Grammar of French and Bengali: A Short Comparative Study

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Abstract:

Learning a foreign language has multi-dimensional benefits. In this hyper-connected and interdependent world, everyone feels it is essential to learn a new language. People learn a foreign language for several purposes. Some people learn it because they find it fascinating; some people learn it for academic purposes; some people learn it for business purposes; and others consider that being able to communicate with someone in their native language is a fantastic gift. Knowing a foreign language allows you to perceive the world in different ways; it helps you expand your knowledge and know the world's various cultures.

Acquiring and retaining proficiency in a foreign language can provide difficulties for learners or students. Difficulties in learning may arise due to teachers' poor involvement in teaching methods, materials, and techniques, learners' negative attitude towards the target language, cultural differences between the two languages, learners' L1 interference in learning the grammatical rules and vocabulary of the target language, and so on.

In this context, this paper aims to compare some of the grammatical aspects of Bengali and French languages, verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc., to dissipate complexities. Some insights into phonological differences between the two languages would also guide the learner.

Grammar is indispensable for a learner to learn a foreign language because a new language cannot be learned only through unconscious assimilation. The focus of this paper is to show specific nuances of grammar in both Bengali and French, which is inevitable for a foreign language learner.

Keywords: Foreign Language, Bengali language, French, Grammar, Comparative study

Introduction

French is a Romance language of the Indo-European language family. French has a rich history and documentation, like other international languages. French literature dramatically impacts the development of literary genres in the Western world. It has developed through the simplification and vulgarization of Latin. The French language's historical and cultural origins significantly impact present French more than any other language because of the interactions and disputes that shaped its historical evolution and the opinions individuals hold about it and other languages. French has early borrowings from Celtic languages, Germanic languages, Norman languages, etc.

In the mid-16th century, Pierre de Ronsard and Joachim du Bellay founded a group of poets, Pléiade, who considered vocabulary borrowing and neologisms a way to enrich and promote the use of the French language in literature. According to Rickard (1989:100), the French language of the *lie de France* by the seventeenth century was very similar to that of the twentieth century. After English and German, French is the most widely spoken language in Europe and is an official language in over 29 nations. French is moderately an 'inflected or synthetic' language with SVO word order.

One of the principal languages of the Indo-Aryan linguistic family is Bengali, often known as Bangla. The Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, and Bangladesh, a neighbor, speak it. Bengali is one of the official West Bengal and Tripura languages in India. Bengali has a millennial-old literary history and has developed tremendously during the period of the Bengali Renaissance. Sanskrit literature has influenced the language extensively. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee regarded the Bengali language as the "eastern variety of MagdhiPrakrita"; the dialects of Middle-Indo Aryan were called

Magdhi Prakrit, which was spoken in the Magadh region of early India. The Bengali script originates from Brahmi script's eastern variety, which reseresembles that. Standard Bengali has two forms, viz. Chalit and Sadhu, the former ones, are dominant now and are used both in spoken and written form.

With several inflected forms of verbs, nouns, and pronouns, Bengali is an inflectional language that follows an SOV word order. Bengali language vocabulary is enriched with words borrowed from Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman (which includes Tibetan, Burmese, and Thai), Arabic, Turkish, Persian, etc.

These languages belong to different language families with phonological, morphological, and syntactic differences. These differences play a significant role in learning both the languages as a foreign language. Grammar is indispensable for a learner to learn a foreign language because a new language cannot be learned only through unconscious assimilation. The focus of this paper is to show some of the grammatical differences between the Bengali and French languages, which is inevitable for a foreign language learner. Before I delve into the grammatical differences, I want to mention both languages' phonological differences.

Phonology of Bangla and French

The study of phonology focuses on the organization and application of sounds in natural languages. A language's phonological system consists of an inventory of sounds and their characteristics and rules that define how sounds relate to one another.

The French language has 38 distinctive sounds or phonemes. Of these 38 speech sounds, 18 are consonants, 13 are pure vowels, 4 are nasal vowels, and 3 are semi-vowels. Though French uses the Roman alphabet, unlike English, its spelling system has silent features that make pronunciation difficult for a non-native speaker. The final consonant in a word or the plural forms' *s'* or *'x'* remains understood in French. On the other hand, the inventory of Bengali or Bangla phonemes consists of 28 consonant sounds, four semi-vowels, and 14 vowel sounds (7 are pure vowels and 7 are nasalized ones). Additionally, the count of the triphthongs and diphthongs is done separately. Bangla has approximately twenty-five diphthongs, but this

number largely varies on the construction of vowel clusters. Though both languages are different, some sounds are familiar in both languages. French and Bangla Consonantal sounds are shown in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively, and the vowel sounds are shown in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively.

French Consonant Sounds

[p]	[paRi]	Paris	[b]	[bã]	Banc
[t]	[tɛt]	t̂ete	[d]	[dam]	Dame
[k]	[kɑ]	cas	[g]	[gaRsɔ̃]	*Garcon*
[f]	[fœ:j]	feuille	[v]	[vɔl]	Vol
[s]	[sal]	sale	[z]	[zo:n]	Zone
[ʃ]	[ʃa]	[chat]	[ʒ]	[ʒœn]	Jeune
[l]	[laRʒ]	Large	[R]	[Ra]	Rat
[m]	[matɛ̃]	matin	[n]	[nɔ̃]	Non
[ɲ]	[ɔɲɔ̃]	oignon	[ŋ]	[smɔkiŋ]	Smoking

Table 1

Bangla Consonant Sounds

[p]	[pul]	bridge	[pʰ]	[pʰul]	Flower
[b]	[bɔr]	bridegroom	[bʰ]	[bʰɔr]	Weight
[t̪]	[t̪ɑl]	Rhythm	[t̪ʰ]	[t̪ʰɑlɑ]	Plate
[d̪]	[d̪a:n]	donation	[d̪ʰ]	[d̪ʰan]	Paddy
[ʈ]	[ʈɔk]	sour	[ɖ]	[ɖal]	Pulse
[ʈʰ]	[ʈʰɔk]	cheat	[ɖʰ]	[ɖʰa:l]	Shield/slope
[tʃ]	[tʃal]	rice	[tʃʰ]	[tʃʰa:l]	Tree bark
[dʒ]	[dʒɔl]	water	[dʒʰ]	[dʒʰal]	hot in taste
[k]	[kɑ:l]	tomorrow	[kʰ]	[kʰal]	Canal
[g]	[gu:n]	quality	[gʰ]	[gʰu:n]	Termite
[s]	[sɑ:pʰ]	clean	[ʃ]	[ʃap]	Snake
[m]	[mon]	mind	[n]	[nɑm]	Name
[ŋ]	[gɔŋga]	ganges	[l]	[lɑl]	Red
[r]	[rɔŋ]	colour	[ɦ]	[ɦɑt̪]	Hand

Table 2

French Vowel Sounds

[i]	[fini]	fini	[e]	[ete]	Été
[ɛ]	[pɛ:R]	père	[a]	[sak]	Sac
[ɑ]	[pɑ]	pas	[ɔ]	[alɔ:R]	Alors
[o]	[mo]	mot	[u]	[fu]	Fou
[y]	[lyn]	lune	[ø]	[dø]	Deux
[œ]	[malœ:R]	malheur	[ə]	[pəti]	Petit

Table 3

Bangla Vowel Sounds

[ɑ]	[kɑn]	ear	[i]	[mil]	Similarity
[e]	[peʈ]	belly	[o]	[gol]	Round
[u]	[buk]	chest	[ɔ]	[bɔk]	Stork
[æ]	[bæŋ]	frog			

Table 4

French and Bengali have some common phonemes. Among consonants, [p, b, k, g, s, ʃ, m, n, ŋ, r, l] are common, and among vowels, [ɑ, e, i, ɔ, u, o] are common. It can be stated that French has more significant vowel variation, while Bangla has more consonantal variation. Every pure vowel in Bengali has a nasalized equivalent. There are just four pure French vowels that have nasalized equivalents. Their examples are provided in Table 5 and Table 6, respectively.

Bangla Nasal Vowels

/ɑ̃/	/cɑ̃ḏ/	moon	/ĩ/	/ĩḏur/	Rat
/ẽ/	/pẽcɑ/	owl	/õ/	/ḏʰõɑ/	Smoke
/ũ/	/ũcu	high	/ɔ̃/	/pɔ̃cɑ/	Rotten
/æ̃/	/pæ̃c/	complexity			

Table 5

French Nasal Vowels

/ɛ̃/	/pɛ̃/	pain	/ɑ̃/	/vɑ̃/	Vent
/ɔ̃/	/bɔ̃/	bon	/œ̃/	/œ̃/	Un

Table 6

Nouns in Bangla and French

'In linguistics terms, nouns are items which display particular type inflection (e.g. of Case or Number), have a specific distribution (e.g., they may follow Prepositions but not say, Modals), and perform a specific syntactic function (e.g., subject or object of a sentence).

Nouns are generally subclassified into common and proper types and analyzed in terms of Number, Gender, Case, and Countability. (Crystal, 2008, p. 333)'

The following examples show common and proper nouns in Bangla and French.

Bangla	Common Noun	French
chatro	'student'	madame 'madam'
boi	'book'	enfant 'child'

Bangla	Proper Noun	French
Dilli	'Delhi'	Hercule 'Hercules'
Tajmohol	'Tajmahal'	Turquie 'Turkey'

Gender in Bangla and French

Gender is of two kinds-natural and grammatical. Natural gender refers to the sex of real-world entities, and grammatical gender builds grammatical relationships between words in a sentence. Bangla has a natural gender and is not grammatical. Bangla noun roots may be inflected for the category of gender by the suffixation of the feminine morphemes like /i/, /ni/, /ɔni/, etc. On the contrary, gender in French is grammatical and not natural. In French, a verb is inflected for gender and agrees with the noun. French uses the determiners (article) *le, la, un, unto* mark the grammatical gender of the noun.

Bangla

Masculine	*Feminine*
baba 'father'	maa 'mother'
kaka 'uncle'	'kaki' 'aunt'
dhopa 'washerman'	dhopini 'washerwoman'

French

Masculine	*Feminine*
le frère 'a brother'	la sœur 'a sister'
ungarçon 'a boy'	une fille 'a girl'

It can be challenging for a non-native speaker of French to discern a noun's gender. For example:

Un jupon (a slip) is masculine, while *une chemise* (a man-tailored shirt) is feminine.

NumberSystem in French and Bangla

Bangla is a classifier language. This indicates that the form of a verb in Bangla changes according to tense, aspect, modality, and person alone, not the gender or number of the subject or object. The singular–plural distinction is not marked on the noun. Bangla, being a classifier language, has multiple class-specific suffixes attached to nouns to express pluralities. For instance, the classifiers "-ta/-to/-te" denote specificity and singularity; "-jon" can only be applied to humans; "-khana" is limited to inanimate count nouns; "-khani" is specific to mass nouns; "-gulo" denotes plurality and specificity; and "-ra" is a plural classifier limited to animate count nouns. The examples are not exhaustive.

In French, the plural forms are formed by adding *'s,' 'x,' and 'aux,'* or by keeping the nouns ending in the single unaltered form, such as *le fils, les fils*or in other ways. The noun form changes concerning numbers, and the singular and plural articles *un, une, le, la, des, and les* get attached to the noun form accordingly. Let us consider the examples below:

Bangla

Singular	*Plural*
a) aamta	chelegulo
aam-ta	chele-gulo
'the mango'	'the boys'
b) ekti	pakhira
ek-ti	pakhi-ra
'a or one'	'the birds'

French

Singular		*Plural*	
a) le château	'the castle'	les châteaux	'the castles'
b) un chien	'a dog'	des chien	'the dogs'

Articles in Bangla and French

Bangla employs *ektı andekta* as indefinite article while '*tı, ta, kʰa:na, kaʰ:nı, gu:lo, gu:li* etc., are used as definite articles.

In Bengali, the classifiers *'-ti, -te, -to, -jon, etc.'* are attached with the numerals to indicate indefinite articles, whereas '*-ti, -te, -to, -kʰana, -kʰani, -gulo, -guli, -ra,*' etc. are attached with the root form of the noun as well as numerals to show definiteness. On the other hand, French consists of four types of definitive articles: le*, la, les, and l'* (occurs when followed by vowels or the sound /h/) and three types of indefinite articles such as *une, and des.*

Bangla

estimate – a girl (indefinite)
ekjonbyakti – a person (indefinite)
mobile – the mobile (definite)
boil – the book 'definite'

French

un ami – a friend (masculine, indefinite)
une amie – a friend (feminine, indefinite)
des amis – friends or some friends (masculine indefinite)
le livre – the book (masculine, definite)
la fille – the girl (feminine, definite)
les filles – the girls (feminine, definite)
home – the man (masculine, definite)

Pronouns in Bangla and French

Bangla has three classes of personal pronouns. They are first-person, second-person, and third-person personal pronouns. They are as follows:

1st person singular		*1st person plural*	
ami	'I'	amra	'we'

2nd person singular		*2nd person plural*	
apni	'you'	apnara	'you all'
tumi	'you'	tomra	'you all'
tui	'you'	tora	'you all'

3rd person singular		*3rd person plural*	
Se, o, e	'he/she/it'	tara, ora, era	'they, those, these'
tini, uni, ini	'he/ she'	enara, onara	'they, those, these.'

In Bangla, the second person, *apni and apnara*, are honorific, *tumi and tomra* are formal, and *tui* and *tora* are informal. *Tini, uni, ini*, and their plural forms are also honorific in Bangla, while the other personal pronoun forms are formal and informal.

Personal pronouns in French agree with the person, number, and gender of their noun referents. The following personal pronouns below are used along with verb conjugation.

1st person singular	*1st person Plural*
je 'I'	nous 'we'
2nd person singular	*2rd person plural*
tu 'you'	vous 'you all'
3rd person singular	*3rd person plural*
il/elle/on 'he/she/one or we'	ils/elles 'they'

In French, the pronouns *il* and *ils* are used for masculine, and *elle* and *ells* are used for feminine. Pronouns such as *je*, *me*, *te*, *se*, *le*, and *la* become *j'*, *m'*, *t,' s'*, *l,'* and *l,'* respectively if followed by a vowel sound or the sound /h/.

Preposition in Bangla and French

Prepositions are typically affixed to nouns or pronouns in French to signify a connection between the noun or pronoun and the verb, adjective, or noun that comes before it. Both simple prepositions (à, chez) and prepositional phrases (d'après, près de) are found in the French language.

For example:mon livre est**avec**toi 'my book is **with**you'
Some of the common prepositions are as follows:

à	to, at, in
à côté de	next to, beside
après	after
au sujet de	about, on the subject of
d'après	according to
de	from, of, about

Prepositions such as *à* and *de* when used with the articles *le* and *les* form' à + le = au', 'à + les = aux,' 'de + le = d', and 'de + les = des.'

Unlike French, Bangla employs Postpositions instead of Prepositions. Postpositions in Bangla occur after the nominal or the

pronominal, where the nominal or the pronominal function as their object.

For example, shyamoljhumer**pase** bose ache' Shyamal is sitting **beside** Jhum.'

Some common prepositions in Bangla are as follows:

opore	'up/on'	talay	'under'
niche'	down below'	baire	'outside'
pase	'beside'	Jonne	'for'
bhetore	'inside'	songe	'with'

Adjectives in Bangla and French

Adjectives are distinguished from nouns only semantically, not grammatically. (DIXON & Aikhenvald, 2004)a cross-linguistic typological study discussed the word class adjective semantic categories common in world languages. He mentions, 'Four core semantic types are typically associated with large and small adjective classes.…. Namely….DIMENSION, AGE, VALUE, COLOUR…Several peripheral semantic types are typically associated with medium-sized and large adjective classes. Such as….PHYSICAL PROPERTY….Moreover, a sub-class referring to corporeal properties, e.g., 'well,' sick'….HUMAN PROPENSITY—' jealous,' 'happy,' 'kind,' clever,' generous,' 'cruel'…SPEED—' fast,' 'quick,' 'slow,' etc. (DIXON & Aikhenvald, 2004).'

The semantic types typically associated with the adjectives in Bangla are discussed below.

Dimension	bɔɾo' big',lɔmbɑ 'long,' bete 'short.'
Age	noṯun 'new,' puɾono 'old.'
Colour	ʃada̱ 'white',kɑlo 'black',
Value	bʰalo 'good,' kʰaɾap 'bad.'
Physical Property	ʃɔkṯo 'hard,' nɔrom 'soft,'
Human Propensity	cɑlɑk 'clever,' bokɑ 'foolish.'
Speed	d̪ruṯo 'fast', d̪ʰiɾ 'slow'
Difficulty	ʃɔhoɟ 'easy,' kotʰin' difficulty.'
Similarity	æk 'same,' pritʰɔk 'different.'
Qualification	ʃoṯṯi 'true',sad̪ʰaron 'common'
Quantification	ʃɔb 'all',ɔnek 'many', ɔlpo 'few'
Position	ucu' high',nicu 'low'

Cardinal / ordinal   æk 'one,' kuɽi 'twenty' / proṯʰom 'first,' diṯi̯o

The referenttfʰeleta, "the boy," is modified by the attributive feature of the adjective bʰalo, "handsome.". Both the attributive and predicative usage are possible for the adjective bʰalo.

For example:

bʰalocʰele'   good boy
cʰeletabʰalo   'the boy is good'

Both in Bangla and French, adjectives are classified semantically. French adjectives agree with the nouns they describe regarding number (singular or plural) and gender (masculine or feminine). The following lists a few French semantic categories:

Dimension   *grand* 'large, big,' *petit* 'small, little,' *court* 'short'
Age   *nouveau* 'new', *vieux* 'old', *jeune* 'young'
Color   blanc 'white,' rouge 'red,' noir 'black.'
Value   *bon* 'good,' *gentil* 'nice,' *mauvais'* bad.'

In French, an adjective of feminine singular is formed by adding[-e] to the masculine singular form, as shown in Example 1, but [-e] is not added when the masculine adjectives end in [-e, -eux, -f, and - er] as shown in Example 2.

Example 1:

un **hardi**marin – a daring sailor
une fille **hardie** – a daring girl

Example 2:

un **large**trottoir – a wide pavement
une**large** route – a wide road

The singular form of a masculine or feminine adjective is modified to make a plural by adding/s/ to a noun root. For example:

Singular adjective	*English*	*Plural adjective*
sincére	'sincere'	sincéres
fort(e)	'strong'	fort(e)s
Bon (ne)	'good'	bon(ne)s

The attributive adjective in French can be placed before or after the noun to which it modifies. Consider the following example:

uneagréable soirée / une soirée agréable : a nice evening

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Verb in French and Bangla

As previously stated, the verb form in Bangla varies according to tense, aspect, modality, and person, not the gender or quantity of the subject or object. There are 56 inflected forms of a root verb in Bengali, including variant spellings. It changes when a particular inflectional suffix is added to a root verb.

For example, when the suffix -*chhi*(present continuous, first person) is attached to the verb *khao* (to eat), it becomes -*khachchhi* (eating), whereas when the suffix –*echhi*(present perfect, first person) follows the root verb, it becomes kheyechhi (eaten). The verb form in Bangla does not change with the number of referents. The verb *jaoa*(to go) conjugation in the present tense is shown below.

Bangla

Singular   *Plural*

1st:amijachchhi 'I am going   amra jachchhi 'we are going'
2nd: tumijachchho 'you are going'   tomrajachchho 'you all are going'
3rd: se jachchhe' he/she is going   tara jachchhe 'they are going.'

Unlike Bangla, verbs in French change according to number, gender, and person and give different forms. Let us consider the verb like to read in the present tense and observe how it is conjugated.

French

Singular   *Plural*

1st: Je lis ' I am reading'   nous lessons   'we are reading.'
2nd: tulis ' you are reading'   vouslisez   'you all are reading'
3rd: il/elle lit 'he/she is reading' ils/elleslisent   'they are reading'

Adverbs in Bangla and French

An adverb is commonly used after conjugating a verb or an adjective in French. It modifies the conjugated verb in a phrase or a sentence. The adverb follows the verb it modifies directly if the verb is in the simple tense. Now let us look at the adverb *souvent* (often), which comes after the verb *lire* (to read), the conjugated verb.
Je lissouvent – I read often.

However, if the verb being used is a compound tense, that means that if a tense consists of a main verb and an auxiliary verb like *être* (to be), *avoir* (to have), or *aller* (to go), the adverb goes after the first conjugated verb. In the example below, the adverb *beaucoup* (a

lot) comes after the auxiliary verb *avoir*(to be) and before the central verb *dormer* (to sleep).

J'ai beaucoup dormi– I slept a lot

Like other Indian languages, adverbs in Bangla can be categorized into adverbs of place, time, and manner. Nevertheless, there are other ways in which Bengali adverbs can be formed, such as suffixation, reduplication, conversion of adjectives, and the use of specialized adverbializers. Adjectives are formed by the conversion of adjectives such *as bhalo*(good as well as bad) and by the adverbialization of substantives such as *madhye*(in the middle and also amid, amidst)*sese*(at the end as well as ultimately, finally), adverbialization of verbs (*phire*-perfect participle of the verb *phira* to return and also, *mile*-perfect participle of the verb *mila* to meet and also together), adverbialization of numerals *pratham*(first and also firstly) and of pronouns (*temon* such like and also thus, so)(Racova, 1990).

According to Racova (1990), 'A relatively large number of adverbs are formed with the aid of semi-suffixes, i.e., such word-forming suffixes which have preserved in large measure the lexical meaning of the original word (the etymology of the semi-suffix is evident even to-day), e.g., *bismitabhabe*(surprisingly) from *bismita*(surprised) +-*bhābe* (locative from *bhab'manner'*), *smaranartha*(in memory) from (smaran) memory + artha purpose, etc……*kare* is used to form adverbs of manner from substantives (*rāgkare'angrily,' dayākare'kindly*,' *jorkare'forcibly*,' '*trāmekare'* by tram), from adjectives (*bhalokare'well*,' *sampürnakare'completely*,' *cupkare'quietly'*), from interjections (*tup kare'quickly*,' *phaskare* swiftly)(Racova, pp. 111-112).'

Consider the examples:

amiektaboi**kokhonokokhono**pori - I read a book sometimes. (Reduplicated form)

tomra**kalke**aeso – you all come tomorrow (Time adverbial)

se **chup kore** bari chole galo – she/he quietly left for home (manner adverbial from substantives)

ami**phiretakabona** –I will not look aback. (adverbialization of verbs)

dim ta **prothome**bhangtehobe – firstly, you have to break the egg.

(adverbialization of numerals)

There are various ways to form adverbials in Bangla. I have discussed a few above. For further study, one can read (chatterji 1921, 2011, 2016; Racova 1990).

Conclusion

As French and Bengali belong to two different language groups, phonological and grammatical similarities and dissimilarities exist. Bengali, being SVO order, exhibits great distinction of structural and grammatical patterns to that of SOV order of French. One of the main differences between the two languages is that of gender. Bengali does not have grammatical gender, but French is highly gender-marked; word forms change according to grammatical gender.

N.B. I have used International Phonetic Alphabets, but not through the paper. I have mainly used to demonstrate the phonology of the French and Bangla. For the rest of the paper, I have mainly used transliteration.

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