

Original Paper

Applied Research on Improving Oral French Proficiency for French Majors Based on ANL

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Abstract

This study focuses on enhancing oral French proficiency for French majors based on Acceptable Noise Level (ANL) theory. By analyzing the theoretical framework of ANL and its potential applications in language instruction, combined with the characteristics of French oral communication, a teaching model integrating phonetic training, scenario simulation, and interactive feedback is proposed. The study emphasizes constructing a systematic training framework encompassing personalized pronunciation correction, multidimensional scenario-based task design, and dynamic assessment mechanisms. This aims to enhance students' fluency and accuracy in complex linguistic environments. Although experimental validation is not the primary focus, a small-scale case study confirms the theoretical model's feasibility, offering new theoretical perspectives and practical pathways for French oral instruction.

Keywords

ANL theory, French oral teaching, pronunciation training, scenario simulation, interactive feedback

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, French, as a vital language for international communication, has seen increasing emphasis on cultivating oral proficiency. However, traditional French teaching models often prioritize grammar and vocabulary acquisition while neglecting students' ability to apply language in authentic contexts—particularly the fluency and accuracy of oral expression. The

Acceptable Noise Level (ANL) theory, originally applied in hearing aid fitting to assess individuals' speech comprehension in noisy environments, has recently been introduced into language pedagogy. It offers a novel perspective for enhancing students' oral proficiency. This study aims to explore how ANL theory can be leveraged to construct a systematic and scientific model for improving oral French skills among specialized students, addressing shortcomings in traditional teaching approaches.

2. Overview of ANL Theory

2.1 Definition and Implications of ANL

2.1.1 Core Definition

Acceptable Noise Level (ANL) is precisely defined in audiology as the difference between the maximum comfort threshold for speech perception and the maximum background noise level (BNL) an individual is willing to tolerate, measured in decibels (dB). The maximum comfortable threshold represents the upper limit of sound pressure level at which an individual feels most comfortable during speech listening, without experiencing fatigue or discomfort. The maximum background noise level denotes the highest background noise intensity the listener can tolerate without impairing their comprehension of the speech signal. The resulting ANL value, derived from the difference between these two thresholds, serves as a crucial quantitative indicator for assessing an individual's ability to receive and tolerate speech signals in noisy environments.

2.1.2 Interpretation from a Language Teaching Perspective

When applied to language education—particularly research on enhancing oral proficiency among French majors—ANL theory gains new significance. In authentic communication settings, students rarely encounter ideal noise-free environments but instead face complex linguistic contexts, such as conversations in noisy cafés or multilingual international conferences. In such contexts, ANL can be understood as the threshold of a student's ability to maintain effective spoken output within these complex linguistic environments.

Specifically, effective spoken output requires not only accurate pronunciation and correct grammar but, more importantly, the capacity to clearly and fluently express one's views and ideas amidst interference, ensuring the listener's comprehension. For instance, during a noisy French conversation corner event, where background noise like other languages or music may be present, students need a certain level of ANL ability to accurately organize their language, adjust their speaking pace and intonation, and successfully engage in oral communication. A low ANL score indicates poor tolerance for background noise, leading to stilted or even ineffective expression under minimal disturbance. Conversely, students with high ANL scores maintain strong oral output capabilities even in complex noisy settings.

2.2 The Application Potential of ANL in Language Teaching

2.2.1 Quantifying Oral Performance to Support Personalized Instruction

ANL theory provides language teaching with an effective means to quantitatively assess students' oral performance across diverse linguistic environments. By precisely measuring students' ANL values,

educators can understand each learner's speech reception capabilities and oral expression proficiency in noisy settings, thereby establishing a scientific foundation for personalized instruction.

Due to differences in auditory sensitivity, linguistic foundations, and learning experiences, students exhibit varying ANL values. For instance, students with heightened auditory sensitivity and strong language foundations may maintain high-quality oral output even in high background noise, resulting in relatively high ANL values. Conversely, students who are more sensitive to noise or face challenges in oral expression may have lower ANL values. Teachers can develop targeted instructional plans based on students' ANL scores. For students with lower ANL scores, enhanced oral training in noisy environments—such as dialogue practice simulating bustling social settings—can gradually improve their tolerance for background noise and oral expression skills. Conversely, students with higher ANL scores can be provided with more challenging language tasks, such as participating in multilingual discussions, to further develop their comprehensive language proficiency.

2.2.2 Adjusting Instructional Variables to Enhance Spoken Adaptation and Fluency

Variables such as noise levels and linguistic complexity within teaching scenarios significantly impact students' spoken adaptation abilities and expression fluency. ANL theory provides theoretical guidance for adjusting these variables. By appropriately controlling them, students' spoken language skills can be progressively enhanced.

Regarding noise levels, instructors can incrementally increase background noise intensity in teaching scenarios based on students' ANL scores and training progress. For instance, initial stages may involve oral practice in relatively quiet environments to familiarize students with basic expressions and communication techniques. As training advances, introduce mild background noise—such as soft background music—to practice speaking in moderately distracting conditions, thereby building noise adaptation. Finally, simulate more noisy real-world settings like markets or stations, enabling students to engage in spoken communication within high-noise environments to further develop their oral adaptability.

Regarding linguistic complexity, instructors can adjust the difficulty of speaking tasks based on students' ANL scores and language proficiency. For students with lower ANL scores and weaker foundational skills, begin with simple daily dialogues using basic vocabulary and sentence structures to gradually build oral expression proficiency. As students progress, incrementally increase linguistic complexity by introducing specialized vocabulary, intricate grammatical structures, and longer sentences. This allows practice across varying levels of linguistic complexity, enhancing fluency and language application skills.

2.2.3 Emphasizing Dynamic Assessment for Optimal Instructional Outcomes

ANL theory underscores the importance of dynamic assessment—timely adjustments to teaching strategies based on real-time student feedback to achieve optimal learning outcomes. During language instruction, students' oral proficiency and adaptability to noisy environments evolve continuously, necessitating ongoing evaluation and refinement.

Teachers can gather real-time feedback through classroom observation, oral tests, and peer/self-assessments. For instance, during dialogue exercises, teachers observe students' performance across noise levels, documenting errors and challenges. Oral tests quantify progress over time, while peer/self-assessments enable students to identify weaknesses in their own and peers' expressions.

Based on this feedback, teachers can promptly adjust instructional strategies. If students' oral expression significantly declines at a certain noise level, teachers can reduce noise intensity and reinforce training at that level. If students struggle with a specific language concept, teachers can provide focused explanations and practice for that concept. Through dynamic assessment and timely adjustments to teaching strategies, instruction remains aligned with students' actual needs, achieving optimal oral language teaching outcomes.

3. Current State and Challenges in French Oral Teaching

3.1 Limitations of Traditional Teaching Models

3.1.1 Imbalanced Teaching Content Focus

In traditional French teaching models, explanations of grammatical rules and vocabulary acquisition occupy the vast majority of classroom time. In traditional French teaching models, the majority of classroom time is devoted to the systematic and detailed explanation of various grammatical phenomena, from noun gender and number inflections, verb tenses and aspects, to complex sentence structures, striving to ensure students master comprehensive and accurate grammatical knowledge. Vocabulary instruction similarly emphasizes spelling, meanings, and basic usage, requiring students to memorize large numbers of words.

However, this excessive focus on grammar and vocabulary has led to a serious neglect of oral practice. Students may memorize numerous grammar rules and vocabulary, yet often struggle to apply this knowledge flexibly in real-life conversations. For instance, when expressing themselves on everyday topics, they might hesitate excessively due to concerns about grammatical correctness, resulting in halting speech. Alternatively, they may recognize a word's meaning but fail to use it accurately in sentences, undermining communication effectiveness.

3.1.2 Low Student Engagement in Class

In traditional French classrooms, students predominantly adopt a passive role in knowledge acquisition. Teachers dominate the classroom, delivering instruction according to predetermined lesson plans, while students primarily listen and take notes, lacking opportunities for active expression and interaction. Teachers ask questions infrequently, and these questions often carry a certain degree of directionality, requiring students to respond along the teacher's predefined lines of thought. This makes it difficult for students to truly exercise their own initiative.

This passive learning approach fosters fear and lack of confidence in oral expression. Students dread making mistakes that might invite criticism from teachers or ridicule from peers, making them reluctant to speak up. Over time, their oral skills fail to develop effectively, leading to the phenomenon of "mute

French”—where students can read and write French but struggle to communicate fluently orally.

3.1.3 Rigid and Limited Teaching Scenarios

Traditional French instruction is typically confined to the classroom, with relatively monotonous teaching contexts. Teachers often deliver knowledge in a static classroom environment using tools like blackboards, textbooks, and multimedia presentations, making it difficult to simulate the complexity and diversity of real-world language situations.

Authentic language exchange occurs across diverse settings—shopping in malls, ordering in restaurants, asking directions while traveling, conducting business negotiations—each governed by specific linguistic conventions and communication styles. Traditional teaching deprives students of opportunities to practice speaking in these real-world scenarios, leading to discomfort and difficulty in actual interactions. For instance, students may proficiently recite shopping-related vocabulary and sentence patterns in the classroom, yet become flustered when actually interacting with sales staff in a mall due to nervousness or unfamiliarity with real-world language application.

3.2 *The Need to Enhance Students' Oral Communication Skills*

3.2.1 The Need for Rapid Language Organization

In authentic French communication settings, students must develop the ability to organize language quickly. Whether in daily conversations, academic discussions, or business exchanges, interlocutors rarely afford students ample time to think. They must swiftly comprehend questions and formulate appropriate responses.

For instance, during casual chats with French friends, a sudden question about cultural or social topics may arise. Students must immediately draw upon their linguistic knowledge and critical thinking to formulate a coherent, substantive response. Without this rapid language organization skill, students may experience hesitations or unclear thought processes, undermining communication effectiveness. However, traditional teaching methods currently lack systematic training for this specific ability, leaving students deficient in this area.

3.2.2 Competency Requirements for Handling Diverse Topics

French majors will encounter a wide array of topics in their future studies and careers, spanning culture, arts, technology, economics, politics, and more. Consequently, they must develop the ability to navigate varied subjects, employing appropriate language tailored to each topic's characteristics and demands.

Different subjects demand distinct vocabulary, expressions, and knowledge bases. For instance, discussing cultural arts requires specialized artistic terminology and cultural literacy, while addressing technological topics necessitates familiarity with relevant scientific vocabulary and the latest developments. Traditional teaching, however, often remains confined to fixed topics within textbooks, lacking expansion and training on broader subjects. This results in students feeling at a loss when confronted with new or unfamiliar topics, hindering their ability to engage in effective oral expression.

3.2.3 The Need for Clear Expression in Noisy Environments

In real-world communication settings, noise is unavoidable. Whether in public spaces, outdoor

activities, or noisy workplaces, students must maintain clear expression despite background noise. This requires them to adjust their speaking pace, intonation, and volume during oral communication to ensure their message is understood.

However, current teaching practices rarely incorporate oral training in noisy environments. Students typically practice speaking in quiet classrooms, lacking the adaptability and coping strategies needed for noisy settings. When actually exposed to noisy environments, they may struggle with issues like speaking too softly, speaking too fast or too slow, or unclear pronunciation, which impede effective information transmission and communication.

3.2.4 The Need for a Systematic and Scientific Oral Training Framework

To address these diverse oral proficiency development needs, French majors urgently require a systematic and scientific oral training framework. This framework should encompass all aspects of oral practice, including phonetic and intonation training, flexible application of vocabulary and sentence structures, cultivation of oral expression techniques, and scenario-based oral exercises.

Simultaneously, this training framework must be targeted and tiered, enabling personalized training plans tailored to students' varying proficiency levels and requirements. For instance, beginners could focus on foundational phonetics and intonation training alongside simple daily conversation practice, while intermediate and advanced learners could engage in discussions on complex topics and oral exercises in noisy environments. However, current teaching practices lack such a comprehensive oral training framework, resulting in unsystematic and unscientific improvements in students' oral proficiency.

4. Constructing a French Oral Proficiency Enhancement Model Based on ANL

4.1 *Phonetics Training: Laying the Foundation for Oral Communication*

4.1.1 Pronunciation and Fluency Training

The first hurdle in speaking is pronunciation and fluency. Based on ANL theory, pronunciation training should emphasize the systematic and continuous application of the four-step method: "Imitation-Comparison-Correction-Consolidation." Students must master distinctions such as vowels versus nasal sounds, plosives versus their articulation points, as well as phonetic phenomena like liaison, weak forms, and assimilation. Through daily, fixed-duration pronunciation practice, students gradually improve accuracy and natural speech flow.

4.1.2 Listening Input and Imitation

Adequate listening input is essential for spoken output. Students should diversify their exposure to French news, campus life dialogues, lecture excerpts, and other materials, noting common expressions and fixed phrases. Through the "listen-imitate-correct" cycle, they gradually incorporate pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm into their own speech. After recording, compare with the original audio to self-correct, focusing on stress placement, pauses in speech flow, and the use of intonation at sentence endings.

4.2 Situational Simulation: Enhancing Spoken Adaptability

4.2.1 Actionable Spoken Task List

Design a set of common tasks centered around campus life, academic research, career planning, and social issues. Examples include introducing research directions, presenting viewpoints and refuting opposing arguments, and delivering brief reports. Each task should specify input materials, output formats (oral presentations, Q&A, debates, etc.), and assessment criteria. By simulating authentic scenarios, this approach enhances students' adaptability and expressive skills in spoken English.

4.2.2 Three-Part Expression Structure

Employing the three-part structure—"phenomenon description → cause analysis → countermeasures/viewpoint explanation"—helps students organize coherent arguments in both daily and academic contexts. This framework not only maintains logical coherence in spoken expression but also elevates academic communication proficiency.

4.3 Interactive Feedback: Enhancing Spoken Fluency

4.3.1 Regular Dialogue Practice and Peer Evaluation

Conduct scheduled dialogue exercises with peers or language partners, incorporating mutual evaluation sessions to document strengths and areas for improvement. Through questioning, counter-questioning, responding, and supplementing during conversations, spoken output becomes more natural and adaptable. Peer evaluation not only enhances self-awareness but also promotes naturalness and fluency in spoken expression.

4.3.2 Teacher Feedback and Personalized Guidance

Teachers should actively participate in students' oral practice, providing timely and specific feedback. Feedback should cover aspects such as pronunciation accuracy, natural intonation, and clarity of expression. Simultaneously, tailored guidance should be offered based on individual differences to help students gradually overcome challenges and obstacles in spoken expression.

5. Validation and Optimization of the Theoretical Model

5.1 Small-Scale Case Validation

Although this study is primarily theoretical, the feasibility of the theoretical model was validated through a small-scale case study. A group of French major students served as experimental subjects, undergoing a semester-long training program based on the ANL-based oral proficiency enhancement model. Post-training, improvements in oral skills were assessed through oral tests, student self-evaluations, and instructor evaluations. Results demonstrated significant enhancements in pronunciation accuracy, natural speech flow, situational adaptability, and interactive feedback.

5.2 Optimization Directions for the Theoretical Model

Based on the case validation outcomes, the theoretical model underwent further refinement. On one hand, personalized and differentiated phonetic training was enhanced by developing tailored training plans based on students' pronunciation characteristics and challenges. On the other hand, the diversity

and complexity of simulated scenarios were enriched by introducing more variables from authentic contexts, such as phonetic variations across French-speaking regions and cultural background differences. Additionally, the timeliness and effectiveness of interactive feedback were strengthened by establishing a more robust feedback mechanism, ensuring students could promptly receive guidance and adjust their learning strategies.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

This study constructs a systematic and scientific oral proficiency enhancement model for French majors based on ANL theory. Integrating components such as phonetic training, scenario simulation, and interactive feedback, the model aims to improve students' fluency and accuracy in complex linguistic environments. Small-scale case validation demonstrates its promising feasibility and effectiveness. Future research should expand sample sizes and extend training periods to comprehensively evaluate the model's long-term impact. Simultaneously, exploring methods and pathways to apply ANL theory to oral instruction in other languages could provide valuable references and insights for the broader field of language teaching.

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