduction, un plein-tarif, le départ, l'arrivée, le quai, la carte bleue, la chèque, une espèce.</i>	underlined. By clicking on the audio sign., learners are enabled to listen to the dialogue as a whole or the underlined word and expressions in isolation.	played, and the learners are to answer twenty questions in all on the recordings. The exercises are autocorrected which gives the learners opportunity for immediate feedback.	on the learning platform generally.
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Table 3. Social Interaction Mechanisms in Podcas Français Facile and Lingolia Français

Online Resource	Image/Video Interaction	Audio Interaction	Autocorrected Exercises	Discussion Forum
<i>Podcas Français Facile</i>	Lesson: <i>une famille internationale</i> There is a picture showing an international family. However, the common nouns associated with members of a family are presented using a text rather than image / video. Words to be learnt are as follows: <i>le père, la mère, la femme, le mari, le neveu, la nièce, le cousin, la cousine, l'oncle, la tante, les parents, les grands-parents, le frère, les enfants, les petits-enfants.</i>	Lesson: <i>une famille internationale</i> There is an audio recording of the text used to present the family vocabulary, but it is devoid of any interaction between the presenter and the learner.	Lesson: <i>une famille internationale</i> There are exercises on the text presented, but learners are not given the interactive opportunity to answer the questions. The presenter asks the questions and answers them by himself.	Lesson: <i>une famille internationale</i> : No provision is made for discussion forum on the lessons presented.
<i>Lingolia Français</i>	Lesson: <i>au restaurant</i> The lesson is presented using images. The following words are to be learnt: <i>le restaurant, le serveur, la serveuse, le chef cuisto, le cuisinier, la cuisinière, l'hôte, la carte, le plateau, le repas, le tablier, l'addition, la boisson, la caisse, plat, dessert, couteau, fourchette.</i>	Lesson: <i>au restaurant</i> There is an audio recording of the text used to present the restaurant vocabulary, but it is devoid of any interaction between the	Lesson: <i>au restaurant</i> Two types of exercise available: (1) Having listened to an audio clip on the vocabulary related to <i>le restaurant</i> , learners are expected to fill in gaps by choosing an option from a drop-down of options provided (2) Learners are also	Lesson: <i>au restaurant</i> Having successfully gone through the lesson, learners have the opportunity to post their comments and even

		presenter and the learner.	expected to rearrange words in correct order. (3) There is also an exercise requiring learners to choose the right definite article for the nouns taught. The exercises are autocorrected which gives the learners opportunity for immediate feedback	ask questions on the lesson.
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Table 4. Social Interaction Mechanisms in TV5MONDE

Online Resource	Image/Video Interaction	Audio Interaction	Autocorrected Exercises	Discussion Forum
TV5MONDE	Lesson: <i>loisirs /sorties</i> The lesson is presented using images and a video clip to teach the common vocabulary of <i>loisirs /sorties</i> : <i>le sport, le théâtre, le cinéma, le film, la pièce de théâtre, le concert, stade, match de rugby, la discothèque, faire du vélo, jouer aux échecs, aller à la piscine, jouer de la guitare, aimer voyager, les vacances, détester le métro.</i>	Lesson: <i>loisirs /sorties</i> : By clicking on the audio sign, learners can listen to the instruction to the exercises.	Lesson: <i>loisirs /sorties</i> Five types of exercise are presented in an interactive manner: (1) Fill-in the gaps with options provided (2) Matching images with the right word. (3) Placing words in the right column. (4) Rearrangement of words in sentences. (5) Words puzzle. These exercises are all autocorrected.	Lesson: <i>loisirs /sorties</i> The lesson and the exercises can be shared by learners on their twitter handle. This can generate online discussion.

Judging by what the three tables above present, it can be opined that though the five online platforms under examination provide for interactive mechanism in their vocabulary lessons, they do not share the same degree of social interactivity. For *Bonjour de France*, *Lingolia Français* and *TV5MONDE*, they can be said to be fully interactive taking into account the fact that they both provide learners with interaction mechanisms with the materials presented in terms of images, video, audio, autocorrected exercises as well as giving them the opportunity to discuss the lessons not only with the developers, but also with other learners of French.

In the case of *Lexique FLE*, the interactive mechanisms provided can be said to be adequate, but not as fully as *Bonjour de France*, *Lingolia Français* and *TV5MONDE*. While *Lexique FLE* makes provisions for images, audio clips and autocorrected exercises, it failed to provide for a means by which learners can

discuss their comprehension or otherwise of the materials presented with other learners. For *Podcas Français Facile*, it is the view of the authors of this study that the online resource is inadequately interactive. The reasons are not farfetched: it failed to provide mechanisms for autocorrected exercises and a means by which learners can further discuss the lessons with others.

4.2 More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)

Assessing the five portals in this study vis-à-vis the principle of MKO is not a difficult task. Looking at the developers of the portals, one could categorically state that the principle of MKO has been taken into consideration in the development of the online resources. A critical look at Table 5 shows that the authors and/or developers of the five online resources are more knowledgeable others as far as the learning of French vocabulary is concerned:

Table 5. Knowledgeability of the Developers of the Five Portals

Online Resource	Developers	Developers' Professions
<i>Bonjour de France</i>	Names not published	French teachers with <i>L'Ecole Azurlingual</i> in Nice, France.
<i>Lexique FLE</i>	Anne Fournier Perrot Thierry Perrot and their children Marion and Romain	French instructors with <i>CIEL</i> in Bretagne, France
<i>Podcas Français Facile</i>	Vincent Durrenberger	French teacher with Keio University, Japan
<i>Lingolia Français</i>	Lorraine Garchery Laure le Cloarec	French Teachers in France
<i>TV5MONDE</i>	Dorothée Depont Magali Delcombel Sabrina Fécoho Robert Angéniol	French teachers with <i>Alliance française, CAVILAM</i> and <i>Université catholique de Louvain</i> respectively

As can be deduced from Table 5, all the authors and/or developers of the vocabulary lessons in the five platforms under assessment are not only native speakers and teachers of French but are also teachers of French as a foreign language. That being the case, it is evident that the social interaction principle of MKO has been satisfied by all the five online resources.

4.3. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Zone of Proximal Development as a social interaction principle as defined by Vygotsky (1978: 86) himself is "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.*" From this definition, it is imperative that every cognitive development, foreign language learning inclusive, requires that the interaction that occurs between a learner and a more competent other should consider both the current and the potential levels of the learner because the difference between the two levels is the ZPD and that is where effective learning

takes place. So, it is incumbent on the MKO to know the learner's current problem-solving capacity and to what higher level the capacity would expand after assistance has been provided.

Among the three Vygotskyan principles, the ZDP remains the most complicated resulting in different interpretations by researcher and educators. This concern made Wertsch (1984:7) to remark that ZDP was at the risk of being used "loosely and indiscriminately, thereby becoming so amorphous that it loses all explanatory power." (see also Mercer and Fisher (1999) and Palinscar (1998) Whatever interpretation might have been given by different researchers and educators, the authors of this study hold the view that ZDP is the space between the actual ability of a learner and the predetermined ability after the learner has been helped by a more knowledgeable individual. The assessment of the five online resources under examination is therefore based on the ability of their respective developers to determine the actual competence of the intended learners and their potential level of competence after they have used the resources provided. This assessment is visually presented in Table 6:

Table 6. Zone of Proximal Development and the Five Portals

Online Resource	Actual Competence of Learners	Potential Competence of Learners
<i>Bonjour de France</i>	Lesson: <i>les ustensiles de cuisine</i> Lesson specifically intended for beginners and vocabulary taught appropriate for beginners: <i>un couteau, une fourchette, un verre, une cuillère, une assiette, etc</i>	Lesson: <i>les ustensiles de cuisine</i> Exercises appropriate to test the potential competence of learners.
<i>Lexique FLE</i>	Lesson: <i>à la gare</i> . Level of intended learners not indicated by the authors. Vocabulary taught: <i>la gare, un billet, le guichet, la billetterie automatique, le panneau d'affichage, aller-retour, aller simple, etc</i>	Lesson: <i>à la gare</i> Exercises appropriate to test the potential competence of learners.
<i>Podcas Français Facile</i>	Lesson: <i>une famille internationale</i> Level of intended learners not indicated by the authors. Vocabulary taught: <i>le père, la mère, la femme, le mari, le neveu, la nièce, le cousin, la cousine, l'oncle, la tante, les parents, etc.</i>	Lesson: <i>une famille internationale</i> Exercises appropriate to test the potential competence of learners.
<i>Lingolia Français</i>	Lesson: <i>au restaurant</i> Level of intended learners not indicated by the authors. Vocabulary taught: <i>le restaurant, le serveur, la serveuse, le chef cuisto, le cuisinier, la cuisinière, l'hôte, la carte, etc.</i>	Lesson: <i>au restaurant</i> Exercises appropriate to test the potential competence of learners.
<i>TV5MONDE</i>	Lesson: <i>loisirs /sorties</i> Lesson specifically intended for beginners and vocabulary taught appropriate for beginners: <i>le sport, le théâtre, le cinéma, le film, la pièce de théâtre, le concert, stade, etc.</i>	Lesson: <i>loisirs /sorties</i> Exercises appropriate to test the potential competence of learners.

The ZPD assessment carried out on the five selected online learning resources, as represented in Table 6, shows that while two of them, *Bonjour de France* and *TV5MONDE*, specify the actual learning level of the intended learners, the three other platforms, *Lexique FLE*, *Podcas Français Facile* and *Lingolia Français*, do not indicate the learning level of the intended learners. In order to satisfy one of the core demands of the ZPD, as enunciated by the social interaction theory, any given learning material

should be situated between the actual learning level of the intended learner (what the learners can do without help from a MKO) and the expected learning outcome after the intervention of the MKO. This is what the developers of the three online resources failed to take into consideration. It is very important for the authors of online learning platforms to categorize their learning contents into actual learning categories like A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 or Beginner, Elementary, Intermediary, Advanced etc. The categorization of learning contents based on the principle of ZPD is very crucial both for the developers and the user of online learning resources because such would afford the developer to produce the right contents and for the learners to be properly situated in his or her ZPD for effective learning to take place. In the two platforms where the actual learning level of the targeted vocabulary learners is identified, navigation through the contents becomes very easy and result-oriented thereby making learning effective for the learners.

However, the authors found out that all the five online resources assessed take into account the potential learning competence of the leaners after the intervention of the vocabulary learning contents displayed by their developers respectively. The exercises provided for the learners on the lessons assessed show clearly that the expected learning outcome has been adequately tested. By the time the learners go through all the lessons provided and are able to attempt the exercises successfully, they should be able to become independent in the learning level they have covered and ready to proceed to the next level of ZPD in their vocabulary learning experience.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

It is obvious that the advent of new information and communication technologies has revolutionized major aspects of human life. The teaching and learning of foreign languages has benefited tremendously from these technologies, most especially from the Internet resources. It was based on the foregoing that the authors embarked on this study to investigate the impact the online French vocabulary learning resources have on the teaching and learning of French vocabulary. Five platforms dedicated to the online learning of French vocabulary were examined using the framework of the social interaction theory of language learning and acquisition. The findings of the authors, after the assessment of the five online resources, show that not all of them satisfy all the underlying principles of the social interaction theory. The authors, therefore, recommend to developers of online French vocabulary learning resources to always bear in mind the interactionist principles of social interaction, more knowledgeable other and zone of proximal development respectively when producing their learning contents. This recommendation is also applicable to developers of online resources dedicated to the learning and teaching of other aspects of the French language such as grammar, pronunciation, composition writing, culture and civilization etc. The authors are also of the view that these Internet resources, if properly utilized, have the potential of improving the level of vocabulary acquisition by foreign learners of French. It is therefore recommended that teachers of French should devise means by which online learning resources can be optimally deployed in their classrooms. While there are numerous language teaching and learning theories, the authors are of the view that the social interaction theory that is rooted in the Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory has been very relevant and will continue to be very relevant for a long time to come.

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