

Language As An Effective Tool For Business Communication: The Role Of French As A Foreign Language In Ghana

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Abstract: Bilingualism is gradually becoming the standard for effective business communication across the globe. The ability to communicate in a language other than English or one's native language is beneficial to the growth and success of any business. The knowledge of French can boost effective communication across cultures and increase lucrative employment opportunities exponentially. This paper examines the role of the French language as an effective tool in business communication in Ghana. Unfortunately, even though Ghana is surrounded by French-speaking countries, Ghanaians cannot boast of communicating fluently and effectively in French. Studies conducted recently revealed that only one percent of the estimated population of 28 million Ghanaians can speak French. This is due to inconsistent policy framework for the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in Ghana. The various reforms from Governor Gordon Gugisberg in 1925 to the Anamuah-Mensah Education Review Committee of 2002 indicate that the educational policies never provided any clear focus regarding the teaching and learning of the French language. There is no seriousness with regards to the issues of French language teaching at the various levels of our educational system. The implementation of the language policy in the education system has been shrouded with difficulties that showed gross inconsistencies between policy and implementation. Inadequate teaching and learning resources, lack of trained teachers, poor teaching methods, lack of interest and motivation are some of the challenges facing the teaching and learning of French in Ghana. The paper therefore strongly recommends a clear language policy guideline for the teaching and learning of the French language in Ghana. There is the need for a strong political will and commitment on the part of government to give special attention to the training of teachers of French. The reality of globalization and economic development impose on Ghanaians to be proficient in the French language since we are engulfed by French-speaking neighbours. Like the United States of America and other European countries, tertiary institutions in Ghana should make the study of French a requirement for graduation since it continues to play a crucial role in the socio-economic, political and diplomatic relations internationally.

Keywords: Business communication, communication, culture, French as a foreign Language, language.

I. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

These days, more and more companies are going global, making connections with consumers, vendors, and clients all over the world. As a result, these companies are looking to hire employees who already have a leg up on other applicants. An important benefit of bilingualism is the major advantage it can give in the business world. While there are many ways to succeed professionally and set yourself apart in your given field, language skills are an often-overlooked way to make

you stand out from the crowd. Bilingualism can positively affect finding and excelling in a job.

The knowledge of French can offer employees the ability to travel for their work, visiting countries that give you the opportunity to be in a setting to truly practice your skills with the language. In addition, being bilingual allows you to explore the world around you, learning about the culture and making both social and professional connections. Finding those professional connections abroad increases your overall

networking pool, and could give you numerous job options in exciting new places.

A. WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

Many linguists and scholars have given diverse definitions of a language. Scholars who study language as a science (the scientific study of language is called linguistics) however offer diverse technical definitions of their object of study or investigation. Here, the key word "language" is seen in linguistic context. The essence is not to review such definitions here; I shall however be concerned with language as a means of human communication, the role of French. Language as a term refers to all "instruments" means, vehicles or modes of communication. Whether a language is written or not, whether it is African, European, and Asian or otherwise, it is primarily spoken. It is a fact that oral communication is considered to be the primary function of every language. All the languages in the world whether "major" or "minor" fulfil this communicative function.

Hjelmslev (1968) as cited in Kwofie (2005:6), offers the following definition of language:

Language is the instrument by means of which man fashions his thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions, the instrument by means of which he influences and is influenced by others, the ultimate and deepest foundation of human society.

Moirand (1990:8) offers a similar definition of language:

Le langage est un instrument, un outil. C'est un outil magnifique, mais difficile à manier. Son premier but est de servir, d'être utile. Sans le langage, il n'y a pas de communication entre les êtres. C'est pourquoi nous avons cherché à enseigner, dès le début, le langage comme un moyen d'expression et de communication.

These definitions indicate clearly that the principal tool for human communication is language. Exchange of thoughts, feelings, opinions and values among members of a community is what makes community life meaningful. Community life is therefore not possible without communication. Language is thus an indispensable means of communication for all societies and upon which their survival depends. Language as an important instrument for human communication, is made up of words and meanings put together into discrete units to form sentences. These sentences are then joined together to provide information that can be used to exchange ideas with other people (Van Berkum, 2008). Language therefore is a basic form of communication. Communication therefore cannot be separated from language.

Language is the medium for expressing and embodying the values, beliefs and meanings which members of a given society share by virtue of their socialization into it. Learning a language is therefore learning the behaviour of a given society and its cultural customs. Language is a product of the thought and behaviour of a society. An individual language speaker's effectiveness in a foreign language is directly related to his/her understanding of the culture of that language. So, we can conclude that language is a part of culture, and through it, we can express cultural beliefs and values, and that the specific usages of a given word are peculiar to a language and its

relationship with culture. Guessabi (2017) argues that culture is a language in itself. Language always carries meanings and references beyond itself. For him, language and culture are homologous mental realities. The use of language is deeply entrenched in human culture. Therefore, cultural products are representations and interpretations of the world that must be communicated in order to be lived. The meanings of a particular language represent the culture of a particular social group. To interact with a language means to do so with the culture which is its reference point. (<https://www.language magazine.com/blurring-the-line-between-language-and-culture/>)

B. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral conventions, basic assumptions, and values that are shared by a group of people and that influence each member's behavior and each member's interpretations of the meanings of other people's behavior. Culture is very important in the study of language. This is because it shapes our view of the world and language is the most representative element in any culture. Languages by their nature are very dynamic and closely intertwined with human culture; they serve as a medium through which the cultural artifacts (art, music, dance, customs, literature, etc.) are expressed and interpreted. Language and culture cannot be separated and are part of each other. To communicate meaning through the transmission of a message to someone from a different cultural background, there is the likelihood of misunderstanding due to cultural differences (Robock, 1989). Language is obviously a vital tool. Not only is it a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but it forges friendships, cultural ties, and economic relationships. It is evident that knowledge in the language is relevant to the understanding and appreciation of the socio-cultural practices of any linguistic community. In this light, knowledge of the codes of behaviour of other people is very necessary if a foreign language student is able to communicate effectively in the target language.

Throughout history, many scholars have reflected on the importance of language. For instance, the scholar Benjamin Whorf as cited in Algeo (2001) has noted that language shapes thoughts and emotions, determining one's perception of reality. Whorf's ideas imply that the language we speak affects not only the way we think, but also affects the way we view the world around us. We habitually formulate our perceptions of the world in a language, according to the particular biases and prejudices inherent in whatever language we know. Thus, language limits the way we perceive reality, the way we think about it, and the way we talk about it.

For John Stuart Mill as cited in Kroon (2017), "Language is the light of the mind." For him, language gives one an opportunity to understand and express everything in one's mind. Without light, one's mind is at darkness suggesting that one cannot understand anything that one perceives without language.

For Sapir (1929), language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, and values characteristic of a community; it also represents a fundamental expression of social identity. He noted that speech serves as a

peculiar potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language. Language can therefore also be considered as an important means of cultural transmission as far as each society has a culture or cultures and culture is defined as what society does or thinks and language is seen as a particular show of thought. Sapir's concept of language as a potent symbol of social solidarity is relevant. The study is guided by his concept which emphasises the importance of learning French as a foreign language apart from English and our various native languages in Ghana. French language study would be meaningless without any knowledge of people who speak it or the country in which it is spoken.

Using social constructivist theory as a guide to the study, meaning is seen to arise from social processes to which individuals contribute. These processes are constructed through language. Analysis of language activities will contribute to an understanding of how organizational actors make and modify meanings, social identities, and roles. Secondly, knowledge is created and shared through language usage (Allen, 2005). Thus, language is used to produce and reproduce knowledge as it plays various roles within various contexts.

Knowledge sharing is the formal and informal exchanges of ongoing social interaction that mobilizes knowledge that is dispersed around the organization or its stakeholders (Doz, Santos, & Williamson, 2001; Kalla, 2006). Knowledge sharing through language will create avenues for social capital necessary for thriving human survival and concerns. For that matter, Ghanaian professionals should be part of this knowledge sharing through the use of the French language.

II. WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Once again the key word is "communication". Language and communication are considered as bedfellows; one cannot exist without the other. Imagine a world without language or communication. The objective here is to provide an exploratory description of a language as a means of human communication where French plays a vital role rather than make an exhaustive analysis of the theories and models of communication. Communication (from Latin *commūnicāre*, meaning "to share") is the act of conveying intended meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs and semiotic rules (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication>).

Communication is the essence of human life and existence. It is a necessity. To express oneself, an individual has to communicate his feelings, thoughts, pass on information to others and this is done through the use of language.

Human communication is unique for its extensive use of abstract language. Communication is not just simply the act of transferring information from one place to another, neither is it the transmission of a message nor the message itself. It is the mutual exchange of understanding, originating with the receiver in mind. In other words, the desired outcome or goal of any communication process is understanding.

Communication theory was proposed by S. F. Scudder in the year 1980 as cited in Harper (2013). It states that all living beings existing on the planet communicate although the way

of communication is different. Thus, the universal law of communication theory says that all living beings whether they are plants, animals or human beings communicate through sound, speech, body movements, gestures in the best possible way to make others understand and be aware of their thoughts, feelings, problems and any other information.

Communication is a continuous process which involves the exchange of written and verbal messages and it is suggested in the literature that verbal communication is one of the topmost competencies needed to excel in a managerial position in an organization (Shrivastava, 2012). It is therefore particularly important for managers to be aware of the significance of language and communication skills for staff motivation and job satisfaction.

Pre-requisite of communication is a message. This message must be conveyed through some medium to the recipient. It is essential that this message must be understood by the recipient in same terms as intended by the sender. He must respond within a timeframe. Thus, communication is a two way process and is incomplete without a feedback from the recipient to the sender on how well the message is understood by him.

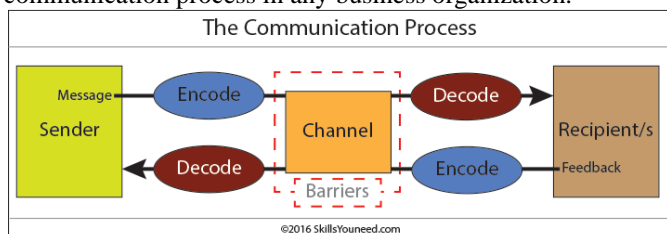
Communication theory states that communication involves a sender and a receiver (or receivers) conveying information through a communication channel. According to Aristotle model of communication, the speaker (sender) plays a key role in communication. The sender first prepares a content which he does by carefully putting his thoughts in words with an objective of influencing the listeners or the recipients, who would then respond in the sender's desired way. The content has to be very impressive in this model for the audience or the receivers to get convinced or influenced and respond accordingly. In this model of communication the speaker must be very careful about his selection of words and content. Aristotle model puts the speaker in the central position and suggests that the speaker is the one who drives the entire communication process (<https://www.managementstudyguide.com/aristotle-model-of-communication.htm>).

Effective communication is therefore the process of successful transmission of the message from the sender to the receiver. If the receiver is able to download the message in exactly the same way as the sender intended to do, communication is effective. The receiver must understand what the speaker wants to convey and accordingly must give his valuable feedback or simply respond. If any of the participants whether the sender or the receiver is not clear about the content of the conversation, the communication is said to be ineffective.

Effective communication not only plays a key role in organizations but also in one's personal life. An individual is not born with an effective communication, it comes with due course of time and of course through lots of practice and dedication. The knowledge of the French language is crucial as far as effective communication in any business organizations is concerned. (<https://www.managementstudyguide.com/aristotle-model-of-communication.htm>).

The communication process considered as a continuous and dynamic interaction, is both affecting and being affected by many variables.

The diagram below represents the major elements of a communication process in any business organization.



Source: (2016SkillsYouneed.com).

Figure 1: The Communication Process

The major elements of a communication process are as follows:

- ✓ **SENDER/ENCODER** - Sender/Encoder is the person who intends to convey the message with the intention of passing information and ideas to others using symbols (words or graphic or visual aids) to produce the required response. The sender may be an individual, a group or an organization.
- ✓ **ENCODING** - Since the subject matter of communication is theoretical and intangible, it further requires the use of certain symbols such as words, actions, pictures etc. Conversion of subject matter into these symbols is the process of encoding.
- ✓ **MESSAGE** – The Communication process begins with the decision about the message to be conveyed. All messages must be encoded into a form that can be conveyed by the communication channel chosen for the message. The sender must use the appropriate language to ensure that the main objective of the message is clear to elicit the response of the recipient. Effective communicators encode their messages with their intended audience in mind as well as the communication channel.
- ✓ **CONTEXT** - Every communication proceeds with context. The sender chooses the message to communicate within a context. Communication is affected by the context in which it takes place. This context may be physical, social, chronological or cultural.
- ✓ **MEDIUM/CHANNEL** – The person who is interested in communicating has to choose the appropriate medium for transmitting the message else the message might not be conveyed to the desired recipients. The choice of an appropriate medium of communication is essential for making the message effective and correctly interpreted by the recipient.
- ✓ **RECIPIENT/DECODER** - Recipient/Decoder is a person for whom the message is intended, aimed or targeted. The degree to which the decoder understands the message is dependent upon various factors such as knowledge of recipient, their responsiveness to the message, and the reliance of encoder on decoder. Once received, the receiver needs to decode the message. Successful decoding is also a vital communication skill. People will decode and understand messages in different ways based upon any barriers in communication which might be present, their experience and understanding of the context of the message, their psychological state, and the time and

place of receipt. Understanding how the message will be decoded, and anticipating as many of the potential sources of misunderstanding as possible, is the art of a successful communicator.

- ✓ **FEEDBACK** – Feedback is the process of ensuring that the receiver has received the message and understood in the same sense as sender meant it. Feedback is the main component of a communication process as it permits the sender to analyze the efficacy of the message. It helps the sender in confirming the correct interpretation of message by the decoder. Receivers of messages are likely to provide feedback on how they have understood the messages through both verbal and non-verbal reactions. It may also take a written form like memos, reports, etc. Effective communicators pay close attention to this feedback as it is the only way to assess whether the message has been understood as intended, and it allows any confusion to be corrected. It is extremely important to bear in mind that the extent and form of feedback will vary according to the communication channel used (<http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/business-communication/7-major-elements-of-communication-process/25815>).

III. WHAT IS BUSINESS COMMUNICATION?

Effective communication is vital for efficient management in order to improve industrial relations. In this modern world, the growth of telecommunication, information technology and the increasing competition and complexity in production have increased the importance of business communication in organizations.

Walter (2004) defined “business” as the activities of buying and selling of goods and services, the work that people or organizations do to earn money. Friedman (1994) also defined “business” as the commercial enterprises, professions or trades operated for the main purpose of earning a profit by providing products or services.

Businesses are created by entrepreneurs who put their money at risk to promote a particular venture for the purpose making profit. These businesses vary in size ranging from one person selling to an international corporation worth billions of dollars in assets and thousands of employees. There are a wide range of career areas that exist in these business settings like business management, banking and finance, human resources, marketing, sales, public relations and industries (Thill, 2001). Businesses are important because they involve economies that can earn revenue from in and outside the country. They also build very good relations across linguistic and cultural borders. Communication needs to be effective in business. Business communication is goal oriented. Today, with the advent of technology, there are cell phones, video conferencing, emails and satellite communication to support business communication. Effective business communication helps in building goodwill in any organization (Moreau, 2013).

Communication is very important and therefore very crucial in business organizations in sending messages or speaking clearly to customers. The ability to speak French as a

foreign language also plays a very important role in business administration as it helps increase opportunities for understanding and building trust (Griva, 2009). Communication is the essence of management. Effective communication is significant for managers of the organization to enable them perform the basic functions of management such as planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling. All the essential information must be communicated to the managers who in turn must communicate the plans to be able to implement them. Managers in any organization cannot perform well without effective communication.

(<https://www.eztalks.com/unified.../importance-of-business-communication.html>)

Communication is a skill which involves systematic and continuous process of speaking, listening and understanding. To succeed in running a good business in this twenty-first century, organizations must make it a point to share information with people inside and outside the organization. This is because the main goal of every business is to communicate effectively with others to be able to sell products or provide services (Kaul, 2014).

Societies, businesses and technologies around the globe are all dependent on effective communication. Without effective communication there is confusion, dissatisfaction and misunderstandings. In order to operate a business appropriately, one must understand the basics of business communication and its essential role in creating success. Business communication is any form of communication, verbal or nonverbal, that is used to relay a message, promote a product or service or share information (Joey, 2002).

The importance of communication cannot be overemphasized neither can it be overlooked. Effective business communication is crucial and to communicate effectively in business negotiations requires an exchange or a progression of ideas to achieve a predetermined goal. Effective business communication results in positive feedback. One importance of communication in business is that a customer is without a doubt the lifeblood of any business. Businesses rely on clients for their survival. Effective external communication can help attract new customers and retain the existing ones (www.edukart.com/blog/importance-of-effective-communication-in-an-organization/).

There are various aspects in business communication, namely:

- ✓ Business to business
- ✓ Business to employees
- ✓ Interpersonal communication
- ✓ Business to the public

A. BUSINESS TO BUSINESS

The first aspect of business communication is business to business. This is any communication that is done from one business to another. Any communication between the two businesses is considered business-to-business communication. Business-to-business relationships are vital for a strong and successful business and can help strengthen and grow the business to benefit both parties.

B. BUSINESS TO EMPLOYEES

Another form of business communication is business-to-employee communication. This is any corporate communication, whether it is information, correction or encouragement. Most businesses leave this type of communication to the human resources department for clarity and effective execution. Effective communication to employees is crucial to prevent misunderstandings and promote unity of thought and process throughout the entire organization.

C. INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION

One of the greatest downfalls of management on a corporate level is the inability of the various departments to communicate effectively. When interdepartmental communication is ineffective it affects the customer and the employees. A communication breakdown between two departments makes the business incompetent and can collapse.

D. BUSINESS TO THE PUBLIC

Communication to the public is typically in the form of promotion or advertising and can be very effective in generating new clientele. Other forms of communication to the public are public relations and media coverage and corporate statements. When communicating to the public a business must be very careful to ensure the proper message is being understood. Public communication must be simple to understand and cannot have hidden messages or some of the public may find themselves confused.

In most organizations, effective communication offers the best opportunity to make an outstanding first impression. Using powerful words, images and messages, business professionals can craft strong internal partnerships while developing the foundation of a solid client base. However, the second half of the feedback cycle can really cement interpersonal relationships. By building a reputation as an engaged listener, a business professional can set up next actions that solidify his commitment to acting on requests or adjusting after responses.

Thus, we can say without mincing words that effective communication is a building block of successful business organizations. The importance of language is beneficial whether one does it for fun or for a career or even just for personal travel. It must therefore be embraced and not ignored. The importance of language is essential to every aspect and interaction in our everyday lives. We use language to inform the people around us of what we feel, what we desire, and question or understand the world around us. We communicate effectively with our words, gestures, and tone of voice in a multitude of situations. No one would talk to a small child with the same words he would in a business meeting. Being able to communicate with each other, form bonds, teamwork, and it's what separates humans from other animal species. What role then does the French as a foreign language play in all these business communication processes? (<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/business-communication-43167.html>).

IV. THE ROLE OF FRENCH IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

As political and economic issues become increasingly international in scope, there is a growing need for business professionals to be competent in foreign languages. Languages help businesses to compete globally and the French language is no exception. Large and small companies are recognising this as the global market becomes more competitive. It is therefore not surprising that many countries around the world are making it mandatory to teach a foreign language and most colleges and high schools require a foreign language before graduation. Several countries in the world are producing business executives not only for qualifications, but also those who have multi-lingual fluency (Schutzler, 2011).

Foreign language teaching and learning is compulsory at a young age in several countries including England, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and Singapore (Henry, 2012). In 2010, President Obama acknowledged the need to improve foreign language skills among the American population. The statement focused on the need for Americans to read, speak and understand other languages in order to prosper economically and to improve relations with other countries (Overmann, 2011).

Language and culture greatly affect the success of any business if it intends to operate in an international territory with a foreign company. While companies work hard to remain competitive in a market, employees also need a competitive advantage in securing employment. Studies indicate that multinational companies greatly consider language skills when considering applicants seeking employment (Beyene, 2012).

The ability to study another language, for that matter French as a foreign language helps to understand the culture of the people who speak the studied language which in the long run assist in a company's decision-making process. It is a fact that English is a popular language globally in conducting business. However, many multinational business companies have learnt the risks of relying solely on English for business transacting. Peterson (2002) pointed out the difficulties that AT&T had in the 1980's in expanding their business in Europe as a result of lack of foreign language skills. Learning a foreign language cannot be separated from learning the culture, values and traditions of the people who speak it. To communicate effectively in other foreign languages such as French is gaining popularity globally. What role then does the French language play in business communication? Below are basic facts about the French language.

A. FACTS ABOUT THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

a. THE FRENCH IS A LIVING WORLD LANGUAGE

A world language by definition is a language that is spoken internationally and is learned and spoken by a large number of people as a second language. A world language is characterized not only by the total number of speakers (native and second language speakers), but also by its geographical distribution, as well as use in international organizations and diplomatic relations. The French is next to English as one of

the most widely spoken and fastest spreading world languages today as first and second language users worldwide.

For many centuries, French had long been the official language of communication, culture and erudition. It was the language of diplomacy and arts. It was the language of diplomacy and was the favoured second language among the elite and the educated classes in Europe, Middle East, Africa and South America. But with the fall of France and the rise of the Anglosphere, since World War I, the French language was gradually displaced by English as the world's lingua franca today. However, French still remains an official language in many international institutions, from the UN to the European Union to the Olympics Committee (founded by a Frenchman), and learning French still retains the favoured second language among the elite and the educated classes across the globe (OIF, 2010 *La langue française dans le monde*).

Africa has a bulk of the world's French-speaking population. According to the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, an estimated 115 million African people spread across 31 Francophone countries can speak French as either a first or a second language. Due to the rise of French in Africa, the total French-speaking population worldwide is expected to reach 700 million people in 2050. French is the fastest growing language on the continent in terms of either official or foreign languages (OIF, 2014).

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region where the French language is most likely to expand, because of the expansion of education and rapid population growth. It is also where the language has evolved the most in recent years. Some vernacular forms of French in Africa can be difficult to understand for French speakers from other countries, but written forms of the language are very closely related to those of the rest of the French-speaking world. Moreover, French still remains one of the working languages of many international organizations, including the United Nations, European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the World Trade Organization, the International Olympic Committee, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization of American States, the European Space Agency, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It is also a working language in nonprofit organisations such as the Red Cross, Amnesty International, Médecins sans Frontières, and Médecins du Monde. Given the demographic prospects of the French-speaking nations of Africa, French could be the language of the future (*Forbes Magazine*, 2014).

The French as a living world language as has the following properties:

- ✓ It has a large number of speakers
- ✓ It has a substantial fraction of non-native speakers (function as *lingua franca*)
- ✓ It has official status in several countries
- ✓ It is used across several regions in the world
- ✓ It has a linguistic community not defined strictly along ethnic lines (it is multiethnic, pluricentric language)
- ✓ It has one or more standard registers which are widely taught as a foreign language
- ✓ It has association with linguistic prestige
- ✓ It is used in international trade relations

- ✓ It is used in international organizations
 - ✓ It is used in the academic community
 - ✓ It has a significant body of literature
- Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_language

B. FRENCH IS A SIGNIFICANT JUDICIAL LANGUAGE

It is one of the official languages of the main international and regional courts, tribunals, and dispute-settlement bodies such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Caribbean Court of Justice, the Court of Justice for the Economic Community of West African States, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the International Criminal Court and the World Trade Organization Appellate Body. It is the sole internal working language of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and alongside English, one of the two working languages of the European Court of Human Rights.

Werber (1997) published in *Language Today* a comprehensive academic study entitled "The World's 10 most influential languages". In the article, he ranked French as being second after English the most *influential* language of the world, ahead of Spanish. His criteria were not solely the numbers of native speakers, but also included the number of secondary speakers (which tends to be specially high for French among fellow world languages); the economic power of the countries using the language; the number of major areas in which the language is used; the number of countries using the language, and their respective population; and the linguistic prestige associated with the mastery of the language. He highlighted in particular that the French benefits from a considerable linguistic prestige. Werber (2008) reassessed his article, and concluded that his findings were still correct since "the situation among the top ten remains unchanged."

C. IT IS THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF OVER 29 COUNTRIES

French is spoken by approximately 125 million people as a first language and 165 million as a second language. The Francophone world is spread across Europe, Africa, and the Americas as well as in and around the Pacific, with Europe and Africa offering the largest concentration of countries where French is recognised as an official language. French is one of the world's most influential languages, and is reputed to be the foreign language which is most widely used in international communications, after English. Besides being spoken in France, it is one of the official languages of Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada; it is the official language of Haiti, and more than 15 African countries, various French overseas dependencies. In addition, French is the unofficial second language of a number of countries, including Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, and Syria. Almost 300 million people speak French as their native language or as a second language. Today it is one of the six official languages of the United Nations.

Being largely derived from Latin (with the addition of modern vocabulary from English) the French language has a lot fewer words than the English language (which is derived from both Old French and old forms of German).

Source: (OIF, 2007, *La Francophonie dans le monde 2006–2007*)

French is also one of the most useful and most studied languages especially in the professional environment as determined by their diffusion around the world, their interests from the economic and political point of view, as well as the geographical proximity with the country of origin. In terms of ranking, the French language comes second after English as the ten most studied languages in the world as stated below.

1. English holds the first position
2. French
3. Spanish
4. Italian
5. Chinese
6. Japanese
7. German
8. Arabic
9. Portuguese
10. Russian

Source: (ACTFL, 2011)

Table 2: *The Ten most studied languages in the world*

Here, it is obvious that European languages including French have the upper hand. This is because their culture is the main reason people learn them around the world. Truly, understanding a country's culture happens through learning its language and reading its most famous authors (even their greatest cookbooks).

b. IT IS SECOND TO SPANISH AS THE MOST STUDIED LANGUAGES IN THE UNITED STATES

Spanish is by far the most studied language in the United States, whether in high school or college. According to the Modern Language Association (MLA), in the United States, colleges and universities offer plenty of opportunities for students to learn foreign languages as requirement for graduation (Goldberg et al, 2015).

The tables below show a list of foreign languages most frequently taught in American schools and colleges. They reflect the popularity of these languages in terms of percentages and the total number of enrolled students in the United States.

1. Spanish is the most studied language in the US, with 50% of college students choosing to learn Spanish.
2. French is next at just over 12%
3. American Sign Language is studied by 7% of students
4. German is studied by 5%
5. Italian is next at just over 4%
6. Chinese is at 3.9%
7. Arabic is steadily growing, at 2.1% in 2013
8. Latin, at 1.7%, is still taught in most US universities
9. Russian was chosen by 1.4% percent of students
10. Ancient Greek, at less than 1%, comes in last place, followed by Ancient Hebrew, Portuguese, Korean and Modern Hebrew, respectively

Table 3: List of foreign languages most frequently taught in American institutions of high education.

The French language comes second among the top foreign languages studied in the United States. Below are the top foreign languages studied in American institutions of higher education (colleges and universities), based on fall 2013 enrollments:

College and university students (2013)

Rank	Language	Enrollments	Percentage
1	Spanish	790,756	50.6%
2	French	197,757	12.7%
3	American Sign Language	109,577	7.0%
4	German	86,700	5.5%
5	Italian	71,285	4.6%
6	Japanese	66,740	4.3%
7	Chinese	61,055	3.9%
8	Arabic	32,286	2.1%
9	Latin	27,192	1.7%
10	Russian	21,962	1.4%
11	Greek, Ancient	12,917	0.8%
12	Hebrew, Biblical	12,551	0.8%
13	Portuguese	12,415	0.8%
14	Korean	12,229	0.8%
15	Hebrew, Modern	6,698	0.4%
	Others	40,059	2.6%
	Total	1,562,179	100%

List of top five most commonly learned languages by year Grades K-12 (primary and secondary schools)

Year	Languages									
	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
2004-2005	Spanish	72.9	French	15.0	German	4.2	Latin	2.6	Japanese	0.7
2007-2008	Spanish	72.1	French	14.1	German	4.4	Latin	2.3	Japanese	0.8

Higher Education (colleges and universities)

Year	Languages									
	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
1960	French	37.9	Spanish	29.7	German	24.2	Russian	5.1	Italian	1.8
1968	French	34.4	Spanish	32.3	German	19.2	Russian	3.7	Latin	3.0
1980	Spanish	41.0	French	26.9	German	13.7	Italian	3.8	Latin	2.7
1990	Spanish	45.1	French	23.0	German	11.3	Italian	4.2	Japanese	3.9
1995	Spanish	53.2	French	18.0	German	8.5	Japanese	3.9	Italian	3.8
1998	Spanish	55.6	French	17.0	German	7.6	Italian	4.2	Japanese	3.7
2002	Spanish	53.4	French	14.5	German	6.5	Italian	4.6	American Sign	4.4
2006	Spanish	52.2	French	13.1	German	6.0	American Sign	5.1	Italian	5.0
2009	Spanish	51.4	French	12.9	German	5.7	American Sign	5.5	Italian	4.8
2013	Spanish	50.6	French	12.7	American Sign	7.0	German	5.5	Italian	4.6

Source: "Foreign Language Enrollment in K-12 Public Schools" (PDF), American Council on the Teaching of

Foreign Languages (ACTF). February 2011. Retrieved October 17, 2015.

FRENCH IS AN IMPORTANT LANGUAGE FOR BUSINESS

Knowledge of French is widely considered to be a crucial skill for business owners all over the world. Today, the importance of the French language in the business world cannot be overlooked. Globalization is a dominant feature of post-modern industrial and developing societies and is being led by multi-national corporations. Whether it is high tech companies such as Apple, automobile manufacturers like General Motors, or even much smaller firms that specialize in one-off items manufactured throughout the Far and Near East, business has managed to overcome trade and regulatory boundaries in order to sell wares through free markets. Communication is paramount; imagine the difficulties if no efforts were made to establish a cohesive way by which businesses communicated.

In 2011, Bloomberg Businessweek ranked French as the third most useful language for business, after English and Standard Mandarin Chinese. French is also internationally recognized to be of high linguistic prestige and used in diplomacy and international commerce, as well as having a significant portion of second language speakers throughout the world.

In the United Kingdom, a study conducted by The Guardian (2014) found that 50% of British managers considered French to be a valuable asset for their business. It ranked French as the most sought foreign language ahead of German (49%) and Spanish (44%). MIT economist Albert Saiz calculated a 2.3% premium for those who have French as a foreign language in the workplace.

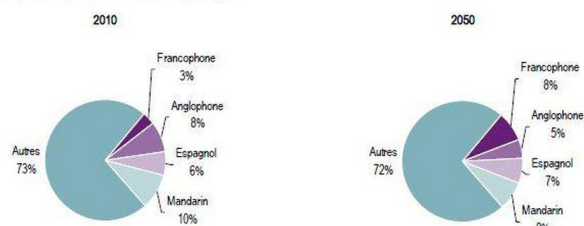
<https://www.theguardian.com/...business-network/2014/.../language-skills-great-busine>.

As indicated earlier, French is taught in many universities around the world and it has influences especially in the diplomatic, journalistic, legal and academic worlds. In English-speaking Canada, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, French retains the privilege of being the first foreign language taught and far ahead of other languages. In the United States, apart from Spanish, French is the most commonly taught foreign language. The future of the French language is often discussed in the news. An example is the recent debate in New York City. In 2014, *The New York Times* documented an increase in the teaching of French in New York, especially in bilingual programs where only Spanish and Mandarin are now offered more than French. In a study published in March 2014 by Forbes magazine, the investment bank Natixis indicated that French could become the world's most spoken language by 2050. It noted that French is spreading in areas where the population is rapidly increasing, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. With an estimated 270 million speakers across 55 countries, it is clear that Francophones (French speaking people and nations) have an extensive influence worldwide. The same magazine also predicted French to be "the language of the future". The OIF (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie) predicts that by 2050, an immense 700 million people will be fluent in

French. Subsequently, it is no wonder or surprise that the language continues to play a crucial role in international and diplomatic relations.

The table below indicates the OIF's prediction of 700 million people being fluent in French by the year 2050.

Graphique 1 : Répartition des locuteurs par langue



Sources : OIF, divers rapports, Natixis

Figure 1

This is perhaps the over-riding reason as to why French apart from English has been considered as one of the most influential languages in the business world. This is because France and other French-speaking countries conduct or have businesses such as fashion, cosmetics, hair and skincare products, wine, food, film, art, music, banking, hotel industry that are global. Commerce and tourism, art, fashion, wine, have made it a necessity for the French to be bilingual or multilingual. Conventions and shows attract many people from all around the world to France. It is therefore not unusual for the French to commute to Anglophone countries including Ghana to run their business branches there.

FRENCH LANGUAGE AS THE MODEL OF EFFICIENCY

While French may not be easy to learn, it has been adopted by foreign companies as the most effective means of gaining access to global commerce and trade. This is reflected in the fact that over 49 million Africans use it as first or second language and several million students are currently learning French across the globe. The knowledge of the French language will not only allow for access to commerce and trade, it also provides an efficient way by which business is conducted. A report by the Michel Thomas Language Centre (2004) in the United Kingdom suggested that British business companies could benefit a lot if their employees are bilingual or multilingual (<https://www.amazon.fr/Michel-Thomas-Advanced-French/dp/0340887001>).

Apart from cultural differences and aside the predominance of English, the French language serves as an efficient means of communication to conduct business throughout the world, and has also provided an effective tool used to deal with political differences, also seen as barriers to trade between Francophone and Anglophone countries in particular.

IMPORTANCE OF FRENCH TO INDIVIDUALS

With the continuous spread of French as the language of choice throughout the global business community, it is imperative for non-French speakers like Ghana to understand that without the necessary French language skills they risk being left behind in terms of global competition.

Being bilingual is eventually becoming the standard for communicating effectively in the world today. Knowing a second language can help advance one's career, as many businesses, market products and services are emerging across the globe. Additionally, governments and security agencies constantly need people who can speak other languages other than English in order to communicate effectively and with ease. To be a cog in this dynamic world of business, it is important to learn the French language. Hence, learning French is primary to individual success and should be given to anyone wishing to gain access to the corporate world of today business. As the importance of French continues to spread, learning the language appears to be one of the most productive means to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. In any case, whether the French is one of the most widely spoken languages or not, Ghanaian tertiary students should bear in mind that it's important to learn French as a foreign language which would in the long run be useful in a professional environ. As Michel (2004) pointed out, persons who are bilingual or multilingual, can make greater salary than a computer programmer or engineer because they can use their abilities in foreign language to obtain success in a wide range of career paths. Also due to the increase of international population, a multilingual person can easily communicate and translate to prospective audience.

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the role of the French language as an effective tool in business communication. Attempts have been made to review and explain the major concepts and importance of language with particular reference to the French in relation to human communication, and more importantly business communication. Ghana, as a matter of urgency, needs to give priority to French language teaching and learning; a language that is ranked among the top three most useful foreign languages for international communications and for conducting business around the world. It is a language that is sure to make Ghanaian diplomats and business professionals to compete favourably in the West African sub-region in particular and the world at large. Tertiary institutions (public and private) should support the efforts of government by making the French language a requirement for graduation as done elsewhere particularly in the USA. The French language should therefore be seriously considered as a language which serves as a means of communication for daily interaction, a tool for solving problems of every kind, and more importantly a tool for national development.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is the urgent need for political will and commitment on the part of government to give priority to the French language teaching and learning to ensure that Ghana competes favourably among African countries in particular and the world in general. A clear language policy guideline should be put in place for the teaching and learning of the

French. Special attention also needs to be given to the training of teachers of French language. The demands of globalization and economic development impose on us as Ghanaians a responsibility to be proficient in the French language since we are engulfed by French-speaking neighbours and also a member state of the prestigious International Organisation of the Francophonie. Tertiary institutions (both public and private) in Ghana should support the government by making the French language a requirement for graduation as done elsewhere. This will serve as a source of considerable competitive advantage for Ghanaian professionals in political diplomacy as well as the socio-economic relations internationally.

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